Developing Evidence-Based Effective Principles for Working with Homeless Youth: A Developmental Evaluation of the Otto Bremer Foundation's Support for Collaboration Among Agencies Serving Homeless Youth

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Nora F. Murphy

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Jean A. King
Advisor

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Dedication

The Way It Is

There's a thread you follow. It goes among
things that change, but it doesn't change.
People wonder about what you are pursuing.
You have to explain about the thread,
but it is hard for others to see.
While you hold it, you can't get lost.
Tragedies happen, people get hurt
or die, and you suffer and get old.
Nothing you do can stop time's unfolding.
You don't ever let go of the thread.

William Stafford, *The Way It Is* (1998)

To My Boys

More than anyone, you have helped me have the courage, strength, and wisdom to follow my thread. You are my love and my life.

Ayrie, you are always with me in spirit, part of my every breath and my every thought.

You woke me up and opened my heart, and your death inspired my rebirth.

Shiya, you are my light each day and show me how to float, how to laugh, and how to feel joy.

You have helped me learn how to keep my heart open.

Abstract

The purpose of this research was trifold. First, it was an attempt to gain an understanding of the experiences of fourteen unaccompanied, homeless youth between the ages of 18 and 24, living in the Twin Cities metro area, who have utilized services at two or more of the six grantee organizations. The second purpose was to understand how the shared principles of these organizations have been implemented in practice. The third purpose was to explore the extent to which implementation of these principles helps lead to healthy youth development from the perspective of the youth. This study was conducted as part of The Otto Bremer Foundation (OBF) Support for Homeless Youth and is a component of a utilization-focused developmental evaluation. The researcher employed a multiple case study approach. Qualitative data were generated from interviews with the youths themselves, street workers, agency staff, and Foundation staff. Fourteen individual case studies were written, and a cross-case analysis was conducted. The analysis provides insight into how the principles are enacted, as well as how they support a young person's healthy trajectory. This study found that all nine principles were evident in case stories, albeit some more than others. All principles interacted and overlapped, but each added something unique to the organizations' approach to working with youth. Implications for practice, policy, and funding are discussed.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

You have no place to call your home. You're always bouncing around. You don't have your own space. You're just outside more than you're in. Homeless, to me, is not having anything, not being able to go home, not being able to just say, "I'm cold, and I'm going home." That's the biggest part about it. Like, a couple days ago, me and the mother of my baby were in an argument, so I couldn't go there. Then it got real cold, and I think it started snowing, and it just dawned on me like, Man, I don't have nowhere to go. I don't have nowhere to stay. *That's the definition of homeless to me. It's not being able to go home, not having a home to call home.*

~ Thmaris on what it means to be homeless

Background of the Problem

Homelessness among adolescents and young adults is a major social concern in the United States (Robertson & Toro, 1999). Each year, hundreds of thousands of adolescents like Thmaris spend the night on the streets, in shelters, in abandoned buildings, or in some other inadequate location without supervision by an adult caretaker (Fowler, Toro, & Miles, 2009; Hammer, Finkelhor, & Sedlak, 2002). The number of youth suffering from homelessness in any given year, however, is difficult to determine. Various sampling and estimation techniques yield quite different results, and estimates vary widely, depending on how homelessness is defined and measured. It is commonly cited that approximately 7.6% of 12- to 20-year-old youths spend at least one night per year in a shelter facility (Ringwalt, Greene, Robertson, & McPheeters, 1998), but no national count includes those who stay in shelters *and* those who stay in unsupervised locations (Witte, 2012). Kidd (2012) wrote, "The only agreed-upon points regarding the number of homeless youth in North America is that it is large (e.g., one million youth in the United States) and it is likely growing" (p. 534).

Homeless youth are a heterogeneous group. Some of these young people become homeless during adolescence in response to high levels of family conflict and maltreatment that leads them to run away; whereas others are forced to leave when parents will no longer provide care (Thompson, Bender, Windsor, Cook, & Williams, 2010). Other adolescents have aged out of foster care or juvenile justice placements, typically between the ages of 18 and 21, and have no home to which they can return (Haber & Toro, 2004) and no network of people to help meet their needs. Homelessness often occurs slowly, over a number of years; youths have reported that there was not a single event that precipitated homelessness but rather a series of cumulative events (Kennedy, Agbényiga, Kasiborski, & Gladden, 2010).

Regardless of their pathways into homelessness, homeless youth share many background characteristics, including high residential mobility (Cauce, Paradise, Ginzler, Embry, Morgan, Lohr, & Theofelis, 2000; Toro & Goldstein, 2000), a high degree of conflict in the family, and high rates of child abuse and/or neglect (Caton, Wilkins, & Anderson, 2007). Four specific groups of young people at an increased risk of becoming homeless are: youths who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or questioning (LGBTQ) **(**Cochran, Stewart, Ginzler, & Cauce, 2002); young women who are pregnant or have children **(**Halcón & Lifson, 2004); young people of color (U.S. Conference of Mayors, 2008); and youth who have been under the supervision of the child welfare or juvenile justice system **(**Teplin, Abram, McClelland, Dulcan, & Mericle, 2002).

Research indicates that, when compared to their housed peers, homeless youth are at increased risk for physical health problems (Shaw & Dorling, 1998), are more prone to

engage in risky sexual behavior (Steele & O'Keefe, 2001), are at increased risk for mental and behavioral health problems, are more likely to attempt to commit suicide (Yoder, Whitbeck, & Hoyt, 2008), have more interactions and run-ins with the criminal justice system (Levin, Bax, McKean, & Schoggen, 2005), and have increased disengagement with the educational system (Barber, Fonagy, Fultz, Simulinas, & Yates, 2005). They are likely to face stigmatization (Kidd & Evans, 2011) and experience victimization and traumatic events (Tyler, Gervais, & Davidson, 2012). However, seemingly unbelievably, there are positive aspects to homelessness as well. Some escape truly unbearable living situations, and homeless youths can develop survival skills, personal strength, and resilience in response to living independently in challenging situations.

Youth Homelessness in Minnesota

Since 1991, Wilder Research of St. Paul, has conducted a triennial statewide homelessness study to better understand the prevalence, causes, circumstances and effects of homelessness in the state and to promote efforts toward permanent, affordable housing for all Minnesotans. Results of the 2012 study show that youth homelessness rates in Minnesota are the highest in the past two decades (Gerrard, Shelton, Pittman, & Owen, 2013). The most recent count of homeless individuals in Minnesota indicates that nearly half all homeless people are age twenty-one and younger. This includes 1,151 youth on their own, including 146 who are age 17 and younger and 1,005 who are 18 through 21 (Gerrard et al., 2013). This rate is three times higher than the first count in 1991 and 25% higher than the number of homeless adults, youth, and children counted only 3 years ago

(Owen, 2010). From this count, Wilder Research estimates that 13,100 people are homeless on any given night in Minnesota; of these, 2,500 are youth or young adults. Wilder Research estimates that this equates to approximately 22,000 unaccompanied homeless youth in Minnesota each year (Owen, 2008).

The number of young people residing outside of a safe home in Minnesota appears to be growing at a rate faster than other subpopulations in the state (Owen, 2010). Between 2006 and 2009, the population of homeless young adults aged 18 to 21 increased 57%, and the population of homeless youth age 12 to17 increased 46%. It is reasonable to believe that the actual number of homeless youth is much higher. Of those experiencing homelessness, youth tend to be difficult to find, as they are less likely than adults to stay in shelters and are more likely to "couch surf"—the act of finding various couches to sleep on & homes to survive in until they are put out—or stay places not intended for habitation (Owen, 2008).

While statistics tell a partial story, Wilder Research reports reveal that 61% percent of homeless youth in Minnesota are female, 46% report a serious mental illness, 42% have been physically abused, and 27% have been sexually mistreated. These young people also reported high rates of placements in other systems. Sixty-four percent of homeless youth had experienced a placement in a foster home, group home, detention facility, or treatment center. Specifically, 37% of youth had lived in a foster home; 18% had lived in a facility for persons with emotional, behavioral, or mental health problems; 25% lived in a residential group home; and 37% had been held for more than a week in corrections. Twenty-eight percent reported having run away from placement, and 17% of

youth interviewed had left some type of social service placement in the previous 12 months (Kennedy et al., 2010; Owen, 2008; Owen, 2010).

In addition, African American, American Indian, and Hispanic children in Minnesota are more likely to experience homelessness than their Caucasian peers. Although American Indians comprise only 1% of all Minnesota youth, they make up 20% of homeless youth in the state; African Americans comprise 6% of Minnesota youth but 43% of homeless youth in Minnesota; and youth of Hispanic ethnicity comprise 5% of Minnesota youth but 11% of homeless youth statewide (Hong & Piescher, 2012). Young parents are also over-represented among homeless youth in Minnesota; 34% of youth interviewed reported that they had children of their own. Twelve percent of homeless youth identified themselves as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or unsure about their sexual orientation (Kennedy et al., 2010; Owen, 2008; Owen, 2010).

Youth Homelessness in the Twin Cities Metro Area

Homelessness is a significant and growing social problem in Minnesota. The impact of homelessness on the mental, behavioral, and physical health of youth and on their life course trajectories is substantial. While there are various resources available to support homeless youth, data suggest that these resources are woefully inadequate. Youth shelter leaders in the Twin Cities area report that they cannot meet the growing demand for beds and services. Catholic Charities' Hope Street Shelter, for example, reported having to turn 425 youth from their beds during the last quarter of 2012, as compared to 375 for the same quarter in 2011. Fewer than 15% of the estimated unaccompanied homeless youth are able to access one of the estimated 100 emergency shelter beds

designated for youth in a given fiscal year (Continuum of Care Report, 2010). Drop-in shelters are also seeing an increasing demand. YouthLinks' Youth Opportunity Center helped 1,803 youth in 2011, as compared to 1,252 youth in 2010, and was on track to help even more in 2012 (Hopfensperger, 2012).

Twin Cities area school districts reported similar increases in homeless youth. Between the 2009-10 and 2010-11 school years, there was an 18% increase in homeless or highly mobile school-aged youth in the state of Minnesota. Of these, 62% attended a school in Hennepin or Ramsey Counties, and 44% attended either a Minneapolis or St. Paul public school (Minnesota Department of Education, 2010-11 McKinney-Vento Homeless Child Count). During this time period, Minneapolis Public Schools saw a 12% increase in homeless or highly mobile youth among their students, totalling 3,398 youth or 8% of their total student body. There were 1,516 homeless or highly mobile youth, 3% of the student body, in the St. Paul Public schools in 2010-11.

Statement of the Problem

Youth Homelessness as a Systems Problem

Homelessness has been recognized as a serious problem in the state of Minnesota, and Heading Home Minnesota was created as a coordinated public-private partnership to put an end to it (Kadwell & Nelsen, 2013). Seven counties (Anoka, Hennepin, Olmsted, Ramsey, Saint Louis, Scott-Carver, and Steele) and six regions of the state (Northeast, Northwest, West Central, Central, Southeast, and Southwest) have developed and are implementing plans to end homelessness in their communities under the umbrella of

Minnesota's Roadmap for Ending Homelessness, as well as the statewide Business Plan to End Long-Term Homelessness. The Heading Home Hennepin Roadmap states:

> There are a number of reasons why the average Minnesota citizen should care about growing homelessness. The first is that people without homes cannot build productive lives. Physical and mental health deteriorate, and it is difficult (if not impossible) to find and keep a job. Without income and a place to sleep at night, people are more likely to turn to crime. Children cannot move forward with their education, and they cannot develop healthy, sustainable relationships with their peers. Youth without family turn to dangerous behaviors simply to survive on the streets. The deterioration in wellbeing and fraying of relationships threatens the health and wellbeing of Minnesota's families and communities both now and for the future (2012, p. 1).

It is clear, as evidenced by this excerpt, that the state of Minnesota views homelessness as a problem that places the impacts of homelessness in multiple interrelated formal and informal systems. Therefore, it may prove helpful to think of homelessness as a systems problem, one that goes "beyond the capacity of any one organisation [sic] to understand and respond to" (Briggs, 2007, p. 1). Large-scale social problems such as homelessness are often characterized by disagreement about the causes of the problem, the best way to tackle the problem, boundaries that appear clear but are not, and by diverse and conflicting perspectives (Bridges, 2007; Richardson, Coryn, Henry, Black-Pond & Unaru, 2012).

A single homeless youth may interact simultaneously with his or her family system, peer network, educational entities, the foster care system, the juvenile justice system, a youth drop-in center, and a homeless shelter. For example, as in the case of Zi (case story will presented later), a youth who runs away from an unbearable foster care placement to be with family will be served a warrant for arrest. Because schools are mandated to report her to the police if she attends school, she Zi felt she had no choice

but to abandon high school, and the drop-in center became her safe refuge during the school day. A single youth can touch and be touched by an astonishing number of systems, and what happens with this youth in one of these systems impacts what happens in other systems. In Zi's situation, a negative experience with foster care led to her involvement with the juvenile justice system, which then caused her to forsake her education.

Collaboration to Address Youth Homelessness

Meeting the needs of a single youth, as well as addressing the systemic phenomenon of youth homelessness and the growing social problem, requires that individuals, organizations, and systems collaborate. Thus, two challenges will be addressed by this research. The first is to learn more about how individuals, organizations, and/or systems might collaborate in order to best address youth homelessness at the individual, organizational, and systems levels. The second is to incorporate youth voice as a way of improving the quality of the research and the validity of the findings (Walker, 2007). Only a small subset of the existing literature includes youth voice. Of the more than 200 articles on homeless youth reviewed for this dissertation, fewer than one-quarter of them relied on a method that incorporated qualitative perspectives shared by youth. This research study took advantage of a unique opportunity to address both challenges.

Context for this Study

The OBF Youth Homelessness Initiative is a commitment by The Otto Bremer

Foundation to fund six grantees at four million dollars over a period of three years. The goal was to build on the research related to youth development, resiliency, and prevention, focusing on strategies and programs that had already proven to be effective. The six grantees (three emergency shelters, two youth opportunity drop-in centers, and one street outreach organization) received funding dedicated to expanding their existing services, as well as to support collaboration and improved outcomes at the systems level. This approach was taken in recognition of the fact that youth homelessness is a systems-level problem, and many youth will come into contact with several of the six organizations while experiencing homelessness.

Principles-Driven Developmental Evaluation

Developmental evaluation is appropriate when a program or model is in the process of being created, still emerging, and while those involved are figuring out what they want to do and how to do it. Thus, developmental evaluation helps with documentation of new initiatives in what is being developed, gather ongoing feedback about what is emerging, and evaluate the implications for making a difference (Patton, 1994; Patton, 2011). This research study is a component of the larger-in-scope, resources allocation and time commitment, principles-based developmental evaluation.

The Otto Bremer Foundation convened members of a reflective practice group (RPG) at least once monthly to engage in a principles-based developmental evaluation in order to support their ongoing collaboration. The reflective praqctice group, still meeting at the time of this paper's completion, consists of The Otto Bremer Foundation executive director and three program officers, as well as leadership from the six grantee

organizations, for a total of approximately eighteen members. This reflective practice group decided to engage in a particular type of developmental evaluation: principles-based. A principle is defined as "a fundamental truth or proposition that serves as the foundation for a system of belief or behavior or for a chain of reasoning" (Oxford University Press, 2013). A principles-based approach is appropriate when a group of diverse programs are "all adhering to the same principles but each adapting those principles to its own particular target population within its own context" (Patton, 2010). Collectively, the group agreed on nine principles that did or conceivably could guide their work. The challenge for this research, then, was to collect evidence about those nine principles in action, as experienced by youth.

Developing evidence-based principles is an emerging approach that is in contrast to the more traditional approach of developing evidence-based best practices. Evidence-based best practices and evidence-based principles make different assumptions and have difference strengths and weaknesses. A practice is the implantation of a method or the customary, habitual, or expected procedure of something (Oxford Press, 2013). The label "evidence-based best practice" describes "standardized procedures sometimes but not always validated through randomized controlled experiments or, as second choice, quasi-experimental designs" (Patton, 2012, p. 155). Best practice models are based on the assumption that there is a *best* way to do things, regardless of context. Evidence-based effective principles are different, in that they have to be "interpreted and adapted to context" (Patton, 2010, p. 167). Rather than providing a standardized model or method, principles provide guidance for action in the face of complexity.

Collaboratively Identified Principles for Health Youth Development

The six grantee organizations agreed to work with the nine principles for engaging homeless youth in support of healthy development. Leaders of the six organizations collaboratively identified the nine shared principles, based on a comparison of the six organizations' existing missions, visions, values, and/or philosophy statements. The nine principles developed were described at the onset of this study as follows: harm reduction, trusting relationships, positive youth development, trauma-informed care, non-judgmental, journey-oriented, strengths/assets-based, collaborative, and holistic. All of the organizations already stated at least three of the nine principles stated in their individual missions, visions, values, and/or philosophies at the outset. Journey-oriented emerged from group member discussions and does not currently appear on any of the organizations' missions, visions, values, and/or philosophy statements. These principles have not been systematically and empirically validated. This dissertation research collects evidence about how these nine principles can help develop a principles-based framework that is informed by youth voices. It also explores how these principles are experienced by the recipients of the service: the youth.

Research Questions

- *Process questions:* 1) How do homeless youth actually experience the principles of harm reduction, trusting relationships, positive youth development, trauma-informed care, non-judgmental, journey-oriented, strengths/assets-based, collaborative, and holistic? 2) What does implementation of the principles look

like in practice?

- *Outcome questions:* 3) What are the impacts of the principles articulated above on ways to work with homeless youth? 4) In what ways does the work impact the trajectory of the lives of young people?
- *Emergent question:* 5) What other important principles may be guiding the work with youth, principles not yet fully identified, labeled, or understood?

This project used a multiple case study approach to answer the research questions set forth above. Qualitative data were generated from interviews with the youths themselves, as well as with street workers, agency and Foundation staff, and key informants. Quantitative data were collected through a review of the young people's case files. Individual case stories were written, and the constant comparative method was applied to a cross-case analysis. This approach allowed the researcher to understand the heterogeneity of experiences and to explore them through a systems lens.

Importance of this Study

Youth comprise the fastest-growing subset of homeless individuals both nationally and in Minnesota (Owen, 2010; Robertson & Toro, 1999); however, a recent review of literature for research findings on and interventions for homeless individuals found that comparatively little research has been focused on homeless youth (Toro, Dworsky, & Fowler, 2007). Most of the research on homelessness conducted over the last two decades has focused on homeless adults, particularly those with mental health

disorders and substance abuse problems. To improve services and outcomes for homeless youth, more research should be focused on this unique and vulnerable group (Toro et al., 2007).

This study privileges the voices of youth who have experienced homelessness in the Twin Cities area. The goal is to more accurately understand youth homelessness through their individual experiences rather than relying solely on reports of adults in their environment (such as social workers and shelter staff) or on quantitative measures that are not able to shed light on contextualized experiences (Slesnick, Dashora, Letcher, Erdem, & Serovich, 2009; Toro et al., 2007). This research presents the experiences of fourteen homeless youth in the Twin Cities Metropolitan area who have utilized services provided by the six organizations funded through The Otto Bremer Foundation's Youth Homelessness Initiative. This paper presents these experiences in the fourteen individuals' own voices, addressing a gap in the existing literature.

While there are many reasons why youth leave home and as many frameworks in which to investigate the problem, The National Alliance to End Homelessness divides the causes for youth homelessness into two categories: family breakdown and system failure. While these categorizations may not capture all the causes of youth homelessness, they suggest that the problem is, at least in part, a societal one and not one caused by the youth themselves (Schneir et al., 2007). This is consistent with the near consensus reached by researchers that there are overarching structural barriers—such as lack of health insurance, absence of stable housing, and inadequate shelter resources—that , that help to account for the myriad of negative outcomes documented in studies of homeless youth

(Zerger, Strehlow, & Gundlapalli, 2008). This study is important because it addressed another gap in the literature by applying a systems lens to the research design. This framework considers homelessness as a problem rooted in multiple competing systems rather than as a failure of any individual young person.

Lastly, the proposed study is important because it contributes to the evaluation field by exploring the role that a principles-based developmental evaluation can play in informing a collaborative systems-level response to a wicked problem. Michael Quinn Patton wrote about this approach in his book, *Developmental Evaluation: Applying Complexity Concepts to Enhance Innovation and U*se (2010); however, to date, there is little published research exploring how the implementation of such would impact actual practice. Rather than seeking to develop evidence of a best practice that can be applied the same way in multiple settings without consideration of context, evidence of effect principles guides cohesive decisionmaking and action across diverse contexts.

Summary

The thesis will be organized into six chapters. This chapter, Chapter 1, provides the introduction to the study and describes the purpose, rationale, and significance of the study. Chapter 2 presents a review of the literature on four topics: factors related to youth homelessness, an introduction to principles versus practices, a discussion of the research underpinning the nine shared principles, and a review of literature related to systems thinking in research and evaluation. Chapter 3 provides a detailed description of the methodology, including a description of the selection process, questionnaire, and

interview tools, as well as an introduction to the participants. Chapter 4 presents the individual case studies for each of the fourteen youth, providing the reader a glimpse into the experiences of each young adult. Chapter 5 submits a cross-case analysis of the fourteen cases to elucidate common themes. Chapter 6 discusses the findings and limitations of the study, looks at opportunities for further research, and discusses implications for practitioners. A visual roadmap of this paper is presented in Figure 1.

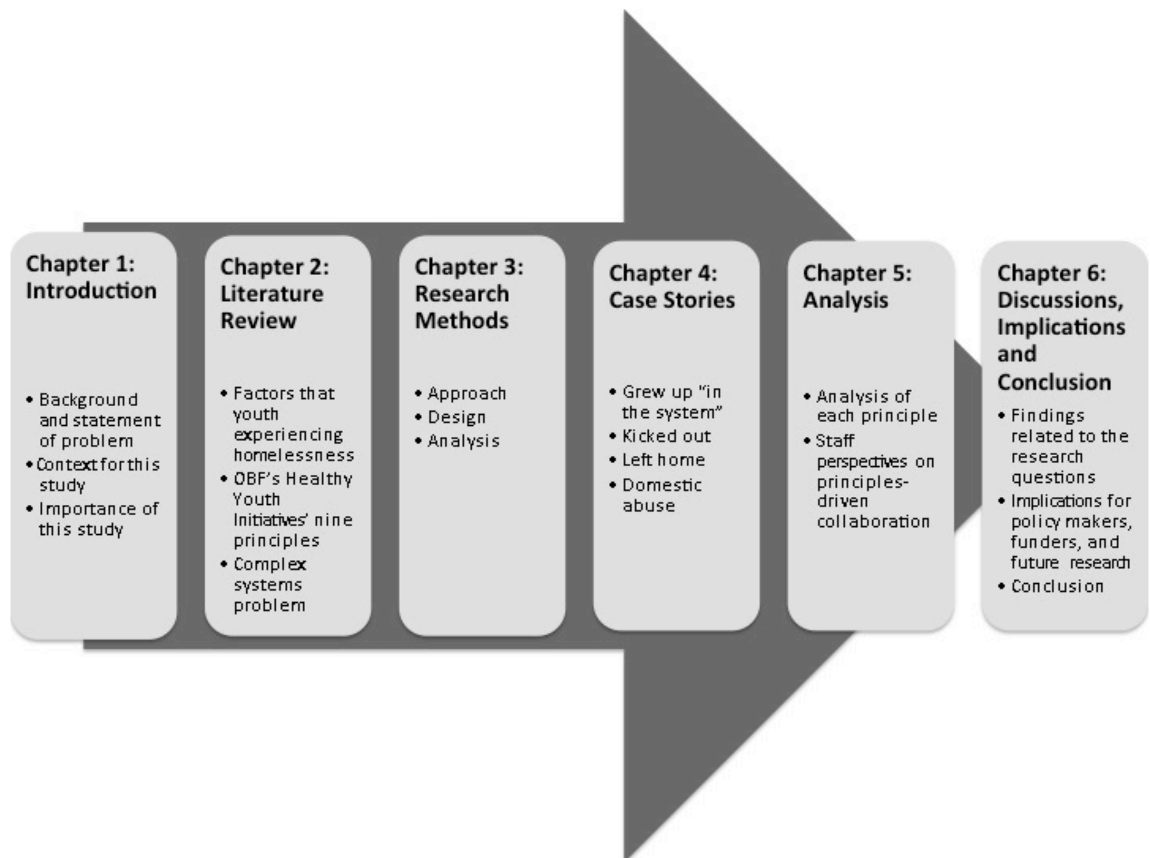

Figure 1. A visual roadmap of the information presented in this dissertation

Definitions

This study focuses on the experience of unaccompanied homeless youth in the Twin Cities metro area. Defining what constitutes an "unaccompanied homeless youth"

may seem fairly straightforward; however, the issues involved in determining an appropriate and accurate definition are really quite complicated. For this reason, various terms related to homelessness are defined for the purposes of this study, as set forth below:

Chronic or long-term homelessness: The label used by the federal government and some researchers to describe an individual or family who has been continuously homeless for a year or more or has experienced at least four episodes of homelessness in the last three years.

Emergency shelter: The United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) defines this as any facility with overnight sleeping accommodations, the primary purpose of which is to provide temporary shelter for people experiencing homelessness. The length of stay can range from one night to three or more months.

Homelessness: Based on the definition established by the U.S. Congress in the McKinney-Vento legislation (2000), someone is homeless if he or she: 1) lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence; or 2) has a primary nighttime residence that is a supervised, publicly or privately operated temporary living accommodation, including shelters, transitional housing, and battered women's shelters; or 3) has a nighttime residence in anyplace not meant for human habitation, such as under bridges or in cars. This definition is extended to also include those under 18 who are: 1) sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason (sometimes referred to as "doubled- up"); or 2) living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or

camp grounds due to lack of alternative adequate accommodations; abandoned in hospitals; or awaiting foster care placement.

Permanent supportive housing: Designed to provide lodging (project- and tenant-based) and supportive services on a long- term basis for homeless people, many of whom have disabilities.

Principle: A fundamental truth or proposition that serves as the foundation for a system of belief or behavior or for a chain of reasoning.

Street outreach: Programs that target youth on the streets. Staff may give items to street youth, act as counselors if they build trusting relationships with the youth, and connect the youth to programs and services in the community.

Transitional housing program: Housing where homeless people may stay and receive supportive services for up to twenty-four months. These programs are designed to enable people to move into permanent housing.

Unaccompanied: Homeless youth who are not staying with a parent or guardian (Haber & Toro, 2004). This is in contrast to a young person who is homeless but accompanied by members of his or her family or an adult guardian.

Youth: Many research studies count youth ages 12 through 17; others count those from 18 through 21; and still others consider this ages 18 through 24. For the purpose of this study, a youth is defined as a young person aged 12 through 24.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter is presented in four parts. The first part explores homelessness, its causes, and its impacts. This part explores interrelated factors associated with youth homelessness and offers a discussion of the subpopulation of youth that are most at risk of becoming homeless. The second part reviews the literature available on the nine collaboratively developed shared principles, placing emphasis on how they apply to working with homeless youth whenever possible. In the third part, youth homelessness is presented as a complex, serious systems problem, characterized by highly interdependent causes and influences, a problem that is socially complex and difficult to solve. This part discusses the value/utility of a system-thinking perspective and a framework by which to view this social problem. The fourth part describes to approaches to address complex social problems: developing evidence-based best practices versus evidence-based effective principles.

Part 1: The Interrelated Factors that Affect Homeless Youth

No typical homeless youth exists, and youth homelessness has no single cause. The literature offers varied explanations as to why youth become homeless in the first place and why they continue to live that way; however, no one particular characteristic or experience has been identified as a primary cause or contributing factor to youth homelessness, and each individual differs in how they become, experience, and exit homelessness. Distinguishing between causes and consequences of youth homelessness is often difficult, and the complexities, characteristics, and contributing factors associated with youth homelessness often intersect (Thompson et al., 2010).

What we do know is that most “youth are running away from problematic situations rather than running toward the street” (Karabanow, 2004, p. 4). Although entering the streets can lead to some positive outcomes, such as escape of abuse, rape, and other unsafe situations at home (Reid, Berman, & Forchuk, 2005), it does not solve all problems and often creates new ones. Kennedy (2010) conducted semi-structured individual interviews with fourteen adolescent mothers to examine their life histories with a focus on experiences with violence and adversity, adaptations and coping in response, and sources of support. None of the participants reported any one, single event that precipitated their homelessness; rahter, they described “a chain of risks that accumulated over childhood and adolescence and ultimately culminated in homelessness” (p. 1743). The young women reported that as risks accumulated over time, supports became harder to find, and they felt they became increasingly isolated, with very limited options.

Regardless of their various pathways into homelessness, homeless youth share many background characteristics. One important difference between homeless youth and their housed counterparts seems to be that homeless youth have experienced a far greater number of residential moves than those of their housed peers (Cauce et al., 2000; Toro & Goldstein, 2000). Another is the high degree of conflict in the family. Youth consistently identify child/parent conflict as the primary reason for their homelessness (Robertson & Toro, 1999), and they tend to report more family conflict than their peers who are housed (Toro & Goldstein, 2000). Others are forced to leave by parents who cannot or will no longer provide care (Thompson et al., 2010). Some adolescents leave home to escape

abuse or victimization, and those who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgendered are sometimes told to leave when they express their sexual orientation (Cochran et al., 2002). Other adolescents simply age out of foster care or juvenile justice placements and have no home or community to which to return (Haber & Toro, 2004). Regardless of the specific reasons, family conflict is a strong predictor of youth homelessness (Tyler, 2006). With few job skills and limited income, adolescents experiencing homelessness are rarely capable of obtaining safe, affordable housing. Youths living without homes are at great risk for victimization (Gaetz, 2004; Stewart et al., 2004; Tyler, Whitbeck, Hoyt, & Cauce, 2004).

One of the most common ways that researchers distinguish between types of youth is to categorize them. *Runaways* are those who have left home without parental permission, *throwaways* have been forced out by their parents, and *street youth* have spent at least some time living on the streets, as well as in government programs such as foster care or the juvenile justice system (Farrow, Deisher, Brown, Kulig, & Kipke, 1992). Although these categories reflect important distinctions among youth with respect to the reasons for their homelessness and their experiences during it, they are neither static nor mutually exclusive (Hammer et al., 2002).

Four specific groups of young people are at an increased risk for homelessness: those who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning (LGBTQ); young women who are pregnant or already have children; young people of color; and youths who have been in the child welfare or juvenile justice systems. Research findings related to each of these overlapping groups of youth is presented in the following sections.

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning youth. Research has found that LGBTQ adolescents leave home more frequently, are victimized more often, use highly addictive substances more frequently, exhibit higher rates of psychopathology, have more sexual partners than heterosexual adolescents, and are exposed to greater victimization while on the streets (Cochran et al., 2002). The findings from the LGBT Homeless Youth Provider Survey, a national, web-based survey conducted from October 2011 through March 2012, indicate that almost all organizations serving homeless youth are serving LGBT youth and that LGBT youth make up approximately 30% of clients who utilize housing-related services such as emergency shelter and transitional living programs (Durso & Gates, 2012). In this same study, care providers reported that nearly 7 in 10 (68%) of their LGBT homeless clients have experienced family rejection, and more than half of those clients (54%) had experienced abuse in their family (Durso & Gates, 2012). A young person in one study shared about her coming-out experience: "My mom wouldn't accept it because she would be shunned in the community. People back home get killed and tortured for being gay, so she was so scared for me. So that landed me at [a shelter]" (Winland, Gaetz, & Patton, 2011).

Pregnant and parenting youth. A significant percentage of homeless youth are pregnant or parenting, but little is known about adolescent mothers who are homeless during pregnancy and motherhood. Over half of homeless adolescent females report having been pregnant at least once, with more than a quarter reporting two or more pregnancies (Halcón & Lifson, 2004). A systematic review of the literature identified only nineteen studies of homeless adolescent mothers (Scappaticci & Blay, 2009). The

studies revealed that these young women had experienced high rates of substance abuse, mental disorders, and a lack of social support, as well as high rates of having experienced physical and sexual violence. They also have significantly greater histories of rape and voluntary sexual activity than never-pregnant teens and report twice as many pregnancies compared to teenagers in the general population (Scappaticci & Blay, 2009; Sheaff & Talashek, 1995).

One study that documented twenty-six pregnancy outcomes among thirteen homeless women (ages 18–26) and eight homeless men found that eight pregnancies were voluntarily terminated, three were miscarried, and fifteen were carried to term (Smid, Bourgois, & Auerswald, 2010). Of the fifteen babies carried to term, twelve mothers lost custody of their newborns as a result of contact with medical and/or social services (Smid et al., 2010). The three mothers who were able to keep their babies were also the only three young women who were able to return to their families for housing. One woman reported delaying seeking prenatal care until late in her second trimester because she was "afraid [the clinic] would find out about me being pregnant and try to take away my baby, just like they do to everyone who's been homeless for any time during their pregnancy" (Smid et al., 2010, p. 8). Some women reported having to choose between their babies and their partners because the only housing available to young mothers does not allow the fathers to stay. These difficult choices and hard outcomes highlight the deep mistrust that formerly pregnant or parenting youth report regarding child services and other adults, as well as the uniqueness of their experiences and needs.

Youth of color. Discrimination against racial and ethnic minority populations has

long been embedded in American society. It has been argued that this has resulted in the overrepresentation of people of color experiencing homelessness. According to recent estimates, African Americans constitute 42% of those living without homes, Caucasians 39%, Latinos 13%, Native Americans 4%, and Asians 2% (U.S. Conference of Mayors, 2008). Researchers have not identified a clear explanation as to why people of color, particularly African Americans and American Indians, are overrepresented among the homeless. The Heading Home Hennepin Roadmap (2006) identifies four factors that may be particularly salient to Minnesota and Hennepin County: 1) underemployment due to racial discrimination in the job market; 2) lack of access to affordable housing due to racial discrimination in the housing market; 3) overrepresentation of people of color in the criminal justice system; and 4) disparities in poverty rates.

Youth exiting foster care. There is substantial evidence that youth in the foster care system become homeless at a much higher rate than their housed peers. Youth age out of foster care when they turn 18 or 21 (depending on the state they live in), and they are expected to live independently and support themselves once they leave the child welfare system. However, these youth often lack the financial, social, and personal resources needed to do so, thus increasing the likelihood of homelessness. Of the 264 youth followed for 2 years in the Youth Aging Out of Foster Care in Metropolitan Detroit study, 17% reported experiencing homelessness within 2 years of exiting the foster care system (Toro et al., 2007). Other youth homelessness rates for the first year after aging out of the foster care system range from 12% (Courtney, Piliavin, Grogan-Kaylor, & Nesmith, 2001) to 14% (Courtney et al., 2007). Another longitudinal study of youth

aging out of the foster care system found that 15% of youth reported being homeless in the subsequent 4 years, and 25% reported couch-surfing during the same period (Courtney et al., 2011). In total, nearly a third of the youth who aged out of foster care (31%) experienced homelessness or couch-surfing in the 4 years after leaving the system (Courtney et al., 2011).

Youth in the juvenile justice system. Every year, approximately 200,000 juveniles and young adults ages 10 to 24 years, most of whom are not high school graduates and have never held a job, are released from secure detention or correctional facilities and reenter their communities (Teplin et al., 2002). Many face confounding and sometimes crippling challenges such as physical or mental health obstacles or substance abuse problems. A recent study of 1,800 arrested and detained youth found that nearly two-thirds of males and three-quarters of females met diagnostic criteria for 1 or more psychiatric disorders (Teplin et al., 2002). They often return to neighborhoods suffering from high poverty, unemployment, and crime rates (Mears & Travis, 2004). They are often unable to live with their families because those who have been convicted of certain drug offenses and other crimes are denied Section 8 housing (Popkin, Cunningham, & Burt, 2005). Combined, these grim factors place young people at increased risk of becoming homeless upon leaving the juvenile justice system.

Impacts of Homelessness on Youth Health and Wellbeing

Research has demonstrated that homelessness impacts the health and wellbeing of young people. The impacts discussed include physical, mental, and behavioral health; engagement with other youth-related systems; and stigmatization. Homeless youth appear

to have a wider range of health and behavioral problems, including medical, mental, and alcohol or drug addiction, than their housed peers. Whereas some of these problems appear to be longstanding, others are likely worsened by the stress of homelessness.

Increased risk for physical health problems. The health trajectories of most homeless youth are poor, and mortality rates are strikingly higher than those of housed youth (Kidd, 2012). Though highly variable, estimates of up to forty times the mortality rate of housed youths have been reported (Shaw & Dorling, 1998). Homeless youth suffer twice as many ear infections, have four times the rate of asthma, and have five times more digestive problems than housed youth (Bassuk, Friedman, Batia, Holland, Kelly, & Olson, 2005). Once ill, homeless youth are less likely to seek help for their physical health problem than their housed peers. A study that explored homeless young adults' perspectives on accessing healthcare conducted focus groups with a purposeful sample of twenty-four homeless, drug-using young adults (Hudson, Nyamathi, & Sweat, 2008). The youth involved in the study perceived both structural and social barriers to accessing healthcare. Structural barriers included limited clinic sites, limited hours of operation, priority health conditions, and long wait times. One social barrier was perception of discrimination by uncaring professionals, law enforcement, and society in general (Hudson et al., 2008).

Increased engagement in risky sexual behavior. Adolescents (ages 15 to 24) in the United States are at higher risk of acquiring sexually transmitted infections (STIs) than sexually active adults. While this population represents only 25% of the ever sexually active population, they acquire nearly 50% of all new STIs (Weinstock, Berman,

& Cates, 2004). This rate is even higher for homeless youth. A study of 244 homeless runaways in Colorado found that 100% of them were sexually active; 88% had been sexually active in the previous three months, and 49% reported having had 10 or more partners up to the time of the study (Booth, Zhang, & Kwiatkowski, 1999). Some youth engage in *survival sex*, the exchange of sex for food, money, shelter, drugs, and other needs and wants; research literature indicates between 11% and 41%, with some variation depending on city, sampling methodology, and sample characteristics such as duration of homelessness (Walls & Bell, 2011). Because of this risk-taking and/or mediating behavior, homeless youth are at a higher risk of contracting STIs such as chlamydia, herpes, and viral hepatitis (Noell et al., 2001). One study of new admissions to a residential care facility for homeless and runaway youth found that 60% of the 106 residents had an STI at the time of admission (Steele & O'Keefe, 2001).

Increased risk for mental and behavioral health problems. Rates of serious mental health disorders among homeless youth, assessed with standardized instruments and diagnostic criteria, range from 19 to 50% (Robertson & Toro, 1999). In 1 study, nearly 1 in 5 (16%) youth had attempted suicide in the year before the interview, and of these attempters, 52% had made multiple lifetime attempts (Yoder et al., 2008). Despite the high rates of mental illness among homeless youth, research indicates that homeless young people are less likely than their housed peers to approach and engage with mental health services (Solorio, Milburn, Rotheram-Borus, Higgins, & Gelberg, 2006). Young people experiencing homelessness may become reluctant to engage with mental health services as a result of negative past experiences, such as being involuntarily detained in

psychiatric inpatient units or feeling judged by service workers (Keys, Mallett, Edwards, & Rosenthal, 2004). In some cases, youth do not seek help because they do not view the diagnosable mental health issues as problems that truly need to be resolved.

Although the reason for the high prevalence of mental health issues reported among homeless youth is far from clear and the proposed interventions varied, it is a prevalent factor in the population of unaccompanied youth living without homes (Edidin, Ganim, Hunter, & Karnik, 2012; Hughes, Clark, Wood, Cakmak, Cox, MacInnis, Warren, Handrahan, & Barbara Broom, 2010; Milburn, Batterham, Ayala, Rice, Solorio, Desmond, Lord, Iribarren, & Rotheram-Borus, 2010; Robertson & Toro, 1999; Toro, Lesperance, & Braciszewski, 2011). In 2009, the Presidential Task Force on Psychology Contribution to End Homelessness was commissioned by James H. Bray, PhD, during his tenure as president of the American Psychological Association (APA), with the goal of identifying and addressing psychosocial factors and conditions associated with homelessness. While the task force findings weren't specifically about youth, the report clearly indicated that while rates of mental illness among people experiencing homeless in the United States are higher than those of the general population, most people who are homeless are not suffering from a mental disorder (Bray, 2009). While mental illness may lead to problems that result in homelessness, it does not appear to be a sufficient risk factor on its own, based on comparisons of people who are homeless with mental illness and those without mental illness (Sullivan, Burnam, Koegel, & Hollenberg, 2000).

Increased engagement in illegal activity. Homeless youth often engage in behavior that is considered to be criminal. Such behavior includes selling drugs,

panhandling, stealing, and exchanging sex for money or food. In a Chicago study, 58% of youth reported engaging in stealing, 52% in selling or trading drugs, and 24% in selling or trading sex (31% of female respondents). Additionally, 47% reported 1 or more prior arrests, 53% of which resulted in a conviction (Levin et al., 2005). In some cases, illegal behaviors may precede and even cause entry into homelessness; in others, illegal behavior is a coping response to being homeless (Zerger et al., 2008). Behavioral problems such as conduct disorder or oppositional defiant disorder are common mental health diagnoses that may increase likelihood of engaging in illegal behaviors (Cauce et al., 2000; Toro & Goldstein, 2000). Incarceration is common among homeless youth and serves as a serious barrier to yough acquiring gainful employment or housing, and this only adds to a vicious cycle (Gwadz et al., 2009). Nonetheless, the criminalization of homeless youth is often viewed by the public and in research as a moral flaw of the individual, and the contributing societal and structural factors that contribute to this cycle go unnoticed (Kidd, 2012).

Homeless youth who lack employment in the formal economy typically turn to the *street economy* (e.g., panhandling, prostitution, drug selling) for survival (Aratani & Cooper, 2012). The level of engagement with the street economy increases with the duration of exposure to homelessness and homeless peers (Gaetz & O'Grady, 2002; Gaetz, 2004; Kidd, 2003). Researchers interviewed eighty homeless youth in New York City about the factors influencing their initiation into the street economy. Almost all interviewees had participated in the street (81%) and formal economies (69%). Five main factors simultaneously influenced their initiation into the street economy: 1) social

control/bonds; 2) barriers to the formal economy (e.g., homelessness, educational deficits, mental health problems, incarceration, stigma); 3) tangible and social/emotional benefits of the street economy; 4) severe economic need; and 5) the active recruitment by peers into the street economy (Gwadz et al., 2009).

Stigmatization. Homelessness is a socially created construct, typically associated with the absence of fixed, regular, and adequate housing (Kidd & Evans, 2011). As Kidd and Evans (2011) write, “The term ‘homeless’ carries with it a stigmatizing set of beliefs and values (i.e., personal, moral, and social failure), rivaling even the most extreme sources of stigma (e.g., mental illness)” (p. 755). Homeless youth are often negatively labeled and stigmatized by service providers, law enforcement, peers, and society in general (Bender, 2007). Despite the powerful and pervasive social stigma faced by homeless youth, there are few mentions of it in the research literature on homeless youth (Gaetz, 2004; Kidd, 2003; Kidd & Scrimenti, 2004; Kidd, 2009; Kidd, 2007). Kidd’s 2003 and 2004 studies used a qualitative approach to uncover and describe the range of socially oppressive and discriminatory actions faced on a daily basis by young homeless people. Kidd found that the impact of stigma included feelings of worthlessness, loneliness and social alienation, and suicidality (Kidd, 2003; Kidd & Scrimenti, 2004). This stigma can be a barrier to homeless people accepting help from individuals or programs, especially when the act of accepting help reveals someone’s homelessness (Bond, 2010). Surprisingly, the stigma associated with homelessness can also impact those who work with homeless youth. As Gharabaghi and Stuart (2010) report, the workers shared that the social stigmatization surrounding homeless and street-involved

youth also reflects on the service providers and can sometimes negatively impact the staff's ability to maintain connections and positive relationships in their local communities.

Trauma: Before, During, and After Becoming Homeless

Trauma deserves special attention as people try to understand youth homelessness. It is not a new concept; however, until recently, trauma has largely been viewed to be applicable to only a select group of individuals, under extraordinary circumstances, such as survivors of catastrophic events such as war, earthquakes, and abduction (Hodas, 2006). In 2000, the fourth edition of *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-IV-TR) expanded the definition of *trauma* to one or both of the following: 1) The person has experienced, witnessed, or been confronted with an event or events that involve actual or threatened death or serious injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of oneself or others; or 2) the person's response involved intense fear, helplessness, or horror (American Psychiatric Association, 1994, p. 427-428).

It is clear from this definition that experiencing abuse in the home or watching the abuse of a sibling or parent falls under the umbrella of trauma. This definition also makes it clear that being taken from or kicked out of the home can be a traumatic event during which one might feel great fear or helplessness. Additionally, victimization and trauma are often part of the daily life of homeless youth. In comparison to their housed peers, homeless youth experience disproportionately high rates of sexual assault, robbery, physical beating, and assault with a weapon (Tyler et al., 2004; Tyler et al., 2012). Once on the street, approximately 83% of homeless youth report exposure to at least 1 form of

victimization (Stewart et al., 2004). They are exposed to community violence and are vulnerable to further victimization by predatory adults, criminals, pimps, and other street youth (Haber & Toro, 2004; Schneir et al., 2007). In other words, a homeless young person may have experienced trauma in the home, as a result of the circumstances surrounding their leaving the home, and as a result of living as a homeless unaccompanied youth (Hopper, Bassuk, & Olivet, 2010). While each homeless young person is is unique, trauma seems to be one factor that they all have in common.

Childhood trauma, particularly that resulting from maltreatment, negatively impacts normative development at many levels, from brain development to impulse control to social skill development and capacity for problem solving (Hodas, 2006). The strong relationship between childhood trauma and later negative outcomes and behaviors is becoming even clearer as the data from the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) study are analyzed (Anda, Felitti, Bremner, Walker, Whitfield, Perry, Dube & Giles, 2006). The ACE study included 17,337 adult members of a health management organization and assessed 8 adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), including abuse, witnessing domestic violence, and serious household dysfunction (Anda et al., 2006). Anda et al. (2006) used the number of ACEs as a score or a measure of cumulative childhood stress and hypothesized a "dose-response" relationship of the ACE score to eighteen selected outcomes and to the total number of these outcomes (comorbidity). At least 1 ACE was reported by 64% of respondents. For persons with ≥4 ACEs, the risk of negative outcomes increased substantially compared to a respondent reporting 3 or fewer ACEs: for injected drug use (11.1-fold increase, alcoholism (7.2-fold increase), illicit

drug use (4.5-fold increase), depressed affect (3.6-fold increase), hallucinations (2.7-fold increase), panic reactions (2.5-fold increase), anxiety (2.4-fold increase), and smoking (1.8-fold increase). Measures of sexuality were associated with the ACE score of ≥4 with intercourse and promiscuity increased 6.6- and 3.6-fold. These strong associations between childhood trauma and negative health outcomes has led people to propose that the term “trauma spectrum disorders” might be more useful than narrowly focusing on a diagnosis of PTSD (Davidson, 2002).

In summary, no particular characteristic or experience has been identified as a primary cause or contributing factor to youth homelessness, and the literature offers varied explanations for why youth become homeless in the first place or why they may remain so. Some young people are at an increased risk of becoming homeless and trauma appears to be one experience shared by nearly all youth experiencing homelessness, whether that trauma was experienced in the home, as a result of the circumstances surrounding their leaving the home, or as a result of living as a homeless unaccompanied youth (Hopper et al., 2010). Trauma negatively impacts normative development at many levels, from brain development to impulse control to social skill development and capacity for problemsolving (Hodas, 2006), perhaps causing, contributing to, or amplifying some of the adverse effects of homelessness described in this section. Given the complexities of this phenomenon and the fact that decades of interventions have not decreased the numbers of youth experiencing homelessness, it behooves us to examine how we define what “works” in addressing youth homelessness.

The next part in this chapter describes the principles that guided the work or the

organizations that were recipients of The Otto Bremer Foundation Youth Homelessness Initiative grants. The members of the reflective practice group (representatives of the aforementioned organizations) collectively considered these nine principles to be effective guiding principles for working with youth experiencing homelessness.

Part 2: The Shared Principles of the Agencies Serving Homeless Youth

The nine principles were listed as follows at the onset of this study: collaborative, harm reduction, holistic, journey-oriented, non-judgmental, positive youth development, strengths/assets-based, trauma-informed care, and trusting relationships. These principles emerged from the collaborative process described in Chapter 1, but they had not been systematically and empirically validated as to their effectiveness in working with homeless youth**.** A short literature review on each of the principles follows, in alphabetical order to prevent giving priority to one principle over another.

Collaborative

Collaboration commonly refers to "working together." The idea of working together, collaborating, for a more effective response for young people is not new, and it has been recognized that collaborative practice among young people, schools, youth work services, and families provides better, more sustainable outcomes for young people. *The Collaboration Handbook* (Winer & Ray, 2011) is one of the most widely cited sources on the topic. The premise of this handbook is that the many of the social problems we face as a society (hunger, homelessness, pollution, climate change, healthcare costs, etc.) are interrelated; thus, long-term change requires collaboration. None of these problems can

be solved by one person or one entity alone, and solutions require that people collaborate across programs, systems, and geographic boundaries. Collaboration done well provides mutually supportive relationships, better responses to complex situations, and improved impact, and it is more cost effective due to a better use of resources (Winer & Ray, 2011; Kang, 2010).

While "collaboration" is often used, the term is infrequently defined. Winer and Ray (2011) propose that there is a collaboration continuum that ranges from lower intensity to higher intensity. At the lower end of the continuum lies *cooperation*, which they define as "short-term informal relations that exist without any clearly defined mission, structure, or planning effort" (Kindle Location 459). *Coordination*, which is of moderate intensity on the theoretical continuum, is defined as "longer-term interactions around a specific effort or program. Coordination requires some planning and division of roles and opens communication channels between organizations" (Kindle Location 459). True *collaboration* is the highest intensity and is defined as "more durable and pervasive" (Kindle Location 461). Participants bring separate organizations into a new structure with full commitment to the common mission. Such relationships require comprehensive planning and well-defined communication channels that operate on all levels. For the purposes of this research, "collaboration" will loosely include cooperation, coordination, and collaboration.

Many community collaborations are not actually collaborations that provide integrated services to support holistic approaches to supporting youth development. Rather, they are coordinated partnerships or co-locations. Co-location, in and of itself

does, not constitute a collaborative or holistic approach. In the absence of careful planning and ongoing communication grounded in clearly articulated and shared expectations, co-location can create a situation in which agencies are merely co-tenants rather than collaborators. Ferguson (2009) asserts, "Most community collaborations fail because they do not pay adequate attention to building and sustaining relationships" (p. 85). Truly integrated service seeks to counter the "silo effect" through realignment of multiple services, effective use of resources to avoid duplication, timely transfer of information, and development of a transparent and seamless response to the complex needs of individual service users (Bond, 2010).

Collaboration to solve wicked problems. *Wicked problems* are defined as those that "go beyond the capacity of any one organisation [sic] to understand and respond to, and there is often disagreement about the causes of the problems and the best way to tackle them" (Briggs, 2007, p. 1). The terminology was originally proposed in 1973 by H.W.J. Rittel and M.M. Webber, urban planners at the University of California, Berkeley, USA. Since Rittel and Webber first introduced the term, there has been a steady increase in the literature and research around wicked problems. Australia has applied the concept to some of the country's more pervasive social problems; in 2010, the Australian Public Service Commission released a brief titled, "Tackling Wicked Problems: A Public Policy Perspective." The brief defines *wicked problems* as: 1) complex and serious; 2) a challenge to define with different stakeholders seeing the problem from different perspectives; 3) characterized by many interdependent causes and influences; 4) resistant to solutions; and 5) characterized by evolving conditions. Finding a solution is

challenging because the problem is a moving target.

Given the fact that youth homelessness is a phenomenon characterized by interrelationships and ambiguity, by boundaries that appear clear but are not, and by diverse and conflicting perspectives, it can appropriately be framed as a wicked problem. Both the cause and the solution involve individuals, families, communities, and the various systems people interact with such as schools, hospitals, and child welfare and criminal justice systems. Collaborative strategies are particularly relevant when it comes to solving wicked problems because part of the solution is likely to involve multiple stakeholders working toward a common goal (Roberts, 2000). Without collaboration and communication, this change across multiple and varied facets is not likely to happen in a coordinated or cohesive way. As Briggs (2007) stated, "Tackling wicked problems is an evolving art. They require thinking that is capable of grasping the big picture, including the interrelationships among the full range of causal factors underlying them. They often require broader, more collaborative and innovative approaches" (pg. iii).

Collaboration across boundaries. More attention has been given recently by policymakers and researchers to the complex and unique challenges of serving youth who are moving between and across service systems, especially those served by multiple agencies simultaneously. This increased attention is a result of the increased visibility of the way poor collaboration across these systems creates additional challenges for the youth, decreasing the likelihood of positive outcomes for vulnerable youth (Culhane & Byrne, 2010; Culhane, Metraux, Park, & Chen, 2012). One study commissioned by the Stoneleigh Foundation intended to take a close look at the nature and extent of

multisystem services involvement of youth in Philadelphia by using data from multiple systems. Using these data, the researchers identified a cohort of youth moving from grades seven to nine over the 2004-06 school years. The researchers found a nexus among the child welfare, the juvenile justice, and the public mental health systems for a substantial portion of the youth who were either chemically dependent or who were in the juvenile justice system. More than half of the youth identified in one of these systems was also in one or both of the other systems (Culhane et al., 2012). Because the data systems of these three systems were separate and siloed, there was no way to ensure that there was not a duplication of services or, even more importantly, to ensure that the young person was receiving holistic, complementary, cohesive care.

It is clear that these existing public sector institutions and structures were, by and large, not designed with a primary goal of collaborative work. They have different purposes, different measures of success, different funding streams, and are often constrained by different policies and regulations at the local, state, and federal levels. Thus, rather than creating meaningful collaborations among psychologists, social workers, case managers, nurses, physicians, teachers, and schools to best serve the multifaceted needs of individuals at risk of homelessness, we have developed a system of silos (Bray, 2009). Bruce Perry, a psychologist and neurologist reflects on his training:

> The public systems working with high-risk families and children are overwhelmed. Oddly enough, during my years of clinical training in child mental health, I had little introduction to the child protective system or to the special education and juvenile justice systems, despite the fact that more than 30% of the children coming to our clinics were in 1 or more of these systems. The compartmentalization of services, training, and points of view was staggering. And, I was learning, very destructive for children (Perry & Szalavitz, 2007, p. 34).

It is imperative that we understand how these systems interact, where the relationships are, where the boundaries are drawn, and what the diversities of perspectives on homeless youth there are within these systems.

Harm Reduction

As discussed earlier, homeless youth are at high risk for substance abuse, mental and physical illness, and victimization. Service providers are aware that while homeless youth report the need for mental health and substance abuse treatment, other more basic needs must be addressed first (Brooks, Milburn, Jane Rotheram-Borus, & Witkin, 2004). Adolescents experiencing homelessness face unique challenges and may benefit from interventions based on harm reduction (Hudson et al., 2008). Rather than working toward an "ideal" goal that may be or feel unrealistic at the given time, the emphasis should be on making safer choices (Ferguson et al., 2011). An example would be focusing on keeping a young person safe and reducing the negative impact of drugs and alcohol rather than requiring sobriety. Such "low-threshold interventions" are suggested by Baer et al. (2004) to improve engagement with homeless people, referring to interventions that do not require consistent, regular attendance, adherence to strict rules, and extensive disclosure by the young people.

The harm-reduction approach is supported by research investigating the efficacy of street outreach with youth that found that in order to engage socially excluded young people, work must start where the young person is, not be prescriptive, and must deal with the issues that the young person sees as important (Crimmens et al., 2004). Otherwise, there can be unintended consequences. Toro et al. (2007) found, "When

housing programs for individuals who are dually diagnosed require abstinence as a condition for obtaining housing or for remaining housed, consumers with histories of substance abuse who are at risk of relapse are also at risk for housing loss and continued homelessness" (p. 35). These common barriers to moving off the street—drug use, mental health issues, and challenges in readjusting to a routine lifestyle—can be linked to trauma effects (Karabanow, 2004). This has implications for service providers. For example, if a shelter does not promote a harm-reduction model, a youth using drugs to manage severe negative effects of trauma would be denied a bed in the shelter. But it often takes time and the assistance of mental health professionals to replace this coping strategy (drug abuse) with more effective alternatives. In the meantime, the youth requires safe and secure shelter, and a harm-reduction policy would be more inclusive and responsive to the young person's needs (Coates & McKenzie-Mohr, 2010).

In a study that sought the perspective of youth, services perceived to provide assistance tailored to young people's individual needs, that had less restrictive rules, and that did not require the disclosure of personal information were more likely to be used by homeless youth (De Rosa et al., 1999). Restrictive and prescriptive rules set up certain expectations for youth to abide by; often, the consequence of not obeying the rules is a suspension from the program for a specific and set amount of time. Youth have reported that it is difficult to follow the rules and meet the expectations of these programs (Karabanow & Clement, 2004). They find these low-threshold rules, with compliance to actions such as repeated drug testing, offensive (Ryan, 2013).

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Youth Program, Family and Youth Services Bureau, states that a harm-reduction program should: 1) have a low-barrier for entry; 2) create a safe space (see also: "trauma-informed"); 3) meet youth where they are; 4) empower youth by offering enough control to make their own decisions (see also: "journey-oriented"); and 5) provide youth with access to adults they can trust (see also: "relationships") (Family and Youth Services Bureau, 2012). It is obvious from this list that there are overlaps and synergy with other principles; however, the aspects of harm reduction that make this principle distinct, and therefore important to distinguish from the other principles, are the low barrier for entry and commitment to meeting youth where they are.

Holistic

The term *holistic* can be viewed at two levels. It can be thought of as: 1) a framework through which to view the phenomenon of homelessness; and 2) the ways in which services are provided. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model of development provides a theoretical framework for thinking about the phenomenon of homelessness and the ways in which services are provided so various systems—the family, schools, mental health services, etc.—can be brought together to address multiple aspects of youth wellbeing (Ferguson, Xie, & Glynn, 2012).

Bronfenbrenner's ecological model of development (1979) conceives child and youth development as a function of interactions between individuals and the contexts in which they live. These contexts, or systems, are defined as microsystems, mesosystems, exosystems, macrosystems, and chronosystem. The *microsystem* includes the immediate environments with which children and youth interact regularly. Initially, this system is

composed of family; later, the system expands to include new settings such as childcare or particular spiritual communities. The *mesosystem* represents the interrelations of those settings and the strength and diversity of their links to one another. A well-integrated mesosystem (for example, parents involved with schools or schools involved with neighborhoods) fosters healthy development in multiple contexts. The *exosystem* represents more distant contexts that affect development indirectly through their influence on the adults in a child's world. Exosystem settings may include parents' workplaces, school governing boards, community organizations, and social service agencies. Examples of exosystem influence on development include workplace policies on maternity or paternity leave and school board policies on acceptable curriculum or educational practices. The *macrosystem* represents the broadest social and cultural contexts in which development takes place. They shape and direct the functioning of lower-level exosystems and mesosystems through law, organization, ideology, and economic opportunity and constraint. Finally, the *chronosystem* represents the changes across time in children's development and environmental circumstances (Hill, McGuire, Parker & Sage, 2008).

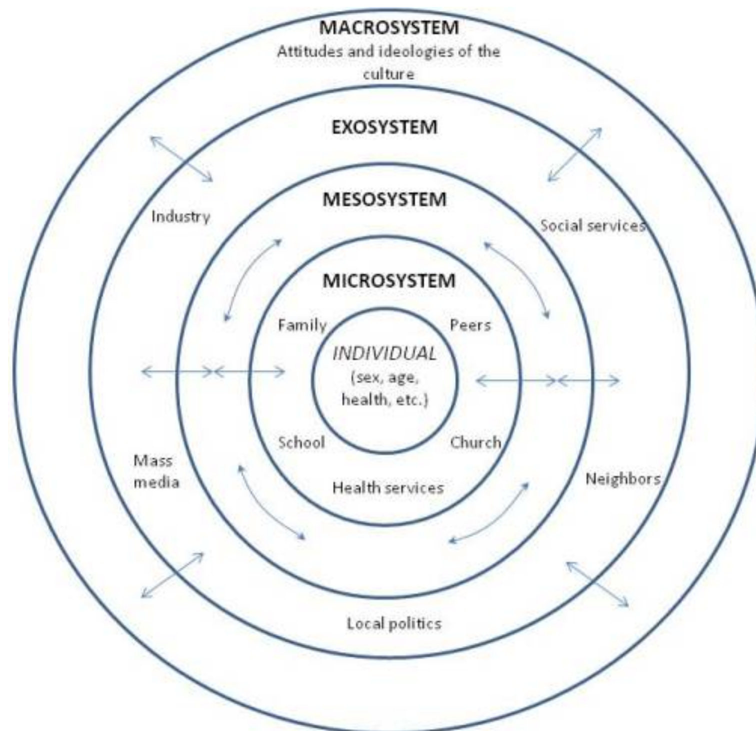

Figure 2. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Framework for Human Development

Bronfenbrenner's model of ecological development (presented in Figure 2) makes it clear that collaboration is essential to ensure that the various microsystems are being addressed in a way that is supportive of the young people's individual developmental needs and journeys. Figure 2 illustrates the range of contexts youth live and operate in; it is clear that a single program cannot meet all of the needs an individual may have. Collaboration is critical to ensure that multiple contexts are working in synergy with each other, as opposed to conflicting. Homeless youth need more help than their housed peers to navigate existing collaborations and work across boundaries to create new collaborations on their behalf. They have less social capital (Bantchevska, Bartle-Haring, Dashora, Glebova, & Slesnick, 2008) and are, therefore, less likely to be able to make important resource connections on their own. They are also more likely to be judged

negatively than their housed peers (Kidd, 2007; Kidd, 2009); this necessitates that someone knows them in one context and can and will advocate for them in another.

Collaborating to help youth access their needs across their micro- and mesosystems requires attention to the way in which youth experience the collaboration. In an evaluation of integrated legal services in the UK, the four areas critical to the delivery of this approach were accessibility, seamlessness, holistic identification of problems, and tailored services (Buck & Curran, 2009). *Accessibility* relates to the logistics of access (location and hours, knowledge of the service, experiences at reception and client satisfaction, etc.). *Seamlessness* refers to the clear identification of roles and responsibilities, clarity in policy and processes, procedures for sharing case management, and information exchange and aftercare. *Holistic identification* of problems relates to the ability of intake staff to detect problems and future needs. *Tailored services* depends on intake staff judgments about client capacity, their understanding of service aims, and their perceived role within the wider service context (Buck & Curran, 2009).

The U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness framework for ending youth homelessness. On June 12, 2012, the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) unveiled a framework for ending youth homelessness. The framework will be adopted as part of the Administration's federal strategic plan on homelessness, which sets a goal of ending youth homelessness by 2020. Later that same month, The National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth, The National Center on Family Homelessness, The National Center for Housing and Child Welfare, The National Healthcare for the Homeless Council, The National Law Center on Homelessness and

Poverty, and The National Network for Youth released a joint paper urging federal agencies to take immediate and specific actions. The coalition states that the action steps respond to known, documented problems experienced specifically by homeless youth. The actions include creating easier access to physical and mental healthcare, developing strategies to help homeless young parents obtain and maintain housing, developing strategies to assist young parents in choosing high quality childcare providers and securing childcare subsidies, making it easier for homeless unaccompanied youth to apply for financial aid, increasing access to food assistance programs, and implementing the Federal Safe Harbor Law that resolves the issue of criminalizing prostitution for youth under the age of consent and enhances penalties for perpetrators. By looking at the agencies that collaborated to create the call for action and at the types of actions called for, one can see that they touch all aspects of a young person's micro-, meso-, exp- and macrosystems. The call for action shows that improving outcomes for youth experiencing homelessness requires that we look across systems and agencies for solutions. What it does not do, however, is explain how these actions can be addressed in a holistic, integrated, and cohesive way.

The ways in which services are provided. The needs of homeless youth are complex and varied and may include money, food, healthcare, education, employment, childcare, and support in maintaining, building, or rebuilding relationships, including those with family members. Addressing one of these needs in isolation from the other interconnected needs is unlikely to be as effective as an intervention that addresses the multiple overlapping needs (Slesnick et al., 2009). A

holistic approach to meeting young people's diverse needs requires that we think about those needs broadly and conceptualize their development, then journey toward wellbeing to produce positive, mentally, emotionally, physically, and socially healthy youth (Mak, Ng, & Wong, 2011). There are calls for holistic services, but there has been little discussion of the definition or what these services would look like in practice. What we do know, thanks to decades of trial and error, is that providing fractured and fragmented responses does not work. A Newtonian perspective suggests that the parts can explain the whole and that focus is placed on understanding the parts in greater detail. By contrast, complexity science suggests that the whole is not the sum of the parts and, therefore, cannot be understood simply by understanding the parts. Emergent properties of the whole are inexplicable by the parts. In complexity, studies of natural and human systems are explained by both kinds of analysis, micro- (or analysis of the parts) and macro- (holistic analysis) (Zimmerman, Lindberg, & Plesk, 1998, p. 10).

Even when service providers recognize that youth are whole persons, the temptation arises to describe the whole in terms of collective parts and to make sure that every aspect, part, or attribute is somehow "covered" by the different types of services offered (Noddings, 2010). Taking a holistic approach to working with homeless youth means integrating social service systems rather than providing fragmented and uncoordinated services to better meet the multiple and complex needs of people in homeless situations. Integrating delivery systems usually involves changing the ways that agencies share information, resources, and clients.

Those changes may include pooling funds, consolidating programs, developing cross-agency strategic plans, or using a centralized management information system. Integrated services provide a holistic approach to working with individuals to meet all their needs, whereas separate services address only one or a portion of individuals' needs. Finally, integrated services ensure that individuals are offered all the services they need, regardless of which service they seek (U.S. General Accounting Office, June 1999, "Report to Congressional Committees, Homelessness: State and Local Efforts to Integrate and Evaluate Homeless Assistance Programs").

Many service providers are moving toward finding ways to provide a full range of services and supports, including crisis remediation, safe shelter, food, clothing and medical care prior to commencing any therapeutic intervention (Thompson, McManus, Lantry, Windsor, & Flynn, 2006). One model for providing holistic care is for a single organization to provide multiple services. An alternative mode is for multiple complementary programs and activities to co-locate at one physical location (Bond, 2010).

Journey-Oriented

The journey-oriented principle seeks to expand the understanding of the role of services, changing it from getting youth from Point A to Point B (e.g.,from shelter to housing) to one of supporting young people's lifelong health development. Through this lens, life can be conceived as a journey filled with lessons, hardships, heartaches, joys, celebrations, and important moments. Some of these events challenge courage, strength,

and faith. Homeless youth, as stated earlier, are at increased risk for challenges such as abuse, neglect, and other types of traumas. They are more likely to live in poverty and experience family instability than their housed peers (Koegel, Melamid, & Burnam, 1995; Haber and Toro, 2004; Ziesemer, Marcoux, & Marwell, 1994). They are also more likely to parent at a young age and be involved with the foster care or juvenile justice system. As a result of all of these factors, homeless youth experience a great deal of change on their journey, much of it unexpected, unplanned for, and/or unwanted. These young people have little control over their lives and must often deal with unwelcomed changes such as staff leaving, aging out of a program, or being sentenced at a court hearing. Each of these changes requires adaptation on the part of the youth and sometimes a shift in one's perception about the world or about oneself.

Transitions: Our internal response to change. William Bridges is recognized as a pioneer in the field of transition management. His book, *Managing Transitions: Making the Most of Change* (2001), is an autobiographical study of how to turn a difficult loss into a time of renewal. Bridges makes a clear distinction between *change*, an event or situation that happens relatively fast and is defined by an outcome, and *transition*, a slowly occurring psychological reorientation process, experienced when individuals come to terms with change. Change is largely external, and transition is our internal adjustment to that change. Thus, becoming homeless might be a change youth experience, and their transition to understanding themselves as "homeless youth" may be a resulting psychological transition.

Table 1

Characteristics of Change Versus Transition

Characteristics of Change	Characteristics of Transition
• Takes place at a specific time	• The necessary process of adjusting to a change
• External	• Internal
• Fast	• Slow

This model provides a useful framework for service providers. Bridges writes that people have a tendency to resist all transitions in their lives, regardless of whether they are planned-for or wanted or not. "We feel these unexpected losses because, to an extent that we seldom realize, we come to identify ourselves with the circumstances of our lives" (Bridges, 2004, p. 12). He continues later in the chapter: "…[E]ndings make us fearful. They break our connection with the setting in which we have come to know ourselves, and they awaken old memories of hurt and shame" (Bridges, 2004, p. 17). Bridges's framework is useful for helping to distinguish between the changes and the resulting internal, emotional, and psychological impact of these changes. The main reasons for one's resistance to transitioning to a new beginning are: 1) the loss of their identity and their world; 2) disorientation of the in-between-time; and 3) risk of failing in a new beginning (Corbett, Heath, & Zanghhi, 2008). This may help explain why some youth resist making changes that appear, to others, to be positive.

The Stages of Change model. Several of the grantee organizations use The Stages of Change model, developed by Prochaska, DiClemente, and Norcross in framing

a journey-oriented approach to their work with youth. The Stages of Change theory is useful for those who wish to reduce harm associated with a habit and was originally developed to help understand how people end addictions (Prochaska, DiClemente, & Norcross, 1992). Program service providers have used The Stages of Change model to understand how and why others change or do not change; it is also an aid to help homeless youth create realistic self-change plans (Prochaska & Norcross, 2001). The six stages of change are precontemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, maintenance, and termination (Prochaska, 2008).

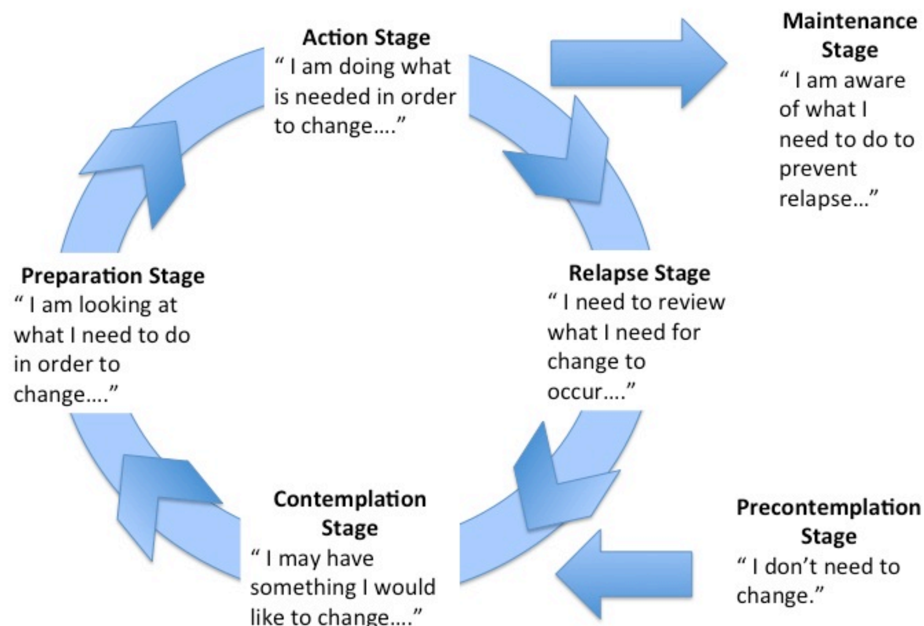

Figure 3: Stages of Change model (Prochaska, DiClemente, & Norcross, 1992)

Each of the six stages has specific characteristics. *Precontemplation* is the stage at which there is no intention to change behavior in the foreseeable future. Many individuals in this stage are unaware of their problems. During *contemplation,* the individual is aware

that a problem exists and seriously thinks about overcoming it but has not yet made a commitment to take action. People can remain stuck in the contemplation stage for long periods of time. *Preparation* is a stage in which individuals intend to take action in the very near future. *Action* is the stage in which individuals make the considerable commitment of time and energy to modify their behavior, experiences, or environment. During *maintenance.* one works to prevent relapse. One does not necessarily move through these stages in a linear fashion; rather, it is a process Prochaska et al. (1992) call *spiraling*, which involves relapsing from one stage to an earlier stage. The final stage, *termination*, is the stage at which individuals have no temptation to relapse and are confident that no matter what situation they face, they will continue with their healthy behavior and will not relapse (Prochaska, 2008). Indeed, the reality of relapse requires that an individual be resilient and flexible, particularly since the process of overcoming is neither linear nor absolute on first attempt. Overcoming also requires that individuals have optimism and hope for a better future than the present and past that define them. This hope will serve as the catalyst, the motivation that will get them through the most difficult stages of change, thus helping to move the individual beyond adapting to or surviving a difficult situation to acquire a life of purpose and meaning (Brush et al, 2011).

Youth who experience homelessness often experience uncertainty without the parental and social supports to help them access healthcare, education, employment opportunities, and stable housing (Ensign & Ammerman, 2008; Ryan, 2013). Many have not completed high school, very few are employed full time, and many are involved in

unstable relationships; all of these aspects will likely affect them later in life (Tyler, 2006). They face criteria tied to dates and ages rather than developmental stages. These criteria, chronological rather than developmental, can cause young people to transition in their lives when they are not yet ready to do so, and there can be serious unintended consequences for these restrictions. For example, some teenage boys are separated from their families because shelters policies force older adolescent males to be housed in adult shelters apart from their families, causing them to become homeless at a much earlier age than if they were able to live with their parents (Shelton et al., 2012). Young women who are pregnant often have to move into adult shelters because youth shelters are not equipped to serve the needs of newborns and infants. A journey-oriented approach focuses on where youth are in life and what needs they have. It is geared at supporting healthy development rather than focusing on chronological markers such as their age.

Non-Judgmental

In the narratives of homeless young people, participants describe regularly feeling judged by others, including people who pass them by, police officers, and service providers (Farrugia, 2011; Ferguson et al., 2011; Hudson et al., 2008). The fear of being judged is one commonly cited reason why they do not seek care (Courtois, 2008). One youth shared with a researcher, "I went to hospital for three days with pneumonia and realised [sic] none of them had been anywhere near the streets, didn't know what I was like, and treated me like a shit 'cause of the way I looked… I'd rather go to the streets than go to the hospital where most judge ya, you know? They don't care about the way you feel or the way you are" (Keys et al., 2004). Another young person, in a different

study, shared, "Your problems are personal. You don't want people sat there [sic]. You'd think they were judging you" (Quilgars, Johnsen, & Pleace, 2008). A youth in another study stated simply, "Don't judge anybody until you walk in their shoes" (Hudson, 2010, pg. 7). She spoke of others judging "gangbangers" and said, "You have no idea about the crap they had while they were growing up. It wasn't too long ago that we ended up at skid row, and there were no rooms available, and a gangbanger found us a shelter" (Hudson, 2010, p. 7).

The research literature makes a clear connection between building important trusting relationships and approaching the youth without judgment (Farrugia, 2011; Ferguson et al., 2011; Garrett et al., 2008; Hudson et al., 2008; Ikeda, 2012). *Non-judgmental* refers to meeting youth where they are and taking it from there rather than spending time on where they "should" be. Young report being less likely to access services from staff whom they perceive as judgmental or as having ulterior motives for helping them (Garrett et al., 2008; Ikeda, 2012), and they respond best to programs that avoid labeling them (Kurtz et al., 2000). When a program staff is non-judgmental, youth feel comfortable to make mistakes and do not feel pressured to make the decision the staffmember wants them to make. A non-judgmental approach by staff is interpreted as a sign of respect and is generally discussed within the context of positive relationships with staffmembers (Kidd & Davidson, 2007; Kidd, 2007) Interviews with program staff also revealed that they believe non-judgmental support is critical to building the trust needed in order for youth to make use of available resources (Barry et al., 2002; Gharabaghi & Stuart, 2010).

Developing safe, supportive, non-judgmental relationships is critical to increasing young people's engagement with services (Barry et al., 2002; Darbyshire, Muir-Cochrane, Fereday, Jureidini, & Drummond, 2006, Dixon et al., 2011). This may be particularly critical in developing therapeutic relationships. In these specific types of relationships, the patient may be beset by shame and anxiety, terrified of being judged and "seen" by the therapist. The therapist, in turn, may be perceived as a stand-in for other untrustworthy and abusive authority figures, someone to be feared, mistrusted, challenged, tested, distanced from, raged against, sexualized, etc. Perhaps the therapist will be viewed as a stand-in for the longed-for good parent or rescuer to be clung to, deferred to, and nurtured by. These two perceived identities may alternate in unpredictable kaleidoscopic shifts, especially when the patient is highly dissociative and easily triggered. In a related vein, issues of personal safety and revictimization are typically much more pronounced in this treatment population versus one that is more general (Courtois, 2004).

Positive Youth Development

Positive youth development (PYD) is a broad term that refers to the field, practice, approach, and theory of youth development that focuses on the talents, strengths, interests, and future potential of all youth (Benson et al., 2006; Pittman et al., 2003; Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003). This field emerged in response to deficit-reduction methods of intervention and prevention designed to reduce or rid youth of negative and undesirable social behaviors (Benson et al., 2006; Pittman et al., 2003; Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003). The PYD field is relatively new, and it was not until the 1990s that certain sets of

principles, philosophies, and approaches were correlated with a field of postive youth development (Benson et al., 2006; King et al., 2005; Lerner et al., 2006).

Positive youth development is based on prevention science and focuses on protective factors that promote social, behavioral, or cognitive competence and foster self-efficacy and resiliency (Catalano et al., 2004). The Search Institute Developmental Assets, the 5 Cs of PYD, and the 5 Promises of the America's Promise Alliance are the most widespread, influential frameworks for understanding and strengthening positive youth development (Benson et al., 2006; Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Small & Memmo, 2003). While these models are not in complete agreement about terminology, conceptualized benefits of participation in PYD programs include the promotion of young people's competence, confidence, connection, character, caring, and contribution indicative of PYD. These models are summarized below in Table 2.

Table 2

Three Influential Positive Youth Development Frameworks

PYD Framework	Description
The Search Institute Developmental Assets	A framework of 40 Developmental Assets identifies a set of skills, experiences, relationships, and behaviors that enable young people to develop into successful and contributing adults. Assets are internal and external (Benson, 2007).
Lerner's 5Cs of Positive Youth Development	Lerner's 5 C's are classified as competence, confidence, connection, caring/compassion and character. An additional sixth C, contribution, was added and is attained when a person has more fully realized the five C's (Lerner, Almerigim Theokas & Lerner, 2005).
The 5 Promises of the America's Promise Alliance	The Five Promises have been identified as the fundamental resources that young people need to succeed.These promises are caring adults, safe places, a healthy start, effective education, and opportunities to help others (America's Promise Alliance, 2013).

The models do agree in many areas. First, the reduction of risk factors and the promotion of assets and strengths are complementary approaches to promoting adolescent health (Benson, Scales, Leffert, & Roehlkepartain, 1999). In other words, focusing on positive development does not mean one is excluded from also working on reducing harm. A second area of agreement is that positive youth development is only fully realized when young people are given opportunities to genuinely participate in their own development in ways that are meaningful for them (Eichas, 2010; Heinze, Jozefowicz, & Toro, 2010; Larson, 2011; Lerner et al., 2003; Taylor-Seehafer, 2004; White, 2009). In other words, PYD is accomplished *with* young people rather than *to* them. A young person's participation may invole learning new skills, creating positive change to the structures surrounding them, or simply developing relationships (Benson et al., 2006).

Because the field of positive youth development is based on the belief that all youth possess the latent resources for positive development (King et al., 2005; Lerner et al., 2003; Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003), it is critical for service providers to create opportunities for leadership, skill-building, and sustained youth/adult partnerships that tap in to these (sometimes) latent resources. To engage young people effectively at any level, there must be meaningful opportunities, sufficient resources, well-informed staff, friendly spaces, and flexibility for young people to participate for varying lengths of time (Bell, Vromen, & Collin, 2008). Participation needs to be relevant; in other words, workers must think about the ways in which young people in their particular context would like to participate—such as face to face, online, or in groups (Bell et al., 2008).

Although research that specifically focuses on positive youth development in

homelessness among adolescents is limited, there has been some research in the last few years investigating youth in the juvenile justice systems. As a result, experts in the juvenile detention setting are increasingly recommending that deficit-based intervention approaches be replaced with interventions informed by a PYD intervention framework (Butts, Bazemore, & Meroe, 2010). Viewed through the lens of positive youth development, the traditional juvenile justice system either disrupts the course of positive development (via labeling, forcing association with delinquent peers, interrupting school or family life, and/or foreclosing future opportunities) or, more frequently, fails to provide the conditions for positive youth development for youths whose trajectories are already disrupted (Ferguson, Bender, Thompson, Xie, & Pollio, 2012).

As with youth in juvenile detention settings, coping with homelessness and the associated challenges without positive supports or resources can amplify likelihood of engagement in harmful behavior and victimization (Halcón & Lifson, 2004; Heinze, 2012). The associated challenges—such as lifestyles characterized by residential instability, family conflict, school difficulties, and risk-taking behavior—may have the result of reducing access to supportive relationships and empowering experiences that facilitate positive youth development (Halcón & Lifson, 2004; Heinze, 2012).

