

A CASE STUDY OF THE LIFE EXPERIENCES OF HIGH SCHOOL
GRADUATES/GENERAL EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT (GED)
RECIPIENTS IN TEXAS WHO EXPERIENCED HOMELESSNESS
DURING THEIR PUBLIC SCHOOL EDUCATION

A Dissertation

by

RUTH ANN REIDER

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

May 2011

Major Subject: Curriculum and Instruction

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Approved by:

Chair of Committee,	Patricia J. Larke
Committee Members,	Norvella Carter
	Patrick Slattery
	M. Carolyn Clark
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ABSTRACT

A Case Study of the Life Experiences of High School Graduates/General Education Development (GED) Recipients in Texas Who Experienced Homelessness During Their Public School Education. (May 2011)

Ruth Ann Reider, B. A., Sam Houston State University;

M.Ed., Stephen F. Austin University

Chair of Advisory Committee: Dr. Patricia Larke

The National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty (NLCHP, 2007) recently reported that there were 1.3 million homeless children living in the United States. The voices of homeless children and youth are often silent, as the literature generally reflects their experiences only indirectly, as related by care givers or social service providers. In contrast, this study provides firsthand accounts of the difficulties encountered by children and youth who struggle to complete their educations while being homeless. This qualitative case study examines the personal and educational experiences of seven adults who had been homeless as children or youth and who graduated from high school or earned their General Education Development (GED) equivalents.

Two research questions framing this study were:

1. What do the voices of adults who received a high school diploma or GED tell us about their life experiences as a homeless student?
2. What do the voices of adults who received a high school diploma or GED tell us about their educational experiences as a homeless student?

Purposeful sampling was used to locate participants. The population of this study was culturally diverse and included African American and European American individuals currently between the ages of 18 and 51 years. Data was generated via interviews using a protocol designed by the author. This instrument included both fixed and open-ended questions designed to allow participants the opportunity to share their educational and personal experiences. Various forms of documents were also consulted.

The constant comparative method was used to analyze the data. Three categories regarding the life experiences of homeless children and youth emerged from the study; family, the road to homelessness and homelessness. Two categories were identified pertaining to educational experiences; determination or self-motivation and sources of support. The participants' testimonies confirmed some of the existing literature regarding homeless children and youth and, in particular, supported research conducted on the attributes of resiliency. In addition, participant narratives provided insight into the struggles of a marginalized segment of the school population by allowing us to hear their stories in their own words.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my parents, John and Betty Ennis, for their encouragement, love and support throughout my life. Their commitment to education, intervention on behalf of those who struggled and their faith in God defined much of what they believed and who they were. They are dearly loved and missed. I picture them playing along heavenly beaches and splashing in heavenly surf as they did during their youths along the beaches of the Texas Gulf Coast. Family afternoons spent at the beach are some of my fondest memories. I love you both.

I also dedicate this dissertation to my maternal grandparents, Thomas and Jane Johnson, for their unconditional love and support throughout my life. They were the most incredible grandparents a child could ever imagine. Nothing was impossible, as far as they were concerned, if it was beneficial to their children and grandchildren. I have so many wonderful memories of them both throughout my life. Thank you!

In addition, I dedicate this dissertation to my paternal grandmother, Fannie Mae Ennis, whom I never had the opportunity to meet. I appreciate her commitment to raising her children when she became a single mother, and her belief in the importance of faith in God and in education.

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I am thankful to God for His grace and for all the blessings He has given me in my life. I am grateful to the seven participants in this study who shared their experiences with me in the hope that others might benefit from their life stories. I learned more about the research topic due to the help of the participants, and was encouraged by their testimonies.

Dr. Patricia Larke, chairperson of my dissertation committee, has been a source of encouragement and assistance throughout my journey at Texas A&M University. She has challenged me to “rise to the occasion” throughout my coursework and the development of my dissertation. I have transferred that challenge to my personal life as well. Dr. Larke welcomed me into her home for meetings and even made sure I called her when I arrived home so that she could be sure that I had arrived safely from my commute to College Station. She has been an unprecedented role model in my life. When I think of Dr. Larke, I am reminded of her faith, confidence, and thoughtfulness. Dr. Larke remained steadfast, reminding me that I could complete this study and the Ph.D. program, even when my faith in my own abilities or my confidence wavered. Thank you Dr. Larke!

Dr. Norvella Carter has encouraged me throughout my journey at Texas A&M University. I met Dr. Carter at a meeting regarding the PhD program at Texas A&M University. I felt fortunate to have been a student of Dr. Carter’s on many occasions. Dr. Carter is deeply committed to education and concerned about her students. Her

thoughtfulness, wisdom, and cheerful demeanor are evident as she speaks. Her help throughout this journey has been invaluable.

I first met Dr. Carolyn Clark as a student on campus at Texas A&M University. Her insights into qualitative research and her instructional style were captivating. She offered suggestions and support in her classes that I truly appreciate. Dr. Clark has encouraged me during the development of my dissertation and I very much appreciate her guidance.

