

# Psychology Alum with a Global Perspective

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**Hal Morris,  
M.A. Psychology ‘06**



*Homeless Brazilian street children face dangerous conditions daily in Rio de Janeiro.*

**A**rval (Hal) Morris, M.A. Psychology '06, responded to Antioch University Seattle’s call to action: because the world needs you now, both dynamically and literally by building bridges between countries, between languages and between individuals.



*Hal Morris*

His passion for travel has led him abroad extensively: to Europe, Africa, Asia and South America. While living in Guatemala prior to entering graduate school, he began to feel the pull that

would eventually lead him to Brazil and to founding the Brazilian Children’s Charity (BCC), an organization that provides counseling and other services to low-income and homeless children.

The communities Morris found in Brazil resonated with his beliefs and the need he encountered there called him to action.

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Morris actually started the BCC before receiving his Psychology degree with a dual concentration in Mental Health

Counseling and Couple and Family Therapy. He opened the first office in Rio de Janeiro, a vibrant but dangerous, city with dramatic socio-economic divisions, gang-violence and social upheaval.

In Rio, wealthiest neighborhoods often sit on one side of a street with overcrowded favelas (slums) only a few feet away on the other. The favelas are, in effect, miniature city-states outside the law and ruled over by ruthless drug lords. Their gangs are heavily armed, not only with machine guns, but with grenades, explosives and even rockets.

On the BCC website ([www.bccharity.org](http://www.bccharity.org)), Morris has assembled a collection of videos and articles that depict some of the dangerous conditions Rio’s children face on a daily basis. Police helicopters sometimes exchange gunfire with drug gangs only blocks from the BCC offices. City busses are attacked and, within the last five years, crack cocaine has become the most sold drug in the city.

In preparation for the 2014 World Cup, the Brazilian government has begun a program of “pacification” but while progress has been made in bringing the favelas under control, often it is the children who are caught in the middle of the conflict. More than 80 percent of homeless people are addicted to crack. Murder is the number one cause of death for males 15-44 years of age and children in Rio are eight times more likely to die of violent causes than in the West Bank.

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The homeless are left with few resources. Social and financial assistance is rare, so the work of the BCC is critical to helping children cope with poverty, violence, drug addiction, STDs and psychological ailments.

Both for reasons of privacy and for safety, Morris and his students usually provide their services outside the office. Frequently they travel to their patients and work in churches, schools, private homes or even outside at the beach.

To grow the organization, Morris has planned the BCC "capacity building" model as one which will expand to include three non-profit funding organizations (in Brazil, the United States and Germany), a guest lecture series, a restaurant to provide-job skills training and an education program to train new staff.

Morris describes it as, "taking the American model and applying it to Brazil. However, we're not opening a foreign agency. We're working with Brazilians so that they can open their own non-profits."

An important part of the work is training new therapists. The BCC offers Brazilian University psychology students paid, year-long internships and Morris hopes to grow the program from training its current capacity of two students a year to ten. He is also looking toward opening branch offices in other Brazilian cities such as Fortaleza, Recife, Salvador, Natal, Belo Horizonte, Sao Paulo and Vitoria.

"I am officially approved by the Universidade Federal Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ) as a specialist in marriage and family therapy and mental health counseling. I hope to begin teaching in 2011-2012. When I was in Seattle last June, I received

approval to take my Washington State MFT licensure exam in October. This will change my status from associate to clinical membership in the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy (AAMFT). I intend to continue the licensure process and eventually become accredited as an AAMFT supervisor. This will enable Brazilian therapists to receive supervision from me as well as take the licensure test and eventually work in the US."

Whether he's taking therapy to the streets of Brazil or building bridges between nations, Morris's efforts are working. The world needs Hal Morris and he's answering the call.