To examine how youth-centered programming contributes to positive outcomes, Eccles and Gootman (2002) analyzed hundreds of studies to identify a set of core dimensions of successful programs that reduce negative behavior and promote positive behavior, including: physical and psychological safety; clear and consistent structure; supportive relationships; opportunities to belong; opportunities for efficacy and

mattering; opportunities for skill-building; positive social norms; and integration of family, school, and community efforts. Very few studies have examined contextual characteristics associated with positive development in programs specifically for marginalized youth populations.

Table 3

Dimensions of Programs that Promote Positive Youth Development

Program Dimensions	**Dimension as defined by Eccles and Gootman (2002)**
1. Physical and Psychological Safety	Safe and health-promoting programs and practices that increase safe peer group interactions and decrease unsafe or confrontational peer interactions.
2. Clear and Consistent Structure	Limit setting; clear and consistent rules and expectations; firm-enough control; continuity and predictability; clear boundaries; and age-appropriate monitoring.
3. Supportive Relationships	Warmth; closeness; connectedness; good communication; caring; support; guidance; secure attachment; and responsiveness.
4. Opportunities to Belong	Opportunities for meaningful inclusion, regardless of one's gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or disabilities; social inclusion, social engagement, and integration; opportunities for sociocultural identity formation; and support for cultural and bicultural competence.
5. Opportunities for Efficacy and Mattering	Youth-based; empowerment practices that support autonomy; making a real difference in one's community; and being taken seriously.
6. Positive Social Norms	Rules of behavior; expectations; injunctions; ways of doing things; values and morals; and obligations for service.
7. Integration of family, school, and community efforts	Concordance; coordination; and synergy among family, school, and community.
8. Opportunities for Skill-Building	Opportunities to learn physical, intellectual, psychological, emotional and social skills; exposure to intentional learning experiences; opportunities to learn good habits of mind; preparation for adult employment; and opportunities to develop social and cultural capital.

While not all programs can include all nine dimensions listed in Table 3, the table does provide a framework for organizing thinking, program planning, and evaluation as it relates to positive youth development.

Strengths/Assets-based

Within the literature, there has been a notable shift toward the importance of working with young people using a strengths-based approach (Baer, Peterson, & Wells, 2004; Barker, Humphries, McArthur, & Thomson, 2012b; Bender, 2007; Ferguson, 2012; Kidd & Davidson, 2007; Lindsey, Kurtz, Jarvis, Williams, & Nackerud, 2000). The strengths-based perspective was initially proposed by Weick et al. (1989), founded upon the assumption that all individuals, including children, have strengths. Many strengths-based models have been referred to in the research literature to date, all with the general emerging consensus that strength characteristics are relevant to the development of a youth's wellbeing (Benson, Scales, Hamilton, & Sesma, 2006; Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak, & Hawkins, 2004; Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Lerner, Dowling, & Anderson, 2003; Lerner et al., 2006; Pittman, Irby, Tolman, Yohalem, & Ferber, 2003; Scales, Benson, Roehlkepartain, Sesma, & van Dulmen, 2006).

Strength-based approaches are relevant to all youth because the approach proposes optimal functioning and development irrespective of the young person's current state or the adversity he or she has faced (Brownlee, Rawana, Franks, Harper, Bajwa, O'Brien & Clarkson, 2013; Epstein, Rudolph, & Epstein, 2000; Park, Peterson, & Seligman, 2004). Strengths-based programming may be intended to increase the number of strengths shown by youths, to support youths in utilizing existing strengths to address

their current issues, or a combination of both (Brownlee et al., 2013).

Existing research suggests that homeless young people respond better to client-centered approaches that are strength-based, flexible and forgiving, and encourage them to strive toward positive goals, in spite of any setbacks (Cauce et al., 2000). Service providers working from a strengths-based perspective emphasize strengths and demonstrate a belief in a client's power to make change. Strength-based approaches focus on the strengths already possessed by the client and those found within their environment (Thompson et al., 2006). This is in stark contrast to the deficit approach in which youths are treated as at-risk individuals, with issues perceived as problems (Bond, 2010). The focus, when working with youth through a deficit approach, is on identifying and managing perceived risks, avoiding undesirable social outcomes, and framing decisions around what is wrong with young people and their situation (Bond, 2010). Operating from a strengths-based model rather than an individual-deficit perspective increases the inevitability that deficiencies are minimized and competencies are enhanced (Bender, 2007).

Because this shift from deficits to strengths is relatively recent, very few studies utilize a strengths-based perspective to investigate the homeless youth population (Bender, 2007; Kurtz & Linnemann, 2006; Lindsey et al., 2000; Rew, 2003). The research that does exist shows that homeless youth have several specific strengths (Lindsey et al., 2000; Rew, 2003). Strengths include the acquisition of the resources and knowledge necessary to survive on the streets, the ability to meet their basic needs, and the capacity to develop relationships that provide them with acceptance, guidance,

friendship, and resources (Rew, 2003). Research has also found that youths have internal resources such as independence, responsibility, maturity, caring, determination, and self-confidence (Lindsey et al., 2000). Self-improvement consists of learning from mistakes, taking responsibility for one's actions, avoiding bad influences, and setting and reaching personal goals (Lindsey et al., 2000). When asked what strengths they needed, youth noted a positive attitude, intelligence, and the ability to interact with others (Bender, 2007). They stated that they cared for themselves better anyone had previously (Bender, 2007; Rew, 2003).

Youth see recognition of their personal strengths as one of the most important aspects of providers working with them, critical in increasing the likelihood of long-term positive outcomes (Bender, 2007). They see that they could be good mentors for programs, helping the programs establish credibility and trust with potentially new clients (Ferguson et al., 2011). Kidd and Davison (2007) found developing personal strengths to be a theme among the interviewees. One young person stated, "No matter what situation I walk into, no matter how hard or traumatic, I am going to learn from it and grow from it… All the more strong I will get" (p. 225). Kidd and Davison reflect on sentiments such as these by writing, "In here are messages of hope that persons have the strength to get what they want, with strength tied in both as necessary and arising from adapting to the streets, and helping a person to maintain herself in the face of forces/problems that can drag her down or make her want to give up" (p. 225).

Trauma-Informed

Many homeless youth have experienced trauma before becoming homeless,

during the transition to homelessness, and/or during the homelessness itself. By the time a child reaches the age of 18, the probability that the child has been touched directly by interpersonal or community violence is approximately 1 in 4 (Perry, 2010). This rate is much higher for youth experiencing homelessness. Hopper et al. (2010) define *trauma* as an experience that "creates a sense of fear, helplessness, or horror and overwhelms a person's resources for coping" (p. 80). This includes but is not limited to experiencing or witnessing verbal, physical, or sexual abuse and/or witnessing the death of a loved one. Homelessness can be especially traumatic for young people, due to the associated loss of housing, family connections, social roles, and routines (Olivet, Paquette, Hanson, & Bassuk, 2010). A study of 100 homeless youth that asked young people about their experiences prior to becoming homeless, assistance received while dealing with stressors, and current needs found that that trauma is both a cause and a consequence of youth being homeless, as a large majority of participants experienced a number of traumatic events both preceding and during homelessness. The authors concluded that trauma in the lives of both male and female homeless youth should be understood as a pervasive reality with serious implications for practice (Coates & McKenzie-Mohr, 2010).

Trauma impact on brain development. Not only is trauma a pervasive reality that affects one's mental and emotional health and overall conditions in one's life, but recent research shows that early childhood risk and adversity can also alter the physical development of their brains as well (Perry, 2010; Romeo & McEwen, 2006). The impact of traumatic experiences on the brain can include the development of neurophysiologic patterns or brain processes and behaviors that affect an individual's emotional,

behavioral, cognitive, and social functioning. Perry, a leading researcher on the relationship between trauma and brain development, feels that understanding how the brain is impacted is critical to understanding what interventions will best help children who have experienced trauma. He writes about the challenges people experience, such as homelessness, that are associated with trauma.

> These myriad problems impact the individual, family, community, and society; in the United States these problems are the target of billions of dollars and even more hours of work to educate, protect, enrich, and heal children impacted by developmental maltreatment. Despite these efforts and expenditures, the results of policy, programs, and practice tend to be ineffective and incomplete. Millions of children remain scarred by childhood trauma and maltreatment, expressing only a fraction of their full potential… One contributing factor in this inefficiency is insensitivity to the fundamental principles of brain organization, development, and functioning. It is the brain, after all, that is the origin of the major problems addressed in education, mental health, child protection, juvenile justice, and substance abuse interventions. (Perry & Hambrick, 2008, p. 39)

Perry goes on to say that without understanding the basic principles of how the brain develops and changes, one cannot expect to design and implement effective interventions.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Regardless of the type of trauma or timing of the experience, researchers have begun making the case that homeless adolescents frequently experiencing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Bender, Ferguson, Thompson, Komlo, & Pollio, 2010; Ko et al., 2008; Schneir et al., 2007; Thompson et al., 2006). While the likelihood of developing PTSD and the increased severity of its symptoms are related to the frequency and duration of trauma exposure, it is not understood why some people develop the disorder and others do not and why the symptoms vary so widely (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). What is known is

that PTSD changes the body in multiple and varied ways (Anda et al., 2006; Trickett, Negriff, Ji, & Peckins, 2011). Characteristic symptoms of PTSD are classified in *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders-IV-TR* (American Psychiatric Association, 2000) into three clusters: (a) re-experiencing the trauma, (b) increased sense of arousal, and (c) avoidance and numbing. Further research is needed to understand the development and manifestation of PTSD symptoms in homeless youth.

Perry (2007, pp. 76) wrote: "Post-traumatic stress disorder is not signaled by a constellation of new symptoms that develop long after a stressful event but is, in many regards, the maladaptive persistence of the once adaptive responses that began as coping mechanisms in response to the event itself." He describes two very different reactions that a young person's brain might employ when faced with a trigger that reminds him or her of past or current trauma. The *alarm state*, more commonly known as the "fight-or-flight reaction," is one in which the young person's body is in hyper-arousal. As the individual begins to feel threatened, the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral functioning become hyper-aware, focused on identifying and coping with threats. Thinking, behaving, and feeling are directed by more primitive parts of the brain in such a state, and the processes that deal with future-thinking and consequences cease. This response is accompanied by increased heart rate, blood pressure, and respiration, as well as a release of glucose stored in muscle (Perry, 2010). Triggers that cause a young person to enter an alarm state can result in very noticeable and monumental behaviors. The second possible reaction, the *dissociative state*, is essentially a mental mechanism by which one withdraws attention from the outside world and focuses on the inner world. In this state,

one may feel detached, as though they are simply watching a movie about someone else rather than living their own reality (Perry, 2010). In this state, the young person may appear to be unmotivated, as though they do not care. Their answers to direct questions may seem unclear or evasive.

Trauma-informed care. Given the pervasiveness of trauma and the serious and longlasting impacts of the experience, it is imperative when working with homeless youth that service providers and care systems be trauma-informed for all youth. That is, the staff must be able to understand, anticipate, and respond to the special needs of trauma survivors. Historically, homeless service settings have provided care to traumatized people without directly acknowledging or addressing the impact of trauma but instead addressing the symptoms as mental, physical, or behavioral problems that are separate and distinct from the experience of trauma (Condly, 2006). The damage of traumatic events goes beyond the immediate harm and can erode one's view of the world as a safe place and one's view of the self as valuable (Condly, 2006). Both the immediate harm and the long-term effects vary in each person and can manifest in predictable and unpredictable ways in behaviors. Researchers have found that individuals exposed to complex trauma suffer from a variety of psychological problems above and beyond PTSD, including depression, anxiety, self-hatred, dissociation, substance abuse, self-destructive and risk-taking behaviors, victimization, and problems with interpersonal and intimate relationships (Courtois, 2008).

Trauma-informed services are not specifically designed to treat symptoms or syndromes related to sexual or physical abuse or other trauma, but they are informed

about and sensitive to trauma-related issues present in survivors or witnesses of abuse and other kinds of traumatic experiences. A *trauma-informed system* is one in which all components of a given service system have been reconsidered and evaluated in the light of a basic understanding of the role that violence plays in the lives of adults, children, and adolescents and families or caregivers seeking mental health and addictions services (Harris & Fallot, 2001). *Trauma-informed care* refers generally to a programmatic stance that integrates awareness and understanding of trauma (Hopper et al., 2010). Trauma-informed care has multiple facets and involves: 1) recognizing of the pervasiveness of trauma and committing to identifying and addressing it early, whenever possible; 2) seeking to understand the connection between presenting symptoms and behaviors and the individual's past trauma history; 3) relationships and interventions that take into account the individual's trauma history when promoting healing and growth; and 4) recognizing the need for youth to exercise independence and have a sense of control in their lives (Kidd, 2003; Prescott, Soares, Konnath, & Bassuk, 2007; Thompson et al., 2006).

Linking behavior challenges to trauma histories allows new attributions to be considered and solutions sought. For example, drug use by homeless youth may be understood as a form of self-medicating in order to manage the distressing effects of trauma (such as anxious arousal) (Anda et al., 2006; Coates & McKenzie-Mohr, 2010; Kidd & Davidson, 2007; McKenzie-Mohr, Coates, & McLeod, 2012; Perry & Szalavitz, 2007; Perry, 2010). Effects of complex trauma are often severe and can undermine other efforts that youth may be undertaking to bring stability and security to their lives (Coates

& McKenzie-Mohr, 2010). Common barriers to moving off the street (such as drug use, mental health issues, and explosive tempers) can be linked to the effects of trauma (Karabanow & Clement, 2004).

Trusting Relationships

There exists a wide body of research suggesting that relationships, social connectedness, are a protective factor against many forms of child maltreatment, as well as a means of promoting pro-social behavior (Travis & Combs-Orme, 2007; Coohey, 1996; Ludy-Dobson & Perry, 2010). These social connections can exist in a variety of ways and contexts: positive relationships with caregivers; a sense of belonging to the community; supportive relationships with teachers; friendships with peers; strong family relationships; early family connections; high levels of parental warmth; supportive and warm relationships with fathers; and relationships with extended kin (Stronge & Reed-Victor, 2000). In contexts particular to service youth, supportive relationships are viewed most favorably by youth when the staff are caring and consistent and allow a certain level of intimacy to develop rather than maintaining rigid staff/client boundaries (Ferguson, Kim, & McCoy, 2011). Previous research has found that youth feel particularly positive about staff members who are perceived to go above and beyond the basic requirements of their job description, to offer reciprocality in the relationship (Boyden & Mann, 2005; Keenan, 2010; Murray Nettles, Mucherah, & Jones, 2000' Ikeda, 2012). Once developed, safe relationships with staff provide a context for the youth to feel emotionally safe and to learn to trust others (Kurtz, Lindsey, Jarvis, & Nackerud, 2000).

The essential element of a relationship is central to all practice with humans but is

exaggerated for any population group for whom critical relationships with loved ones have been marked by loss, abuse, and neglect, as is often the case with youth experiencing homelessness. In order for homeless young people to engage with services, they must establish rapport and trust in the relationship with the service provider and perceive that the services will lead to positive experiences. Previous research has found the establishment of rapport with homeless young people to be the initial necessary step to effective interventions (Barker, Humphries, McArthur, & Thomson, 2012a; Barry, Ensign, & Lippek, 2002; Karabanow & Clement, 2004; Kidd, 2003; Kidd, Miner, Walker, & Davidson, 2007; Quilgars, Fitzpatrick, & Pleace, 2011; Thompson et al., 2006).

Building rapport and trust is easier said than done. Exposure to trauma during the critical developmental stages of adolescence can derail emotional growth and adversely affect self-esteem, while reducing one's ability to relate to and trust others and avoid future victimization (Thompson et al., 2006; Thompson, McManus, & Voss, 2006). This leads to a decreased ability to trust services and the people who deliver those services (Garrett et al., 2008; Karabanow & Clement, 2004; Kurtz et al., 2000). Young people who have run away from child welfare programs and are experiencing homelessness are particularly difficult to build trusting relationships with because they have longstanding, negative histories with staff in agencies that are supposed to help them (Kurtz & Linnemann, 2006; Kurtz et al., 2000; Ryan, 2013). Many who have been homeless before accessing services have had to develop a skepticism and mistrust that is necessary for survival on the streets (Kurtz & Linnemann, 2006; Kurtz et al., 2000; Ryan, 2013). In

some cases, these young people have never encountered any trustworthy adults in their lifetime (Kurtz et al., 2000), and the relationships they form with service providers within drop-in centers, shelters, and transitional living programs are their first positive experiences with adults (Ferguson, Bender, Thompson, Xie, & Pollio, 2011).

Create a therapeutic web. There is value creating multiple opportunities for youth to develop trusting relationships with adults. Bruce Perry, a leading researcher and practitioner in the fields of psychiatry and neurology, has been working with children who have experienced trauma for several decades. He discovered through his work with the children who survived the Branch Davidian siege that, when working with youth in a programmatic setting, youth can benefit from the existence of what Perry calls a "therapeutic web" (Perry & Szalavitz, 2007). This approach allows young people to access a number of staff members in different roles and in different ways, thus allowing the youth to meet their therapeutic needs through a multitude of relationships and interactions. Perry describes this below.

> Each night after the children went to bed our team would meet to review the day and discuss each child. This "staffing" process began to reveal patterns that suggested therapeutic experiences were taking place in short, minutes-long interactions. As we charted these contacts we found that, despite having no formal "therapy" sessions, each child was actually getting hours of intimate, nurturing, therapeutic connections each day. The child controlled when, with whom and how she interacted with the child-sensitive adults around her. Because our staff had a variety of strengths— some were very touchy-feely and nurturing, others were humorous, still others good listeners or sources of information— the children could seek out what they needed, when they needed it. This created a powerful therapeutic web. (Perry & Szalavitz, 2007, p. 72)

One can imagine that youth staying in youth homeless shelters could benefit from a similar approach. Research has found that children and youth benefit when "multiple

players in the child's life" are "on the same page in understanting the child's needs" (Richardson, et al., 2012, p. 171).

Looking Across the Principles: Journeys of Youth Experiencing Homelessness

Three studies identified during the literature review focused on the journey experienced by homeless youth from the perspective of the youth. These studies show the principles in action, helping to frame the analysis. The first collected stories through a web-based storytelling project, the second through a phenomenological research study with 12 youth, and the third through interviews with 128 youth in 6 major Canadian cities. All findings span multiple principles, particularly journey-oriented and trusting youth/adult relationships.

The Toronto Youth Street Stories is an innovative, web-based storytelling project that was conducted with homeless youths in Toronto. Through the project, over fifty youths were encouraged to express their personal perspectives through adult-led, creative writing workshops, resulting in youth-created stories, poems, and pictures about a wide array of feelings and experiences. Across the dozens of written pieces, there is evidence of a chronology of street life. This "arc of experience" involves living with abuse and despair, leaving home, living on the street, experiencing a crisis or turning point, accessing services, and gradually moving away from street life toward self-sustaining independence and security. It includes the stories of youth who have transitioned away from the street, as well as those still facing homelessness (Ottaway, King, & Erickson, 2009).

The second study, a phenomenological study that looked at how former runaways

and/or homeless youth were able to navigate their journey and achieve a measure of self-defined success, focused on: 1) decisive turning points in the lives of the young people; 2) the personal and contextual factors that enabled them to successfully resolve difficulties; and 3) how they defined success for themselves (Lindsey et al., 2000). All twelve research participants reported that learning new attitudes and behaviors helped them deal more effectively with turning points and difficult times. The youth specifically described the importance of learning about themselves, about being in relationships with others, and from their experience, as well as having faith in a higher power. Learning about themselves encompassed such ideas as the development of self-confidence and self-love and learning both the importance of taking care of oneself and how to do so. Learning about being in relationships with others helped them discover how to be more considerate, responsible, and careful with others. This area of learning involved such lessons as learning to trust others and accept help, becoming better judges of character and avoiding bad influences, and helping others. Learning from experience was related to gleaning lessons from their own successes and mistakes. Faith in a higher power was an important factor in creating success in their lives, although their concepts of spirituality varied (Lindsey et al., 2000).

The third study looked at 128 young people (90 males, 38 females) and 50 service providers in 6 Canadian cities and revealed several connected themes related to the street-exiting process, including contemplation (thinking about getting off the street), motivation to change, getting help, transitioning from the street, changing daily routine, and redefining one's sense of self (Karabanow & Naylor, 2013). The youth in the study

reported that they felt isolated with little social capital, separate from others because of their homeless status and sometimes their homeless appearance (Karabanow, Hughes, Ticknor, & Kidd, 2010). Many found a sense of belonging within the homeless youth population and felt a sense of family and community that was sometimes safer and more consistent than they experienced in their homes.

Several youths reported that they thought of their service providers as surrogate families, in that they met basic needs and provided safe and caring environments (Karabanow & Naylor, 2013). The authors stated, “It is precisely this sense of inclusion that makes it difficult for most young people to move away from street culture” (Karabanow & Naylor, 2013, p. 51). For these youth, the process of transitioning away from the street meant reducing ties with street culture and friends and building (or rebuilding) relationships with mainstream society. Despite the fact that creating a new sense of belonging and identity was reported to be difficult for youth, building new relationships outside of the homeless youth culture was seen as important for healthy transitioning. While they spoke of loneliness and uncertainty, they were also pleased to describe the development of new relationships and routines that they perceived to be good for them (Karabanow & Naylor, 2013). Four of the greatest benefits cited were an increased sense of control over one’s life, having direction in one’s life, and being stable in terms of both housing/security and personal wellness (Karabanow & Naylor, 2013).

Principles Summary

Some of the principles are well defined in the literature as they relate to working with homeless youth: trauma-informed care and harm reduction, for example. Others,

such as holistic and journey-oriented, are less so. Still others, such as youth/adult relationships and positive youth development, are covered in extensive literature, albeit with differing vocabulary and definitions; it was challenging to identify which vocabulary or definitions to adopt for the purposes of this research. Where the concept is clearly defined, deductive coding was applied to the case stories presented in Chapter 4. Where the concept was not clearly defined, emergent coding was conducted. The vast majority of the studies cited in this chapter researched principles in isolation from one another. Chapter 5 of this study will seek not only to understand how youth experienced these nine individual principles but also identify ways in which these principles overlap and interact.

Part 3: Homelessness as a Complex Systems Problem

Youth homelessness is a problem, and its cause and solution lies in multiple systems. This paper has demonstrated how multiple systems interact around the phenomenon of youth homelessness (child welfare, mental health, educational, juvenile justice, etc.). While homelessness is experienced by young people at the individual level, it is also a symptom of fundamental social problems that requires societal responses across multiple systems (Kidd, 2012). Homelessness, therefore, should considered not only a problem of an individual or a family but as a structural problem in our society. The points of causation and the leverage points for change can be found in all levels of this nested system: individual, families, and the multiple, entangled systems that interact with the lives of families at risk of becoming homeless, as well as in public attitudes and social

norms. The multiple, entangled systems include educational, child welfare, juvenile justice, first responder, healthcare, philanthropic systems, and the system of researchers at universities and other institutions.

The majority of research, to date, has focused on individual and familial factors, but many have suggested that structural and systemic factors contribute to individual and familial factors (Toro, 2006). For example, poverty, an inadequate supply of affordable housing, domestic violence, discrimination, and inadequate social and health services, can lead to family breakdown, trauma, job loss, mental health problems, or addictions that may ultimately result in homelessness for one or more individuals in a family (Winland et al., 2011). Several recent investigations have found that the availability of personal, social, and/or service resources (e.g., subsidized housing or access to services), rather than the degree of pathology or types and numbers of diagnoses, is the best predictor of successful long-term adaptation among people who are homeless (Haber & Toro, 2004; Zlotnick, Robertson, & Tam, 2003).

Treating a system problem as a flaw of individuals has serious and detrimental consequences for those individuals. In interviews with fifteen youth workers in either New York City or Toronto, all interviewees described their frustrations with the influence of larger social systems upon their efforts to help their clients (Kidd, 2007). One of the most powerful influences described was that of the social stigma associated with their clients. They felt society views homeless youth as criminals, lazy, drug addicts, etc., and this creates a dynamic in which they must fight hard to secure resources for their clients because greater society perceives these youth as undeserving of resources. Kidd et al.

(2007) go on to write, “Further complicating the counseling process is the direct impact of social stigma upon the youth. The workers described having to deal with the fallout of dehumanizing treatment at the hands of the public and police, including the anger and cynicism of the youth as a reaction to stigma, and a process of self-fulfilling prophesy in which clients begin to believe in and adopt the stereotypes applied to them” (p. 24).

The field of evaluation has traditionally focused on programs. Take, for example, The Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation mission statement: “The mission of the reconstituted Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation is to promote concern for evaluations of high quality based on sound evaluation practices and procedures and to meet existing and emerging needs in the field of evaluation…” (Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation, 1995, p. 4). The resulting evaluation standards are the Program Evaluation Standards (Yarbrough, Shulha, Hopson, and Caruthers, 2011), placing the emphasis of the standards on evaluation of programs. It makes sense then, given the framing of youth homelessness as a systems problem, to discuss the intersection of systems thinking and evaluation.

Systems Thinking in Evaluation

The interdisciplinary field of systems thinking has grown rapidly since it was introduced in the early 1970s (Ackhoff, 1971) and is quickly gaining traction in the field of evaluation as interest among foundations, governments, researchers, and social entrepreneurs involved with large-scale social change has led to an increased focus on the design, implementation, and evaluation of system change interventions (Cabrera, Colosi, & Lobdell, 2008; Hargreaves & Podems, 2012; Leischow & Milstein, 2006; Wulczyn et

al., 2010). Evidence of the growing interest in systems thinking in the evaluation field is demonstrated by the fact that the American Evaluation Association Systems in Evaluation Topical Interest Group grew from 4 members in 2004 to almost 500 in 2010, just 6 years later (Hargreaves & Podems, 2012). Additionally, four books in the field of evaluation have been published since 2010 addressing the topic of systems thinking in evaluation (Funnell & Rogers, 2011; Morell, 2010; Patton, 2010; Williams & Hummelbrunner, 2010). The reasons for this growth in popularity are likely as diverse as those who believe it holds great promise. Yet beneath these reasons may lie a more fundamental explanation for the allure of systems thinking: It offers a model for thinking that resonates with people who live and work in these systems (Cabrera et al., 2008; Patton, 2010; Zimmerman, Lindberg, & Plsek, 2009). Increasingly, researchers, practitioners, and policymakers are acknowledging that the systems they are seeking to change and improve need to be viewed not as a machine but as a complex, adaptive entity (Eoyang, 2007; Kitson, 2009; McDaniel Jr. et al., 2009; Patton, 2010; Patton, 2012b). They also posit that evaluations should be designed to address the complexity of the system in and on which the evaluation is taking place (Eoyang, 2007; Parsons, 2012; Patton, 2010).

This creates tension for researchers and evaluators, as the proponents of complexity thinking challenge their colleagues to take a critical and reflective look at evaluation assumptions and practices as they relate to these competing paradigms and to explore the implications for practice (Eoyang, 2007; Parsons, 2012; Patton, 2010; Westley, Zimmerman, & Patton, 2007). One of the hallmarks of systems thinking in

evaluation is flexibility and a sense of discovery (Hargreaves & Noga, 2012). More time is devoted to describing and understanding process, relationships, levels of influence and interactions, and adaptive cycles (Hargreaves & Noga, 2012; Patton, 2010). There is value in systems thinking, as it allows evaluators to better explain why things did or did not happen, as well as to examine particular unanticipated changes (Hargreaves & Noga, 2012; Patton, 2010). It also increases the evaluators' ability to identify leverages for change at different levels of the system (Hargreaves & Noga, 2012; Patton, 2010).

Complexity Theory

Given the fact that youth homelessness is a persistent and growing problem with no clear cause or solution, homelessness can be framed as a wicked problem (Sherman & Peterson, 2009) and addressed by applying complexity theory as the particular type of systems theory. In the last decade, scholars across diverse disciplines and fields have made the case that the improvement of complex problems in health, education, and social service organizations would be enhanced by understanding these organizations as complex adaptive systems (CAS) (Begun, Dooley, & Zimmerman, 2003; Eoyang & Smilonich, 1998; McDaniel Jr., Lanham, & Anderson, 2009; Patton, 2010; Wang & Li, 2011).

Complexity theory focuses on the following characteristics inherent in complex systems: dynamic, non-linear, robust, and emergent (Begun et al., 2003; Eoyang, 2001; Holland, 1995; Marion & Bacon, 1999; Uhl-Bien, Marion, & McKelvey, 2007; Zimmerman et al., 2009). *Dynamic* describes the interactions between and among individuals and networks in the system in ways that include changing in unpredictable

ways and in repeating cycles and existing in state of equilibrium (Patton, 2010). *Non-linearity* is the idea that small actions can have large reactions (Begun et al., 2003; Parsons, 2012). As Stevens and Cox (2008) wrote:

> In linear understanding, A plus B always equals C. Complexity theory suggests that this is not an adequate way to deal with complex phenomena… In other words, Action A plus B may lead to Action C, but it may also lead to Actions D, E, and/or F. On the other hand, it may lead to no change at all. (Stevens, 2008, p. 1324)

Robust describes the fact that complex systems exhibit the ability to alter themselves in response to feedback and can adapt in response to changes in the system (Begun et al., 2003; Johnson, 2009; Marion & Bacon, 1999). *Emergence* refers to the way in which individuals self-organize and gravitate toward attractors (think of the dynamic leader, the contentious troublemaker, or the coalescing issue), which suggests unpredictability due to an inability to state precisely how a system will behave.

All of these characteristics indicate that while systems change in what may appear to be chaotic ways, unexpected things are actually emerging, as described by the laws of complexity (Stevens & Cox, 2008); thus, it is inaccurate to treat a complex system as the sums of its parts (Byrne, 2009; Mihata, 2002; Westley et al., 2007; Zimmerman et al., 2009). The attributes of a complex system make it evident that a system cannot be expected to produce a specific outcome at a specific time in a specific and predicted linear fashion.

Wicked problems, a specific type of complex problem we have already discussed at some length, are the problems we face that seem intractable—problems such as poverty, the educational achievement gap, and structural inequities—and where it is difficult to identify and agree upon causes and solutions as they are complex, changing,

and spanning system boundaries (Briggs, 2007). As such, youth homelessness is a phenomenon characterized by interrelationships and ambiguity, by boundaries that appear clear but are not, and by diverse and conflicting perspectives. It is a complex systems problem in which both the cause and the solution involve individuals, families, communities, and the various systems people interact with such as schools, hospitals, and the child welfare and criminal justice systems. Given these interrelationships and the wickedness of the problem, an inquiry into youth homelessness would benefit from applying a systems-thinking perspective, complexity theory specifically. The following section explains how the traditional model of developing evidence of effective programs (evidence-based best practice) defies the principles of complexity theory. It then proposes an alternative approach: evidence of effective principles.

Part 4: Two Approaches to Addressing Social Problems Related to Youth

Rules-Based Versus Concepts-Based

When framing youth homelessness as a systems problem, an important question to pose is: How do organizations achieve a shared understanding of how to address the problem so people can collaborate across systems boundaries to work together toward contextually appropriate solutions? Some fields, such as economics and accounting, have addressed this question by debating whether cross-systemcollaboration should be guided by specific rules or by general concepts. In the early 2000s, scholars of finance and accounting advocated that the United States shift from rules-based to concepts-based standards. As a rules-based field, people and organizations could hypothetically work

together across systems because they all followed the same set of explicit rules. Maines et al. (2003) provided commentary on this debate in the accounting field professional journal, describing a continuum ranging from unequivocally rigid standards on one end to broad concepts on the other end. In this commentary, they provided an example of a rules-based standard: "Annual depreciation expense for all fixed assets is to be 10% of the original cost of the asset until the asset is fully depreciated" (p. 74). By contrast, a concepts-based statement was written on the same topic: "Depreciation expense for the reporting period should reflect the decline in the economic value of the asset over the period" (p. 74)

The scholars acknowledged that the rules-based statement is attractive because it leaves no room for disagreement about the amount of depreciation expense to be recognized, allowing for comparability and consistency across organizations and time. However, the authors point out that "such a standard lacks relevance due its inability to reflect the underlying economics of the reporting entity, which differ across firms and through time" (p. 74). In the latter, the goal of the standard is to understand the actual depreciation of an asset based on contextual factors rather than on consistency and comparability. This debate over rules versus concepts has traditionally been framed as a trade-off between the certainty and lower administrative costs of clear rules versus the flexibility to adjust decisions according to context when guided by concepts (Friedman & Wickelgren, 2012). Maines et al. (2003) argue in favor of concepts that allow people and organizations to adapt to context because "it is impracticable, if not impossible, for any standard-setting organization to anticipate and provide for every possible form and type

of financial transaction and business relationship. Detailed standards are likely to be incomplete or even obsolete by the time they are published" (p. 74).

Arjoon (2006) discussed how this tension is debated in the field of organizational development, framing it as an ethical debate. His argument is that that effective organizational governance "optimally captures and integrates the appropriate aspects of rules-based and principles-based approaches, and identifies and assesses the related risks" (p. 53). Thus, the decision whether to use rules or principles (concepts) is an ethical one, based on an analysis of the risks that each approach presents in a given situation. Arjoon goes on to summarize David Stewart's (1996) assessment of the relationships between rules-based approaches and business ethics. Stewart points out that a rule-governed approach suffers from the following four drawbacks:

> (1) It leaves open the question of what to do when there is no specific rule to apply to a given situation, and so it requires continual growth of rules to cover new situations; (2) as a consequence, it requires another set of rules to help decide what to do when rules conflict with each other; (3) obeying the rules leads to a false sense of having acted ethically through meeting what is minimally required and not fulfilling the spirit of the rules in the first place; and (4) rules-based forms of conduct attempt to look for loopholes as ways of satisfying the technical demands of the rules while still doing things that the rules were intended to prevent. (Arjoon, 2006, p. 67)

Arjoon points out that the principles-based approach, on the other hand, "searches for principles for guidance, general understandings that help to make moral decisions in a variety of circumstances, and assists in discovering the morally relevant aspects of decisions" (p. 67). One avoids the traps outlined by Stewart (1996) when guided by principles rather than rules. Principles may be operationalized differently in different contexts, thus avoiding (to some extent) the need for a continual growth of principles to cover new situations. Principles may be in conflict with each other, but that is not a

problem. Rather than immediately creating a new principle, the existing ones become a guide for discussion and action in a particular context. For example, the harm-reduction approach described earlier in this paper may be in conflict with building trusting relationships. A youth who is continuously high may lack the ability to form relationships. The person working with that youth has to decide which principle will more heavily guide his or her work with that youth at that time. Thus principles-driven work does not "attempt to look for loopholes"; rather, it demands deep thinking about "the right thing to do" is in a given scenario, using appropriate means. People step into gray areas of ambiguity rather than attempting to turn gray into black and white. Arjoon (2006) summarized the difference between the two approaches. Tabe 4 presents an overview of this summary.

Table 4

Charachteristics of Rules-Based vs. Principles-Based Approaches

Rules-Based	Principles-Based
Complies with a specific set of requirements (e.g., checklist of do's and don'ts)	Emphasizes ''doing the right thing'' using appropriate means
Follows the letter of the law	Corporate behavior is guided by a focus on end results (objectives-oriented)
Emphasizes details and enforceability	Emphasizes communication
Leans toward the quantitative, objective end of the spectrum	Leans toward the qualitative, subjective end of the spectrum
Focuses on detection	Focuses on prevention
Tends to be fear-driven	Tends to be values-driven
Promotes blind obedience	Promotes alignment with values
Tends to consider issues in black and white	Considers issues in the gray areas
Is easier to implement	Is more difficult to implement

Evidence-Based Best Practice Versus Evidence-Based Effective Principles

Evidence-based practice and effective principles are presented in this section as two possible approaches to determine what to do when working toward solutions in complex social situations. In evidence-based best practice, a set of rules is applied, and the outcomes are measured through research. Evidence-based practice promotes the use of standardized procedures (rules and treatment manuals) for specific disorders and relies heavily on experimental randomized clinical trial methodology (Chambless & Ollendick, 2001). The types of evidence that are considered particularly credible by researchers and

evaluators and are used to support claims of best practices are single-summative studies and metaanalyses (Patton, 2013). *Single-summative* evidence is "a rigorous and credible summative evaluation of a single program," whereas *metaanalysis* is a systematic or statistical aggregation of "the results of a group of programs all implementing the same model in a high-fidelity, standardized and replicable manner to determine best practices" (Patton, 2013, p. 22).

Evidence of effective principles is the "synthesis of the results of a group of diverse programs all adhering to the same principles but each adapting those principles to its own particular target population within its own context" (Patton, 2012, p. 22). In each case, data are collected with the purposed of determining what works in a particular context. Single-summative evidence and metaanalysis use research methods that assume a high degree of predictability and do not take context into account. By contrast, evidence of effective principles assumes that while the principles remain the same, there will be necessary variation of implementation across contexts.

Table 5

Comparison of approaches

Evidence-Based Best Practice	**Evidence-Based Effective Principles**
Evidence is typically collected via experimental or quasi-experimental design	Synthesis of results across a diverse group of programs
Assumes a high degree of predictability	Assumes a high degree of unpredictability
Implemented the same regardless of context	Implemented with sensitivity to context

Knowing when to use an evidence-based best practice approach to addressing a

social problem versus an evidence-based effective principles approach depends on one's ability to determine the complexity of a situation. "Best practices only work in simple situations on simple problems where key causal variables can be identified, manipulated, and controlled, like using mosquito nets to reduce mosquito bites and thereby reduce the spread of malaria. Best practices are recipes that prescribed exactly what to do, *regardless of context*" (Patton, 2010, p. 155). Effective principles provide guidance for action in the face of complexity. Neither approach is inherently better than the another. As Arjoon (2006) stated about organizational development, the decision is an ethical one, and it should be about the best fit in a given situation. Patton describes this as "situation recognition."

> Situation recognition involves matching an approach or intervention to the nature of the situation. Top-down dissemination of best practices works, but only for certain kinds of interventions in certain kinds of environments. The World Health Organization's campaign to eradicate polio depends upon careful, precise, and thorough presentation of the same procedures every time a new case of polio is identified anywhere in the world. (Patton, 2012, p. 84)

The challenge for researchers or evaluators is to determine which type of situation they are working in. The following sections will explore the two approaches in greater depth.

Evidence-Based Best Practice

The label "evidence-based" is widely used in the medical, health, and education fields, typically to describe something that produces a statistically significant change in an experimental or quasi-experimental study. Researchers frequently make a call for more evidence-based best practices such as the one below, made by researchers at the end of a comprehensive literature review on interventions related to supporting homeless youth:

> Although many interventions have been developed to address the diverse needs of homeless youth, the vast majority have not been evaluated. As a result, we know relatively little about what works. Closing this gap will require methodologically sound studies that include control (or at least comparison) groups in experimental (or at least quasi-experimental) research designs. (Toro et al., 2007, p. 20)

The typical approach is to declare that there are just a few possible solutions and focus on selecting from among these options. A typical way to frame this dialogue is by simplifying the issues to something that can be addressed by a predetermined set of practices and then presenting the solution as either/or scenarios (Conklin, 2006). For example, if a community wants to address increasing high school dropout rates, they could consult the Institute of Education Sciences "What Works Clearing House" and choose between The National Guard Youth ChalleNGe (sic) Program (WWC Intervention Report, 2012) or the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program (WWC Intervention Report, 2009). This approach makes the assumptions that there is a "best" way to do something, that these practices can be empirically documented through research, and that these practices transcend context. Implementing such a program, therefore, means following exactly the same protocol that defined the program in those research studies. The program is written in a program manual or some other format, and the program staff in the new context are expected to follow the manual exactly. Evaluation emphasis is, in part, placed on assessing the fidelity of implementation (Lipsey et al., 2010).

Evidence-Based Effective Principles

The use of evidence-based effective principles is an approach proposed by Patton (Patton, 2010; 2013) that attends to the inherent complexity in social problems. Because social environments—and, therefor, social programming—are dynamic, the program or

strategy needs to constantly respond to changes in social, political, economic, environmental, technological, and demographic patterns while, at the same time, have a framework that guides cohesive approaches and solutions. The development of shared effective principles plays to the need to maintain a tension among collaboration, coordination, and autonomy. Patton (2010) describes what being principles-driven looks like in the Strengthening Families program.

> Being principles-driven, implementing the Strengthening Families approach is not about using a particular model or started a new program. Rather, it is about engaging existing programs, services, and other entities as partners around the use and promotion of the protective factors as their rules for action. It includes changes at multiple interrelated subsystems of a complex system including policy (governmental and organizational); formal and informal organizational connections; professional development for practitioners, space programs, space and activities; and changes in families understanding and use of protective factors. (p. 224)

Patton goes on to state that because principles can bridge organizational and system boundaries, collaboration around unifying principles has the potential to act as "primary points of influence that affect the whole complex system bringing about change in each of these subsystems involves cross-scale innovation and systems change" (2010, p. 224).

Despite the relative newness of this approach, three government agencies that work with youth experiencing homelessness have produced reports that provide exemplars of employing a principles-based approach. The first is Australia's Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA), the second is The United States Department of Health and Human Services, and the third is The United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH). Each will be discussed in this section. The Otto Bremer Foundation will be described as a fourth

agency engaging in this approach, the only one of the four to rely on youth voice as a means by which to reality-test and validate the principles.

Reconnect: Working with young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. The Australian Government commissioned a report, "Reconnect: Working with Young People who Are Homeless or At Risk of Homelessness." The report was funded by the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) and commissioned by The Institute of Child Protection Studies (ICPS) to identify effective responses to and interventions for working with young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness (Barker et al., 2012a). The report draws on data collected from surveys sent to stakeholders across Australia, interviews with fifteen key informants, and an extensive literature review. The result of this investigation was the identification of the key "principles of practice." These are described in the report as a range of principles that support effective practice with young people who are homeless and presents them as a "unifying framework from which to make decisions about appropriate techniques and strategies" (Barker et al., 2012a, p. 40). As noted previously, the authors remind the reader that the principles do not work in isolation but rather operate as "interdependent and mutually supportive" (Barker et al., 2012a, p. 40). The principles identified are: relationship-oriented (rapport and trust); client-centered (choice and agency); flexible; holistic; strengths-based; and solutions-oriented" (Barker et al., 2012a).

The Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY) Toolkit. The Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY) Toolkit was funded by The Family and Youth Services Bureau

(FYSB) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, developed by and for advocates in the runaway and homeless youth (RHY) and domestic and sexual assault (DV/SA) fields. The Toolkit was created to help programs better address relationship violence with runaway and homeless youth, and it offers organized information, resources, tips, and tools drawn from the lessons learned by collaborative projects funded by The FYSB, which brought together domestic violence programs and runaway and homeless youth agencies to address relationship violence among street youth. Because a number or factors have made partnerships between the RHY and DV/SA fields challenging in the past, The RHY Toolkit authors took the approach of identifying those principles that are shared by both fields: supporting creative, committed partnerships; honoring, valuing, and involving the individuals they serve; creating justice through social change; creating safety and fostering trust; and building autonomy through a strengths-based model.

Opening Doors: The Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness. In early 2010, the United States federal government released its first-ever comprehensive plan to end homelessness across the nation: "Opening Doors: The Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness." In developing this plan, the federal government appointed a task force of policy experts to focus specifically on youth who are at risk of experiencing homelessness, particularly those aging out of the foster care and juvenile justice systems. In June of 2012 this task force released a report that included "A Research Informed Intervention Model for Youth Experiencing Homelessness." This framework provides strategies for how to approach the problem of

youth homelessness in a more coordinated and effective way across different disciplines working with this population. The plan reflects the following principles: 1) assessment of homeless youth based on risk and protective factors should inform appropriate intervention strategies at the system and organization levels, as well as for individual youth; 2) culturally-appropriate and effective intervention strategies should target assessed needs and strengths; 3) trauma-informed care and positive youth development will provide important practice frameworks for delivering intervention strategies; 4) over time more homeless youth will make positive transitions to independence and adulthood; and 5) progress monitoring and program evaluation will provide data for adjusting and improving strategies over time.

The Otto Bremer Foundation Homeless Youth Initiative. This Initiative provides a fourth exemplar. In partnership with The OBF Homeless Youth Initiative reflective practice group, this research took the principles-based approach one step further. The shared principles were identified and agreed upon by the group, eighteen professionals who have played a wide variety of roles in serving homeless youth. These were generated through a consensus-building process before this research project began. Michael Quinn Patton, the group's external evaluator, sent this correspondence to the reflective practice group in May of 2012:

> Share in advance [of our next meeting] by email any list or statement of principles, values, philosophy, theory of change, etc., that informs your approach with homeless youth. We'll be doing reflective practice on these, looking for cross-cutting themes that might help us focus on empirically validating shared evidence-based principles (Patton, personal communication, May 4, 2012).

The group then reviewed the principles, values, and/or philosophies shared by each of the organizations and decided on principles to which they could all commit. For example,

four organizations explicitly listed harm reduction in their shared materials, and there was a great deal of overlap in the ways in which harm reduction was explained:

> **Streetworks:** Harm-Reduction Approaches: We believe in meeting youth "where they're at" instead of focusing on whether a youth is engaging in behaviors that put him or her at risk. We focus on actions that can be taken to reduce the level of risk or harm to which youth are exposed. Harm reduction is a set of practical strategies that are offered in the hope of reducing negative consequences of unsafe behavior. By accepting other, less harmful options, youth begin to accept a spectrum of strategies from safer behaviors. The goal is a healthy life, where youths have self-determination and hope for their future (Able-Peterson & Bucy, 1993, p. 38).
>
> **Face to Face SafeZone:** SafeZone uses harm reduction strategies that reduce negative consequences of abusive relationships, and risky behavior (drug use, alcohol use, sexual experiences, and sex work). Harm reduction strategies meet youth "where they're at," in a nonjudgmental manner (Smieja, personal correspondence, June 14, 2012).

With the exception of journey-oriented, all of the principles appeared in two to four of the organizations' existing materials. Once the group identified the nine principles, they asked, "How will we know if these are the right principles if we don't talk to youth?" This was the impetus for this research that explored the validity and implementation of principles through youth voice.

Why Evidence-Based Effective Principles?

Some fields of practice, such as mental health and juvenile justice, are beginning to question the limits of evidence-based best practice. They are recognizing that despite a great deal of time and money allocated to developing evidence-based best practice models, the approach has fallen short of its promises. Replicated programs often are not implemented with as much fidelity as possible because new locations face budget constraints, workforce limitations, and other differences in context. Lipsey et al. (2010)

reviewed the dissemination of evidence-based best practice models in the juvenile justice field and determined that, although programs were determined through research to be the "gold standard," replication of these programs is often "uneven with mixed levels of effectiveness" (p. 1).

The mental health field has seen a similar phenomenon since being challenged to deliver effective, evidence-based programs. This challenge dates back to Knitzer's (1982) call for a system of care (SOC). Knitzer and Cooper (2006) recently assessed progress in developing systems of care at the twenty-year mark, and their assessment is that although system-level effects with SOCs have been good, individual outcomes have not. The authors write that after twenty years, the use of evidence-based programs in community-based settings has produced fewer promising effects than anticipated. Their conclusion is that "[o]ne major challenge is overcoming obstacles to the adoption of evidence-based practices. This requires crafting and evaluating infrastructure mechanisms, including incentives to facilitate rapid dissemination and 'ownership' of effective treatments" (p. 674). Patton (2011) and Lipsey (2010) offer "effective practices" and "effective principles" as alternatives. Effective practices are more highly proscribed than effective principles but much more situationally flexible than evidence-based best practices.

Hagemoser (2009) outlines three errors of reasoning in the evidence-based approach and claims these errors contribute to some of the disappointing effects described above. Hagemoser feels the most pervasive reasoning error of evidence-based practice advocates is the failure to "make a distinction between knowing that it works versus knowing how it works. The two are separate concepts, and the former is a

necessary but far from sufficient condition for appropriately inferring the latter" (Hagemoser, 2009, p. 603). In other words, knowing the outcome of an intervention may reveal little to nothing about the process that actually led to the change (Ablon & Marci, 2004). A second reasoning error is the assumption that the parameters of change specified by a given best practice manual have been proven correct if the intervention demonstrates efficacy. "This fallacy is called *affirming the consequent*. This error occurs when one reasons as the following: If theory *x* is true, then it would lead to outcome *y*; outcome *y* has occurred; therefore, theory *x* has been validated" (Hagemoser, 2009, p. 603). A third error is the tendency to assume that *specificity* implies *validity*. This error likely posits the intervention's concrete specifications as the important variables rather than as "expendable markers for the underlying constructs" (Hagemoser, 2009, p. 603).

Limitations of the Existing Literature

Because this study explores both a content area (homeless youth) and process (principles-based evaluation), there are two bodies of literature to consider when examining limitations: literature on homeless youth services and evaluation literature on developmental evaluation generally and principles-based developmental evaluation specifically. The single greatest limitation of the existing literature on homeless youth is its scarcity. Kellock (2009) suggested that adolescents are the age group most at risk for experiencing homelessness but the least studied (Robertson & Toro, 1999; Toro, Dworsky, & Fowler, 2007). Moore (2005) argues that "the numbers of homeless youth are increasing, but this subgroup of the homeless population remains one of the least

understood, most vulnerable, and most difficult to reach" (p.18). The transient nature of these youths and their distrust of adults and institutions make it logistically difficult to find, survey, and interview them. As a result of these challenges, homeless people, in general, remain an understudied segment of society, and homeless adolescents living on their own are the subgroup on which the least research is available (Cauce et al., 2000; Moore, 2005).

A second limitation is that most research on homeless adolescents has treated heterogeneity among homeless adolescents categorically and primarily as a function of where they were staying at night (on the streets or in shelters) or their reasons for leaving home (such as being told to leave home, leaving to escape abuse, or being removed for child maltreatment) (Milburn, Liang, Lee, Rotheram-Borus, Rosenthal, Mallett, Lightfoot, & Lester, 2009). While these are useful distinctions, they may also be artificial. There is no evidence to support the claim that the needs of a youth sleeping on the streets differ from those of one staying in a shelter or that the needs of a youth who was kicked out of his or her home are different from those of one who was removed by child protective services. The research in this dissertation looks for commonalities across youth, regardless of the circumstances that led them to homelessness or where they sleep at night.

A third limitation of the existing literature is the focus on the individual causes for homelessness, impacts of homelessness, and reasons for exiting homelessness. This frames the phenomenon as one with simple cause-and-effect relationships that can be solved by interventions aimed at the level of the individual. It simplifies the problem to

the point where the findings cease to be useful in addressing the larger issues. A systems inquiry framework is needed to examine the interrelationships, boundaries, and diverse perspectives at multiple levels of the system, framing the problem in a way that is more realistic and, therefore, more useful. Additionally, there is a lack of research that seeks to understand why some subgroups of youth are over-represented among homeless youth and what their special needs may be (Cauce et al., 2000; Ferguson-Colvin & Maccio, 2012; Pennbridge, Mackenzie, & Swofford, 1991; Shelton, Mackie, van den Bree, Taylor, & Evans, 2012; Toro et al., 2007). The systems perspective can help provide insight as to whether there are systemic reasons that some groups are represented more than others. A fourth limitation is that there is little comprehensive information on model programs serving youth or young adults who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, not to mention the lack of less formal strategies or approaches for approaching youth homelessness (Toro et al., 2007).

A fifth and related limitation is the lack of youth voice in the research. It has already been established that there is a lack of research that seeks to understand the causes, impacts, and solutions of youth homelessness. Only a small subset of the existing literature includes youth voice. Of the more than 200 articles on homeless youth reviewed for this dissertation, fewer than a quarter used a method that incorporated qualitative perspectives shared by youth. Involving homeless or other at-risk youth in the research process improves the quality of the research (Walker, 2007) and may increase the likelihood that the research will lead to better policy and practice. Some researchers go so far as to state that any attempt to design strategies to address the needs of these youth and

improve outcomes for youth needs to include their voice in the development process (Kellock, 2009; Sabo, 2004).

Summary

This chapter presented the literature in four parts. The first part explored homelessness, its causes and its impacts. The literature shows that while no typical homeless youth exists and that there is no single cause, certain groups are more likely to experience homelessness, and there are considerable impacts on young people's social, emotional, and physical health and wellbeing. The second part of this review described the literature available on the nine collaboratively developed, shared principles. Some are clearly defined in the literature, while others are not. This has implications for analysis. In the third part, youth homelessness was presented as a complex and serious systems problem to define, characterized by highly interdependent causes and influences, socially complex and difficult to solve. Applying complexity theory and a systems-thinking lens helps frame the problem. In the fourth part, two approaches were described for conducting research on what works in addressing complex social problems, and it was argued that, given the complex nature of this topic, an evidence-based effective principles approach provides the best fit.

The following chapter describes a research method and approach that is sensitive to the complexity of the youth homelessness phenomenon and that allows for the identification of principles in the stories of fourteen young people who are experiencing or have experienced homelessness.

Chapter 3: Research Methods

As stated in the introduction, The Otto Bremer Foundation (OBF), a family foundation in Minnesota, has funded six organizations through The Youth Homelessness Initiative to improve their work with homeless youth, both at the individual organization level and collaboratively, at the initiative level. Of these six grantees, three are emergency shelters, two are youth opportunity centers, and one is a street outreach organization. The purpose of this research was to understand the 9 shared principles, as experienced or not, by 14 unaccompanied homeless youth between the ages of 18 and 24 who live in the Twin Cities metro area and who have utilized services by 2 or more of the 6 grantees. A multiple case study approach was used, and data were generated by interviews with the youth, street workers, agency staff, and others who could contribute to an understanding of the youths' experiences. Youth case files were also reviewed. A reflective practice group comprised of eighteen individuals, representing program leaders and foundation staff, convened monthly to engage with the data and participate in the analysis. Individual case stories were written, and both deductive and inductive coding was conducted, using the constant comparison method to identify if, where, and how the youth experienced the principles in action. The research questions were the following:

> *Process questions:* 1) How do homeless youth actually experience the principles of harm reduction, trusting relationships, positive youth development, trauma-informed care, non-judgmental, journey-oriented, strengths/assets-based, collaborative, and holistic? 2) What does implementation of the principles look like in practice?
>
> *Outcome questions:* 3) What are the impacts of the principles articulated above on

ways to work with homeless youth? 4) In what ways does the work impact the trajectory of the lives of young people?

Emergent question: 5) What other important principles may be guiding the work with youth, principles not yet fully identified, labeled, or understood?

It must be noted that this research study is a component of a larger, longer, developmental evaluation initiative. The research component was included as an important part of the evaluation because it systematically gathered youth voice and provided information about a principles-based approach to collaboration. This is an important part of the developmental evaluation, because the stakeholders were not interested in gathering evaluative data about individual programs; rather, they sought research data on a principles-based approach, related to the nine principles in particular, that could be relevant to the larger field of homeless youth.

Interest in large-scale social change among foundations, governments, researchers, and social entrepreneurs has led to an increased focus on the design, implementation, and evaluation of system change through complex interventions (Hargreaves, Parsons, & Moore, 2010; Hargreaves, 2010; Leischow & Milstein, 2006). A simple intervention is typically implemented by a single agency or program, such as a standalone emergency shelter. More complicated efforts involve teams of experts or program units within an organization, such as The StreetWorks Collaborative, a network of thirteen community-based agencies designed to pool resources and more effectively conduct outreach to homeless youth across the Twin Cities metro area. Complex, networked interventions often involve the collaboration of multiple actors in multiple

sectors at multiple levels. The addition of The Otto Bremer Foundation, an organization with a different level of resources and influence and a desire to convene organizations in a way that creates systems change, elevates this particular initiative to the level of a complex intervention (Hargreaves, 2010).

Michael Quinn Patton introduced developmental evaluation as a fourth and distinct evaluation purpose in a 1994 article in the *Journal of Evaluation* and expanded upon the approach in a recently published book, *Developmental Evaluation: Applying Complexity Concepts to Enhance Innovation and Use* (2010). Patton argues that developmental evaluation provides a critical and pragmatic alternative for evaluators working in complex situations in which there is high uncertainty as to the cause of the problem and low agreement about what ought to be done to solve or correct the problem. Given that this initiative is, in part, the development of a new program or strategy—principles-based collaboration—a developmental evaluation was the best fit, because the approach assumes a world of multiple causes, diversity of outcomes, inconsistency of interventions, emergent phenomena, and interactive effects at every level, including the system level (Patton, 1994). Unlike formative and summative evaluations, developmental evaluation does not assume a logical chain of events that can predict outcomes, nor does it assume that outcomes can be produced on a predictable timeline. Given these assumptions, a qualitative approach and interpretive framework were selected.

Qualitative Approach

Qualitative research is a method of inquiry employed in various academic

disciplines, whereby evaluators aim to acquire an in-depth understanding of human behavior and the motives that govern such behavior (Patton, 2002). Qualitative research encompasses a wide variety of methods that take an interpretive and naturalistic approach to its subject matter, seeking to provide rich descriptions of complex circumstances that are unexplored in the literature (Patton, 2002). Qualitative researchers study systems, people, interactions, and events in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. Thus, qualitative inquiry assumes that reality is socially constructed by every unique individual from within his or her own unique contextual interpretation and uses a variety of methods, including but not limited to case study, personal experience, introspective, life story, interview, observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Whereas quantitative research methods are largely concerned with internal validity, external validity, reliability, and generalizability (Cook & Campbell, 1976), qualitative research methods substitute the concept of “trustworthiness,” which contains four aspects: predictability, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Qualitative methods are more easily adapted to complex adaptive systems than traditional quantitative methods. Qualitative methods that have been used with a systems lens in research and evaluation include situation analyses, rapid assessments, environmental scans, mapping of community assets, and observations of system activities (Hargreaves, 2010). When applied using the complexity lens, these methods can allow evaluators to gain a deeper understanding of the systems and its boundaries, identify

underlying differences in perspectives among key stakeholders, and identify relationships to address in the next phase of the evaluation.

This research used an interpretive qualitative paradigm to frame the study, a framework characterized by the notion of multiple, constructed realities, rather than a single true reality (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Interpretive refers to participant observational research that has, at its center, an interest in identifying human meaning in social life with particular attention to context and original intent (Patton, 2001). I chose to use qualitative inquiry for this study because the paradigm creates an opportunity to understand this approach as experienced by those who matter the most: the homeless youths themselves. It is the experiences of the youth, as described by the youth, that sheds the most light on the phenomenon in question. It is also appropriate for the study of a principles-based approach to evaluation given its relative newness and the dearth of literature on this evaluation approach.

Research Design

The literature contains numerous examples of the use and application of case methodology. Case studies are used primarily when researchers wish to obtain an in-depth understanding of a relatively small number of individuals, problems, or situations (Patton, 2001). Well-known researchers such as Stake and Yin have written about case study research and suggested techniques for organizing and conducting the research successfully. Creswell (2007) describes *case study* as a “qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system or multiple bounded systems, through

detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information, and reports a case description and case-based themes" (p. 73). Given that this study involves an understanding of the complex relationships between and among multiple intersecting systems, case study is an appropriate method.

This research used the multiple case study analysis approach described by Robert Stake (2006). Multiple case study design is useful for investigation, description, and explanation of complex social phenomena (Stake, 1994; Yin, 1994). "We take a particular case and come to know it well, not primarily as to how it is different from others but what it is, what it does" (Stakes, 1995, p. 8). This is done, in part, to create thick, thorough description of a case in order to convey what the reader would have experienced if he or she had been present (Stake, 1995). Triangulation of evidence in multiple case studies provides results that are more robust than might be experienced when using, for example, single case designs (Stake, 1994; Yin, 1994). In fact, variety of types of evidence can provide superior case study analysis (Stake, 1994).

In contrast to other forms of research, case study places the researcher in the field in order to observe and record "objectively what is happening but simultaneously examin[ing] its meaning and redirect[ing] observations to refine or substantiate those meanings" (Stake, 1995, p. 9). This focus on interpretation is fundamental and relies on data analysis, as well as the researcher's own understanding of his or her experience and the existing literature (Stake, 1995). The end result is a constructivist understanding of the cases.

The multiple case method is used when the researcher seeks a better

understanding of how this whole, or *quintain*, operates in different situations. In this case, the quintain is the principles-based work that each grantee is engaging in through The Otto Bremer Foundation's Homeless Youth Initiative. Each unique case is selected for what it can reveal about the quintain. Stake (2006, p. 86) writes, "To carry out the study of the quintain, we need to organize separately our data gathering and reporting of the individual cases. These case studies will have one or a few research questions (issues) in common and will have others particular to each. The issues are important problems about which people disagree—complicated problems within complex situations." All decisions, such as recruitment strategy, sampling techniques, and interview protocols, are made with the quintain in mind rather than the individual cases, keeping in mind that the cases should seek out and present multiple perspectives, contradictory testimony, and competing values (Stake, 2006). In this case, it is through the experiences of the youth that we understand if and how The OBF Youth Homelessness Initiative is impacting the experiences or outcomes for unaccompanied homeless youth in the Twin Cities area who use services provided by one of the six grantees. The study design is presented in Figure 4.

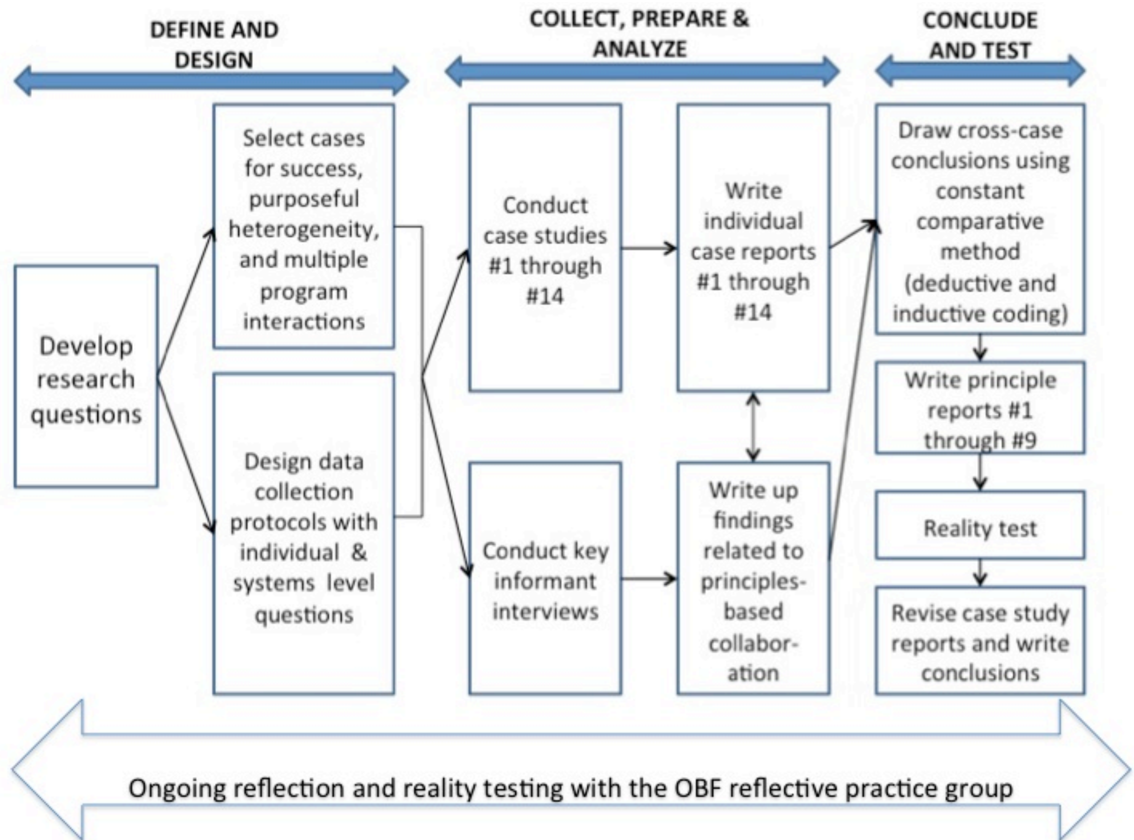

Figure 4: Research design

Reflective Practice Group

Reflective practice involves creating a habit, structure, or routine to examine an experience (Schön, 1983). A reflective practice group is convened for the purposed of regularly and consistently examining an experience together. Reflective practice groups can vary in terms of how often they meet, how much time they devote to group reflection, the scope and scale of the experience upon which they are reflectiong, and why that reflection is being performed. In this particular instance, The Otto Bremer Foundation convened members of a reflective practice group at least once per month for a period of

nearly two years to engage in an examination of the ways in which they could improve outcomes for youth experiencing homelessness, while bringing additional attention and intentionality to their collaboration with each other. Michael Quinn Patton, an internationally recognized evaluator and author, facilitated the sessions and led the group through a principles-based developmental evaluation process to support their ongoing collaboration. The reflective practice group (which is still meeting at the time of the writing of this paper) consists of The Otto Bremer Foundation executive director and three program officers, as well as leadership from the six grantee organizations, for a total of eighteen members. Throughout this research process, the researcher met with the reflective practice group nine times for sessions ranging from two to five hours.

Table 6 shows the meeting schedule for the reflective practice group and the level of interaction they had with the research process.

Table 6 *Timeline of Engagement with the Reflective Practice Group*

Date	Reflective Practive Activities
October 2012	The research met with the reflective practice group to propose the possible dissertation research component of the principles-based developmental evaluation. The researcher and members of the groups discussed the potential benefits and challenges of working with a graduate student on dissertation research. Ultimately, the reflective practice group voted to work with the student researcher and the executive director of The Otto Bremer Foundation gained approval for the Board of Trustees.
November 2012	(There was no meeting between the research and the reflective practice group in November of 2012. The researcher worked with individual organizations to gather letters of support and worked with her advisor to prepare the application for approval of human subjects research through the University of Minnesota Institutional Review Board.)

Timeline of Engagement with the Reflective Practice Group

Date	Reflective Practive Activities Continued
December 2012	The sampling criteria were decided upon in advance of this meeting, and organizations were asked to nominate youth who met those criteria. Together, the group selected a sample from the nominees who met the sampling criteria, provided purposeful heterogeneity, and represented the population of youth the organizations served. For example, there was a discussion of the fact that the majority of the youth selected for the initial sample were African American. The group discussed that Native American youth are underrepresented in the demographics of youth served and that it was, therefore, appropriate that they were underrepresented in the proposed sample.
January 2013	The group reviewed the interview protocols drafted by the researcher. There was a discussion about the type of data the interview protocol might yield, as well as how the questions might be interpreted by potential interviewees. One question was added, several were removed, and two were modified.
March 2013	One case study was completed between the February and March sessions. The group reviewed a completed case study and worked in teams to code for evidence of principles. A discussion of what was learned followed.
April 2013	Group members were assigned to small teams of three to four people. Each team was assigned three case stories to read and was instructed to conduct a cross-case analysis. This allowed the group to deepen where their understandings of the principles converged or diverged and to start to make connections among the principles, their work, and the youths' experiences.
May 2013	Analysis of several of the principles was completed between the April and May meetings. Group members were asked to review the first principle, trusting youth/adult relationships. Discussion revolved around good evidence, weak evidence, reinforcing learning, and surprising learning.
June 2013	All of the principles were drafted in rough form by this meeting, and members were asked to read all of the principles. The focus of the meeting was "bringing it all together: interrelationships between principles." Group members worked in small teams to make visual representations of the interrelationships between the principles.
July 2013	Group members were asked to identify next steps given that the research phase of the developmental evaluation was concluding.

The reflective practice group was an important part of the process for several reasons. First, engagement with the reflective practice group increased the veracity of the case stories. In a few instances, a young person recalled a timeline incorrectly or interpreted an important interaction differently than the staff. In such instances, cases were adjusted to reflect the divergent understandings of what happened. Second, it is easy for a researcher to read research literature about practice and not truly understand the practice. Working with the reflective practice group made the principles come to life.For example, one can read about taking a non-judgmental engagement in the literature and understand it in an academic sense. However, what is not clear in the literature is that there are times when being non-judgmental is not appropriate; occasionally, staffmembers may need to take a non-judgmental stance on something they actually care very deeply about. Third, the group took ownership of the process and supported the research in many ways from helping the research connect with youth, providing case files, arranging meeting rooms, etc. While this may not sound critical, these small details can potentially derail a research project.

While it is not traditional for a reflective practice group comprosed of stakeholders to participate in research, it was an important part of this process and honored the overall goals of the developmental evaluation, allowing participants to develop their own understandings and relationships as a part of the process. They are better poised now to engage with the research findings and implement them in their own organizations than they would have been had they been handed a 400-page document at the end of a year without ongoing engagement with the process. Henceforth, the term

"we" in this paper refers to the researcher and the members of that reflective practice group.

Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, *trustworthiness* is described as a way of adding credibility, validity, and rigor to the study (Creswell, 2007). Several steps were taken to ensure credibility of the study. First, the interview questions were piloted with staff at the six participating organizations, as well as with key people within The Otto Bremer Foundation. Second, youth reviewed their own stories to validate that the integration of their interviews, the staff interviews, and the case file data presented a true version of their individual stories. Third, during and following the data collection, I debriefed with the aforementioned staffmembers in multiple ways and at multiple times to do a reality test on my analysis and interpretation of the data (Patton, 2012a). Patton (2002) describes reality testing as a step that not only increases the accuracy of interpretations, but also engages stakeholders on the evaluative process thereby increasing buy-in.

Table 6 (above) describes the depth with which reflective practice group members engaged in reality-testing. Third, multiple sources of data were used for triangulation. Triangulation of data is the process of corroborating evidence from different sources (e.g., a case worker and a young person), types of data (e.g., field notes and case files), or methods of data collection (Creswell, 2007).

Case Selection

Selecting Youth

To maximize learning and "preserve multiple realities" (Stake, 1995, p. 12), participants were selected based on their unique perspectives. Stake suggests that one asks, "Which cases are likely to lead us to understandings, to assertions, perhaps even to modifying of generalizations?" (1995, p. 4). Selectees were between the ages of 18 and 24, were or had been homeless and unaccompanied by family, utilized services provided by least 2 of the 6 grantees, and were identified by staff as being reasonably reflective and articulate.

Program leaders from the reflective practice group worked with the staff at their respective organizations to identify two to three young people who fit the criteria. They brought descriptions of the youths to the reflective practice group, and the collective pool of nominees was reviewed to see if they: met the criteria; adequately represented the racial demographics served by the organizations represented; and represented key experiences such as foster care placement, pregnancy or parenting, sexual exploitation, LGBT self-identification, and interactions with the juvenile justice system.

Upon approval from the university Institutional Review Board for the study, participants were selected using a purposeful sampling approach called "heterogeneity sampling" (Patton, 2002). The strength of heterogeneity sampling is that themes that arise out of variation are of particular interest and value in capturing the core experiences and shared dimensions of a setting or phenomenon (Patton, 2002, p. 235). Since the research

goal was to investigate the full range of experiences across various settings, Patton's sampling model was appropriate because it allowed us to see how principles were enacted in various settings (street outreach, drop-in centers, and emergency shelters) and with youth with different reasons for becoming homeless, different levels of interactions with foster care and juvenile justice, different parenting status, difference races, and so forth.

Interviews were conducted with fourteen youth. At the time of the interviews, they were asked to nominate one staff person who knew them well to participate in an interview about that young person. Youth were also asked for permission to review their case files. Table 7 displays the fourteen youth interviewed and selected characteristics and is sorted in ascending order from the age at which they became independently homeless.

Table 7

Youth Demographics and Primary Reason for Becoming Homeless

Youth	Gender	Race/ Ethnicity	Current Age	Age at Indep. Homelessness	Primary Reason for Homelessness
Macnificent	M	African American	19	13	Grew up in “the system”
Maria	F	African American	19	13	Left abuse and/or neglect
Pearl	F	African American	23	13	Kicked out
Alexa	F	African American	22	14	Domestic abuse
Ladybug	F	African American, Native	19	15	Kicked out
Minna	F	African American	22	15	Left abuse and/or neglect
Zi	F	African American, Caucasian	21	15	Grew up in “the system”
Unique	M	African American	18	16	Left abuse and/or neglect
Julia	F	African American, Caucasian	21	16	Kicked out
Thmaris	M	African American	22	16	Grew up in “the system”
Asha	F	Caucasian	23	18	Domestic abuse
Kenzo	M	African American	22	18	Grew up in “the system”
Isaiah	M	African American	22	18	Kicked out
Harmony	F	African American	21	18	Left abuse and/or neglect

As indicated in Table 7, interviewees were 18 years or older at the time of the interviews, but all had been homeless for 2 or more years. Interviewing youth over the age of 17 is consistent with researchers who have made the case that the age considered “youth” in research should be extended past 18 to reflect trends among housed youth of the same age who are staying in their parents’ home longer and establishing independent households at later ages than in previous generations (Shanahan, Porfeli, Mortimer, &

Erickson, 2005). In 2004, more than half of the 27.8 million young people in the United States ages 18 to 24 were living with their parents (Clifford, 2005). All youth interviewed were primarily located in the Twin Cities metropolitan area, although the majority had also lived in other regions of the state or in other states for some part of their lives.

Table 8 shows that the sample of youth addressed had high involvement with the foster care system (64%) and the juvenile justice system (57%). More than a third of them were pregnant or parenting (36%), and nearly half disclosed being sexually exploited (43%). These statistics are similar to those presented in the literature review.

Table 8

Youth By Involvement With Formal and Informal Systems

	Foster Care	Juvenile Justice	Pregnant/ Parenting	Sexual Exploitation
Asha	X	X	X	X
Thmaris	X	X	X	X
Ladybug	X	X	X	
Macnificent	X	X		
Kenzo	X	X		
Zi	X	X		
Isaiah	X			
Maria	X			X
Minna	X			
Alexa		X	X	
Harmony			X	X
Unique				X
Pearl		X		X
Julia (none)				

Table 9 shows that all youth except Asha met the criteria of utilizing services from more than one of the 6 organizations, and more than a third of the youth (36%) utilized services from 4 or more programs. Asha was included in the sample because she provided the important voice of someone who was homeless in an abusive and sexually exploitative relationship. The table is sorted in drecreasing order by the total number of organization types utilized.

Table 9

Number and Types of Grantee Organizations Utilized

Youth	Street outreach	Drop-in	Youth shelter	Host home	Total number of orgs. utilized
Unique	X	X	X	X	5
Kenzo	X	X	X		5
Minna	X	X	X		5
Isaiah	X	X			5
Zi	X	X	X		4
Pearl	X	X	X		3
Harmony		X	X		3
Maria		X	X	X	3
Alexa	X	X			2
Macnificent		X	X		2
Ladybug		X	X		2
Julia		X		X	2
Thmaris		X			2
Asha		X			1
TOTAL					44

Table 10 displays that all of the grantee organizations were represented by at least three case stories.

Table 10

Number of Youth Utilizing Services at Each Grantee Organization

Grantee organizations	Number of youth	Percentage of youth
YouthLink: Youth Opportunity Center	11	79%
Avenues for Homeless Youth: Shelter and Host Home	9	64%
Lutheran Social Services: StreetWorks Collaborative	7	50%
Face2Face: SafeZone	7	50%
Catholic Charities: Hope Street Shelter	7	50%
Salvation Army: Booth Brown House	3	21%

Staff Interviews

While the case stories written for this research relied heavily on the young people's stories of their own journeys, data were also included from interviews with one staff person, nominated by each youth, who knew him or her well. Young people were asked to nominate one person who: worked at one of the six reflective practice organizations; knew them well; and was reachable for interviews about the youth and their journey. There were two reasons for the staff interviews. The first purpose was to potentially add detail and depth to the case stories by gaining a second perspective on the

young person's journey. The second was to add validity to the accuracy of the case studies through triangulation. Among the fourteen youth, a total of ten staff people were nominated across all six organizations.

Table 11 displays the role that each of the nominated staff people held in relationship to the youth and the location where their relationship was first formed.

Table 11

Roles of Adults Nomonated by Youth and Location Where Relationship Formed

Youth	Role	Location relationship formed
Alexa	Therapist	Drop-in Center
Asha	Therapist	Drop-in Center
Harmony	Case Manager	Youth Shelter
Isaiah	Case Manager	Drop-in Center
Kenzo	Case Manager	Drop-in Center
Minna	Administrator	Housing program
Julia	Administrator	Housing program
Ladybug	Case Manager	Youth Shelter
Macnificent	Case Manager	Youth Shelter
Maria	Case Manager	Youth Shelter
Pearl	Case Manager	Earlier child protective services placement
Thmaris	Case Manager	Drop-in Center
Unique	Outreach Worker	Youth Shelter
Zi	Administrator	Housing program

Overall, eight youth nominated a case manager, three nominated a program administrator, two nominated a therapist, and one nominated an outreach worker. Five of the young people first met the staff person they nominated at a drop-in center, five at a

youth shelter, three at a supporting housing program, and one at an emergency child protective shelter. Nearly all of the quotations from youth in the section that follows describe their relationships with these ten staff.

Data Collection

Semi-Structured Interviews

Qualitative interviewing, according to Patton (2002), assumes that the perspective of others is "meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit" (p. 341). While a structured interview has a formalized, limited set of questions, a semi-structured interview is flexible, allowing new questions to be brought up during the interview as a result of what the interviewee says. The interview protocol was developed by the researcher and was designed using a combination of introductory and background questions to establish rapport as well as open-ended questions meant to allow the participant to share his or her own experience around the topics relevant to the research questions (Patton, 2002).

Once the sample was agreed upon, the program staff contacted the youth identified to see if they would be interested in participating in the research. There were two substitutions, as one youth could not be located, and a second chose not to participate. In both cases, a youth with similar characteristics was identified by program staff and invited to participate. A total of sixteen were invited to participate in the research, and fourteen agreed to participate. I then worked with program staff at each of the organizations to set up a time for the first interview. How this was done depended on

the organization and their typical protocols for corresponding with youth. In some cases, they set up the interviews; in others, they gave my contact information to the young person and asked him or her to call the researcher.

Interviews were held in a public location, usually the drop-in center, a shelter, or a transitional living program. They lasted an average of 78 minutes but ranged from 72 to 103 minutes. At the beginning of each interview session, I gave the youth a copy of the informed consent form that we reviewed together, as well as fifty dollars in cash. Participants were informed about their rights while involved in the research, including the opportunity to discontinue or take a break at any time. The participants and I discussed the limits of confidentiality and the use of a pseudonym. They were also informed that the money was theirs to keep, regardless of whether they decided to participate in the interview or not. I asked for their permission to record the interview, to view their case files, and to interview the nominated staff person; all students agreed. Some nominated a staff person right away, while others waited until the conclusion of the interview.

At the conclusion of each interview, I checked in with each young person to make sure they were okay and to see if they would like me to get someone for them to talk to. Although several of the youth cried during the interview, none asked for a staff person. I also asked if they preferred to be indicated by a pseudonym; only four of the fourteen selected a name for use in this research. Before concluding our meeting, I promised to interview the staff person they nominated, review their case file, write their story, and contact them again to invite them to review their story. Eight of the young contacted me during the writing period to notify me of changes in their contact information.

Next, I contacted the staff nominated by each youth, ten in total. Each professional had played a role at some point in the youth's journey. Staff interviews lasted an average of sixty-five minutes and ranged from fifty-one to ninety-three minutes. The longer interviews were with staff who were questioned about two of the young people. The staff also made case files available to me. As I could not remove the case files from the locations, I simply sat with the files in a private location at each agency and took hand notes of my observations.

Notes were not taken during the interviews, as I hoped to focus on the interviewees spoken words. However, I wrote down my impressions of the interviews immediately following the interviews. All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed.

Case File Review

Case files are often gathered as part of the program implementation process and typically contain data about client needs and characteristics, participation in program activities, type and intensity of services, resources used, and, in some cases, achievement of short-term outcomes. The analysis of the case files was conducted to determine which organizations the youth had been affiliated with and to build a timeline with important events and dates. This information was used to provide background information for the interviews and the case studies. Sensitive and/or identifying information was not included in any documentation or reporting.

Data Security

I created documents from the notes from each interview, notes from the case file

review, notes from The OBF reflective practice group meetings, and digital transcripts from the interviews. These were typed on my computer and were password protected.

Writing and Reviewing Case Studies

Case studies were written by organizing the youth interviews, the staff interviews, and the case file notes into a linear story for each young person. The primary text for the writing the case study was the youth interview. Priortity was placed on using the participants quotes when possible and to keep the intention of their words and story when paraphrasing. If I was unsure whether I was writing their interpretation of an event or my own I would return to the transcript to confim that I was indeed reflecting their telling of the experience rather than my own interpretation. The staff interview was added to more deeply convey an incident or period of time, to add a new dimension to the story, or to add information that was not shared in the interview. Case study notes were primarily used to establish the dates and sequence of events. In only once instance, there was a discrepancy between or among the youth interview, the staff interview, and the case file. In that case, the youth reported having a child when he first entered the shelter. Over the years, the youth stopped talking about this child, so the staff came to believe that the young person might not have, in fact, fathered that child. Upon further discussion of the matter with a case manager, it was determined that it was in the best interest of the young person not to mention the possible child.

The names used were chosen by the youth in four cases. In ten cases I chose a name that reflected a sentiment expressed in the telling of their story. For example,

Thmaris means *protector* and was selected because of the role he playes as a provider and prtector for his young brothers. Minna was selected because it means *strong*, a character trait that was characterized Minna and was important to her.