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I would especially like to thank my brother Britt, his wife Sally, their children Britt II, Brandi, John, and Brian for their support. My brother has been a comfort to me throughout this journey, and encouraged me to complete the writing of my dissertation even when I felt overwhelmed. I appreciate my nephew Britt IIs' patience and understanding.

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books and journal articles to clutter her computer room, and has driven to College Station, Texas with me to submit copies of my manuscript to Dr. Larke. Her friendship has been so very dear to me. I would like to thank Mrs. Jessie Hall, Carolyn's mother, for encouragement and thoughtfulness. Each Saturday and Sunday I was honored to be her dinner guest. She went to great lengths to prepare delicious family meals, making biscuits or cornbread from scratch and preparing fresh vegetables to accent her main dish of smothered steak, chicken and dumplings, barbeque or chicken noodle soup. She prepared these incredible home cooked meals for Carolyn and me so that I could devote most of my weekends to writing. Mrs. Hall and Carolyn have driven to the library at Texas A&M University with me, boosted my spirits and given me advice commensurate with that which I believe my parents and grandparents would have given. I truly believe I would not have been able to complete this journey without their help and kindness.

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was a woman of God whose faith was unshakable and apparent in every aspect of her life. I would also like to thank Mr. William Plummer and the whole Plummer family for being an inspiration to me. May God bless you all.

While researching this subject and writing the dissertation, I found myself reflecting about my own high school experiences. I would like to thank my high school principal, M. B. Donaldson, for his direction and guidance.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Imagine what it would be like to play ‘hide and seek’ and be left unfound. You get lost and can’t find your way home. You are left to wander, to make your own way, in a strange and hostile world with no one caring. This bleak scenario is lived by many children and youth in America today. They are the homeless children who are in the United States (Shane, 1996, p. 3).

Children and youth in the United States of America are experiencing homelessness at an alarming rate. Multiple social indicators suggest that the destitution of homelessness for American families, children and youth typically impacts individuals and then radiates outward in a ripple effect, subsequently touching public schools, health care facilities and social service providers prior to the phenomenon receiving attention at a national level. In 2007, the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty (NLCHP) reported that 1.3 million children were homeless in the United States. Images of homelessness in America are often that of the single male, but in reality many homeless are families, children, and youth. During the 1980s the emergence of homeless

This dissertation follows the style of the *American Educational Research Journal*.

families increased at a rate not recorded in the United States since the Great Depression of the 1930s.

Barbara Duffield (2001) cited the emergence of homeless families as the new face of homelessness. Although, homelessness is recurrent in the history of the United States, the degree to which it is currently experienced by families and children is particularly disturbing. Families, women, and children reflect this new face of homelessness (Duffield, 2001; NLCHP, 2007). As families struggle to survive and remain together, children have become the proportion of the homeless population that has increased most dramatically. As a result, both children and youth experience interruptions during their education, which in turn results in a high dropout rate.

Shane (1996) has divided child and youth homelessness into four categories; familial, unaccompanied, street youth, and babies. Families often struggle to remain together while homeless. Children accompanied by an adult family member while homeless represent the familial homeless population. Homeless children who have been removed from the custody of their parents or who voluntarily leave home are defined as unaccompanied. Children or youth who are unaccompanied and literally reside on the streets are considered street youth. Shane (1996) identified homeless babies as infants who are born to homeless women, or who are have been abandoned.

Bonnie Bernard's studies regarding resilience have led her to recognize four characteristics of resilience, namely "social competence, problem solving, autonomy, and a sense of purpose and future" (Bernard, 1993, p. 44). Bernard further emphasizes

protective factors enabling the resilient child or youth to surpass their circumstances or challenges (Bernard, 2004).

Although literature exists regarding child and youth homelessness, and research regarding resilience has evolved, there has been minimal concern with uniting the two subjects. Children and youth who do not merely survive, but rise above the challenges of homelessness and graduate from high school or receive their General Education Development (GED) equivalent have rarely been the subject of investigation. They are truly resilient children and unique among the homeless population. Their ability to succeed despite obstacles warrants attention.

Statement of the Problem

Homelessness among children and youth is increasing at an alarming rate. However, minimal studies have been devoted to this issue. Even fewer investigations have examined resilient homeless children and youth. The literature regarding homeless children and youth has been represented primarily from the perspective of secondary sources such as mothers living in shelters, medical professionals, and social service providers (Bassuk, Rubin, & Lauriat, 1986). The voices of homeless students have not been adequately considered in discussions of the problem or when enacting legislation.

Theoretical Base

The ability of the human species to excel while experiencing life threatening or invasive circumstances remains the primary focus of resilience. Norman Garmezy,

revered as the founder of the study of resilience has defined resilience as “manifest competence despite exposure to significant stressors (Rolf & Glantz, 1999, p. 7).

