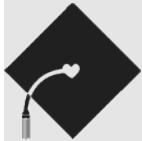


Research Expert in Youth Homelessness

Principal Investigator for Voices of Youth Count at
Chapin Hall, University of Chicago



Matthew Morton

Stetson University, Class of 2006



Describe your current position.

I lead the research and the policy team overall at Chapin Hill. My job is to connect all the dots to make sure everything is linked together as a cohesive research initiative, and to make sure that we're connecting the dots with what policymakers and communities need so that the research we're producing and the questions that we're asking are responsive to help people make better decisions. We're really using evidence to help communities, states, and the country effectively end youth homelessness. My work feels most meaningful when youth with lived experiences are involved as partners in the process of communities using evidence for decision-making

What does an average work day look like for you?

I could be developing a research protocol, working on a survey, analyzing data, or writing reports. I also am on calls much of the day with partners across the country, my own team, the federal government, or national organizations to help link these issues to their advocacy agendas. We provide an objective source for helping them make better decisions based on the evidence. Almost once a week I'm traveling for at least a couple of days for meetings such as with community partners or conferences to present on the research of Voices of Youth Count.

What are some of your favorite things and some of your least favorite things about your job?

My favorite things are interacting with communities, especially with young people with lived experiences of homelessness. They bring so much resilience, energy and expertise to the cause of ending youth homelessness. I also love seeing communities light up when they see how evidence can help them find those blind spots in their systems and services. They then tackle those blind spots once data brings that to life.

One of the hardest things about my job is that even when you have movement—even when you're working on solutions—we're still addressing a social symptom of structural inequalities and problems. When we think about addressing youth homelessness, we're often struggling with far too few resources and far too many young people. So it ends up being like a triage process: who do we need to help most urgently? The fact that we have to triage youth to begin with is the failure of multiple public systems.



What has been the biggest impact Bonner has had on your life or work?

Bonner made me feel like I was a part of something bigger than myself—part of this supportive network of both young people and adults with diverse public service interests who share a common passion of making a difference.

Also, during my time in Bonner, we were committed to relationships: not just to talk about service, but to invest in each other. When we're engaging in service, we need to reflect. And I needed friends to hold me accountable that my success wasn't about me; I had to remember who that was for.

The third thing about Bonner is the progressive engagement model. Your first year, you might be volunteering at a Boys and Girls Club, and by your fourth year, you may be advocating to state legislatures about how to improve education policy for low-income schools and communities. By having that four-year commitment and support, you really have the potential for progressive engagement and for moving up in the way that you're thinking about public service during your experience.

What do you wish you knew as a recent Bonner graduate preparing for this field?

Even while I was a Bonner, I wish I was more attuned to how important empirical skills are. I avoided economics and statistics courses like the plague. I understand it's not for everybody, but I feel like every day, we are moving more towards a world that demands evidence. I really encourage Bonners to think about challenging themselves and picking up those research skills even if they don't plan on becoming a researcher because it helps them helps them navigate better in the advocacy world and develop programs in systems for people that need them. In undergrad, I wish I was more intentional of pursuing those skills in that are transferable and make me a better advocate.