I met with eleven of the youth to read them their final story and could not make contact with three of the youth because they had moved or did not return calls and emails. Of the eleven youth I did meet with, I handed them a hard copy of the case story and gave them three options. They could read their story silently to themselves, the could read it aloud to me, or I could read it aloud to them. All eleven youth chose one of the two latter options. I had an electronic copy of the case story open on my computer so we could make necessary changes as they arose. No one made sunstantive changes to their story. Once I had gotten the age of a child wrong and that correction was made. In another story I had used the word *drugs* and the youth asked my to change it to *marijuana* so as not to give the impression that he was using harder substances. One youth wanted to add a sentence making it more clear how meaningful her relationship with her case manager was to her. No one asked me to change facts, remove facts, or alter the story. On the contrary, all of the youth I met with expressed being pleased to see their own voices reflected back to them. One young person said, "I've never seen my story laid out like this before. It makes me realize things about myself." Another said that she was inpsired to write so she could add to her story, one wanted to share it on facebook, and another wanted to make his story into a movie. During these meetings. I explained the name choice to each youth I met with for the case study review and have them the option to change their name. No one indicated that they wanted to change their pseudonym.

Data Analysis

Individual cases were described but not analyzed (Yin, 2003). I initially conducted a preliminary exploratory analysis (Creswell, 2005) with all the documents. During this stage in the analysis, the files were uploaded into NVivo 10, texts were read, and notes were made using the electronic notes feature in NVivo 10. The initial codes were formed, including both the principles outlined in the original research questions, as well as any other themes that emerged from the first read through of the texts.

The constant comparison analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) is likely the most common methodological approach to the analysis of qualitative data. The constant comparison method is conducted deductively or *a priori*, whereby codes are identified prior to any analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994) and then looked for in the available data. Alternatively, the constant comparison method can also be conducted through an inductive process (whereby codes emerge out from the data) or abductively (codes emerge from the application of a continuing cyclic and iterative process). *A priori* coding was applied in regard to three of the principles, because these three principles have a fairly clear definition in the research literature and in practice. Emergent coding was applied to the remaining six principles, as there was not a clear definition established in the literature, and there was not a commonly agreed-upon definition amongst practitioners.

Table 12

Type of coding and analysis

Emergent	A priori
Journey-oriented	Positive youth development
Strengths-based	Trauma-informed care
Non-judgmental engagement	Harm reduction
Trusting youth/adult relationships	
Holistic	
Collaborative	

Cross-case analysis was used to make assertions about the phenomenon as a whole (Stake, 2006), highlighting differences, as well as similarities, between cases. A cross-case analysis allowed for examination of the data from a perspective that cannot be achieved through individual case analysis. For the cross-case analysis, the codes of the transcripts were used to identify patterns, commonalities, and diversity in the experiences of the fourteen young adults.

"For more important episodes or passages of text, we must take more time, looking at them over again and again, reflecting, triangulating, being skeptical about first impressions and simple meanings" (Stake, 1995, p. 78). This holistic analysis was conducted across the cases using the qualitative analysis software NVivo 10. These themes were built around answers to the research questions that arose from the thematic codes. After themes were developed, patterns were sought among the themes in order to establish a smaller number of categories (Creswell, 2007; Stake, 1995). Themes were compared across cases for similarities and differences. Interpretations of these contrasts were then made.

Researcher Positionality

I am a heterosexual, white, female graduate student. My upbringing was middle-class. I was raised by two parents, with my two siblings, in a moderately sized town in New Hampshire. I am a single parent to three children: a 5-year-old who is living, a child who passed away at age 41/2, and an 18-hear-old whom I am hoping to adopt in the upcoming year. I have worked with adolescents as a teacher and with nonprofit program staff for more than a decade. Many of the youth I have worked with were homeless or highly mobile. It was through my relationships with these youth that I came to care deeply about the topic of youth homelessness. I am socially liberal and believe there exist structural inequities that make it more likely that some people will experience homelessness, inequities that make it more difficult for some people to exit homelessness than others. When proposing this research project, I expected that the research process would affect me profoundly both professionally and personally; ultimately, it did just that. I discuss this in Chapter 6, in a section titled "Researcher's Stance."

Limitations

Given that youth homelessness is a large, complex social problem, there are several limitations to this study. First, the research focuses on 14 cases, though there are more than 20,000 homeless youth each year in Minnesota. A study of this size cannot hope to capture the myriad of complex journeys youth take in the Minnesota Twin Cities area. Second, while the focus is on one specific initiative, it is difficult to distinguish

between the impact of The OBF Homeless Youth Initiative, the work that the organizations would be doing if it were not for The Otto Bremer Foundation, and various other initiatives at the local, state, and federal levels. Third, there was only one principal researcher on this study. It would have been ideal to have more than one person working on the study, given the complexity and the voluminousness of the material. Fourth, this study explored the extent to which the young people's success can be attributed to external factors (principles-driven programming), but it did not consider to what extent their success can be attributed to internal factors (character strengths).

Summary

Nearly all of the research published about homeless youth is written from the perspective of adults. If we are going to improve services provided for homeless youth, it is absolutely imperative that the voices of the youths themselves be represented in the research literature. This study addressed that gap by examining the extent to which there is evidence for the proposed principles for working with homeless youth by asking homeless youth to explain their own understanding of their experience engaging with principles-driven work. To gain an understanding not only of the individual experience but also to make sense of what is happening in a system of organizations that serve homeless youth, the research project used a multiple case study approach to answer the research questions previously set forth. Qualitative data were generated from interviews with the youth themselves, street workers, agency staff, Foundation staff, and key informants. Using multiple sources to add depth to the youth stories contributed to the

trustworthiness of the findings, as did the ongoing reality testing with the reflective practice group.

Chapter 4 presents the fourteen case stories, combining the youth interviews, case file data, and staff interview data. Eleven of the fourteen cases were read and approved by the youths themselves, and all of the cases have been read by leadership staff at the six grantee organizations and members of The Otto Bremer Foundation staff. Chapter 5 will provide an analysis of the data, presenting the results of the deductive and inductive coding that was applied for each of the principles. Through this analysis and the discussion that follows in Chapter 6, the researcher hopes that a better understanding of the experiences of homeless youth and the services and approaches that youth identify as important will lead to greater support for these services and/or approaches. The assumption underlying this research and the methods selected is that society will benefit from hearing and understanding these stories.

Chapter 4: Case Stories

The youth who were interviewed detailed four ways in which they ultimately became homeless. Four can be categorized as growing up in the system. These young people spent more time in out-of-home placements when they were growing up than they did living with their own family members. Kenzo, for example, became a ward of the state at 9 and has not seen his mother since that day; he has never met his father. Between the ages of 9 and 18, the boy lived in 10 foster home placements, several group homes, and 2 juvenile justice placements. The second group of youth reported having been kicked out of their homes. Two (Julia and Pearl) were ordered to leave because their parents did not approve of their sexual orientation; the family of one moved across the country, leaving the youth behind; and one was judged to be too hard to handle. A third group, four youth, left home after years of abuse and/or neglect. Finally, two young women opted to leave their abusive homes, only to become homeless with their equally abusive boyfriends and became homeless with their boyfriends.

While there are many similarities between the groups, there are also some important differences. First, none of the youth who grew up in the system or who left home to be with an abusive partner reported being LGBT, nor did they stay in any host home placement. Second, the women who left home to be with an abusive partner also did not stay in a youth shelter, as doing so would have meant living separately from their boyfriends. Third, the youth who chose to leave home did not have interactions with the juvenile justice system.

Table 13 groups youth by the way in which they became homeless and illustrates some descriptive characteristics.

Table 13:

Youth Grouped by the Ways in Which They Became Homeless

	Gender	Current Age	Age First Homeless	LGBT	Foster Care	Juvenile Justice
Grew Up in the System						
Kenzo	Male	22	18		X	X
Macnificent	Male	19	13		X	X
Thmaris	Male	22	16		X	X
Zi	Female	21	15		X	X
Kicked Out						
Isiah	Male	22	18		X	
Julia	Female	21	16	X		
Ladybug	Female	19	15		X	X
Pearl	Female	23	13	X		X
Left Home to Escape abuse and/or Neglect						
Harmony	Female	21	18			
Maria	Female	19	13	X	X	
Minna	Female	22	15	X	X	
Unique	Male	18	16	X		
Domestic Abuse						
Alexa	Female	22	14			X
Asha	Female	23	18		X	X

Grew Up in the System

The four youth in this category have lived the majority of their lives in homeless shelters, foster homes, group homes, residential treatment centers, and/or juvenile justice facilities. These young people experienced high mobility throughout their childhoods, and their parents were absent for long periods of time. As a result, they missed a great deal of schooling. Their siblings were also raised in different foster homes or

government-run facilities. These young people generally do not have adult role models on whom they can rely for material or emotional support. For some, the transitional living program is the first safe space they can remember, as well as the place where they stayed the longest. These youth were especially appreciative of having their basic needs met (food, clothing, and reliable shelter). What follows are individual case stories for each of the four youth who grew up in the system.

Kenzo

Kenzo is a tall, 22-year-old African American male with an engaging smile. He has a way of being both relaxed and in constant motion. He was born in Chicago but moved to Minneapolis with his mother when he was 5 years old. In both Chicago and Minneapolis, Kenzo and his siblings were in and out of foster care. Kenzo explained:

> *My mom couldn't take care of us. She would bring us to the hospital. We'd get checked up and stuff, and the police would take us. That happened all the time. I knew if we were going to the hospital, we were going to foster care—unless somebody was real sick.*

His mother placed her children in foster care for the last time when Kenzo was 9, an age at which he was growing stronger and taller and beginning to fight back. Kenzo suspects that his mother was afraid that she would no longer be able to control him. He described this period in his life:

> *My mom got mad. She got a broomstick and start hitting me so hard. It was just getting like I couldn't care less. When I was 9, I got mature quick. I was mature very fast… My mom put me in a foster home before everybody else, because I started getting really pissed off about being beat and started fighting back. My mom…the last time she beat me, I just grabbed something and hit her with it. I started getting pissed off. My anger just…I got tired of being hit and not being able to hit back. I got tired of curling up in a ball and crying. I just started getting really pissed off. I'm not taking these beatings anymore. I started beating, and I*

started cussing. I didn't never cuss at my mom before. She just started noticing things about me. She would beat me, and I would start cussing at her. She would beat me more. She beat me, and I would throw something at her. My mom just looked at me like she was scared. I was just 9 years old. I got tired of taking beatings… My mom was five-eleven and was real athletic…but she couldn't deal with me no more, how she used to. She used to be able to beat me. I used to cry and run. Then I stopped running. I stopped crying. I started hitting her back. Then she just was like, "I'm bringing you to foster care."

Kenzo's mother also put her other children in foster care at that time, in part because her landlord did not pay his taxes, so all of the tenants were evicted. His mom did not have anywhere to go, so rather than the whole family facing homelessness, she placed her children in foster care. When the court date arrived to determine her parental rights, she did not try to fight for her children. Kenzo remembers that she walked into the courtroom late and cussing:

I'm guessing she was drunk and stuff. The judge was like, "Your parental rights are just gone. I see right now that you're not taking this seriously." I guess she just seen how many times we were in foster care, and how many times we got beat.

Kenzo never saw his mother again after that day. He grew up as a ward of the state until he aged out at age nineteen, never living anywhere for more than a year over the decade he was in child protective custody.

Kenzo has mixed feelings about his mother. On the one hand, he recognizes that even though she beat her children and lost her parental rights, she also cared about them.

Just things about her… She loved us a lot. Anytime the new Jordans came out or anything, we always had brand new stuff. She smoked a lot of weed and was drunk, and she even sold drugs. She had money. When we wanted something…she would get everything name brand. Everything had to be good. So it wasn't one of them evil moms. All she did was beat us. I guess I might be minimizing the situation. But after a while, those beatings just felt normal to me. It just felt like

> *you just got to take it. I felt like this: Everybody takes a beating. I'll just take mine more often. It's weird thinking about it.*

On the other hand, Kenzo fears who he would have become had he grown up with this "not one of them evil moms," and he feels that her loss of parental rights may have been one of the best things that has ever happened to him:

> *In a way, I think that was probably the best thing. If would have grown up living with my mom, I think I would be in a whole different position. I would probably be in prison right now, just because of how angry my mom is and how angry I am. The way I would grow up learning from her. I would just be a monster. I would be in prison or dead right now if I [had] stayed with my biological mom.*

Kenzo has never seen his mother since and is unaware of the identity of his biological father. When his mother was asked about his father, she replied, "I don't know what he's doing. He could be dead, for all I know. I don't know where he's at. I don't know what his life is like now." When she was angry at Kenzo, she often claimed, "A lot of your traits, you got from your dad." Because he never knew his dad and has not seen his mother since he was 9, Kenzo has not developed relationships with any extended family member.

> *I don't know where she is at. I haven't heard from her, seen her, talked to her since I was 9, when she lost her parental rights. It's like she just vanished. It's not like there's family to connect with… I will say that not knowing aunties, never meeting actual biological cousins…It's like you just…at first, when I was younger, it was something. But now it's like I accepted it. It's weird not having that part of the family. It's like you don't have any cousins. I don't know any of my cousins. I don't know any of my aunties, uncles. I don't know my dad.*

Growing up in the system. During his nine years in foster care, Kenzo lived in ten foster homes and more shelters, group homes, and residential treatment centers than he can count. He has a brother and two sisters, but the siblings were often separated, in different foster homes. His brother, the youngest of the four, is still in foster care. Kenzo

recalls that every foster home was different, with their own unique rules and expectations. It was not until his final foster home that Kenzo made a lasting connection with a foster parent.

> *My last foster home…I'm real close to her, call her "Mom" and stuff. I don't even think about it as being foster care. I just think I didn't have no life before that… I call her my mom to this day. Me and her are very close. We talk every day for at least an hour on the phone… I think why it lasted with her is she's more a sweet person, like…nicer. It wasn't more, like…strict. I couldn't last in strict places. I would be gone quick. I have a very strong personality. It's like when I was younger, you could not tell me what to do. You punish me and have me stay in, I'm leaving anyway.*

Sadly, even though this was his most successful placement, resulting in a relationship with a foster parent that endures to this day, Kenzo was removed due to his anger management issues. As he alludes in the above remarks, he did not want to be told what to do with his life or how to live it, and he quickly lost his temper when he felt his independence and control were in jeopardy.

He also reflected on some of the personality traits he shared with his biological mother:

> *My mom, when she wanted something…if you didn't, she'd just choke you real quick or hit you. My mom did not like being ignored. When people ignore me, when I'm talking to someone and they ignore me, it really irritates me. My mom was just like that…had a very, very, very bad temper. That's why she lost her parental rights.*
>
> *It was like…My mom drank a lot. She was an alcoholic. When she was mad, she was mad. She even…My mom [didn't] care. She would smack me in front of my social worker if she felt like it. It wasn't just the act. She had anger that was so hard for her to hold in. I know that because now I know how I am, and it's like how it is to hold mine in, and hers is even worse… It's a battle.*

Kenzo accepts his last foster family as family, even though they are different in

appearance. His foster mother treated him like a son, and Kenzo even considers her biological son to be a brother. While the foster mother currently resides in Arizona and Kenzo has aged out of foster care, there still exists the possibility that he will stay with her in the future, if he learns to control his temper.

Kenzo has also lived in several correctional facilities:

> *[When I was 13], me and my foster dad got into it. I chased him with a steak knife. I was really angry. That's when I knew that…that was the first time I went to jail. I went to jail in high school for fighting… Since the age of 18, I've been in jail a few times, just for disorderly conduct and a bunch of small stuff. It was like anger, fighting with police officers, being loud… I used to walk around certain neighborhoods with my friends, and I would always get into trouble. I have a temper problem, and I don't fear a lot of stuff that other people fear.*

Kenzo attributes this temper and rage, in part, to the survival skills he was forced to develop when he was young.

> *When I was little, I used to get beat all the time by my mom. She got her parental rights taken when I was 9 years old, [but before that] I was going to Minneapolis on the city bus by myself, doing a lot of stuff in different neighborhoods I didn't know nothing about. I was just young, riding bikes everywhere. I would come in at two a.m. My mom was so busy with alcohol. It was like I always had to just wait outside.*

He also attributes his temper, in part, to his own mental health status. He was recently diagnosed as bipolar and schizophrenic and has been hospitalized several times in the recent past. Kenzo is currently on medication and is learning coping skills, like staying away from situations that might cause him to lose his temper.

> *When I'm around a lot of people, [I try to stay] really calm. I don't really try to go too many places. I try to go from Point A to point B. I have a rage of anger. It's just… I recently got into some legal problems. It was when I was with this girl. I got into an argument, and she lied to the police about a lot of stuff. I'm so angry with her. That's why I don't like to go places. This happened on the east side of St. Paul. I don't usually be over there, but it's like…if see her, I know I'm*

angry, and I know what I'm capable of. When I'm pissed off at a person, if I don't like a person when I see them, I will chase them and beat them up really, really bad. I was calm for a long time. I just don't…it's hard to control my anger at times. This has been since a young kid. People [who] don't know that side are like, "You're quiet." It's just because if I'm mad, I just black out and go crazy. It don't matter about the consequences. I like being calm and chill. If I'm not, then I'm a whole different person.

Missing school. Kenzo missed out on school for three years while he was living in a boys' group home. In that program, he learned a lot about structure, state of mind, and farming, but those lessons did not really translate to a post-secondary academic setting.

> *There was a little gap [in my schooling] from when I was 15 years old to late 17. [For] basically three years…I was in this place called Southwestern Youth Services. It was like four hours away. There was this boys' program where they taught us a lot of stuff.*

During this time Kenzo was paid to work on a farm, with tasks including feeding baby calves, planting trees, and removing rocks from the fields. At the same time, the program taught Kenzo how to control his mind.

> *I just used to be crazy-wild. I used to get kicked out of school and do stuff. But when I came back, I was just calm. My bipolar…it's hard to control, but the program taught me to control it. That was a big, important part of my life, being out there and working out on the farm. I think that program kind of helped me too. If it wasn't for that program, I would have really been in prison.*

He returned to Minneapolis, enrolled in a high school and, to his surprise, graduated. "I would draw all day in class. I wanted to play basketball and draw, so that's what I did. I just drew in class. I'm surprised I graduated a legitimate high school, as much work as I didn't do."

Kenzo enrolled in college with the intent of collecting student loan money. He did not have a clear idea of why he would want to go to college or what he would want to

accomplish while he was there.

> *I was going to St. Paul College. I was getting my student loan money, which is thousands of dollars, and buying a lot of clothes… A lot of my friends did that too. When they got homeless, they enrolled in college because they wanted the student loan money to survive. So they all enrolled in St. Paul College. So many people I knew that were homeless did that.*

He studied physical therapy at St. Paul College, but he quickly realized that he was not interested in the classes necessary to complete the major. So, Kenzo transferred to the Art Institute, only to discover that art was not a good fit for him either. He is currently not enrolled in school.

Becoming homeless. Kenzo became independently homeless when he was 18. He had begun fighting with his foster mother and losing his temper more and more frequently, and he decided it was time he do his own thing. He describes his journey through homelessness as one of good fortune. He stayed at an adult shelter before serving thirty days in jail.

> *I guess me being kind of homeless…I guess I was one of the luckier ones. For instance, my first time, I stayed at [the adult shelter] over south. I stayed there…went to jail because I had a warrant. The police just ran my name one day when I was at Human Services building. They recognized me. They said I had a warrant. I went to jail for, like, thirty days. I got out. Obviously, my bed at Our Savior's was gone.*

After jail, he stayed at one youth shelter for a month, then moved to another youth shelteter where he stayed for an additional month. During Kenzo's stays in shelters, he kept busy, making sure that he had back-up plans so he could avoid what he called "the cold winter."

> *Me and my friend used to have this term called "the cold winter." You don't want to be caught in there. He was in a similar situation, like me. He didn't know his family neither. But his tenth-grade year in high school, his family just popped up*

out of the blue… His mother did very…how should I word this? She didn't put him first. She was the type who would get mad at him, throw him out at three a.m. It could be showing, freezing, [and she'd still] throw him out. She don't care. It's like that. So we called it "cold winter" because he always used to get thrown out in the cold. So he was like, "You don't want to be caught in one of those."

Filling out his paperwork and making sure he had options was Kenzo's way of ensuring that he did not end up on the street in the middle of that cold winter life.

A lot of things that I do [are] because of security. I always want to have money to have places to go. I guess when you're homeless, you understand that aspect more, your survival method. You understand the value of having a job. You understand the value of saving, having a bank account. You understand how important that is when you're homeless. You can be homeless again, especially if you were homeless multiple times. You understand that value: "I can't be caught in the cold winter." Luckily, places like [the drop-in center] have resources. They can call an emergency bed. Thank God for places like that, or I don't even know where I would be.

Kenzo's friend had a strained relationship with his mother, and that impacted Kenzo greatly; it made him feel even more scared about someday meeting his own mother again.

He told me if he could switch anything back, "I would have waited until after high school to meet my mom. I was younger, and I was happy to see her again. But when I seen her, it wasn't what I expected." Me and him was, like, the closest, best friends. I always took note of that. That's what made me even more scared of seeing my biological mom. I didn't want to have my hopes up. My hopes ain't too much up, because I remember when I was there before. I remember what happened when I lived there when I was younger. We had a lot of good times. I'm the type of person that just elaborates on the bad times. I remember the last part of it, when she used to beat us a lot. My hopes ain't even that high for my mom. It's just that I don't want to expect something, and she's even in a worse spot in life than she was before.

"When I realized I was homeless, the air felt colder outside." Kenzo didn't couch-hop for very long. He tried it when he was first homeless, but it did not work for

him:

> *I'm the type of person [who'd] rather be at a homeless shelter than stay at someone else's house because people get tired of you. I know that part of life very well. That's when I realized I was homeless… It felt different. I was going on the city bus with a garbage bag. It felt weird. When I first felt homeless, you think about everything differently. You're like, "Okay, I have to have a job. I have to get a place." You don't understand how certain things work. "I have to keep calling homeless shelters." I didn't know what to do.*

He kept his homelessness a secret from his friends because he did not want anyone knowing his situation. He told them he had his own apartment, an effort to maintain his reputation. Kenzo realized it took hard work to keep up the image of having housing; this helped to develop his work ethic. "Even though I was homeless, I was trying to get on top of my stuff. [I would] go down to [the drop-in center], do stuff at the library, try to go back to school, try to get a job." His work ethic increased, and he started to take the idea of college more seriously.

> *I needed something to do during the day. Homeless shelters kick you out, so you need to do something productive. I wanted to do something with my time. That's when I got tired of walking around the streets all day. I was already homeless and had to be out of there, so I needed to find a place to go… If you go to the library or something, you have something to do. I was playing basketball and stuff like that. I had a membership to a gym. I figured out things to do… When I got homeless, I got my stuff together quick.*

Living in youth shelters was not like Kenzo feared it might be. "I'm thinking you're in a room with 1,000 mats, and everybody just lays [sic] down, and people smell like liquor." In his experience, however, he realized youths in shelters are given their own room, their own clothes, and have somewhere to return to at night.

> *I have friends that were homeless, and they don't…they take it as…they look at it different. A lot of people look at homeless differently. Some people are on drugs, and they don't really care about being homeless. They're so interested in drugs.*

> *Some people look at is as a stepping stone. Me? It was state of mind. I just didn't tell myself I was homeless. Technically I was, but to me, I wasn't. I would forget I was homeless sometimes. They let you shower and all that. Now, at the adult shelter, you kind of feel homeless. It's like everybody is there. It's kind of rough. You smell alcohol on their breath; they walk around with garbage bags. I felt uncomfortable. It was my first time…in an adult one. It was a new world to me. After that, I went to the youth ones. I didn't even feel homeless there, because people talk to you. It was different.*

It was also monumental and important to Kenzo that youth at homeless shelters are given food whenever they are hungry.

After leaving an adult shelter, he stayed at his first youth shelter for the maximum time allowed. His case manager from the drop-in center helped him find a second shelter, and he stayed there for five months. He and his case manager worked toward getting him into a transitional living program, where he currently resides. He has lived in his apartment for nearly three years, the longest he's ever stayed in one place in his life.

Kenzo did not do drugs and used his time each day to work with his case manager at a drop-in center. There, he could get bus tokens and condoms, and youth were connected with resources, as well as helped with their first month's rent and deposit. Kenzo learned about a transitional living program while he was attending the drop-in center, and his case manager helped him apply for the program. He has not seen his case manager in the last year because he has not needed him as much and because he aged out of the program.

Finding someone to talk to. One of the things Kenzo liked best about the drop-in center was making a connection with his case manager, Aidan. For Kenzo, it meant a lot to have someone to help see that his needs were met, to help him work toward his goals, and to just have someone to talk to—someone who would genuinely listen. He created a

similar bond with his case manager at the transitional living program (TLP). When he lost his ID, his case manager helped him replace it. "If you need to talk to her, she'll talk to you. Try to get a job, she'll check in with you. She ain't all up on you. She lets you do your thing. I like that," Kenzo said of his case manager.

Turning point. Kenzo began looking at life differently when he became homeless. At that point, a real turning point for the youngster, he realized he needed to apply what he'd learned about approaching life with an intentional state of mind.

> *When you're homeless in a youth shelter, you don't feel homeless. You just feel like it's different. When you're in an adult one, you feel homeless. It's different. When you're an adult, they kick you out earlier. You even have to come back later and get a bed to lay [sic] in… I look at it like being homeless was a state of mind. It was like…I thought of it like, "This is somewhere to live. I live at a program." Nobody knew I was homeless. I dressed nice because I had my student loans [to spend]. Didn't think of it as homeless. I didn't even feel homeless when I was at the youth homeless places. I had nice clothes. I had my bus pass. I would just go there to sleep at night. It was my room. I shared it with somebody. I had a closet. I didn't feel homeless. I just did not tell myself I was homeless.*

He also feels his experience with foster care helped him deal with homelessness. For one thing, foster care taught him to adapt quickly to new surroundings.

> *One thing that made it better for me being homeless was [that] I was in a lot of foster homes. I know what it is to drop everything and get something new. When you go to a different foster home, that's a different set of rules, different personalities. You might have a foster parent who's this way...like, you have to ask every time you go in the fridge. Every time you want something, you have to ask. It's the same in the youth shelters.*
>
> *I have this thing I say to myself. "I adapt to my surroundings." Sometimes you have to. You have to know when and where to do certain things. I know how to talk and when to talk certain places. I know how to talk, especially with having years of retail experience. I know when to adapt to my surroundings. When I go to [the drop-in center], I know when to adapt. It's different surroundings. I know when to adapt.*

Fierce: That's the mind state when I'm trying to become something. When I'm on the job, I'm going to be in fierce mind state. I'm going work all day, pop 5-Hour Energies all day, and just work like a roadrunner. When I'm in my apartment, I pace a lot. I have [an] unlimited supply of energy. When I'm regular, it's like water. I adapt to my surroundings. I had this friend who would say, "I'm like water. I adapt to my surroundings." I try to be calm, cool, and collected.

Kenzo feels as if the transitional living program is a great next step after living in shelters and utilizing drop-in centers. To Kenzo, his apartment feels like home.

I just really like this program. They help you get going. Even when people…people move in here and don't be having money sometimes. They might take you to [the drop-in center]. This place gives you stuff for your apartment. They have the kitchen every Thursday. They have food deliveries. They bring you to the food shelf. They give you a ride to and from there in Roseville. They give you a bus card when you move in, food cards, resources. They put [up] job postings, have classes here, all types of stuff. I like that because that's how it feels at [the drop-in center] as I'm living here.

Dealing with anger. Kenzo credits the drop-in center with helping him learn how to channel some of his anger into energy that he can direct in positive ways.

I have to take my bipolar-ness and stuff like that and my unlimited amounts of energy and just transfer it into something good. [The drop-in center] has helped me learn how to channel it. I just learned how to channel. Anything, bad or good…anything that's bad, you can make it good. You have to channel it into something. It might not be a job. It might not be school. You have to figure out something. You have to put your energy toward that. I know it sounds easier than it is. It took me years to develop this. If you're teaching a class on this to some people, it might go in one ear and out the other. This is years of me being at that program and being at [the drop-in center] and me being out of foster care and stuff to learn this. It's like I finally…I finally know how to do it.

Dealing with his own anger issues and the impact they have on his life has helped Kenzo see his mother differently.

It doesn't make me think that she was such a bad person. I remember when she used to beat us, and I used to look at her like, "You're evil." But my mom wasn't an evil person. When she got mad, she would just beat us. That's just what

happened. Then I started getting beaten so much that it just wasn't even a beating. It was like, "Whatever." It just didn't matter.

As he reflects on his mother, Kenzo remembers good times as well as bad. He misses her and thinks about her a few times a week. Until recently, he thought about her every day. Confronting those feelings and emotions has played an integral role in his ability to "move on…to move forward."

In a way, I'm scared to see my biological mom. I just don't know. All that time…it kind of scares me thinking about her. So I don't talk to them like that because it scares me. I don't know what I would say to her. When me and my sisters talk, we can't even talk about our biological family without something bad in the conversation. My older sister had different experiences…much worse, that she refuses to tell me about. I think I kind of get…I kind of have a view if she says, "I don't want to talk about the different things that happened to me that you don't know." She's so angry with my biological mom.

Recently, Kenzo and his biological siblings have been connecting with extended family on Facebook, but this has been emotionally difficult. His sister asks, "If we were in foster care, why didn't you guys come get us when we were younger? Why are you trying to make a connection with us now?"

Where he is now. Kenzo has a lot of internal drive and is determined to rescue himself from homelessness.

I'm a perfectionist. I'm harder on myself with certain things. I want stuff to be done exactly. I always knew how to obtain certain things. That's why when I was homeless, when I got homeless, I was like, "You know what? This isn't where I want to be."

He is proud of being involved with the transitional living program for so long, the longest he has ever lived in one place. The stability is good for him, and he can feel himself gaining control and getting stronger.

Kenzo was recently arrested for a dispute with his former girlfriend and is

awaiting trial. He explained:

> *All it was was us getting into an argument, so I'm getting charged terroristic threats. Terroristic threat is when you threaten someone like, "I'm going to kill you." I didn't even tell her I was going to kill her. I just said, "I an going to break your windows in your house." I sent her text messages. She showed the police. My public defender's trying to argue, "He didn't threaten her. He threatened her house." But that's a very thin line. I don't think they care about that in court.*

Kenzo is working on keeping the upcoming court date in perspective and is hoping that it will work in his favor that he has been seeking treatment and taking medication for bipolar disorder. He would like to have a job, but with his court case looming, he does not want to make a long-term commitment to an employer. He has always had a job, and he feels unsettled being out of work with no income or no place to go each day. Kenzo is not sure if he will lose his place in the TLP if he is sentenced to serve the full time. He is worried, but he also feels optimistic that whatever the outcome, he will be able to get another job, focus on maintaining a calm mental state, and keep working toward his goals.

Macnificent

Macnificent is a 19-year-old, African American male who has an infectious energy that keeps people engaged and laughing. He was raised in Mississippi and has bounced between relatives' homes, the streets, foster homes, group homes, and jail. He grew up with his two brothers, one a year older and one a year younger, but his two sisters did not live with them. Macnificent described what it was like for him and his siblings growing up in poverty in Mississippi:

> *My life was always poor. We were the poor. There was nobody. We were the brokest out of the whole block. We never had nothing, never. It makes me want to*

cry sometimes because it was always like that. We never had no opportunity. I got talent, and I do music. I look back at all the times when we were in the car. Me and my brothers used to sing songs about what was going to happen and what we were going to do, about the futures we wanted, but there were no opportunities for us—nothing.

Because everyone in his family was in the same situation, there was no one there to help them.

I had family members, but I could never go to my family members because they were doing bad themselves. It's like, "Why would I let you in?" I have family members I was staying with that put me out… We had nowhere to go, no people we could turn to. We used to panhandle for money every single day. There have been times when we did that all day and couldn't even get fifty cents… The only way you're going to get something to eat is if you take somebody's money or somebody's food.

When Macnificent and his brothers were 12, 13, and 14, they spent part of the year sleeping in a car, without any adult supervision or care. That was Macnificent's first experience with truly feeling homeless.

We slept in a car for three weeks, and we panhandled for money. This was every single day…and drug abuse just to ease pain. Where's my mama? She's not around. I have an older sister. She was never around. But when she popped up, she can only do so much, buy us something to eat for the time being. But what happens when it gets dark and we're homeless again?

We were in the car for so long. I'll never forget it, an old Lincoln Continental with leather seats. We were all in the front because they had a lot of stuff in the back. That's where we would sleep, in the front of that car.

Macnificent and his brothers moved out of the car when their uncle invited them to live with him in an apartment he had recently acquired, but his uncle lost his Section 8 housing because there were too many people in the apartment and because the boys were not attending school. Once again, Macnificent and his brothers found themselves living in a Lincoln Continental. They had to beg, hustle, or steal every morsel of food. Macnificent

remembers, with mixed feelings, how he and his brothers would spend their days making up rhymes and rapping about the future. This ended abruptly one day when their mom showed up and took them to the police station.

> *So my mama popped up out of the blue three weeks after we left my uncle's. It was like, "I can't do this no more. I have to find me and my children a place to stay." We went to a police academy. My mama…I don't know if it was set up like that or if my mama knew exactly what she was doing, [but] the police were like, "Why are those kids coming in here looking like that? Aren't they supposed to be at school?" My mama couldn't explain herself. She was like, "That's why I'm here, to get some help." They put us all into DHS [Department of Human Services] custody. They told my mama they'd take her to jail, but they'd give her a chance to get us back. We stayed in DHS custody for five years straight.*
>
> *In DHS custody, they separated us. Even when we were in DHS custody, it got to the point where even our own social workers weren't right. That's the God's-honest truth. Our social workers split us all up. First, it was me and my oldest brother, Levius, and my youngest sister and my younger brother, Andy. They were together, and then we were together. Then they split us up. I can understand it. We were bad. I'm not going to deny that. We were bad, getting kicked out of school, doing drugs, and stuff like that. But this is how we grew up.*

For the next five years, Macnificent lived primarily in group homes or juvenile detention centers.

Becoming homeless. Macnificent moved to Minnesota with his uncle when he was 18 years old, but he quickly became homeless. He stayed with his uncle and his older brother, who had moved to Minnesota five years earlier to be near extended family. But once again, his uncle's Section 8 housing was revoked due to too many people in the apartment, and they had to move out. Macnificent had other family in Minnesota, but no one was able to take him in.

With no one to call on for help, Macnificent turned to theft to meet his needs, and he stole a cell phone to sell for food money. He almost immediately found himself

arrested and in jail. As Magnificent said, "I didn't know that the stuff that I wanted was just one phone call away… Sometimes you find stuff out the hard way." When he got out of jail, Macnificent learned about the drop-in center.

> *He was like, "Do you have tokens to catch the bus?" I'm like, "What's tokens?" I didn't even know how to catch the bus. We don't have no buses where I'm from. We do, but it's not like…this. It's a whole new ballgame. So he said, "Go to [the drop-in center]. They'll give you some tokens." And when I got there, they gave me something to eat because I was hungry, and I was like, "Look, I don't have a place to stay."*

The drop-in center gave him a list of youth shelters and phone numbers to call, but almost every place was full. The process of calling the numbers and asking for beds was so discouraging that Macnificent almost gave up.

> *[The drop-in center] gave me some numbers, and I called most of the numbers on the paper. And my last number on the list, I wanted to say, "You know what? I'm not going to even call this number or worry about it. Everybody is turning me down." It was just that they were all full. I called [the youth shelter]. They were like, "We're going to set up something called an emergency room. So yeah, there's an opening." So they set up the bed, and the next morning, I was in there.*

God's gift: the youth shelter. The youth shelter's ability to set up an emergency bed for one night made all the difference for Macnificent. He described it as "a place that helps you get a better life" and said living there "was the best thing that ever happened to [him]."

> *With [the youth shelter], when I first got there, I thought it was like a dream. I was like, "What group home lets you go in the refrigerator and take food?" Everybody was laughing at me because where I'm from, they don't really do that. Even though you're at the group home and they're supposed to feed you and stuff, you still can't go in the refrigerator and fix your own something to eat. That was one reason that I thought it was a sweet place to be. Another reason is because it was so laidback and comfortable. You could get comfortable and still be on your business.*

Access to food was critical to Macnificent, who had lived much of his life not knowing where his next meal would come from.

> *Where I'm from, it's hard to get food. You have to do something wrong to get your own food or go through so much just to get something to eat. With [the youth shelter], I was so surprised about the refrigerator thing. They really do it like this? It was like, "Okay, just make something to eat." I was like, "I just go in there and make something to eat?" "Of course." I was like, "Okay." Then it was like my whole life changed.*

Access to clothing was also new for him, something he continues to be appreciative of.

> *I have fresh, clean clothes on, [and] I didn't even really had to do anything but say, "I need some clothes." Brand new stuff—brand new socks and underwear and t-shirts—and all I had to do was say, "Look, I really need this." That means a lot to me. That means…that's beyond a lot to me. I take that, and I appreciate it more than anything in the world, even if it's just a pair of socks. When I was at home, even in DHS custody, I asked for a pair of socks, and it was a big problem. Like I [was] wrong because I want[ed] a pair of socks.*

Macnificent once told his case manager, Aimee, "It was like God's gift, my getting into [the youth shelter]. It's like God's taking care of me, because He brought me to you guys." His case manager agreed with the sentiment. Getting into the youth shelter so quickly after arriving in Minnesota gave Macnificent the chance to start fresh and to create a life for himself that was different than anything he was used to; no longer would he have to struggle and hustle and steal.

When asked about the youth shelter expectations, Macnificent described that youth at the shelter are not allowed to smoke, drink, or break curfew. Youth are expected to be "doing what they're supposed to do and not just laying [sic] around. They're expected to be constructive with how they use their time." Other than that, he recalls not having to worry about anything else. For once in his life, Macnificent was able to focus

on his goals and ambitions, not where his next meal was going to come from. Both Macnificent and his case manager feel the rules, structure, and supportive atmosphere at the youth shelter helped him create that fresh start.

He also appreciates that he was always treated with respect at the youth shelter.

They treat you with the most respect. Respect is everything. If I disrespect you or discriminate on you or put you down…that's not respect. At [the youth shelter], everybody there respects who you are. Everybody is treated the same. There are no favorites. We're all there for the same reason. The people that I stayed with…we were all there for the same reasons: to get on our feet and do better, to get in school if you wasn't…to get a job…and to get a place to stay… There have been times that I cried at [the youth shelter], like, "How did this come upon me? How did I get so lucky?"

Macnificent described why the drop-in center and youth shelters are both important but play different roles in a young person's journey:

[The drop-in center] is an opportunity to get your starting point. That's where you can start if you don't know nothing at all. [The drop-in center] is the place you go to say, "I need help with this. I don't have a place to stay. I'm hungry right now. I need to take a shower and wash my clothes. I need transfer. Help me out with my GED." That'd be a starting point. If [the drop-in center] can't really help you, they still got other places they can take you. They gave me the numbers to [the youth shelter]. [At the youth shelter], they will help you. They will help you reach your goals. They won't let you fall back.

In addition, Macnificent feels that the staff members at these organizations truly care about youth:

From the kindness of their heart[s], they care about the youth. It's a blessing. It's a miracle. I don't look at it as something you can just do, get in this program and get your own place to just stay. This is a miracle, everything. I go in my house every day like, "This is mine." It's nice to say that, and you work for it. You deserve it. You don't have to do nothing wrong.

Finding support. One thing Macnificent found particularly valuable at the youth shelter was the encouragement of his case manager. Aimee met him where he was and

helped him set goals, apply for housing, and get his sentence reduced. She even found a therapist for him; despite his original resistance to the idea of therapy, Macnificent connected with the therapist, and it was beneficial.

One of Macnificent's goals is to become a musician and rap artist. Aimee and the youth shelter helped him achieve his dream of making music by helping him acquire a computer and music-creation software. In the past, he would have had to steal such equipment.

> *I do music, and I need a computer for it. It was so hard for me to get a computer. When my last one crashed, it was like my whole life just crashed. I look at a computer like that. They donated a brand new computer so I can do my own music. I can do whatever I want with it. "It's yours," they said. "Do the right thing with it. Do your music. Be happy." That puts a smile on my face every single day*

Leaving his comfort zone. Getting into the youth shelter was a turning point for Macnificent because, little by little, he began to see, for the first time, a different path for himself. When Macnificent first moved there, he felt his only means to getting what he wanted and needed was to commit crime.

> *It was like a dream. I couldn't explain it. I had to get out of my comfort zone because I was comfortable with my life in Mississippi… Mississippi is the same pattern and same things every day. You see the same things. A job's just impossible to get… My hometown is all wrong. I didn't know what to do. I was lost.*

His brother told Macnificent he did not have to commit crimes to build a life for himself, that there were people and places that would help him; however, at first, Macnificent did not believe him.

> *Still, in my head, it was like, "Okay, I hear you, but I'm still in my Mississippi zone. I have to roll to get money." What he was saying was true, but it seemed unreal. It seemed like…"You mean to tell me I can go to a place like [the youth*

shelter], and they'll help me with my own apartment as quick as a snap of a finger?" He's like, "Yeah." I didn't believe him, but he was right.

"The Mississippi zone," as Macnificent put it, was the place where he had to deal and steal to meet his needs. By contrast, the "Minnesota mindset" is one in which he could take advantage of opportunities offered to him. The boy realized that in order to move forward and reach his goals, he had to leave the Mississippi zone that had hindered him for so long.

> *Why not get out of the Mississippi zone? I mean, why do I have to do something wrong to get what I want? If you want to keep doing that when you don't need to, you want to be a bad person. You're comfortable with what you're doing. At home [in Mississippi], you have no other choice. You don't want to starve to death. But here, you don't have to do wrong for something to eat.*

Macnificent does not think he could have made this switch without Aimee's support, encouragement, and high expectations:

> *My case manager will help me. She will say, "You can do this." Before, I said, "I can't do it," and I would give up and quit. With her, that's not an option. "You're too strong. You can do this." And I get it accomplished every single time. That's why I love my case manager. Even though I whine and cry sometimes and say, "I can't do it," I always accomplish everything that I try to do.*
>
> *She believes in me. That's why I can't fall back. They won't let me… They believe in me. They know what you're capable of, even if you don't. Ain't no such word as "can't"… When you really have the opportunity, there's no word "I can't."*
>
> *Just like if they were to say, "Reach over and grab this piece of paper. You're a strong female or male, and you can do this. All you have to do is pick it up and grab it." Why wouldn't you? Why would I say, "No, I can't do it," knowing the whole time that I can reach over and grab this piece of paper? That's a perfect example.*
>
> *What it all boils down to [is], when you look at what you accomplish, it feels good. That's why I changed to a better person. I'm a whole different person. I'm not the same person I used to be because I don't have to [be]. It's just that easy. It's not a hard step because it's just that easy. Go the right way, and it's easy to take that right path.*

Where he is now. Together, Aimee and Macnificent found placement for him in a permanent supportive housing program. Macnificent has his own apartment now and is at a positive place in his life, somewhere he never dreamt he'd be.

> *What I came from is not too good. It's the opposite of what's going on now. Instead of moving forward, I was always pushing back… I had that mentality when I got up here. But [the youth shelter] wouldn't let me go back. It was always a step forward. Even if I took one step back, I was always taking three more steps forward. Even though I thought I wasn't accomplishing nothing, my case manager was like, "This is what you've done…" And she was right. It felt like I wasn't doing nothing, but if I wasn't, I wouldn't be in my own apartment.*
>
> *[The youth shelter] is the best thing that ever happened to me, ever in my life. I never had my own place to stay before. I never was working on getting my own job. All of this is a big step that I can accomplish and be proud of, and make the next step to smiling and having a brighter day than what I came from.*

Macnificent is on probation and had to serve sentence to serve (STS), which requires him to complete hard labor in lieu of serving jail time. Macnificent described how important this was:

> *When I first got up here, I caught a felony for robbing. I was in my Mississippi comfort zone. I got in trouble [for] robbing somebody and trying to get their phone just to get some money… It wasn't like I was going to keep the phone for me. I was going to sell the phone to get some money, but it was a bad choice. You can't take nobody's stuff and get away with it. I got in trouble for that.*
>
> *During the process, I had already started made a change for myself, and I was working on getting my housing. My caseworker was like, "We're going to clear this up. We're going to fight this. That is the wrong way. You don't need to go to jail. You have important stuff to do." She'd seen the potential in me. She told me, "There's always a better way."*

It has not always been easy for Macnificent to walk this new path, but Aimee has remained by his side, even during the darkest times. He is certain that without her help and intervention, he would have gone to jail.

> *It was hard work. Even though I did wrong, and I admitted to [it], it was up to*

me to make it right. When you can admit that you did wrong, that's a big change there. My case manager opened up that door. It was up to me to make it right, and she helped me out. The whole time, she was there for me. That's respect, love. You can call it anything you want, but I say it's respect and love.

If it wasn't for her, I would be locked up. I wouldn't have my house. The judge was talking like 120 days in the JDC and all this other stuff. I don't remember exactly what, but everything was bad. But even though I did get in trouble, that still didn't change what I had going for me. With [the youth shelter] and my case manager, I couldn't fall back.

We worked it out. Now it's all over. All I have to do is keep working…accomplish what I'm trying to do. Even though I still have a lot to accomplish, it's going to get accomplished. I know it, and I feel comfortable. I can say that because I'm not falling back. My case manager not going to let me.

Finishing his STS has been difficult, and Macnificent has been slow to complete it. He and his case manager have gotten frustrated with each other, and he has yelled at her and called her every name in the book. Aimee has been upset, and so has he, and at times, they have gone a week without talking. Nevertheless, she has shown him that it is okay to be upset with trusted people in your life. As Aimee said, "You can apologize for what you said, and I can apologize for making you upset, and we're able to move on." Macnificent's computer is on hold until he finishes his STS.

She knows I want my computer. It's like, "If you don't get this done, no computer for you." There are rules. You have to follow them. She is not trying to be wrong or nothing or make me mad. It is what it is. That's all right. They're sending me [down] the right path.

Overcoming challenges. Macnificent explained that one of the greatest challenges for him was leaving his comfort zone, where he had to steal to meet his needs. He realized that he had to change so as not to lose everything he had gained since entering the youth shelter.

If I was staying in my Mississippi comfort zone, [the youth shelter] wouldn't work

> *out at all. So that's why I had to get out of that comfort zone. Why would I let go of all that? If I did, I wouldn't be here…I would be locked up… My case manager helped me with all this too. When I got in trouble, they showed me a better way: "You don't have to do this." That's how I figured everything out. That's when I finally realized that you don't have to do all this nonsense.*

Aimee saw that Macnificent was trying to create a better path for himself, and she patiently and wisely nurtured those positive changes. She helped him defend himself in court, resulting in a sentence of community service rather than jail time.

A second difficult change for Macnificent was giving up marijuana. Again, his case manager was instrumental:

> *I used to do marijuana a lot… I smoked marijuana just to ease my pain. Even though it took me getting into trouble and figuring out the hard way that smoking was not what it is… I learned that you [will] never get anything accomplished if you're trying to smoke all the time. I had to get out of my comfort zone with that. I can't smoke. You have business to take care of instead of just sitting at home smoking… It's to the point where I don't even look at drugs. There was a point in time when I really needed drugs. There was that point, but now it's like I have too much going for me.*

Macnificent shared that his case manager was always there to remind him that he had accomplished too much to turn back to drugs. She is not sure whether he has completely stopped using marijuana, but she does not focus on the fact that he may be using it occasionally. Rather, she focuses on the fact that he no longer uses it in a way or to an extent that it appears to negatively impact his life.

The best thing that ever happened to him. Macnificent credits the collaboration among the drop-in center, the youth shelter, and other organizations as critical; he considers his connection with these organizations to be the best thing that has ever happened to him.

> *I thank [the youth shelter] every single day and [the drop-in center]. If it wasn't*

for [the drop-in center], I wouldn't have a number to call [the youth shelter]. If it wasn't for [the youth shelter], I wouldn't be in my own apartment and doing my own things, looking for a job like I'm supposed to, like youth are supposed to.

[The youth shelter] is the best thing to ever happen to me. I can't break it down no more than that. I got my own house. I can go say, "Bro, I'm going to come to your house." If he ain't got nothing to eat, [I can say,] "Come to my house." We don't have to ask nobody for nothing. But if we do, we got resources… I can go to my case manager like, "Look, I need this for my restroom. I need this to put in my refrigerator." It's possible. If not, they have other places that I can go to.

He believes these resources make it possible for driven youth to move forward.

Being successful here? It's easy as one, two, three. All you have to do is move forward. If you fall back, there has to be something. You don't want help. But if you want the help, you're moving forward. It's going to get to the point where there's something better and better and better.

Macnificent is a realist, however, and he does consider the day when he will not have the support of this case manager anymore.

If I didn't have my case manager, [sometimes] it feels like I will fall back. But because of all the work that me and my case manager [have] been through, I think…I still won't fall back… If it wasn't for her, I wouldn't make it through this stuff… Basically, she taught me everything—not to fall back when you can accomplish something, just because you feel like you can't. "Can't" is not a word here. We're looking for "Yes, I can."

The work has been hard, as any self-improvements are, but when Macnificent looks back at what he has accomplished, he feels it has been worthwhile. He is safe in his own apartment and working toward his goals, not worrying about his safety in jail.

When you are messing around, you have to watch…your back. Life is on the line when you are in jail. But you can be in your own house, talk on your own phone, be on your own computer, do your own music, eat your own food, be in your own house with your own stuff, put on your own clothes, not nothing orange. Why would you settle for less?

Aimee has taught him many important lessons, one of which is that he can get whatever he wants and needs through hard work.

She opened my eyes to a way like…I couldn't even explain it…like, just get it done. If you don't get it done, then that's when you look at the bad. When you get it done, then the good stuff follows behind you. You can have your house and your car. That's what a lot of people don't look at. They just look at it as "All this hard work." But my case manager opened my eyes to "You can do it, and you're going to do it. You're going to make it. Don't say you can't, because that's not an option."

Hard work is what Macnificent intends to do. He is motivated to get a job, save up, and buy a home so he can move his younger siblings out of DHS custody.

I want to get my own house, and you have to start somewhere…just like I started at [the drop-in center]. They hooked me up with [the youth shelter], and then I got my own place. Next, I'll get my own-own place, like my own house and car. Even though it's hard work behind that, I have to get back in school. I have to accomplish everything and just get back in school and work, work, work. No time for playing around. No time, no playing around. It's all hard work.

If I do that, then I can get my brothers and sisters [out of foster care]. That's my plan in the long term. Right now, it's all in process. Doing what I'm supposed to be doing is taking me to the point where I can get my brothers and sisters in my own house.

He is proud that he has his own apartment and that he can see a future in which he will own his own home, help his younger brothers and sisters, and even create his own recording studio. He is proud that he has learned from his case manager to always look on the bright side, because when he looks ahead to his future, he finally sees possibilities and success.

Thmaris

Thmaris was born in Chicago in 1990. He has an older and a younger brother and was raised by his mother. His family moved to Minnesota in 1996, albeit without housing to move into. As a result, they moved around a lot between extended family members' homes and family shelters, never staying anywhere for more than a year. Thmaris's

mother was addicted to alcohol and drugs, and it often fell on Thmaris and his older brother to take care of their younger brother. Consequently, Thmaris has been earning money for the family since he turned 12, sometimes through a job—like the construction apprenticeship he had at age 12—and sometimes through stealing or dealing weed. Even though he stole and dealt when he had to, he recognized early on that he was happiest when he was working with his hands and providing for his family through real, legal, gainful employment.

When Thmaris was 13, his mother entered an alcoholic treatment program, and he and his brothers went to stay with his uncle. Thmaris remembers that period as one of the lowest points in his life. There were six kids in a three-bedroom house, with people coming and going all the time. There was never enough food or clothing, and he did not feel safe or secure in that environment. When his mother returned from the treatment center to collect the boys from their uncle's home, Thmaris thought things would get better, but they got much worse. His mother accused Thmaris's older brother of molesting Thmaris and their little brother, and those harsh accusations tore his family apart. To this day, he does not understand why she did this.

> *She really went above and beyond to try to prove it and try to accuse him. I know that made him feel like nothing. I know it made him feel like the worst kind of person. It wasn't true. There was no truth to it. My bigger brother…he's super protective, and he's not that type of dude. It just hurt me for her to do something like that, to accuse her own son of something like that. She just accused him of the worst crime ever. That really stuck with us.*

Not only was it painful to see his mother wrongfully accuse their brother, but as a result, they lost their older brother, their protector and the closest thing they'd ever had to a father figure. This placed Thmaris in a tough position; he was torn between his older

brother and their mother. If he placed his loyalties with his older brother, it would mean he could not have a relationship with this younger brother.

> *He had to place us [at] a distance. He stepped back from being in our lives a lot. When he went to Chicago to stay with my dad, it was like we never saw him…never talked to him. It was confusing for me, because I'm the middle child. So I have a little brother and…an older brother. When she sent my brother away, I always felt like she abandoned him, just threw him out of our lives… I would go up to Chicago to see my brother. I'd stay there for a couple of months, just to get that big brother/small brother bond again. Then I would come back because I didn't want my little brother growing up like, "Dang. Both of my brothers left me." It was just always really hard, and I just felt like [my mother] just put me in a position to choose whether I want to be around my little brother or my big brother.*

Once again, Thmaris found himself having to grow up quickly. With his older brother gone, he felt as if he had to serve as his younger brother's sole provider and protector.

His mother continued to cycle in and out of treatment programs, and Thmaris and his younger brother simultaneously cycled in and out of foster care. Foster care was a time of relative peace and stability for Thmaris and his brother, though, and they developed a relationship with their foster mother that they maintain to this day. He was always drawn back to family, however, and ended up staying with his mother when he was 16, a year he remembers as the longest of his life. At that time, she was not able to let the boys stay with her because she had Section 8 housing, and they were not named on her lease. Thmaris was angry at the world, fighting with anyone and everyone. He started running with a gang and got into a lot of trouble. Many nights, his mother would lock him out as a consequence for such behavior.

Becoming homeless. After being locked out several times, Thmaris decided he'd

had enough, and he told his mother he was going to move out. When he first moved out, he stayed with his girlfriend. When he could no longer stay there, he couch-hopped or slept outside, in public places. His girlfriend introduced him to the drop-in centers in Minneapolis and St. Paul; she was familiar with them because she often relied on them for diapers, wipes, and other baby supplies for her child. Thmaris gravitated toward the drop-in center that he felt had a smaller, more intimate feel to it. First and foremost, he used it as a place to get off of the streets and be safe. He also appreciated the support they provided, helping him write a résumé, apply for jobs, and locate apartments, but he only took advantage of these services sporadically.

When asked to recall his first impressions of the drop-in center, Thmaris describes a place with clear rules and expectations: no profanity, fighting, smoking, drugs, or intoxication. The expectation is that youths will try their hardest to succeed in whatever they want to do.

> *They help you with a lot of stuff. I just feel like there's nothing that you really need that you can't really get from here. If you really need underwear and socks and t-shirts, they have closets full of stuff like that. If you really need toothpaste and toothbrushes and deodorant and all that stuff, all the hygiene stuff, they have that here. If you have a whole lot of stuff but nowhere to go, they have lockers where you can leave your stuff here; nobody [can] really get in them. They have showers here… They have so many resources…it's ridiculous.*

During his first few years utilizing the drop-in center, Thmaris was still involved with his street gang and was, therefore, frequently in and out of jail. Being a gang member was his primary source of income, and he was loyal to his fellow gang members, even when his association with them got him in trouble. He recalled one arrest in particular, for auto theft:

I was in jail a lot. I remember back in 2009, I was running with this group of guys, and they was doing breaking-and-entering and stuff like that. I knew it could come with jail time or whatever, but I just seen these guys with a lot of money, and I was very broke at the time, so I'm like, "Well, I'm doing it with these guys."

One time, we go to this one house, and there's a car there. The guy I'm with gets the car, and he was driving it around. We get to the house and he's like, "Well, I forgot to go to the store to get some something." He's like, "Could you go to the store?"

I'm like, "Yeah." So I get the car and I get the keys, and I go to the store. And right away, I was just surrounded by cops, and I got thrown in jail for auto theft. I could have easily just gave those guys up, but I had always been taught to be a man of responsibility. If I did something, then I should take responsibility for it. So I got thrown in jail. I got a year and a day of jail time over my head, with five years' probation.

After this conviction, Thmaris began using the resources offered at the drop-in center more consistently and secured a job delivering newspapers. Because he had a job and was making progress, he was accepted into a transitional living program (TLP). Things were finally moving in a direction Thmaris felt good about, but he violated the probation related to the auto theft and lost his place in the TLP program. He claims he violated his probation because his probation officer was in St. Cloud, in Washington County, while Thmaris was staying in St. Paul; it was difficult for him to report there without consistent access to transportation. Thus, Thmaris decided to serve his year and a day instead. For eight months, he spent time in two correctional facilities. By the time he was released, he had lost his job and his spot in the TLP.

Turning point. Going to jail and losing his TLP membership was a turning point for Thmaris. When he got out of jail, he recalls:

[I said to myself,] "I need to stop with the crimes and committing crimes and just try to find something different to do with my life"… I went to school for welding

> *technology, and that's been my main focus ever since I got out. [Rarely would I] go back to jail. If I did, it would be for arguing with my girlfriend or not leaving the skyway when they wanted me to, so it was like trespassing and stuff like that. After I got out of Moose Lake, it just really dawned on me that I needed to change my life and that the life that I was living wasn't the right path for me.*

Thmaris did not know how to accomplish these positive changes on his own, so when he got out of prison, he went straight to the drop-in center to ask his case manager for help.

Finding support. Each time a young person visits the drop-in center for the first time, they are asked about their previous experience with the foster care system. If they report that they were in foster care for at least 30 days from ages 16 to 18, they are typically a case worker who is supported by the Healthy Transitions grant through the Minnesota Department of Health. Thmaris had two case workers previous to Rahim, but he was transferred to Rahim when Rahim began working with youth under Healthy Transitions. This was a lucky move for Thmaris, because this relationship developed into one that has been deeply meaningful to him.

> *I just feel that ever since I turned 20, I realized that I'm an adult and that I have to make better choices, not just for me, but [also for] the people around me. Didn't nobody help me with that but Rahim… The things that he was able to do, he made sure that he did them. I remember days that I'd come down [to the drop-in center], and I'd be like, "Rahim, I haven't eaten in two days," Or, "Rahim, I haven't changed my underwear in, like, a week," or whatever. He would give me bus cards to get to and from interviews. He would give me Target cards to go take care of my personal hygiene. He would give me Cub [Foods] cards to go eat. It was like every problem or every obstacle I threw in front of him, he made sure I would overcome it… He was the greatest mentor I ever had. I've never had nobody like that.*

> *Out of all the other caseworkers…nobody ever really sat me down and tried to work out a resolution for my problems. They always just gave me pamphlets like, "Well, go call these people and see if they can do something for you," or, "You*

> *should go to this building because this building has that, what you want." Every time I come to him, I don't have to worry about anything. He's not going to send me to the next man, put me onto the next person's caseload. He just always took care of me. If I would have never met Rahim, I would have been in a totally different situation. I would have [gone] a totally different route.*

Without the support of Rahim and the resources at the drop-in center, Thmaris is certain he would still be in a gang, dealing weed, and would have eventually ended up in jail again. It was not simply that Rahim has been there for him; more so, Rahim has been with the drop-in center for more than five years. This consistency has meant a lot to Thmaris, who shared, "I just seen a lot of case managers come and go. Rahim is the only one that has never went anywhere. So many years have gone past, and Rahim is here." After Thmaris's turning point, Rahim recalls the young person coming into the drop-in center with an intense focus on changing his life:

> *He was here pretty close to every day, and he'd never been here that frequently before. He was here all the time, working on job searches. He started to take school really, really seriously, which has been a really positive and strong thing for him. And we kind of sat together and figured out a path that hopefully would help provide for him over time. He got his high school diploma, which was really huge. I think just being successful at something was helpful. He's a smart kid. I think getting his high school diploma helped convince him of that.*

Thmaris recalls this time similarly: "Everything I was doing [with Rahim] was productive. When you get that feeling, like you're accomplishing something and you're doing good, it's like a feeling that you can't describe."

Going back to school. When Thmaris first considered going back to school, he was planning to go just to get a student loan check, like many of the homeless youth around him; however, Rahim helped him see a different path. Aware of Thmaris's past positive experiences with construction and building, Rahim urged Thmaris to consider

careers that would allow him to work with his hands and to focus on the big picture. He also made sure Thmaris had the support of a learning specialist from St. Paul Public Schools, who helped the youth figure out what steps he needed to take to get from where he was then to his dream career in welding.

> *The first time I ever talked to him about school, I was like, "Yeah, man, I just feel like I should go to school and get a loan." And he was like, "Well, it's bigger than that. That loan money is going to be gone like that.*
>
> *He didn't tell me, "No, you shouldn't do that." He just said, "Just think about the future," and I just thought about it. I was thinking and thinking. And then I was like, "What if I went to school for something that I want to get a job in?" He was like, "Yeah, that's the best way to go."*
>
> *I talked to him about construction, and he told me, "You already basically have experience in that," because he knows all the jobs I had. So he was like, "You should go into something that's totally different but that pays a lot of money." Then I researched it and then just knew that I liked working with my hands, so I just put two and two together and was like, "Well, I want to go to school for welding. Ever since I learned how to weld, it's like, " I love it!"*

Thmaris loved welding but was intimidated by the engineering part of the learning, which he referred to as "book work." Again, it was Rahim's belief in him that helped him persevere.

> *I started doing the book work, and I was getting overwhelmed. It was like every time I came down here, even if I just came down here to use the phone, Rahim would be like, "How's that welding class going?"*
>
> *He just kept me interested in it. I don't know how to explain it. I was just thirsty—not even to get a job in it, but more to show Rahim what I'd learned and what I accomplished.*
>
> *He would tell me, "I'm proud of you." Then I'd show him my book work, and he'd be like, "Man, I don't even how to read this stuff." And it just made me feel like I was actually on the right path…like I was doing what I was intended to do with my life. That's just how he makes me feel. He makes me feel like I'm doing the right thing, and he makes sure that I know it.*

Thmaris finished his welding certificate with a 4.0 grade point average and the respect and positive notice of his teachers. He accomplished this against great odds. He was homeless while completing the program, meaning he had no consistent place to sleep, to do homework, or to even store his books. Getting to campus was challenging because tokens were hard to come by. During this time, he was also dealing with one of his greatest challenges: unhealthy relationships with older women. In part, these relationships are a survival technique, as he could stay with them to keep himself off the streets. However, they also represent a symptom of Thmaris's desire to be loved, to have a family, and to take care of others.

> *I just super easily fall in love. I always look for the ones that have been through the most, the ones that have always had a rough time, and I try to make their life better. That's the biggest thing for me, trying to stay away from love. I don't know. I'm just so into love. It's probably because I wanted my mom and dad to be together so bad it killed me. Every time she [brought] a new man home, it killed me inside. I just want a family.*

The relationship he was in while attending his first semester of welding classes ended badly. She threw away or burned everything Thmaris owned and paid people to jump him and "beat the hell out of him." They broke his hand and wrist so badly that surgery was required, and the healing time was long and painful. Despite all of this, Thmaris persevered. He completed his welding certificate and is now completing his general education requirements.

Leaving the gang. His choice to walk this different path required Thmaris to leave his gang, which is not always an easy feat. His case manager helped him with this, too, talking him through what the gang had to offer. Certainly, it offered money and camaraderie, but as Thmaris grew older, it also offered more opportunities to serve

extended jail time. While Thmaris was in jail for auto theft, no one from the gang bothered to visit him, put money on the books for him, or check on his little brother. Thmaris identified leaving the gang as one of the greatest challenges he has had to overcome: "I think the first biggest thing I had to do was leave a lot of friends that weren't on the same level or the same type of mentality that I was… I had to leave them alone, regardless [whether] I knew them my whole life or not." Thmaris's case manager believes his commitment to school was critical in his decision to ultimately leave the gang:

> *Leaving a gang is almost like drug addiction. You have to replace it with something. In Thmaris's [case], he actually can replace it with this really furious effort toward getting his education, looking for jobs, and trying to do something different with himself. If he had just tried to quit the gang and replaced it with nothing and [done] nothing all day, it would've been a lot harder. But he replaced it with this welding certificate, and that was really good. He got very, very excited about welding. It's nice, because he is naturally good at it.*

Becoming a father. Thmaris's three-month old son, his namesake, is his pride and joy; however, he and the boy's mother have a rocky relationship, and Thmaris is frustrated, as he wants to raise the child alongside the mother. He grew up without his own father in the picture, and he wants a better life for his own son. He feels his son would be happier in life if he could see both of his parents every day.

> *Man, I just have so many plans for him. I just…I don't want to put him on a pedestal or anything because I don't want him to go through having a dad that thinks so highly of him, and then it's so hard for him to meet my goals. I want him to make his goals. I want him to be happy. That's all I care about. Regardless if he wants to work at Subway instead of going to school… If that's your choice, that's your choice.*

Becoming a father has also motivated Thmaris to give up the gang life and marijuana. He realizes that if he does not stop selling drugs, he might not live long

enough to see his son grow up.

> *I don't want to sell drugs all my life and then, when I die, my son be like, "Wow. Dad didn't leave me nothing," or, "He didn't teach me anything but how to sell drugs." No, that's not what you would want for your son. You want your son to know what it is to work for his money. You want your son to know how it feels to come from a long day's work, tired, like, "Damn. I earned my money though."*

Couch-hopping. Throughout his time visiting drop-in centers, Thmaris has never stayed at a youth or adult shelter. He typically couch-hops or stays with women he is dating. Some nights, he walks the skyway all night or sleeps in a stairwell. After staying in family shelters when he was younger, he has vowed that he will never stay in a shelter again.

> *When we first came to Minnesota, that's all we did. We stayed in shelter as a family. It was, like, traumatizing to me, because [in shelters] you see, like, humans at their weakest point. You see them hungry, dirty. I didn't like that. I don't like being around a whole bunch of people that was… I'm not saying that I feel like I'm better than anybody, because I definitely don't, but I just felt like it was too much to take in. It was too stressful, and it just made me want to cry. It was crazy. I don't want to go back to a shelter ever again.*

Where he is now. Currently, Thmaris is not stably housed. He spends some nights at his baby's mother's house, some with friends, some outside, and some in hotel rooms. Despite this, however, he maintains a positive, hopeful outlook on life:

> *The fact that I have my certificate for welding…just blows me away. I would have never thought, in a million years, that I would have that. Even though I've still got to look for a job and still got a long way to go, I just feel proud of myself… I know a lot of people that don't even have a high school diploma or a GED, and they're struggling to get into college, and people going to college just to go get a loan and stuff like that.*
>
> *I just feel like I'm bettering myself. I've learned a lot over these past seven years. I've matured a great deal. I honestly feel that I'm bettering myself. I don't feel like I'm taking any steps back, regardless if I have employment or my own house [or not]. I just feel like each day, I live more, and I learn more, and I just feel…*

I'm just grateful to be alive, grateful to even go through the things I'm going through.

Thmaris is convinced that it is critically important for someone to believe in him, to truly appreciate his potential. He credits his case manager for this, stating that it is this belief that has encouraged him to believe in himself and his ability to improve:

He just saw more in me. I didn't even see it at the time. He saw great potential, and he told me that all the time. "Man, I see great potential in you. I see that. You can just be way much more than what you are." Just to keep coming down here and having somebody have that much faith in you and believe in you that much… It's a life changer.

My mom always used to tell me that I wasn't shit. You know what I'm saying? She's a super alcoholic, and when she gets drunk, she always says that. "You ain't shit. Your daddy ain't shit. You ain't going to be shit." She was just always down on me. Just to hear somebody really have an interest in you or want you to better yourself… It just changed my life.

I honestly feel like if I didn't have Rahim in my corner, I would have been doing a whole bunch of dumb shit. I would have been right back at square one. I probably would have spent more time in jail than I did. I just felt like if it wasn't for him, I probably wouldn't be here right now, talking to you.

Through this relationship, Thmaris was able to learn things that others may take for granted, such as how to create an email account, write a résumé, apply for a job online, or to use time productively.

To be honest, I never knew what a résumé was, I never knew how to create an email account, I never knew how to send a résumé online, [and] I never knew how to do an application for a job online. He taught me everything…about that. He taught me how to look for an apartment, how to look for a job, how to dress, how to talk to a boss, a manager, [and] how to get a job. There's just a lot of stuff like that.

I also learned that there's always something to do productively instead of wasting your time, so I just thought about making my résumé better. I just thought about sending emails to companies I knew were hiring, just doing productive stuff. I never knew what "productive" was until Rahim. I just didn't think about time that

> *was being wasted.*

Thmaris hopes to open his own car modification shop someday. He yearns to make his son proud, and, despite their difficult history and relationship, he also wants to impress his mother. He realizes it will take a lot of hard work to achieve these goals, but he feels motivated and determined to do so.

> *That's what I basically learned from being at [the drop-in center]. I understand now the value of doing what you need to do versus what you want. A lot of people say, "Men do what they want, and boys do what they can," but that's not it. Men do what they need to do, and boys do what they want. I'm so glad I learned that—for real—because I was always just doing what I wanted to do.*

He is proud that he has been able to overcome the challenges in his life in order to get a high school diploma and graduate from his welding program. Feeling successful has just fueled Thmaris's ambition to experience more success.

> *You don't know how it felt when I graduated high school. I was like, "Wow! I did this on my own?" And it just felt so good. I'm thirsty again to get another certificate or diploma or whatever, just because it's just the best feeling in the world. It's better than any drug. It's like…man, I don't even know how to explain it. It felt like you just climbed up to the top of the mountain, like, you made it.*

He sees other young people "wasting their time" at the drop-in center and wishes he could tell them what he now knows: "If you're still stuck in that stage where you don't know what you want to do with your life, then come here and sit down with a case manager. Try to talk to somebody, and they'll help you better your situation." For Thmaris, the drop-in center and his case manager were key to helping him quit his addiction, leave his gang, get a high school diploma and welding certificate, and setting a foundation to build a better life for himself—a life he and his son can be proud of.

Zi

Zi is a 22-year-old African American/Caucasian woman who was born in Minneapolis. She has three siblings: an sister one year older, a brother six years younger, and a sister seven years younger. A quiet grace emanates from Zi, a stark contrast to the hurt and chaos she has experienced. Zi's mother was addicted to heroin, her father was an alcoholic, and both lost their parental rights early in Zi's life. Zi and her siblings spent much of her growing up years in foster care.

When Zi was 7 years old, she, her siblings, and her half-siblings lived with her dad for a year, a time marked by frequent and severe beatings.

> *My dad used to whoop us. He was abusive. That's all he ever knew, whoopings. He used to whoop us all the time. I remember one day… My dad was always at work, so we were always at home by ourselves. We [broke] a lamp, so we were like, "We better tell Dad before he gets here." We called my dad at work to tell him. He said, "When I get back, you all are getting a whooping." I remember that day we were like, "I'm not getting no more whoopings by this man," so we ended up running away. We went to this lady's house. We had gone to her house before to pick up her leaves for money. My sister is so dumb. She ended up calling my dad, and he used caller ID to find us.*

Zi didn't know that during that time, her dad was sexually abusing one of her stepsisters. When Zi found out, she didn't believe the allegations, and she told her stepsister not to tell anyone else; however, the girl had already informed a teacher at her school. As a result, the children were removed from the home, and the father's paternal rights were lost. As Zi remembers it, "He didn't want to fight for us anymore." Her half-siblings were sent to live with relatives in Arkansas, and she and the others were placed back in the foster care system.

Zi's mother lost her parental rights as well, so Zi and her siblings became wards of the state when she was 10 years old. At that point, her stepgrandmother and her biological maternal grandfather took custody of Zi, and she moved to Reno, Nevada. She was there for five years, and she recalls that her grandparents planned to adopt her. However, just before the adoption was finalized, her grandpa died. She and her stepgrandmother did not get along. One of the main sources of friction in their relationship was the fact that Zi was forbidden from communicating from her relatives in Minnesota.

> *When I lived in Nevada, it was okay, but my stepgrandma didn't want me to communicate with anybody in Minnesota. She didn't want me to communicate with my mom, and I didn't like that. She used to talk bad about my mom. I didn't like that either. We would get into it. I felt like a prisoner in my own house in Nevada. I'd have to sneak [to] talk to my sister or my mom. She would… If my mom would write to me, I would never get any letters. If I wrote my mom, my stepgrandma would read it.*

Zi moved back to Minnesota when she was 15 years old. Even though things did not work out in Nevada, it has been a source of tension in Zi's relationship with her sister that her grandparents wanted to adopt her but did not her sister.

> *My grandma and grandpa didn't want to adopt her, but they wanted to adopt me. They can't do both of us. So I just always felt bad that I left and left her here by herself. Now that we're older, we talk about it. She used to be jealous and mad because I got to go to Nevada and whatever. She had to stay here in the system, still going through everything.*

Becoming homeless. Zi was placed in a group home when she returned to Minnesota. Her sister visited her there, and it was the first time Zi had seen her sister in five years. Zi's desire to be with her sister and mother was strong, so she ran away from the group home on the first day she was there. For the next three years, it was a trend

with Zi; she often ran away from her Social Services placements.

> *I wanted to see my sister and my mom. I hadn't seen my mom in, like, five years. When I ran away, I was kind of new to Minnesota again. When I left [Minnesota], I was young, so I didn't know my way around. My sister said she was going to bring me back to the group home, so I [wouldn't] be on the run. Then she ended up not bringing me because she was messing with this dude, her boyfriend or whatever. They went somewhere, so I was at my mom's house. Then my mom made me go back. She brought me to [an emergency shelter]. From there, I kept running away… I kept going to my mom's house.*
>
> *I'm not going to let a piece of paper tell me I can't see my mom. Yeah, she lost her full rights. I don't care. That's my mom. She brought me into this world, and I'm not going to live in this world not seeing my mom.*

Because Zi was a ward of the state, a warrant for her arrest was issued every time she ran away. She would be picked up and brought to a juvenile detention center.

> *My social worker kept putting out Social Services warrants for runaways. I only got caught two times from 15 to 18. The first time, they released me from JDC because it was my first time running. The second time, they were trying to send me to a lockdown facility in Hastings. I jumped out of the car on our way there. I didn't want to go. I ran back to Minneapolis. Actually, [that] time, I think my mom had just split with her husband. She didn't have her place for a whole summer, so I had to stay with my friend.*
>
> *I was on the run for a long time. Then they finally… I think finally my social worker was like, "She is just going to keep on running." This is when I was 17. I think he felt like because I was going to be turning 18, and I was not going to be a ward of the state anymore, he basically gave up looking for me.*

Zi couch-hopped from the ages of 15 to 18, living with her mother, her friends, and her cousins. She loved living with her mother, but she also recalls that those were difficult times. The places were often crowded, and she used to feel uncomfortable and unsafe. Zi recalls long periods of time hanging out downtown, only interrupted by visits to the drop-in center for dinner.

> *Me and my mom, we would get into it, and she'd be quick to kick me out. It would*

never last that long [though]. So I would go stay with a friend or something. She'd threaten to call the police and tell them I was there or threaten to call my social worker.

Then, when I turned 18, it seemed like we were getting into it a little more. I remember a month and a half before I moved in here, me and my mom got into it because she had met this guy, and I felt like she was not really choosing him over me, but taking his side on everything, letting him do more stuff in the house than me… It ended up [being] a fist fight. I didn't want to put my hands on my mom, but she was the type to just keep going. It was like, "Mom, just leave it alone." She'd just keep going and going and really make [me] mad. We got into a fight, and that's when she had kicked me out.

By this time, Zi was on the waiting list for a transitional living program and was able to move in to her first apartment soon after her mother ordered her to leave this final time.

The drop-in center: A safe haven. Several times during these three years, Zi found herself in police custody. The first time Zi went to the juvenile detention center (JDC), it was the result of a police raid early one morning at her mother's house. There was a warrant out for Zi's arrest because she had run away from her foster placement. Zi suspects that the social worker tipped the police off to their location.

They asked for my name, and I had a warrant, so they took both of us. They were doing a warrant sweep early in the morning. I remember it because we felt like, "Dang, we ain't no murderers." They came in so deep that you would have thought were…like, really wanted. I remember my mom snapping on the police, "You came in here like my daughters are criminals."

Zi was sent to JDC again when she was picked up for being outside downtown after curfew. When they ran her name through the system and discovered that there was a warrant for her arrest, they tried to transfer her to Hastings, but Zi jumped out of the car and ran straight to the drop-in center. She had been told about the drop-in center by a friend: "I have a place you can go, eat, shower. They can help you with clothes and stuff

like that and help you get into school."

> *When I ran from the car, I took the skyway all the way to [the drop-in center]. After that, I went there every day. I remember I had clothes in my locker. I went there, and it's like they always knew when we were on run. [The drop-in center] is private property, so they –The only way they would call the police when we go to [the drop-in center] is if they felt like we were in danger. But they never called the police on me. They just called it on my sister because she came there with a black eye. They were like "She's in danger." So they called the police. But they never called the police on me there even though they knew we were runaways.*

Zi came to trust the drop-in center because it was one place where she felt safe and relatively confident she would not be arrested. Even so, it was years before she began using all the offered resources. In part, this was because being engaged with the outside world put her at risk of being placed back in JDC. Even going to school was dangerous.

> *I remember when I first started going there, I wasn't using them for what they could help me with. I would just go there and eat and hang around in the drop-in and then leave. It took me two years to finally use their resources and to get stuff done. In between the two years, my case manager would help me get into school, but then my social worker found out I was going to that school. I didn't want him to send the police there, so I had to stop going. They helped me out with some stuff before I used them to my full advantage.*
>
> *I felt safe there. They were very helpful. If I didn't have anywhere to take a shower, I could take a shower there. If I wanted to wash my clothes, I did that. They helped with just anything: helped me get an ID, my Social Security card, or documentation I need. I used to go there to do little jobs to get money when I didn't have any. I built relationships with staff there too.*

Over time, Zi came to appreciate not only the resources offered by the drop-in center, their ability and willingness to meet her basic needs, but she also took advantage of the activities that related to art, culture, and holiday celebrations.

> *I just enjoyed a lot of different projects at [the drop-in center], like Culture Club. We had to do this project. I have the book upstairs. It was, like, a month-long project. We'd go around the city to different areas and take pictures. We were taking a lot of pictures, and we made this book. It was called* Home Is Where the

> Heart Is. *We'd take pictures of homeless people, then pick a couple pictures and put it in a book and just tell a little bit about our stuff. This was around the time my mom died, so I wrote a poem about her. I joined different activities… When they had open mic, I read poetry.*
>
> *I was in the newspaper too—not the big newspaper, but I think it was* Star-Tribune*, when I graduated through [the drop-in center]. The camera was there, and I wrote a speech. They picked me to talk, and they interviewed me.*

Zi also recalled holidays spent at the drop-in center. Since she wasn't able to spend Thanksgiving or Christmas with her biological family, spending it with her chosen family at the drop-in center was the next best thing.

Finding support: Zi found supportive adults at the drop-in center, and these relationships changed and deepened over time.

> *I formed a relationship a couple times at [the drop-in center]. One was [with] my case manager, and he was just cool. I felt like I could talk to him about anything and everything. He always helped me with stuff that a caseworker is supposed to help you with, but I feel like he was more interested. He cared more—not just [for] his job, but more personal.*

Zi also formed an important relationship with a staff member named Jacky. In the beginning, she mistrusted Jacky and felt Jacky would report her and cause her to be sent back to JDC; however, the more she talked to Jacky, the more she came to trust her. Later, when Zi had to face some difficult challenges in life, Jacky was one of the first person he turned to for help and support. She also made friends at the drop-in center, and they are like family to her.

> *Yeah. I feel like I really didn't have a family, so I made my own. I have people I can call on that really aren't my family, but blood couldn't get us any closer.*
>
> *They all loved me there. I guess [they loved me] because I talk to everybody. If I talk to one more or told one staff more than the other, I still talked. I wasn't one of those youth that just went in there and didn't talk to anybody or was just mad at the world.*

Turning point: Zi's turning point came when she was 17. She decided that she was tired of "doing the same stuff" and submitted an application to the transitional living program.

> *When I moved in here, that's when I was like, "I want to get my GED." I started doing tutoring down here. I started doing that when I first moved in here, and when my mom died, I stopped taking the GED tests. I was very depressed. I stopped doing that, and then I finally started back up…[and] I got my GED in December, 2010. They were trying to help me find jobs and stuff like that. It took me forever to find a job. I just now found a real job, not doing temp service or internship. I just started working in December at Walgreens, and I'm very blessed to have that job.*

Although she has achieved much and has come far, Zi has suffered many losses, and these sometimes bring her to the brink of despair, causing her feel a desire to hurt herself.

Loss and more loss. Zi has been deeply affected by the deaths of many close people in her life. The first person she lost that she was close to was her grandpa, an important father figure in her life. Later, her cousin Christopher was killed during a robbery in Minneapolis. Soon after that, she lost a very close friend. The most difficult loss was in 2009, when Zi lost her mother. The connections she made with people at the drop-in center helped her get through that hard time. When she called and reported, "My mom just died. She is at the hospital," the two staff members she was closest to, Lily and Jacky, accompanied her to the hospital with her. Zi remembers Lily crying "real tears," genuinely saddened. Jacky made a cake for the funeral; Zi explained that even though she liked Lily and Jacky prior to that incident, their reaction profoundly deepened her connection to them. Lily remembers that time in Zi's life:

> *Zi and her sister came to Jacky and [me] and said, "My mom died. We have to go*

identify the body. What do we do? We have to go." Well, Jacky and I had never done that. So, like I said before, all we knew how to do is show up, so we walked with them.

And I think that's…ultimately, that's what this work is. You walk with people. You don't walk ahead. You don't have to follow behind. You're just walking with [them] so that's what we did.

Lily feels privileged to know such a strong, funny young woman with a "huge and caring heart." She shares, "She has allowed me to really see who she is, and I'm incredibly grateful for that."

Of all the people she has lost, Zi found her mother's passing to be especially hard. She reflected on her mother's life in a positive manner:

She wasn't a bad mom from the start. People make mistakes. People make choices they regret later on in life. At that time, that was her main priority: doing drugs and stuff. That changes people. I don't consider her a bad mom. She would have been a bad mom if she would have [kept] us in her life while she was on drugs.

Learning truths about her past. Zi did what few people ever have to do: She read about her life through the notes of her case manager and social workers. In her files, she discovered devastating information, but it helped her to better understand the people in her life. She described what it was like to read her file for the first time:

I can't remember when I was younger, but to be able to read the stuff… I think the case first opened in 1995, when I was 4. Then they closed it. It opened back up in 1998, when I was 7. That's when I became a ward of the state. Just seeing stuff like that… It hurt reading it. I didn't remember being at the park and my mom pass[ing] out. We couldn't wake her up and had to call the police. Reading that, I remember what happened, but reading how they put it into words and saying, "Zi said…" and, "Katrice said her mom…" I don't remember saying a lot of it. They really make parents out like they're bad. And my stepgrandma… The things she says in reports is all fake. She said all this stuff, but it wasn't true.

It was very difficult for Zi to read all that had happened during her time in foster care. While she and her siblings were sometimes placed together, they were separated

more frequently as they grew older; Zi resents the foster care system for this, and she believes this forced absence from her siblings caused her to act out:

They stopped putting me and my sister in the same foster homes because we used to be bad. One time, we were staying with these foster people. We had just moved in with them. I don't remember what happened that night, but I told my sister that the foster dad had hit me, but he really didn't. So we started fighting with the foster parents, and they called the police… I remember it was around her birthday, because we were supposed to go to Wisconsin Dells with my great-auntie's mom for her birthday… I remember the police came, and they [took] us to a lockdown facility. I remember my sister being mad because she was like, "This is all your fault." [By fighting with the foster parents], she was just having my back as being my sister. They stopped putting us together in group and foster homes because we would always get into it with either another foster sibling or foster mom or dad.

That's when I started being more bad. I'm in the system, and I can't be in the system with somebody I love? We're both in the system, but we're both going through this by ourselves basically. It doesn't make any sense.

Zi also learned from the files that her mother had been writing to her while she was in Nevada, but her grandmother confiscated those letters. She feels great sadness that she was never able to read the letters and grew up thinking her mom didn't care:

I used to tell myself that I hated my mom because I felt like she never tried to reach out to me when I was in Nevada, but I [didn't know] she was trying to. In this writing class…the teacher told us to write a letter to someone that we wanted to ask question. I asked, "How come you never called or tried to talk to me all those years?" It was, like, a five-page letter, just asking questions and just telling her how I felt.

Recently, Zi's father got drunk and told Zi's older sister the truth about their stepsister's allegations of sexual abuse: "Yeah. I did it. I did touch Celia. I'm sorry." Nevertheless, part of Zi still does not want to believe it.

Forgiveness. Part of Zi's journey has required forgiving her mother and her sister. She shared the following about her feelings toward her sister:

I used to blame [my sisters] like, "You guys are the reason we're back in the system. Dad didn't touch you guys." My sister Katrice….lied and said my dad touched her, too, just so they would believe Ava. I used to hate my sister for that. I used to tell her, "I hate you, Katrice." I used to be mad, like, "You're the reason we're back in the system. We were good at my dad's. We didn't want for nothing. Yeah, he whooped us and stuff like that, but we went to school every day, and we had clean clothes on our back[s]." I was mad about the whole thing. She finally told the truth, like, "Dad never really touched me. I just did it to help Ava out, so they would believe it." I was mad about that whole situation.

Zi also shared the following about the act of forgiving her mother; however, it did take the young woman a while to get to this point:

I feel like I'm better now because I forgave her before she died. It's not eating me up inside like it is my sister. She never forgave my mom. She was always mean to my mom and then nice and then mean because she felt like my mom owed her something. I could just hear my mom's voice, like, "I don't owe you nothing." That's true. She [didn't] owe us anything. What she did in her past was her past. Forget a little bit, or we're going to deal with it, and it's just going to make our relationship worse.

I'm just glad I told my mom before she died, "I forgive you. People make mistakes. I know it wasn't your intention [to give] us up. You didn't have us and like, 'I know I'm going to give them up.' I learned to be able to forgive you for everything."

It took, for me, the time that I was living with her, getting to really know my mom and just see that she wasn't a very happy person. Before she died, I realized she started to become happy again. My mom [had] been through a lot of stuff. I realize that. I guess [for] some people, it's hard, and [for] some people, it's not. [For] some people, it's harder to let go, and some just can't let go. I'm the type that just lets go and forgives.

Learning to believe in herself: Zi's greatest challenges has been overcoming her fears and learning to believe in herself:

I had to overcome my fear of feeling like I can't accomplish things. I was down on myself and doubting myself like, "I can't do it." But I learned from a couple people, "Stop doubting yourself and telling yourself you can't do it. You don't know if you can do it or not if you haven't attempted or tried to do it." I had to

overcome that fear to be where I'm at now. I had to tell myself, "You want better for yourself, Zi. You want to be more than what your mom was, more than what your dad was, more than what their mom and dad were. You don't want to keep this cycle going, the same cycle." I just told myself, "I want better for myself. I want to live a happy life. I don't want to always be sad, down, and depressed like my mom was, blaming everybody for [it]."

Today, she has made great strides and feels like a changed person. This has strained her relationship with her sister, however, as she has not made these same changes.

All of a sudden, I woke up one day, and I needed change. It was a process. I'm still working on it. I'm just a whole different, changed person. I still have my father and things I deal with by myself.

I tell my sister all the time that our relationship isn't the same anymore. After my mom died, we argue and argue more. We fight more physically. I told her, "You have to change yourself before anybody can change you. Before our relationship can be better, you need to deal with what you're going through. You need to deal with that, and maybe we can have a better relationship. But you have things bottled up inside of you. You have animosity and anger toward all the wrong people. You need to deal with that." She hasn't dealt with that, so our relationship is not good. I had to overcome a lot of stuff to be able to try to be where I'm at now.

Where she is now. Zi is rightfully proud to have her own place, a job, and her GED. She is proud that her depression does not get the best of her, as often as it used to. Now that she has her GED, stable housing, and the support of caring people in her life, she has turned her attention to other goals she would like to achieve in her near and distant future.

I'm trying to better my life. I was going to school for medical assisting, but I stopped going because I started working. I'm trying to get back into school so I [can] finish that. I was trying to get my diploma for medical assisting and then go back to school for criminal justice. I just wanted a job right away. I just took my placement tests and passed, so I'm about to start school for medical assisting. Next, I'm going to school for criminal justice, because I want to be a parole

officer. Right now, I'm just working, just trying to take care of business. I planted my butt for so many years, finally growing up basically, just trying to get things done.

Zi feels as if she has created a home for herself in her apartment through the transitional living program, and she is grateful for a secure, stable place to live in while she works on other areas of her life, like getting her GED and finding a job.

I've been here almost four years. It's home. I'll be happy when I move, but I don't want to move unless I know I'm ready. I don't want to struggle again. I'm scared to become homeless again, especially being grown and feeling like I don't have as much resources as I did when I was younger. People don't want no grown people living with them. That's what made me keep this housing for so long. I just don't want to see myself back out in the streets.

I'm [always thankful] for this place, even though I don't like it because of the rules and stuff. If it weren't for this place, I don't know where I'd be. It's not like I could stay with my mom still or just run back to her. If I never got into this place, I don't know where I'd be.

She appreciates that the staff at her TLP know her and watch out for her.

I have my days when I feel depressed, and I feel down and don't want to talk to nobody. I got really close with Cherise, [who] works here. She knows when something's wrong. I never knew that until a couple weeks ago. We were talking, [and] she was like, "You may not know, but staff you choose to talk to or choose to let get to know you, we know when something's wrong." If I walk in here and I'm like, "Hi," and keep going, that's not like me. Whenever Cherise is here, I'll come in and sit and talk to her for maybe five minutes or a couple hours. I sat down and cried to her about situations with my sister and just life situations. She knows when something's wrong. So does my case manager. If I don't talk to her or I just walk by her office, she'll text me like, "Are you all right?" She knows. "Have you seen your therapist or psychiatrist? Do you need to talk to somebody at [the drop-in center]?"

She is ready to move forward with her education, and she credits the support she has gotten at the drop-in center and the TLP as crucial to her success.

They helped me by realizing my worth… wanting me to better myself and get my education and find housing and just be secured and just be okay. They helped me

with that. The staff….even though this is [the TLP], they're through [the drop-in center]… "Go to your tutoring and go to this and do this. You can do it, Zi." They helped a lot in that role as far as me completing it and getting it done, having people by my side, really bothering me about doing it and getting it done. They helped me with that. I think if they weren't there to help, I'd probably still be trying to finish doing my GED, still trying to accomplish that. That's cool that they helped me with that.

Recently, Zi was hospitalized because she hurt herself. She was depressed at the thought of her upcoming birthday, the anniversary of her cousin's death. She went through a hard time and felt as if there was no longer a reason to live. However, when she found out her sister is pregnant, that gave her plenty of motivation to carry on. Zi is looking forward to being an aunt. She has plenty of reasons to stick around, and she hopes to show her niece what it is like to be truly loved.

Kicked Out

The second category of youth are those who were kicked out. This occurs for a number of reasons. It is not clear from the case study why Isiah's adoptive family moved across the country without him, telling him that he was no longer welcome in their home. Ladybug was kicked out because she and her mother fought often, and her mother deemed her "too hard to handle." Julia's and Pearl's parents kicked them out because they were gay; in Julia's case, the homophobia was a result of the family's deep religious affiliation. Kicked-out youths are more likely to have ties to their family members (albeit inconsistent and not always supportive) than their peers who grew up in the system. Their case studies are very revealing.

Isiah

Isiah is a laidback, tall, 22-year-old African American. A staff person describes him as someone who “has a smile that lights up a room.” He likes to have fun, but he can also be serious and has a very determined streak. Isiah was born in Milwaukee and grew up in Wisconsin. He has early memories of being in foster care, until he was 8 years old and was adopted by a large family. As a teenager, Isiah was aware that his biological mother resided in Minneapolis, and he met with her briefly when he was 16. It was for this reason that he was drawn to Minnesota when it came time to choose a college; he enrolled at Augsburg College at the age of 18. Isiah’s adoptive parents and seven siblings moved to North Carolina just a week after Isiah left for college, and they did not forewarn him that they were moving. As Isiah put it, “They moved to North Carolina, and I wasn’t invited.”

Becoming homeless. Isiah completed his freshman year, but the following summer, when classes ended, he had no home to go back to, no money, and no support system. He remembers his merge into homelessness being a very terrifying moment in his life.

> *I tried to get in contact with my adopt[ive] parents, and they basically said I was on my own because I was 18. They actually moved to North Carolina…so I went to live with my real grandma in Madison, but she was sick. I came out to live with my mom, but she lived in transitional living, so I couldn’t… I basically hopped on a bus to Minneapolis from Madison, and I didn’t know what to think or where I was going. That’s how I got homeless.*
>
> *When I got here… I don’t know. I actually cried because I couldn’t get in contact with my mom, and I had nowhere to go. It was hard. I’m just thankful it was summertime.*

Since Isiah's mother resided in a transitional living program, he could only stay with her a few nights a week. On other nights, he had to find elsewhere to sleep. He had no friends or other relatives in Minneapolis, so he was forced to sleep in public places or stay at the adult shelter until a bed in a youth shelter opened up. His mother suggested that the adult shelter might be a good place for him to stay.

> *When I checked into the [adult shelter], that's when I knew I was by myself. It was scary. I stayed there for two months. I didn't get no sleep… I'd never been through nothing like that. I couldn't trust anybody. It was weird. I slept right next to somebody I didn't know. Then things got stolen from me. It became very hard to sleep… It was hard to find things to do during the day. It was hard to get a job because I didn't have an ID or my certificate. It was frustrating. I was actually waiting to get into [a youth shelter]. I kept calling and calling, but there was never an opening. I tried to stay there for two months.*

Finding support. While he was homeless, Isiah visited several drop-in centers, although he preferred one over the others and spent more time there. He did not know much about the drop-in center when he first started going there, but he remembers being told, it was "a place for people my age to hang out, get stuff, like school and jobs. You're expected to make progress in your life, not just kick it." When asked what he thought about this, he replied:

> *I didn't mind it. Progress was what I wanted. I'd never gone through this. I'd always had it easy. I wanted to actually work for something, get stable again, get an apartment, get a job, and do what I had to do to achieve that.*

He liked that they had high expectations of him and wanted him to do well. He recalls that the staff also supported him by providing him with dinner and helping him get food stamps, general assistance, or anything else he needed. He also took Independent Learning Skills (ILS) classes. He found ILS helpful for learning about "budgeting, living

on your own, life skills, job-searching," and he described how he uses what he learned in ILS in his current life.

> *Right now, I budget, and I do job-searching. I have a professional résumé, so I'm looking for a new job. They help me with interview skills. Just living on my own, I prepare my own meals and all that stuff. That really helps you out.*

Being in the adult shelter without money inspired Isiah to work tirelessly to find a job:

> *I was really focused on getting a job. They woke us up. We had to leave at, like, six or something. I'd go to the library until ten, and I'd be there all day, looking for jobs. Or I'd do side things… Craigslist…you go on there and look…. I helped people move and stuff like that. There were events or studies that you can do for somebody. There was a food test I did. I made some money [even without] a job. I took advantage of the opportunities that were there.*

Navigating the social side of the drop-in center was more challenging, when it came to forming relationships with other youth as well as staff.

> *It was awkward. I didn't know nobody. All the kids had their little groups they hung out with. I just sat by myself for a while. I'd come for dinner [and] go to the class. I probably did that for a couple weeks until I started meeting some people through sports and stuff like that. [Meeting staff] was awkward, because they ask a lot of questions. I didn't really know them, so I didn't know how much to share [or] how much not to.*

Isiah did not open up at the drop-in center until he made a meaningful connection with one of the staff. This staff person, a case manager named Liam, spoke to Isiah repeatedly during his visits there.

> *One person kind of opened me up, Liam. We actually started talking. He had this cool sense, like he was someone I could trust. He came up to me a lot of times, trying to talk to me, and I really didn't say nothing to him. He kept on trying. I knew he actually cared.*

Isiah is most impressed when staff helps him because they care, not just because he or she is on the clock. Liam was a very supportive, positive influence in Isiah's life in many ways:

I had a job interview downtown. I had to work that day, so [Liam] offered to give me a ride to the interview, and he actually stuck around, waiting… It took, like, thirty minutes, and he gave me a ride back. He actually helped me prepare for the interview. He wasn't even on the clock. That's what I really appreciated.

He would actually come to some of my basketball games. I actually liked that, because that was one of our connections. We were both sports fans. I appreciated that he [came]. It was a great feeling.

He actually worked in my apartment complex for a while… It was good to have him there because he actually knew stuff about me. I didn't have to explain everything. He knew what made me mad. He just got me, so it was easy to talk to him about stuff. If I needed to talk to him about something, then I could just pull him aside and tell him, "I have something important to talk to you about." He would just be there for me, in the best way he could… He would help me with my budget and give me a ride sometimes. He would help me with my job search, make sure everything is okay with me mentally and physically, take me to appointments when I need them, and help me get to job interviews.

Isiah also connected with his counselor. There was a period of time when his biological mom was using drugs, and it strained their emerging relationship. The drug use put a wedge between them, and that was difficult for Isiah to deal with. His counselor was someone he could really talk to: "I really opened up to her during our sessions. I usually don't talk to anybody. I usually always felt better afterward, just letting it all out instead of holding it all in."

For Isiah, sports were one way he could make connections with other young people. As a staff person described, "Basketball is Isiah's passion and joy, and sports are his interests. He's a dynamic basketball player. He has amazing skill." Isiah made many friends on the basketball court at the drop-in center, some of whom he still has today.

They have a smoke break [at the drop-in center]. I don't smoke, so I'd go outside and shoot hoops and play two-on-two with some people who came out there. That's how I really got to know people. A lot of people I met here, I still talk to. They're very close. There are some people who actually live in my apartment

complex. Our relationship has really grown. I try to stay in contact with people… I'm not from here, so I don't have a lot of friends. I try to meet new people.

Some of the friends he made at the drop-in center live in the same permanent supportive housing program where he now resides. They hang out in the community room, watch TV, and play videogames. Even surrounded by these friends, however, he does not feel he truly has anyone to talk to:

I like to keep that to myself or with someone that I've known for a really long time. My best friends back home, I can [talk to]. Since I've only been here four years, there's really no one I've known long enough to trust.

He has been living in permanent supportive housing for more than two years, and his apartment feels like home. To Isiah, it is "a place where [I] can go and lock the door. [I] don't have to worry about being attacked or anything. [I] have that space just for [me]."

Turning point. When Isiah was first homeless and living in the adult shelter, he was very depressed:

The bottom was very hard, just living. It was very hard to just try to stay happy. I had contact with friends, but I was living at Catholic Charities. It was hard to hold conversations with them or be happy, because I knew my situation. I've always been a happy person. I'd never gone through adversity like [that] before. It was very hard to be down that low. I'd never even imagined I could.

At "the bottom," though, he found a new source of internal strength, drive, and motivation. He reflects that although he was always focused, he has become even more focused and driven since becoming homeless:

When I first became homeless, I was down in the dumps, like, "Why me? What am I going to do? How am I going to get through this?" I never had to face anything like [that] before. Then one day, I was thinking, "I'm down here, and the only way is up. Why not keep on going?"

Basically one day I was sitting in the [adult] shelter, just looking at the people

there, like, 40 or 50 years old. I decided I don't want to be like that when I'm that old. I'm going to straighten up now and be stable. That's been my push. I hate depending on people for things. I just want to get back to where I used to be.

Being in the situation, if you give up on yourself and you don't have no drive for yourself, no one else going to push you if you don't want to be pushed.

A staff person who has known him for a long time remembers seeing this motivation when he started coming to the drop-in center:

I remember seeing his case manager coming over with him frequently and getting him connected, making sure he's going to get connected with other staff. He has more follow-through, generally speaking. A lot of youth come in, and they're in that pre-contemplation. They're not clear on what they want. They may be like, "I just want to get into housing," but they aren't ready to take the steps. Isiah, fortunately, was at a higher level and was ready to move into action and do the legwork that needed to be done and the follow-through. [He] kind of had that diligence.

Youth and adult shelters. Isiah had very different experiences at youth and adult shelters:

At the adult shelters, it's more…throw a mat on the floor. There are, like, 100 people in there. The food is ridiculous. The place is really dirty to me. When I got to [the youth shelter], it was actually like a house. I had my own room. The staff cooked dinner, breakfast, [and] lunch. It felt like home, in a way. There [were] also classes, like [Independent Living Skills]. It felt safer. I didn't have to worry about anything.

As a result of these experiences, Isiah feels young people should be able to access services separate from adults until they are 25 or 30 years old.

After spending two months in the adult shelter, visiting drop-in centers, and calling youth shelters every day, he was finally able to move into a youth shelter. He was at the youth shelter for four months before moving into permanent supporting housing (PSH). Isiah recalls his first night at the youth shelter:

I was happy, but I was nervous because I didn't know how that was going to be,

how it was run… I had my duffle bag with my clothes and a garbage bag full of personal items. Then I hopped on the 19 bus, and they took me right there. When I got in, I had to do a long intake. They asked me a lot of questions. Then I got to eat some food and do my laundry. Right after that, I went to my room and got it all situated. Then I watched some TV; I hadn't seen TV in two months. That was a warm feeling. I liked it. There were other people there my age, and I was much more comfortable.

The intake questions were difficult for Isiah to answer though. "I had to tell somebody I didn't know a lot of stuff. They did ask some personal questions. It was hard to tell them and be open." Still, he understands why the questions had to be asked. As he sees it, "You want to make sure you have a good fit of people in one place. If you don't know somebody so well, you don't know what to expect."

Isiah described what a typical day was like in the youth shelter:

They woke us up at eight or nine a.m., and I'd shower and eat breakfast. Then I would just watch a little TV, and then you either had to leave from one to four p.m. to job-search or do something, or you could stay there and do some class. They gave us that option. Then I'd usually leave and look around and job-search. Then, once I got back around four, I'd just sit around on the computer or something. I'd wait for dinner. Some of the people who lived there… We'd play games or something—board games or card games. Then we had chores we had to do every day. I'd get that done. We had to go to sleep, I think, on weekdays at eleven and weekends, like, one or something.

Basically, the rules were that there was no fighting. Each person had a goal plan. You have to make steps to your goal plan if you're going to stay there. If one of your goals [is] to get in school, you have to show that you're trying to get in school or get a job. You always had to do your chores. No contact with other people, like relationships or anything like that. Yeah, that's really it. It was basically just your goal plan. If you weren't doing your goal plan, they had a problem with that.

Sports. As previously mentioned, athletics have always been central to Isiah's life. In high school, he ran track and played football and basketball, and he continued basketball and track while in college. He currently plays in an indoor football league and

a basketball league at the Target Center. He likes playing in these leagues because it keeps him busy when he is not at work and adds some fun to his life. This outlet has been of great physical and social benefit for Isiah. Because he is shy and often quiet, sports are essential, as they allow him to make connections with people—both youth and adults—that he might not be able to make otherwise, at least not as deeply.

Goals for his future. Some of Isiah's goal plans were to find his own place, get a job, and to start paying off his student loan. Another was to build a relationship with his mother. At the youth shelter, his case manager helped him work toward all of these goals, and one of the most important aspects of that was to help him realize why his mother gave him up for adoption.

> *I got good support. They had basically anything I needed. When I moved there, I didn't have ID or a birth certificate. They got those for me. They also helped me answer a question I always had, why my mom gave me up. They actually…sent a letter to the court system [and] got the court files for me to see what happened.*

While Isiah did not discuss what he learned, he did express that access to those court records revealed truths and answered questions he'd long held, and that meant a lot to him.

Isiah was excited when he finally achieved another goal, securing his own apartment:

> *It felt great because I've lived on my own in the dorm, but this is an apartment. It was exciting to get the opportunity to live by myself in a new apartment complex that was just built. It was very exciting. I didn't have regrets [about leaving the youth shelter], but I missed it. When I found out I got it, I didn't want to go because I felt comfortable right where I was. I felt at home. Then I was like, "I have to do this," and I decided to go.*

The expectations for Isiah at the housing program are similar to those he

experienced at the drop-in center and the youth shelter:

> *It was like [the youth shelter] again. You have your goal plan. You're expected to pay your rent on time. You're supposed to meet with your case manager to set up a budget. You're expected to have a job. If you don't, they'll help you out. They want you to progress, not take a step back. It's different here, the rules about relationships. They don't care. It is an apartment. But fighting? They take that seriously, so there's none of that.*

The transition was made even smoother by the fact that the person he connected with at the drop-in center, Liam, was now working at the apartment complex and became his case manager; however, Liam has since left, so once again, Isiah feels he has no one to talk to.

Where he is now. Currently, Isiah is searching for his own apartment outside the permanent supportive housing program. He is also working toward paying off his student loans and looking for a new job. He does work as a sales associate at a thrift store, a volunteer position that became a paid one after three months of work; he reached his two-year anniversary of employment with the thrift store in April of 2013.

> *I want to find a better job, so I've been actively looking. I try to fill out five job applications a day. It's time-consuming, and it's hard—especially knowing you're [probably] not going to hear from all of them or maybe not even one… I'm looking for something retail, like, customer service. I've applied to Marshalls, Macy's, Target, [and] Walmart.*

In spite of his longing for a new and better job, it has meant a lot to Isiah to have stable housing for two years:

> *It's meant a lot to have my apartment… If you have that, you can focus on other things. Other things just seem to come around in a circle. Once you're stable, you can find new jobs. You can get rentals and a rental history so you can find something else to move into.*

A typical day for Isiah involves working from ten a.m. to four p.m., Monday

through Friday. He plays basketball and football in the evenings and on weekends. After work, when he is not playing sports, he heads back to the apartment complex to hang out with friends, play videogames, relax, and watch movies.

> *It's good, but it's not good enough. Just having my own place? That is good. Working is good. But I think I could do better. Having my own-own apartment [would be better]. My job isn't the worst job in the world, but finding something [that pays] more and [is fun would be] better—just being able to be financially stable and not having to worry, "Should I pay for this, or should I pay for that?" That would be better. I like to look at the big picture. Things are good now, but I'm trying to make them better and get where I want to go.*

Developing and maintaining this positive outlook, despite everything he has gone through, has been one of Isiah's greatest challenges.

> *Being homeless, there's nothing positive. Being able to wake up every day and go on with my business. Even though I know I don't have a place, not knowing what to expect was really hard. Probably the second thing was just knowing if I was going to get out of it. Here, they gave me courage. I was optimistic, but it was hard to be. Once you're homeless, it's very hard to find something: an apartment, a job. That's the hardest thing.*
>
> *I'm most proud that I didn't give up, and I asked for help, which is something I rarely do. I don't like asking for things. I don't like depending on people, but this is a situation where I had to. I gave in and looked for help. I'm very proud of that, because that's very hard for me to do.*
>
> *The situation has been new to me, but I wouldn't change it. I tell people [that] all the time… Going through this could be what I needed to get through life. Life isn't easy. You have your bumps through the road. But if you go through adversity, you're going to be ready for it.*

Feelings about his family. Isiah's adoptive family knows nothing about the life he is leading now. Isiah has four brothers and three sisters, all of whom were also adopted. Other than one brother whom he occasionally talks to on Facebook, he has not had any interactions with his family in nearly four years.

> *The last time I talked to them, I was in college. It was over Christmas. They don't*

know what I've gone through in the past four years. I kind of have a grudge against them, but not really. I kind of let it go. I haven't made any effort to make contact with them.

Just the situation that they put me in… I thought it was a setup. I was going to college in August of 2009, and they moved. I left August 22, and they moved August 25, to North Carolina. I didn't find out until halfway through college. That's always been my thing. I paid my own way to college. When I was younger, I saved [up] all my money, but going to college…just drained me. If I knew that situation was going to happen, I would have been more prepared. It was, like, a curveball.

Isiah has faced a lot of emotional trauma and has had to work through hard feelings about his birth mom and his adoptive family:

My birth mom… I had to let that go, because she helped me a lot in this whole situation… She sat me down and explained some things, so that made it easier to let go. I started fresh and just… She has been helping me out, looking out. With my adoptive parents, that's going to be motivation, to be honest. I believe they did me wrong. I'm not going to let that break me or anything. I'm going to continue living my life and reach the goals I set.

Access to a therapist was important in helping him work through these feelings, helping him understand how to let go of some and reframe others. He credits his time with his therapist as integral to his progress toward achieving his goals. Letting go of grudges has been freeing for Isiah, and his therapist was a key factor in that success.

What he wants others to know. Isiah wants people to know just how hard it is to try to make it on your own when you are 18 years old:

It's hard to go through these things, especially if you've never gone through anything. It's hard to become an adult [when] you don't even know how to ask for help. It's hard to be happy when you're going through the situation. It's hard to talk about the situation. It's scary too. Sometimes I've been scared.

The drop-in center has played a crucial role in helping Isiah get where he is now:

Having [the drop-in center] means a lot. It's hard to ask for help. To have a place where you can come and ask for help and not feel bad about it is great. There are

> *a lot of people here who care and want to help you, and it's just a safe place to be when you don't have nowhere to go.*

Isiah appreciates that the people at the drop-in center, the youth shelter, and in his permanent supportive house program have been patient with him and have believed in him.

> *They were very patient. Getting somewhere you want to go takes time. They know that. I know that. Them just being there throughout the whole process helped me out. Throwing stuff at me like apartments, transitional living places, shelters… They believed in me. They made me feel like I could do anything.*

If he was going to talk to a young person who was experiencing homelessness, Isiah would encourage them to have hope. "Everything is going to be all right. Just stay focused. Don't give up. There are people here who care about you and who want to see you succeed. If you put everything into it, you're eventually going to get there."

Julia

Julia is a quiet, kind, young African American-Caucasian woman who was born in north Minneapolis. She was raised by strict Jehovah's Witnesses, and her parents were verbally abusive and very controlling. She is the youngest of six siblings, three boys and three girls. Her father is particularly abusive; Julia has stated that she doesn't believe he truly loves his children. Currently, Julia's oldest brother lives in a western suburb of Minnesota with his wife and his children, and her older sister lives in a northern suburb with her husband and two children. Her three younger siblings still live at home.

Julie describes herself as very quiet, shy, sweet, caring, and generous. She says people sometimes mistake her quietness for "weirdness," but she is really just someone

who prefers to sit and observe, until she feels comfortable enough to open up.

When Julia's mother first found out that Julia is homosexual, she tried to shame and scare her straight. She referred to her daughter as "disgusting" and told her she would be plagued by HIV and/or AIDS. She also heaped guilt upon the girl, telling her that she would negatively affect her siblings, nieces, and nephews. Julia took this as hurtful and hypocritical; she could not understand why her mother would stay with a hurtful father who mistreated his children and family but would not accept Julia herself, who was not truly hurting anyone:

> *I told my mom that, and she was like, "Stop bringing it up, because I can't control him. I can't help that." I said, "You can kick him out of your house. That's what you can do. He might be a white man, and you're a black woman, but that doesn't matter. If he's treating you bad and all the kids… Why do you think your kids are getting in trouble? Do you think they're going to take his side and live with him?"*
>
> *The only reason my mom stayed with him was for money, so she didn't have to work. She thought all the kids were going to go to him. My dad works all the time, and I'm pretty sure he doesn't want us. That's just BS.*

It hurts Julia that her mother is only willing to extend forgiveness and patience to their father, while casting blame and judgment on her. When asked what she wishes she could say to her mother, she offered this response:

> *You're telling me I have to watch what I'm doing, even though you actually weren't watching what they were doing? Did I get affected when my sister got pregnant at the age of 18? Or when my brother left when he was 16 or 17 and went to California, and I didn't have nobody to protect me? Or when my dad told me when I was 9 to get out of his life, for no reason? What about the people you tried to keep in my life [who] are hurting me? What makes you think the stuff you're doing is not hurting me? Calling your child "disgusting" and telling them they're going to die? That's not hurting anybody?*
>
> *I'm not hurting anybody. I haven't, [and] I'm not going to… It's just crazy that my mom is so…but I'm not hurting anybody.*

Becoming homeless. Julia was attending an alternative high school, and her mother sometimes kept her home simply because she did not like the way Julia chose to dress; she preferred skirts and dresses to the girl's choice of jeans and hoodies. It was very important to Julia's mother that her daughters dress in stereotypically feminine fashions, and she was often critical and verbally abusive about Julia's choice of attire:

> *She didn't let me wear boxers, and if she noticed I had [them] on, she wouldn't take me to school, or she would make me change and then take me… Then she would yell at me when she would drive me to school, to the point where I was crying and in tears in first hour. [I was] late, with tears in my eyes, because my mom treated me like shit. [She] just forced so much on me.*

One summer, Julia's mom decided to go through her room and confiscate anything she considered inappropriate, including the girl's ear-gauging supplies, her lip rings, and any of her belongings with rainbows on them, since the symbol is often associated with gay pride. When Julia told her school counselor about this, the counselor said, "Oh, it's time for you to leave, because obviously, she's taking it too far." At the same time, her mother was trying to scare, guilt, and shame Julia into being straight, and she eventually gave her daughter an ultimatum: "Act like a girl and like boys." If she didn't comply, she would have to leave or suffer being disowned. So, the day came when Julia finally opted to leave, even at the risk of becoming homeless.

> *My mom said, "It's time to go," and I was like, "Okay." I got my stuff, and I called one of my friends. She is like my sister. I called her to pick me up, and I stayed with her for two months. After that, I stayed for a week at my best friend's house.*

Finding support. When Julia approached her high school counselor to discuss the shaming and verbal abuse and threats she was experiencing at home, the counselor recommended that Julia join LGBT groups so she could learn to feel more comfortable

with herself, as well as receive some much-needed support. Julia took the counselor's advice and joined an LGBT support group at her school. There, she encountered an outreach worker, and she spoke to that worker about various support and housing programs available in the community.

One event she attended at her high school was particularly memorable because it helped Julia realize there were other young people struggling, just like she was:

> *When I was [in] high school, they took me to this leadership conference. I did not want to leave. It was so amazing. It was on all these youth, and they all had…either they were homeless, or their family was abusive. There was something that wasn't right in their life. Just hearing other youth—the same story, kind of—just made me feel better that I wasn't the only one. It might be rough, but it's not as rough as [it is for] the other person.*
>
> *One of the speakers [asked] a question, and if it applied to us, he would have us move up one or stand up or something: "Have you ever tried to commit suicide? Have you ever been abused in any form, physically or verbally?" Seeing all the other people stand up or move up was just interesting, [and] youths from my school [did] it too. I wasn't the only one. [Before that], I felt like I was the only one trying to stay focused in school and get my high school diploma, keeping my grades up by staying positive as I was, but I was really struggling, because every time I went home, I hated it. I was [basically] tortured. I felt like I was in prison. There were so many rules. I couldn't do anything.*

Another experience Julia appreciated was being able to work with an intern at a youth shelter, someone who was training to be an art therapist

> *We did all these cool projects. She got a bunch of magazines, and she told me to pick out the ones [of interest] to me. I would pick out different pictures, and I would put it on this little piece of paper. Then, she [asked] me, "What's the reason for this picture? What does it mean to you? Do you see yourself like this? Do you want it to be pictures of who you want to be? How do you think your life is? Do you think you have a great life?" [and] stuff like that. "Do you want to have money? Do you want to have a nice car?" Whatever [I] picked, she wanted a reason…and the meaning.*

Living with a host family. When Julia left home, her counselor called the drop-in

center to help connect Julia with many valuable resources. From a case manager at the drop-in center, Julia learned about an LGBT host home program. She met with Kiko, from the host home program, and completed an application. When they met the second time, she perused profiles of potential host homes. After Julia selected a family, Kiko called and set up a time to meet; Julia eventually moved in with the second family she met, a family of three. She liked Michelle, Kara, and their 3-year-old daughter, Liv, immediately.

> *I met with them, and they were so awesome. I love them to death [to] this day. Then I met with them, like, on a Monday. They wanted to do another meeting with just me and the host, so on Wednesday, we went to this fancy Italian restaurant. They have a lot of money, so they took me to this really fancy restaurant, and I tried mussels for the first time. It was good. Then, that Saturday, I moved in.*

The rules and expectations vary from host home to host home. In the home Julia chose to live in, those rules were geared toward keeping people and pets safe in the home, maintaining a family schedule, and absolutely no tolerance of theft.

> *They had animals, two Great Danes… I loved those dogs. They had a Lab, and they had two cats and five fish. They had [a rule,] "Don't harm the animals," which I wasn't going to. And mostly, [there was] "Don't harm Liv," which I would never put a finger on that little girl. I love that little girl. She's like my little sister.*
>
> *They just didn't want anybody over during the week, any of my friends. Sometimes I could have [company] but usually not. They didn't want anybody to spend the night during the week, but [on] weekends, [they] could. It's such a short night, because Kara got off of work at six p.m., and then they put Liv to bed at eight p.m. or eight thirty. They had her in a school, Montessori school. They didn't want her to be unable to sleep. Kara had to get up really early in the morning for work. She had to be at work at, like, seven thirty a.m. They'd rather me have people over during the weekend…and if I decided to spend the night at my friend's house, [I had] to let them know at a decent time.*
>
> *They didn't really care about material things. If you steal it or one of your friends*

steals it, yeah, that sucks, but it's just material. It's not somebody's life. I can always go and buy a new CD or a new iPod, but I can't go and get the same little girl or same animal. They were like, "You can do whatever. Just don't harm the animals or the little girl." I wasn't going to put a finger on them. I love each and every one of them. That was all the rules they had really.

For Julia, some of the greatest advantages of living in the host home were having someone to talk to and learning what a supportive family can feel like.

To me, that's how a family is supposed to be. When I lived with them, we would sit down at a table and eat, and conversate. At my parents' house, they don't do that. We did that when we were young, when we were toddlers, [but] we stopped doing that a long time ago. At Michelle and Kara's, we sat down every night and talked and ate dinner together. I was able to talk to them. I was comfortable talking to them about everything.

She was also able to be open about her girlfriend, something she never could have done in her parents' home.

She lived with them for almost a year and was sad when she had to move on. She realizes now that she was not doing what she needed to in order to stay in their home, and she wishes she'd made different choices. Julia did graduate from high school while she was living there, and Michelle and Kara wanted her to continue into a postsecondary education. Unfortunately, the school was far from her home, and it took her two hours to get there by bus. As a result, she often missed the first hour of school, and her grades began to suffer.

I [am] kind of sad that I left. I wasn't doing what I was supposed to when I was at their house. Well, I was…going to school, but I wasn't taking it serious. I just wasn't doing as well, and I was getting discouraged.

I wish I would have stayed longer, and I did what I was supposed to. I was really trying to find a job. It kind of looks bad because I literally found a job not even a month after I moved out. [That] makes it look like I wasn't trying before, but I was.

Leaving the host home was one of the most difficult things Julia has ever had to do in her life, and she still misses Michelle and Kara a lot.

> *Now that I don't live there, I don't see them often, and I don't talk to them often… I had so much support there, and I was able to talk to them about everything. Now that I'm not there, I barely talk to them. The last time I seen [sic] them was [three months ago]. They took me out to a restaurant downtown for a late birthday dinner, which was really nice. That was the last time…and I miss them a lot. They're, like, my parents…my other family.*
>
> *I miss the support, because I would like to come home and talk to them… I called them a couple weeks after I moved out, and I never called them when I lived there. I just texted them. So they were, like, awkward. We had an awkward conversation. It was over the phone, but I missed them and wanted to talk to them. I do want to see them again.*

After leaving the host home, Julia transferred to [Minneapolis Technical and Community College] (MCTC) and graduated in June. It saddened her that her host family did not learn about her graduation until a few months later.

Julia felt that even when she was trying her hardest in school or in her job search, she still did not live up to her host family's expectations.

> *They had very big expectations, and they want you to go to school or have a good job. They just wanted me to be successful and go to school and get good grades, or at least have a part-time job so I could have money. I tried to get a job at Kohl's. Kara [even] gave me a reference to talk to the corporate people. They gave me two interviews, and she told me [about] the interview questions. I did exactly what they said, and they didn't hire me. So I don't know. I think Kohl's doesn't like me. It kind of sucked that I didn't get the job. I did get an internship at a thrift store, which I did for, like, four months while I was there. It wasn't bad, but I'd rather have a better job—or at least did school better. I wasn't [living] up to their expectations.*

Her first apartment. While living in the host home, Julia applied for an apartment with a transitional living program (TLP). She also worked with a case manager at a drop-in center, Anne, as it was a requirement of the TLP program. Six months later,

Julia received a letter that provided her with a number to call if she was still interested in an apartment. She responded that she was approved, then went to the TLP to complete the application process.

> *After you got approved, they had you do an intake, pretty much like you do [at the drop-in center]. They ask you if you have any theft or felonies. "Have you ever abused anybody? Have you ever tried to kill yourself?" They would ask you questions about that to make sure [they're] not bringing [in] somebody who shouldn't be in the [the TLP] because they'll harm everybody else. After that, you get a letter from Section 8, [with] your appointment. Then they tell you your move-in date, [and] you move in.*

After she left the host home, Julia spent one night at a youth shelter before she moved into the TLP. The shelter did not have a room for her, but they were able to set up an emergency bed.

One of the first things Julia did when she moved into her first apartment was to go over the rules and expectations with a staff person. She recalls that most of the rules related to visitors: visiting hours, the number of guests, overnight stays, and how to get permission for visitors. She also remembers that she was expected to have twenty hours of productivity each week, which included activities such as applying for jobs, working, or going to school. There were also rules about drug and alcohol use:

> *You can't have liquor, even if you are 21… You can come to the building high or drunk or whatever, but you just can't be in there. You can't come out high or drunk from the building. You have to come from somewhere else and come in… You can't come downstairs from your apartment and be wasted, even if you're 21. It's just stupid. But it's understandable, because there are youth that are 16 in there. That makes sense.*

Youth also receive gift cards in amounts up to $100 for stores like Target and Cub Foods to enable them to buy supplies for their new apartment.

Julia was still meeting with her case manager at the drop-in center but was also

assigned a case manager at the TLP. The caseworkers operated with two different approaches. Anne, from the drop-in center was more hands-on and proactive. Renee, from the TLP, put more of the responsibility on Julia.

> *I would meet with [Anne] every week, and we would have a list of things we would do, like update my résumé or apply [for] certain jobs. Renee…you only see her when you came to see her. That's the only time. She didn't have, "Oh, here are places that are hiring."*

Julia thinks this might be part of the reason some youth at the TLP are not working, because they are in need of case managers who will require them to meet on a set schedule and show progress toward their goals. Julia acknowledges that the TLP used to have two case managers, but they were down to one. As a result, some services and resources that had been available in the past, such as Facebook updates about potential jobs, were no longer provided.

Moving out of supportive housing. The TLP where Julia lived is unique, in that some of the floors have supportive units for youth transitioning out of homelessness, while others offer traditional rental units. At the time when Julia shared her story, she was transitioning from her apartment on one of the TLP floors up to "the fifth floor," to a traditional rental unit. She had made the arrangements to move to the fifth floor in the middle of the month, but she was unaware of all the fees this would entail. She feels this was not explained to her, and she was upset when she was expected to come up with $1,000 in just two weeks, more than she typically earned in an entire month of working her two minimum-wage jobs.

> *I don't understand why I had to pay $1,000. They told me…the landlord told me I only had to pay $443, which is how much I [am able] to pay with my three jobs for that month, and I wouldn't have to pay rent until [next month]. Then he told*

me my deposit would transfer to the fifth floor because it's the same freaking building, even though they say it's technically not because they're under two leases. They said my deposit would transfer… They never told me the deposit upstairs was more, and they scheduled me to move in on the fifteenth of this month. They didn't tell me I have to pay for living on the third floor, St. Barnabas's level, and the remainder of the month for the fifth floor… They didn't tell me any of this stuff. If I would have known I wouldn't have had to pay all this money, I would have waited until the first [of the next month], but they said I could move in on the fifteenth [of this month].

The landlord, who oversees both the TLP and the traditional units, suggested that Julia ask the drop-in center for help covering these costs, but Julia felt the drop-in center is much more likely to offer financial support to someone who is not working than someone who is.

They said [the drop-in center] will help me. [The drop-in center] won't help anybody that has a job. Sorry, [but] especially not three jobs. They never helped me before. They helped me in housing, but they never gave me money before. I feel like the only way you can get money out of [the drop-in center] is if you don't do what you're supposed to. One my of my neighbors messed up his sink. He was gone for three days, and his sink basically…something was wrong with the water. Then it damaged everywhere because it flooded. That, plus backup for rent, was, like, $1,000. They paid for every single thing. He doesn't have a job, and I'm pretty sure he's not trying to get a job. But I [have] a job…[and] you guys won't help me?

At the time, Julia had not actually asked for financial help, but she was clearly worried that they would turn her down, so she decided to move out, even though she had no place to go. She called her mother and asked her to help her move her bed out of her apartment. Both of her parents showed up, and the landlord took the opportunity to speak to her and her parents.

Right when we got there, in the lobby, Tania came out… She was like, "Can I talk to you real quick?" Then she brought up my ex-girlfriend, Tabitha. She's like, "Kayla seems very sweet, and she is way better than Tabitha… She seems like a

very nice person, your girlfriend. But since she came into your life, you've been making drastic changes"

Why [was she] bringing up my ex-girlfriend when she had nothing to do with me moving or any of this?... My parents should not know about any of this…so why would she bring them into this? Obviously, there's a reason why I'm homeless, and they don't know anything.

Complicating the situation further, as a result of this interaction, Julia's mom decided she should stay in the transitional living program because the staff seemed to care so much about her.

At the time when Julia shared this story, she had a meeting set up with her caseworker from the TLP, as she needed an explanation and a clearer understanding of why she owes $1,000 instead of the $443 she initially expected to pay. This whole situation has resulted in Julia feeling uncomfortable where she lives, as well as angry and taken advantage of.

I don't feel comfortable [in my TLP] at all. I feel like they're just causing so much drama for me. I feel like I'm on a little kids' playground, and people just keep talking. It seems like everybody's trying to save their ass because they don't want to lose their job.

She said something about if I leave, she's going to [say] I abandoned the apartment. She said, "But I'm not going to take you to court." Well, yeah, I know [she's] not going to take me to court. I might have left the apartment, but you know it because [they're] charging me $1,000 for no reason. You really think a judge is going to be like, "Oh, this youth at 21, who has basically two minimum-wage jobs, has enough to afford $1,000 in two weeks"? Yeah, okay. You're really going to win all right. I don't want to live there anymore because I'm uncomfortable, [and] my girlfriend feels uncomfortable.

The staff knew she was confused, upset, and angry. They felt bad about the situation and could see that Julia was struggling with all the big changes in her life. One staff member reported:

Julia had and has really amazing relationships with people here. Like, she is really close with Kennan, who's at the front desk right now, and really close with Renee. She is an amazing young person, and she had gone through a really traumatic breakup before this new girl came into the picture. She was developing this new relationship, I think, and I don't think she was able to, like, be present and understand the difference between living in [the TLP] and the [fifth floor] and the difference in rent and the difference in…because she [felt] wronged. We all felt really, really bad about that.

I think that [was] just a really hard experience, too, because transition is hard, and even though, like, you're moving up, moving onto the fifth floor, and that's more independence. It's still a transition, and you're still leaving things behind, so we all have to recognize and acknowledge that.

The staff also felt glad that Julia was comfortable to express her feelings, even when it came to anger and mistrust.

When you hear about this experience and her experience, like, if that's the only snapshot you see, some people could say, "Well, that's not a very good snapshot," but I like it. I like it because this is a safe place for her to do that, a safe place for her to say, "Hey, wait a minute. I don't think you're being fair to me, and you're supposed to be fair to me. I need to understand this." I think that's what this is about. Like, if we're really doing this work, if we really are going to help young people grow up and heal, then we need to create space for them to talk about it, because that's all practice for when they can come back and say, "Can we talk about that conversation? How do you think it went?"

Where she is now. Throughout her residency at the TLP Julia worked full time, obtained her high school diploma, and received GLBT support and mental health therapy. She recently moved into independent housing, is earning a steady income, and plans to go to college in the fall. She has made great progress but acknowledges that the transition to living on her own has sometimes been hard, especially financially.

Now it's… I have to pay for everything, [like] food. Before, all I had to worry about was my cell phone and getting around… Now I pay for everything—food, cell phone bill, my roof over my head. I pay for everything now. It's like, "Yeah, it's a good thing I have experience and I'm doing well, but this sucks. Being an

adult sucks."

Julia believes the expectations they held for her at the host home are partially responsible for how successfully she is managing her transition to adulthood.

> *But they did have big expectations, which I appreciate. That's why I'm doing so well on my own, because not only am I paying all my bills, but I'm [also] paying them on time. I'm just being responsible and taking all their advice and stuff like that, making sure it's good. I'm doing good.*

They also helped her a great deal simply by being available to listen:

> *Just listening [can] do so much [for] somebody, just listening to their story and having a conversation with them. Youth…even if they don't seem like they want it, they do. I know there's youth [who are] like, "I don't want to talk about." They won't talk. But deep down, they know that's going to help them so much.*

Having people to talk to, people who listen to her, has helped Julia let go of some of her hatred, resentment, and blame.

> *You're not going to have all that hatred. You're going to eventually forgive them. You're going to move forward instead of staying in that spot or going backward. I feel like that's why some youth do so bad, because they're not willing to talk about it, or [else] they just don't know how to handle it, so they go backward or blame whoever. They blame them and do what's wrong—steal or whatever—just because, "You say I'm a bad person, so I'm going to show you a bad person."*

Julia also had to find a way to forgive her mother:

> *That fact that she keeps trying to say, "You're disgusting," and stuff like that…it might be hurtful, but at the end of the day, I know what's the truth and what's right. You have your opinion, and eventually you will hopefully accept me for who I am. But I'm not… I just try to stay positive about everything.*
>
> *Everybody is going to do for themselves at the end of the day. You're going to be a Jehovah's Witness and study the Bible and do your thing because that's your choice—not because somebody else told you to, but because you want to do it… At the end of the day, I'm going to do what I'm going to do. They're going to do what they're doing to do.*
>
> *To this day, I feel like if my mom wasn't in the picture, my dad would not care. But I wouldn't want to be around my dad, because I don't like my dad. I don't*

> *hate him anymore, but I used to. I used to hate both my parents, but I don't hate them anymore.*

Julia is dating someone right now and feels she can talk to her girlfriend about anything; this is a great comfort to her:

> *I could just talk to her about everything, and she could talk to me about things. She is so open about her past and everything.[She tells me]stuff she [has] been doing and the stuff that she [has] done. Most people don't tell people, especially somebody they're with. I feel like if she is open that much—and, so far, she hasn't lied about any of it—it's like, why not open up to her and tell her stuff nobody really knows? She is the one person I really trust right now.*

She feels this person is an extremely positive influence in her life, and Julia is proud of where she is right now.

> *I felt like I wasn't an average youth. I've been through stuff, but I haven't been through what I've heard, a lot of people's stories… I feel like mine was [not as bad], but I came out strong. I've always stayed positive or tried to, even at the worst times.*

A staff person who knows Julia well said of her:

> *She is persistent, and I think she's determined. She's funny. She is a thinker. She can think critically. I think she has a good sense of who she is for this age and time. I think she has figured out a lot of things. She's smart. I mean, I think she can do whatever she wants to do.*

What she wants others to know. Julia hopes others can learn from her story, that people will realize there is a reason to stay positive and have hope, even when things are hard and change is slow:

> *I would just say to be patient and positive. It might seem like they're not helping you, but everything takes time. I learned that it gets worse before it gets better. There is hope, and it does get better. I feel like I'm that example. Everything has gotten better, to a degree. I got kicked out. I didn't have a job. Now I have a job. I have a place to stay. My family [are still kind of assholes, but it does get better. You just have to stay positive, because [even if] it seems like it's not going to get better, [it] really does.*

Ladybug

Ladybug is a 19-year-old African/Native American woman who presents herself with self-assurance and grace. She describes herself as sweet and driven. Ladybug was born in Houston, Texas and has alternated between residing there and in the Twin Cities throughout her life. Most of her extended family is in Texas, but her mother and two brothers live in the Twin Cities; she and her brothers have not lived in the same home since they were little. She is not close to anyone in her family at this point in her life.

Growing up, home life was hard for Ladybug. Her mother and brothers were abusive, and she always felt herself being pulled in different directions by her mother and by the grandmother who raised her for a large portion of her childhood.

> *My mom is a drug addict. She has mental issues and anger issues. I was mentally, physically, and emotionally abused in the house. It got [to be] too much for me. I couldn't be a kid. I didn't have a childhood. Even as a child, I didn't have that, and I just got sick of it.*
>
> *And my grandma…she didn't want me to turn out like my mom. I couldn't do a lot of things that I guess my mom did when she was younger, 'cause she thought I would turn out like my mom. And my mom's expectations…she didn't want me to…do somethin' with myself and be somebody. She wanted me to pretty much be like her. I wasn't able to make my own decisions when I was with them, so I left home when I was 15.*

Ladybug also spent time in foster care when she was young, but she has very little memory of those times:

> *I was [in foster care] when I was little. I didn't know about it until I actually got a little older. My foster mom is still in my life. My mom lives next door to my foster mom. They've been around for a long time. My mom tends to keep a lotta things from us. She don't tell us everything, and since I was so young, I didn't know at the time. I just knew I went to go live with another woman. I didn't know it was*

called "foster care." I don't talk to her much because she is old, and she doesn't come out much. But when I do see her, she is like family. She was always there. Even after I was at her home, she was still there.

Becoming homeless. By the time she was 15, Ladybug and her mother were fighting a lot, and her mother kicked her out of the house and ordered her to go to Passages (not the real name), a short-term emergency shelter with a focus on family reunification.

> *My mom actually sent me there. I didn't know about [Passages] before that. I didn't even know where it was. She just packed all my stuff, took me to the bus stop, and told me that if I didn't go, the police would be puttin' an Amber Alert out on me, so I pretty much was forced to go.*

She stayed at Passages for five days, but the organization's primary focus is on family reunification, and as Ladybug put it, "That was somethin' I wasn't wanting to do and my mom wasn't willing to do." This focus on family reunification was frustrating for Ladybug:

> *I didn't like [Passages] personally because they kept forcin' me to do family reunifications. If you didn't wanna reunite with your family, you had to go elsewhere, and I didn't think that was right. I'm homeless. Obviously, I'm here because it didn't work out at home. There's really nothin' they could do to fix it, because my mom was not willing to come to any meetings to try to figure out the root of the problem so it could be fixed.*

Finding herself. Ladybug realized she needed to find herself and live up to her own expectations of herself rather than ending up like her mother or grandmother wanted her to.

> *I got to an age where I decided this is not what I wanna do. This is not who I am. I need to get out and find myself. Because if I continue to go this route, I am gonna end up like her. It's a lot to get to know me, 'cause I'm still tryin' to get to know me. All my life, I really hadn't had the chance to actually be me. It's always… I had to live up to somebody else's expectations instead of my own.*

So, Ladybug left Passages and moved in with her boyfriend. When that did not work out, she went back to Passages. She knew that neither Passages nor her boyfriend's house was an appropriate solution to her homelessness, so she called about a bed at a youth shelter. Her stay at this shelter, the first of two, was short:

> *The first time, it really didn't work out with [the youth shelter] because I was on a different level. I wasn't tryin' to go to school. I wasn't tryin' to do what my case manager wanted me to do in order for me to be a better person and be successful. It didn't work out, so I left.*

Ladybug couch-hopped for several years after her first stay at the youth shelter:

> *I was in and outta other people's home. I didn't have any family to stay with. It was just people I met. I wouldn't call them friends because they're a friend to a certain extent, until you start living with them. Then, after a while, problems develop. They see that I'm homeless, and I really don't have any foundation or anything like that. Really, if you're not family to them, they really don't care about you.*

Couch-hopping did not provide Ladybug with reliable housing. She gave the example of one friend who let her stay but refused to give Ladybug a key. "She would leave and go spend the night somewhere else, and I'd be locked out for weeks at a time with no clothes or anything." Another friend she stayed with came to rely on her for childcare and other help around the apartment:

> *Her house was clean at first; then it got real nasty. She just didn't care anymore, and she started to depend on me to clean up because I don't live in a nasty environment. Then it was just like, "You're expectin' me to watch your child, clean up your house? I'm not a maid. I wanna be somewhere where I can get on the right track and do somethin'. By me watchin' your child while you work, I'm not able to go to school and do things a teenager should be doing." I left there.*

Ladybug stayed with yet another friend, but there, she had to worry about being sexually assaulted while she slept:

> *It just got to a point where when I left, they would talk about me and mess up my*

> *clothes and stuff like that. It was just not a good environment for me. I didn't feel safe. I was being touched while I was sleeping and things like that. It was people partyin' all night. I couldn't sleep. I wasn't able to get up and go to school. They had drugs in the house. It was not a place for me, so I've been bouncing around between places until I came here [to the shelter].*

After leaving this friend's home, in desperation and feeling she had nowhere else to go, Ladybug tried once more to stay with her mother. Unfortunately, the environment was still abusive and unsafe:

> *At a point in time, I ended up back at my mom's house. That was the last resort. I didn't have nowhere else to go, so I decided to go back. It didn't work out… She expected me to pay her rent. How was I supposed to do that with no job? Her boyfriend moved in, and all the fights and arguments and my brothers…they grew up and started developing real bad anger issues. So when they would get into it, it would be really physical—police calls and stuff like that, to where we almost got evicted. I decided to leave and became homeless again.*

While homeless, Ladybug did take advantage of some opportunities offered by outreach workers, a chance to earn some extra money:

> *I needed some quick cash, so [the drop-in center] referred me to an outreach program. They had this thing where you could go and do voluntary work at food shelters and do a little work there, and they'll pay you on the spot. That's how I ended up bein' connected with them. But then, while I was doin' that, I met this lady. She was really nice. She gave me all kinds of supplies on top of what they give you, like hygiene products, other resources, and things like that.*
>
> *The money gave me another way to eat, to eat things I like, and just let me get little things. I was able to get my nails done and stuff…just a little extra money in my pocket.*

Ladybug reflected on what it meant to experience homelessness:

> *Homelessness means you don't have a stable home and a place to call home. Even if you're at a place, it doesn't mean it's home. If you're not comfortable, if you're not safe, then it's not a place you call home. A home is somewhere where you [can] go and not have to worry about anything, to relax and be at peace with yourself. And if you don't have that, that's not a home. Livin' with my mom was not a place to call home. That's not where I felt safe. If there was anywhere else*

in the world that I would choose to go, that was not the place I would wanna be… It's depressing. It's sad. It's unbearable. I wouldn't wish that upon my worst enemy. Words can't even describe homelessness.

I would call it my lowest point, bein' homeless. That [was] the lowest point in my life, because everybody should have a home. There was nights I would sleep outside 'cause I didn't have anywhere to go, and bad people would stay at the house, and I'd have to kiss their ass[es] and do what they wanted me to do just to have a place to stay. Nobody should have to do that.

Staying safe. Ladybug was jailed twice, both times for crimes related to the inherent precarious necessities of homelessness: meeting one's basic needs and keeping oneself safe.

I was homeless, and I was cold, and I was staying with someone. We got into an argument. They kicked me out, and they wasn't giving me my belongings. So I had no clothes, and I was cold. It was wintertime. So I went and stole some clothes and got caught. I ended up gettin' cited.

Later, when I was 17, I went up to this middle school…with my friend to pick up his sister, and I was smokin' a cigarette. [The police officer] caught me off guard. She asked me how old I was. I told her I was 17. She stopped me. She arrested me and put me in handcuffs, and she searched my bag. And I was homeless. Especially since I'm a pretty girl, people would always mess with me. Men would try to come onto me and grab on me and stuff like that, so I had two pocketknives in my purse.

She arrested me. She said it was trespassing, possession of tobacco, being underage, and possession of a weapon. I guess the pocketknife was bigger than what the standard of what's considered a pocketknife. I got arrested for that. I guess they had a warrant out for me because I didn't do somethin' I was supposed to do with probation [from the shoplifting incident]. With that situation, I got on probation, and I had to go to court for that because I didn't follow through. I didn't know what I was supposed to do. That was the problem. So I got sent to a juvenile center after I did my four days for that.

It's hard bein' homeless, 'cause you don't have anyone to protect you. Who's gonna protect me? So I had to have a knife to protect myself.

Turning point. Parenthood can significantly affect one's outlook on life, and Ladybug began making better choices when she became pregnant, because she was

thinking about the life she wanted for her unborn child:

> *I'd say six and a half months [into my pregnancy], it all became real. When I actually started feeling her move and things like that, I thought, "I really gotta get it together. How am I gonna keep a child and raise it and take care of it if I have no job, no education…no stable housing, or anything like that? I don't wanna be homeless with a baby because it would just make matters worse." I didn't want her to go through what I went through, so I decided to get myself together.*

Looking back, she realizes she was not ready to be in the youth shelter when she was 15, as she did not want to give up her relationship with her boyfriend:

> *I was still with my boyfriend at the time, but we couldn't live together. That was the problem. We would always fight and argue. I was more focused on him than anything. I like him because I didn't have my father around. I didn't really have a male figure, and he was…there for me. I was young and just in love, I guess.*

Once Ladybug put her mind to making positive changes, things in her life came together at an amazing speed. She earned her GED in just two weeks. She took all five practice tests at a drop-in center in one week and passed them all, and they gave her vouchers to take the real test. She took the five tests the following week and passed them with flying colors.

> *I'm very intelligent, real book-smart. I was stuck in love for a time, so it was kinda hard for me to settle down. Plus, I was movin' from school to school because I was moving around so much. I had to change my school so many times [that] my credits got mixed up and things like that, where it was just too much for me, but I didn't wanna be 21 and in school.*

At that time, Ladybug sometimes visited a drop-in center for meals and to speak with the case manager about applying for housing. The case manager could not offer her much information about resources for pregnant women or mothers, so Ladybug did her own research and discovered a program she really liked. She applied and was accepted.

She also called several shelters to inquire about a bed. When she was eight

months pregnant, a spot opened at the same shelter where she had stayed at two years earlier. She described her second stay at the shelter as a pleasant experience:

> *They were wonderful. They [were] really helpful and even pushed me to do something, as well stay on top of [things]. My case manager really helped me a lot. She gave me a lot of resources. She stayed on top of me to make sure I was doin' everything I was supposed to. We had weekly meetings to make sure I [was] following the goals I set for myself. But [it wasn't] just her. All the staff really helped me. They would say, "I know you from when you used to stay here. We see the difference in you from back then to now." It was wonderful. They can't do anything unless I do somethin'. They're really helpful.*

During Ladybug's second stay there, she came to understand that in order to accomplish something, she had to be dedicated to achieving it.

Ladybug's case manager, Via, described what it was like to work with Ladybug when she returned to the shelter:

> *She was major in mama mode, like, very determined to get housed with her child as soon as possible, into housing before the baby was born. That is really hard to do. Ideally, you can get them in somewhere, but a lot of times, there're just no…openings. So she filled out every application you could think of. She was calling around to every program that was for mothers. She didn't let a lot of it get her down. She just stayed really positive and was super motivated.*
>
> *And I was really impressed. In the beginning, she was maybe putting off more of, like, a standoffish, protective vibe, with a little more attitude. Then, the more we [worked] together, the more I just watched her walls come down. She really started to trust me and the things I was giving her. It became a really good partnership.*
>
> *She'd tell me if people weren't getting back to her, and then I would make a follow-up call and advocate for her. I got her connected to a [Minnesota Visiting Nurse Association] (MVNA) nurse… She got connected there and started meeting with them and kinda started getting ready for baby stuff. Part of her case plan was [that] she had housing, pregnancy support, employment, education.*

Ladybug relied on her determination and dedication to secure a spot in a scattered-site housing program. The program requires that the young person be at least 18

years of age, has been in shelters, on the streets, and/or couch-hopping for one year continuously, or has experienced four episodes of homelessness in the last three years. They must also be financially eligible for [General Assistance] (GA) or Social Security income (SSI). Through this permanent, supportive housing program, Ladybug is able to access case management support. The program also helps clients save for the future.

> *They have a set rent maximum, which is $550. You only pay 30 percent of what you make, and you pay a contribution, which is saved up over time. So, when you're outta the program, all the money comes back to you, so you'll have somethin' to stand on just in case you lose a job right before you end the program or things like that.*

Ladybug gave birth prior to moving into the supportive housing program, forcing her to face a difficult decision: leaving her baby with her mother at night and continuing to stay at the shelter or moving to People Serving People (PSP), where she would be able to stay with her baby. PSP is an emergency shelter for children and families, and Ladybug was afraid she would not get the help she needed there:

> *My mom had my baby at night, and I would get up every morning and be with her. You're not allowed to have kids there, and I didn't wanna go to PSP because PSP is not as helpful as [the youth shelter]. It was a hard choice, but it helped me to stay at [the youth shelter]. If I would have [gone] to PSP, I [would] probably still be in PSP right now. PSP has resources, but they don't really move as fast. In [the youth shelter], as long as you're movin' fast, they move fast. It all depends on you. At PSP, it's like you're on their time. In here, you're on your own time.*

Even though Ladybug receives case management support through her housing program, she stays in touch with her case manager, Via, from the youth shelter aftercare program. Via has been critical in helping Ladybug transition to her apartment:

> *Me and Via still keep in contact. She comes to my house. Since I've been in there, she has been at my house twice, but before I moved out, she would come see my baby all the time to see [that] she's okay, make sure we're okay, make sure we have everything we need. And when I moved out, she made sure I had starter*

supplies for my house: cleaning supplies, dishes, pillows, sheets, cooking supplies, hygiene products.

Ladybug did not look to her case managers to learn about what it meant to become a parent. She had basically raised herself, so she felt she knew what she needed to know in order to raise her child.

Finding support. Ladybug describes the staff at the youth shelter as her support system:

I have a relationship with pretty much everybody here [at the youth shelter]. They're my support system. When I'm sad or upset, I can come to them for advice and things like that. They're really good with that. There was a time [when] there was a situation with my niece and my grandfather. I was upset. I was ready to go do somethin' that [would] land me in jail for the rest of my life. They really helped me calm down and understand the situation so I wouldn't do somethin' that was gonna end [with] me in jail. Even when I didn't live here, I could still call and be like, "Hey, I'm upset," or, "I need some advice," or, "I need some help." I'm still able to do that with them. I feel like we have [a] long-term relationship. It's not like I was somebody that was here, got the resources, left, and just left it at that. I still come back. I still visit. I still keep in contact. I call as much as I can just to say, "Hi. How are you? What's goin' on? Can I come and visit?" and things like that.

Ladybug is very careful, however, to distinguish between help and support:

Anybody can help you. If I need a ride, somebody could lend a ride. That's helping. It's hard to explain it. I guess it's just…to me, anybody can help somebody. There was a time [when] I saw somebody standing on the side, and they were homeless. I gave them some money to get somethin' to eat. That's help. But support is like, "Hey, come with me." You know? It's talking to them and telling them, "There's something other than what you're doing right now. There's somewhere you should be or could be so you [won't] have to do this, asking somebody for money and stuff like that."

I can't explain their support [here at the youth shelter]. When I was at [a different shelter] I didn't have support. They didn't support [me] as they [do] here. They didn't talk to me or really take the time to get to know me and really understand me. Here, [at the youth shelter], they [don't] judge or anything like

that. I've had a lot of bad situations in my life, almost life-taking situations, and I'm able to feel comfortable enough to tell them about the past. They tell me what I could've done differently or things like that. They help me make different choices.

Ladybug has also met other youth in the shelter, and she feels she has formed many lasting friendships there.

Where she is now. Ladybug says, "Finally, I'm very happy. I don't wake up frowning anymore. I wake up to my smiling baby and smile back at her." She is very focused on being a good mother: "When I have a goal, I pretty much do everything…in my power to get it done, especially now that I have a baby." Via, Ladybug's case manager, stops by to visit occasionally and noted that while being a new mom is sometimes isolating, Ladybug's face lights up every time she holds or plays with her baby girl. Ladybug appreciates Via's visits. As Via shared, "She has a hard time showing she is struggling, so she gets super excited when I get there."

Ladybug is proud of how much she has accomplished. Now that she has passed her GED, found permanent housing, and had her baby, she has her sights set on finding a job and starting college in June of 2013 at a local university. She is starting by taking her general education requirements and hopes to enter a nursing program:

Getting up early and being tired all day from doing so much [has] paid off. I don't even look at it as being hard. Now, everything is so easy for me because I have [accomplished] so much. If I wanted to just sit at home, I could do that and not have to worry about anything.

She credits the youth shelter with helping her get to this positive, hopeful place in her life. She even wonders if she would have been able to keep her baby without their support:

To be honest, without [the youth shelter], I don't know where I would be right now. I don't know. I think about that sometimes, like, "Where would I be? [Where would] my child be?" If I hadn't come here, I wouldn't be able to support my child and take care of her, even give her a place to stay.

I heard that if you go to the hospital and you're homeless, and you don't have nowhere to go, they will take your child, and that probably would have happened, because my doctor was askin' me, "You're homeless, right? What are you gonna do? Where you gonna go? Where is the baby gonna live?" I told him I was in a shelter, in a program. They were like, "Okay. At least you know where you're gonna be so you just won't leave here and your baby be stayin' outside with nowhere to go."

Ladybug reflects that one of her greatest challenges has been learning to believe in herself; she was always discouraged by her family, told she would not accomplish anything.

Believing in myself to do something, to become somebody, to do better…that was hard. I came from nothin'. [People always told me I'd] never be anything. I would say it's hard. It's hard when you think about it… It's hard to make a transition [from] sitting around, not [doing] anything, living the fast life, to becoming somebody and doing something positive with your time, something that's gonna benefit you in the future. But when you're actually doin' it, it's pretty easy, because it feels good. It's hard, especially when you have nobody that has taught you to do things.

Another challenge Ladybug has had to overcome is fear, an obstacle that affects many homeless youths:

[I] fear myself, 'cause sometimes I just give up. That's my fear: givin' up. If I give up, I'll just completely stop everything I was doin' to help me, and I'll end up back at square one. That's a fear of mine: to be back at square one. That was my lowest point. I was so depressed. I was always cryin'. It got to the point [when] I was so angry that if somebody looked at me wrong, I would start a problem. That's a fear, because I can go to jail for the rest of my life. I know what I'm capable of, and I don't wanna be in jail.

Ladybug is very self-aware now, and she realized she also had to learn how to control her anger:

I never really let [the anger] go. I just knew I had to control it, but I never let it go. I still have anger issues. Sometimes, it gets the best of me. I have to stop and think, "If I get mad and do this, how's it gonna affect my past, present, and future?" I just learn to control it, to take a breather, take two seconds and think about the consequences. I pretty much bottle it up, or sometimes I'll let it go. The anger's always here. I get angry a lot.

But I learned to act differently. I'll go outside and scream or somethin' like that or call someone I know will listen to me… Havin' somebody just to listen to me calms me down, even if I have to cuss them out. It makes me feel better. Yeah, I need to [fix] that, because my anger is off the chain.

She learned how to control her anger because she had to. She realized it was holding her back and that it might someday cause her to harm her child in direct or indirect ways:

I looked at my past and seen [sic] how my anger got me into situations I did not need to be in. [There] was a time [when] I got into it with somebody over some petty stuff. I got shot at. You never know what other people are capable of. Your anger could hold you back from a lotta things. In job [interviews], sometimes the manager or interviewer would be a little snotty. They ask some unnecessary questions. And I'd get upset and say the wrong thing without thinking… Now I have a baby, so I don't wanna put that anger on her and end up takin' my frustrations, [my] anger on my baby. I just look at her, and it all goes away. She is precious. She makes me happy.

Ladybug is very grateful for her case manager, who has helped her work on ways to deal with her anger. She is also proud of her many other accomplishments:

I'm so proud of myself that I actually finished school. I know I should've graduated a long time ago, [but] I finished. Now I have a place that I call home, [where] I feel safe and comfortable. I'm very proud of myself. I was able to prove [wrong] the people [who] told me I wasn't gonna be nothin' and nowhere, that I wouldn't be able to accomplish this. It feels good, especially [when it comes to] my mom. I feel like I'm showin' her that there's a way. There's more to life than drugs and guys. It's more than that.

My mom didn't finish school. She had kids at a young age, and she didn't do what she was supposed to to be where I'm at. I'm showin' not only her, [but also] my brothers. I have a brother [who's] older than me. They're pretty much goin' down the same road my mom is, and I'm showin' them it's more to that. "You can do it

if I can. You can do it. It feels good." [A friend told me] she looks up to me. That felt really good. It was the first time somebody ever told me that… My mom actually told me she's proud of me, and it felt really good just to hear somebody say that. [A lot of people say] they wanna get on my level. I'm gonna impact somebody else's life and not just mine.

What she wants others to know. Ladybug wants other young people who are experiencing homelessness to know that there are people and places waiting to offer them support. She recommends the drop-in center and youth shelter to her friends and others, because they have made such a positive impact for her personally:

I actually do recommend [the youth shelter] to a lotta people. I just talked to my friend yesterday. She is six months pregnant, and she said she is tired [of] having no education. She wants to get it together before her baby comes. I recommended [she] come here because they're really helpful. They not only help you, [but they will also] support you. Some people get depressed and end up miscarrying because of so much stress. The shelter can help them with their stress.

She recently recommended the drop-in center to her brother:

My brother's [girl] just had a baby. He just turned 18. He hasn't finished school. I try to push him and encourage him to go [to the drop-in center] 'cause it's easy. He's smart. I tell him, "You should do it. [The drop-in center] is a good place." You can go there and get Pampers, formula, bus tokens, other resources. You can use computers for job applications and things like that. It gives [homeless, unsheltered] people a place to be safe and meet other people and vent to them about their situation, but I don't feel as comfortable sharin' my story with them and their staff as I would the people here [at the shelter].

Ladybug wants other people experiencing homelessness to know that there's always hope:

Even though I've had a lotta struggles, sometimes you have to struggle to get to a better place. It takes [being] at your lowest place to get to your highest place. It takes time, patience. I want everybody to know there's hope. There's always hope. Don't ever give up, 'cause life is what you make it.

Pearl

Pearl is a high-energy, articulate, 23-year-old African American woman who loves to keep the people around her laughing. She was born male and raised as a boy in Minnesota, living sometimes with her mother in north Minneapolis but more often with her father in a small town. The State removed Pearl from her mother's place when she suffered sexual abuse at the hands of people her mother invited into the home. While Pearl lived with her father and paternal grandmother, her grandmother physically abused her. When she was 12, her grandmother called Child Protective Services and lied, claiming that Pearl had physically assaulted her. As a result, Pearl ran away; she was eventually charged with running away and second-degree assault and was returned to the home, but her time with her father ended abruptly when she was 13 and decided to come out to him as gay:

> *Me and my father had some difficulties because I decided to come out [of] the closet and tell him I was homosexual, and he didn't approve of that. So we got into an altercation, and [he] sent me back to live with my mother. When we arrived where my mother was staying at the time, he said, "You can have this fag. I don't want this fag stayin' at my house."*

For Pearl, this event marked the starting point of a downward spiral, and she began to get in trouble. At the age of 14, she was placed in an emergency shelter. There, she met Sonia, who ultimately became Pearl's case manager. Sonia has played a largely important role in Pearl's life, and she still recalls their first meeting:

> *He came in when he was 14. I talked a lot with him, and our relationship developed. He came out to me, and I talked to him about what it means to be gay and all this. He was okay with being Jeremiah and being out. He finally felt more comfortable being him.*

Since Pearl (then Jeremiah) could not stay with her father or mother any longer, Sonia suggested a nearby youth shelter, but Pearl did not take her advice. Rather, she ran away from the emergency shelter and spent her first night alone on the streets. It was a frightening experience, as she'd never been in that part of town and did not know anyone. After just a few nights, she called the youth shelter Sonia had recommended and secured a bed. She stayed there for four months.

The youth shelter. Pearl has a long and varied history with the youth shelter; she stayed and left the place three times over a span of several years. At times, her behavior was problematic, and she refers to these times as "rampages."

> *Hell, I can be so evil sometimes. I can also be so loving, but everybody has their days. When I have mine, people push my buttons, and I don't think before I act. I just say what's on my mind. I don't hide nothin', don't bite my tongue… One of the staff members—[who] doesn't work here anymore, thank God—[didn't] like me because I let her know about herself. I called her [a] witch. I didn't like her. We did not like each other. We couldn't be on the unit more than fifteen minutes without an automatic clash. I think it was a personal grudge…a jealousy problem. I think she was jealous because I had so much respect for Sonia—so much.*

Pearl frequently refused to follow the rules, ignoring the requirements to avoid dating others in the shelter or to return to one's room at a certain time.

> *That was a rule, but I always broke them. No, you weren't allowed to have boyfriends. I still have boyfriends. The reason why they didn't allow you to have boyfriends or girlfriends in here… They were afraid of sexual tension.*
>
> *I always broke the rules. I make my own rules. They'll tell me to go to bed, and I'll be like, "I ain't goin' to bed. I ain't tired." They'll be like, "Go to your room." "I'm not tired. You go to bed. You go in your room." That's how I was. I had a [smart] little mouth. My mouth is so slick. They be like, "Go to bed." "No." "Go to your room." "No." "Turn the TV off." "No."*
>
> *They didn't put me out because they knew it was me. They know it's me bein' me. They know if they push my buttons too far, they're gonna have to put me out,*

'cause that's when they get cussed at. I've always been outspoken. Sonia can tell ya a million more stories about me. She even got cussed out, and she is still here. She knows when to push and when not to.

Just as Pearl said, Sonia remembers Pearl testing the boundaries:

She tested every boundary, everything. She was angry. Sometimes she hits below the belt, but I was an angry teen. I remember doing that. She really didn't mean it. I think just it's like, "Okay, the conversation is going to be over," knowing she could come back, and we could start over the next time.

Due in part to her own personal experiences as a youth, Sonia understood why Pearl was angry and acting out. Pearl was working through changes, transforming in a way most people will never understand.

She transformed into a beautiful young woman. Going through that change during the hardest years of life, being a teenager already, being taken out of your home, being homeless, to having your own apartment, having your own cell phone… She has overcome a lot. She's a survivor.

Once, while Pearl was still living on the on the male side of the shelter as Jeremiah, she got into an altercation with another youth because he had an issue with her sexual orientation:

I didn't understand at the time. I'd never experienced homophobia from another youth at the shelter. I'd never experienced hatred. So the next mornin', I talked to Sonia about it. I was so hurt, and it really bothered me. When I got to see her and talk to her about it, they discussed it with Tim. I had known Tim for so many years. He said, "We don't allow that." So [the other youth] left, and the day went on.

Transitions. Eventually Sonia, whom Pearl had met at the emergency shelter when she was only 13, came to work at the youth shelter and was assigned as Pearl's case manager. Pearl connected with other staff at the youth shelter, like her previous case manager, Tim, but her bond with Sonia was the most prevalent. When Pearl decided to change her gender, she reached out to Sonia, who ended up being a powerful advocate

and support for Pearl:

> *One day, I put on women's clothes. The next day, I would [wear] boys' clothes. So I took that step, and that was a battle right there. I reached out to [the youth shelter], and Sonia always was there. She had my back. She said, "We can go ahead and get you hooked up with the services for transgenders." So she hooked [me] up with a doctor, who provided hormones. She got me outfits. She made sure I was A-okay.*

Before going to the clinic, Pearl was taking hormones obtained through a friend, not a doctor. Beyond her medical care, Sonia also assisted Pearl with shopping for bras and other feminine clothing:

> *I [knew] she was starting to be more comfortable with being Pearl and wanted to be called Pearl but still wanted to be on the male side of the room. She really confided in me. She talked to me about lots of different things. I took her shopping to get bras. She didn't even know what would fit her, didn't know what size to get, what kind. We bought clothes too. She would model all the clothes she wanted—some too revealing, some appropriate. [More or less,] I think she was testing me to see what our program could buy. We agreed on quite a few outfits. I've also given her makeup and all the tools necessary to become Pearl.*

All of these things would have been terrifying for Pearl to do on her own, worrying about what people might say or do to her. With Sonia's support, she was not afraid to make the changes into the person she wanted to become.

Sonia has worked with transgender youth before and knows how horrendously they can be treated by the people around them. In the past, she witnessed staff in a different program refuse to call a transgender youth by the name she wanted to be called. She has young transgender women sell themselves on the street because they have no other option.

> *I know how bad it's gone for so many young kids, and selling themselves on the street…[is] not even an option. It's like they're forced into it. It's like, "Okay, wait. We have to stop this."*

> *I wanted to make sure Pearl knew it was going to be okay. I wanted her to know, "You can be this person. There are going to be struggles. It's going to be hard. You can have some good times. You might do things you never thought you would. I'm here to help you the entire way."*

She thinks their bond developed, in part, because she was honest, consistent, and nonjudgmental with Pearl:

> *I always tried to be someone she could talk to without judgment. With all of her thoughts and thinking and questions… I didn't know all the answers, but I worked hard to find [the] and to figure out what she was trying to tell me.*
>
> *I was also always honest with her. I never told her I would do anything I couldn't do. I never said I was going to do anything [if] I wouldn't follow through. The entire time, she knew what she was going to get from me—every time. I feel like that's why she keeps coming back, because she knows exactly what she can get from me. You're not going to get turned away, no matter how frustrated I might get.*

During this time, Pearl was anxious to get her own apartment. She was utilizing the support of both the shelter and the drop-in center and remembers that her case manager from the youth shelter and drop-in center worked together to find her a spot in a transitional living program. She moved into her first TLP apartment just a few months before her 18th birthday, but Pearl was developing an alcohol addiction and had to leave her apartment:

> *Yep, [the TLP] was the sober housing. In sober housing, you're not allowed to do drugs or have liquor. When you're in [the TLP], they're doin' breathalyzer… I denied it, so they told me to leave. I left, but I left on good terms.*

After being asked to leave the TLP, Pearl worked with her case manager at the drop-in center to get into a group residential housing (GRH) demo program. Through this program, Pearl was housed in her own apartment and received financial support for living expenses. Living in the GRH meant Pearl was assigned a third case manager, and she is

relatively certain she needed all three at the time:

> *Once again, [the youth shelter] knows me more than [the drop-in center]. They know more about me and my ups and downs, where I've come from, where I've struggled, and where my lowest points were. They all came together and put this picture together. This program they were gonna put me in, the GRH…it's worth it. So now I had all three case managers working together to keep me on a straight and narrow path.*

Finding Pearl. Once she was situated in her housing program, Pearl felt she needed to shut out the people she'd had relationships with at the youth shelter. She felt as if she needed to spend time getting to know herself, finding her path, and she needed to do this alone:

> *There was a point in time in my life that I completely shut [the youth shelter] out, and it wasn't because I wasn't gettin' the right services. It wasn't because I didn't need them anymore. It's because I had to find me. And when you have to find [you], that's when you take some time out.*

Sans the support from the youth shelter, she spent much of her time drunk, but she did not want the people who cared about her to worry:

> *I had picked up a drinking habit. I used to drink so, so, so much. I had to find myself, 'cause I didn't want them to see me like that. [That was] a battle I fought for many, many months. I didn't go to no treatment place 'cause I knew I could do it on my own. Now…I drink on occasion. Back then, when I was 17, 18, 19, and 20, I was a heavy drinker, and I ended up pickin' up an addiction to prescription drugs. It was just a happy place for me. But anytime I would come [to the youth shelter], I would not tell everything, because I know how Sonia is. I know how she gets. If I say, "I'm high off this medication," or, "I've been drinking," she would practically choke me and be like, "We're goin' to the hospital." That's the main reason why I had to shut them out, because I had to find me. I had to reach out and look for myself, and I found myself after a long battle.*

Pearl ended up in a very dark place and realized that she did, indeed, need her support people from the youth shelter in her life:

> *And you be like, "Okay, I have all this on my plate. I have to dig in and look into*

it to make my life more complete," and I felt that on my own, I really couldn't. Not even the strongest person on God's green Earth can do it. I couldn't do it, so I ended up reaching out to [the youth shelter again], and they opened their arms. They were like, "Just come. Just get here," and they got me back on track.

Pearl knows that when she cuts the youth shelter out of her life, Sonia worries about her emotional state, as well as her physical safety:

> *What makes her worry about me is me being a transsexual. I get identified as a woman too much, and I don't [just] share me bein' a transsexual [with] the world. I have to feel there's a place, a time, a need, a person I can share that with. I cannot share it with everybody. We have to be in a comfortable setting. I have to know I'm safe, and I have to know the person I'm with is gonna back me up before I even share it.*
>
> *So, me being who I am drives her crazy, because she doesn't know what's gonna happen. If I tell the wrong person, my life could be in jeopardy… It may affect the person I've grown to be if I'm harmed, and Lord knows I've had a couple close calls. There's a guardian angel watchin' over me to make sure I'm strong.*

On the occasional times when Pearl returned to visit during that time, Sonia did whatever she could to offer support and guidance:

> *She would visit me a lot, and I was always trying to help her by giving her a journal, [so she could] write out different things she could think about or talk about, places she could go to learn about things or just to learn about herself.*
>
> *I'd think, "What can I give you in the ten minutes you're going to give me before you leave again? [What can I give you] that might be different than what I gave you the last time?" She emptied my toolbox sometimes. I gave her something all the time, different ways she could think [about] or view things in her life.*

Turning point. Pearl recalls feeling happy when she was consistently drunk, but she ultimately came to realize that she had to kick that habit in order to keep her life and her mind:

> *I had to kick the alcohol and…prescription drugs out. I wouldn't have been addicted to them if it wasn't so heavy in my family… It wasn't nothing new. The doctors prescribed them, fed my habit. I was happy. I was high, and it was good. I fed my alcohol habit. I was drinking. I got drunk, fell asleep, passed out, [and]*

didn't know where I was, but I was happy—really happy because it was covering up everything. Liquor and prescription drugs were my cover-up.

Pearl's turning point came when she suffered a close call, a near-death experience:

I had a [close] call with my life. It wasn't an [overdose]. I [was] almost raped, and thank God that He snapped me out when He did, because who knows what could've happened then?

That's when I came back. I had to come visit. I called here and said, "Sonia…" She said, "Yeah?" I said, "I need help with my life." She [could] hear in my voice that I really needed it, and she said, "Okay."

It was a Wednesday. Normally, on Wednesday, people from the past can come and visit after noon. I was up at eight a.m. and waited and waited. Once eleven a.m. hit, I called. "I need to see you. I need to see everybody." When I came back, I was happy, because this was home.

Coincidentally, Al Franken was visiting the shelter that night, and Sonia invited Pearl to spend the night and meet him:

That was the night she requested me to spend the night here, because Al Franken was comin'. I told him my story, my lifetime. He wanted to hear how it is being who you are at your lowest point in your life, because there's a difference between bein' an adult and homeless and being a youth, a kid, not knowing the streets and being homeless.

Through the support of the youth shelter, Pearl was able to transition out of her downward spiral into an upward positive trajectory.

The role of a supportive person and place. To get back to a healthier place, Pearl needed permanent housing and "the love and support" of people at the youth shelter. She shut them out repeatedly over the years, but they were always there for her whenever she came back in need of support.

Between my drinking problem [and] my addiction to prescription drugs, I lost myself. I can tell ya that. That's when I lost my complete mind, and it took me till

> *about 20 years old to notice that I [was] truly losing my mind. That's when I reached out here and got the help I needed.*
>
> *Being here has made my life so much… If I need anything or [am] out of anything, I can always call [the youth shelter], 'cause it's home. I've told that to plenty of people. I've told Sonia that when I'm here, I feel like I'm home, 'cause I've spent so much time here. Being around Sonia makes me feel like I have a lot of love, a caring person I can fall back on when push comes to shove. She knows I love her with all my little heart.*

Pearl appreciates feeling wanted, which makes her happy—a very different kind of happiness than the one she felt when using alcohol and prescription drugs to cover the pain.

> *It opens my eyes…to happiness. I know bein' a homeless youth isn't the thing you should be happy for, but revisiting your past and knowin' where you were during your lowest point puts a smile on your face. You can look back and be like, "I've come a long way…and I've grown up to be a better person."*

Sonia has always been there for Pearl, even when Pearl was not living at the youth shelter, and that has meant the world to Pearl and made a real difference in her life:

> *It's meant a whole hell of a lot. I love her as a person, and I appreciate the things she has done. She's seen me at my breaking point, at my worst. She's seen me cry. I've cried on her shoulder. I've dealt with her pain plenty of times. She's seen me when I was in a domestic with an ex-boyfriend. She's been there. There're certain things I haven't shared with her because it'll worry her, but I know she loves me. She has seen me grow up.*

Pearl feels Sonia supports her as she would a family member rather than simply a case assignment, a client, and this genuine concern had made all the difference.

Where she is now. Pearl is 23 and has been living in her group residential housing program for almost 5 years, since she was 18 years old. While living in her apartment at the GRH, she disappeared into drinking and drugs, then found her way back out again. The rules of the GRH have helped to motivate her, as she does not want to be

asked to leave the program. She is currently working one day a week.

It's been a long journey full of struggles. Pearl's greatest challenges have been working through her sexual orientation and gender issues and overcoming her addiction. She is proud to be where she is in life and says, "I haven't failed yet." As Pearl describes it:

> *I had to become strong, and I became strong at a young age. But then I reached my breaking point, and I fell. I had to build myself back from the bottom to the top.*
>
> *I am who I am because of my struggles and knowin' the people I know, the community I know, and the outreach that has been lended [sic] out to me… I found the real Pearl deep down inside. I had to reach down deep inside. It hurt—pain, suffering, tears, blood, and sweat—to actually find the real me.*

Sonia has also the growth and maturity that Pearl has gleaned from the process:

> *Trans[gender] is a really hard transition. She's probably one of the strongest people I know. She wants good things out of life. She wants people to love her. Until she allows herself to feel that love, it's still going to be rough, but I think she's beginning to allow that. She's growing up. She's maturing… I think she's feeling more comfortable in the skin she's in. People see her as the woman she is.*

Pearl's relationship with her mother has changed and is improving:

> *At the time, my mother didn't understand it. She had no understanding. Now, it's to the point where she would hurt somebody over me. It took two and a half years to get her to understand, but now she does. She calls me Pearl. She calls me her daughter. She doesn't disrespect me. Anybody says anything [bad] about me, she is defensive. So it's not the part where it was her tryin' to get used to it. It [took] me actually getting my name changed for her to be, "I get it." She woke up. I've noticed that being a mother of a transgender woman has made her a much stronger woman herself. She needed to become stronger so she could support her transgender child.*

Pearl has come to consider her mother's husband as her father. She and her biological father have not spent much time together, and while she is hopeful that their relationship will improve, she is not sure that it will.

What she wants others to know. Pearl thinks the drop-in center she visited could be more welcoming for transgender youth. She recognized that the organization is GLBT friendly and that many of the staff are GLBT, but she does not feel the organization, as a whole, does a good enough job protecting youth and staff from anti-GLBT attitudes and comments. Thus, she was more likely to visit the drop-in center before she was transgender than after. She also feels youth would benefit from access to addiction counselors at both the drop-in center and shelter.

Pearl encourages all youth experiencing homelessness to call the youth shelter:

> *Because it's a very good place—very. I think this is one of the best shelters out there, and I think it's 'cause I have a physical tie to this place. I think it's one of the best shelters because of the staff, because of the environment, because [of] its [location]. There's a doctor's office onsite. You have a lunchroom. You have bathrooms. You have your own kitchen. You have your own room. You have this. You have that. You have everything you'd want.*

The shelter is GLBT friendly, supportive, and defensive. If someone says something derogatory, the staff can be counted on to take it seriously and handle it quickly. Pearl feels the staff at the shelter where she stayed should be considered part of the backbone of the GLBT homeless youth community.

Also, Pearl believes funders and policymakers should realize the necessity for safe places such as the drop-in center and the youth shelter:

> *Well, I give my full support to [the youth shelter], and I give my full support to [the drop-in center]. All the people who are funding these two organizations…they're funding a good cause. It's helped people like me, people who are just [in] bad situations—domestic, sexual, all of that. Knowing that you have a place [to go] and that you're safe and [don't] have to worry about this and that is a good thing. It's a blessing.*

Left Home to Escape Abuse and/or Neglect

Youth who left home to escape abuse and/or neglect share stories that are strikingly similar to the stories of those who grew up in the system, with one important difference. These young people experience high mobility throughout their childhoods and have parents who were absent for long periods of time; nevertheless, for a variety of unknown reasons, the children were never taken into protective custody by Children's Services or the foster care system.

Harmony

Harmony is a bright, 21-year-old African American woman with a quick and easy smile. She describes herself as someone who tries to "be optimistic and persevere and keep growing. I'm a good time. I'm funny, I think. I laugh. I find myself funny. I'm a nice person, to an extent, but I don't mess with anybody. I try to be nice." Her friends would say she is a good friend. "I'm there for them whenever, schedule permitting. If I have it and they need it, I'll give it…. Why not? So, when people ask me for stuff—even when it's money [or] or time—if I have it, I'll help you out."

Harmony was born in Minneapolis and lived with both parents until she was 6 years old. She then moved in with her grandmother because her mother became a flight attendant, and her father was in prison. She lived with her grandmother until she was 18. She has one sister, Laila, who is 6 years older than she is and who lived primarily with the grandmother since birth, because their mother was only 15 when Laila was born. Harmony always felt her grandmother favored her sister and treated Laila better than her.

Even though her sister was older, her grandmother gave Laila much more support, financial and otherwise. At this time in her life, Harmony is much closer to her dad's side of the family. He has remarried and lives in the suburbs with his new wife. Harmony said, "That whole stepfamily…they really embrace me."

Becoming homeless. Harmony describes her relationship with her grandmother as a "constant battle." Harmony reflects on what it was like to begin living with her grandmother at age 6:

> *Those first five years, I was with my parents, and then, all of a sudden I'm with my grandma. I didn't want to be there, so I acted out, but my grandma didn't see that as, "Oh, she just wants to be with her parents." She just saw me as defiant, so she was, like, really hard on me. It didn't make the situation any better, but whatever. From second grade on, it was a battle. I turned 18, and it was getting worse. You try to grow past the mistakes you made, but she just wants to hold on to the past. It's like, "I can't change what I did. I'm sorry. I shouldn't have [done] it. I was a child. I wasn't thinking with the right type of mind, but I'm older now, so stop trying to treat me like I'm 12 when I'm 17 years old. I'm not that little kid anymore."*

At 18, Harmony decided to move out of her grandmother's home and in with her father. This was the crux, the first in a series of unfortunate events that eventually led to Harmony becoming homeless.

Living with her father did not work out, and within two weeks, she moved to her stepgrandmother's house. While Harmony felt she was trying to follow her stepgrandma's rules, things did not work out there either. With her grandmother, everything seemed to be a battle. Looking back, she recognizes that her stepgrandmother was under a lot of stress at the time. "My uncle…he just got sentenced for two twenty-five-year terms, and that's her baby. She is stressed about that and dealing with him and putting money on his books and all these things." Harmony and her friend decided to get

an apartment together, but that only lasted for a couple months, at which point she moved in with her cousin.

Harmony's life went on like this for nearly a year. She moved from place to place but never had a place to call home, and each stay ended badly. For example, one stay ended when her cousin threatened to burn her clothing if Harmony did not give her money:

> *She was talking crazy, like she was going to burn my clothes. "What? You don't burn my clothes when I'm living out of a suitcase! You're going to burn my clothes?" She took my clothes and wouldn't give them to me. That was crazy.*

During this time, Harmony engaged in sex work for money. She was out with her boyfriend on some nights and various older, wealthy men on other nights. Some nights she went on multiple dates, which often afforded her a place to stay for the night. Her boyfriend did not know about the other men, and it was sometimes difficult to keep those two worlds separate:

> *I was going out with other dudes, and my boyfriend—well, not really boyfriend—[was] a socialite, so sometimes I would see him when I was out. I'd be at a 21-plus club, and I wasn't 21. I [was] messing with these men who had this money, so it didn't matter. I could always get in. Sometimes I'd see him, and I had to dip out…because I [was] with another dude. I couldn't get caught. Then he really wouldn't want to be with me.*

Finding support. After her cousin put her out on the street, Harmony reached out to a nonprofit organization dedicated to helping women and girls escape systems of prostitution and sexual exploitation through advocacy, direct services, housing, and education. Harmony remained at that short-term shelter for a month in 2011, before she was connected to the youth shelter at the age of 19.

> *I went to this place [that helps girls escape sexual exploitation] because I had*

> *gotten caught up in some bad stuff again… I lived there for, like, a month, and my best friend was living at [the youth shelter]. She was like, "There's a bed open. I know you're getting sick of all these people treating you wrong. You don't have to live like that. You can come here. They help you find a place, so you don't have to depend on anybody." I'm like, "Okay, cool." I called in the morning. I got the bed and moved all my stuff there that same day.*

When Harmony moved into the shelter, she did not have any positive relationships with family members and no one she could live with:

> *Before I became homeless, I thought homelessness was just living on the street. I didn't classify hopping from house to house as being homeless, per se, because I was sheltered. But yeah, that is homelessness for sure. When they don't want you there anymore, where are you going to go? You have to think about another place. Or when a situation becomes tense… It always seems like when you go and stay at someone's house, it's good in the beginning, but it always turns bad.*

What she found at [the youth shelter] was support, help solving her problems, and a sense of belonging:

> *I like [the youth shelter]. They're really good people here. They help you. They encourage you. They're really just there for you… They're really good people, and they listen to you. They help you work through your problems. They provide you with so much. Living here, you don't even think you're living in a shelter. You just think of it like a big group home.*

Harmony was only at [the youth shelter] for a few months before being asked to leave for breaking the rules too many times. When she left, she used her sister's place as a home base, but she was not really living anywhere. Harmony describes this time in her life as "living the fast life."

> *I wasn't even really staying at my sister's house. I'd go there to take a shower or to spend [maybe one or two nights a week]. I was going out every night, meeting dudes, going out and spending the night with them. I had a boyfriend, but he really wasn't my boyfriend, because he didn't act like it. Three or four nights out of the week, I spent the night at his house. Then, about two to three nights a week, I'm out with a dude or something. Depending on how that all added [up], once a week, I [was] at my sister's house, but I would go there every day like, "Leave the*

> *keys out so I can take a shower and get some clothes." It was a life of that. It was not a good life. It was fun, but it was not productive.*

During this time, Harmony also visited a drop-in center. She found that it was crucial to have a safe place to go during the day, especially for access to resources such as meals, tokens, and socializing.

> *I was going to [the drop-in center] from time to time. They're cool. It's a nice environment at [the drop-in center]. It really is. They try to help you. They provide you with meals. There are times when it's like, "I'm hungry. Let me get there by five thirty so I can get that meal and a token."*
>
> *When you speak to someone, they set you up with some resources. They do. Once again, I don't really like to open up to people or to talk to people about my struggles. [The drop-in center] is a cool place. It's a chill-out place.*

Still, Harmony wanted more and asked if she could stay at the youth shelter again. Her case manager granted her a reentry meeting, and she recalls that day: "I had to really plead my case, like, 'I really do need you guys. I know the rules.'" She was permitted back into the youth shelter in January of 2012 and was more committed to making it work. No one in her life—neither her boyfriend nor her club friends—knew she was homeless.

Harmony described the "yard system" at [the youth shelter]:

> *A yard is just like a demerit, a strike on your name. You only get twenty when you first move in. Once you reach twenty, you get kicked out. You're exited automatically. Twenty chances is a lot. They start over every two months, but when they start over, you don't get twenty every time. They go down two. So, two months later, it's eighteen. Two months later, it's sixteen. You know the rules by now. Ways to break rules: not doing your chore, not following directions, and you can't be in other youths' rooms, which is a very logical rule… What other rules are there? Curfew is eleven. On the weekends, it's one or two. You get two nights out, which are generally held for the weekend, because you're supposed to get business done for the week… Also, you have to wake up by nine. You have to be dressed for your day by ten. If you don't wake up, you get a yard. You can sleep in*

if you want to, but you get a yard for that. You can't take three nights out consecutively, and if you don't come home, that's a yard too—or if you come late. That's pretty much all the rules.

Harmony described the rules regarding curfew and spending nights away from the shelter as the hardest she had to follow. She was transitioning out of the fast life and still wanted to spend time at clubs and with her boyfriend. However, she eventually came to realize that having a bed was more important than spending extra nights out, and she began to make more positive choices as a result of the yard system:

> *Sometimes it got irritating when you wanted to go out. Then it's like, "Dang, I'm going to get a yard. Fuck it. I got ten. I'm not at twenty. I'll take that yard. I just won't stay out three nights in a row because I'm not trying to lose my bed." It wasn't too hard adjusting. I'd rather have somewhere to go to sleep than to be out with guys all the time. It was fun. I still could be out with men or go to the clubs. That's all I did. We just went to the clubs. I could still do that, and I still do. Plus, here, it's like, "Hey, let's go out to the club." You can all get dressed together and have fun.*

Transitions. Harmony's stay at the youth shelter lasted for two months before she got into a physical fight with another young person there:

> *I got into a scuffle. People acted like they couldn't respect [my wishes]. I got really upset and flipped out. It was about a plate, and I ended up breaking the plate. I threw the plate and hit this boy in the face, cut his face open. It wasn't good. I got kicked out.*

This incident occurred at an unfortunate time, when Harmony had just been accepted into a transitional living program and was about to begin looking for an apartment. As a result of the altercation and being asked to leave the youth shelter, she had to move back in with her sister but was determined not to enter the cycle of couch-hopping again. She called around to other youth shelters and found an available bed in a different youth shelter.

Coincidentally, one of Harmony's relatives worked at the second youth shelter,

and Harmony was sure he'd taken her name off of the list of people who could stay there, stating that Harmony was not actually homeless. Her case manager, Mia, at the first youth shelter still advocated for her and worked with the staff at the second youth shelter to find Harmony a bed. There was not a list from which Harmony's name could be removed, and the reason Harmony did not have a bed was simply because one was not available until after the weekend. Nevertheless, she did not understand this and was not able to resolve the issue on her own. For Harmony to gain clarity about the situation, she needed staff from both shelters to talk directly to each other.

This was a critical moment, from Harmony's perspective. Without the bed at the second youth shelter, she does not think she would be where she is now. She spoke about the staff from the first youth shelter intervening on her behalf when she was certain her uncle took her off the list:

> *I told Mia about it, and this is another reason I love [the youth shelter]. Without them, I really don't think I would be where I'm at, in my own place. I really don't. They believe in me so much that I got into [the second youth shelter]. It did work out. I'm really thankful for that. I really am. Without them being there and telling them my story and really fighting for me, I wouldn't have a place. I would still be trying to make it.*

Harmony turned 21 while she was at the second youth shelter, at which point she should have aged out of the shelter. She had secured an apartment by her 21st birthday but could not move into the apartment for a month. As this point, she worried where she was going to go, but the staff at the second youth shelter were able to get a waiver from the state licensing agency, and Harmony was able to live at the shelter for a month past her 21st birthday. Harmony recalls this as a critical time in her life, when people at both youth shelters worked together to fight for her because they believed in her:

I don't remember what the process was called, but you have to send something down to corporate to ask if it's okay if this person can stay. They're like, "We've never done this before, so we don't know how long it could take, but it has to come by your birthday, because if it doesn't, we have to kick you out." I think it was the day before my birthday, it came back, and it had been, like, a week and a half or something. It came back saying I could stay.

I really thank God for everything and everybody in my life. Without them, I don't even know what I would be doing right now. I really don't. I don't even know where I would be if I didn't have Mia and Miss Stella and everybody in my corner—even the people at [the second youth shelter], like Robert, Frank, everybody. They just really believed in me.

It is worth noting that Harmony cried tears of gratitude and relief as she relived this critical time in her life:

The importance of supportive relationships. For Harmony, her time at the youth shelters was a new experience: a time when caring adults believed in her for the first time. She remembers telling her grandmother about her hopes and aspirations and being told, "You can't do it," or "You won't do it." Through these new, caring relationships, Harmony learned how to ask for and how to accept it.

I had to do a lot to get where I am. It's made me a stronger person. I feel like I'm very self-reliant. If I need help, I know how to ask. I don't like to, but I do know how to ask and get the resources I need. Clearly, I really wouldn't have anywhere to live if I didn't. I really wouldn't.

What mattered most to her in her interactions with all the people who supported her at the youth shelters was their nonjudgmental approach. This approach allowed Harmony to trust them, and she began to see her own life choices in a different way:

That's one thing I learned here: There's no point [in lying] about anything or trying to act like you're innocent. Everybody makes mistakes, and they understand that. They work with you… They really do work with you in your walk and what you're going through. They don't hold it over your head, but they do remind you so you don't make the same mistakes… They teach you responsibility,

because they're not going to let you keep slacking and doing the same thing over and over. You don't learn like that.

The care and respect shown to Harmony enlightened her to the fact that she should show them the same consideration in return. "If you keep making the same mistake, that's telling them you don't really care. Who wants to be treated like that or have their kindness taken for a weakness?"

Harmony had different case managers at the various organizations she interacted with, but she connected most closely with Mia. She especially appreciated that Mia was honest and transparent with her:

> *Mia is more on you about your business. I needed that. If I see that I can get away with something, I try to…but Mia is not going for none [sic] of that. Just talking to Mia… She was always real with me. I appreciate that. Some people, when they work with youth, they don't like to be real. Clearly, we're homeless, so we need that "This is what it is" to help you realize that you have to be on your grind. Every time I talked to [Mia], she gave me the real facts about what's going on with my case and what I need to be doing. I do need you on my ass. I may not like it, but [I need] you being there and pushing me and telling me, "This is what you need to do," but not [being] overbearing or yelling at me like, "You need to do this now!"*

Mia also helped Harmony connect with a therapist at the youth shelter. She agreed that Harmony benefitted from people taking an honest, direct approach with her. Mia explains:

> *She was working with a therapist here who connected with her so well, because he was super upfront, really fair, honest with her. The three of us would have consultations sometimes. [We] would talk together because [Harmony] was, in my opinion, mature and could comprehend what we were talking about in a way that a lot of young people can't. We could have conversation about her past and previous relationships and current, to-this-day relationships with men.*

Over the time that Mia has known Harmony, she has seen healthy change in her

relationships with men, as well as deepening and repaired relationships with some of the women in her life. Mia and Harmony kept in touch throughout her various placements. This meant a lot to Harmony, because she did not have to open up to new people as she moved between organizations or when there was staff turnover within an organization.

Where she is now. Harmony is at a place in her life right now that she feels good about. She has worked hard and had the ability to visualize the future she wanted, but she also acknowledges that she needed the support of people, programs, and space at Breaking Free, the two youth shelters, the drop-in center, and the transitional living program.

> *I'm in a really good place now. I'm happy with my life. I live [in my own apartment]. I go to school. I work… I'm trying to get into the dental hygiene program at Normandale. [I'm taking] science classes and getting high grades in my science classes.*

Finding the apartment was not easy. When things ended badly with the apartment she was renting with her friend, Harmony was evicted, making it difficult to be accepted into another apartment complex. Harmony relied on The Link to help her get accepted for an apartment. She wanted a one-bedroom, but The Link has a $525 limit, only enough for a studio. She reflected on what her journey has taught her: "I live in a studio now, but I had no choice, but whatever. I was being really picky. My journey has taught me you have to take stuff for what it is. You have to start small and work on it. Everything is a process. Nothing comes easy. Everything doesn't come fast."

Harmony also recently had a baby and is learning to be a mother. The pregnancy was unexpected and was difficult for Harmony to deal with. This fall, she had her apartment, was back together, and was excited about where her life was heading. Then,

she found out she was pregnant with another man's baby, and she became depressed and scared of what would happen with her apartment and with school. She also feared she might lose her boyfriend, whom she loved.

> *I started [Normandale] in the fall, and everything was good. Then I found out I was pregnant. I never wanted to be pregnant at my age. I wanted to wait until I was at least 25. That's when I wanted to start, maybe even 26. I wanted to do it with somebody [who] was right, but it didn't happen. I'm pro-choice, but by the time I really found out, it was too late, so it was like, "Hey, I'm having a kid. Okay."*
>
> *When I found out, it depressed me. I was sad. I didn't go to school. I found out in the beginning of October and didn't go to school [that whole month.] I just didn't want to get up and go. I was like, "Fuck, I'm pregnant. Shit is really changing now." Plus, on top of that, me and my not-so-really boyfriend broke up in January. We had just got back together in August. I got pregnant in June. Here it is October, and I'm finding out, so me and him [were] three months into really working on us and dang, I [was] five months pregnant with someone else's baby. That was hard. I cried so much.*

It especially hurt Harmony to know she was bringing a child into the world who might never know her father. Harmony let her teachers know she would be having a baby in the middle of the semester, and most were very accepting and understanding of her situation. She planned ahead and signed up for hybrid classes, done partially online, and she used her loan money to buy a laptop and pay for Internet service for the remainder of the semester. Even though she is taking classes to apply to the dental hygiene program, she is also taking a child development class to become a more educated parent.

> *So yeah, I just took that class [to]…learn about my child. I can learn how a child's brain develops and what they're thinking and how to guide them through life… I don't want to make the same mistakes my parents or grandma did. I don't want to ever do that to my child.*

Harmony's biggest challenge was to learn that things take time and that she needs

to work with people to reach her goals. She has also learned that working with people requires developing relationships based on trust and some degree of open communication.

> *[My biggest challenge has been] knowing that nothing works on my time. I'm on someone else's time. [Also], I [realize] I have to convince people or get them to understand what's going on, and that means I have to open up. I don't like to open up to people and tell them my business. It's not like they're going to change anything for you. That's how I used to feel. [I had to] understand that it takes time to get what you want.*

Through her experiences, Harmony has discovered that she is a good friend and a good listener:

> *People don't really listen to people nowadays. I like to listen. It's intriguing. People's lives are intriguing, even the boring ones. It's nice. It makes people feel like somebody actually cares, somebody besides an adult or someone trying to use them, but when it's a stranger and I don't know them and I'm getting them to open up to me, it makes me feel good. I feel that they're appreciative. I like that.*

She is proud that she has been able to improve her relationship with her family and that she has gotten to the point where she can now appreciate what she has in her life:

> *Hearing people's stories, I am thankful for my life. I've had a very fortunate life. When I was younger, I never went without anything. I may not have had name brands, but my grandma's a shopaholic. She'd come home with big bags of clothes and be like, "Here. Try this on. I want to see how this looks on you." It would be, like, a half-hour fashion show, trying on all these different clothes. I've been lots of places. [I] appreciate my life and—even though my grandma's crazy—everything she has done for me. She's a rock. She's a very solid person. She may be kind of messed up in her raising techniques, but she's a provider. Everything I have gone through has helped me appreciate my life.*

Mia also shared that Harmony is one of the strongest, most resilient youth she has ever met. Harmony's hopeful that with her strength, resilience, and hard work, things will just continue to get better.

Maria

Maria is an 18-year-old African American woman who has lived in Chicago and the Twin Cities area for her entire life. At the time of the interview, she was wearing a fun, bold red wig and a shy, pretty smile. Maria describes herself as a funny, intelligent person who is good with kids. People often tell her she would be a good social worker. She is kind and feels it is difficult to make her mad. When she does get angry, she easily forgives. Her friends know her as someone who is always there to cheer them up.

> *Sometimes I act really silly and play too much. When they mad, I like to tell jokes and stuff, and they're like, "Stop makin' me laugh. I'm tryin' to be mad!" I'm like, "Don't be mad. Don't you wanna be around me because I'll make you laugh?" They're like, "Yeah, but you doin' it too much!"*

Maria's case manager also described her as someone who is intelligent, social, and makes friends easily, an extremely positive person indeed.

When Maria was younger, she grew up in several households with some of her brothers and sisters. She is the second oldest of seven siblings, who currently range from ages 4 to 19. Her older brother lives with her aunt, her younger brother lives with a different aunt, and her three sisters are with her grandma. Her youngest brother lives with her father, and she has not seen him for four years. Maria's mother was young when she began having children and was not always around when they were growing up. Maria's father was in jail for most of her life, and Maria remembers living with a lot of different family members in many different homes. She first lived with her grandmother, then her great-grandmother, and then her aunt, the person who eventually became her legal guardian.

Maria's childhood was marked by physical and sexual abuse and loss. She first remembers losing beloved family members when she was 6 years old, and it tore her family apart:

> *I remember the day when I was 6. It was January 11, 2001, and my two cousins passed that day. We were sittin' at my mom's house, and they was sittin' at the table with my grandmother. One of my cousins, Ray, told me to come in the living room and asked me to sing a song for him. The song was called, "It's Gonna Rain" by Kelly Price, and I sang the song because I was a music person. My mom said I was singin' and stuff since I was 2. I sang the song for him.*
>
> *While I was singing, my other cousin, Santia, ran in the house crying because her and her boyfriend got into an argument. He hit her. My other two cousins, Ray and Moe, walked out the door to see the boyfriend, and I never saw them again. They got shot. It makes me so sad, 'cause they was my favorite cousins. They [were] always around. They used to play with us…like big kids… It's, like, after they died, my family was destroyed, 'cause now they blame it on my cousin Santia…and it was her little brother, Moe, [who] died too. He was only 17.*

After her cousins passed away, Maria moved in with her aunt in Minneapolis and lived with her from the ages of 7 to 12. During those five years, she was molested by her aunt's son almost every night. She finally escaped the home and moved back in with her grandmother, but she had to leave her little sister at her aunt's; that was devastating for her. She remembers talking to her sister when she left her aunt's home:

> *I asked her if he'd been touchin' her, 'cause I had the feelin' that he had been. She was 7 at the time, and she told me, "Yeah, he has." I started cryin', because now my little sister was goin' through what I went through.*

Becoming homeless. Maria did not even live with her grandmother for a year before leaving and becoming homeless at the age of 13.

> *From there, I [was] homeless, house to house, not really havin' no luck, not really goin' to schools. When that was goin' on, I felt I [didn't] have nobody no more, like everybody was mad at me, like I was a bad person. So I just tried to run away from my family, because every time I came around, there was always a*

problem, or they was [sic] talkin' down about me. I felt like I wasn't gonna be nothin' and wouldn't get nowhere.

Maria would sometimes return to her aunt's for brief periods of time, but her aunt physically abused her. She once hit Maria so hard in the head that she was hospitalized for three days. Despite their fights, Maria's aunt continued asking her to return; this was seemingly because her aunt desired Maria's general assistance money and food stamps.

> *When I was stayin' with her, she never bought me what I needed. She always told me what she was gonna do for me but didn't do it. When I get mad or feel like she was not tryin' to help me, like she was just takin' money from me, it was the truth, and I was tired of bein' used by her. So I just kept leavin' her house. She would try to call the police and say I [wasn't] comin' home and stuff, that she [didn't know where I was]. It was hard.*

Maria was homeless for four years, couch-hopping, bouncing between family members' homes, and living on the streets before she spent her first night at a shelter. For Maria, those were four incredibly hard years. Maria describes what it took to keep going:

> *It was hard, scary… I didn't know if I was gonna live. Sometimes, I just thought about killing myself. I have this one cousin. She would give me clothes to get up and go to school. Sometimes she'd have to sneak me in her house. That's how I was living my life, sneakin' in and wearin' other people's clothes, having nowhere to go, [not knowing] what [I was going to] eat. When I was young, I even sold my body to keep clothes on my back and eat. I didn't wanna go through that no more.*

Maria was going to school in Minneapolis, and her first exposure to services for homeless youth was through her school.

> *The school I was going to…there was this man I was working with. He's a caseworker at the school. When I told him I was homeless and needed rental assistance, he told me to call [an outreach organization], that they come out in different areas. [He said], "They'll come sit with you and talk with you and see what money they can put down for your rent and deposit." I was callin', but their phones went to voicemail. I was leavin' messages, but they never called me back.*

Maria ended up connecting with an outreach worker from a shelter through her school.

The outreach worker was there twice a week, and she and Maria developed a relationship. During this time, the cousin who had molested her throughout her older childhood had returned to Minneapolis, so Maria needed a safe place to stay. She tried to go to Chicago but had to return to Minneapolis shortly thereafter to attend the funeral of a younger cousin. She stayed with the family of the younger cousin for a few months, but everyone in the home was grieving and depressed, and that was difficult for Maria to deal with. So, at the encouragement of the outreach worker, she started calling the youth shelter. After just a few days of calling, she was able to get a bed.

Maria went to the youth shelter for the first time in October of 2012. She remembers being nervous her first night, but she quickly came to feel comfortable:

> *I was kinda nervous 'cause it was my first night. I'm a shy person, so I was like, "Who's gonna be my friend? Who can I talk to in here?" But within a week, I was already makin' friends, and everybody made me feel comfortable. I liked it a lot.*

Maria recalls that when she first came to the shelter, intake took a very long time, and the shelter staff read her the rules and gave her chore assignments. Some of the most important rules she remembers were about curfew and when youth could spend the night away from the shelter. Cell phone conversations could not be held in the hallways, and no eating was allowed in areas other than the meal room or bedrooms. Also, those staying there had to be respectful of other youth staying in the shelter.

Maria found it easy to connect with all of the adults in the shelter, but she bonded particularly well with her case manager, Izzy. Izzy remembers that they had a connection from the first day they met:

> *Typically, they come in, and I don't meet them until the next day or a day or two, so I ended up meeting [Maria] on her second day here. She was shy but really*

smiley and very pleasant. It's kind of hard sometimes as a case manager. You have to jump into getting really heavy information from them right away. I try to build a rapport as best I can beforehand. It's making small talk and maybe noticing that their hair looks nice, or whatever the case is with that particular youth. We had a pretty strong connection right away, and she was really open with me. I remember both of us feeling like we had met each other before. We sat together and did her intake and her vulnerability assessment and case plan. It probably took close to two to three hours.

At the top of the case plan Maria and Izzy wrote down her strengths: "Gets along with people, going to school, sharing a pretty smile, caretaker, positive attitude, active, resilient, and wants to open up her own restaurant someday with soul food." Further down in the case plan, they listed goals Maria set for herself: to go to school every day, to find a job, and to find somewhere more stable to live.

Over the months while Maria lived at the shelter, her case manager helped her do what she needed to do to work toward these goals. This included scheduling appointments (such as for healthcare), helping her make it to the appointments on time, making sure she was at school every day, helping her find jobs, and helping her meet her hygiene and clothing needs.

Sometimes my therapist…[it's] too far to go to. So she [Izzy]'ll take me up there [and] drop me off, and then I'll just have to catch the bus back. She helped me with clothes I needed, boots. She helped me find places to go stay, [helped] me fill out applications and make sure I was at school every day. When I missed more than six days, she took me to…I think it was a truancy meeting. She made sure I went there. She helped me with a lot.

It was of great benefit to Maria to have goals in place and to have the support of her case manager to help her meet them. Maria reflects that Izzy kept her focused and accountable, even when things were very difficult. It was important to Maria that her case manager knew her so well.

Izzy seems like a big sister to me because she…like, she can tell when I'm not feelin' well, like I'm feelin' sad, like I don't wanna talk. It's, like, Izzy will always be there for me. I'll just go talk to her and tell her my problems. She asks what she could do to help me. I tell her I just need to talk to people every now and then.

A staff person at the shelter also helped Maria get her food stamps and general assistance sent to her, rather than to her aunt.

When my auntie put me outta her house, she was still gettin' my food stamps, and she wouldn't give me nothin'. Even if I was to go to her house, she still wouldn't give them to me. [There] was a point [when] she told me I couldn't come to her house no more. [A staff person at the shelter] helped me to get that all straightened out.

Maria remembers the desk staff fondly: "The staff that sit at the desk…they pretty cool. You can reach out to them and talk to them. They're always there to help me with jobs or anything, [to] fill out applications. They encourage you to get interviews, 'cause I get nervous."

Once Maria established a routine in the shelter, she did rely on the drop-in centers as often. She spent her days commuting on the bus, to her therapist's office and to school. She found it too hard to manage traveling back and forth between these various commitments in different places and still make it to the drop-in center. Ultimately, she only went to the drop-in center to meet with the case manager when she was picking up her general assistance or food stamps, but it was comforting to Maria to know that they were there if she needed them.

Maria attended several schools before finding one that worked for her. Many of her friends and relatives are involved with gangs, and this impacted Maria's schooling. Even though she was not personally involved with any gang, she was often caught in the middle of the drama and worry of people getting jumped, threatened with guns, and so

forth. Izzy helped connect Maria with appropriate resources, developed safety plans, and worked with her on transferring schools.

Even without the gang-related aspect, school was challenging. Maria struggled to get up early, get to school on time, and follow a daily routine. She also felt a bit overwhelmed, as she had to make up for much schooling she'd missed out on during her childhood:

> *Sometimes at school, I wanna raise my hand and try to say the answer, but I feel like if I say the answer, everybody's gonna look at me like, "She is stupid." Like, "She didn't know that?" That's just the type of person I was in school. I never really talked. Sometimes the work was hard, and…when I was younger, I used to be out of school for a whole two months when I needed to be in there. I really didn't learn that much. When I got to high school, I was in school every day and didn't know what I needed to know.*

In spite of these difficulties, Maria earned straight A's on her most recent report card and was awarded a certificate for leadership among her classmates. It was the first achievement award she'd ever been given, and she is proud of her accomplishments at school.

Gaining employment has been harder. Despite filling out several applications and attending interviews, she has not been offered a job.

Another of Maria's goals was to obtain her vital documents and get assistance, which she did pretty quickly. She now has her Social Security card, State ID, and birth certificate and is on medical assistance.

Finding support. Izzy recalls that Maria came to the shelter at the perfect time, due to her young age, her estrangement from her family, and her intrinsic motivation to change things in her life:

When she got here, she was 17. There really aren't a lot of places for youth to go when they're a minor. There's The Bridge, but they try to get you reunified with your family as quickly as possible. [That] can be good, but it's not always the best fit for some of the youth we see. She heard about us from an outreach worker. I think it was perfect timing. She was at the right age. She was really ready to work on things, super motivated the whole time she was here.

Maria also set a goal to talk about things that were on her mind rather than bottling them up. She realized that if when she held things in, she suffered from depression:

If I was to sit in a room and think about, like, everything that happened to me or I've been through, I'll get to cryin' and feelin' like I don't wanna be on Earth anymore—like I wanted to die. When I talk to somebody about it, it makes me feel better. The people I talk to about it…they give me good advice, and they tell me how much they like me and how I'm doin' good. They just put good stuff in my head. Then I rethink it and realize I am a good person and [that] everything's gonna work out better.

Maria's commitment to openness is a real strength, and it has enabled Izzy to help her get the services and support she needs. Izzy explained:

When she opened up with me, she was very honest about the trauma she had been through. She'd been really honest, and that helps me, because I know then kind of what services I need to connect her to. I want it to be their case plan and what they believe they want to work on, because that's really the best way. They're going to obtain their goals.

It was through this open communication that Izzy was able to reconnect Maria with a therapist she had seen in the past:

She was being really open with me about the trauma and abuse she had been through. She was really emotional about it and still really struggling with everything she had been through. I asked her if she wanted help with Mental Health Services, and she was open to that. That can sometimes be hard, because there is such a stigma placed on mental health. Because it was one of her goals, she ended up getting an assessment and getting connected with a therapist she used to see and saw her a few more times.

Maria described her therapist as an important person in her life. She felt the therapist had a perspective about life that was different and beneficial:

> *My therapist was telling [my case manager] that she liked to see me, so I went back to her. We talk about a lot. We get along. She is an older woman, someone older, [who's] experienced life already. It's helpful, because I have a different view of life [from] other people's, I guess. It's like someone [who's been] here longer than I have [has a different view of life too]. It was good to talk to an older person.*

Together, Maria and her therapist worked on the depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress related to the significant abuse, neglect, and loss the girl has experienced.

Where she is now. Maria moved into permanent, supportive housing just a few months ago. To help her decide where she wanted to live after leaving the shelter, she was able to tour of some transitional and supportive living programs with her case manager from school. She recalls visiting the place where she now lives:

> *When I got there, we [had] orientation. We walked around. I just thought, "This is where I wanna be," so I called them and I told them I was interested, and they gave me an interview. I did the interview, and they said they wanted me to keep callin' and lettin' them know I'm still interested. So every week, I called them. One week, I forgot to call, and they said they were tryin' to call me to come in. I would be able to move, so that was in January of 2013. It went pretty fast. Like, it was just Christmas when I did the orientation. Then, [on] New Year's, I got a call later in the day, and they told me I was accepted.*

Before she moved, Maria and Izzy spent a lot of time talking about the transition into TLP:

> *[It's important to] have that conversation about the transition ahead of time and make sure they have a list of contacts, people they can call. If someone…is struggling with self-harm or suicidal ideation or anything like that, I'm gonna give them a list of the numbers for Cope or different crisis lines and also make sure they have their Mental Health case manager's number and all those other people they're working with.*

Izzy also helps the youth develop ideas about what they can do when they are on their own, things to help them feel less lonely or isolated. Some young people she works with have found success with journaling, volunteering, or joining activities at the drop-in centers.

Maria enjoys living at the TLP, but she admits that it gets lonely and boring sometimes. The first night was so hard that she tried to return to the shelter to spend the night. It has been a big change to go from couch-hopping and living in a shelter to having her own space, with its own kitchen and bathroom. Sometimes she sleeps with the light on because she feels uneasy being alone in her own room, but it also feels like home:

> *Every time I walk in my house, I just smile—like "This is mine." When I was younger, my grandma and my mom used to tell me I wasn't gonna be nothin'. Everybody talked down about me, like, "You're not gonna be nothin'. You're gonna be a whore. You're gonna have a lotta kids before you turn 18." All those people [who] said those things [are] now congratulating me and saying they proud of me. It's like I made everybody happy. Now I'm happy.*

One of the things Maria most enjoys about her new home is being able to cook her own meals.

Maria mentioned that while the TLP has a lot of requirements the tenants are expected to live up to, she believes they are fair and reasonable:

> *I have to be in at midnight. I can have company every day, but [only] for four hours a day, and two people can visit me at a time. I have to be in there for at least thirty days to start spendin' the night out. I have to keep meeting with my case manager for at least a month. [The] twenty-seventh of each month is inspection day. We have to do laundry, and we have to pay for it now, so that's a big thing. Every fifteenth, we have to have our paystubs to pay our rent or whatever, but I don't have to do it right now because my first two months are paid for already. We have to have a job. When you got a job, the rent is $250, and without a job, it's $150.*

Maria is permitted to stay in the apartment until she reaches the age of 25.

Looking back. Growing up, Maria always felt different from the people around her. Being in the shelter has helped her realize that there are other young people who have faced similar challenges.

> *I always felt different than other people. I felt people had better lives than me—like, they don't go through the same as me—until I moved here and see that [there's] other people out there [who] need helping, too, other people who don't have their parents.*

Maria is developing deeper connections with family members, including her older brother and parents. She explains:

> *My dad is now outta jail. I'm happy, 'cause I was a daddy's girl. For some reason, when I was younger, my mom was always tougher on me, but now we are closer. I love my mom to death. We talk about a lot a stuff now, and I just think to myself, "Why couldn't we do this when I was younger?" because that's when I needed her most.*
>
> *That's another thing that changed… I really think it's [changed] 'cause my mom was young, and she really wasn't ready for kids. She had my brother at 17, me at 18. Every year, she had a kid. By her being young… I mean, if I was my age right now with two, three kids, I wouldn't know what to do. I'd probably take them to my grandma and ask for help. My mom would take us to someone's house and drop us off. We wouldn't see her for another week. I think she [matured], and now she wants us all back.*

Maria feels proud of where she is in her life right now: "I have a place called home. I'm in school every day, and I'm learning new things. I've been taught somethin' that I should've learned in grammar school." She has advice to offer other young people who might be experiencing homelessness:

> *I think they need school, number one. And if there is anybody in life that hurt you, just forget about it. Some people can hold a grudge against the people [who] did somethin' to them way back then. They'll take it out on others they're just now meetin'. I don't really think they should do that. You should open up to more*

> *people, 'cause there're people out there [who] really care.*

Maria currently has three case managers: one from school, the aftercare case manager from her shelter, and one from her current permanent, supportive living program. She feels they all collaborate well and give her consistent messaging and support. She even mentioned that they all seem to like each other, and that is important to her:

> *They helpin' me with learnin' how to be a mature adult, with rental history, and teachin' me how to follow rules, because there's always gonna be rules. They have a lotta rules here. I wanted to give up, but I'm gonna follow them. They helped me with housin' supplies and stuff like that. They said they was gonna help me with interviews and help me answer the questions. If I need someone to talk to, there're people there I can talk to, and [they] help me with tutoring. They're helping me with my future.*

Maria encourages young people experiencing homelessness to seek the help of case managers who are "encouraging them to do better, complimenting them on what they're doing good, and talking to them about what they need to accomplish the goals they wanna accomplish." Izzy and the rest of the staff with whom Maria has connected have helped her find herself, and she now wants to live and fully experience life. She still has goals she wants to achieve, but she is taking it one step at a time. "They help me with finding who I am, not being that person where I wake up and feel like I don't wanna be here." On the day with we spoke with Maria, she woke up happy, glad to be alive.

Minna

Minna is a strong, determined, ambitious 22–year-old African American female. She was born in St. Paul, Minnesota and grew up in the Twin Cities area. Minna spent

most of her childhood living with her mother and brief periods living with her father. She has one sister that is older by 10 years and a brother older by 8; she lived with them until she was 13. She also has a younger, adopted sister, who is currently 2. Minna describes the house she grew up in as something other than a home; she does not believe her parents took care of her the way they should have. In fact, Minna thought about running away many times in her childhood:

> *I thought about leaving my household since I was 10 years old. I can remember this one time [when] I was like, "I'm going to leave. I don't know where I'm going to go, but I'm just going to get my coat and leave right now." I got my coat and went outside and sat on the steps. I was like, "Where am I going?... I could hide in the store and stay there." I would have these thoughts. My mom comes out, and…I turn around. She is like, "What are you doing?" Usually, I'd ask if I [could] go outside, because 10-year-olds don't just walk out the door. I'm like, "Nothing. Just playing and sitting here." She looked at me like she knew. She was like, "No, come in the house." [She had to know she was] doing something wrong, [because] I wanted to leave.*

Minna's father was in jail for most of her life, and when he was not, he was often an abusive. Minna thinks of him as a frightening person to be around.

> *My dad was a horrible man. He had anger issues, never accomplished nothing [sic] with his life; was a drug dealer all his life… When I was younger, I remember him being in jail for a really long time. My dad pulled a gun on my mom right in front of me one time. I was probably 8. He was a horrible man.*
>
> *Of course my dad was missing [when I was growing up]. He's the stereotype, in jail. I would say out of my 22 years, my dad… If I took all the time I ever [saw] my dad's face or spent with him and compressed it into years, it would probably add up to maybe four or five years. I only had my dad four or five years, sporadically.*

Nevertheless, Minna also loved her father very much, and this was a point of contention between her and her mother.

> *It's crazy, because I used to be such a daddy's girl. "I don't care about my mom.*

[I] just care about my dad." I used to say that all the time. That probably was partly [because] of my mom not taking care of me. She looks at me, and who does she see? Nothing but my dad.

One time, when things were not going well between Minna and her mother, her mother took the girl to live with her dad:

I don't know if I even forgive her for this, but maybe I do. I never even thought about it until now. But one time, she made me go live with him, and I hated her for that. I was the most miserable person ever. So was his fiancée. When he would be gone, we'd be cooking, and she'd be helping with my homework. We'd be playing music and dancing. As soon as she [knew] he [was] coming home, there [wasn't] a peep in the house. Everybody disappeared. Lights [were] off, everything [was] cut off, everything put back perfect. Any little thing out of place was a problem. If it [was] too perfect, that was a problem too.

It was just horrible. I hated my mom for making me go live with him, but that was at a point in time where she felt like she couldn't control me no more. I was just, "If you're not going to be a good parent, why should I be a good daughter or a good student?" That's how I was thinking. That's where it starts: in the home.

It was during this stay with her father that Minna experienced her one and only placement in the foster care system. With a smile on her face, she remembers those few days as a high point in her childhood:

One time I was with my dad, and he got arrested while I was with him, and they put me in foster care for a couple days. It was the most wonderful two days of my life. I got placed with a Caucasian family. I just remember [there] being a lot of kids. They were all sitting around me, and wanted to show me everything in their room. They were fighting over me and letting me feed the fish. I remember this little boy stood up, and he was like, "No! She gets to feed the fish because she is our guest."

By the time Minna was 15, her father was back in jail, and she and her mom were fighting a lot. Minna felt her mother had given up on her and was distracted by personal issues that took her attention away from parenting:

She just didn't take care of me or do things a mother's supposed to do. I was like,

> *"Okay. You don't want to be a mom, so I'm going to leave," so that's what I did. I left. I ran away and went and lived with my cousin.*

Becoming homeless. When Minna first became homeless, she was only a sophomore in high school. She tried to stay in school, but that was no easy feat in her circumstances, and she had no one in her life to give her guidance or encourage her to go to class. She was absent often, sometimes for up to a week at a time. This did not feel right to Minna so she left her cousin's house and went to Passages (not the real name), a short-term emergency shelter with a focus on family reunification. She knew of Passages from a time earlier in her life, when her mom had dropped her off there:

> *My mom actually introduced me to [Passages]. She dropped me off there one time. I don't know what that was about, but my dad came and picked me up. It was funny, because when he came to pick me up, I didn't want to leave. I was like, "I want to stay here. I can't stay here?" He was like, "No, this is not that type of place." I thought that was home.*

Things did not work out at Passages, Minna "just started hopping from place to place to place." She stayed at more places than she can remember: with her sister, cousins, and friends. Unfortunately, none of these arrangements lasted for long.

For a few months, Minna stayed in a small motel suite with her sister, her sister's boyfriend, and their six kids. She babysat during the day and couch-hopped at night, because there was no other place in the motel room for her to sleep. She could not get a job because she was busy caring for her nieces and nephews while her sister worked a six a.m. to seven p.m. shift. Because Minna was busy for so many hours during the day, she had no time to seek help for herself:

> *What employer am I going to talk to? What counselor or teacher am I going to talk to after eight p.m. and before six a.m.? Nobody—at least nobody I should be talking to. So that was hard. I didn't want to quit, because my sister needed me.*

Little sisters are always there for their big sister.

There were nine of us in a room, and there were two let-out beds. Can you imagine? I had to be there all day… It's almost like I wasn't living there. It's almost like, for one point in time, I wasn't living anywhere. I would be there from six a.m. to seven p.m., and then, I would just go hang out at somebody's house and not even go to sleep sometimes and come back there at six a.m. and do it again. I was [basically] just sleeping in a different place every night.

Then I got tired of that, and I rented a room for, like, two months. I really shouldn't have done it. I should have just slept at my sister's, but I didn't want to be in that room no more. I was taking my money that I made with my sister and renting the room. It would take a me a couple hours to get there, so I would only be there from ten p.m. to five a.m. If I didn't go straight there, I'd get there at midnight, so I [was] only there for four or five hours. Then I [went] right back to my sister's. I forgot about that [time in my life]. I've stayed so many places it's ridiculous.

When Minna tired of staying with relatives and friends, she started calling shelters and eventually found an open bed at a youth shelter. She was there for six months, all the while visiting drop-in centers:

Living at the shelter, you had to leave between nine a.m. and six p.m. You had to be doing something productive. That's what I was doing. I was going [to the drop-in centers] and job-searching and talking to counselors and therapists. That's basically what I was doing every single day, filling out these applications… Of course I would take some days off. I would go to a friend's house like, "Today, I'm just going to relax. It's too hot to be moving around."

She found the staff at the drop-in centers to be a great source of support and benefitted from visiting more than one center:

I got a little bit of the same from each place, just extra support. Not in a bad way, but they almost pushed the support on you. Even if you [went] in there and sat down and didn't say anything, somebody would come over and talk to you and say, "What do you need? What are you here for? How can I help you?"

Minna was committed to working towards her goals and was able to find a job at a retail store, but after six months, Minna left the youth shelter, quit her job, and began

babysitting for her cousin. This provided her with a place to stay and earned more money than she was making at her retail job. Unfortunately, soon after Minna moved in, her cousin lost her job and could no longer pay her for babysitting. Minna turned to making money by doing hair, babysitting for friends, and going on welfare. “It was like I just fell all the way back down to the bottom, and I got really depressed.”

Once again, Minna reached out to the people she had made relationships with at the various drop-in centers and shelters, and she found housing through an LGBT host home program. She remained with her host family for seven months. It started out well, but it ended when Minna’s depression got the best of her again, and she began to pull away from her host family:

> *I was really excited. I had a beautiful home with two beautiful people—at first. I was so excited and happy. I did so much stuff, positive stuff. I started doing yoga and getting into bike riding. I’m talking three hours in the hot, burning sun. I was so happy, I didn’t care. I had my own bathroom and room. I had four cats; I love animals. I was going to school. It was nice until I got depressed again. I don’t know why I got depressed. Maybe it had to do with my mom and relationship stuff. I let that stuff get in the way,[and] I wish I wouldn’t have, but it happened.*
>
> *Then things got kind of weird with the host home parents too. I was 19. I had a birthday there, turning 20. I was an adult. I think they almost forgot that I was an adult. I think they needed a more dependable person. After I got out of school, I wanted to leave. I wanted to hang out with my friends, and sometimes they’d be like, “Don’t you want to stay home?”*
>
> *I don’t know. Stuff just got weird… I was going to move out one time, and they talked me out of it. Then another time, I was like, “I’m just going to go,” and I packed up my stuff and moved out… I never really knew [why it got weird]. I don’t think they knew how to handle another depressed, dependent adult. I was kind of dependent. It was weird. That’s the only way I can explain it. I’m glad I went through it. I don’t regret any of it.*

Leaving the host home program depressed Minna even more, and she felt

discouraged and as if she had failed:

> *It was kind of discouraging, because they had everything I needed. I had everything I needed, and I still didn't succeed. I was just getting discouraged. Sometimes when you're scared, what do you do? You run. That's what I did. I ran right back to one of my cousin's house.*

While she stayed at her cousin's house, Minna frequently used marijuana. She made ends meet through babysitting and by pooling resources with her girlfriend at the time:

> *When I was at my cousin's, I was sleeping on the couch. All my stuff stuffed in this tiny little room. It was so small, like a walk-in closet. Then I had a problem with her because I always had to give her all of my money. Just crazy stuff, the type of stuff you go through when you live in somebody else's house or apartment.*
>
> *I had a really big marijuana problem. I was a pothead. All my money went to pot, food, and just obsessive shopping for no reason. One month, I went to the mall seventeen times to get stuff I did not need… I could have been saving up that money for whatever, but I didn't. I just spent it all on pot and didn't even care about saving it for nothing.*
>
> *I don't know about other people, but for me, marijuana makes you say, "Whatever." I guess when I was high, I'd be like, "Whatever." Then, when [I'd lose my high], I'd be like "Man, I need to do something with my life." When I started to think about that stuff, I'd be like, "Just toke up again. Whatever."*

Minna left her cousin's and rented a room with her ex-girlfriend for a few months, and after that, she moved in with another cousin.

Turning Point. It was while Minna was living with this cousin that she met an outreach worker named Kri. She recalls, "I can't remember how I met Kri, but Kri was the go-to man. After I met him, that's when stuff started happening for me. He hooked me up with [the second youth shelter]… I keep meaning to call Kri and thank him." From that point on, things started to change for Minna, and she moved into her second youth shelter:

> *When I got into [the youth shelter], that's when everything clicked. That other half of me that was wanting to do stuff just took over. I had this almost overwhelming [desire] to succeed. I just wanted to go, go, go and do it, do it, do it. "I want to go now and learn now!"*

Minna was eager for interactions with staff at that shelter, the first place that had felt like home for years:

> *I would be early, waiting [for them] to open the door. I'd be thinking, "I want to come home now. I don't want to be out here." Everybody else wants to hang out… I could have hung out somewhere, but I wanted to come home and talk to the staff there and laugh and joke and do activities or whatever was planned.*

The staff at the shelter worked hard to make sure Minna felt comfortable, given her past experiences. They were careful to let her have choices, and they did not pressure her into relationships with staff members with whom she might not have felt comfortable. As one staff member, Anne, shared, "The power of choice, I think, was good for her. It's one approach to trauma-informed care, to give youth choices over even the smallest things. A lot of her power had been taken away just from all she'd been through."

Minna felt the shelter was staffed with caring, supportive staff, and she truly connected with them:

> *They were super supportive. It was crazy. I connected with them so much it's not even funny… They were always listening. Of course, we're all human, so we kind of have a pattern, and we kind of all do the same things. We mess up in the same ways because we're humans. We all do the same stuff. But they would listen as if they've never heard this mistake before. It wasn't like, "Oh, you just do the same thing. You're just a statistic." No. They were listening as if it was a new world problem.*
>
> *They were just extra supportive. They just push it on you, like, "Every single day, I'm here for support." I heard that at least once a day. I heard that word, "support," at least once a day. If you think about [it], that's two months, sixty days. At least once a day I heard that: "I'm here to support you."*

Not only did the staff support her, but Minna also felt they truly, genuinely cared

about her. She remembers a time when she had to go to the emergency room, and several staff persons were very concerned about her wellbeing:

> *I remember when I was staying at the shelter, I actually had to go to the hospital, because I have endometriosis. I have it really bad, and it's severe when it happens. I just need to go to the emergency room right away because I'm in so much pain. That happened when I was there, and I hadn't told them [about my endometriosis] yet. They didn't know what was going on. Everybody was worried—so worried! Even the other residents were coming out of their room. I guess one paramedic was being really mean to me, and they were like, "Hold on, dude. Don't treat her like that. She is really in pain."*

After that incident, the staff helped Minna file a formal complaint against the EMTs.

Minna also noticed that the staff were excellent at finding the positive in young people and their goals:

> *Some [young people] in there…you know, they weren't all here. They had ideas or things they wanted to do that made them sound kind of crazy. But [the staff] will take it and turn it into something that could be positive—like, "Oh, I just want to tag buildings all my life." "Okay. Well, we have art programs," and stuff like that.*

The staff truly saw Minna's gifts and strengths, and Anne had this to say:

> *She has a lot of [strengths]. I think she is strong, a leader. She's outspoken. She's funny. She has ambition and drive, and she's a very good advocate for herself. People here are just drawn to her. She has that natural energy to sort of get people to follow her in a way… She understands what she needs and wants and how to get it and just being clear about that, just all those things. She's caring, wants to do good, and doesn't want to take crap from nobody.*

During her time at the shelter, Minna secured two jobs. She was hired on with an organization in south Minneapolis, a position she still holds today, and landing that job was very meaningful to her because she was the only one among her peers to successfully graduate from the training program. "I was so proud of myself. It was [my] first accomplishment…in a long time."

While staying at the youth shelter and working, she also applied for apartments elsewhere. After two months of living in the shelter, she was able to move into a permanent, supportive housing program (PSH). This is significant, in part, because the shelter had a thirty-day limit, but they let her stay more than thirty days in order to create a seamless transition from the shelter to the housing. This let Minna know that the people at the shelter really did believe in her, and it provided her with an alternative to moving back in with her family.

As is the case for many youth, the transition to living alone in an apartment was not easy for Minna. Anne explained:

> *Those first three months of transition, people are lonely. Like, it's straight up scary, lonely, and sad, which makes sense to me. You've come from a crazy, packed household with siblings and nieces and nephews and shelters, and everybody's always around you, and you've experienced that your entire life. All of a sudden, you have this apartment, where you're alone. It's big and hollow and vacant. That's scary stuff.*

Minna went through some difficult times during that period of transition, but she remained determined and focused and accepted the support offered by the staff. Not only did she ultimately do well in her PSH, but she also effectively used it as a launching point for her next opportunity, Job Corps, a no-cost, residential education and career technical training program administered by the U.S. Department of Labor. Job Corps assists young people ages 16 through 24 with access to career, technical, and academic training. Minna feels it is the perfect program for her at this stage in her life:

> *I got accepted into Job Corps in October, but I didn't start until January. It was eating me up inside. I told no one this, but I guess I'm telling you now. I actually cried because I couldn't start until January. I was like, "I wanted to start now!" Every day, I was crossing off the calendar.*

Minna is staying at Job Corps right now, her second time enrolled in the program; when she approached the organization when she was 17, she was admittedly not ready to make such a commitment, as the requirements can be grueling. This time, however, she has an intense desire to get her GED and to succeed:

> *I'm more mature now. Everything I needed is here, and it's free. I won't be in debt. I'm not going to sit here and act like I want to be in school for years. I do not. I'm the type of person who [doesn't] like to stick with one thing. I'm going to get a trade here, and I might get a license in cosmetology. Then I might get a license in massage therapy. I might [be] a bartender, and I want to be a nurse. I am seriously thinking about getting all four of those. If I'm feeling a certain way, I can say, "I put in four good years in this job. I want to go do this now." I want to have something to fall back on, just in case.*
>
> *Job Corps is not easy. It is not for the weak. There's just so much you have to do on a daily basis. It's crazy. Sometimes I get upset, and I want to tell the staff, "You stay here for a night and follow every single rule, and you're going to see how many rules just slip your mind." There are so many. The rule book is thick, and you better read it… There are so many rules it's ridiculous. [But] rules help. If there are no rules, probably no one would ever graduate Job Corps, but it's a lot.*

Anne, one of the staff people who knows Minna quite well, discussed that leadership qualities are very apparent in Minna, one of her greatest strengths:

> *She was one of our shelter helpers. It was like, "Staff, stand back. Minna's got it," but she didn't do it in this way of junior staff. She was just in this way of, "Hey, you're gonna lose your housing. Move your butt. You're gonna be in a time violation. Let's go." Not necessarily a mother hen, but [she] was just really concerned about her peers, which came out in a good leadership/role model quality. And now she's doing leadership stuff at Job Corps. That's definitely a trend I've witnessed [in her personality].*

Currently, Minna is working as a leader for the other young woman in her dorm, allowing her to develop skills important to her career and her life, things that cannot always be learned in a classroom:

Where she is now. Minna believes her life would have gone differently if she had lived in a loving, supportive home, but she has also decided to focus less on what could have been and more on who she wants to be and what she wants to do in the world:

> *I think that if I would have had a nice home, I'd have my high school diploma right now. I'd be in college right now. If my parents were doing what they needed to do… I'm only saying that now because I'm telling you this story. I don't say that to people. I don't even bring them up no more. I'm 22 years old, and I can change it now… I'm not going to blame them no more… There's no excuse anymore for me. It's on me now. It has nothing to do with them. It's in the past… I think I made that decision [to stop blaming my parents] a while ago. I just had to learn how to do it.*

Letting go of the past and focusing on the control she does have in her life has helped Minna get to a place in her life, one she feels good about:

> *I feel good. I feel like a college student. The only stress I have is college stress. School is stress, which is good. Everybody goes through this stuff. When I get really stressed out, it's better. I just think about where I came from. It's better than having no-food or no-money stress. I do what I have to do, and I'm really determined.*
>
> *Job Corps is my home now. I'm making it my home. I'm a leader on my floor. That means I take attendance. I talk to them about stuff. I help [with] whatever you need. When someone's sick and can't do their floor job, I do it… This is my home for now, until August. That is my goal for when I graduate.*

Even though Minna feels good about where she is right now, she is not one to sit on her laurels. She is very future-oriented, always thinking about what she wants to do next and how she is going to build a life that is secure and happy.

Minna is grateful to all the organizations she has worked with since becoming homeless, for they have pushed her, helped her to realize she has options, provided her with resources, and taken the time and effort to check up on her.

It's hard to even say everything they did for me, because there was so much. They

helped with trying to find GED, making goals. I definitely made a lot of goals. Transportation? They helped with that. I always jumped on the bus. Not having to worry, "I have to scrape up this change to get on the bus," was nice. Résumés, cover letters, and meals every day.

Minna also found therapy to be helpful, particularly because she was able to see a therapist with whom she'd made a connection years earlier.

When asked about her greatest challenges, Minna feels it was most difficult to stop smoking and deal with her depression:

The biggest challenge was to stop smoking. That was a really… It was like a miracle. When I say smoking, I mean smoking marijuana and cigarettes. It really was a miracle how I stopped. I'd definitely tried to stop in the past, [but] it only last two or three days. Three months ago, I stopped cold turkey. I was just so uninterested. Maybe it had to do with me just wanting to cleanse myself and renew myself and prepare. I see kids here. We get a break every two hours from school, about a ten- to fifteen-minute break. They're darting to the smoking section. I don't have anything to do. I'll get some water, use the bathroom, or just keep doing my work. I don't have to go and run and try to puff a cigarette. It's crazy.

Another thing I had to get over…probably depression. I don't get depressed. I think I was depressed because I wasn't doing things with my life. Although smoking marijuana makes you feel good, chemically, it makes you sad. It takes away your happiness.

I'm still working on me. I'm proud of who I am today, especially when I see other people [who] still have a little way to go. I'm so glad I don't think like that no more. I'm so glad I don't do that stuff no more. I'm proud of me.

What she wants others to know. Minna is very reflective about the support she has received and what it has meant to her. She wants people to know that everyone is on their own journey, and to go with them on those journeys, one must exercise patience and nonjudgmental understanding, as well as try to see the positive in others:

Just that patience… I know you see somebody, and you're like, "This person clearly doesn't want help. They don't want to help themselves." Patience,

persistence, and understanding: That's how I opened up. If you're really understanding, I'm going to open up even more, and I'm going to be willing to talk to you more. If you're really judgmental, you have to pay attention to everything you do: how you look at a person, what kind of things you say to a person, your body language. You have to be totally understanding. If they say, "I killed somebody," you have to be somewhat understanding. You have to do what you have to do, but you have to be understanding, especially if they open up and tell you something.

You have to just figure out a way to make it positive. Like, I was so negative about myself. But the staff I met always could say something positive about me… The more they told me, the more I started to believe it. I started to see it and believe in myself.

I would just say that: Be understanding. Have patience and persistence. [Don't] just say something one time. Say it again and again and again: "I support you. I support you," every day, every minute. When they're mad at you, [say], "You can be mad at me, but I still support you."

This type of relentless, unconditional support has helped Minna believe in herself, and today, she proudly declares, "There's no stopping me now!"

Unique

Unique is a resourceful, intelligent, engaging 18-year old African American male who was born in Minnesota and raised in both New York City and the Twin Cities area. He did not grow up with siblings, and his father was not a part of his life. His mother was always in a relationship with a man, was not home often, and raised Unique to be independent from a very young age:

She was by herself, but she wasn't. It was weird. She always had a man, but…never my dad. I always knew that… She has raised me to be independent. I was left home alone at, like,4 years old. She would say, "Just don't open the door for anybody. I'm going to call two times, hang up, call again. That's me. Pick up the phone." That was the system.

Sometimes, Unique was left with babysitters, and at least two of these sexually

abused him. This is how he remembers learning about sex and his sexual orientation.

> *I've always been gay. I was gay from the beginning. I was gay in the middle. I was gay in the end. I always knew I was gay. When I was 7 years old, I had two babysitters. They were brother and sister. I would end up giving the brother a blowjob, and I would end up having sex with the sister. I liked doing one a lot more than I liked doing the other. That's when I knew I was gay.*

Unique knew it was not right for him to grow up in such a manner, that it wasn't healthy for him, and he desperately desired to be in a home where someone would give him the attention he deserved and parent him properly. He remembers calling Child Protective Services when he was 7 years old.

> *I was tired of living with my mom, so I called social services. She knew from the get-go they were coming. I remember, she was like, "You ought to be careful what you say, or else you can't stay with your mommy anymore." I looked at her like, "I don't stay with you now. You just live here with me."*

He recalls that his mother portrayed their situation in the best possible light when Child Protective Services came, and the adults ignored what he had to say:

> *Yeah, she showed our house off like it was on* Cribs *from TV when the people came. I did notice how she never took them to the kitchen. I told them, "Check the refrigerator. Check the food." I kept telling them there wasn't food, but I [was] only 7, so what [did] I know about taking care of kids? They didn't believe me. They did not believe me for shit. They're like, "There's nothing wrong here. He has a computer and a bunch of videogames. He's fine."*

Looking back, Unique recalls a childhood full of disappointment. He wishes he could tell his mother, "Don't get me wrong. You tried your best to raise me. You were a single mother. You had me young, I understand. But those do-or-die moments? You were not there." His mom missed choir concerts and other important events in Unique's life, and on the weekends, she went to clubs, leaving Unique home with no supervision or food to eat. She lived as if she did not have a child at home.

She would put me off on other people. I lived with Uncle Allen in Michigan for, like, three or four months, just randomly. Or I'd always be babysat and home alone. She lived a life like she didn't have me, and I was absolutely okay with that. My thing was, "Just feed me. Don't give me twenty dollars at random at two a.m."
I was hungry, but at the end of the day, I wanted my mom. I wanted my mom. It sucked knowing I'd be the last one picked up for soccer practice every single Saturday, or my mom [wasn't] out there when I was in the choir. Yeah, our songs sucked, and we [didn't] sound good, [but] as a parent, it's your job to suffer, like we will one day. My mom…we didn't get to go through those times together. We have our moments. She was more like a friend. I'll never get past that. I wanted a mom. I didn't need a friend for the century.

She always disappointed me, and I probably always disappointed her. It was always a disappointment.

Leaving home. Unique's mother was always dating someone, but her relationship with a man named Chaz developed into something more serious than the others. He moved into their home and tried to assert himself as Unique's father. Their relationship was volatile, and Unique left home in April 2011 when Chaz physically assaulted him.

Her new guy, Chaz, put his hands on me. I screamed for help. I told her, "Get this man off of me," but her only concern was, "Don't break the glass table." I couldn't be there after that…like, no. Still, to this day, I can't be around him. He put his hands on me, and that wasn't okay with me. Ever since that, I've just been gone. I cut her off. I couldn't talk to her for an entire year. I was like, "Don't talk to me. Don't call me. Please forget my number. I'm dead to you. You're dead to me." It was just that serious.

Unique had tried to make it work, living with Chaz and his mother, but when Chaz assaulted him and his mother refused to defend him, it pushed him past his breaking point. Soon after he left home, he learned that his mother was pregnant with Chaz's baby and that they were engaged to be married. This news was difficult for Unique:

I had a panic attack when my mom told me she was pregnant, and I stayed at my grandma's house. I realized the reason I never wanted a little brother or sister is because I [didn't want] them to go through what I went through. I just don't.

> *Even if that doesn't happen, I don't want to watch you get everything I didn't get to have… I can't be there for that.*

Unique has not been home since he left, and he does not regret leaving, though he does miss many of the things he left behind. He shared, "I miss my house. I miss my mom. I miss my bed, my room. I'm never going to [get] those things back. I'm not. But it's okay for me to miss these things. Those are important things."

Born again: Becoming professionally homeless. Unique's first night away from home was marked by mixed emotions, as is the case for many youths who find themselves living on the streets:

> *It was scary, exciting, and really, really confusing. My friend…picked me up, and I stayed at her apartment for, like, two or three days so I could figure out what I was going to do. All of a sudden, you enter this whole new world of shelter this, shelter that, call at this time and see if there's an opening. It was like, "Really?"*

Unique learned about the youth shelters from an outreach worker at school, who gave him a list. He called a number of places before he found a shelter with an available bed, but he had no money to get there, and the friend he was staying with would not give him a ride. Thus, he lost that bed, and it was weeks before there was another opening, this time at a different shelter. He describes entering shelter life and becoming "born again"; he was born again as someone who was, as he calls it, "professionally homeless."

> *So then I was there, and that's when I was born again. It's an entirely different world, especially if you're young, black, and homeless. Like, everybody knows everybody. If you're friends with this person, you're definitely not friends with another person. Like, it's just a whole different world. You got to make sure you know when places are open, where to go to…if you need something, how you can get it. Like, there's tricks, flips, and dips for everything. Moving to [the youth shelter]…that's when I learned all of them. I became professional. I learned everything quick.*

> *I was professionally homeless. All of us were. The shelter will give you two [bus]*

tokens, one to get there and one to get back. You needed two to get back during rush hour, and there's a curfew. There's also, like, you can't come back until so and so time. So, for bus tokens, what you do is you get your two, go to [the drop-in center], get another one there, [and] now you have three. If there are any other youth places you can go get tokens, you go to them. You call case managers. It doesn't even matter if they just gave you tokens yesterday. I need tokens because tokens are money. That's how you can buy cigarettes. That's how you get on the bus. Tokens are money. So are gift cards. You can literally survive off of being homeless.

Then you have your general assistance (GA) which you can survive off [of]. And, oh God, food stamps. I don't know where I would be without food stamps. Food stamps are the Lord. I don't know if you know how to sell food stamps. Yes, people sell food stamps. The common equivalent is, if I sell you fifty dollars in food stamps, you give me twenty-five dollars in cash. That will save your life. It's just something you need to do… Back in the day, [it was] two cigarettes for a token. You have to know all the prices for everything. You have to know how much everything's worth, what can you sell, what can you pawn, [and] what can't you… I learned more on being on the streets than I did at school. I can run a whole fucking business… I learned a lot!

I would never want anybody to experience homelessness, but if you're going to…I want you to go about it the right way, because there are do's and don'ts, and I had to learn the hard way.

As Unique went through the experience of homelessness, he had to learn how to take care of himself. He was already quite independent, but there was still a lot for him to learn:

I was born again because I learned how to take care of myself. I learned time [and money] management [and how to] be responsible. My second [time]at [the youth shelter] I went and got my Social Security card and my birth certificate. Like, I wasn't bullshitting. You can't bullshit. Every second is precious. By wasting a second, you're basically fucking yourself…and the one rule is, the only person you can't fuck is yourself.

In Unique's perspective, another aspect of becoming born again as professionally homeless is learning how to create your persona or your reputation. This sometimes required fighting:

Like, you have to make those decisions. I never wanted to be a fighter, but I just never wanted to be messed with. So it's like, "Yeah, you may not like me, but you can't do anything to me. I don't disrespect you." Whereas other people would be like, "I don't give no fuck," and they fight you in the middle of the street. There have been moments like that. Like, when I was in [the shelter], there was a girl there named Verna. I was going to beat her ass. I can't stress to you enough [that] I don't fight. I am a pacifist. I do not believe in violence, but I was going to beat her ass because she was talking shit. And my tolerance used to be so high. In the homeless world, you can't have high tolerance. People take that for granted. You just can't be weak.

The altercation with Verna changed the way people looked at him and treated him:

Everybody was like, "You lunged at her." I was like, "I didn't lunge," and I didn't, but apparently I must have been the first one to try to strike. I don't remember that. I just remember getting held back. Everybody was like, "Unique, don't do it! Don't do it, Unique"… It's in those tiny moments right there. Those moments are what's going to make and break you, because from then on, everybody was like, "Yeah, don't fuck with him." I was that bitch. Everybody started to fuck with Verna… Those moments are what gives you respect, gives you rank, gives you everything.

One's persona and reputation in such an environment can dictate how that young person navigates the world of youth homelessness. For example, Unique preferred one drop-in center over another because at the second center, no one knew him; thus, his reputation did not precede him. He described visiting a drop-in center where he was not known: "The atmosphere inside was so different… It's one thing to go into [the drop-in center] and be queen bitch and then go to [a different drop-in center] and just be a stranger all over again. I don't like not being in my territory."

Transitions. Unique has been homeless for two years, and during that time, he has lived with friends and family, on the streets, in two youth shelters, in a transitional living program, and in a host home. In all of these places, Unique had trouble abiding by the rules. He was raised to be independent and essentially had to parent himself, so he has

difficulty allowing others to control any aspect of his life. For example, Unique was asked to leave the first youth shelter for staying out all night without the permission of his case manager.

> *I went to a party. Somebody had gotten murdered down the street, like, a couple days before. Friday night, this girl named Cashmere wanted to go to a party, and she didn't want to go alone, because [that other] girl had just got killed. So I was like, "Okay, I'll go with you," thinking everything was going to be cool. I went, [and] everything was fine. We came back home. I went to sleep… I [got] a phone call Monday: "Yeah, I was informed you went to a party on Friday. You need to call me to ask for overnight."*
>
> *This pissed me off, because case managers have their own different rules. Mine wanted me to call to ask permission between the hours of ten a.m. and two p.m. Like I really know what I'm doing with my day or my night between those hours! I also got in trouble for going to my uncle's funeral. After that night with the party, [my case manager] kicked me out.*

When Unique told teachers at school that he'd been kicked out of the shelter and had no place to go, they found him a bed in a different shelter. Unique did not want to go, however; his pride kept him from wanting to take their advice.

Before his stay at the second youth shelter, he stayed at his aunt's for a bit, couch-hopped some, and tried to enroll in a transitional living program. None of these scenarios worked out, so he ended up going to the youth shelter the school had found for him weeks earlier. There, he truly connected with a staff person for the first time. He transitioned out of the shelter and into a transitional living program (TLP) after just a few months.

In the TLP, he was responsible for chores and his own grocery shopping and cooking. He described it as his "first taste of freedom." Even so, he still had trouble conforming to the rules and expectations, and he sometimes paid others to do his chores

for him. He particularly struggled with the requirement that he remain enrolled in school:

> *Me and the TLP did not get along or agree. Their whole thing was, "You need to go to school," like, "You need to be at school." My thing is, "If I don't feel like going to school, I'm not going to go… Y'all ain't the ones getting a diploma." I just don't see how that coincides. If what I'm doing doesn't bother you directly, why does it concern you?*

Another rule he took issue with was the one concerning the number of nights he could sleep away from the TLP. He felt he had addressed any potential problems with that rules before moving in and that the staff at the shelter went back on their word:

> *I got kicked out because…it really pissed me off, because before I moved in, I'd babysit for my family members when they worked the nightshift. I said, "I know y'all have a problem with curfew and all that, but is that going to be a problem?" "No, Unique. It's not going to be a problem." It was getting [close to] Christmas season. My aunt was picking up extra shifts because she wanted to have a good Christmas for her kids. I understand that, so I kept trying to babysit [for her]. They didn't believe me. "Oh well. You're lying, you're lying, you're lying." My auntie even tried to talk to this woman [at the TLP], and she was like, "Oh well. I don't believe you."*
>
> *Now, if I'm coming to you like an adult, saying, "Hey, this is what I have to do before I move in," they say, "That's not going to be a problem." But now it's a problem all of a sudden? If this was a problem from the get-go, I wouldn't have moved in, because I would have already known better.*

His time in the transitional living program highlighted the fact that homeless young people are often forced to make adult decisions and act like an adult:

> *It's just like any average home, except while you're a teenager, with all the feelings and hormones and the emotions, you have to teach yourself. At the same time, everybody reminds you [that] you can't be a teenager. You have to be an adult. Like right now, I'm 18, and a lot of people tell me I have a much more mature mindset, but you have to. [I] need to do things in an adult way, despite the fact that I have so much teenage angst and, "God, cry me a river," and all that shit.*
>
> *It was my first taste of freedom. That was my own house. It was interesting. Like, you have your own room. You have your own key. They give you a little set of*

dishes. They go grocery shopping, but if you want food-food, you have to go grocery shopping for yourself. You have to be responsible about that. I made great friends there. Like, to this day, they're still my friends. I got into a lot of fights there too.

Finding support. Shiloh because Unique's case manager at the youth shelter and has been with him ever since. She plays a very integral, important rule, in that she is an outreach worker and is not as tied to a specific location or program, as some other case managers are. She remembers meeting Unique for the first time at the youth shelter, and the first thing he said to her was, "Who's this white bitch?" She knew right away that she was going to enjoy working with him but that he was going to need clear boundaries and expectations. She created a lot of opportunities for them to talk—from being present in the common space or sitting with him while he did laundry—but it took a while for Unique to open up to her.

When Unique was ultimately asked to leave the TLP, Shiloh helped him file a grievance and create a transition plan.

When he got his notice that he was going to be discharged, he and I sat down and filled out different applications for housing. He really wanted to get into the GLBTQ Host Program through Avenues, so…I made sure to get the ball rolling on that. I also helped him file grievances, because he was ranting. He was like, "Fuck that bitch. I'm going to do this and that," and I was like, "Okay, well, let's do this a healthy way. There is a form you can fill out. We should probably avoid swearing in it, but…we can do it together."

He was like, "Wow! I feel so empowered," and, "Thanks. Most staff members wouldn't do that, because it's where they work, and they don't want to…" I was like, "Well, I think your voice needs to be heard. If you feel like this was unfair to you, you should be able to speak your mind in a safe, healthy way, without telling somebody you're going to blow up their car or something crazy like that."

Shiloh let Unique know that she did outreach outside of the youth shelter and that he could still call her, even though he was not living at the shelter anymore. Outreach

workers do not normally do such intensive case management, but she realized Unique had trouble trusting people, and he trusted her. Shiloh made a very professional and very generous decision to stay connected to Unique as a support person in his life.

In between. Unique lived on the street between leaving the TLP and securing placement in a host home. He did not attend school during that time, and he drank a lot and smoked a great deal of weed. He also engaged in survival sex. Shiloh stayed connected with him during that time, checking in with him at least weekly, and he began to open up to her more and more about his challenges. Shiloh recalls one night when Unique was having a meltdown after being told to stop drinking and smoking:

> *He was like, "And I don't know why everybody is telling me to fucking quit smoking and drinking, because that's the only thing that seems to keep me level-headed." And I was like, "Well, if that's what you feel—if self-medicating right now feels good for you… I'm not going to tell you it's bad if that is what's keeping you going today and tomorrow. We can talk about other healthy coping skills…" And he's like, "Yeah, let's talk about it." I asked, "Why are you using? What's behind this? Why do you feel like self-medication is going to help you right now? What's going on? What are some things you like to do that help you relax besides getting high?" I've told Unique this a million times: "It's your body. It's your decision."*

Shiloh has always focused her conversations with Unique on what he wants and needs rather than what she thinks he needs, and this youth-focused approach has allowed her to work with him on important issues related to his physical and mental health, his education, and his safety. This open channel of communication was particularly critical at that time because Unique had turned to sex work to earn money.

> *I'm not ashamed. I needed money sometimes. I wasn't always at a shelter. There wasn't always a safe place for me to put my head. Sometimes I needed to work hard, and that's what I ended up having to do. I was lucky. I didn't have a pimp. I met up with a bunch of different youth who are like me. We were good. All of us*

were making money. We were all putting in. All of us were prostituting. We were all escorts, to put it a nice way, but it was balanced. All of us had a place to stay. If you each put in twenty dollars, [you] have a room.

Unique stopped prostituting when a friend of his went out for a job and never came back. He has not seen her or heard from her since the night she disappeared, and this has affected him profoundly:

I probably still would have been doing it if Alicia didn't disappear. She went out for a job. She didn't come back, so I stopped. It's dangerous… In my mind, she's in California on a beach, relaxing and enjoying the life I know she deserves. I never talk to her. I thank her though. She got me out. She wanted me out. She kept telling me, "Unique, you're too smart for this. Go to school. You don't need to be doing this." I was like, "No, the money's good." That can always trap you. If you find an easy way to get money, and it's good money, of course. But I love my life a lot more than I love money.

Happy, angry, sad, and mad. Unique left his mother's home nearly two years ago and asks himself almost every day whether he made the right choice:

Yes, there would be moments when I would be on the city bus, and I'd smile because I'd realize, "I'm happy. I can't blame anybody for anything. It's all on me." I think that was the problem with my mom. She kept raising me to be so independent, but she never gave me the opportunity to…which is where we kept butting heads sometimes. I would do it all over again. Leaving was the best decision I've ever made in my entire life.

Unique describes himself as "happy, angry, sad, and mad all at the same time." He is happy because he's 18, and he's survived that long, without fathering any children. He is happy because he is his own person, and the one deciding his fate is him:

I have friends and a family. There're a lot of love in my life right now. I'm very grateful and happy for that. I am. It's one of those things. When you're young, you know you still got it, and everything flows… I'm loving that.

He is angry because he feels like he doomed to work hard forever, without getting anywhere:

I'm tired of working so hard to go four steps forward, to go six steps back. It's just a constant struggle. When it comes to the homeless program, everybody knows everybody, so when bullshit happens, it affects everybody. I try my hardest not to be in it, but I'm everybody's best friend, so somehow I always get thrown into it. It's a struggle. You have to keep yourself motivated.

Unique says his sadness comes from the mistakes he has made:

I made a lot of mistakes. I could have been in college right now, probably on a full scholarship anywhere. There are so many possibilities and opportunities that I've wasted and messed up on. I'm at that age where I'm old enough to realize it, and I'm sad about it. There are also things now: My best friend is HIV positive, my grandma has Alzheimer's [and] forgets my age sometimes, my friend may potentially leave me 1,000 years before he's supposed to. I'm not a kid anymore. You start seeing the real things in the world, and it depresses [you]. Ignorance is bliss. It really is.

Where he is now. Unique is currently living in a host home and has been there for nearly a year. In his current placement, he and his host have had disagreements about curfews and checking in:

[The host] was very clear about what he wanted me to do and how things were going to get done. I was like, "That's cool," but I never agreed to it. When I first moved in, I had a midnight curfew. I was like, "No, that's not going to work," and it didn't… "Curfew what?"

I was supposed to call and text when I'm not going to be home. I did it the first two or three times, but I'm never home. I forget. I'm always somewhere else.. That's the goal, the game plan. I want to be everywhere but here.

Unique explains that he and his host "have a habit of getting under each other's skin." For example, his host asked him not to take the Nintendo Wii, a videogame console, out of the home without asking. Unique ignored this rule, but he felt he was justified because his host did not use the Wii very often.

His host also asked that Unique never smoke in the home, but while the host was away having Christmas dinner elsewhere, Unique smoked in his bedroom. Again, Unique

felt justified: "He left me to go to his sister-in-law's and didn't even get me a Christmas gift. That was my Christmas gift to myself…smoking in my goddamned home. I opened the window. I turned the fan on. But that's the thing with nonsmokers. Y'all can smell everything."

Unique describes that the life of homeless young person is one of constant change. He gives the example of the time he enrolled in a high school near the youth shelter where he was staying:

> *My first day of school, I was so excited. I had signed myself up to school. I was thinking, "I'm going to make a stand. I'm going to take charge. I'm going to be a part of my own education." I got kicked out of my shelter the same day.*
>
> *Then I was like, "Okay, now what do I do? What's going on? I got to find a whole other place to stay." The thing about being homeless is…nothing's constant.*

He explained that he had become accustomed to the pace of change, and as a result, he did not unpack for several months, even after moving into his host home. Sadly, Unique simply did not trust that the arrangement would last for any significant period of time:

> *When I finally moved in here, I lived here for two whole months and didn't unpack shit because I was always ready to be like, "Okay, I got to be able to…" You forever have a back-up plan. If Jamal kicks me out right now, I have four houses [where] I can spend the night to help me come up with my next go-to. Like, everything can change. Your best friend will become your worst enemy within two minutes.*

Unique is currently on a waiting list to move into an apartment in a permanent, supportive housing program. His circumstances and experiences have left him a bit jaded, so he is already thinking it will not work, because the program is becoming smoke-free, and he does not want to pay rent to live in a place where he cannot smoke. He is also hoping to go to college in the fall on a two-year scholarship to study theater, and he

would eventually like to study acting in London. "You're going to see me on TV one day. Just watch. Wait for me. I'm going to be on there. It's my goal."

His relationship with his mother is cordial, and they work at the same accounting firm, but he does not think they will ever be close again; he is too hurt about her marriage to Chaz and his young half-brother. He wants to move forward, but he harbors anger toward his mother, and this causes tension between them:

> *I believe you need to be able to forgive. Being mad is only hurting yourself. I forgive my mother. I talk to her now and work with her, but you cannot forget. Forgetting makes you dumb. Forgetting means they're going to do same shit. I'm all for forgiveness. I think it's something everybody should practice, but don't forget.*

Gay and homeless. Unique reflects on what it has meant to be gay and homeless. In some ways, it has made him feel less safe. He now feels the need to avoid certain areas and to carry a weapon at all times. In other ways, however, it has deepened his level of comfort with himself:

> *I've always been gay. In fact, I think…being in the homeless world, I became a lot more comfortable being gay. I'm very much more comfortable now. It became… It was me. It was who I am… When you're professionally homeless, you can't be ashamed. You can't regret anything about you. If it's you, it's you. You need to say, "Fuck that," and keep doing you. It's the way society's making you be. If you have a problem with anything about yourself, that's a weakness. We don't do [weakness].*

What he wants others to know. Unique has visited multiple drop-in centers and youth shelters and has strong feelings about the way they operate and the support they offer. Despite all the very positive things he says about Shiloh, in general, he feels case managers are not as helpful as they could be:

> *I never understood the purpose. They never really helped me beyond what I need to do. Like, they didn't wipe my ass. They might have given me a ride here and*

there, but there have been many times when I needed help, and all I could rely on [were] me, myself, and I. I couldn't rely on a case manager, and you learn that quickly.

He also accuses people who rely on their case managers of being freeloaders:

If you call one case manager [and] it doesn't work out, call another one. If it doesn't work out, like, you have a whole list of case managers you can call. Those are freeloaders. I couldn't be one of those, and they do have them out there. Like, y'all are cool being professionally homeless. Y'all know the work. It's worked for you? Cool. Me personally, I had to get out. I'm too independent.

Despite his strong negative feelings about case managers in general, Unique feels that youth experiencing homelessness who do not connect with an adult staff person are in "the lowest ranks of homelessness."

From my experience, if you're not staying in a shelter or a TLP where, like, people can actually take time out to get to know you on a real level, then you're like the lowest rank of homelessness. Like, people can hang out at [the drop-in center] all day, which is fine, because [the drop-in center] is a territory, but nobody [that works] there really knows you.

Unique also has conflicting feelings about both of the organizations he has utilized over the past two years. He sometimes alternately praises and criticizes them in the same train of thought. When asked about the two youth shelters where he lived, he replied as follows:

[The youth shelter]was a home, a base where I could go and feel safe. I guess that's like any other shelter. If you're staying in a shelter, you can always feel safe, depending on which one you're at. But that's as far as it goes. They help you, but at the same time, it's like…you can give a man a fish, or you can teach him how to fish. They just give you fish.

One of Unique's most persistent criticisms is that the drop-in centers and shelters actually motivate young people in the wrong direction; in effect, he believes they keep young people homeless:

If you're going to say your mission statement is to help end teen homelessness or make it better in any way, do that. Don't just be a hangout spot for professionally homeless people and let them be homeless. You let them think, "We're going to help you," yet they're still at the same spot they were three or four years ago. I know some people who are still like that, who are still at the same spot they were three or four years ago, fucking with [the drop-in center].

Unique feels lucky to have found Shiloh, who seems to him to be different from other case managers he has encountered on his journey:

Shiloh don't have time for the bullshit. Shiloh's not going to work for you unless you want to work for yourself. With Shiloh, it was never, "What can I do for you?" It was, "How can I help you help you?"

Shiloh's got that mindset that everything is precious, and you have to do what you need to do. Every second can't be wasted. Shiloh taught that to me too. At the end of the day, you're going to go to sleep with yourself. Not one of these friends…are going to be able to do that for you. You're going to do it by yourself. You need to take care of your own business. That's why I'm taking care of it. Shiloh wasn't going to let me be lazy. I was already independent. Then, when Shiloh came, I became smarter and independent.

When asked specifically if there were ways in which the organizations helped him, he cites access to small jobs, such as working at a food pantry or giving presentations and workshops. He credits those odd jobs for putting "money in the pocket and food in the belly."

Empowered. Unique recalls a turning point when he was living at the transitional living program and attending a leadership meeting at the drop-in center. He realized then that he did not wish to remain homeless permanently, and he needed to empower himself to do more if he was going to change his life. Remarkably, he has since organized a group of friends to start a nonprofit:

We were at the [the drop-in center], in the basement. We had leadership training. I was listening to everybody describe their experience with [the drop-in center],

how some of the case managers can be disrespectful or how some rules make absolutely no sense. Think about it. Okay, there's a problem… So we decided to start a nonprofit to go to these places to consult [with] them [about] how to improve their services. Who better to help regulate a youth homeless shelter and a youth drop-in center than the homeless youth?

I want more for me. At the same time, I want more for other homeless youth. I don't agree with a lot of the places. Instead of griping about it, I started a whole company so that we can fix shit. I feel empowered. I want other people to feel empowered. You can take charge of your life. You just need to say, "Here's my life." Start doing it. It's that simple. It's not hard at all.

Domestic Abuse

Two young woman who participated in this study have a long history of being in relationships with abusive partners. Alexa was born into a family with a history of domestic abuse, and she grew up watching all of the women in her life—her mother, aunts, and cousin—be abused by men. As Alexa stated, "The cycle just kept goin' on and on." Asha was adopted at an early age and was sexually abused be her adoptive parents and later in her foster care placements.

Asha's and Alexa's stories are strikingly similar, in that both young women were isolated from everyone in their lives because their abusers demanded it. They have multiple children with more than one father, and each of the fathers was or continues to be abusive to them. Neither young woman stayed in shelters for extended periods of time because they did not want to be away from their respective boyfriends and because it would have exposed the abuse they had worked so hard to hide. Those suffering from the brutal physical and emotional effects of intimate partner violence present additional challenges for programs trying to reach homeless youth.

Alexa

Alexa is a strong, beautiful, 22-year old African American woman and a committed mother of two: a daughter, age 2, and a son, age 4. She was born in Chicago and was raised with her brother by her single mother. Her father was rarely present, and Alexa does not remember meeting him until she was 9 years old. She also has a sister by her father, but she grew up in a different home.

Alexa thinks about her father a lot and wonders if her life would be different now if she had met him earlier or if he had been around to help. She remembers her mom struggling a lot and living in an unsafe neighborhood:

> *So it was just me and my brother and my mom livin' in the ghetto, if you wanna be technical. We witnessed a lot a stuff. I think that's why I'm so grown up at this age, because I have experienced a lot of things when I was younger. But since I have kids, I don't want them to see that side, my rough side.*

Sometimes Alexa and her brother were locked outside of the apartment so the adults inside could do drugs. When Alexa tried to tell her mother about this, her aunt and the other adults lied and denied it.

Alexa and her family moved to Minnesota when she was 9, and she was raised with several cousins, whom she was very close to. As she has grown older, her relationships with her cousins have suffered and become more distanced. She attributes this to issues she has with trusting others and her tendency to pull away from and mistrust people in her life:

> *My family always says, "You think we're against you, and we're not. We just wanna help you," but that's just how I grew up—like, don't never let nobody get close to you, [or] then you lose them. So what is the point of gettin' close to*

somebody?

When Alexa and her family moved to Minnesota, they lived with her aunt, and she remembers that as a terrible time in her life:

> *It was, like, so many people: my auntie, her kids' father, my three little cousins and their brother, my mom, my mom's boyfriend, and my brother. That's a lot a people in a three-bedroom apartment—a whole lot, too many. I don't ever wanna go down that route ever again.*

Alexa and her family moved to a new place, but life did not really get any easier. things were still hard. Her mother was working a lot and not paying attention to the children. Her mother was in an abusive relationship at the time, and Alexa remembers feeling that her mom did not love them; no matter what happened in the home, she would always take her boyfriend back into their homes and their lives. Alexa was angry, hurt, and "running the streets and getting into some stuff."

During this time, her uncle was killed less than a block from her home. Alexa remembers that as a really difficult time for the family and for her in particular. The event nearly pushed her past her breaking point:

> *I was close to him, 'cause he was a father figure to me. Even though he did some things, I still respected him. So it was terrifying for me, 'cause I had to still live upstairs for another year or two, and we could see where he got shot outside of my brother's bedroom window. Then we got put out. I'm like, "Oh, my God," but I'm kinda glad we moved, 'cause I was into a lot a things, like fighting. I probably tried drinking and smoking when I was still living there too. And I'm like, "Oh my God. Something's gotta give."*

Becoming homeless. Looking back, Alexa realizes homelessness came slowly for her. She met her children's father the summer after eighth grade and moved out of her own home to live with him. Eventually, his mother kicked them out of the house. It was this final act by the boyfriend's mother that technically resulted in Alexa's homelessness,

but she believes it was a process, something that happened slowly over her lifetime:

> *Everything happened slowly. Each year, I would go through something. It was just ridiculous… I started letting myself go, started doing all types of things: stealing, fighting. That's when the weed smoke got really heavy… [I needed] Alcoholics Anonymous at 16, because I was just drinking so much. It was just crazy.*

Alexa felt she had to choose between her mother and her boyfriend, but this did not seem strange to her, because she had seen her mother choose between a man and her children many times before. Alexa moved onto the streets to be with the boy whom she loved, in spite of his many indiscretions:

> *He was cheatin' on me, [but] I still loved him for him. And I'm like, "Okay, I'm bein' homeless with you. You make sure we got somewhere to stay. Both of us is okay. But you're still doin' what you do, which is sleepin' around, and I'm young, dumb, don't have nobody to turn to. So, of course, I'm gonna follow behind you."*

Becoming a parent. Despite being homeless, Alexa stayed in high school because she was absolutely committed to earning her diploma. No one at the school, neither the teachers nor the other students, knew she was homeless. She even recalls that relatives she went to school with did not know, and she followed a very specific routine to keep her homelessness a secret:

> *Every day after school, this [was] what I would do. I go get something to eat, meet up with my boyfriend, at his school, and then we'll go wherever we go. We'll smoke weed. Then we'll go to his friend's house. I stay there. Then we go to the next house the next night. Then we go to the next house. And then I'm like, "Okay, I have my own bed at home. My mom's at work. So why not go to my house? I got keys. But why not go to my house one day while she is at work?" I would sneak him in. She wouldn't even know… We would go house to house, house to house.*

Alexa became pregnant with her first child while she was in high school, and she stopped smoking weed and drinking. She became homeless with and for her boyfriend, and even though he is not the biological father of her child, he has been with Alexa and

her son since her second trimester.

> *My son is, like, his son. He was there when he was born. He was there when I was five months pregnant. We got back together. My son will pick him over his dad any day. My son's dad's mom died recently, and I let him come around, and my son was like, "You're not my daddy." I'm like, "Whoa!" It felt awkward, but it is what it is. He said, "My daddy is in jail."*

Domestic abuse. As previously mentioned, Alexa was born into a family with a history of domestic abuse. She watched both her mother, her aunts, and her cousin be abused, nearly every female in her family. Alexa stated, "The cycle just kept goin' on and on."

Sometimes she would try to leave her boyfriend but would not find what she was looking for in other relationships and would end up returning to her children's father. When she became pregnant with her first child at 17, she was still in an abusive relationship with her children's father and withdrew from her friends and did not talk to anyone but him. She found it impossible to leave him. "Every time somethin' happened to me—like, he abused me—I'd try to find love somewhere else, and I end up gettin' pregnant twice with him. It made it no better."

Alexa has been in abusive relationships for several years, but her worst experience occurred one year prior to the time we spoke with her. Due to what she has been through, Alexa has a tendency to shut out people who care about her, particularly when she is involved in an abusive relationship; in part, this is because she does not want them to judge her. "My family told me millions of time, 'You cut us off when you go through things,' and really, the family is the most important thing when you're goin' through anything."

It is difficult for Alexa to end relationships, even abusive ones and even when she or her loved ones suffer grave damage as a result. She recalls the low points in her relationship with her ex-boyfriend, who tried to strangle her when she was pregnant with her daughter:

> *I blacked out. The last thing I seen [sic] before I blacked out was my son gettin' slammed in the door. My mom was outside when it all was happenin', yellin' my name. That's how I woke up. [There] was a brief second when I fell out, 'cause I was big, pregnant. I didn't wanna be bothered with him because I knew he was sleeping around and everything else. [I decided], "My baby's more important than this." He went to jail for eighteen months. He got out. I let him come back. This time, I started bein' abused months later, and I'm like, "It's just a cycle." I had two black eyes. He stole her car and rent money. I had bite marks. He choked me and punched holes in the wall. He hit me when I had my kids. He mentally, emotionally, and verbally abused me. He abused me any way he could. It's just crazy.*

Alexa believed what he told her, that no one was going to love her more than he did; however, she came to a point when she realized she needed to choose between him and her children's wellbeing:

> *So it's, like, why did I keep lettin' him do this to me? This is not love. I love my kids more and my life. If they don't have me, they have their grandma, but it's nothin' like havin' your own mom. That's what I realized, too, as I was growing up. So when he started doin' all these things to me, I really broke down. He came up to my job. I lost my job for a month. I lost all my self-esteem. I lost everything: my pride, my joy. But I still made sure my kids went to school. They ate, bathed—like, everything. I still do stuff with them.*

The drop-in center. Alexa originally learned about the drop-in center from her boyfriend, who assured her they could help her. He would not go with her because he was seeing other women who went there, and he did not want to be seen with Alexa. When she first visited, she was not impressed, but she came to feel comfortable there.

> *[There're] a whole buncha kids [at the drop-in center]. Even though they're my*

age, I'm much more mature; I thought they were irritating. And when I really got to know the staff and stuff, I felt comfortable.

When you come to [the drop-in center], you can pretty much do a lot a stuff. You can actually sleep down here, eat. I'd just come down here, sit down, get on the computer, [and] job-search. Like, I could block everybody out. If there [was] a lotta noise, I could block it out.

I don't really remember the rules when I was comin' down here, to tell you the truth… I know you can't eat anywhere in the building. You have to clean up after yourself. No fighting, no arguing. It's like a typical place. You cannot do any of those things. If you're in public, you can't act like that. Whatever you can't do in public, you can't do it down here, basically.

Alexa is an outgoing person, and she made a point of getting to know the staff at the drop-in center:

I introduced myself to every staff member. I'm a very talkative person, so I asked them questions. I introduced myself, 'cause you have to do intake. Over the years…I started gettin' close with them. I actually started comin' [to the drop-in center] after I had my son, then me and my son were down here a lot.

Alexa described the types of resources and support she was able to access through the drop-in center. They have showers and food, both of which are hard to come by when you are homeless. It's a safe space to be when you want to get off of the streets, and it is a place to go on holidays when youth do not have other family to turn to. Each youth is assigned a case manager, and when Alexa met with hers, they worked together to identify her goals and what she needed to accomplish to reach those goals. Alexa shared:

If you're looking for an apartment, they help you do that, help you fill out applications for waiting lists. If you're goin' through some things, they'll try to figure ways out to help you, take you to food shelves and different places for assistance. If you're pregnant, they send you [to a clinic] for prenatal care, which is free… They actually help you with a lot a stuff.

On Christmas, they give out Christmas presents. Thanksgivin', they actually have a dinner. They have a lotta stuff. You just gotta know what you want to do and move forward with it.

But the youth need to work; everything is not simply done for them. As Alexa stated, "If you're just comin' down here just not to do nothin', then what is the point of comin' down here?"

The drop-in center is willing to help young people, regardless of the choices they have made in their lives:

> *If you have a past, like, nobody judges you about it. Say, for instance, you used to do different drugs, other than smokin' weed. They don't judge you. They just help you. Pretty much, they help youth, period.*

Alexa has been working with a case manager toward the goals she set for herself: going back to school and finding a job. While Alexa was visiting the drop-in center, she was able to see a therapist named Monica. "I see Monica a lot, so that helps me. She is a good support system to help me through a lotta things." She originally met Monica when she was sitting outside the clinic, in tears: "My boyfriend kept callin' me. He's the one who choked me when I was pregnant with my daughter and tried to blame everything on me, and at that time, I believed him." Monica remembers:

> *I actually met Alexa [when] I was walking into the clinic. She was one of those memories you never forget. She was super pregnant, and she was wearing this yellow, strapless sundress. She was sitting outside, just bawling and bawling and bawling. I had no idea who she was, and I wasn't even working down here yet, so I just kind of stopped and sat and talked with her. She was having a hard time with this guy, who ended up going to jail. She was on her way to a prenatal visit. We touched base, and that was that. I didn't see her again for a year.*

Alexa began seeing Monica on a regular basis after her daughter turned 1 year old and her boyfriend was released from jail. By that time, Monica had started working at the drop-in center.

Turning point. Alexa was homeless for a while after giving birth to her son. Her

mother took care of her child while she stayed in various places with her boyfriend.

> *It was terrifying. It was terrible. When I had my son, I did not know how to take care of a kid. At this point, my boyfriend had got out his first place, and I was with him. We was [sic] stayin' at his mom's. Then we were stayin' at his grandma's. We'd go to a friend's house, and I brought my son to all of these place, but that got too hard, so I just ended it. I stopped going from place to place and went back to my mom's. It was just too much. I will never put [my son] through that again.*

She has worked hard to provide her children with consistent housing and schooling. Alexa is proud that her son has been in the same daycare for four years. Her 2-year-old daughter has been going there as well. Sometimes, making sure her children have what they need means getting creative about getting help and making sacrifices:

> *I have to make sure they have everything. If I don't have food, I make sure they eat. In the last two months, I've been strugglin' so bad, it feels like I'm homeless with my food situation, but we have a roof over our head. I have to go downstairs, because my ex-boyfriend's cousin's mom and grandma live downstairs. They'll feed them. I literally bring them down when I wanna feed my kids. And when I do get money, it's McDonald's, 'cause that's their favorite place, the Golden Arches. They have everything.*

Since having children, Alexa has made better use of the resources at the drop-in center. "As long as I could remember, I've always been doing things on my own, but I just need support. So when I come down here, I got support. My kids is the ones who keep me pushin'." The staff have seen this motivation and commitment in Alexa. Monica shared:

> *She is super motivated. [Two months is] the longest she has gone without a job. She has always worked. She is extremely smart, and she really wants to go back to college. She always takes really good care of her kids. For example, her son had a speech impediment, and she made sure he got a speech therapist. She is always on top of anything to do with her children.*

The drop-in center did what they could to help Alexa create a special Christmas

for her children this past December, even though they had aged out of the program:

> *This year, I was kinda skeptical about Christmas, but the outcome turned out perfect for my kids, because my mom bought so much and Tamika put together a bag for me. She is helpful. I was too late for any programs because I didn't know you had to register for Toys for Tots before Thanksgiving. Tamika told me, still call Toys for Tots, and they still brought me Christmas presents the day of Christmas. So [the drop-in center] has so many resources there to help you.*

Working with Monica has been incredible too. In talking with Monica about the domestic abuse cycle, Alexa has come to realize it is not actually a weakness; it is something she can overcome. Alexa is very intelligent, and the women have been able to engage intellectually as well as therapeutically regarding this issue.

> *Sometimes therapy just treats the symptoms or behavior or, "This happened to you…" but another question is, "Why? Why do you stay in this? It's not just love. We love lots of people. This person is able to do this to you. Why?" So, learning about how domestic abuse works, learning about what power looks like, learning about his reasons [is important].*

This type of learning has helped Alexa to see a different, more positive path for herself.

Alexa's case manager helped her get her first apartment. It was not an easy task, considering that she was pregnant and had no rental history, and she was also a bit anxious about living on her own:

> *At first, I wasn't really wasn't looking [for an apartment], because I didn't have no rental history or nothin', so I came down here [to the drop-in center]. They're like, "Oh, here's a stack of applications for single moms [who] got kids or who are on the verge of havin' kids. And we wanna put you on waiting the list." So my old case manager put me on a list.*

When she was three months pregnant, they told her she had moved to the top of the waiting list. Her case manager took her to sign the lease and see the apartment. At first, Alexa had nothing and had to sleep on the floor. Now, three years later, her apartment is well furnished and feels like a real home for her and her children. She has been living in

the same housing program for three years and has held a job for the last two and a half. She has also been going to school on and off, depending largely on whether her boyfriend is in jail or not.

> *I was just taking my generals, and I only went for two semesters. Before my son, I passed my English and reading. After my son, I had to take my math, and I passed. So, when my boyfriend is gone [in jail], I pass my classes. Last year I was going back, but he got out of jail, and I ended up droppin' out. I think I was taking keyboarding or something. I forgot. But I had to drop out. Couldn't go to school with two black eyes, so I just stopped going.*

Her boyfriend recently went to jail for several years, due to his physical abuse of Alexa. The strength and courage Alexa showed in pressing charges is one of her biggest accomplishments. Monica explained:

> *The level of abuse had been increasing steadily. I was like, "Okay." There was nothing you can do, and I was doing everything I was supposed to, but I was getting really scared. He kicked down her door, and she called the police. He went to jail, and he kept begging her to drop the charges or say she'd lied. We were meeting twice a week, once a week, and she didn't drop the charges. That's phenomenal. [For] her [to] be able to do that was one of the biggest accomplishments she has made so far.*

During these tumultuous times, Alexa could not always make enough income to meet her needs. The drop-in center helped her during those months when she could not afford her rent, and they helped her pay for school. When she dropped out mid-semester, she incurred fines and penalties she could not pay, and that would prevent her from reenrolling. The drop-in center was able to help cover the cost of the fines.

The support of staff at the drop-in center, particularly her case manager and her therapist, has been incredibly important for Alexa. They worked together to help her stay in school, meet her needs, and furnish her new apartment.

> *It was meant for them to be in my life, 'cause if I didn't find Monica, I don't know*

> *what I'd do. Tamika also came to my house and really helped me a lot. She knows I'd be strugglin' at some point in time, but she'll find a way to help me.*

Where she is now. Alexa feels good about where she is in her life right now. She is currently working on getting back in school for the fall and on finding a townhome so she and her children can have more space. Her son will be entering kindergarten in the fall, and she has enrolled him in a school she feels good about. Even more importantly, she is feeling good about herself.

> *I'm actually feeling good. My self-esteem is up there. My kids…like, every day, they do something new, so they're teaching me. That motivates me to keep on pushing… and everything is coming together, 'cause at first, it wasn't happening.*
>
> *I'm proud that I made it to 22. Any person would be proud [after] the stuff I've been through. I actually almost died from bein' abused. I'm proud of makin' it to 22. I'm a proud mother of two beautiful children. I'm proud that I have my own place. I'm proud that I don't have to depend on a person to take care of me and my kids, because that's my responsibility and nobody else's. I'm also proud of myself. I help people out, and I don't expect nothin' back from them unless they're willin' to give it to me. I'm actually proud of myself.*

With her ex-boyfriend in jail, Alexa has found more peace in her life and has started dating someone who treats her well. Since ending her abusive relationship and entering a healthier one, she has been less stressed, less depressed, and has had fewer migraines. She credits many of these positive steps to the work she has done with her therapist. Monica helped her understand some of the choices she has made, and Alexa now believes she deserves someone who treats her well.

Alexa's current relationship is different than those in her past. Looking back on her relationships, it is hard for her to believe what she has gone through. Alexa realizes that she never had a chance to explore and to experience what it is like to be in a non-abusive relationship, and she described how it is different this time: "I'm in different

spirits. We act like we've [known] each other for years, and we've been talking for a few months. It actually seems like we've [known] each other for ten years, and it's crazy." Although his friends and family talk of marriage, Alexa is adamant that she is not ready for that yet.

Alexa's relationship with her mother has also improved since the birth of her children. When she was pregnant with her son, she stayed with her mother, and she realized they needed to build a relationship; Alexa discovered then that she needed her mother.

> *I'm like, "Okay, something needs to change. Mom, we need to build this relationship together. I'm tired of feelin' empty inside. I'm tired of not knowin' you love me." She told me straight up, "I do love you. You are my daughter. I always loved you. You just wanted to do what you wanted to do. You had me worried every night when you were gone, stressed out. I didn't know how to tell you I love you, even though I do." We actually have a closer relationship now than we ever had since my kids, the closest ever. I love her to death.*

Learning to trust. In order to get to where she is now, Alexa has had to address her relationships with abusive men and has learned to open up to and trust the people she shut out while she was in the throes of those abusive relationships:

> *The abusive part of my life…I had to overcome that. I have to let that part of my life go. The biggest challenge [has been] me holdin' grudges toward people, 'cause I have done that. I had to stop that too. I don't have too many people close to me, but I have a handful—not even that. I had to really learn how to open up. Like I said, I had trust issues before. Those are the biggest challenges in my life right now.*

The drop-in center helped her with this; there, Alexa found people who were always there for her, people who would listen, people whom she could trust:

> *I started seeing people at [the drop-in center] and started to trust them. Like, that's how I learned to open up. But in the past year, I closed it back up. Then I*

reopened up, because I met somebody. Actually, they told me [at the drop-in center], "Everything you go through is for a reason. Just keep on pushing. Keep on taking care of them kids." I done spoke to them about stuff I was going through, and even when I couldn't come down here, I'd call. I'll call Lena, Tamika, or Aubrey and tell them, "I'm goin' through this. I need somebody to talk to," and they'd say, "Oh, come on down so you could talk to us." Or I'll call Monica. I'll call her at eight at night and leave her a message: "Call me when you get up please. I'm going through a little stage," and she'll work through it with me. I have to open up to the people I know and have known for a while.

Through talking to these supportive women at the drop-in center, she has come to view her past relationships differently:

My boyfriend [who abused] me…I can't be mad at him. I allowed him to do it to me. It's not on him. It's really basically off his childhood, why he does the stuff he does. Two wrongs don't make a right. I told him recently, "In order to forgive, you have to forget," and that's what I have done. I forget everything he done to me, and I'll forgive [him], but that don't necessarily mean we have to be friends.

What she would tell others about the drop-in center. Alexa is thinking about starting a nonprofit for abused women. She has been inspired by the help she's received, and she believes she can help other women in similar situations. She described the steps she has taken so far: writing down her ideas, thinking about a name, and researching the requirements of opening a nonprofit in Minnesota. Alexa is rightfully proud that she's found the strength to get to where she is in her life today. She wants to use this strength and what she has learned to help others, and she has only good things to say about the drop-in center:

I'll tell them this actually is a great place for you to get yourself together, and if you don't choose to do it right now, make sure you do it in the long run, 'cause it takes time for a person to overcome all their obstacles. It's a good support system, and if you're willin' to get that help and that support, then you can move forward. Sometimes it struggle to be a survivor.

Asha

Asha is a spirited, 23-year-old Caucasian woman, a mother of three children, ages 7 and 2 years and 7 months. She was born in Texas and grew up all over Minnesota in the foster care system: Jordan, Maple Grove, Belle Plain, Shakopee, Chaska, Prior Lake, and Minneapolis. She was adopted twice and also lived in several shelters and group homes. In these placements, she experienced much sexual trauma.

She was sexually abused by the father in her first adoptive home, and when she reported it, she was met with resentment, disbelief, and blame. Asha resented that man for abusing her, the mother for accusing her of lying, and the siblings for not believing her. Asha and her sister were removed from the home when Asha was 13. Her adoptive parents made it very clear that they favored her younger sister and blamed Asha for ruining their family:

> *When we were taken from them, they sat and talked to [my little sister] and told her how much they loved her and how she was so special, and she was their everything, and they'd always love her. They didn't say nothing to me. They told me I was a lying little heifer—for [lack] of a better word—and I could die. They said I was never going to have a family, [that] nobody was ever going to love me because I…ripped their family apart. It was terrible. I swear up and down to this day that the mom knew what was going on. She just didn't know what to do about it. She didn't want to believe it.*

Asha took out the anger, hurt, and resentment of this abuse and other abuse she had experienced earlier in life on every other family she stayed with or placement she was in.

> *I would take it out on them in one way or another, manipulation so I could get what I wanted. I would see how far I could pull it. It was just trial and error. "I'm going to stay here and push your buttons to see if you're really in this, or if you're just going to say 'I can't take it anymore, and you can go.'" That's all the families. They got to the limit where they just say, "You can go."*

As she got older and started acting out more, her social workers often forced her into juvenile facilities:

> *They would offer me a choice, like, "You can be here, or you can be with a family." I actually think I would have rather stayed [in] some of the juvenile facilities rather than actually being with a family. The staff became my family, even though I knew they really weren't.*

Asha was 15 and staying with a foster family when she got pregnant with her first child. She kept her pregnancy a secret for as long as she could because she knew it would not go over well with the foster parents when they learned that the baby's father was the foster mother's brother. When it became obvious that she was pregnant, she and her cousin came up with a cover story and told them she was pregnant by a boy she'd sneaked out of the house with in the past. Eventually, her cousin fessed up and told Asha's foster parents that this story was not true. Asha was so upset about her cousin's disclosure that she talked to her court-ordered therapist about it. The therapist deduced that the father of her baby was the uncle, her foster mother's brother. Asha was shocked that the therapist figured it out. When the therapist let her know that she was a mandated reported and had to report the incident, Asha begged the therapist to give her enough time to tell the family first. That night, when Asha returned home, she told her foster mother they needed to talk:

> *"We need a serious conversation." She looked at me like, "What!? You're pregnant." "No," I told her, "it's more serious than that." I'm like, "It's about who the dad is." She's like, "I thought it was whoever you got in the car with that one day." I was like, "No, I lied." She looked at me, and her eyes started watering, like, "Why do you have to lie to me?" I'm like, "Because I knew it would be a problem if you found out it was your brother." She was like, "No way! I can't believe it."*
>
> *Before they found out it was the uncle's, it was, "We're going to have a baby*

> *shower and do this and that. We're going to make sure you guys are okay. It's not a terrible thing… We wish you would have been older, more safe." Afterward, when they found out it was the uncle, it depended on who was saying it. Some [said], "You're wrong for that. You know better. You should have told somebody." Somebody else [said], "You consented. You knew what you were doing. You probably asked him to do it." It made me mad, and I didn't like how they made me feel.*

Asha was removed from that home, and despite how much their reaction hurt, she admits, "If I had to pick any family to live with, they'd probably be one of the first."

Asha stayed in a youth shelter until she went into labor. Rather than returning her to the youth shelter after that, social services took her to the home of the second family to adopt her. Asha suspects that the family only took her in so they could have her son:

> *They took me away from our family and put me in the shelter. I ended up going into labor, had my baby the next day, stayed in the hospital for a couple days, and went to this brand new home. I didn't know these people. [They] had clothes and a bed and everything set up for my son, but they had nothing set up for me. I felt like they wanted my son, that they were just going to take him from me. One evening, me and the mom got in a fight, and she said the system should never let me have him, that they should have taken him from me the second I had him.*

That family has since adopted her son, who is now 7 years old. It hurts Asha that her child is being raised by others, even though she feels they are providing for him better than she could. She does not feel like part of the family, even though they adopted her just before her 18th birthday; she is still convinced they only did so in order to maintain permanent ties to her son.

Becoming homeless. Asha's relationship with her second adoptive family was never good, and it was not long before she desired to live on her own with her son. During that time, she graduated from high school and began taking classes at a community college. A girl in her one of her classes offered to let Asha and her son rent a

room in the apartment she rented, and Asha stayed there until she enrolled in a program that provides single mothers and their children with safe, affordable housing, early childhood education, life skills training, and support for career-track education. She was only able to stay in that program for six months. Asha's adoptive parents took her son for the summer, and Asha lost her focus. She was partying and hanging around with guys, behaviors that eventually got her kicked out of the program.

> *[The program] was really strict. Guys could come in your apartment one day out of the month, with no overnights unless it was a female and it was approved. The one night, my guy…came up and got tore up from the floor up. He ended up trying to talk me into spending the night. I got kicked out. I had four days to leave, no options, nothing. I didn't obey the rules, and I knew what the consequences were. I took responsibility for that. My parents told me I could come and stay out there, and I almost wish I would have, but I didn't.*

When she was asked to leave the program, her adoptive parents offered to let her move back in with them, but that meant giving up her freedom and leaving the person she was dating, and that was not a choice she was willing to make. She went back to her boyfriend, who also became her pimp, and she began living in a place where she had to worry about being assaulted in her sleep:

> *I was [at my parents'] for a week, and I told them to take me back to St. Paul. I missed the dude I was messing with, thinking it was love, knowing it wasn't. I missed the freedom. I couldn't smoke there. I couldn't drink and do the things I wanted to do. I came back [to St. Paul]. He convinced me to start prostituting. I ended up getting charged with it… I feel like it was entrapment.*
>
> *I was sleeping at the bus stop, because I was technically homeless then. [My boyfriend] would either let me sleep in his car, or he'd sneak me into his mom's house, or he'd have me go and sleep at his uncle's house. Do him a couple of rocks, and he'd be cool. The only thing I'd have to make sure [of was that] I was completely covered; otherwise, I would wake up to him trying to get some.*

Asha was picked up for prostitution one night when she fell asleep at a bus stop, a

near-fatal incident for her. She explained what happened when an undercover cop circled the block several times:

> *I'm ignoring it. I'm tired. I just got off work, working at Subway, a whole eight-hour day. I was working forty hours a week there, and that still wasn't enough money for [my boyfriend]. I was almost wondering if he was an undercover cop. He came around five or six times. Finally, the last time, I got up. I went over to the car.*

> The undercover police officer offered her a ride, and she accepted. When he asked where she wanted to go, she said, "I ain't got nowhere to go. Just drive around and get me out of the cold." When he asked if she needed money, she said, "Yeah. I need some money. Money would be great. I could get something to eat. If I got enough money, I could find a place to stay for the night." He asked her what she would do in return for the money, and she asked, "What do you want me to do for the money?" The police officer listed things she could do, and she replied that she wasn't interested in doing any of them. At that point, as she recalls it, he parked and pulled out his badge:

> *I'm like, "The kind of police officer like bam-bam, thank you, ma'am? Or we're going to do this and go our separate ways? Or I'm going to jail?" He said, "You're going to jail." I'm like, "Shit."*

> That was not the only time Asha was approached by police officers. She remembers the most disturbing incident was when four patted her down, asking where her crack pipe was and how long she'd been prostituting. She recalls feeling molested:

> *"…like I was 5 years old, with my dad touching on me in my room, where I'm supposed to be safe, my sanctuary, except I'm all out in front of people, sitting there in the parking lot. They're just grabbing me. It didn't feel good. I felt terrible."*

In this instance, Asha was arrested and was released later that morning, early enough to make it to her shift at Subway. When she got off work and went home, her boyfriend was furious that she had been arrested, and he beat her unconscious. When she regained consciousness, she was still being abused.

The whole side of her face was swollen, and she tried to cover it when she went to

work the next day. Asha recalls what happened when her co-worker noticed that she was acting strangely:

> *She told me to move my hair and said, "I want to see what it looks like. I want to see what he did." I was like, "How did you know?" "Because you're covering your face. It has to be for a reason." I showed her, and she told me all these different places I could go, all these different options I had. I didn't want to go. I was in homeostasis, fear of change. Tia taught me that. It was my favorite word for a whole year.*

Asha only left her boyfriend briefly before going back to him. He beat her severely again, and she left to stay in an adult shelter.

> *I went in there freaking out. They told me I needed to go to a battered women's shelter, that they really couldn't help me there for what I was going through. I cussed them out, screaming and yelling and waking up half the people [who] were sitting in the front area asleep, and I left.*

It was the kindness of a waitress at a restaurant that night who saved Asha's life:

> *I went to Mickey's Diner, and Mickey's Diner saved my life. I probably would have jumped off a bridge, because I was scared he was following me, that he was going to do whatever. The lady sat there. She fed me, and different people came in. They were talking to me. People kept asking if I was hungry. There was another young kid [who] came in there, and he was homeless too. We sat and talked. They fed him too. It was just a real different feeling. There are people out there [who] care, [who] don't even know what you're going through, but they see you need help. They're going to help you.*
>
> *After that, I started staying at [the adult shelter]. When I first got into the women's program, the two ladies there were asking me "How old are you? You look young. You don't need to be here. Why are you homeless?" They were trying to tell me all these other programs to go to, that I shouldn't be down there, that it's not the right area for somebody as young as me, and the people down there are terrible.*

The drop-in center. Asha stopped prostituting after she started staying at the adult shelter and visiting a drop-in center. She was working with a case manager there, Sonny, who was attempting to help her find housing. She was in a youth shelter for a

short while, but she was asked to leave due to smoking marijuana. After that, she couch-hopped and found a variety of places to stay short-term.

> *I couch-hopped from person's house to person's house, and then came [to the drop-in center] to ask for resources and housing options and housing programs. When I was couch-hopping, I rented one of my manager's basements or a room in a friend's. I got a corner in somebody's house. Every time I did, it was, "Sonny, I found a new place to move into." He would say, "Really? What do you mean? Like, you're on the lease?" "No." "Really? Do you remember what happened last time you did this?" "It's going to be different. These people are like family." He'd say, "They were like family the last time," and I'd say, "Still, it's going to be different." But it was always the same thing, different person.*

She shared that the drop-in center helped her with transportation, housing resources, job-searching, and social skills. She participated in a luncheon at the drop-in center and realized things she had never paid attention to before about the way she presented herself and the words she chose to use. She also learned, through her interactions with staff and youth at the drop-in center, that sharing her experience and perspective could help others. She said, "I wouldn't be as far as I am off the streets if it wasn't for a lot of the stuff they've done here." She also recognized that, at times, she didn't want to accept what they had to offer. She would accept a gift card and trade it in for money to buy "a snack or some cigarettes or something to drink to run away from [her] problems." She spent a lot of time running away from her problems before realizing, "No matter how far I ran or how many times, it was still always going to be there."

The support of people at the drop-in center, particularly her therapist, helped her come to this realization. Asha felt the staff at the drop-in center did a lot to help her and others, but to some degree, they would only match the amount of effort the young person

was willing and able to put in:

> *I think they do a lot, and they want to see how much you're going to put into it before…you're just going to sit there and let them do the work. I understand that, because it's not right for somebody to sit there and take credit for something or get the reward when they haven't done anything.*

Asha wishes there were more youth shelters, more job opportunities, and more chances for young people to do work that is meaningful to them and the communities they live in. As for the shelter, she shared:

> *It'd be great for [the drop-in center] to be tied in with [a new shelter that's being planned]. People who are doing certain things here should actually be staying in the shelters instead of just being in the streets all night. People [who] are working on some goal plans here and are trying to take the steps to go somewhere should be able get their foot in that door. "Okay, since you're doing all this, let's get you in this place. This is a nice program. They can help you with some foundation and building skills, but you actually have to work for it."*

Asha also thinks it would be helpful for both the youth being served and the youth in the community if more opportunities were provided for authentic, meaningful community engagement:

> *I think being able to get in touch or having more resources or more connections with other programs would be great… If they were able to get us connected with jobs, that would be great. But if somebody was really serious about trying to get off the street with jobs and in housing programs, they would help us be more community-oriented, so we can actually help the young kids in the community [who] are trying to get off the streets. [We could help others] get out of poverty and move forward with their lives.*

Asha has had at least one opportunity to engage in a community planning and development effort that was offered to her through the drop-in center, and she was very thankful for it.

Finding support. During this time, the drop-in center added onsite mental health

support, and Asha began talking to a new therapist, Tia. It really helped her to have Tia to talk with about her relationship issues. At the time, Asha was pregnant by someone who was in a relationship with someone else; when that young man found out she was pregnant, he demanded that she get an abortion:

> *[My daughter's] dad, [who] I was just screwing on the side, was down for the ride. Didn't care what, when, or how. I was pretty much down for whatever. The baby-daddy…his girlfriend or so-called baby-mama came around, and I moved around. When she was gone, I was right there. I found out I was pregnant. He told me to kill it. I told him to kill himself.*

Tia was struck immediately by Asha's intelligence:

> *She is so smart. The first time I met her, I started to do the diagnostic assessment. She actually said, "Let me do this." She read the questions out loud and filled in her symptoms. Then we had to debate over her diagnoses. She wanted to diagnose herself, something I didn't necessarily agree with. We looked in the [Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders] (DSM). We made a pros/cons list and went with a different diagnosis. She is very smart, and she has a lot of insight into why she does some of the things she does.*

Asha began seeing Tia more regularly, and Tia took a harm-reduction approach, even though Asha was still in a relationship with her boyfriend. Some therapists refuse to work with clients who remain in a situation of ongoing domestic abuse, but Tia has seen that this can sometimes have the unintended consequence of making the client feel more isolated and alone. Instead, they worked together to reduce harm. If Asha was going to allow her boyfriend and his friends to sleep over, even though it was a lease violation, Tia would suggest, "Okay, so he's still going to sleep over. How about not having any of his friends sleep over?" As Tia shared, "It's about taking minute steps to help her set boundaries."

Asha's therapist has provided empathy and unconditional positive regard, and

because Asha enjoys being intellectually engaged with her own treatment, Tia also took the time to explain to Asha how trauma works:

> *I have the worst drawing of the brain ever, and I showed her how trauma memories are stored differently than what you had for dinner yesterday and how triggers work. We discussed what it feels like when she is being triggered. For example, a smell could come up, and she is not aware of the smell. Suddenly, she is tense and snapping at her kids. So it's just helping her be aware of these triggers for her own personal trauma.*

Part of Tia's work with Asha has been to connect her with other positive people and supports in the community:

> *Drawing other people in and even sitting with her, calling landlords or calling domestic abuse support places… I would like her to do a group. They're harder to find than you would think. It's just sitting with her and finding out the information. If I say, "Here, call this number," she is not going to, but if I sit with her, at least she has the information at her disposal, helping her not be afraid to reach out.*

Tia also recognizes that she not only needs resources related to domestic abuse, but also assistance in seeing that her basic needs are met. Some of Tia's important work also involves modeling:

> *You can't really address trauma if somebody's hungry. You can't do it. If she is hungry, where are the food shelves, and when can you access them? Do you need diapers? Do you need formula? Where else in the community can you access these things? So, I give her the phone numbers for different food shelves and different places to pick up diapers and formula if you run out of WIC, making sure all that stuff's going on… just doing a lot of collaborative work with other professionals.*
>
> *I think part of it is so overwhelming to them. If they are in the room with me and are hearing me talk to their probation officer, hearing someone advocate for them in a way that's not confrontational, then next time, I'll want them to call and ask for what they need. It's a process.*

Asha has started keeping a journal and writing poetry. Together, she and Tia

reflect on where she has been and how far she has come:

> *She used to drink and smoke and engage in a lot of other substance stuff. She is pretty much sober now. We talked about how that's changed and why that's changed and her coping skills she utilizes now. She can list them off… really reflecting on where she has come and what she still needs to work on. Every three months, I have to update the treatment plan. We'll talk about the progress she's made from here to here. Sometimes I just ask her, "I've been working with you a long time. What do you think has changed? How do you think you were able to do this?"*
>
> *Even staying in her housing program…a lot of professionals think these people should just be so excited to have housing. There are a lot of rules, and a lot of these kids have not grown up with any, so, "How have you managed to stay here? How are you able to do that?" I just ask a lot of reflective questions and do a lot of exception-finding. "Your foster mom told you that you were never going to be able to follow through or be able to be responsible, but you made the choice to get your money so your rent was always paid. How did you make that choice?" I give her the power to see, "Actually, I did this. Tia didn't do this. My case manager didn't do it. I made this final decision." I use a lot of reflective questioning.*

A new relationship. At this same time, Asha started talking to an old friend from the drop-in center, who was in jail. They spoke on the phone and eventually met in person when he got out of jail, despite the fact that he was also dating someone other than Asha.

> *Me and him talked and chilled, whatever. He was locked up, so we were sitting there on the phone. He would have his girlfriend call me on three-way, and we'd sit and talk about how when he gets out, he really wants to start messing with me and talk, and he wants it to be serious. His girlfriend is sitting there on the phone the entire time.*
>
> *He got out, and we started going out or whatever. He was trying to do me bogus, still messing with his ex-girlfriend, talking about how he's going to be there for the baby. It's going to be just like his daughter and this and that, all that good stuff. His stepmom ends up getting a place and says we can be there as long as we pay a portion of the rent and put our food stamps in the house. I'm like, "Whatever, that's cool."*

Asha and her new boyfriend moved in with his stepmother, and things were very difficult. He is still seeing other people, and he beats her. No one who resided in the home did anything to help her. “Me and him used to get into it all the time. People would just watch, and no one would do anything to stop him.” She would try to catch him with other women, but it did not change anything.

She remembers walking into a bar when she was nearly nine months pregnant, “yelling, cussing, throwing shit at him” because he was “flirting with other girls, hugged up, and snugged up.” The police were called that night to put a stop to their fighting. He and Asha are still together, and he is the father of her second daughter. Three days after their daughter was born, his other girlfriend beat her up, or “whooped [her] ass,” as Asha described it. She was angry and jealous that Asha had a baby by the man they were both dating.

After Asha had her daughter, she went to a treatment center for two months to help her stop using marijuana.

> *I was a pothead. I probably would be a pothead again if I could actually regain some of my tolerance. I have no tolerance. I hit a blunt once right now, and I’m so high I can’t remember how to talk. I’m just sitting there drooling. And with them [my kids], somebody’s got to be functional, because [my boyfriend] stays high almost all the time. I can deal with him when he’s high. It’s better than when he’s not.*

When she left the treatment center, she and her daughter lived with her boyfriend and his mother, but this time, it did not last, and Asha and her daughter were kicked out.

Turning point. Asha’s second pregnancy was a turning point for her. She had lost her son to her adoptive parent and did not want to lose her daughter.

> *Realizing that I was going to bring another child into this world, not having my*

> *first one, and not having any place to bring her… I mean, what was I going to do? Take her from the hospital and go to the Dorothy Day Center? You can't have kids there. I'm going to take her from the hospital and go to the family shelter? I don't even like the family shelter. I ain't never been there before. I don't really want to go there.*

Before entering the treatment program, she stayed in a one-bedroom apartment that housed ten people. If her daughter woke up in the middle of the night, four adults yelled at her to be quiet. Asha knew she could not stay there anymore, and she decided to seek treatment. She shared, "I don't ever want to have to rely on somebody else for anything. I don't want to rely on somebody else for housing. I can say the wrong thing and get put out."

Where she is now. Asha had another child, and her daughters now are ages 2 years and 7 months old. She has a Section 8 subsidy and recently moved from a one-bedroom apartment to a two-bedroom duplex. The drop-in center and another organizations helped her pay the $800 deposit. However, Asha consistently puts her eligibility for Section 8 in jeopardy by allowing people to stay in the duplex when their names are not on her lease. She risks this out of a desperation to help family or friends who are experiencing homelessness as she did.

> *If they found out how many people I had staying at my house some days, I'd be gone. There would be no Section 8 voucher, I would be back at square one—except for instead of one child, it would be two. It's like, baby-daddy's cousin comes and helps out every once in a while. He has nowhere to go, so it's like, "Okay, you're family. You can stay for a little while." Then he gets an attitude because the girls want to mess with him… He wants to snap because I don't want him bringing a whole bunch of females in and out of my house… Another friend of the family came over and spent the night last night. He at least makes me laugh the majority of the time he's there, but baby-daddy has attitude because he can't get none if other people are around.*

Asha puts up with the uncertainty and the other females because she wants to do for others what she wishes they had done for her: provide a safe place to sleep.

Asha is at a place in her life where things are better than they were in the past, yet nowhere near where she wants them to be. It is very difficult for her to maintain the focus and determination required to keep making forward progress for herself and her daughters. She described her life as a “see-saw,” and she is “in the middle.”

> *So, if I lean this way, we go way down, or if I lean this way, we go way up. I think it depends on the day and what’s going on and whether or not baby-daddy gets into a fight or whether or not I have a trigger from the past abuse. I know my big thing right now is finding a house or a place big enough for all of us. I want to get the girls in daycare. I want to get [my oldest daughter] in school, because she is not a normal 2-year-old. She is advanced and smart. I don’t know how to describe it, but I want to get her somewhere where she can excel. Even though she’s already beyond where she should be, I want her to go farther.*

Asha wants to go back to school as well. She knows she’s smart, she likes learning, and she believes it would be helpful to her to have a degree. However, enrolling in college has been a difficult goal to achieve:

> *I see myself, and I feel like I’ve done myself down. I started going to college. I never finished. I got so much going on that’s keeping me from going back. I get distracted every day with these two or with him…just attitudes and whoever’s in and out of the house, trying to clean up behind grown folks and little kids, just everything that piles up and trying to figure out what steps I need to take to get my student loans in the fall. What steps do I need to take to get these guys in daycare? What do I need to do to get us a new apartment? Then, packing and moving… I have to do baby steps, and once I get to the next place, it’s baby steps to get them in daycare. Baby steps to find a job so I can start paying off some of the student loans.*

One of her main motivations to go to college is because she wants to be a good role model for her daughters:

> *I have high expectations for them. “I graduated high school, so you will graduate*

> *high school. I don't care if Dad did it. If you do get your GED, you will go to college," but I don't feel like I can sit there right now and say, "You have to go to college" when I have not finished college.*

When asked about the two biggest challenges she has had to overcome to get to where she is now, Asha explained that she still has some work to do. She is proud of the fact that she is learning to ask for and accept help.

> *Accepting the fact that I make mistakes…instead of making them over and over again, learning from them…and admitting when I'm wrong and when I need help. I still have a hard time with that. I tell people I have single-mom syndrome… Sometimes I'll be outside and carrying groceries and pushing the stroller. "Let me help you with that." "It's okay. I'm a single mom. I can do this." All somebody's trying to do is be nice and help me out because they see that I'm struggling, but I'm hard-headed and stubborn. I'm a she-man, and think I can do it all by myself.*

The major issue Asha feels she needs to overcome is her propensity to linger in relationships with abusive men. She knows she deserves better, and she is afraid her daughters may someday be hurt as well, caught in the cycle. However, it is a struggle, because in order to protect and value herself and her daughters, she feels she has to give up on someone she loves:

> *The biggest one I still have to overcome is understanding that I am good and how others treat me. That's more so with domestic abuse, but I don't want to give up believing that this man can change, that he can be better, that he will be better, that he will do better. I just hope it doesn't kill me in the long run.*

Asha is most proud of her children and proud that she has come so very far without giving up. She wanted to end her story with a poem she wrote, words that explain why she stays with her boyfriend, despite the physical and emotional pain he causes her:

They say I deserve better.
Yes, I know it's true,
but I know he's not as bad as it just gets sometimes.
I hate that the kids see and hear us fight,
but we love each other every night.
He says he loves me. I believe him too.
I know I don't like all the things he does,
but they don't see him in the good times,
when he cares for the kids,
or how hard he tries to get on track.
Other situations just keep holding him back.
My faith in him is flawless.
I believe he can be great.
All he needs is to catch his break.
The stress he carries is heavy, but he won't split the load.
It's always on his mind, his shoulders and back.
When he gets mad, he just snaps.
Sometime I can calm him down.
Other times, I just add the fuel.
All I know is, I love him and don't want to lose the fight,
because I want to support him through the fight,
even if he don't want me there at the end of the night.

-By Asha, 2013

Chapter 5: Analysis

The fourteen case stories presented in Chapter 4 were analyzed to identify which of the nine previously identified principles were present in the young people's stories. The following section describes what a principles-based approach looks like in practice. Cross-case analysis was conducted for each of the nine principles to identify emergent themes. *A priori* coding was applied to four of the principles: 1) positive youth development; 2) trauma-informed care; 3) harm reduction; and 4) nonjudgmental engagement; because there was an extensive literature base outlining what these approaches look like in practice. The remaining five principles were coded using an emergent coding approach, because there was little agreement in the literature as to what journey-oriented, for example, looks like in practice. Evidence for these principles is provided within the case stories.

At this point in the process, the actual names of some principles have been modified slightly from the list originally provided to the researcher in order to better match what was learned through the literature review and through the analysis of the case stories. For example, trusting relationships was changed to trusting youth/adult relationships to make clear that the literature review and case stories focused primarily on the relationship between youth and adults—typically staff at the youth-serving organizations—and not other type of relationships, such as peer, romantic, or family relationships. Another example is the change from strengths- and/or assets-based approach to strengths-based approach, because there was almost no mention of the Search Institute Developmental Assets in interviews with staff and youth. The concept

actually used in practice and recognized by youth is generally strengths-based, rather than the specific asset framework developed by the Search Institute. Henceforth, the nine principles will be: trusting youth/adult relationships; journey orientation; collaboration; holistic approach; trauma-informed care; positive youth development; harm reduction; nonjudgmental engagement; and strengths-based approach.

As seen in Table 14, all nine principles were evidenced in the case studies, and seven were present in at least two-thirds of them:

Table 14:

Principles Evidenced in the Case Stories

Proposed Principle Titles	Original Principle Titles	Number of Case Stories
Trusting youth/adult relationships	Trusting relationships	14
Journey orientation	Journey-oriented	13
Collaboration	Collaborative	13
Holistic approach	Holistic	13
Trauma-informed care	Trauma-informed	12
Positive youth development	Positive youth development	12
Harm reduction	Harm reduction	10
Nonjudgmental engagement	Nonjudgmental	9
Strengths-based approach	Strengths- and/or assets-based	6

The following description of these principles will illustrate that all are interrelated and interacting, albeit some more than others. Table 15 displays the nine principles grouped into four domains, each consisting of principles that appear to be more highly interrelated with than those not placed in that domain. A description of each domain is provided.

Table 15:

Principles Grouped by Domain

Principles and domains	Descriptions of Principle Domains
Principle 1: Journey orientation **Principle 2:** Strengths- and/or assets-based approach **Principle 3:** Positive youth development	**Complex Developmental Orientation** Working with youth to support their healthy development involves recognizing where they have been, where they are, and where they would like to be and tapping into their strengths to support their progress and development on this journey.
Principle 4: Trauma-informed care **Principle 5**: Harm reduction **Principle 6:** Nonjudgmental engagement	**Meeting Youth Where They Are** Meeting youth where they are involves recognizing that they likely have experienced trauma, then responding in appropriate ways, in part by not judging their behaviors and choices and also by helping them reduce the potential for harm in their lives.
Principle 7: Trusting youth/adult relationships	**Relationship Orientation** Each of these principles is about relationships: with adult staffmembers in the programs, with oneself, with family, and with community. Relationships are at the heart of all of the case stories.
Principle 8: Holistic approach (wellbeing and mental health) **Principle 9:** Collaboration (across organizations and systems)	**Bio-Psycho-Social-Cultural Wellbeing** A holistic approach to wellbeing means working in and across all of the contexts in Bronfenbrenner's (1979) socio-ecological model of development. This cannot be done without collaborations across boundaries.

Each principle will de described in the order it appears in Table 15 so the relationships between and among the principles can be described.

Principle 1: Journey-Oriented

Journey orientation is presented first because, ultimately, this work is about the young persons' life journeys. It is about recognizing and honoring where the youth came from, where they are, and where they want to go. The principles are meant to guide programs and staff in supporting young people's healthy development and positive life trajectories. All of the youth provided narratives about themselves that could be described as journeys, and none had journeys that were linear or predictable. All fourteen youth stated explicitly that their journeys were arduous, and all expressed hope for a brighter future.

Analysis of the case stories revealed a journey arc that shares five common features. First, youth shared histories of trauma and relatedly described their situations before and after homelessness as experiences of struggle and perseverance (explained in Principle 4: Trauma-informed care.) Second, all of the journeys were affected by supportive relationships developed along the way (explained in Principle 7: Trusting youth/adult relationships). Third, the majority of youth had a clear turning point in their stories, a time when they chose a healthier path. These turning points were generally spurred by concern over their own future or the future of their child(ren). This turning point caused a shift in perspective and vision that coincided with setting new goals and aspirations, often related to housing, education, and employment. Fourth, healing and forgiveness of others was critical for several of the youth. By letting go of grudges and blame, the youth consequently experienced healing effects that supported their ability to

move forward. Fifth, working toward these goals often led youth to develop a future-oriented, more hopeful perspective.

Turning Point: Seeing a New Path

As mentioned above, turning points came for many of the youth when they had a new sense of concern about their own future or the future of their child(ren). Pearl was nearly raped. Macnificent and Thmaris spent time in jail. Zi and Ladybug realized they wanted to defy their families' low expectations of them. Ladybug reflected:

> *I got to an age [when] I decided, "This is not what I wanna do. This is not who I am. I need to get out and find myself, because if I continue to go this route, I am gonna end up like [my mother]." It's a lot to get to know me, 'cause I'm still tryin' to get to know me. All my life, I really [didn't have] the chance to actually be me. It's always… I had to live up to somebody else's expectations instead of my own.*

For four of the young women, motherhood catalyzed a turning point. For Asha, the birth of her second child stimulated an urgency to change. She had lost her first child to her adoptive parents and did not want to lose her second. Alexa realized that she wanted her children to have a stable home and consistent schooling. Harmony and Ladybug wanted to find apartments and jobs so they could keep their children and provide for them.

Isiah described that his turning point came when he "hit the bottom." He said, "I'd never even imagined I could be that low." At that "bottom," he found a new source of internal strength, drive, and motivation. That was his turning point, and he became more focused and driven than ever before:

> *When I first became homeless, I was down in the dumps, like, "Why me? What am I going to do? How am I going to get through this?" I'd never had to face anything like this before. Then one day, I was thinking, "I'm down here, and the*

only way is up. Why not keep on going?"

That crucial epiphany was coupled with the ability to see a new path and, therefore, experience a shift in goals and aspirations. For youth who grew up in the foster care system and/or experienced a great deal of abuse and neglect in their lives, it was not until their turning point that they were able to see a different future for themselves. Macnificent described what it was like to see a different path for himself for the first time when he moved to Minnesota from Mississippi and began living at a youth shelter:

> *It was like a dream. I couldn't explain it. I had to get out of my comfort zone, because I was comfortable with my life in Mississippi… Mississippi is the same pattern and same things every day. You see the same things. A job's just impossible to get… My hometown is all wrong. I didn't know what to do. I was lost.*

His brother had assured him that he did not have to commit crimes to build a life for himself, that there were people and places that would help him, but Macnificent did not believe him:

> *Still, in my head, it was like, "Okay, I hear you, but I'm still in my Mississippi zone. I have to roll to get money." What he was saying was true, but it seemed unreal. It seemed like, "You mean to tell me I can go to a place like [the youth shelter], and they'll help me with my own apartment as quick as a snap of a finger?" He's like, "Yeah." I didn't believe him, but he was right.*

Once youth were able to see a new path, they began making more decisions that helped them work toward achieving their goals. This is not to say that every decision they made was in their best interest, that the path then became easy, or that the journey was linear and predictable. Rather, from the youths' perspective, there was a noticeable shift in the trajectory of their lives.

Healing and Forgiveness of Others

Once they begin to see new futures for themselves, youth report finding that they

experience the beginnings of healing and forgiveness—forgiveness of family members and others who have hurt them. Although the topic of healing and forgiveness was not included in the interview protocol, this theme emerged in eleven of the case stories. Below are some quotations that illustrate just how important this part of the journey is for the youth interviewed, specifically about forgiving their parents:

> Julia*: You're not going to have all that hatred. You're going to eventually forgive them. You're going to move forward instead of staying in that spot or going backward. I feel like that's why some youth do so bad, because they're not willing to talk about it, or they just don't know how to handle it. So they go backward or blame whoever. They blame them and do what's wrong, steal or whatever, just because, "You say I'm a bad person, so I'm going to show you a bad person*
>
> Zi: *I'm just glad I told my mom before she died, "I forgive you. People make mistakes. I know it wasn't your intention [to give] us up. You didn't have us and like, 'I know I'm going to give them up.' I learned to be able to forgive you for everything."*
>
> Minna*: I think I made that decision [to stop blaming my parents] a while ago. I just had to learn how to do it. I had to get the courage to do it.*
>
> Unique*: I believe you need to be able to forgive. You being mad is only hurting yourself. I forgive my mother. I talk to her now and work with her. But you cannot forget. Forgetting makes you dumb. Forgetting means they're going to do same shit. So I'm all for forgiveness. I think it's something everybody should practice. But don't forget.*
>
> Maria and Alexa spoke of forgiving people in a more general way:
>
> Maria*: And if there is anybody in life [who] hurt you, just forget about it. Some people can hold a grudge against the people [who] did somethin' to them way back then. They'll take it out on others that they're just now meetin'. I don't really think they should do that.*
>
> Alexa*: And the biggest challenge of me holdin' grudges toward people 'cause I have done that. I had to stop that too.*

Forgiveness seems to be an act that frees youth to change course and pursue a new path on their journies.

Future-Oriented and Hopeful

While all of the interviewed youth were at different places in their unique journeys, they were all future-oriented and hopeful. They had worked toward goals and aspirations, such as finding housing, earning their GED, leaving an abusive relationship, or finding a steady job. When asked to describe how they felt about where they were in their lives, they invariably provide future-oriented answers that were full of hope. Isiah explained that while circumstances are good for him now, he has a newfound view of the bigger picture and is working toward his goal of a better, more stable future. Similarly, even though Minna also feels good about where she is in her life right now, she is always thinking about what she wants to do next and how she will to build a life that is secure and happy. Harmony is hopeful that with her strength, resilience, and hard work, her life will continue to improve. Thmaris described the experience of being on a positive path:

> *I just feel like I'm bettering myself. I've learned a lot over these past seven years. I've matured a great deal. I honestly feel that I'm bettering myself. I don't feel like I'm taking any steps back, regardless…if I have employment or if I have my own house. I just feel like each day I live more, and I learn more, and I just feel… I'm just grateful to be alive, grateful to even go through the things I'm going through.*

Ladybug is proud of how much she has accomplished. Now that she has passed her GED, found permanent housing, and had her baby, she has set her sights on finding a job and starting college at a local university. She plans to begin with her general education requirements with the goal of entering a nursing program. She wants other people who are experiencing homelessness to know that while there are a lot of struggles, there are also reasons for hope:

> *Even though I had a lot a struggles… Sometimes you have to struggle to get to a*

> *better place. It takes [being] at your lowest place to get to your highest place. It takes time, patience. I want everybody to know there's hope. There's always hope. Don't ever give up, 'cause life is what you make it.*

Julia also wants to to impart hope to other youth experiencing homelessness:

> *I learned that it gets worse before it gets better. There is hope, and it does get better… I feel like I'm that example. Everything has gotten better to a degree. I got kicked out. I didn't have a job. Now I have a job. I have a place to stay. My family [are] still kind of assholes, but it does get better. You just have to stay positive, because it does seem like it's not going to get better, but it really does get better.*

This ability to experience optimism and hope for a better future provide the motivation to move through the difficult stages of change toward wellbeing and a life of purpose and meaning (Brush et al., 2011; Perry & Szalavitz, 2007).

Nonlinear and Difficult

Two other themes emerged related to the journey orientation: First, young people's journeys are nonlinear; second, they are difficult. Both of these could be considered normal facets of the human experience, but when it comes to programs and interventions, there is an assumption that "progress" will be made in a somewhat linear or predictable fashion. These case stories showed that while youth are working toward their goals, other important aspects of life also compete for their attention and energy. This sometimes causes them to make decisions that do not support goal attainment. For example, Minna was doing well in her host home, then became depressed and left. This unexpected detour for her was an important part of her journey:

> *I was really excited. I had a beautiful home with two beautiful people—at first. I was so excited and happy. I did so much stuff—like, positive stuff. I started doing yoga and getting into bike riding… I'm talking three hours in the hot, burning sun. I was so happy, I didn't care. I had my own bathroom and room. I had four*

cats. I love animals. I was going to school. It was nice until I got depressed again. I don't know why I got depressed. Maybe it had to do with my mom and relationship stuff. I let that stuff get in the way… I wish I wouldn't have, but it happened.

This could be viewed as either a setback or as a natural part of a human journey. One program staff described the nonlinear nature of the young people's journeys:

I was just having a conversation with somebody today, [and] they were saying, "I wonder if it's bad that [some youth] come and go from the shelter or if it's good," and I was like, "I think it's absolutely good that youth stays with us and goes somewhere else for a few months and comes back to us, goes a few months, and comes back, because I think it's part of the journey, part of the process." I mean, it's like with anybody's life. It's sort of this process and journey, and I think the youth needs to lead that, and we're just there to kind of walk with them through it.

Recognizing the lives and challenges of youth experiencing homelessness has implications for programs: They need to plan for and expect (what look like) setbacks. Programs cannot assume that because youths have set a certain goal, they will follow a straight path to get there; nor does achieving a particular goal necessarily means they are better positioned to work toward their next goal.

The multiple and frequent changes youth experience are difficult. Relying on Bridges's (2004) model of transitions, whereby *change* is time-specific, external, and relatively quick and *transition* takes place internally, over a long period of time, we can see from the case stories that these are both difficult, even when the change appears to be one that the young person views positively. Many of the youth described how making a transition in response to changes in their life involved overcoming fears and learning to believe in themselves. Harmony explained:

Believing in myself to do something, to become somebody, to do better…that was hard. I came from nothin'. I've always had people tell me I'm never gonna be

anything. I would say it's hard. It's hard when you think about it… It's hard to make a transition [from] sitting around and not anything and living the fast life to becoming somebody and doing something positive with your time.

Staff were much more likely to talk about how hard transitions are for youth. One staffperson talked about what it might be like for youth entering a shelter for the first time:

Sometimes I just try to picture myself going through this process, and I just… I absolutely can't even fathom it. Just walking into some strange place and having no idea where I am and having to…go into a bedroom? I mean, let's face it: This isn't a cozy hotel. And you've got thin sheets that were donated that have permanent writing [with the name of the youth shelter] so they don't get lost when the laundry people come. So as much as we try to have stuff on the walls like you're seeing around here and try to create a somewhat cozy environment, I can't imagine what it would be like walking in here for the first time.

A different staffperson talked about what it is like when youth move into independent housing for the first time:

The whole focus with housing… So many people assume they move in and it's all good. You have housing. I'm sure through your conversations that it's not that… This is a transition for you, a transition from being unstable to: Now you have stability. That can be a very murky time for people. Some people need that root. They need that stability, and they take off. Other people don't know how to trust it or own it. They're lonely. We've had people move in, [and] they didn't stay here for the first three weeks, even though they had a key to their own apartment. To be in silence? How do you create a home for yourself? It's a lot of identity change.

Sometimes progress in one area—housing, in this case—creates a challenge for someone in a different area of his or her life.

Complex, unpredictable, and nonlinear journeys are part of the human experience. Recognizing each youth's path as a journey can help one step back and look at the larger picture. That is, youth homelessness is one experience on a young person's journey. It does not define who they are or limit what they will become. It's also important to

remember that, while organizations working with homeless youth are often asked by funders to track quantitative outputs such as number of youth housed, number of youth attaining employment, and number of youth reaching educational milestones, youth are also working toward other less tangible goals, such as healing from trauma, healing relationships, and forgiveness.

Principle 2: Strengths-Based Approach

The strengths-based approach recognizes that *all* youth have inherent strengths, present long before any interaction with a program or services. There was strong agreement amongst staff about the theoretical meaning of this principle, as well as what it looks like in practice. However, youth did not always acknowledge that staff were using a strengths-based approach.

Strengths showed up in the case stories in three ways. First, when the staffperson spoke about the young person's strengths, this approach was not acknowledged directly in the young person's telling of his or her own story, such as in the cases of Unique, Kenzo, Alexa, and Asha. The second way was when the staff explicitly spoke of supporting the young person's specific strengths, but the young person described a general strengths-based approach, such as in the cases of Minna and Zi. Third, some staff spoke of supporting the young person's specific strengths, and the young person acknowledged those specific strengths being acknowledged and supported: Isiah with basketball, Macnificent with music, Thmaris with welding, and Harmony with her ability to take honest feedback, for instance.

As an example of the first scenario, Alexa's and Asha's therapists helped them both by engaging them intellectually in their therapy, because they both identified intelligence as one of their strengths. For example, Asha's therapist recognized Asha's intellect immediately:

> *She is so smart. The first time I met her, I started to do the diagnostic assessment. She actually said, "Let me do this." She read the questions out loud and filled in her symptoms. Then we had to debate over her diagnoses. She wanted to diagnose herself [with] something I didn't necessarily agree with. We looked in the DSM. We made a pros/cons list and went with a different diagnosis. She is very smart, and she has a lot of insight into why she does some of the things she does.*

Because Asha enjoys being intellectually engaged with her own treatment, her therapist also took the time to explain to Asha how trauma works:

> *I have the worst drawing of the brain ever, and I showed her how trauma memories were stored differently than what you had for dinner yesterday and how triggers work. We discussed what it feels like when she's being triggered. For example, a smell could come up, and she's not aware of the smell. Suddenly, she's tense and snapping at her kids. It's just helping her be aware of these triggers for her own personal trauma.*

However, neither Alexa nor Asha acknowledged that their therapists took this strengths-based approach. They did acknowledge that they were able to connect with these therapists better than past therapists, but it is not clear whether this is because they took a strengths-based approach or there were other factors at play as well.

In the second scenario, staff spoke of supporting the young person's specific strengths, but the young person described a general strengths-based approach. The case stories that fall under this umbrella are those in which the youth described that the staff always thought they could do something, even if they, themselves, did not believe they could. For example, Zi shared that the staff helped her realize her worth. There were

times when she did not think she could do it, but she recalls that no matter what, the staff said, “You can do it, Zi!” Minna shared a similar experience:

> *You have to just figure out a way to make it a positive. Like, I was so negative about myself, but the staff and I met. They always [said] something positive about me. I'd be like, “Where do you see this?” The more they told me, the more I started to believe it. The more I started to see it, [the more] I believed it in myself.*

This was interpreted as strengths-based for the purposed of this research because, specifically or generally, the staff saw and supported strengths within these youth that the youth did not yet see themselves.

In the third scenario, there was a match between the strengths identified by the youth and the staffperson they nominated. For example, aware of Thmaris's past positive experiences with construction and building, his case manager urged him to consider careers that would allow him to work with his hands to earn a decent wage or salary. He also made sure Thmaris had the support of a learning specialist from St. Paul Public Schools who helped Thmaris map out what steps he would need to take to get to his dream career of welding. As Thmaris put it:

> *I talked to him about construction, and he told me, “You already basically have experience in that,” because he knows all the jobs I had. So he was like, “You should go into something totally different that pays a lot of money.” I researched it and just knew I liked working with my hands. So, I just put two and two together and was like, “Well, I want to go to school for welding.” Ever since I learned how to weld…I love it!*

In the pair of quotations that follow, it is clear that Harmony's case manager identified and responded to one of Harmony's strengths and the young woman both recognized and appreciated it. Harmony's case managers recalled:

> *I think with her just [having] someone she can count on, being able to call her out when she needs to be called out, praise her when she needs to be praised, don't*

sugarcoat things that don't need to be sugarcoated, and really build on the strength… She accepts honesty, because I think that is a strength. I think sometimes with youth work, especially if a young person can't handle the truth, we sugarcoat things. And for those [who] can handle [it], we still sometimes sugarcoat. But this girl is different. You just need to be honest and real with her.

Harmony described what it was to work with her case manager:

> *Mia, my case manager, is more on you about your business. I needed that. If I see that I can get away with something, I try to, but Mia is not going for none of that. Just talking to Mia… She was always real with me. I appreciate that. Some people, when they work with youth, don't like to be real. Clearly, we're homeless, so we need that, "This is what it is," to help [we] realize [we] have to be on our grind. Every time I talked to [Mia], she gave me the real facts about what's going on with my case and what I need to be doing.*

Although not all youth explicitly acknowledged the strengths-based approach of staff, all felt rewarded by their interactions with these trusted adults. Youth recogniztion of staff utlizing this principle did not appear to follow a pattern by age, gender, professional role, or organizational setting; rather, this seemed to be based on individual personality. Staff unanimously felt a strengths-based approach is critical to their work. One staff member explained:

> *It's so important, because the youth see themselves as deficits constantly. Many times, they've been told their whole life that they're just a pain, and they've gotten that message through being bounced around. [A] number of youth come from our home placements who've just disconnected relationships and that abandonment, all that stuff… They just come to see themselves as a problem. For them to be able to really be like, "Hey, I am good at that!" is so important.*

Several of the staffpersons who were interviewed felt this is an area where programs should delve more deeply. The following quotation from one staff member illustrates this sentiment:.

> *I think we could all do a better job at this one. We ask our questions: "So, what are you good at? What are your strengths?" at the top of every case plan. But*

> *then it's like, "So, do you have any evictions on your record? What's your employment history? Oh, you don't have a job?" and immediately it's like, "Shat are all the barriers?" We focus on the barriers.*

Some, however, felt that being able to do strengths-based work more deeply may require that staff have a relationship with a young person for an extended period of time and/or when the youth is not in a state of crisis:

> *I think when they're around a long time, you can really get to know them and tap into those interests and foster them, but in the shelter, it's tough. I mean, you can notice that somebody's really good at organizing or at art or at whatever it is, assertiveness or whatever the qualities are, but when you're talking a few months and they're in a crisis situation, a lot of times you end up just focusing on the immediate barriers.*

A strengths-based approach appears to be an important principle, whether the youth are aware of the practice or not, and it helps youth develop a belief in their own abilities and worth.

Principle 3: Positive Youth Development

Positive youth development is an approach to working with young people that focuses on their *assets* (capacities, strengths, and developmental needs) and not solely on their *deficits* (risks, negative behaviors, and problems). Positive youth development is a relatively new field, but a great deal of literature has been written in regard to it (see: Benson et al., 2006; Pittman et al., 2003; Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003). The particular aspects of positive youth development differ, depending on the author. Analysis of the cases was conducted using the dimensions of positive youth development, as defined by Eccles and Gootman (2002; see: Table 9), as described in Chapter 2. The results of this analysis are presented in Table 16.

Table 16:

Dimensions of Positive Youth Development Identified in Case Stories

Dimensions of Positive Youth Development	Number of Cases	Percentage of Cases
Supportive relationships	14	100%
Physical and psychological safety	12	86%
Efficacy and mattering	10	71%
Clear and consistent structure	10	71%
Opportunities to belong	9	64%
Opportunities for skill-building	6	43%
Positive social norms	4	29%
Integration of family, school, and community efforts	0	0%

Supportive Relationships

Supportive relationships were critical to youth and present in all the case stories. This principle is explored in depth in Principle 7: Trusting Youth/Adult Relationships, and will not be included in this discussion; however, the quotations below are provided to illustrate the importance of the support that was provided to the youth because, as Pearl said, “Sometimes life’s challenges are too hard to work through alone.”

> Alexa*: As long as I could remember, I’ve always been doing things on my own, but I just need support. So when I come down here, I got support.*
>
> Minna*: They were just extra supportive. Like, they just push it on you. Like, “Every single day, I’m here for support.” I heard that word, “support,” at least once a day. If you think about that, that’s two months, basically sixty days. At least once a day, I heard that: “I’m here to support you.”*
>
> Ladybug*: Anybody can help you. If I need a ride, somebody could lend a ride. That’s helping. It’s hard to explain it. I guess it’s just…anybody can help somebody. There was a time [when] I saw somebody standing on the side, and*

they were homeless. I gave them some money to get somethin' to eat. That's help. But to support somebody is like, "Hey, come with me." You know? It's talking to them and telling them, "There's something other than what you're doing right now." I've had a lot of bad situations in my life, almost life-taking situations, and I'm able to feel comfortable enough to tell them about the past. They tell me what I could've done different or things like that. They help me make different choices.

Physical and Psychological Safety

When the youth spoke of feeling safe, they did not often distinguish among physical, psychological, or other types of safety. Safety was important to the youth, because all of those interviewed had experienced situations while homeless that were serious threats to their safety. For example, Asha's boyfriend was also her pimp. While staying with him at his mother-in-law's house, she was often sexually assaulted in her sleep by men her boyfriend brought home. Pearl was nearly raped on at least one occasion. Unique engaged in sexually exploitative work and was scared when a friend of his went out one night to work and never returned. Ladybug described keeping a knife on her at all times because when she was homeless, people tried to sexually assault her.

For some youth, the need to feel safe eventually convinced them to seek help from youth services. Harmony explained that when she no longer felt safe working as an escort, she reached out to a place that helps sexually exploited women. At the time, her friend was living at a youth shelter and informed her, "There's a bed open. I know you're getting sick of all these people treating you wrong. You don't have to live like that. You can come here." When Harmony moved into the youth shelter, she felt safe and welcomed. Isiah also sought youth services because he was living on the streets and in adult shelters and did not feel safe in either place. He visited the drop-in center frequently, stating, "People here…care and want to help you, and it's just a safe place to

be when you don't have nowhere to go." Later, when Isiah moved into permanent supportive housing, he recalls that it felt like home because he felt safe. He described his apartment as "a place where you can go and lock the door. You don't have to worry about being attacked or anything. You have that space just for you."

Youth who had spent years begging for food, like Macnificent and Thmaris, or living in foster care, like Kenzo, found that the access to food provided by youth service programs helped them feel more safe. Macnificent described this as a feeling of comfort:

> *With [the youth shelter], when I first got there, I thought it was like a dream. I was like, "What group home lets you go in the refrigerator and take food?" Everybody was laughing at me, because where I'm from, they don't really do that. Even though you're at the group home, and they're supposed to feed you and stuff, you still can't go in the refrigerator and fix yourself something to eat. That was one reason I thought it was a sweet place to be. Another reason is because it was so laidback and comfortable. You could get comfortable and still be on your business.*

The importance of feeling safe is also evidenced by how uncomfortable youth are when they do not feel safe. At the time of the interviews, Julia was moving out of her transitional living program (TLP) and into a traditionally managed apartment. There was a misunderstanding between her and the management of the TLP and the new living situation. She felt people were not being honest with her, and this resulted in her feeling angry, uncomfortable with where she lived, and taken advantage of:

> *I don't feel comfortable [in my TLP] at all. I feel like they're just causing so much drama for me. I feel like I'm on a little kids' playground, and people just keep talking. It seems like everybody's trying… I don't want to live there anymore because I'm uncomfortable.*

This situation made Julia feel psychologically unsafe, so much so that she wanted to move out.

LGBTQ youth have particular safety needs. Unique reflected on what it has meant to him to be gay and homeless. In some ways, it has made him feel less safe. He now feels the need to avoid certain areas and to carry a weapon at all times. Pearl felt the drop-in center she visited could be more welcoming for a transgender youth. She recognized that the organization is LGBTQ friendly and that many of the staff are LGBTQ, but she does not feel the organization, as a whole, does a good enough job at protecting youth and staff from anti-LGBTQ attitudes and comments. For this reason, she reported that she was more likely to visit the drop-in center before her gender transition than after.

Efficacy and Mattering

Like many people, ten of the youth interviewed spoke of the importance of doing something that felt meaningful to them or that would make a positive impact on others. Three youth reported that they learned they have something to offer that can help others. Asha learned that sharing her life story can benefit other youth in similar situations. Harmony discovered that she can help others by being a good listener and concerned friend, and Maria found she can make her friends smile and laugh, no matter how down they are.

Several youth spoke of how good it felt to make accomplishments in their education. Minna was able to secure two jobs while she was staying at the shelter. One of the jobs required that she complete a training program, and she was the only one among her peers who graduated from that training. She shared, “I was so proud of myself. It was the first accomplishment [I’d made] in a long time.” Thmaris, who graduated from high

school and earned a welding certificate, described the feeling of accomplishment as follows:

> *You don't know how it felt when I graduated high school. I was like, "Wow! I did this on my own!" And it just felt so good. I'm thirsty again to get another certificate or diploma or whatever, just because it's just the best feeling in the world. It's better than any drug. It's like…man, I don't even know how to explain it. It just felt like you just climbed up to the top of the mountain, just like you made it.*

Maria earned straight A's on her most recent report card and received a certificate recognizing her leadership skills at school, the first achievement award she has ever received; she feels proud of her accomplishments at school. She described why school had been so hard for her in the past and why this accomplishment meant so much to her:

> *Sometimes at school, I wanna raise my hand and try to say the answer, but I feel like if I say the answer, everybody's gonna look at me like, "She's stupid. She didn't know that." That's just the type of person I was in school. I never really talked. Sometimes the work was hard, and…I used to be out of school for a whole two months when I needed to be in there. I really didn't learn that much. When I got in high school, I was in school every day and didn't know what I needed to know.*

The feeling of mattering and accomplishment, whether related to friends, school, or jobs, has the potential to be transformative. Macnificent explained, "What it all boils down to… When you look at what you accomplish, it feels good. That's why I changed to a better person. I'm a whole different person." For Unique, realizing that he could do something that matters gave him a sense of purpose and drive. He has organized a group of friends to start an organization in which youth act as consultants to nonprofit agencies that serve homeless youth:

> *We were at the [the drop-in center], in the basement. We had leadership training. I was listening to everybody describe their experience with [the drop-in center],*

how some of the case managers can be disrespectful or how some rules make absolutely no sense. Think about it. Okay, there's a problem… So we decided to start a nonprofit to go to these places to consult [with] them on how to improve their services. Who better to help regulate a youth homeless shelter and a youth drop-in center than the homeless youth?

I want more for me. At the same time, I want more for other homeless youth. I don't agree with a lot of the places. So instead of griping about it, I started a whole company so we can fix shit. I feel empowered. I want other people to feel empowered.

When asked what else the drop-in center could do to support youth, Asha shared that she thought it would helpful if there were opportunities for both the youth being served and the youth in the community to engage in authentic and meaningful activities in the community:

I think being able to get in touch [with] or having more resources or more connections with other programs would be great. I think even if they sat there and were able to get us (the youth) connected with jobs, that would be great. But if somebody was really serious about trying to get off the street with jobs and in housing programs, they would help us be more community-oriented, so we can actually help the young kids in the community [who] are trying to get off the streets. [We could help others] get out of poverty and move forward with their lives.

Clear and Consistent Structure

Youth were very clear about the structure and expectations staff and programs had of them. They were asked about this specifically in the interview protocol, and even though they sometimes relayed a long list of rules and expectations, none of the youth, with the exception of Unique, had significant complaints about them. The youth understood why these were in place and seemed to trust that programs had their best interests at heart.

Although some details are different across shelters, such as curfews, there is a

general consistency to the rules and structures. Youth encountered similar expectations at drop-in centers and shelters and in permanent, supportive housing programs. For example, Julia most of the rules she remembers when moving into her first apartment were related to how many guests could be in the room and at what times, whether people could spend the night, and how to get permission for visitors. She also remembers that she was expected to have twenty hours of productivity each week, which included activities such as applying for jobs, working, or going to school. There were also rules prohibiting drug and alcohol use. Isiah described the rules at the youth shelter where he stayed for four months:

> *They woke us up at eight or nine a.m., and I'd shower and eat breakfast. Then I would just watch a little TV, and then you either had to leave from one to four p.m. to job-search or do something, or you could stay there and do some class. They gave us that option. Then I'd usually leave and look around and job-search. Then, once I got back around four, I'd just sit around on the computer or something. I'd wait for dinner. Some of the people who lived there… We'd play games or something…board games, card games. Then we had chores we had to do every day. I'd get that done. We had to go to sleep, I think, on weekdays at eleven and weekends, like, one or something.*

Maria, who stays at a different site, described rules that are different in detail but similar in spirit: Both focus on healthy routines and productive use of time:

> *I have to be in at midnight. I can have company every day, but it'll have to be for four hours a day, and two people can visit me at a time. I have to be in there for at least thrity days to start spendin' the night out. I have to keep meeting with my case manager for at least a month. The twenty-seventh of each month is inspection day. We have to do laundry… We have to have a job.*

The rules and structure at the youth shelter, combined with the safe environment, helped Macnificent succeed. When asked about rules and expectations, he described that youth at the shelter were not permitted to smoke, drink, or break curfew. Youth were

expected to be “doing what they’re supposed to do and not just lying around. They’re expected to be constructive with how they use their time.” Other than that, he recalls, he did not have to worry about anything else. For once in his life, he was able to focus on his goals and ambitions, not where his next meal was coming from.

Opportunities To Belong

Nine youth conveyed that they had developed a sense of belonging at one or more of the programs. From Pearl reaching back to the homeless shelter in her darkest hour, to Minna waiting for the shelter doors to unlock, to Zi feeling that everyone at the drop-in center loved her, the majority of the youth developed a sense of belonging. The staff both understood the importance of the youth developing a sense of belonging and wanted the young people to know that they did, in fact, belong:

> *For our aftercare program here, it’s amazing how many youth want to come and spend time with us. “Can I wash my clothes?” “Yeah. Come.” I did it with my mom. There were times I didn’t have quarters for laundry. They’ll come here and wash… It’s sad that they think this is home, but at least they can have that kind of experience. I think that’s really cool.*

Unfortunately, some of these ties are severed artificially as a result of funding tied to age restrictions and eligibility requirements.

Opportunities for Skill-Building

Six of the youth spoke about specific skills they were able to develop with the support of the youth homelessness programs. Isiah was appreciative of the Independent Learning Skills (ILS) classes he took, because they helped him learn about “budgeting, living on your own, life skills, [and] job-searching.” Minna is at Jobs Corps, a no-cost, residential education and career technical training program administered by the U.S.

Department of Labor that helps young people ages 16 through 24 access career, technical, and academic training. Minna feels it is the perfect program for her at this stage in her life. She is working as a leader for the other young woman in her dorm, developing skills that are important to her career and her life, but that cannot always be learned in a classroom. Macnificent is using the computer he acquired with the help of the youth center to further develop his music composition skills. Thmaris earned his welding certificate and learned how to write a résumé, search for a job, and set up an email account. Unique learned about how to manage time and money and to be responsible. Zi learned how to write a speech and speak in public. The common thread among all of these skills is that they were highly relevant to each young persons' journeys and tapped into their individual passions.

Positive Social Norms

Several of the youth mentioned that the organizations had high expectations for them and that the social norm was that youth would work toward goals they set for themselves. As Alexa shared, "If you're just comin' down here just not to do nothin', then what is the point of comin' down here? That's how I feel." Macnificent appreciated that the youth shelter had high expectations for him. Isiah and Zi echoed similar sentiments, but there was not significant mention of how youth were expected to interact with others of any age in the programs' organizational community. It is unclear whether this is because there is a lack of emphasis on positive social norms, an aspect of positive youth development that is important to the youth, or some other reason.

Integration of Family, School, and Community Efforts

According to the case studies, there was no official or systematic way in which programs helped youth integrate family into their journey. It was rare for staff to talk to the young person's family members, other than when reporting what the young person told them about their families. However, the case stories seem to reveal that youth do want and need help navigating these complex and changing family relationships. This is the aspect of positive youth development that seems least attended to by the programs in this study and yet seemingly, according to these cases, of great importance to the youth.

Principle 4: Trauma-Informed Care

The interviewed youth did not talk about trauma-informed care. This language is used by staff, an approach that formally or informally guides their work, and their commitment to the approach is evident from staff interviews. All of the youth had a history of neglect, abuse, and/or other trauma, and none experienced only one type of trauma. A few descriptions of the various types of abuse are provided to give a sense of the severity and its impact. Some youth, such as Kenzo, were physically abused:

> *When my mom got mad, she got a broomstick and start hitting me so hard. It just got…like, I couldn't care less. When I was 9, I [matured] quick… My mom put me in a foster home before everybody else, because I started getting really pissed off about being beaten and started fighting back. The last time she beat me, I just grabbed something and hit her with it. I started getting pissed off. My anger just… I got tired of being hit and not being able to hit back. I got tired of crawling up in a ball and crying. I just started getting really pissed off. "I'm not taking these beatings anymore." I started beating, started cussing. I [had never cussed] at my mom before. She just started noticing things about me. She would beat me, and I would start cussing at her… She beat me, and I would throw something at her. My mom just looked at me like she was scared. I was just 9 years old. I got tired of*

> *taking beatings.*

Others, like Minna, witnessed terrifying abuse of loved ones:

> *My dad was a horrible man. He had anger issues; never accomplished nothing with his life; was a drug dealer all his life; [and] was in jail for a long time. When I was younger, I remember him being in jail for a really long time. My dad pulled a gun on my mom right in front of me one time. I was probably 8. He was a horrible man.*

Sexual abuse was also common. Maria, for example, lived with her aunt in Minneapolis from ages 7 to 12. During those five years, she was molested by her aunt's son almost every night. That same aunt beat Maria so badly on one occasion that Maria had to be hospitalized for three days. Asha was sexually abused by her adoptive family and removed from their home and custody. Others experienced extreme neglect, such as Unique, who called Child Protective Services when he was 7, or Macnificent, who lived in a car with his brothers. As a result of the abuse, trauma, and neglect, many of the youth spoke of a lost childhood. Ladybug explained, "My mom is a drug addict. She has mental issues and anger issues. I was mentally, physically, and emotionally abused in the house. It got [to be] too much for me. I couldn't be a kid. I didn't have a childhood." This section describes the implications for working with youth who have experienced prolonged trauma.

Staff Understanding of Trauma-Informed care

Each youth shows up to programs and services with his or her own history, story, and journey. Staff may never know what kind of abuse the youth have witnessed or endured. As a result, staff were aware of both the concept of and the need for trauma-informed care and understood trauma-informed care as it is described in the research literature. Although each person may have used different words and may have named

only two or three of the four facets, there was generally consensus on the definition of trauma-informed care provided in the literature review: (a) recognizing the pervasiveness of trauma and committing to identifying and addressing it early, whenever possible; (b) seeking to understand the connection between presenting symptoms and behaviors and the individual's past trauma history; (c) relationships and interventions that take into account the individual's trauma history when promoting healing and growth; and (d) recognizing the need for youth to exercise independence and have a sense of control in their lives (Kidd, 2003; Prescott, et. al, 2007; Thompson et al., 2006). For example, when asked how her program approached trauma-informed care, one program administrator explained:

> *[We recognize] that every young person who comes here has experienced trauma, often in multiple forms: one of them being…homelessness, not knowing where they're going to be, and others on top of that—many other things. Their behaviors that may not make sense to us are rooted in what they've experienced, and so we need to not respond to their behavior, to the behavior itself... It's the classic, "If I did X, my mother would do Y in response to my bad behavior." So, instead of responding to the behavior as bad, we ask, "What is this behavior telling us about this young person? What do we need to know? Where is this coming from? What's behind it?" And we react from that place.*

A therapist explained what trauma-informed care looks like in her work:

> *I think, for a lot of therapists, we're moving more toward a medical model, where it's about behavior modification. To me, behavior isn't going to change until we understand where this behavior's coming from and taking a look at the trauma. We can't really treat the behavior until we treat the trauma, so I work with her. A lot of that was just empathy, providing unconditional positive regard, and also explaining to her how trauma works.*

Creating an Environment Responsive to the Prevalence of Trauma

The first step in trauma-informed care is recognizing the pervasiveness of trauma

and committing to identifying and addressing it early, whenever possible. An important first step in recognizing the pervasiveness of trauma is creating safety for the youth in spaces, language, processes, and relationships. Staff should not only aim to keep a child physically safe, but they should also provide a psychologically safe setting for children and families when inquiring about emotionally painful and difficult experiences. Safety was discussed in the principle of positive youth development, and there is evidence to suggest that the interviewed youth felt that programs generally provide a safe environment.

Seeking Connections Between Behaviors and Trauma History

The second step in trauma-informed care is seeking to understand the connection between presenting symptoms and behaviors and the individual's past trauma history. In typical youth work, "good" behavior is rewarded and "bad" behavior has consequences. Trauma-informed youth work, on the other hand, views all behaviors, good and bad, as information. Thus, part of the staff's job is to figure out what people, events, or things consistently trigger particular reactions. Staff often described this as "meeting them where they are." Staff interviewed for this study were aware of this dynamic and described triggers ranging from the scent of one's deodorant, to a bedroom door opening in the night, to being asked to vacuum or make a bed. The following quotation illustrates how the staffpersons at one organization work together to be aware of the fact that healing makes people vulnerable and that feeling vulnerable can sometimes cause youth to engage in disruptive behaviors:

> *When [I'm] with a young person, I'm not actively thinking, "How am I doing trauma-informed care?" When I'm working with other providers or case*

> *managers, that's where that really comes in. I have a young person who's in here, telling the most godawful story I've ever heard and sobbing, and all this really painful stuff comes out. What are they going to act like when they walk out the door? They're going to act [big], right? They're going to be loud and yelling because they feel empty and scared. They don't want to feel like that when they go out to the world. They want to feel tough and strong… We need to be a space for them to express that before we send them out to the world and they get arrested on the bus.*

Awareness of these issues allows staff to address the potential behavior before it happens or before it causes negative consequences, because they understand the source of the behaviors.

Supporting Relationships that Take Trauma into Account

A third step in providing trauma-informed care is developing relationships and interventions that take into account the individual's trauma history when promoting healing and growth. As will be described in a discussion of Principle 7, building trusting relationships is key to helping young people feel safe and open to accepting needed resources. Because different youth are affected by different triggers and have different needs related to trauma, work needs to be more relationship-oriented and less rule-oriented. Creating a space for youth to vent and act out in necessary ways is difficult for staff; they must balance the needs of the individual with the needs of the staff and the needs of the organizational community's other members.

Allowing Youth Independence and Control

The youth interviewed have experienced a tremendous amount of loss of control in their lives. They have lost their homes, sometimes their families, and often their possessions. At times, they do not have control over basic things like where they will sleep, when they will eat, how they will physically get from one place to another, and

who touches their bodies. Several of the youth expressed that their wellbeing was negatively affected by loss of control and positively affected by increases in control. Asha described what it was like to realize that she did not want to be living in someone else's home, a place where they were in control rahter than her:

> *When I went to the treatment facility, I had my own efficiency apartment. It was just me and her. It was my space, my time, my home—maybe not my home, but it was my area. I liked it. I don't ever want to go back to staying with other people ever again. I don't ever want to have to rely on somebody else for anything. Maybe not for anything, but I don't want to rely on somebody else for housing. I can say the wrong thing and get put out.*

When Minna found stable housing and an increased sense of control, she vowed to herself not to make decisions **that** would diminish that control:

> *I made a promise to myself one time that I would give myself whatever I wanted. I didn't want to do anything I didn't want to do because I had so much control over my life… If I don't want to do it, I am not going to do it. That's where a lot of my stress goes away.*

This aspect of trauma-informed care overlaps with Principle 6: Nonjudgmental, and will be discussed further in the section describing the findings related to that principle. One of the important realities that emerged from the case stories is that youth value it when the adults at the agencies do not tell them what they should be doing or thinking and when staff allow youth to maintain control of their choices, thoughts, and actions.

Principle 5: Harm Reduction

The Runaway and Homeless Youth Program of the Family and Youth Services Bureau (2012) states that a harm reduction program should meet the following criteria:

1. Have a low barrier for entry.

2. Create a safe space (see also: Principle 4: Trauma-informed)
3. Meet youth where they are (see also: Principle 4: Trauma-Informed and Principle 6: Nonjudgmental)
4. Empower youth by offering enough control to make their own decisions (see also: Principle 3: Positive Youth Development).
5. Provide youth with access to adults they can trust (see also: Principle 7: Trusting Youth/Adult Relationships).

It is obvious from this list that there is overlap and synergy with other principles. The aspects of harm reduction that make this principle distinct and, therefore, important to distinguish from the principles discussed earlier, is the low barrier for entry. The quotations that follow illustrate what harm reduction looks like in practice from the perspectives of staff. They show the range of high-risk activities to which a harm reduction approach can be applied.

> **Consensual sex:** *Condoms are harm reduction. We don't want them to contract a virus or a sexually transmitted disease. At the same time, we don't necessarily want them to have children if they don't want to have children. That is not for us to necessarily legislate or mandate, but we want them to be smart.*
>
> **Drug use:** *If you are using needles, how are we connecting it with a needle exchange? How can we make sure you are smart about it? If you want to use needles, that's your thing. Let me tell you about the risks about using needles and about sharing them, letting you know that there are places that will take yours and give you new one.*
>
> **Domestic abuse:** *It's about taking minute steps to help her set boundaries…to keep building on that self-esteem, keep giving her hopefully that sense of hope that this is going to turn around. Her current relationship is not the best. I'm just laying the groundwork for if and when she decides to leave. She doesn't have to be so scared… She has things to fall back on.*
>
> **Sexual exploitation:** *One youth I'm working with, for example, is really on the*

fence. She's 17. She's living with a pimp. He's paying for everything. She doesn't know if she wants to get out of it because she's scared. She's doesn't really know. So we sat down and developed a safety plan, like, "What if A, B and C happen? Who are you going to call? What you can do?"—just keeping her on her toes about different scenarios. We talk about different scenarios… As of two days ago, she's pregnant and her pimp kicked her out, and she has nowhere to go. So now we implement the A, B and C—the safety plan we came up with.

Sexual exploitation: *There was a period of time [when] he was trying to become a male model. Sometimes he would be like, "There's this opportunity for me to go model," and it was clearly really shady, not a legitimate business. I got on this thing of encouraging him: "Oh, that's great that you have this opportunity, but let's look into it." I tried to teach him how to judge whether it was legitimate or not.*

Sleeping on the streets: *You want to camp? So let's see how we can help you do better. Let's get you a tent instead of you spreading three or four tarps over trees. Let's go take a look at your campsite and see how vulnerable you are to other people coming in, the police coming in and trashing her stuff.*

Leaving a gang: *Leaving a gang is almost like [overcoming a] drug addiction. You have to replace it with something. In Thmaris's instance, he can actually replace it with this really furious effort toward getting his education, looking for jobs, and trying to do something different with himself. If he had just tried to quit the gang and replaced it with nothing and done nothing all day, it would've been a lot harder, but he replaced it with this welding certificate, and that was really good.*

None of the youth described encountering a barrier to accessing services based on the high-risk activities described above, nor on any other behaviors. In the case of this principle, it seems the absence of a denial of services is a strong indicator that harm reduction is being practiced.

Principle 6: Nonjudgmental Engagement

Fostering an environment of understanding and nonjudgment is essential. Without it, harm reduction and trauma-informed care could not happen, and many youth/adult

relationships would stall before they even got started. A nonjudgmental environment does not mean judgment should not be conferred within the confines of a trusting relationship. The case stories revealed that nonjudgment is often necessary and appropriate in the beginning of a relationship; it then ceases to become relevant or appropriate. As relationships change, youth come to want honest feedback that supports them in working toward their goals. In some cases, honest feedback was used to develop self-reflection skills in the young person as he or she worked toward self-identified goals. This principle, like many others, is a continuum that changes over time.

Meeting Youth Where They Are

At its most basic level, nonjudgmental engagement is a commitment to serving all youth, regardless of their past or current choices:

> *[Staff] sometimes come in and tell me things people do that they are absolutely disgusted by, but they can't not serve them (the youth). We serve anyone who is homeless or at risk. If the young person presents that and they have just gotten out of jail for some kind of heinous crime, we're still going to try to figure out, within our means. What can we do the house that person? We know it's a factor that's going to make it harder to live [one's] life. If you came out of jail and you have a sexual assault on your record, it's going to be hard enough for me to find a place to house you, but our job is to find a place to house you.*

Once youth decided to engage with services, the first relationships formed between youth and staff are created on a foundation of openness and trust. Early in these relationships, the staffperson meets each individual youth where he or she is and does not label or judge youth on the basis of background, experiences, choices, or behaviors. Youth who are approached in this way are more likely to stay or return. In this formative period of relationship-building, nonjudgmental engagement appears to be focused on providing information, making transparent all of the young person's options, and helping them

consider their choices, all the while not passing judgment.

For example, if a youth reveals to one staffperson that she is a dancer in downtown Minneapolis, the staffperson focuses on helping the youth reduce harm rather than passing a judgment about what the youth should or should not do. This staffperson explained:

> *I've had a lot of young ladies who also talk about dancing. That's very much the harm-reduction approach. If you're going to go to downtown Minneapolis, how are you going to get home? Are you going to do this sober? Are you going to do this drunk? If you're going to do this drunk, how can you make sure you're okay? If you're engaging in sex work, what's going to happen if you get caught? What's going to happen to the man? It's really informational. Here are the pros and cons, cost-benefit analysis… They really like that, because it's really nonjudgmental. They ultimately get to make their own decision.*

Providing Honest Feedback

Staff develop instincts about when to offer nonjudgment versus honest feedback. While youth report that staff should approach them with nonjudgment originally, dynamic changes take place once trust is developed and youth sense that the adult has their best interests at heart. Staff must be intuitive enough to realize when, if ever, they can transition from complete nonjudgment to providing honest feedback. Harmony explained that such honest feedback given in a nonjudgmental way helped her to avoid repeating what she perceived to be mistakes:

> *That's one thing I learned here: There's no point [lying] about anything or try to act like you're innocent. Everybody makes mistakes, and they understand that. They work with you… They really do work with you in your walk and what you're going through. They don't hold it over your head, but they do remind you so you don't make the same mistake… They teach you responsibility because they're not going to let you keep slacking and doing the same thing over and over. You don't learn like that.*

Nonjudgmental feedback shows that the adult cares enough to engage with the youth in this way. It indicates that staff have high expectations for the youth and believe they are capable of achieving. Sometimes, honest feedback provides positive judgment. Taking the time to recognize the effort and energy put forth by youth is extremely important in helping them to recognize their own strengths and to believe in themselves (see also: Principle 2: Strengths-Based Approach and Principle 1: Journey Orientation).

On occasion, staffpersons can implement a harm-reduction/nonjudgmental approach and honest feedback at the same time. A therapist explains how she balances nonjudgment and honest feedback within the same session:

> *There have been times when I've said to her, "Okay, I'm not your therapist right now. I'm woman to woman. You can do this. You are smart and beautiful, and you're a great mom. There are so many people who would love you the way you deserve. I believe that he's capable of it, and he's not ready." Then I'll go back into therapist mode: "Let's talk about how we can make this relationship work the way it is. What are fair expectations of him? What are unfair? How can we communicate in a way that…"*

Again, it comes down to instinct about which approach may help young people more. Sometimes, they may need to hear it both ways. The staff interviewed for this research described instincts aquired in three ways: innate, learned through professional training, and developed through experience.

Feedback To Promote Self-Reflection

One of the first steps youth describe when engaging with programs is goal-setting. Goals provide youth with clear, concrete objectives toward which they can strive. This ensures that there is always an aim, something definite that youths and adults can work toward together. Goal-setting allows for each youth to be supported and empowered to

personally work toward a future that he or she has identified. Sometimes, youth need help developing their ability to reflect on why they've made certain choices, to think about how those choices relate to their goals. If youth consistently make choices that do not support their work toward their goals, the staff might ask questions such as, "Is this the right goal? Has something changed? Has something emerged that needs to be addressed first?" These types of questions may assist youth in reflecting on other choices and/or their goals.

For example, Kenzo was not doing well in school, even though he claimed he wanted to study physical therapy. When his case manager had an honest conversation with Kenzo about why he was not going to class or turning in his assignments, Kenzo realized he did not truly desire to be a physical therapist. When Macnificent failed to complete his court-ordered community service hours in a timely manner, his case manager explored questions with him: "Why aren't you completing your hours, even though you don't have any other commitments right now? What does this mean? Is there something related to your mental health or wellbeing that we need to address?"

In both of these cases, the youth could have perceived this line of questioning as judgment, if the questions came from a person with whom they did not already have a trusting relationship. However, the youth instead felt supported, because they knew the case manager was asking the questions to support them in their progress toward their self-identified goals, not to criticize them for the choices they were making. As a result of this ongoing reflection, the youth's goals and pace of work may need to be adjusted as the dynamics of a young person's internal and external life change. Staff experience

frustration at times and explain that they need to be self-aware so as to frame an issue in a way that encourages self-reflection without judging.

Four staff members described that it can be challenging when a young person does not consistently does not make choices that support them working toward their goals. A case manager explains a scenario when a young woman was working part-time but not enough to meet the employment goals she had set for herself:

> *And how do we make sure she can sort of work this program and do the best she can and not be like, "What the hell are ya doin', [name removed]? Go out there and get another job! Why aren't you doing that?" But instead, just bein' like, "Okay, let's take some time with her to go through this… So she was working, but…in my opinion, she could have been doing more work." Judgmental approach right there. But she was also in that transition. All the judgments I just said, we did not put those on her. We tried to encourage her very much but also tryin' to be like, "Okay, what's this three months' transition about?"*

Another staffperson reflected on working with a young person around paying off a school loan debt so he could enroll in college again, one of the goals he had set for himself. Even though many people worked together across agencies to create a viable plan for him, he did not follow through:

> *I think, in regard to the nonjudgmental [principle], that's where you really have to check yourself and just know that even when opportunities and ways to handle certain things are offered, there may still be things for that person and reasons why they're not executing it, even though you create a very clear map. If you're not ready for this, it's gonna continue to be a barrier or whatever the situation is.*

Harm Reduction Versus Enabling

Three interviewed staffpeople spoke of the fine line between harm reduction and enabling:

> *And it's a balance between that point of when you might be enabling and feeding in to the point where you would be holding them to an expectation that isn't*

> *possible, given their situation. So they're just going to fail out of the program. It's finding that sort of middle ground… You want to hold as high expectations as possible, because most of the time, they want to be held to high expectations, but you also don't want to make things so rigid that they can't succeed.*

This illustrates once again that there is no clear rule for how to engage in harm reduction with each individual and that to do this successfully one must, in part, rely on intuition and accumulated experience.

Harm Reduction and Nonjudgment: The Example of Unique

Of all the principles, harm-reduction and nonjudgment seem to be particularly overlapping. Indeed, they may be the cornerstone principles of working with youth engaging in many risky behaviors; without these, the youth may never access the services and develop deeply tranformative relationships described later, in Principle 7. The interplay between these principles can be seen most clearly in Unique's story. Unique has engaged in sex work and has trouble connecting with adults and maintaining relationships over time. He is a good illustration of the necessity of taking a harm-reduction and nonjudgmental approach. His case manager, Shiloh, one of the only adults he respects, discussed how important both nonjudgmental engagement and the harm-reduction approach were to working with Unique. Unique's case is shared here at some length in order to show what harm reduction looks like with a youth engaging in several harmful behaviors at once:

> *The thing I would always start out with is, "No judgment." When we talk about sex work, I ask, "How are you keeping yourself safe in those situations? Is there anything you want me to know about those situations?" He's been smoking weed probably since I've known him, and not ever once have I told him, "You need to quit." I know he drinks underage, [and] not ever once have I told him, "You need to quit."*

There's a staffmember at [a different organization] who is like, "You need to quit smoking, or you need to quit drinking, or you're getting kicked out."

Shiloh recalls one night when Unique had a meltdown about people telling him to stop drinking and smoking:

He was like, "And I don't know why everybody is telling me to fucking quit smoking and drinking, because that's the only thing that seems to keep me levelheaded," and I was like, "Well, if that's what you feel—if self-medicating right now feels good for you—then that feels good for you. I'm not going to tell you that it's bad if that is what's keeping you going today and tomorrow. If you ever want to talk about other healthy coping skills, we can talk about those." And he's like, "Yeah, let's talk about it." We talked about, "Why are you using? What's behind this? Why do you feel like self-medication is going to help you right now? What's going on? What are some things you like to do that help you relax besides getting high?" And I've told Unique this a million times: "It's your body. It's your decision."

Although Unique spoke disparagingly about all of his other case managers, he had tremendous respect for Shiloh:

Shiloh's got that mindset that everything is precious, and you have to do what you need to do. Every second can't be wasted. Shiloh taught that to me too. At the end of the day, you're going to go asleep with yourself…[no one else] is going to be able to do that for you. You're going to do it by yourself. You need to take care of your own business. That's why I'm taking care of it. Shiloh wasn't going to let me be lazy. I was already independent. Then, when Shiloh came, I became smarter and independent.

Of all the youth interviewed, Unique was the least trusting of adults in staff roles at programs and the least trusting of the organizations as a whole. He was sensitive to the idea of being judged or told what to do and is an example of how important it is that staff are able to continually take a nonjudgmental and harm-reduction approach with some youth. Shiloh's persistent attention to nonjudgemental engagement and harm reduction allowed her to develop a relationship with Unique that, according to him, was unlike any

of the other relationships he formed with staff. According to him, Shiloh helped him become smarter and independent, increasing his ability to create a safer life for himself and work toward his goals.

Principle 7: Trusting Youth/Adult Relationships

An arc emerged from these interviews representing a journey of trust-building between the youth and the adult staff who supported them. All of the youth indicated that, prior to their involvement in these programs, they found it difficult to trust others. Therefore, when they met a worker, his or her nonjudgmental engagement was crucial to building trust. Learning that they were not going to be judged gradually helped the youth open up to the staffpersons. As the relationships developed, the youth were more likely to be honest about their needs, as well as asking for and receiving help. The staff, in turn, were supportive, helpful, consistent, and not judgmental. This facilitated a deepening of the relationship, and youth began confiding in staff, sometimes talking for hours at a time. Youth expressed that the engaged, supportive listening of trusted adults was as valuable as the practical assistance they offered. The youth felt cared for, felt the staff members viewed them as people rather than simply clients. When the young people reflected on these relationships, it became clear that these interpersonal connections were the most transformative element of the youth support programs.

Many of the youth credited individual staff members for the progress they had made in their lives. These relationships unfolded over a span of time ranging from one to eight years. This reflects the importance of staff continuity, an important condition for the

unfolding of these long-term relationships. Continuity of staff is difficult in a field that is traditionally characteriszed by low pay and insufficnent funding. Table 17 lists the themes identified in the youth case stories related to one-on-one relationships with staff.

Table 17:

Themes identified in the youth interviews related to one-on-one relationships with staff

Themes related to trusting youth/adult relationships
1. Past experiences make trust difficult.
2. Nonjudgmental engagement is an essential first ingredient in developing a relationship.
3. Learning to open up is important and happens through relationship.
4. Relationships help youth learn to request and receive help.
5. Listening is as important as doing.
6. People matter more than programs.
7. True caring by staff is profoundly important to youth.
8. Relationships are the critical ingredient for effective programming.
9. Continuity of relationships is important.

An explanation of what each of these themes looks like in practice follows.

Past Experiences Make Trust Difficult

The research literature stated that past experiences make it hard for youth to trust others, and this was true for these fourteen young people as well; five mentioned this dynamic explicitly. For example, Alexa had experienced extreme domestic abuse, among the worst her therapist had ever heard of. While Alexa recalls that she was always friendly to staff at the drop-in center, it took years for her to develop trust with any of them. Eventually, she was able to develop dependable, caring relationships with four staff members at the drop-in center. She attributes this tendency to mistrust people in her life

to a strategy that had developed to cope with trauma and loss in her life:

> *My family always says, "You think we're against you. We're not. We just wanna help you." But that's just how I grew up—like, don't never let nobody get close to you. And then you lose them. So what is the point of gettin' close to somebody?*

Another youth, Isiah, shared that for nearly a year, he felt awkward every time he interacted with staff. He stated, "I didn't really know them, so I didn't know how much to share, how much not to."

Staff were sensitive to the fact that it often takes young people a long time to trust them. They shared that the earliest feelings of trust could be nurtured sometimes by simply being in the same space with them, showing that they were nonjudgmental and consistent, and making the young person feel empowered to determine the pace of the relationship's development. This approach is similar to the one described by Perry in a collection of case studies written about working with traumatized youth. In many of the cases he described, he began therapy not by talking or asking questions but simply by coloring in the same room as the child, sometimes for months (Perry & Szalavitz, 2007). One staffperson described building trust with Unique, a young man with reactive attachment disorder. She began by unlocking the laundry room for him and simply sitting in that space with him while he did laundry. Over time, Unique began to talk to her, but it was on his timeline; they began talking only when he was comfortable doing so.

Interestingly, one case manager noted that while the word "trust" is used a lot by staff and youth alike, she is not sure youth always understand its meaning. She described a conversation with Harmony:

> *We talked about trust a lot, because I don't feel like she completely understands what that word means. She throws it out enough times for you to be like, "Well,*

can you explain more what trust means to you or where you learned about it?" And I learned that in past relationships, she hasn't had it, not even with friends.

As stated previously, for some youth, like Harmony, the relationships they form with staff may be their first trusting relationship.

Nonjudgmental Engagement as an Essential First Ingredient in Developing a Relationship

Regardless of what setting a staff member works in, nonjudgmental engagement is important. When youth meet an outreach worker on the street for the first time, they determine in those few moments whether the outreach worker is judging them, their situation, their choices, their dress, their behavior, etc. Outreach workers develop a way of conveying nonjudgment quickly in verbal and nonverbal ways. Without this ability, their effectiveness would be significantly diminished. When youth walk through the door of the drop-in center or a youth shelter, they also siz e up the place to see if there is a sense that they will be judged there. When they complete an intake with a case manager a few hours or days later, they reveal personal details that make them vulnerable to judgment, and case managers must again convey an open, noncritical attitude. If staff fail to do this, the youth may leave and never return or may censor what they share to such a degree that their work together is significantly impaired.

Minna shared her observation that each young person is on his or her own journey and that if staff are to accompany them on that journey, they will need to exercise patience and nonjudgmental understanding while recognizing and highlighting the youth's strengths. She explains that judgment hinders relationship-building:

Patience, persistence, and understanding…that's how I opened up. If you're

really understanding, I'm going to open up even more, and I'm going to be willing to talk to you more. If you're really judgmental, you have to pay attention to everything you do: how you look at a person, what kind of things you say to a person, your body language.

Nonjudgment helps young people lean into a trusting relationship.

Learning To Open Up Is Important and Happens through Relationship

For some youth, learning to open up to others has been an important part of their healing journey, and it was the trusting relationship they formed with a staff person that allowed them feel safe enough to disclose their feelings and stories. Four youth mentioned this explicitly in their interviews. Alexa shared:

> *The abusive part of my life…I had to overcome that. I have to let that part of my life go. And the biggest challenge of me holdin' grudges toward people, 'cause I have done that. I had to stop that too. I don't have too many people close to me. I have a handful—not even that. I had to really learn how to open up. Like I said, I had trust issues before… I started seeing people at [the drop-in center] and started to trust them. Like, that's how I learned to open up.*

Isiah did not open up to anyone at the drop-in center until he made a meaningful connection with a case manager. It took the case manager a long time and many attempts to convince Isiah that he could be trusted. Once that trust was developed, Isiah said his case manager "opened [him] up." Ladybug's case manager described what this looks like from the staff perspective:

> *In the beginning, she was maybe putting off more of a standoffish, protective vibe with a little more attitude. Then, the more we [worked] together, the more I just watched her walls come down. She really started to trust me and the things I was giving her. It became a really good partnership.*

For these youth, opening up to another person was a relationship skill that had to be relearned.

Relationships Help Youth Learn To Request and Receive Help

Many of the youth interviewed had learned to be extremely independent because, for much of their lives, depending on someone else had led to disappointment or harm. Youth discovered that learning to ask for and receive help from trustworthy people fosters positive social connections. It helps them endure hard times, both small and large. Four youth specifically mentioned that their relationships with staff supported their ability to seek and accept help.

Harmony's stay at the youth shelters marked the first time in her life that caring adults believed in her. She remembers telling her grandmother of her hopes and aspirations and being told, "You can't do it," or, "You won't do it." But because she trusted in her case manager and her case manager supported and encouraged her aspirations, Harmony learned how to ask for and accept help. Isiah shared a similar sentiment: "Having [the drop-in center] means a lot. It's hard to ask for help. To have a place where you can come and ask for help and not feel bad about it is great. There are a lot of people here who care and want to help you, and it's just a safe place to be when you don't have nowhere to go."

Thmaris was not used to asking for help; before he met Rahim at the drop-in center, he'd never felt he had anyone he could turn to. Similar to Harmony's case, his mother used to disparage him, saying, "You ain't shit. Your daddy ain't shit. You ain't going to be shit." Thmaris knew there was no point in asking her for help in reaching for his dreams. But he gratefully described all the ways he asked for help from Rahim and

how grateful he was to have someone dependable in his life:

> *Ever since I turned 20, I realized that I'm an adult and that I have to make better choices—not just for me, but [also for] the people around me. Didn't nobody help me with that but Rahim… The things he was able to do… He made sure he did them. I remember days I'd come down to [the drop-in center] and I'd be like, "Rahim, I haven't eaten in two days," or, "Rahim, I haven't changed my underwear in like a week," or whatever. He would give me bus cards to get to and from interviews. He would give me Target cards to go take care of my personal hygiene. He would give me Cub [Foods] cards to go eat. It was like every problem or every obstacle I threw in front of him, he made sure I would overcome it with him. He was, like, the greatest mentor I ever had. I've never had nobody like that.*

Listening Is as Important as Doing

The youth interviewed were grateful for the practical help they received, but they were even more grateful to have someone who listened to them. Eight of the young people talked about the value of being listened to during their interviews. Some of them, like Julia, did not even know what it felt like to be listened to until developing a trusting relationship with an adult staffperson.

> *[I didn't know] just listening could do so much to somebody, just listening to their story and having a conversation with them. Youth…even if they don't seem like they want it, they do. I know there's youth like, "I don't want to talk about." They won't talk. But deep down, they know that's going to help them so much.*

Maria said that sometimes when her case manager, Izzy, asked her if she needed help, she would tell her that what she really needed was someone to talk to.

> *Izzy seems like a big sister to me because she can tell when I'm not feelin' well, I'm feelin' sad, I don't wanna talk. Izzy will always be there for me. I'll just go talk to her and tell her my problems. She asks me what she could do to help me. I tell her I just need to talk to people every now and then.*

Minna appreciated that staff not only listened but also devoted their attention to the young person they were listening to, making him or her feel uniquely valued:

> *They were super supportive. It was crazy. I connected with them so much it's not even funny… They were always listening. Of course, we're all human, so we kind of have a pattern, and we kind of all do the same things. We mess up in the same ways because we're humans. We all do the same stuff. But they would listen as if they'd never heard this mistake before. It wasn't like, "Oh, you just do the same thing. You're just a statistic." No, they [listened] as if [it] was a new world problem.*

People Matter More than Programs

The focus on relationships in the interviews was so prevalent that it might be fair to say that, for the interviewed youth, people matter more than programs. This echoes what Perry and Szalavitz (2007) wrote about working with traumatized youth: "Relationships matter: The currency for systemic change was trust, and trust comes through forming healthy working relationships. People, not programs, change people" (p. 5). This is also evident in the cases of young people who have bounced from program to program until they found the right person to connect with, such as in the case of Minna meeting the outreach worker Kri, or Thmaris, who attended the same drop-in center for years, engaging only tangentially, until he connected with his third case manager and started engaging with more consistency and dedication. It could also be seen when Ladybug moved into her new apartment with her infant. It meant a great deal to her that her case manager, Morgan, was there to help her make the transition:

> *Me and Morgan still keep in contact. She comes to my house. Since I've been in there, she's been at my house twice, but before I moved out, she would come see my baby all the time to see she's okay, to make sure we're okay,[that] we have everything we need. And when I moved out, she made sure I had starter supplies for my house and cleaning supplies, dishes, pillows, sheets, cooking supplies, hygiene products.*

Ladybug shared, at a later date, that, although it was great to have the supplies for

living that the program provided, what meant the most to her was having a familiar, trusted person to talk to whenever she felt isolated, discouraged, or alone in her apartment with a newborn. The youth shelter could offer a program to deliver supplies for new apartments or new mothers, but ideally, the supplies are delivered by a caring, trusted, consistent staffperson.

Several staff and youth interviewed evoked the image of "walking with" the youth. When youth ask for help and the staff do not know what to do, they offer to walk with them through the hard times. Pearl's case manager described being a support through Pearl's transition from male to female:

> *Walking those steps with her… I've gone to a couple appointments, and I don't know what she was doing. She didn't know what she was doing, but we're going to do it. There's a first time for everything. I walked with her along those scary moments in times.*

Zi's case manager recalls when Zi's mom died:

> *Zi and her sister came to [us] and said, "Our mom died. We have to go identify the body. What do we do? We have to go." Well, [neither of us] had never done that, [but] like I said before, all we knew how to do was show up, so we walked with them. And I think that's ultimately what this work is. You walk with people. You don't walk ahead. You don't have to follow behind. You just walk with.*

Macnificent used a similar metaphor when he shared: "It hasn't always been easy to walk this new path." He shared that his case manager was always by his side when things were difficult and feels that without her, he would surely be in jail. Only a person, not a program, can walk with another.

True Caring by Staff Is Profoundly Important to Youth

Nearly all of the young people interviewed spoke of a specific moment when they knew a staffperson truly cared about them. This was usually demonstrated when staff was

present seemingly off the clock, such as attending a youth's basketball game or a funeral service. Staff are aware that this matters, and some described making a direct effort to show young people that they care about them. One staffperson who does not have a role directly working with the youth makes an effort to spend time in the shelter talking with the youth. She described a recent interaction:

> *The other day, one of the youth thought I was clinical staff. When I told her I wasn't, she [was] like, "But you talk to us." I [was] like, "Yeah, I do. I find you interesting. I think you're great, and I wanna know what you're doing." And she [was] like, "But you don't have to." I think the youth really notice that I don't have to be there, but I still am.*

These gestures can be small or large. One staff described the small ways that caring can be communicated:

> *And one of the fundamental components is really just taking notice of youth and really caring and remembering something about them—not whether or not they came in on time or something but just something unique. And they light up.*

Three of the staff interviewed and three of the youth even described this caring as love. Macnificent shared:

> *Even though I did wrong, and I admitted to doing wrong, it was up to me to make it right. When you can admit that you did wrong, that's a big change there. My case manager opened up that door. It was up to me to make it right, and she helped me out. The whole time, she was there for me. That's respect, love. You can call it anything you want, but I say it's respect and love.*

Relationships Are the Critical Ingredient for Effective Programming

Eight of the young people and two of the staff interviewed identified relationships as the most critical ingredient of the programming. It was the trusting relationships that helped youth navigate through hard times and to find a different path for their lives (see also: Principle 1: Journey orientation). Alexa shared, "It was meant for them to be in my

life, 'cause if I didn't find Monica, I don't know what I'd do." Had it not been for the support of staff at the youth shelter, Harmony believes she would not currently be stably housed. She explained, "Without them being there and [listening to] my story and really fighting for me, I wouldn't have a place. I would still be trying to make it." Pearl recalled a point in her life when she had completely severed her ties with the youth shelter to find herself. She ended up in a dark place, depressed and addicted to alcohol; at that point, she realized that she did, indeed, need her support people from the youth shelter in her life:

> *And you be like, "Okay, I have all this on my plate. I have to dig in and look into it to make my life more complete." And I felt that on my own, I really couldn't. Not even the strongest person on God's green Earth can do it. I couldn't do it. So I ended up reaching out to [the youth shelter], and they opened their arms. They were like just, "Come. Just get here," and they got me back on track.*

She does not think she would have been able to do it without them and without her case manager, Sonia, in particular. Thmaris shared a similar sentiment:

> *I honestly feel like if I didn't have Rahim in my corner, I would have been doing a whole bunch of dumb shit. I would have been right back at square one. I probably would have spent more time in jail than I did. I just felt like if it wasn't for him, I probably wouldn't be here right now, talking to you.*

Continuity of Relationships Is Important

These relationships take time. For numerous reasons, they are also time-limited; young people must form them over and over again, and each ending is potentially another important loss in that young person's life. But, as five youth and four staff shared, the longevity and consistency of staff are important. Asha described having to stop seeing her therapist, one she had formed a tremendous bond with, because she will soon be too old to be eligible to see her: "Actually, this July, I'm too old to even work with Tia, which is going to kill me. She's, like, the best therapist I ever had. I've had maybe, like, five

therapists in my lifetime." Harmony stayed in touch with her case manager from the first youth shelter throughout all of her various placements and into motherhood. She shared that the ability to stay connected to this one person was important to her, because she did not have to open up to new people as she moved between organizations.

Pearl and her case manager have known each other for eight years. When they first met, her case manager was working at a shelter for children taken into protective custody. When Pearl later moved into a youth shelter, that case manager coincidentally took a position at the same shelter. During this time, they went through Pearl's transition from male to female, a long and difficult change. They continued to stay in touch through aftercare, and they now stay connected because they care about each other and feel a deep and lasting connection. The caseworker explained:

> *I wanted to make sure Pearl knew it was going to be okay. You can be this person. There are going to be struggles. It's going to be hard. You can have some good times. You might do things you never thought you would do. I'm here to help you the entire way. She's 22 now. She still calls me and checks in with me. She calls in [and asks],, "Were you thinking about me? I felt this signal." It's true. All of a sudden, I'm like, "It's been… Where is she? What the hell's going on? I haven't heard from her for a long time." And within a week, she'll call me. It's always the same. It's insane. It's been good.*

One case manager who was nominated by two youth to be interviewed as a part of their case study described how consistency was critical to maintaining the trust that was developed:

> *I mean, every outreach worker has their own style, but it all falls back into harm reduction, nonjudgmental, the whole thing. A lot of it is just building the relationship with the youth, building that trust, because you can't really… If you're working with a young person who's dealt with chaos and mistrust their whole life and they don't ever have consistency, they're not going to open up with you. [You have to show them[, "You can trust me. I'm consistent when you need*

me."

Continuity and consistency are critical ingredients when staff are developing and strengthening their trusting relationships with youth.

Principle 8: Holistic Approach

Staff generally could not provide a definition of the term *holistic* that went much beyond the idea of "mind-body-spirit," and youth never explicitly used the term or any of its synonyms. Responses like these were common: "When I think of holistic, I don't know, I think of… I don't really know what I think of when I think of holistic," and, "What do you mean by holistic? Mind-body-spirit?" Therefore, an articulated theory of the holistic approach was necessary for the analysis. When applying Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological theory of development, holistic means attending to the individual's health (mind, body, and spirit), as well as the health of the individual's interactions with his or her immediate environment (families, schools, social services, juvenile justice, etc.). How these groups or organizations interact with the youth will have an effect on how the youth develops; likewise, how the youth acts or reacts to these groups or organizations affect how the groups or organizations treat him or her in return.

Two themes emerged related to this principle. First, the idea of holism was discussed primarily in relationship to wellbeing. When youth were asked to describe where they were in their life right now and how they felt about that, their responses revealed that they are moving toward a sense of wellbeing; to them, *wellbeing* is a a holistic term that includes all aspects of their life: mental health, relationships with family, children and partners, school, employment, housing, etc. Similarly, when staff

spoke of the young person's journey, they tended to talk about how to increase a young person's wellbeing by helping the young person work toward his or her self-identified goals. This is in alignment with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological theory of development, which presents an individual as inexorably linked with the context (family, school, jobs, etc.) and is impacted by the interactions between and among these often siloed contexts. A second finding from the data was that agencies appeared to promote a holistic approach in different ways. A fourth theme that emerged from the analysis of the cases is that mental health support—both traditional and nontraditional approaches—is critical. Each of these themes will be explained below.

Holistic Idea of Wellbeing

When youth were asked, "How do you feel about where you are in your life right now?" they invariably touched on many aspects of their individual development, as well the systems and organizations they interact with. For example, Zi shared that she's "trying to better her life" through finding a steady job and going back to school. She feels as if she has created a home for herself in her apartment at the transitional living program, and she has devoted a great deal of time and energy to forgiving her mother, as well as reframing her important relationship with her sister. Her description of where she is in life is a holistic perspective about her wellbeing and development, focusing on her microsystems (family, school, and work) and how these combine to create a sense of security (mesosystem). Harmony also discussed how things in her microsystem (having a baby, entering a committed relationship, securing an apartment, and working toward a degree) give her a sense of pride, hope, and security. Macnificent sees that reentering

school will help him afford his own place to live. Once he had his own housing, he planned to get his siblings out of foster care and to care for them himself. All of the youth had similar responses when reflecting on their life; they discussed a wide range of individual factors and contexts with which they interact regularly. They didn't see education, housing, family, and employment as separate but rather as threads that weave together to create a hopeful and positive life.

Agency Support for a Holistic Approach

Agencies appeared to promote a holistic approach in different ways. In one model, individual staff can be empowered to work with individual youth in a holistic way by working with them to meet various and diverse needs. In another model, the organization as a whole provides a "therapeutic web"—a network of people and services accessible to youth in a way that feels cohesive rather than fragmented.

Individual staff members work with youth in a holistic way. Individual staff members who were interviewed focused on overall wellbeing rather than specific outcomes. Every young person we spoke with discussed how he or she worked with a case manager to set individual goals and described ways in which staff helped them work toward these goals. For example, Harmony did not want to go back to school for her second semester because she would be giving birth to her first child in the middle of the semester; however, she was afraid to disappoint her case manager with this news. Her case manager reminded her that the only person who should be judging Harmony's decisions is Harmony herself. She reinforced that it was not individual choices that she cared about, such as whether Harmony went to school; rather, she was more concerned

about Harmony's overall health and wellbeing:

> *And now the baby's coming, and she said to me last semester, "I'm going to school next semester." I'm like, "I really wonder if that's okay. You've just been really struggling this semester, being in your own house. You were really excited to finally get it, but now you're sad all the time. Maybe school isn't the best thing, because if you can't finish those classes, what's the point of doing it right now?" She told me later, "I didn't want to tell you I didn't want to go," and I was like, "Well, I don't care if you go or not. I want you to make sure you're healthy."*

Other staff described the importance of being able to work with youth in a holistic way, to identify their needs and help to see that those needs are met.

> *A holistic approach was really. At one point, she was interested in getting medication, and I helped her find a psychiatrist, talked to the nurse with her about birth control, talked to her housing manager… And there was a time [when] her ex [held] her by the back of the head and smashed her in the wall. She was complaining about headaches. So I sat with her to call and [arrange] an X-ray [to] make sure she didn't have any brain trauma, and [I] helped her get Plan B after she was assaulted.*

This approach is in contrast to one in which staff have narrowly defined roles: for example, forcing youth to talk to four different people if four needs need to be met.

Create a therapeutic web. The literature review dicussed that when working with youth who have experienced trauma in a programmatic setting, youth can benefit from the existence of what Perry calls a "therapeutic web" (Perry & Szalavitz, 2007). This approach allows young people to access a number of staff members in different roles and different ways, thus allowing youth to meet their therapeutic needs through a multitude of relationships and interactions.

All of the youth interviewed spoke of making meaningful connections with more than one adult. Sometimes, adults met needs for them, but even more frequently, youth spoke of adults who provided consistent messages across settings to provide a net or web

of support. For example, Maria could approach for advice and support:

> *If I was to sit in a room and think about, like, everything that happened to me or I've been through, I'll get to cryin' and feelin' like I don't wanna be on Earth anymore—like I wanted to die. When I talk to somebody about it, it makes me feel better. The people I talk to about it give me good advice. They tell me how much they like me and how [good] I'm doin'. They just put good stuff in my head, and then I think about it and realize I am a good person and everything's gonna work out better.*

Harmony described what it meant to her that staffpersons from two different shelters worked together diligently on her behalf. Pearl also described a low point in her life when multiple case managers helped her; she felt this was important because each of them know her a little differenty. Isiah talked to one staffperson one on one, but there was another whom he felt most comfortable speaking with in relation to his involvement in sports. Clearly, while individual connections with certain staffpersons are critically important for youth, youth also benefit from the support of a whole network of caring adults: a therapeutic web.

Formal and Informal Mental Health Support Is Particularly Important

The case stories also make clear that the youth have experienced a great deal of trauma in their lives. They describe a wide range of mental health impacts, including feeling suicidal, feeling depressed, "hitting bottom," and "reaching a breaking point." Isiah explained:

> *The bottom was very hard, just living. It was very hard to just try to stay happy. I had contact with friends, but I was living at [an adult shelter]. It was hard to hold conversations with [my friends] or be happy because I knew my situation. I've always been a happy person. I'd never gone through adversity like this before. It was very hard to be down that low. I'd never even imagined I could be that low.*

Access to a therapist was important in helping Isiah work through these grim

feelings and helping him understand how to let go of some and reframe others. He credits his time working with this therapist as important in helping him progress toward his goals. Alexa, Asha, Harmony, Macnificent, Isiah, Pearl, and Maria—seven other youth—also benefited from therapy.

Working with a therapist empowered Alexa to leave her abusive relationship with her boyfriend. Since ending this relationship and entering a healthier one, she has been less stressed and depressed and has had fewer migraines. She credits these changes in her life to the work she has done with her therapist at the drop-in center, who helped her cultivate a belief that she deserves to be treated well.

Kenzo's and Thmaris's case managers felt the youths would have benefited from therapy, but it was not available to them onsite at the time when they accessed services at the drop-in center. Kenzo's case manager described how therapy might have benefitted Kenzo:

> *He was dealing with a lot of stuff when he first came here. The anger was one of them… It's actually too bad [our therapist] wasn't [working here] when [Kenzo] first started coming, because he would have been a kid we totally would have had work with [the therapist]. He's definitely someone [who] would have engaged with her, and it might have been really helpful to him, but I don't think he has done anything like that. He's pretty much ignored any referrals to therapy that I've given him. It's too bad, because it is there, and it's not that far below the surface.*

Most interviewed case managers discussed how difficult it is to get youth to see a therapist who is not onsite; unfortunately, this is sometimes the case.

Perry and Szalavitz (2007) described the limitations of the mental health field as it currently stands. Diagnostic tools are inadequate, and the tools psychiatrists and psychologist do have can be inadequate. Not all youth were able to access mental health

support when they sought services from the grantee organizations, so it is not to be expected that a discussion of mental health would come up in all staff interviews. However, in interviews regarding three youth, staff mentioned that youth had received diagnostic assessments as part of a mental health screening and that the diagnostic assessments were either not correct or at least not helpful. Kenzo's case manager discussed Kenzo's diagnostic assessment:

> *It's a big problem with a lot of the young people we work with. They get some early diagnosis or something, and it follows them forever. Half of these therapists and social workers base their diagnoses on [previous ones]. It's ridiculous.*

A holistic approach allows for different ways to think about supporting young people's mental health and healing. Two staff members interviewed discussed providing mental health opportunities for youth who stray from the traditional approaches of therapy and medication. One explained:

> *I think here, really, a lot of youth have aversion to going to traditional therapy. Fortunately, at [our organization] we have some strong mental health practitioners; it doesn't feel like traditional doctor therapy. But they…had to go to counseling [and] don't identify with diagnoses they had, what have you, so it really explores: What are other ways you can create opportunity or experience for a young person that contributes to their healing and feeling more secure in themselves?*

Youth seemed to reap mental health benefits from having staff to talk to and, just as importantly, having staff who took the time to listen to them. This type of mental health support is not about a diagnoses or even about finding solutions; rather, it is about helping people through caring human interactions. The case stories suggest that the power of this informal mental health support should not be underrated.

Principle 9: Collaboration

Taking a holistic approach to young people's wellbeing and development requires that organizations collaborate to meet the population's diverse needs. Table 18 shows the wide range of coordinated, or collaborative, efforts utilized to meet the needs of the fourteen youth included in this study:

Table 18:

Types of Organizations Staff Worked with to Support Youths' Varied Needs

Types of Organizations Staff Worked with to Support Youths' Varied Needs
Basic Needs: Food shelves, furntiure for apartments, supplies for infants and children
Health: Therapy onsite, therapy offsite, nurse onsite, visiting nurse at home, MRI for head trauma, reproductive health services
Housing: Youth shelters, transitional living programs, permanent, supportive housing, scattered-site housing, other housing programs
Organizations that work with youth who are: Homeless, pregnant, parenting, breaking free of sexual exploitation, breaking free of domestic abuse
Education: High schools, career training programs, community colleges, private colleges and universities, for-profit colleges and universities
Child welfare: For youth who were or are in the child welfare system and for youth who have children in the child welfare system
Corrections: Juvenile, adult

Staff and youth both felt collaboration was important, but they had different ideas about it. Youth felt collaboration helped them meet their needs, provided a web of support, helped them maintain momentum on their journey, and indicated that the staff person had faith in them. Staff shared that collaboration is highly relationship-based and

shifts the focus from agency outcome to outcomes for youth. Table 19 compares these varying perspectives.

Table 19:

Collaboration Themes from Youth and Staff Perspectives

Youth Perspective	Staff Perspective
• Collaboration helps youth meet their immediate needs and long-term goals. • Collaboration creates a support web or safety net in times of change and transition. • Collaboration is a show of faith in the young person.	• Collaboration is relationship-based and requires consistent, effective communication. • Most collaborations are goodwill partnerships rather than formal collaborations. • Collaboration shifts the focus from agency outcomes to outcomes for youth.

Collaboration Helps Youth Meet their Immediate Needs and Long-Term Goals

Central to the experience of accessing services is case management. All of the young people interviewed had a case manager at some point, and one had as many as four at one time. Some youth no longer officially had a case manager because they had aged out of case management services; however, even these maintained at least intermittent contact with their former case managers. Case management, as described by these fourteen youth, required that staff be able to collaborate with others to help youth meet their needs. A case manager discussed trying to get a lease violation removed from a young person's record:

> *I was working with her this whole time. She had an [unlawful detainer] (UD) from a former lease… So, helping her work that out even and just going to the*

other agencies, talking to them, getting involved with them… I worked with rental systems and legal systems to see how we could get this off her record.

Another case manager described collaborating with a teacher to support a young person's goal to graduate by the end of the school year:

I've met with his teacher. He's in the Safe Space classroom, which is a really awesome thing. I'm really glad they have that. Rebecca, his teacher, has played a huge role in providing extra support and trying to get him to graduate on time.

Collaborations across systems boundaries help young people work toward a cohesive life, even when systems tend to be siloed.

Collaboration Creates a Support Web

Six youth and all of the staff interviewed claimed that collaboration creates a support web, or safety net, in times of change and transition. This concept is very similar to Perry's idea of a theraputic web, but it expands the web to benefits beyond mental health and healing. One case manager described how she intentionally helps youth build this network: She tells each of the youth she works with that they have a circle of people who support them and that it is part of her job as the case manager to help her client fill in their circle. She described that youth must choose if they are going to allow her to be part of that circle and to what degree. She informs them that the more she knows, the more she can help them complete their circle. The circle might also include a therapist, a school guidance counselor, or a supervisor at the young person's job. This case manager feels that the more people in the circle communicate and collaborate, the better they are able to build a supportive web around the young person.

For example, after being asked to leave a transitional living program (TLP), Pearl worked with her case manager at the drop-in center to get into a group residential housing

(GRH) demonstration program. Through this program, Pearl was able to secure her own apartment and receive financial support for living expenses. Among the TLP, the GRH, and the drop-in center, Pearl had three case managers working on her behalf, and she believes she needed all three:

> *Once again, [the youth shelter] knows me more than [the drop-in center]. They know more about me and my ups and downs, where I've come from, where I've struggled, and where my lowest points were. They all came together and put this picture together. This program they were gonna put me in, the GRH, [is] worth it. So I had all three working case managers working together to keep me on a straight and narrow path.*

Macnificent also felt collaboration was critical in helping him stay on his path and viewed the collaboration between the drop-in center, the youth shelter, and other organizations as profoundly helpful in fostering his stability:

> *I thank [the youth shelter] every single day, and if it wasn't for [the drop-in center], I wouldn't have a number to call [the youth shelter]. If it wasn't for [the youth shelter], I wouldn't be in my own apartment and doing my own things, looking for a job like I'm supposed to, like youth are supposed to.*

Collaboration as a Show of Faith in the Young Person

Youth reported that it is incredibly valuable for young people to hear that the adults in their lives believe in them. Five youth indicated that collaboration across organizational boundaries was one way people showed caring in action. For example, when Macnificent's case manager worked with his parole officer and a judge to reduce his sentencing to community service hours rather than jail time, Macnificent interpreted that intercession as a sign that his caseworker believed in him:

> *My caseworker was like, "We're going to clear this up. We're going to fight this. That is the wrong way. You don't need to go to jail. You have important stuff to do." She'd seen the potential in me. She told me, "There's always a better way."*

If it wasn't for her, I would be locked up. I wouldn't have my house.

Another example of the power of collaboration is Harmony's story. Harmony moved in with friends after being asked to leave a shelter as a result of a physical altercation with another young woman. She did not want to start working as an escort again and desperately wanted to secure a bed in a different youth shelter. She called one and thought she had a bed, but when that did not pan out, she felt confused and vulnerable. She called her case manager from the first shelter, and that caseworker picked up the phone to call an administrator at the second shelter. Together, they were able to resolve the communication issue and find Harmony a bed. She was extremely grateful that the two shelters worked together to find her a safe place to stay, despite her fight, and she interpreted this to mean that they believed in her. "I don't know where I'd be," she said, when asked what she would have done if they had not intervened for her in this collaborative manner. Even a seemingly small effort of coordination can mean a great deal to a young person who is not used to anyone advocating on his or her behalf.

Collaboration Is Based on Relationships

Staff were clear in stating that collaboration is relationship-based and requires consistent, effective communication with people in various roles, organizations, and systems. One staffperson explained:

> *I think that's a big part of the work here, too, building those relationships with those outside agencies. If you're always appeasing and always working on those relationships, I think it ultimately helps the youth you work with [to] get in more quickly. If you're burning bridges, then you're ultimately burning bridges for the clients you serve.*

Working collaboratively in this way requires communication, and it can be daunting for staff to communicate effectively with multiple agencies around multiple

youth and multiple topics. Everyone we interviewed agreed that collaboration is important, yet it is hard to do effectively and consistently:

> *We talked a lot when he was getting into [permanent, supportive housing]. Now, we don't talk very frequently because there's not much need for it. Usually, if we talk now, it's about some other client. I should be better about that, talking to other caseworkers I overlap with often.*

This kind of communication is time intensive and requires commitment from the staff members. Furthermore, relationships may fail to survive staff turnover.

Partnerships, Coordination, and Collaboration

Most collaborations described in this research are technically goodwill partnerships rather than formal collaborations; this is to say that many of the collaborations staff described were relationship-based at the individual level rather than formalized at an organizational or systems level (Winer & Ray, 2011). Case managers talked about whom they "knew." They felt they were often better able to support youth who have transitioned to the next place if they knew or had a prior working relationship with the young person's new case manager. This connection can be critical for youth. A program administrator described that not knowing someone might mean calling a main number, being connected only to voicemail, then having to wait days for a return call. In contrast, knowing someone personally might mean having their unpublished cell phone number and potentially meeting the young person's needs much more quickly:

> *I think we do a really good job individually and help youth navigate the system really well, but it'd be nice if we could make it more equal for anybody and everybody who needs to access it. So, if it's a brand new staffperson, they can advocate for their youth in the same way as somebody who knows everybody over at [the drop-in centers and the youth shelters].*

One staffperson felt strongly that effective collaborations are based, in part, on

transparency:

> *Transparency with each other within the system…that's about me saying, "I've had this young person. This is what happened here. We want to transfer them to your facility. I want you to be aware of all those things that happened." There are times when it would've been easier if somebody at the beginning would've said, "This is what this young person presents with. If you want to take them on, great, but you have to understand the risk." We don't do that very well.*

Shifting the Focus from Agency Outcomes to Outcomes for Youth

Having open, honest, and transparent conversations about how to best meet the needs of a young person collaboratively shifts the primary desired outcome from agency outcomes to the young person's wellbeing. One staff person explained:

> *I don't believe in ownership of clients or outcomes or anything like that. My belief and my knowledge of the system and being a case manager myself… You've gotta know everybody in this damn town if you want anything done. So that's the way [our shelter] staff work… You just know people, and that's what you do.*

In conversations held by the reflective practice group about how principles could drive practice, there was discussion of moving toward shared traning and professional development, as well as shared case management. Currently, the system is such that organizations are funded to work individually, and data privacy regulations constrain the extent to which organizations can share information about individual youth with each other; however, the six-grantee organizations expressed a desire to overcome these barriers and design a system that works for youth—a system that focus on outcomes for youth rather than individual agency outcomes.

How the Principles Interact

The case stories show that young people experiencing homelessness are on unique journeys. Because they have experienced multiple traumas in their lives, their journey

may, at times, look nonlinear, scary, and confusing to people who care about them. Love is one of the strongest motivating factors in their lives, and the youth described going back to the people they love and the behaviors that have helped them survive, even if these people and behaviors hurt them. Caring adults need to be there to support them without judgment, to help them take steps toward reducing harm in their lives, to help them develop in positive ways, and to create a path to wellbeing. This requires caring adults to not only create and sustain one-on-one relationships with the young person, but also to work with adults in other sectors and systems who impact the young person's life and to help the young person build community through lasting, healthy relationships with family, kin, and kith. This means the work with each young person must be highly individualized and contextualized and take place over a long period of time.

This chapter provided evidence of what these principles look like in action and, in some instances, how they have affected the youths' trajectories. Although each principle is important individually, the interaction of the nine principles provides a more comprehensive, thorough framework to support positive growth and development in youth. Effectively supporting these youth involves three stages: 1) recognizing their past; 2) meeting them where they are; and 3) helping them prepare to thrive in the future. Each of the nine principles intertwines with the others; together, they reinforce and support a unique programmatic environment that balances specific strategies and approaches with intuition and individual needs.

Figure 5 displays the relationship between the principles that emerged from the data. Journey orientation gives the figure its time orientation and is displayed across the

bottom as a set of arrows that cross the time span, originating from initial interactions, to deepening engagement, to transitions out of youth-oriented services. Nonjudgemental engagement, harm-reduction, and strengths-based approach are most relevant during the initial interactions. As the youth deepens their engagement with the organizations, the organizations are able to work with them in a trauma-informed way and engage them in activities that support positive youth development. Central to these activities is the relationship(s) with adults that began during the initial engagement and deepen over time. As the youth transition out of youth services, they decrease their reliance on these relationships: sometimes by choice, sometimes by force. The organizations supporting this transition out of the system seek to support the youth development in a holistic way and with the help of others through collaboration.

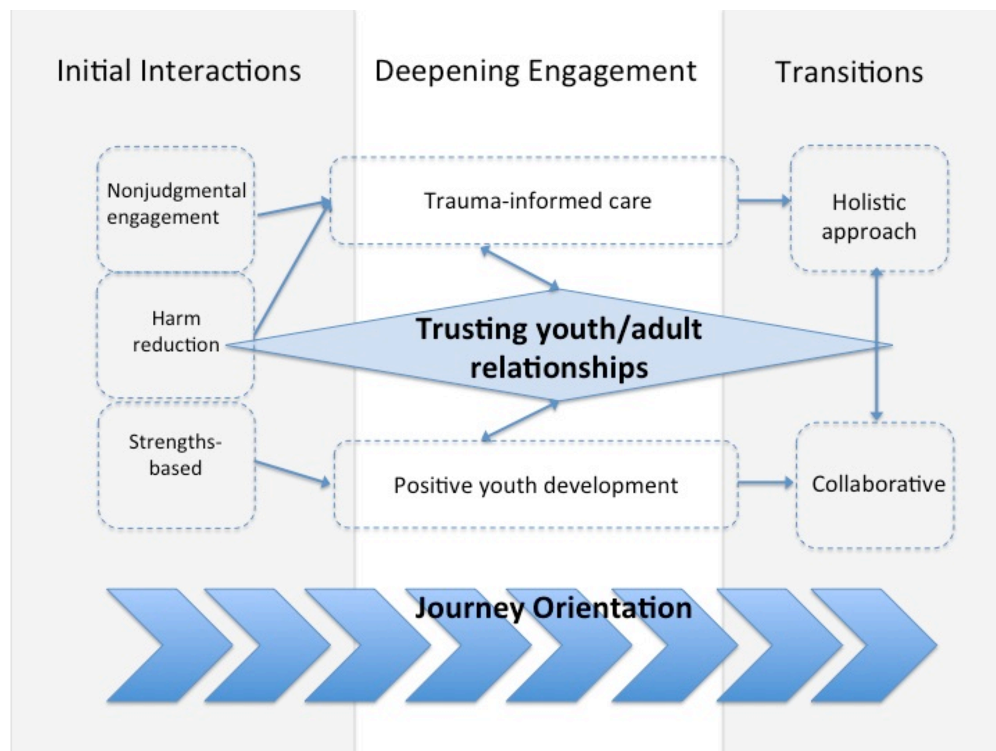

Figure 5: Relationship Between/Among Principles over Time

Because none of the principles fit neatly into a certain time frame and youth's journeys are rarely linear, Figure 5 is limited in its ability to accurately portray the relationships between and among principles. However, it does move show a relationships between the principles based on the multiple-case analysis of the young people's stories.

Youth Contributions

What became clear through an analysis of the case studies is that youth who achieved some degree of self-determined successes were able to get to this point, in part, because they had committed to the hard work of making choices that move them closer to their goals. As stated in the discussion of journey orientation, this is not always a linear path, and youth still make choices that do not move them toward their goals; nonetheless, they decide to make a commitment to work toward certain outcomes. One might call this perseverance or grit. When discussing the trauma they have experienced and what they have had to do to move forward, all of the youth spoke about the fact that one had to be strong and persevere to get to where they were in life. Their struggles were financial, material, emotional, and mental. Regardless of the struggle, though, the youth expressed a need to persevere. For example, Ladybug said that during her second stay at the youth shelter, she understood that in order to accomplish something, one must be dedicated—that it takes hard work. Harmony echoed a similar sentiment, saying that progress requires hard work and patience. Thmaris loved welding but struggled with the engineering part of the learning, which he called "book work." Below are these youths' remarks about struggles and perseverance:

> Alexa*: It takes time for a person to overcome all their obstacles. I'll explain to [other youth] that it's a good support system, and if you're willin' to get that help and that support, then you can move forward. Sometimes it's a struggle to be a survivor.*
>
> Unique*: I'm tired of working so hard to go four steps forward [and] six steps back. It's just a constant struggle.*
>
> Pearl*: I had to become strong, and I became strong at a young age, but then I reached my breaking point, and I fell. I had to build myself back from the bottom to the top… I am who I am because of my struggles and knowin' the people I know, the community I know, and the outreach I have… I found the real Pearl deep down inside. I had to reach down deep inside. It hurt—pain, tears, blood, sweat—to actually find the real me.*

This concept of what youth bring to the relationship with organizations and people within those organizations will be discussed further in Chapter 6.

Principles-Driven Collaboration: Staff Perspectives

Members of the reflective practice group were asked to discuss what the principles-based developmental evaluation work has meant to them and their organization. Leaders reported that the process created a safe space and helped them become more learning-oriented. They also described tension between being principles-driven and rules-driven, and some mentioned similar ension between the principles and their own personal beliefs.

Principles-Driven Approach to Work

Principles-driven work has provided staff with a new way to state their values and to think about solutions they "believe in," both in the present and in the future. As two program leaders shared, "It's about where we want to put the stake in the ground." Two leaders attempted to describe the impact this work with the Bremer Foundation has had

and will have on their work with youth:

> *Sitting in a room with colleagues and [understanding] where they come from and what ideas and thoughts and their principles are really has been helpful—just to understand how the broader community is guided, how people are working together, and how they are not. I want to work somewhere that tells me we are going to do it this way, in a way that makes sense, that we are principled people, and we are going to stand up for what we believe in. We're going to effect change.*
>
> *The study is just so rich. It really helps us understand youth and experiences in their lives and helps us in long-term planning. Knowing what we know lets us ask, "So, what does this mean for us in the future? What are we going to look at differently?" And when we learn something isn't working, how can we explore a different path?*

All nine of the principles proposed by the six grantee organizations were present in the case studies. Learning how to go beyond principles-driven work at the organizational level to principles-driven collaboration at the system level has been a shift for organizations. Organizations are typically funded individually and are, thus, in competition for grant dollars. As a result, the important first step for the Otto Bremer Foundation was to create a safe space in which grantees could show their vulnerabilities to the foundation and to each other. A second step was to create a learning-focused environment, supporting the shift from competition to collaboration. Leaders reported that the process of learning together helped them feel an increased sense of unity and collaboration, allowing staff to better see youth homelessness as a systems problem. This brought into focus the need to talk not only about individual programmatic impact, but also the collective impact. Together, a collective focus on these nine principles expands the idea of collective impact beyond housing to one of young people's journeys, development, and overall wellbeing.

Learning focused. Nonprofit leaders operate in a world that focuses on individual programmatic or organizational outcomes, and the focus on learning was acknowledged and appreciated by all interviewed program leaders. The learning focus shifted the emphasis from competition to collaboration. This generated conversations about doing what is best for all youth, regardless of the services they access, and about collective impact rather than solely focusing on individual program outcomes. One program leader explained:

> *There's that tendency to always…want to make it seem about you, your program, how you are doing well…just always wanting to prove that you are doing your best. It's really important to remember that it is about learning from the other people's stories.*

Increased sense of unity and collaboration. The process of learning together helped leaders feel an increased sense of unity and collaboration, as the following comments demonstrate:

> *I think we have a better understanding of what each of us do and what we each bring to the table, and we know how to speak to that in support of the organizations when we're out doing our own work. I know more about each agency's niche and their focus area, and I can represent them well in the community, in a different way than maybe I could have before.*

> *In terms of being part of the Bremer group, it's been very exciting to have a group of people [who] are willing to listen and certainly help us out, but really listen so they can decide how they are going to help us in the future.*

This collaborative work reportedly also helped people see homelessness more clearly as a systems problem:

> *The conversations we've had in those meetings has helped me see from a higher systems level than before. I don't know if everybody is feeling that way, but that, coupled with the metro youth services redesign conversations… I don't know. I'm seeing things differently. It's meant a lot to me to be part of those conversations.*

Accountability. Because there was significant funding attached to the initiative and strong engagement by the Foundation staff, there was a high level of accountability that supported the momentum of the principles-driven work. One leader explained that the financial investment made by The Otto Bremer Foundation held the organizations accountable for working collaboratively. As a result, there is high participation and engagement in the initiative, differentiating it from other initiatives that start with a great deal of momentum and quickly fizzle out:

> *With Bremer, it's this force that's holding us accountable… "No, you're going to continue to meet. You're going to continue to talk, and you're going to continue to work together." So, just being brought to the table consistently to have conversations about how we all work together has been huge.*

It is noteworthy to mention here that after a year and a half of meeting, nearly every member is still in attendance at the reflective practice group meetings.

Tensions Between Requirements and Principles

Programs and organizations that serve youth operate largely in a world full of regulations and requirements. These rules are mandated by various sources, including county, state, and federal governments, nongovernmental funding sources, and so forth. Sometimes, these regulations do not fall in line with a principles-based approach. For example, programs sometimes have no choice but to enact a practice or policy that might be a trigger for a young person. The best they can do is to be transparent about what is going to happen and why. Program staff described doing the best they could while also meeting licensing requirements.

Personal Views Versus Professional Roles

Staff may have different personal and professional views. The excerpt below

explains the juggling act professionals must do each day when asked to engage in a nonjudgmental way around something(s) they feel strongly about:

> *I'm a conservative in social services, which is relatively unique. I am a Catholic in social services who believes in being Catholic. Like my friends at Catholic Charities, you won't go to my house and find a bowlful of condoms that you can just take and use. That said, I have a professional responsibility, and I have a personal viewpoint that are often at a crossroads from each other… I look at it and say, "If I didn't want to do this, I could walk away, but this is the way I choose to be a professional."*

Two other staff members talked about how hard it is to take a nonjudgemental and harm-reduction approach when they really want to to tell a young person they care about to stop putting themselves in danger. Many of the staff interviewed have witnessed youth being seriously hurt or even killed, and they are painfully familiar with the reality of the danger faced by many youths. However, they also know that, for a variety of reasons, they can't force youth to make certain choices.

As mentioned, all nine principles were evidenced in the case studies, and seven of the nine were present in at least two-thirds of them. This chapter described what the principles looked like in the youths' stories and from the perspective of program staff. The chapter also identifies principles that are more highly interrelated and groups the nine principles grouped into four domains, each consisting of principles that appear to be more highly interrelated with each other than with the principles not in that domain. A figure was also presented to suggest the relationship of the principles over time. While all principles can be important at any time, nonjudgemental engagement, harm-reduction, and strengths-based initial approaches are espcieally important during the initial interactions. As the youth get to know staff, staff are able to engage with them in a

trauma-informed way and develop their strenghts through positve youth development. As youth transition out of programs or out of homelessness, it's important to tend to their needs in a holistic, collaborative way rather than narrowly focusing efforts on single indicators such as housing status or services that can be provided in-house by individual agencies. Trusting youth/adult relationships span the entire interaction and are one of the most critical components of a young person's journey. What wasn't addressed in this research but emerged as important is that youth contributions to their own journeys are as important, if not more so, than the principles; the idea of youth contributions and character strengths will be addressed in Chapter 6. What also emerged are the implications for programs and staff. Working in a principles-driven way looks different than working in a rules-based way; this also will be discussed in Chapter 6.

Chapter 6: Discussion, Implications, and Conclusion

Young people experiencing homelessness share only two things in common: They are not housed, and they are youth. While most have experienced *trauma*, this term is exceptionally broad. Young people's identities, reasons for becoming homeless, challenges, strengths, and future goals vary from person to person, making it difficult to identify a single recipe for working with them. Previous research suggests that youth experience a journey arc that involves living with abuse and despair, leaving home, living on the street, experiencing a crisis or turning point, accessing services, and, ideally, moving away from street life toward self-sustaining independence and security (Ottaway, King, & Erickson, 2009). When youth experience these turning points, personal and contextual factors are instrumental in enabling them to successfully resolve difficulties in order to work toward self-defined success (Lindsey et al., 2000). Ultimately, many seek a place in life where they feel a measure of success and sense of belonging (Karabanow et al., 2010; Karabanow & Naylor, 2013; Lindsey et al., 2000). How programs and services can effectively help youth achieve long-term success and sense of belonging is yet to be determined and understood. This chapter argues that reframing the issues from an individual problem to a systems problem is a useful conceptual shift for researchers, service providers, community members, funders, and policymakers.

This concluding chapter will also make connections among the research questions, the issues discussed in the Chapter 2 literature review, and what was learned through a multi-case analysis across the fourteen stories. This chapter is divided into four parts: The first discusses the findings related to the research questions; the second

suggests implications for policymakers and funders; the third suggests implications for future research; and the fourth discusses the researcher's stance and what was learned about conducting research in this way. The chapter closes with concluding thoughts.

Findings Related to the Research Questions

This section will discuss the findings related to each of the research questions presented in Chapter 1 of this paper.

Research Question 1: How do homeless youth actually experience the principles of harm reduction, trust relationships, positive youth development, trauma-informed care, nonjudgmental, journey-oriented, strengths-/assets-based, collaborative, and holistic?

All of the principles, with the exception of strengths-based, were evidenced in at least half of the stories. This section will explore how the findings presented in the analysis support or differ from the existing research literature presented in Chapter 2. Building on the outcomes of the study, the exploration will discuss the principles in the order used in Chapter 5 rather than in the order they are listed in the research question.

Principle 1: Journey orientation. Two research-based models for considering the principle of journey orientation were provided in the literature review: 1) Bridges's (2001) Transition Framework; and 2) Prochaska, DiClemente, and Norcross's (1992) Stages of Change Model. Bridges's Transition Framework (2001) makes a clear distinction between *change* (an event or situation that happens relatively fast and is defined by an outcome) and *transition* (a slowly occurring psychological reorientation

process experienced when individuals come to terms with the change.) Change is largely external, while transition is our internal adjustment to that change. So, becoming homeless might be a *change* in a youth's experience, and his or her process of coming to understand him- or herself as a "homeless youth" may be a resulting psychological *transition*.

The Stages of Change model developed by Prochaska, DiClemente, and Norcross (1992) is an alternative framework for thinking about how people move through life's journey. This theory was originally developed to create an understanding of how people end addictions, and it is useful for people who wish to reduce harm associated with a habit. Program service providers have used The Stages of Change model (Prochaska, DiClemente, & Norcross,1992) as a way to understand how and why others do or do not change and as an aid to help homeless youth create realistic self-change plans (Prochaska & Norcross, 2001).

Although youth were not specifically asked to identify a turning point, all of them did. The turning point was often not specific; rather, it was something that happened over a period of time, such as becoming a mother and realizing the need to provide a better future for the child. This seemed to stimulate two types of actions: working toward the stated goals and aspirations and working toward forgiveness of those who hurt them in the past. Given that these important turning points took place over an extended period of time and involved the important internal work of healing and forgiveness, the journeys described by youth more closely aligned with Bridges's (2001) Transitions Framework. Youth did not use the language associated with Prochaska, DiClemente, and Norcross's

(1992) Stages of Change model. This is not to say The Stages of Change model is not useful in working with homeless youth, but the data in this study suggest that Bridges's Transitions Framework is more helpful in framing the principle of journey orientation.

Principle 2: Strengths-based approach. Within the literature, there has been a notable shift toward working with young people using a strengths-based approach (Baer, et al., 2004; Barker et al., 2012b; Bender, 2007; Ferguson, 2012; Kidd & Davidson, 2007; Lindsey, Kurtz, Jarvis, Williams & Nackerud, 2000). Strengths-based programming may be intended to increase the number of strengths shown by youths, to support youths in utilizing existing strengths to address their current issues, or a combination of both (Brownlee et al., 2013). Research suggests that homeless young people responded better to client-centered approaches that were strengths-based, flexible, and forgiving and that encouraged them to strive toward positive goals despite any setbacks (Cauce et al., 2000). Strengths-based approaches focus on the strengths already possessed by the client and those found within their environment (Thompson et al., 2006), and service providers working from a strengths-based perspective emphasize strengths and demonstrate a belief in a client's power to make change.

The interviewed staff unanimously indicated that a strengths-based approach is critical to their work. Given that all staffpersons who participated in this study were nominated because of the significant, important relationships they developed with youth, one can conclude that a strengths-based approach was a common ingredient in these relationships. However, it is not possible to tell whether these relationships would have developed in the same way sans a strengths-based approach. Perhaps staff would have

made strong, positive conections with youth simply because they are gifted at building relationships with youth, regardless of a strengths-based approach. Overall, however, the strengths-based approach appears to be an important principle, whether the youth are aware of the practice or not, and it helps youth develop a belief in their own abilities and worth.

Principle 3: Positive youth development. The dimensions of positive youth development that most frequently appeared in case studies were supportive relationships (n=14) and physical and psychological safety (n=12). It is not surprising that these two dimensions appeared most frequently, given that they are extensively interrelated to other principles. Supportive relationships also fall under Principle 7: Trusting Youth/Adult Relationships, and physical and psychological safety is supported through Principle 4: Trauma-Informed Care and Principle 6: Nonjudgmental Engagement. The domain of positive youth development that did not appear in the case studies was the integration of family, school, and community efforts. This domain overlaps with Principle 8: Holistic Approach and Principle 9: Collaboration. The fact that this domain appeared so infrequently in the case studies may be evidence that programs tend to focus on a holistic approach that treats individual needs without extending this holistic approach to the youths' mesosystem or the organizations and systems with which youth frequently interact in their daily lives. It may also be a resource issue with organizations unable to take on the many issues related to family systems. We will discuss later in this chapter the uniquely important role families play in the youths' lives and the desire youth have for support in navigating these complex family relationships.

Principle 4: Trauma-informed care. In the case studies, all of the youth had a history of neglect, abuse, and/or other trauma, and none experienced only one type of trauma. Staff were aware of the majority of the abuse and neglect disclosed by youth in interviews but expressed the assumption that likely no one, other than the youth, knows the full extent of the abuse and neglect experienced in the past or still being experienced. All interviewed staff were aware of both the concept of and the need for trauma-informed care and understood trauma-informed care as it is described in the research literature. Programs and staff expressed that they sought to: 1) create an environment responsive to the prevalence of trauma; 2) seek connections between behaviors and trauma history; 3) support the development of relationships that take trauma into account; and 4) provide youth with a high degree of independence and control.

By contrast, youth did not discuss trauma-informed care. This is language used by staff, an approach that formally or informally guides their work, and their commitment to the approach is evident in staff interviews. Given that trauma-informed care was evidenced by interviews with staff to be practiced as described by the literature, the study found no new insights to provide about this approach as it applied to working with these youth experiencing homelessness.

Principle 5: Harm reduction. Rather than working toward an ideal goal that may be or feel unrealistic at the given time, a harm-reduction approach is an emphasis is on making safer choices (Ferguson et al., 2011). As detailed previously, the Runaway and Homeless Youth Program states that a harm-reduction program should: a) have a low-barrier for entry; b) create a safe space (see also: Principle 4: Trauma-Informed Care); c)

meet youth where they are; d) empower youth by offering enough control to make their own decisions (see also: Principle 1: Journey-Oriented); and e) provide youth with access to adults they can trust (see also: Principle 7: Trusting Youth/Adult Relationships) (Family and Youth Services Bureau, 2012). It is obvious from this list that there is overlap and synergy with other principles. The aspects of harm reduction that make this principle distinct and, therefore, important to distinguish from the principles discussed earlier, is the low barrier for entry. The case studies revealed that this approach was taken in regard to a number of high-risk behaviors: consensual sex, drug use, domestic abuse, sexual exploitation, sleeping on the streets, and gang involvement. None of the youth described encountering a barrier to accessing services based on the high-risk activities described above, nor on any other behaviors. Given that harm reduction was evidenced by the case stories to be practiced as described by the literature, the study provided no new insights about this approach as it applies to working with youth experiencing homelessness.

Principle 6: Nonjudgmental engagement. The case stories support assertions from previous research that fostering an environment of understanding and nonjudgment is essential when working with homeless youth. Without such an environment, harm reduction and trauma-informed care could not happen, and many youth/adult relationships would stall before they even got started. However, a nonjudgmental environment does not mean judgment should not be conferred within the confines of a trusting relationship. The case stories revealed that nonjudgment is often necessary and appropriate in the beginning of a relationship, but it ceases to become relevant or

appropriate over time. As relationships change, youth begin to seek honest feedback that supports them in working toward their goals. This principle, like many others, hinges on a continuum that changes over time. What this principle highlights is the ambiguity of principles-based work and the importance of good professional and interpersonal instincts. When should a staff member engage in a nonjudgmental way? When should that staff person transition to provide feedback that may involve judgment? What is the role of positive judgment in a youth/adult relationship? These are questions each staffperson needs to address in each unique relationship he or she forms with youth, and staff must rely on their professional experience and intuition to answer these questions appropriately. This has implications for hiring and training; in order to implement this principle, programs need staff who have a gut knowledge of how relationships should unfold over time, as it relates to judgment (both positive and negative) and providing honest feedback. Staff who show aptitude in this area are able to deepen these abilities through training in techniques such as motivational interviewing and cognitive problemsolving.

Principle 7: Trusting youth/adult relationships. The arc that emerged from the case stories in regard to trusting youth/adult relationships was presented in the previous chapter. The bottom line was that relationships are critically important, are built on trust, and take time to form and deepen. It is clear that people matter more than programs; the youth attributed much of their success in achieving their goals to these relationships. If relationships are the most important component of the work with homeless youth, then continuity and quality of staff are of the utmost importance. This has far-reaching

systems implications. To support staff continuity, programs must pay attention to factors that retain staff (work-life balance, competitive pay, quality professional development, etc.); funders must fund programs in longer time intervals; and policymakers must consider the implications of placing time-limited boundaries on licensing.To further support the continuity of relationships, communities should provide opportunities for youth to develop relationships with adults who are not program-related or paid. More research is necessary to better understand the conditions under which these relationships develop and the potential for these relationships to provide opportunities for healing and growth and to identify the ways in which programs, funders, policymakers, and communities can support these essential long-term relationships.

Principle 8: Holistic approach. Staff generally could not provide a definition of the term *holistic* that went much beyond the idea of "mind-body-spirit," and youth never explicitly used the term *holistic* or any of its synonyms. The cross-case analysis revealed that the youths' evaluation of their own wellbeing and development incorporated all aspects of their lives: mental health, relationships, school, employment, housing, etc. Similarly, when staff spoke of a young person's journey, they talked about how to foster a young person's wellbeing by helping him or her work toward self-identified goals across multiple contexts. This finding supports journey orientation because supporting wellbeing is a longer-term, internal transition, distinct from external changes such as obtaining housing or employment. It also has implications for practice. Organizations serving homeless youth can increase their ability to take a holistic approach: Individual staff can be empowered through redefined job descriptions to work with individual youth

in a holistic way; programs can support collaboration with other staff; and the organizations as a whole can provide a therapeutic web, allowing youths' various needs to be met via a variety of adults in diverse roles.

Principle 9: Collaboration. No one organization can meet all of a young person's needs, and the youth in this study reported benefiting from positive collaboration. Therefore, a holistic approach to wellbeing requires that organizations collaborate to meet young people's multiple and diverse needs. Staff and youth both felt collaboration was important and shared overlapping, but different ideas about collaboration. Youth felt collaboration helped them meet their needs, provided a web of support, helped them maintain momentum on their journey, and showed that the staff person had faith in them. Staff shared that collaboration was highly relationship-based and shifted the focus from agency outcome to outcomes for youth.

Research Question 2: What does implementation of the principles look like in practice?

The discussion of the first research question explicated both how the youth experienced the principles and what each of them looked like in practice as individual principles. What is important to highlight in the discussion of the second research question is that all nine of the principles were interrelated and interacting, albeit some more than others. Chapter 5 presented the nine principles grouped into four domains consisting of principles that are more highly interrelated with each other than with the principles not in that domain. The first domain, Complex Developmental Orientation, includes three principles: Principle 1: Journey Orientation; Principle 2: Strengths-Based

Approach; and Principle 3: Positive Youth Development. This domain involves working with youth to support their healthy development; recognizing where they have been, where they are, and where they would like to be; and tapping into their strengths to support their progress and development on this journey. This domain is first because, in discussions with the reflective practice group, the concept of a journey arc emerged as the defining feature of the principles-driven work that distinguishes this approach from the traditional solutions-oriented approach to housing. Instead of just meeting young people's immediate needs, organizations focus on where youth have been, where they are, and where they would like to be.

The second domain, Meeting Youth Where They Are, includes three principles: Principle 4: Trauma-Informed Care; Principle 5: Harm Reduction; and Principle 6: Nonjudgmental Engagement. These three were grouped together because they are about meeting youth where they are and recognizing that they likely have experienced trauma. This domain focuses on behaviors not as problems but as symptoms and information.

The third domain, Relationship Orientation, incorporates only one principle, Principle 7: Trusting Youth/Adult Relationships. This is the only type of relationship explored in the interviews. It is conceivable that this principle could expand in future iterations of this research to include other types of relationships such as relationships with self, with family members, and with peers; it could be possibly be reconceptualized around the idea of social connectedness.

The fourth and last domain, Bio-psycho-social-cultural Wellbeing, includes two principles: Principle 8: Holistic Approach and Principle 9: Collaboration. This domain is

listed last because it is the big-picture view of what is covered in the first three domains. Successfully supporting young people's development of self and relationships requires a holistic approach to wellbeing and working across all the contexts in Bronfenbrenner's (1979) socio-ecological model of development. This cannot be accomplished without collaborations across boundaries. It is clear from this discussion of the domains and from the evidence provided by this study that none of the principles operate in isolation from each other; in fact, some are part of another principle's definition. What follows is a discussion of some significant relationships between and among principles that arise in reflection upon the case stories.

Principle 1: Journey Orientation and Principle 7: Trusting Youth/Adult Relationships. Youth are on their own journey, living at their own pace. Thus, relationships with staff that seem to be going well might at some point end abruptly, for reasons unrelated to the staff. Alexa best connected with staff when her boyfriend was in jail or when she was in crisis due to escalating abuse. She would pull back at other times, such as when there was relative peace with her boyfriend. Pearl did the same when she was in the process of "finding herself." There are examples of this theme throughout most of the stories. Relationships are affected by the young person's journey and may start and stop, be good or painful, and require trust. Despite the hard work, these social networks and relationships are vital in young people's lives in order to build positive self-efficacy and to help them in their transition to adulthood (Whitbeck 2009).

Principle 1: Journey Orientation and Principle 8: Holistic Approach. Attaining a holistic sense of wellbeing is a process and a journey. People and the

environments in which they operate change. Even if an individual achieves a state of optimal wellbeing, transitions happen, and he or she must adapt. Life is a continual process of responding to change and adjusting across all domains: physical, social, and mental. Working toward a holistic sense of wellbeing takes time and is an integral part, even a purpose, of one's journey. One could argue that a truly holistic approach is not possible without a journey orientation.

Principle 3: Positive Youth Development and Principle 7: Trusting Youth/Adult Relationships. One consequence of repeated abuse experiences among homeless youth is an internalized belief that they are not respected or valued as individuals, which can contribute to a reticence in voicing their needs and opinions to agency professionals and other authority figures (Kidd, 2003). Creating positive, caring, and trusting relationships with a staff member will support youths' ability to be active agents in their own development. With these kinds of relationships in place, staff are able to uphold high expectations for youth, and youth are empowered to believe these expectations are attainable, because they have built mutual trust.

Principle 3: Positive Youth Development and Principle 9: Collaboration. Advocates of positive youth development often take an it-takes-a-village-to-raise-a-child approach to youth development. They do not see the responsibility of facilitating positive youth development as the sole domain of one person, role, or organization. Peter Benson, a founder of the positive youth development field, was often noted for saying, "If you're breathing, you're on the team!" (Benson, 2012). This is in reference to the idea that all adults are responsible for working together to change young people's lives. Roth and

Brooks-Gunn (2003) wrote:

> One program, even an extraordinarily good program, cannot do it all. Young people do not grow up in programs but in families, schools, and neighborhoods. Our best chance of positively influencing adolescent development through programs lies in increasing the web of options available to all youth in all communities, and ensuring that those options take an approach consistent with the youth development framework. (p. 97)

Principle 4: Trauma-Informed Care and Principle 7: Trusting Youth/Adult Relationships. Youth have different relationships with each of the adult staff members, and, likewise, a staffperson has different relationships with each of his or her youth. This diversity is extremely important. Perry's work in the area of neurodevelopment describes the need for a network of relationships around each high-risk child that provide what he calls a "therapeutic web" that can be evident in a range of policy and program initiatives, such as family support, mentoring, and after-school programs (Perry, 2006, p. 46). The National Child Traumatic Stress Network supports this approach in its "Culture and Trauma Brief" (2007):

> Service providers of all kinds can have a positive impact on runaway and homeless youth and can mitigate the impact of trauma by working to develop supportive relationships with them. Even if a homeless youth never seeks out formal mental health treatment, a strong relationship with an outreach worker, shelter worker, or case manager can make a significant positive difference. (p. 5)

An informal therapeutic web is established with people of varied personalities working in different roles and different settings.This increases the likelihood that "hard to reach" youth find a person they connect with.

Research Question 3: What are the impacts of the principles articulated above on ways to work with homeless youth?

There are four implications that emerged from this research: 1) working in a

principles-driven way takes time; 2) the principles-driven work is nonlinear and highly individualized; 3) working this way requires high degrees of trust and judgment; and 4) it is important to have consistency of understanding and implementation across multiple levels of the system.

Principles-driven work takes time when working with youth. The research provided evidence that relationships can be transformative for youth but that they take time. The case stories demonstrated that the important relationships youth described with staff took from two to eight years to develop. An important implication for practice is that programs need to find a way to retain program staff. Additionally, when someone leaves a position, the organization needs to think about not only replacing that staffperson, but also how to sustain the collaborative relationships they built. As one program administrator explained:

> *They build that relationship and get that collaborative partnership going. Well, when that [person] leaves, it's not a formalized structure, so that [staff] who had a passion for that particular location left, and now that collaboration is gone. Then the [partner] is sort of like, "What's going on?" but the relationships are critical.*

Healing from trauma is also a slow process. As Perry and Szalavitz (2007) wrote, "Trauma is best digested bit by bit" (p. 185). Research has suggested that when working with homeless youth, it may be unwise to focus on trauma-related issues, at least early in the therapeutic relationship (Fisher, Florsheim, & Sheetz, 2005). The time should be taken to build trust initially and work on trauma at a pace that is comfortable for the young person. Healing also takes repetition and consistency. The brain changes in response to patterned, repetitive experiences: The more you repeat something, the more

engrained it becomes. Because it takes time to accumulate repetitions, recovery takes time, and patience is called for as these repetitions continue. The longer the duration or the more extreme the trauma, the greater the number of repetitions required to regain balance (Perry & Szalavitz, 2007, p. 245). Trauma can be a defining experience for youth, something that forms the core of their identity.

Principles-driven work takes time for staff at the organizational and systems levels. Being principles-driven at the organizational level can require extensive discussion and staff meetings. Staff have to collectively engage in case reviews and ask themselves questions such as: Why did we do this here and not here? Are there elements of favoritism at play? What does this help us know about what we should do next time? One program leader explained, “We call it working in the gray zone. There’s nothing black and white.” These discussions of what ought to be done from a principles-based perspective are the most heated when staff try to determine whether or not to exit someone from the program. Program leadership at every organization shared that they have staff who tend to be more rules-oriented, resulting in more straightforward conversations and decisions.

There is an additional time component when engaging in principles-driven work at a systems level because the principles must be understood, operationalized, and implemented with consistency across the system. This involves documenting evidence of what the principles look like in practice at the individual level and the organizational level and bringing these data to the larger systems-level group. The group then works together to look for patterns and reflect on implications, with each group member

bringing his or her learning back to the organization. This requires a continuous cycle of learning and adaptation.

Principles-driven work is nonlinear and highly individualized. Working with homeless youth in a principles-based way is not easy, and there is no recipe as to how relationships ought to be managed. One program administrator shared:

> *We're talking about a very, very, very messy process of creating and building healthy relationships, and there's nothing harder than that on the planet. There are lots of hard times.*

One specific challenge is that professional codes can interfere with principles-based work**.** Training in various professions teaches that staff should not get close to clients. There is sometimes a tug-of-war between how they were trained and what their instincts tell them is right. One staffperson shared her struggle:

> *I was with two girls last night, and both of them are really just sad and lonely, and they keep saying, "I wish I wouldn't have met you at the shelter. I wish I knew you in a friend capacity." It's hard, because it's like, I could see that, but I'm also a part of your life in a way that I can help create change for you, and let's look at what that means. With my social work background—and I have my master's and license—they tell you, "Don't get close," and, "Don't do this," but with young peoplem it's so hard. I think with a lot of them, you build that rapport and that relationship, and you ask so much of them.*

Healing is a complex process, not a linear progression toward an end. Sometimes people appear to be getting worse when, in fact, they are doing important emotional work. Families experience a wide range of responses to the extreme levels of chronic stress and loss they face. Their comfort level in expressing these emotions will depend on their cultural orientation and whether or not these emotions are tolerated in the program setting. Trauma-sensitive environments anticipate these responses and encourage tolerance for emotional intensity as youth attempt to recover from the impact of trauma

on their lives.

Staffing a principles-based program calls for special attention in the hiring process. Social services can be very black and white, due in part to licensing rules that focus on practical details rather than the overall, long-term effectiveness of the program. Therefore, it is often a culture shift for employees and managers to assume a principles-based, big picture-oriented approach. It requires individuals to be comfortable with a certain level of ambiguity and messiness. One staff member explained:

> *I use two words to describe this program for people who are thinking about hosting: messy and magical, and you can't have one without the other. This is a leap of faith. There's not enough training or preparation [to] make you feel ready for this, and if you're going to wait till you're ready, you're never going to do it. It is a leap of faith, and we do our best to train hosts as best we can and to provide support during the messy times, but that's in there. There's nothing neat about it.*

Staff who are comfortable with rules and manuals and uncomfortable with ambiguity may have trouble working in a principles-driven environment. While in other contexts they might tell a youth, "You are kicked out because you returned to the shelter high tonight," principles-based staff must take time to understand the needs of that particular young person, engage with him or her without judgment, and take a harm-reduction approach to the undesirable behavior. The ability to do this comes from intuition, training, and a collective staff commitment to explore what the principles look like in practice.

Principles-driven work requires high degrees of trust and judgment. When organizations are rule-oriented, staff members know what to do in the event of conflict: They carry out the policies stated in the rules manual or handbook. Managers then

evaluate staff based on how they implement the rules listed in the rules manual or handbook; professional judgment is less likely to be a factor in decision-making. A principles-based approach, on the other hand, requires a high degree of subjective judgment. Principles-driven work means saying to the staff, “Do what you think is right. I have confidence in your judgment.” This raises questions: How does one make a judgment? How does one trust one’s own judgment? How do people trust each other’s judgment? The two-part answer is: 1) by building common understanding of the principles in theory and action; and 2) by building trust—staff to staff, staff to management, and staff to youth. This leads to a larger question that will be critical for engaging in principles-driven systems change: How do organizations and systems foster a culture of trust that empowers staff to exercise their professional judgment?

Principles-driven work requires consistency across levels of the system. For the purposes of this study, the principles have been examined as they relate to working with youth. However, in discussions with the reflective practice group, it became clear that the principles need to be enacted throughout the entire system. For example, program leadership reflected that, like the youth, staff members appreciate being treated as people on their own journey and appreciate opportunities to engage in their own positive development (see: Principles 1: Journey-Oriented and Principle 3: Positive Youth Development). Also, as explained above, being principles-driven requires a high degree of trust (see: Principle 7: Relationship-Oriented). To create the space and trust for people to make their own judgments, relationships among staff must be developed and sustained. Additionally, people who have experienced trauma are often attracted to this type of

work. While this may provide a foundation of understanding for working with homeless youth, staff who are trauma survivors have their own triggers, and experiences can be brought up vicariously through their work with the youth. Trauma-informed care means being able to respond to the staff as well. One program administrator explained, “We’re not only trying to know how to do trauma-informed care with young people, [but] we’re also trying to figure out how to do trauma-informed care with our staff to avoid further damage or burnout.”

Research Question 4: In what ways does the work impact the trajectory of the lives of young people?

Cross-case analysis revealed that the nine principles grouped into four domains. All of the principles overlap and intersect with the others, but principles within a given domain are particularly connected. The ways in which this principles-driven work impacts the trajectory of the lives of the young people will be discussed by domain.

Domain 1: Complex Developmental Orientation contains: Principle 1: Journey Orientation; Principle 2: Strengths-Based approach; and Principle 3: Positive Youth Development. Enacting principles in Domain 1 seemed to have the greatest impact on helping youth develop a healthy self-identity, develop a new perspective on their life, and become increasingly focused on future goals rather than immediate ones. Youth such as Macnificent, Thmaris, and Ladybug shared that they had never known a different way to be. Engaging with staff at the six grantee organizations helped them learn how to be productive, develop a new mindset, and see a different future for themselves.

Domain 2: Meeting Youth Where They Are includes Principle 4: Trauma-

Informed Care; Principle 5: Harm Reduction; and Principle 6: Nonjudgmental Engagement. Enacting the principles in Domain 2 seemed to have the greatest impact on helping youth meet their basic needs, feel secure, and stay out of jail. Youth generally began engaging with the programs slowly, perhaps visiting a drop-in center for bus tokens or a shower. What these fourteen youth described finding were places that did not judge them. As they came to build trust with staff at the organizations, they were better able to meet their basic needs for food, clothing, and shelter, thereby reducing their reliance on criminal activity to meet these needs. This, in turn, helped them stay out of jail. Many of the young people shared some variation of the statement, “Without this program/person, I don’t know where I’d be.” The underlying meaning in these statements is that without the program or staff members, the young person would be in a much worse situation, still couch-hopping, trading sex for safety, in jail, or even dead.

Domain 3: Relationship Orientation includes Principle 7: Trusting Youth/Adult Relationships. Through the enactment of this principle, youth found support and developed trust. This, in turn, allowed them to begin the interrelated processes of healing and beginning to recognize their own potential. Domain 1 provides the framework for how programs and staff engage with youth. Domain 2 provides some very practical rules of engagement. Domain 3 is where the transformative power of the programs happens: relationships. The case studies clearly indicated that it was the trusting bonds developed between a young person and a specific staffperson(s) that stimulated and supported young people’s ability to see and work toward a different future.

Domain 4: Bio-psycho-social-cultural Wellbeing includes Principle 8: Holistic

approach and Principle 9: Collaboration. Enactment of these principles supported youth on their journey across the previous domains: finding resources within organizations and with partners to support youth as they met their basic needs, worked toward future goals, and engaged in the hard work of trust building and healing. This domain reinforces the idea that working in a principles-driven way with homeless youth is a systems-level problem, not one that can be adequately addressed by individual organizations.

Research Question 5: What other important principles may be guiding the work with youth, principles not yet fully identified, labeled, or fully understood?

There were needs evident in the youth stories that are not being met through the current enactment of the principles in practice. The three youth-identified needs are: 1) learning to love and be loved; 2) navigating complex family relationships; and 3) developing community connections and a sense of belonging. All of these needs could arguably fall into the relationship-focused domain of the principles that currently has only one identified principle, Principle 7: Trusting Youth/Adult Relationships. It is not clear whether these unmet needs call for the addition of new principles or whether they could be met through the current principles enacted more fully. For example, "developing community connections and a sense of belonging" could arguably fall under Principle 3: Positive Youth Development. This tension is not resolved by this study; rather, the following section will present evidence of these unmet needs from the case stories. The idea of belongingness will be explored again later in this section.

Love

> Relationships are the agents of change, and the most powerful therapy is human love. (Perry & Szalavitz, 2007, p. 230)

Love was a theme present in twelve of the fourteen case studies. Peterson and Seligman (2004) describe *love* as a "cognitive, behavioral, and emotional stance toward others" that takes three forms. The first form is love for the individuals who are our primary sources of affection, protection, and care. This is typically expressed as love for a caregiver. A second form is love for the individuals who depend on us, a desire to make them feel safe and cared for, as is expressed in a parent's love for a child. The third form of love involves the desire for sexual, physical, and emotional closeness with an individual whom we consider special and who makes us feel special. We typically think of this as romantic love. Peterson and Seligman state that relationships can involve more than one type of love and state, "mate relationships are unique in being the only social tie that encompasses all three forms of love" (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, Kindle location 6399). The scientific exploration of love is new, but research has revealed that the capacity to love and be loved is innate, has powerful effects on psychological and physical health, and can be affected in deep and lasting ways by early relationship experiences (Perry & Szalavitz, 2011; Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

Of the twelve case stories that explicitly included a discussion of love, five of the youth discussed loving relationships that were hurtful. Four discussed the pain of absence of love in their relationships with parents. Five mentioned being loved by staff and two being loved by friends. Three youth talked about how important it was to be able to love others, and one spoke of the importance of loving oneself. Three program staff discussed love as a source of healing. Love was not asked about in any of the interviews, yet the topic was frequently mentioned in the case stories as a source of pain, healing, and

motivation. One staff member spoke at great length about love but expressed that she is not confident that the program she works for would want her to talk about the concept of love as it relates to working with the youth.

Love that hurts. Several youth struggled with feeling that they loved their parent(s), believed their parents loved them, yet their parent(s) hurt them. Staff reported seeing this phenomenon frequently:

> *No matter how "bad" or "abusive" the parent is…young people still want approval. They want care and love from that parent figure, no matter what that parent figure's done. I think for anyone…the pull of the parent is gonna be a perpetual thing, throughout life. How the mom assists or hurts Minna's progress will be [something] I think she'll constantly battle.*

Three of the young women explained that they loved their boyfriends, despite abuse; a boyfriend beat one young woman nearly to death in one case and acted as a woman's pimp in another. Several youth also described the pain they felt when love was withheld, and most expressed that they were seeking love in their life.

There is a depth of literature across time and disciplines that describes love's power to heal. Perry and Szalavitz (2007) describe this as it relates to youth who have experienced trauma.

> My experience, as well as the research, suggests that the most important healing experiences in the lives of traumatized children do not occur in therapy itself. Trauma and our responses to it cannot be understood outside the context of human relationships. Whether people have survived an earthquake or have been repeatedly sexually abused, what matters most is how those experiences affect their relationships—to their loved ones, to themselves, and to the world. The most traumatic aspects of all disasters involve the shattering of human connections (p. 231).

One program staff described love similarly to the researcher:

> *Unconditional love and high regard… Every young person who walks through the*

door gets unconditional love. [It's] so transformative, and what's hard is that you can have…like, everybody wants [quantitative] outcomes, and you can graph them. What I can't put on a graph is the physical and spiritual transformation of a young person who has met unconditional love and is now beginning to believe that maybe they deserve a little something better than what they had before.

Despite the frequency with which youth described the importance of love in their life, we found no articulated framework by which staff can talk about love with youth, help them deal with love that is hurtful or withheld, or intentionally harness love's healing power.

Navigating Complex Family Systems

Navigating complex family systems was a second area of need that emerged from the cross-case analysis. Youth were very aware of their relationship to their family at all times. Sometimes, as in the cases of Zi and Minna, youth left programs to return to their families, despite a history of abuse, conflict, or neglect. Zi ran away from foster care to be with her relatives, even though there had been a warrant out for her arrest for years. Minna left her host family to run back to her biological kin, in her comfort zone.

Youth who grew up hearing that they would never amount to anything expressed the desire to prove their family wrong while, at the same time, making them proud. Many youth also expressed a desire for improved relationships with their family members. Alexa felt she needed to learn to allow her family members into her life and has been working on developing a better relationship with them. Asha wishes things were better with her second adoptive parents. Julia hopes her mother will one day learn to accept her. Thmaris wants to make his mom proud. Macnificent is working toward owning a place so he can pull his younger siblings out of foster care and care for them himself. Kenzo thinks about his mother every day; he wishes he could see her again, yet also fears such

an encounter. Pearl yearns for her mother to accept her as her daughter, not as her son. Minna would like to move to the South to reestablish her relationship with her mother. Despite the central role families play in the lives of the youth, it appears from the case stories that programs work with youth one on one and do not intentionally engage family members.

Developing Community Connections and a Sense of Belonging

A third identified need is the development of community connections and a sense of belonging. Researchers and authors from diverse fields, including political science (Putnam, 2001), organizational development (Block, 2009), and psychiatry (Perry & Szalavitz, 2010) have written over the last decade about the importance of community in creating healthy individuals and supporting their development. These authors argue that relationships to community members and having a sense of belonging to a community are among the most important relationship supports a person can have. Without these community ties, individuals and communities suffer. Unfortunately, by almost every measure, Americans' direct engagement in community and civic life has fallen steadily and sharply over the last generation (Putnam, 2001).

Peter Block wrote in his book, *Community* (2009), that we are living in an age of isolation. He frames the lack of community engagement as "the absence of belonging":

> The absence of belonging is so widespread that we might say we are living in an age of isolation, imitating the lament from early in the last century, when life was referred to as the age of anxiety. Ironically, we talk today of how small our world has become, with the shrinking effect of globalization, instant sharing of information, quick technology, workplaces that operate around the globe. Yet these do not necessarily create a sense of belonging. They provide connection, diverse information, an infinite range of opinion. But all this does not create the connection from which we can become

> grounded and experience the sense of safety that arises from a place where we are emotionally, spiritually, and psychologically a member. (Block, 2009, Kindle location 69)

The youth who participated in this study had fragmented, inconsistent, or scarce communities in their childhood and youth. The fact that they did not have a community of people to care for them or provide them a place to live is one of the main reasons they became homeless. The young people consistently described meeting an outreach worker, accessing the drop-in shelter, or moving into youth shelters at times when felt they did not belong anywhere and had no community to take them in. These connections are, therefore, critical to ensuring that once they become housed, they can stay housed. It seems clear that more could be done to help youth build community and belonging outside of these programs.

This first part of Chapter 6 described what was learned in relationship to the research questions. The next part discusses what this means for policymakers and funders.

Implications for Policymakers and Funders

Policymakers and funders clearly hold a great deal of power over social programs and play a very integral, important role in deciding what gets funded, how the problem is conceptualized, what counts as evidence, who can and cannot be served, how organizations do or do not collaborate, and what counts as success.

Conceptualization of the Problem: Individuals Versus Systems

There are many structural realities in our society that make it difficult for economically disadvantaged to participate in community. Perry and Szalavitz (2010)

wrote:

> But solving the biggest problems—like lack of affordable, high-quality childcare and healthcare, the absence of paid family leave, and lack of respect for family time in general—requires coordinated social action and a reframing of the politics that has previously impeded their availability. Even harder to change, of course, are more fundamental problems like severe economic inequality and the stress of poverty and low status that results (p. 309).

As with other principles, while programs can do their best to help youth make community connections, larger societal factors that impede their ability to do so.

Supporting families in the support of their children is one way policymakers can shift the focus from individuals to systems. In every one of our case studies, families experienced a high degree of conflict, mobility, or lack of cohesiveness long before the young person became homeless. To support children, parents and guardians must be able to ask for and receive help without the fear that their children will, as a result, be taken away from them by Child Protective Services. Childcare must be easier to obtain and more affordable; this will allow parents to work, thereby stabilizing housing and decreasing school mobility. Earlier interventions to assist families, as well as support and care programming for those youth who are exiting group homes or the foster care system, are necessary in order to minimize the risk of youth becoming homeless (Coates & McKenzie-Mohr, 2010).

Recognizing the importance of community belonging and relationships with nonfamilial adults in the lives of young people is another way to shift the focus from individual to systems-level solutions. There is a need to profile and disseminate information and research about the positive impact of relationships between significant

adults and young people (Martynowicz et al., 2012). Adequate funding and appropriate policies are necessary to provide young people with the individual adult support necessary to form transformative youth/adult relationships. Unrelated adults can provide emotional and practical support, additional to that provided by relatives. Where family support is not available or is limited for whatever reason, significant adults can play an vital role in young people's transition to adulthood by supporting the development of skills and attributes important to the formation of healthy relationships.

Collaboration across systems. Policy responses to children, youth, and families who experience trauma remain inadequate and fragmented. A review of current policies and practices found that these often undercut the ability of organizations and systems to develop and sustain cross-system collaboration, training, accountability, and infrastructure development aimed at supporting vulnerable populations who have experienced levels of trauma (Cooper, Masi, Dababnah, Aratani, & Knitzer, 2007). The Interagency Working Group on Youth Programs (2013) tackled this issue and released "Pathways for Youth: Draft Strategic Plan for Federal Collaboration." In this work, they made four recommendations for policymakers that would increase the ability of organizations and systems to collaborate across traditional boundaries. Three are particularly relevant to this study. The first is the adoption of shared language for cross-cutting concepts, as was addressed earlier in this paper. When there is no shared definition of terminology as fundamental as *youth* or *homeless*, it is hard to have conversations, collaborate on grant applications, share in data collection, etc. Second is to centralize and disseminate information on promising and evidence-based strategies. The

principles described in this research, for example, have applicability to contexts that work with homeless youth other than shelters and drop-in centers. Secondary and post-secondary institutions or correctional institutions may find these principles useful and effective as well. Third, policymakers can promote data collection and long-term evaluation of policies and programs that impact youth. While youth engage in multiple systems at one time, it is currently challenging, if not impossible, to share data on youth across systems and to evaluate the contributions of each policy, practice, or program or the understand the collective impact.

Organizational relationships: Collaboration versus competition. A holistic approach to wellbeing requires that organizations collaborate to meet young people's multiple, diverse needs. Youth are harmed when organizations have to compete for them in order to secure funding. Funding programs in a way that fosters and supports collaboration requires acknowledging and supporting the time it takes to build relationships, to define the desired collective impact, to develop strategies for collaboration, and so forth. It requires creating a space where organizations can be transparent about their strengths and weaknesses so as to best create synergistic partnerships. It also requires taking a complexity theory approach, acknowledging that the work will not be linear and predictable, thereby documenting rigorously and watching for emergent challenges and opportunities.

Success: Linear and predictable versus nonlinear and individualized. Effective interventions with homeless youth take time. Young people who are marginalized, particularly those who have come into contact with the criminal justice

system, often require more intensive, long-term support to address what can be a lifetime of disadvantage. When success is narrowly defined in a linear way, goals achieved in a predicable manner and on an expedient timelime, effective practies or strategies may be overlooked. For example, we learned through these interviews that youth often feel worse after obtaining stable housing for the first time as a result of leaving crisis mode and having the time and space for the impacts of trauma to surface. At this point, a young person may require mental health services before he or she can successfully hold employment. Overly simplistic measures of mental health or employment status may show a decline or lack of employment and deem the housing placement a "failure." The more complex story may be that the decline in mental health status is necessary as youth heal and build a sustainable forward path for themselves. The bottom line is that there is no one-size-fits-all path to successful outcomes, and to evaluate success as though there is undemines the ability of programs to provide more nuanced, personalized, principles-driven work with each individual.

Implications for Future Research

Research Approach

Research has long been performed in complex systems, yet researchers have historically approached this endeavor with a positivist-Newtonian lens, applying linear thinking rather than conceptualizing the system as complex and adapting. Data are typically collected to produce statements about the relationship between predefined input and output variables; context is deconstructed to produce quantitative estimates and/or

qualitative explanations of the effect of mediating and moderating variables on the relationship between input and output variables; and judgments are made about the extent to which a program has achieved its original goals (Greenhalgh & Russell, 2010).

Increasingly researchers, practitioners, and policymakers acknowledge that the systems they are seeking to change and improve must be viewed not as a machine but as a complex adaptive entity (Eoyang, 2007; Kitson, 2009; McDaniel Jr, Lanham, & Anderson, 2009; Patton, 2010; Patton, 2012); they also posit that research and evaluation should be designed to address the complexity of the system on which the research and evaluation is taking place (Eoyang, 2007; Parsons, 2012; Patton, 2010). Complexity is a specific systems theory that cuts across all traditional disciplines of science, as well as engineering, management, and medicine, and, more recently, the social sciences; it helps theorists and practitioners better understand complex adaptive systems and so-called "wicked" problems (Begun, Dooley, & Zimmerman, 2003; Fennell & Adams, 2011; Zimmerman, Lindberg, & Plsek, 2009). Zimmerman (2009) stated that complexity theory is "revolutionizing how we see the world" because it:

> …provides the language, the metaphors, the conceptual frameworks, the models, and the theories which help make the idiosyncrasies non-idiosyncratic and the illogical logical… Complexity science describes how systems actually behave rather than how they should behave (p. 4).

Given the earlier proposal in this paper that principles-driven work is a better fit for addressing wicked problems such as youth homelessness and that wicked problems are complex, a significant implication is that research conducted in these contexts should, likewise, apply complexity theory. Traditional quantitative research methods are rooted in a positivist worldview and make claims for knowledge based on cause and effect,

reductionism, measures of variables, or the testing and refining of theories (Creswell & Clark, 2007; Slife & Williams, 1995). These techniques and methods rely on basic assumptions about linear organizational dynamics (predictability, low dimensionality, system closure, stability, and equilibration) and are best applied in situations with simple, organized system dynamics (Hargreaves, Parsons, & Moore, 2010; Hargreaves, 2010). These methods tend to artificially constrain systems in ways that make boundaries clear and that assign people to groups (such as age, treatment, or organizational affiliation), which are mutually exclusive by definition with regard to all the rest (Eoyang & Berkas, 1999). Traditional quantitative methods such as randomized experiments and quasi-experimental comparisons are generally undertaken on a sample that should be adequately powered and statistically representative of the population from which it is drawn, require a clear separation between researcher and the people and organizations on which research is undertaken, seek generalizability; and have stable linear dynamics that can be measured over time (Greenhalgh & Russell, 2012). These traditional methods are better suited for simple interventions that have clearly defined goals and outcomes and well-specified activities that are effective in nearly all circumstances (Stacey, 1992). For the most part, they do not take into account the complexity of interventions in complex adaptive systems (CAS) (Cross, Dickmann, Newman-Gonchar, & Fagan, 2009; Morell, 2010; Patton, 2010; Sridharan, Dunn, & Nakaima, 2012; Walker & Kubisch, 2008).

Qualitative research is a method of inquiry employed in many different academic disciplines, whereby evaluators aim to gather an in-depth understanding of human behavior and the reasons that govern such behavior (Patton, 2002). Qualitative research

encompasses a wide variety of methods that take an interpretive and naturalistic approach to its subject matter, seeking to provide rich descriptions of complex circumstances that are unexplored in the literature (Marshall, 1999). Qualitative researchers study systems, people, interactions, and events in their natural settings,; they ateempt to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. Thus, qualitative inquiry assumes that reality is socially constructed by every unique individual from within their own unique contextual interpretation, and it relies on a variety of methods, including, but not limited to case study, personal experience, introspective, life story, interview, observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

Qualitative methods are more easily adapted to complex adaptive systems than traditional quantitative methods and have been used with a systems lens in research and evaluation. These methods include situation analyses, rapid assessments, environmental scans, mapping of community assets, and observations of system activities (Hargreaves, 2010). When applied using the complexity lens, these methods can allow evaluators to gain a deeper understanding of the systems and its boundaries, identify underlying differences in perspectives among key stakeholders, and identify relationships to address in the next phase of the evaluation.

But even with the availability of these qualitative methods, researchers and evaluators working in complex adaptve systems contexts increasingly call for a way to more readily apply complexity principles to research and evaluation (Hawe, Bond, & Butler, 2009; McDonald & Kay, 2006). They have specifically sought methods that allow

us to look at the unexpected consequences, identify the simple rules, self-organization, and/or changes in patterns of system behavior over time, and to understand the underlying conditions that contribute to expected and unexpected changes (Barnes, Matka, & Sullivan, 2003; Hargreaves, 2010; Patton, 2010; Richardson, Cilliers, & Lissack, 2000). Such an approach would seek to: a) identify and describe a variety of perspectives; b) identify and describe boundaries; c) identify and describe relationships; d) identify socially constructed meaning meanings and values; e) seeks to explain contribution rather than attribution; and f) identify levers for change. The importance of each of these six characteristics is described briefly below.

Seeks a diversity of perspectives. Because programs are entangled in complex networks of structures and stakeholders, they can be challenging to understand, and they often pose issues of competition and conflicting goals, increasing the likelihood of divergent but equally plausible interpretations of an issue (Fredericks, Deegan, & Carman, 2008). Problems, resistance, and change manifest themselves in different ways and at different levels (Jones, 2011; McDonals & Kay, 2006). Methods that seek to see differences, as well as similarities, are more likely to identify subtle but important events in Complex Adaptive Systems (Bartel & Garud, 2009; Eoyang, 2001; Gamble, 2008, McDaniel et. al, 2009; Patton, 2010).

Identifies and describes boundaries. Boundaries delineate what is inside or outside the situation of interest and can be physical or conceptual, static or dynamic, and explicit or invisible to those outside the system. Boundaries determine who or what will benefit from a particular intervention and who or what might suffer (Cabrera, Colosi, &

Lobdell, 2008; Eoyang, 2006; Gamble, 2008; Hargreaves et al., 2010; Patton 2010; Williams & Hummelbrunner, 2010). Boundaries are fundamentally about values (Ulrich & Reynolds, 2010). A method used in CAS would seek to describe boundaries from different perspectives and how these boundaries change over time.

Identifies and describes relationships. Relationships are defined as the connections that occur within and across system levels. Because people are individuals who belong to multiple interconnected groups, it is not possible to predict how relationships will change over time, in response to changing factors (Eoyang, 2001; Gamble; 2008; Hargreaves, 2010; Patton, 2010; Williams & Hummelbrunner, 2010). A method used in CAS would seek to describe relationships from different perspectives and how these relationships change over time.

Seeks socially constructed meanings of values. Making sense of the data based on socially constructed meanings of values generates data that are intuitive and resonate with evaluation users (Barnes et al., 2003; Boustani et. al, 2010; Hawe et al., 2009; McDaniel et al., 2009; Patton, 2010). This approach also creates opportunity for those whose voices are often marginalized in the sense making process, revealing multiple, divergent, disputed purposes for a given program or intervention (Williams & Hummelbrunner, 2010).

Seeks to explain contribution rather than attribution. Successfully addressing a problem in a CAS may rely on the ability to adapt in response to emerging insights rather than trying to completely shape the strategy or innovation in advance (Jones, 2011). Methods in CAS need to address the fact that it is always difficult, if not

impossible, to attribute causality in a system where an input never works alone and where the inputs may change over time in response to emergent conditions (Stame, 2004).

Identifies levers for change. Boundaries, differences, and relationships are levers of influence toward a purpose. When analyzing a situation to understand possible points of influence, the method should help identify how one or more lever can be adjusted or influenced to move toward or maintain a purpose-based direction (Parsons, 2012; Patton & Patrizi, 2010).

I believe this principles-driven approach to research, which integrated a traditional method (case studies) with a cross-case approach and reflective practice, bridged a traditional research approach with the realities of the complex adaptive systems within which the research problem was located. Fourteen intentionally selected case studies allowed for the indentification or a variety of perspectives, boundaries, and inter-relationships. The fact that youth read and reviewed their own stories for accuracy, as well as the meaning making engaged in with the reflective practice group, facilitated the development of constructed meanings and values. By selecting youth who engaged with two or more organizations, the research focused on contribution rather than attribution; and by describing the impact of the principles on the young people's journeys, the study identified potential levers for change. This research study represents just one way in which a research approach can be modified to meet the needs of working in a complex adaptive system. Reserachers and evaluators no doubt identify other research approaches that meet the six characteristics listed earlier in this section.

Directions for Further Research

There are several ways additional research could add to our understanding of principles-driven work with these nine principles in organizations that serve homeless youth. One possibility would be to replicate this study in a different location. This would provide insight as to whether these findings were specific to the location (metropolitan, Northern, high density of philanthropic organizations, etc.). A second possibility would be to complete the same study with more cases. A third possibility would be to replicate this study with youth who have not experienced the same degree of success, asking: Why are some youth more successful than others in exiting homelessness? Perhaps a study with youth who have achieved less self-identified success would yield information suggesting that these are not the right principles for them and/or that different principles are needed. A fourth possibility would be to follow the youth over time and gather more data about the impact of these principles on young people's long-term outcomes. This longitudinal data could yield insight into principles in action, those that are not identifiable until later; may reveal a principle that should be considered; or may elucidate unmet needs lacking in the operationalization of the current principles.

A sixth possible related study would explore the ways in which character strengths affect a young person's journey. This emerged as an important distinction in meetings with the OFB reflective practice group and will be discussed in detail. All of the youths interviewed in this study have achieved some level of success in working toward their self-identified goals. This was a purposeful selection criterion. An implicit assumption embedded in this research is that the principles were instrumental in

supporting the youths' positive developments and trajectories. An alternative hypothesis is that it is not the principles that are instrumental; rather, this relies on each youth's character strengths.

Paul Tough (2012) describes the prevailing belief about young people's journey as "the cognitive hypothesis," the belief "that success today depends primarily on cognitive skills—the kind of intelligence that gets measured on IQ tests, including the abilities to recognize letters and words, to calculate, to detect patterns—and that the best way to develop these skills is to practice them as much as possible, beginning as early as possible" (Kindle Location 53). Tough poses an alternative explanation, "the character hypothesis." This is the notion that noncognitive skills, like persistence, self-control, curiosity, conscientiousness, grit, self-confidence, and optimism are more crucial to young people's success than cognitive abilities. Tough establishes how studies have now shown that while IQ and scores on standardized tests are certainly highly correlated with academic and future success, non-cognitive characteristics actually predict success better than cognitive excellence.

What the youth bring: A willingness to engage and deepen character strengths. Tough's interest in character was piqued by Seligman and Peterson's (2004) synthesis of their work to date, a handbook entitled *Character Strengths and Virtues*. Seligman and Peterson listed twenty-four character virtues they believed to be universally respected, regardless of culture or religion. Their list included character strengths such as curiosity, zest, love, forgiveness, gratitude, and humor. What intrigued Tough is that the identified character strengths seemed to have tremendous practical application in real life, across a wide range of experiences.

While character traits have traditionally been viewed as innate, Tough describes how psychologists and neuroscientists have learned in the past few decades that character is created by encountering and overcoming failure. He then describes that American children at both ends of the socioeconomic spectrum are missing out on these essential experiences of encountering and overcoming failure. Youth raised in affluent families are often protected from adversity by nannies, private schools, tutors, and any other protections money can buy; thus, they avoid risk and failure to the greatest extent possible. Youth raised in poverty face adversity, from inadequate nutrition and medical care to dysfunctional schools and neighborhoods, and they often lack access to the support that helps one overcome adversity. This has implications for people who work with youth. While the research on this topic is in its infancy, Tough argues that the cultivation of character during later childhood and adolescence requires that what is needed at this stage is for a young person to have the opportunity to take risks and to learn how to manage his or her failures in a constructive way. Two of the seven character strengths Tough described are clearly evident in the youths' case studies: self-discipline and grit. Three additional character strengths in Peterson and Seligman's work are also evident: love, hope, and forgiveness.

Self-discipline. "The term self-discipline is related to self-control and usually is used in an even more narrow sense to refer to making oneself do things that one does not want to do in the face of temptation to the contrary" (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p. 442). In a longitudinal study of 140 eighth-grade students, self-discipline was measured by self-, parent, and teacher report; predicted final grades; school attendance; scores on

standardized achievement tests; and selection into a competitive high school program the following spring. In fact, a student's self-discipline measure from the fall accounted for more than twice as much variance as IQ in final grades, high school selection, and school attendance. This finding suggests that a major reason students fall short of their intellectual potential may be their failure to exercise self-discipline (Duckworth & Seligman, 2005).

Grit. Grit is described as "a passionate commitment to a single mission and an unswerving dedication to achieve that mission" (Tough, 2012, p. 73)—referred to in Principle 1: Journey-Oriented as perseverance. Duckworth and Quinn (2009) developed the Short Grit Scale in response to Peterson and Seligman's (2004) list of character strengths. The Short Grit Scale (Grit-S) measures two trait-level factors: perseverance and passion for long-term goals. Among adults, the Grit–S has been associated with educational attainment and fewer career changes. Among cadets at the United States Military Academy, West Point, the Grit–S predicted retention. Among adolescents, the Grit–S longitudinally predicted GPA, and among Scripps National Spelling Bee competitors, the Grit–S predicted final round attained (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009).

Hope. Peterson and Seligman (2004, loc. 820) define hope as "optimism, future-mindedness, future orientation." It is characterized by expecting the best in one's future and working to achieve it because one believes a good future is attainable and can be brought about. Seligman has written extensively about the role of optimism and has argued that there are two very different ways people go about explaining the negative events that happen in their lives. Pessimists tend to attribute negative events to causes

that are personal, pervasive, and permanent. By contrast, optimists tend to attribute negative events to causes that are impersonal, specifi, and short term (Gillham, Shatté, Reivich, & Seligman, 2001; Seligman, 2011). Thus, optimists find it much easier than pessimists to "pick themselves up and try again in the face of a setback" (Tough, 2012, p. 54). Optimism leads to more grit and perseverance and is correlated with less anxiety and depression (Seligman, 2011).

Love. As a character strength, love is valuing close relationships with others. Peterson and Seligman (2004) describe it as taking three forms: cognitive, behavioral, and emotional. They state that relationships can involve more than one type of love and state, "Mate relationships are unique in being the only social tie that encompasses all three forms of love" (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, Kindle location 6399). The scientific exploration of love is new, but research has revealed that the capacity to love and be loved is innate, has powerful effects on psychological and physical health, and can be affected in deep and lasting ways by early relationship experiences (Perry & Szalavitz, 2011; Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

What is interesting about these character traits is that we can see both how the youth possess these character traits and how they are developed through interactions with services and the trusted adults providing those services. While there are many important implications, two seem particularly critical. First, the young people in these stories were willing to engage with staff around the development of these character strengths. They were open to seeing those around them differently, thereby deepening their social intelligence. They were open to forgiving those who had done them wrong, thereby

supporting a healthy journey characterized by hope and optimism. Also, despite how hard the work of character development is, the youth in these case stories had the grit to persevere.

A second critical implication is that this makes even more clear the need for programs to develop Perry's therapeutic web, whereby youth interact with a network of caring and therapeutic relationships. Character strengths such as social intelligence and love cannot be developed in the context of one relationship. These concepts have multiple facets, interpretations, and actualizations across people and contexts. Youth benefit from a variety of relationships by which they can learn about and practice these character strengths.

Researcher's Stance

A research project such as this one requires project management skills, interpersonal skills, the ability to engage authentically with youth, to hear their stories, and the chance to do something with the emotions that arise during the interview sessions. I will discuss each point separately.

This project required a great deal of project management, both in juggling a great many details and also in maintaining momentum. In the beginning, I had to propose the project to The Otto Bremer Foundation, the six participating organizations, my dissertation defense committee, and the Institutional Review Board at the University of Minnesota. When change was required in any facet of the research design for one party, that change needed to be communicated to and approved by all parties; this was no small

feat. Once the research began, I communicated by email, by phone, and in person with the thirty people I interviewed, as well as with other staff who played various roles, such as being present at the beginning of the youth interviews, scheduling meeting spaces, granting access to case files, and so forth. During the process, I was in constant communication with Michael Quinn Patton, my evaluation advisor; Jean A. King, my academic advisor; and the eighteen or so members of the RPG. I took their feedback and advice, incorporated it in the research process, and communicated these changes back to the whole group. I created deadlines and met in person with the reflective practice group at least monthly and with my evaluation and academic advisors at least twice monthly. One of my advisors shared the following:

> *Maintaining the momentum of a project like this required a great deal of skill. We [the reflective practice group] met every month, timelines were tight, and work had to get done [in order for us] to move forward. Nora's capacity to manage the data, meet timelines, and get stuff organized every month to keep momentum going was a huge factor in making it successful. [Nora] delivered in a timely way that got us to this point.*

This required more than the ability to juggle details and communicate effectively; it also required excellent interpersonal skills. I had to build rapport and trust with the president of a foundation, world-renowned evaluators, executive directors, case managers, and youth. Without their trust and support, the project could not have happened. One director shared the following:

> *I met with Nora when she interviewed me for the project, and I was nervous, but within one minute, I felt completely comfortable. Her ability to connect with people and be so genuine is remarkable. It made this process possible. Young people felt comfortable connecting with her, and the feedback I received from staff was all very positive. Her ability to connect with young people helped them…tell their story, validate their journey.*

This also took a personal toll. At times, the harsh reality of the experiences the youths have gone through had me in tears at home. In fact, in some interviews, the youth and I cried together. The stories are so powerful because they are real and true, and sharing these truths means opening wounds. I felt guilty that I couldn not help them more and feared exploiting them. Sometimes I emailed advisors just to vent to him about how difficult it was; playing the role of an objective researcher who could not step in to help felt unnatural and uncomfortable. It helped when the youth thanked me for listening and glowed when I read their stories back to them. They often said things like, "You made connections about me that I didn't realize… No one else in my life knows all of this… I want to share this with my brother. It will help me explain things to him that I've never been able to say before… I want to make this into a book." I left each interview with the feeling that the youths appreciated being listened to, that they felt gratitude toward me and the process. I still harbor guilt that I could not do more for each of them, but I also believe the process, overall, has done more good than harm. I still carry some of the sadness I experienced as I sat with the youth and listened to their tales of their difficult journeys, but I also carry a hope inspired by their optimism and their strength.

Such a research design, around a topic as sensitive and emotional as youth homelessness, should not be entered into quickly or without great thought. The researcher is called to draw on a great deal of professional and interpersonal skills and experiences if the research endeavor is going to be effective.

Conclusion

It is easy for people to blame homeless youth for their circumstances, but in these fourteen riveting case stories, it is clear that families and society have failed these youth many times and in multiple ways. None of the youth became homeless solely because of their own actions or due to any single incident or event. In each story, the contributing factors accumulated over a lifetime, and there were family and societal variables that contributed to or resulted in their homelessness. We, as a society, do not seem to feel a sense of urgency in regard to the issue of youth homelessness. Sadly, I see more billboards, fundraisers, commercials, and Facebook posts seeking to raise money for and awareness about housing homeless pets than I do for homeless youth.

It is critical for our young people to have safe housing. The longer they go without this basic human need for shelter, the more likely they are to be victimized, jailed, or to accumulate black marks on their records (criminal, financial, housing, etc.). Helping these youth find housing is crucial, but it is not enough. The collective impact of the trauma many experience before and during homelessness is substantial. The lessons internalized from a life of disappointment can be debilitating. Programs that work with homeless youth must be empowered so they can do more than finding them a place to live and a job. They also need to believe in the youths' potential and self-worth, to help them feel loved, and to have a sense of belonging to community.

If we, as a society, want youth experiencing homelessness to turn their lives around and be successful in their jobs, in their educational endeavors, and in their homes, we need to do so much more. This is what is exciting about the principles-driven

approach. The approach guides people in the implementation of so much more. The principles-driven work described in this study looks at the big picture and tries to honestly see and respond to the complexity of the situation and the diverse and dynamic needs of youth. The approach says, in essence: There are things we believe in—for example, the power of trusting and supporting youth/adult relationships and the fact that all youth possess strengths and assets—and we want to find a way to put these beliefs into practice in our one-on-one interactions with youth, in the ways in which we talk to each other as staff, and when we collaborate across organizations. To be better at our work, we need research that supports effective principles and contextualized decision-making.

Change is rarely easy, and embracing complexity theory in research and practice asks some researchers and practitioners to make a big change. It asks them to step outside their comfort zones and learn new ways of seeing, measuring, knowing, and explaining the world. Nevertheless, it is clear that we urgently need to try something new as we watch decades of interventions in complex systems fail to yield intended results (eliminating poverty, increasing educational achievement, universal access to clean drinking water, etc.). Researchers and evaluators have a role to play in reframing how we address these problems, and complexity theory has the potential to be a powerful perspective to help evaluators work within and across systems to address the world's intractable problems.

Given the potential of collaborative relationships and networks as vehicles for achieving societal goals, it is important that we continue to generate knowledge about the

circumstances under which inter-organizational collaborations are best formed; what type of collaborative relationships may work best depending on the purpose and the context; and how best to support the evolution of collaborative networks. A principles-based approach to collaborating seems to provide a promising way for organizations to collaborate in complex systems; together, organizations can provide a cohesive response to a systems problem in a way that allows for contextual flexibility and adaptation.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Youth Interview Protocol (Youth Ages 18-24)

Hello, and thank you for taking the time to meet with me today. Before we start, I want to review the consent form you signed. [Review important factors such as purpose of the study, voluntary nature, what will be done with the data/reports, the opportunity to review his/her story, skip questions you don't want to answer, what you say will not impact services compensation, etc.] Do you have any questions?

This interview will take about two hours. If you need to get up and take a break or pause for any reason, just let me know. I'll ask you general questions about yourself and what being homeless has been like for you, and then I'll ask you about some of the specific programs you've interacted with. Do you have any questions?

Part A. Background

1. Where were you born?
2. Who did you live with when you were growing up? Describe these [parents/grandparents/foster parents/guardians] for me.
3. Do you have any brothers or sisters? How many? Did you live with them when growing up? Where are they now?
4. Are you close to any other family members (grandparents or aunts/uncles, cousins)?
5. Who did you spend the most time with growing up? Do you still see them?
6. How would you describe yourself?
7. How would your friends describe you?

Part B. Homelessness

1. How would you define what it means to be homeless?
2. When did you first become homeless? What were the circumstances surrounding this time?
3. Describe what it was like the first night you were homeless. Where did you go? Who did you contact?
4. Have you been continuously homeless since this time?
5. Would you define yourself as a typical homeless youth? In what ways? How are you different?
6. What are the two biggest challenges you experienced while being homeless?

Part C. Systems

1. What other systems have you interacted with in your life? In what ways? (Probe on child welfare, juvenile justice, healthcare.)

Part D. Verification

Of the list of following organizations, how many have you interacted with?

- □ Avenues for Homeless Youth
- □ Catholic Charities, Hope Street Shelter
- □ Face to Face, Inc., Safe Zone
- □ Lutheran Social Services, StreetWorks Collaborative
- □ Salvation Army, Booth Brown House
- □ Street Outreach
- □ YouthLink (TLE)

[At this point, to the degree possible, verify major facts in the case file, including which organizations the youth had contact with, in what sequence, and approximate dates.]

Part E. Your experience with X organization (n=1 to 6)

The stories about youth who have been homeless are very diverse. We want to learn more about *your* story and *your* journey. The following questions will ask about your journey as it relates to [list the organizations verified in Part C].

1. Context
   a. How did you come to be at X? How did you come to meet someone from X?
   b. How would you describe what your situation was when you came into this program?

2. Initial Impressions
   a. What was the initial interaction with staff at X like? How did you experience the staffpeople you first encountered?
   b. What were you told about any rules and expectations for you?
   c. What were you told about what would be offered to you?

3. Relationships to peers
   a. What types of relationships did you formed with peers at X? How have these relationships changed over time? What did/do these relationships mean to you?

4. Relationships to staff
   a. What types of relationships were formed with staff? How did your relationships with the staff at organization X change over time? What did/do these relationships mean to you?
   b. When you interacted with staff, at any point, do you remember having conversations about your strengths? (If yes) can you tell me about this?
   c. Can you tell me a story about an important interaction you had with a staff person? Why did you choose to tell this story? What was so meaningful about this interaction?

5. Relationship to organization
   a. How did you come to be more deeply involved in X organization?
   b. What meaning has organization X had in your life?

6. Journey
    a. Do you remember being offered specific options?
    b. Do you remember having to make specific decisions about what you were going to do? If yes, how did this impact you?
    c. As you told me earlier, you have been dealing with multiple issues such as…[be specific]. Some programs have people deal with each of these things separately, and in others, it is more integrated. Does organization X help you work on more than one issue at a time? If so, how? Can you tell me a story about what this looks like? Feels like?
7. Critical points, exits, and transitions
    a. Can you describe any critical incidences for yourself or people you developed relationships with?
    b. What are some transitions or exits in your life that were particular hard? What made them hard?
    c. What are some transitions or exits in your life that went particularly well? What made them go well?
8. Overall impression
    a. How you would describe the organization to another young person? Imagine I'm 16, I'm on the street, and I've asked you for advice. What would you tell other homeless youth about this place? What's helpful? What should they watch out for? What's the philosophy of the place?
9. Current situation
    a. What's your current situation?
    b. What does a typical day for you look like, from the time you wake up until the time you go to sleep?
    c. How do you feel about your current situation?
    d. What steps have you taken since you left X to get to this point in your life?
    e. How did your experience at organization X help you get where you are now?

Those are all the questions I have. Thank you for sharing your very personal and important story with me. Over the next month, I will be typing up what you share with me today and writing your story. Once it's written, we will ask you to review the interview write-up and make changes to be sure it is accurate and says what you want to say. Do you have any questions for me?

Appendix B: Program Staff Interview Protocol

Hello, and thank you for taking the time to meet with me today. Before we start, I want to review the consent form you signed. [Review important factors such as purpose of the study, voluntary nature, what will be done with the data/reports, the opportunity to review his/her story, skip questions you don't want to answer, what you say will not impact services compensation, etc.] Do you have any questions?

This interview will take about an hour and a half. If you need to get up and take a break or pause for any reason, just let me know. I'll ask you general questions about yourself and your work with X organization, and then I'll ask you about some of The Otto Bremer Foundation Healthy Youth Development Support for Homeless Youth Initiative. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Part A: About you and your work with homeless youth

1. How did you come to work with homeless youth?
2. What is challenging about the work you do?
3. What is meaningful about the work you do?

Part B: About your work with organization X

1. How did you come to work at X?
2. What is it like to work at X?
3. Take me through a typical day/evening/night working at X. If there is no typical day/evening/night, describe a day/evening/night from the last week.

Part C: About the young person

4. How did you come to meet Y?
5. What is Y like?
6. Describe Y's journey since you have known him/her.
7. What has been your role in Y's journey?
8. In what ways does working at X support or hinder your ability to work in meaningful ways with Y?
9. Where is Y in his/her life now? What are the important positive of supportive factors in his/her life that helped him/her reach this place? What have been some of the barriers?

Part D: About the Healthy Youth Development: Support for Homeless Youth Initiative

1. Have you heard about The OB Healthy Youth Development Support for Homeless Youth Initiative?
2. If yes, how did you first hear about The OB Healthy Youth Development Support for Homeless Youth Initiative? How was it explained to you? What was your reaction? How did you feel?

3. How did other staff respond?
4. In what ways has X worked with staff around this initiative? Professional Development? Training? Materials? Expectations?

Part E: About the shared principles

1. Are you aware of the shared principles that have been developed as a part of this initiative? [Share a printed list] If yes, how did you hear about them? How were they explained to you? What was your reaction? How did you feel?
2. I'd like now to go through the principles one by one and have you give me a brief definition of what this principle means to you. If possible, I'd also love to hear a story or an example of how this principle relates to young person Y.
    a. Harm Reduction
    b. Trusting Relationships
    c. Positive Youth Development
    d. Trauma-Informed Care
    e. Nonjudgmental
    f. Journey-Oriented
    g. Strengths-/Assets-Based
    h. Collaborative
    i. Holistic
3. How do you feel about the shared principles? Are they the right ones? Why or why not?
4. What does implementation of the principles look like in practice? In what ways, if any, do these principles impact your daily work?
5. How do the principles interact as they are implemented? Are some more important than others? Are any more challenging than others? Are there any missing? How do they seem related to each other?
6. In what ways, if any, has an emphasis on these shared principle change the way you work? Change the culture of X?

Part F: Overall

1. Overall, what has being a part of this initiative meant to you personally and/or professionally?
2. What do you want others to know about what it means to work in this way?
3. Any other closing thoughts?

Appendix C: Leadership Staff Interview Protocol

Hello, and thank you for taking the time to meet with me today. Before we start, I want to review the consent form you signed. [Review important factors such as purpose of the study, voluntary nature, what will be done with the data/reports, the opportunity to review his/her story, skip questions you don't want to answer, what you say will not impact services compensation, etc.] Do you have any questions?

This interview will take about an hour and a half. If you need to get up and take a break or pause for any reason, just let me know. I'll ask you general questions about yourself and your work with X organization, and then I'll ask you about some of The Otto Bremer Foundation Healthy Youth Development Support for Homeless Youth Initiative. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Part A: About you and your work with homeless youth

1. How did you come to work with homeless youth?
2. What is challenging about the work you do?
3. What is meaningful about the work you do?

Part B: About your work with organization X

4. How did you come to work at X?
5. What is it like to work at X?
6. Take me through a typical week working at X. If there is no typical week describe last week.

Part C: About The Healthy Youth Development Support for Homeless Youth Initiative

5. How did you first hear about The OB Healthy Youth Development Support for Homeless Youth Initiative? What was your reaction? How did you feel?
6. How did you explain it to others in your organization? How did your staff respond? How did your board respond?
7. What has it been like to come together as a group with other funded under this initiative? How has participation in this group impacted the work you do in your own organization?
8. How is this initiative similar or different to the way you have received funding from other foundations or from OBF in the past?

Part D: About the shared principles

2. I'd like now to go through the principles on by one and have you give me a brief definition of what this principle means to you.
    a. Harm Reduction
    b. Trusting Relationships
    c. Positive Youth Development
    d. Trauma-Informed Care

e. Nonjudgmental
f. Journey-Oriented
g. Strengths-/Assets-Based
h. Collaborative
i. Holistic

3. How do you feel about the shared principles? Are they the right ones? Why or why not? How are the similar to or different from your own organizations principles?
4. What is it like to work with other organizations around these shared principles?
5. What does implementation of the principles look like in practice?
6. How do the principles interact as they are implemented? Are some more important than others? Are any more challenging than others? How do they seem related to each other?
7. How do you orient people to these principles? Old and new staff? Youth? Training and professional development?
8. What does it mean to you to be principles-driven? How does it inform your work?
9. How do these principles differentiate you from other programs?
10. What, if anything, has surprised you about being principles-driven?

Part E: Overall

4. Overall, what has being a part of this initiative meant to you personally and/or professionally?
5. What do you want others to know about what it means to work in this way?
6. Any other closing thoughts?

Appendix D: Otto Bremer Foundation Staff Interview Protocol

Hello, and thank you for taking the time to meet with me today. Before we start, I want to review the consent form you signed. [Review important factors such as purpose of the study, voluntary nature, what will be done with the data/reports, the opportunity to review his/her story, skip questions you don't want to answer, what you say will not impact services compensation, etc.] Do you have any questions?

This interview will take about an hour and a half. If you need to get up and take a break or pause for any reason, just let me know. I'll ask you general questions about yourself and your work with The Otto Bremer Foundation, and then I'll ask you specifically about the Healthy Youth Development Support for Homeless Youth Initiative. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Part A: About your work with The Otto Bremer Foundation

1. How did you come to work with The Otto Bremer Foundation (OBF)? Describe the path you've taken to get here.
2. What is it like to work at The Otto Bremer Foundation?
3. Take me through a typical week working at The OBF. If there is no typical week, describe last week.
4. What is challenging about the work you do?
5. What is meaningful about the work you do?

Part B: About The Healthy Youth Development Support for Homeless Youth Initiative

6. Describe The Healthy Youth Development Support for Homeless Youth Initiative. Why this initiative? Why now? How did it come to be? What are the important factors surrounding the initiative that made this the right time, place and focus?
7. How did others at OBF respond to this initiative when they first learned of the idea? The family members? The trustees?
8. What has your role been in this initiative? Describe the journey to me from when you first conceptualized/ heard of the initiative until you first met with the leadership of the six grantees for the first time.
9. Can you describe that first meeting? When? Where? What did you do? How did it feel?
10. What has it been like to come together as a group with other funded under this initiative? What have been some of the significant events? Surprises? Challenges?

Part C: About developmental evaluation and effective principles

11. How and why did you decide to do a developmental evaluation? What is OBF's past experience with evaluation?
12. How and why did you decide to focus the initiative on work around effective principles rather than best practices?

13. What was the process like of developing the list of shared principles?
14. How do you feel about the shared principles? Are they the right ones? Why or why not?
15. What is it like to work with other organizations around these shared principles? What does it mean for this work to be principles-driven?
16. What does convening people to do collaborative work around shared principles look like in practice? What has been successful? Challenging? Surprising?
17. What is happening as a result of this work? What do you hope will happen in the future?

Part D: Overall

7. How is this initiative similar or different to the ways in which OBF has given grants in the past?
8. Overall, what has being a part of this initiative meant to you personally and/or professionally?
9. What do you want others to know about what it means to work in this way?
10. Any other closing thoughts?

Appendix E: Youth Consent Form (Youth Ages 18-24)

This form is for participants in a study of the experience of being homeless and receiving services from agencies serving homeless youth. Attached to this form is detailed information about the sponsors of this study and the person who will be interviewing you.

Purpose of the Study

We are interviewing young people who have been homeless and received services while homeless, in order to better understand the experiences and effects of being homeless and what kinds of services and relationships are most helpful, including how services are delivered. We believe it is important to hear the stories of young people who have been homeless. We want to hear your story in your own words.

Interviewing You

To find out about your experiences and hear your story, we are asking to interview you. The interview will ask you to tell the story of how you became homeless, what it was like for you being homeless, what services you've received over time, what you have found helpful, and what things did not help. There are no right or wrong answers to any of the interview questions. The purpose is to hear your story in your own words. If you don't want to answer any question, you are free to say so. If a question doesn't make sense to you, we urge you to ask the interviewer to explain.

Your Participation Is Entirely Voluntary

We want to interview you because we believe people will learn from you about what it is really like to be homeless and what helps and doesn't help. However, we want to be very clear that you do not have to agree to be interviewed. Whether you do the interview or not will NOT affect any current or future services you receive from any agency. If you decide to do the interview but prefer not to share some parts of your story, that is your right. You can stop the interview at any time. You can ask to skip any questions you do not want to answer.

You Will Control and Approve Your Story

We are asking your permission to record your interview. The recording will be used to be sure that we get your story in your own words and don't miss anything important. The recording will be used to write your story with direct quotes from you. You will have a chance to read your interview write-up and make changes to be sure it is accurate and says what you want to say. You will approve your story. The full report may include quotes from your files, agency staff, or others who know you. You will not be able to change those quotes, but you will have the opportunity to comment on them.

Confidentiality

We understand that your life experiences are very personal. We will use the interview to write your story. The story will be shared with the public, but we want to do what we can to shield your identity from those who may read your story. Therefore, we will ask you to make up a name for yourself that is not your real name to use in the story. We will also ask you to help us change some minor details in the story to make it harder for people to know the story is about you.

Please note that it is still possible that someone who reads your story could figure out who you are. Even though we will change your name and some details in the story, people who know you well may figure out that you are the person in the story. It is entirely up to you whether you are willing to take this risk.

Please also note that, as part of the study, we will ask other people who have been involved in your life about you, and we will have to use your real name so they know who we are talking about. We will identify you only to the people named on the attached list. Everyone we speak to about you must first agree to respect and protect your privacy, but we cannot guarantee that they will honor that agreement.

Other Risks

The interview will ask you about things in your life that have probably been difficult. Telling about how you became homeless and what has happened to you on the streets may be hard. Talking about these things may bring back sad memories or remind you of things you have put behind you. You don't have to talk about anything you don't want to talk about, but the interview might still bring back some bad memories. If you don't want to take that risk, it is okay to refuse to be interviewed.

Benefits to Consider

We hope a better understanding of the experiences of homeless youth and the services that help them will lead to greater support for needed services. We believe society will benefit from hearing and understanding your story.

Sharing Your Story

We plan to interview several young people who have been homeless. We plan to share the stories publically to help people understand what it is like to be homeless and what kinds of services are needed and helpful. Thus, all or part of your story might appear in a newspaper or magazine, in a report or academic journal, or on a website about homelessness. By signing this form, you agree to let us share and publish your story using the name you make up. Except as described in this consent form, we will never disclose your real name, unless we are ordered to do so by a court or we otherwise believe we are required by law to disclose it. Agencies that have provided services to you may be identified but not the names of specific people who provided you services.

Payment

If you do the interview, you will receive $100 in two payments. The first payment of $50 in cash, you will receive today if you decide to be interviewed and sign this form. The second payment of $50, you will receive after you have had a chance to read the interview and make any changes you want to make to finalize your story, including changes in details to protect your identity and privacy.

CONTACTS AND QUESTIONS:

The researcher conducting this study is Nora Murphy. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at 140B *Wulling Hall*, 86 Pleasant St. SE. Minneapolis, MN 55455, 612-208-6672, murp0504@umn.edu. Nora Murphy is a doctoral student at the University of Minnesota. You may also contact her advisor, Jean A. King, at 330 *Wulling Hall*, 86 Pleasant St. SE. Minneapolis, MN 55455, 612-626-1614, kingx004@umn.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher or her advisor, **you are encouraged** to contact the Research Subjects' Advocate Line, D528 Mayo, 420 Delaware St. Southeast, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455, 612-625-1650.

Certificate of Consent

I have read the foregoing information, or it has been read to me. This form was presented to me by a person I know and trust without the interviewer present. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about it and any questions I have been asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study.

Print Name of Participant ____

Signature of Participant ____

Date ____
Day/Month/Year

Statement by the Person Taking Consent

I have accurately read out the above information sheet to the potential participant, and to the best of my ability made sure that the participant understands the following:

1. the purpose of the study
2. the kinds of questions to be asked,
3. that participation is entirely voluntary
4. the confidential nature of the interview
5. how the results may be shared and published
6. the potential risks and benefits of participation
7. payment

I confirm that the participant was given an opportunity to ask questions about the study, and all the questions asked by the participant have been answered correctly and to the best of my ability. I confirm that the participant has not been coerced into giving consent, the consent has been given freely and voluntarily, and that the participant is at least 18 years of age. My knowledge of the participant's age is based on
____.

Name of agency person who presented the informed consent form:
____

Position/title: ____

Signature: ____

Date: ____

Sponsors of the Study and Participants in the Design and Analysis
Otto Bremer Foundation, Saint Paul, Minnesota

Agencies serving homeless youth

1. Avenues for Homeless Youth
2. Catholic Charities Hope Street Shelter
3. Face to Face's SafeZone
4. Lutheran Social Services Streetworks Collaborative
5. The Salvation Army's Booth Brown House
6. Youth Opportunity Center at YouthLink

Study Personnel

Student Researcher: Nora Murphy, MA
Doctoral student in Evaluation Studies
Department of Organizational Leadership, Policy and Development
University of Minnesota
612.208.6672, norafmurphy@gmail.com

Faculty Advisor: Jean A. King, PhD
33 Wulling Hall
86 Pleasant St. SE.
Minneapolis, MN 55455
612- 626-1614, kingx004@umn.edu.

Evaluation Director: Michael Q. Patton, PhD
Director, Utilization-Focused Evaluation
Saint Paul, MN