Garnezy’s identification of resilience among patients struggling with schizophrenia lead to his studies of stress resistant, invulnerable or resilient children. The idea that the resilient child can achieve and persevere regardless of the child’s circumstance is one that has led researchers to ponder what is different about the resilient child. Invulnerable is a term often used to refer to the resilient child or youth in earlier studies of resilience:

The concept of invulnerability has undeniably captured the imagination of many. For the mass media it evokes images of heroism and unusual achievements under grim circumstances. Among ordinary citizens it elicits an immediate response of recognition (“Yes, I know someone just like that”). To the researcher it promises the comfort and reward of witnessing the positive side of persons under stress. Most of all, to school personnel it brings a welcome message of hope that they successfully nurture the competencies of receptive children whose families are buffered by poverty, unemployment, illness, spousal loss or separation, parental death, or disaster – competencies that will free them from their “at risk” status (Garnezy & Tellegen, 1984, p. 234)

Bonnie Bernard describes resiliency as “the ability to bounce back successfully despite exposure to severe risks” (Bernard, 1993, p. 44). Four attributes of resilience identified by Bernard are; social competence, problem solving, autonomy and a sense of purpose and future. These qualities have created a framework for describing characteristics of resilience. Social competence includes responsiveness,

communication, empathy and compassion. Problem solving encompasses planning, being flexible, and critical thinking. Autonomy refers to having a positive identity, self-efficacy, adaptive distancing and humor. A sense of purpose emphasizes goal direction, special interests, optimism or hope and the importance of faith and spirituality (Bernard, 1993; Bernard, 2004).

Bernard also identifies protective factors that assist or enable the resilient child or youth to succeed. These environmental protective factors are family, school and community (Bernard, 2004). Protective factors, protective mechanisms and support systems all serve a similar purpose - that of supporting or encouraging the resilient child or youth.

Protective mechanisms and support systems have been identified that empower individuals to excel rather than to succumb to invasive stimuli. These mechanisms were documented in studies of resilient individuals (Garmezy, Masten & Tellegen, 1985; Rutter, 1987). Protective factors were identified by Bernard in which environment, family, school and community are emphasized (Bernard, 1993; Bernard, 2004). Resilience, characteristics of resilience and protective factors provided the theoretical base for this study.

Significance of the Study

This study is unique in that it establishes a union between two issues facing at-risk populations in our nation - homelessness and resilience. Resilience is rarely associated with investigations regarding homeless children and youth. Social deviance,

maladaptive behavior, substance abuse, and mental illness are typical concerns in most investigations of homeless populations. The individual who does not succumb to his or her environment, but whom adapts and excels, is rarely considered with regard to homelessness. Out of 85 dissertations published from 1990 to 2004, only four examined relationships between homeless and resilient populations. Not only does this reveal a gap in the literature, it is evidence that the voices of the homeless are seldom considered worthy of investigation. I believe this is commensurate with discarding the proverbial diamond in the rough. When the talents of resilient homeless children and youth are ignored, we lose an opportunity to learn from their successes. Resilient homeless children and youth may hold the key to unlocking areas of development essential to transforming at-risk populations from vulnerable individuals to self-sufficient achievers.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to provide a voice for individuals who have been homeless during their elementary or secondary education and yet graduated from high school or earned their General Education Development (GED) equivalents, allowing them to share their personal and educational experiences. The investigation not only revealed personal insights into the lives of participants, but also identified attributes of resilience exhibited in the lives of participants and protective factors or support systems that existed in their lives. This data may provide a guide for educators to examine the current support systems available in their schools, allowing them to adapt or design programs to address the needs of this population.

Research Questions

Two primary questions were delineated in order to provide a framework for this study. The primary questions were deliberately broad in nature in order to set initial parameters and provide a guide for the pilot phase of the study. Subsequently, as research progressed, further questions were developed in order to refine the focus of the interviews. An open-ended question format was used with respondents, providing them the opportunity to voice their opinions and experiences. The primary research questions that guided this study were:

1. What do the voices of adults who received a high school diploma or general education development equivalent tell us about their life experiences as a homeless student?
2. What do the voices of adults who received a high school diploma or general education development equivalent tell us about their educational experiences as a homeless student?

A Personal Note

As a career educator, I have occasionally had homeless students in my classes. As any teacher can affirm, it is often difficult to leave one's work day concerns at school. I've often found myself thinking about my students when at home, and have been particularly worried about the welfare of my homeless students. I wondered, for example, where they were sleeping that night or if they had enough food. I've always

done my best to ensure that all the children in my charge are able to meet the academic demands expected of them, but in these cases I wished that I could do more, both as a teacher and as a fellow human being. It was this sense of disquietude that initially caused me to choose a research project that would investigate the lives of homeless children and youth.

However, as the study progressed, I realized that I had additional motivations in pursuing the topic. My own father struggled with homelessness when he was a student. Despite the unpredictability and hardships of his lifestyle, he nonetheless managed to graduate from high school and even to excel in school. He went on to graduate college and earn an advanced degree, becoming a teacher and administrator. His life story exemplifies the trait of resiliency, and is worth sharing with the reader in order to set a context for the research. In addition, I myself ended up experiencing a form of homelessness during the course of the project. I am an adult with a strong support network of friends and family, but even so the upheaval of losing my home took a toll on me. Aware of how blessed I was, I again found myself wondering how it is that some homeless children and youth manage to beat the odds and complete their educations.

Dad

Growing up I had to look no further than our own home for my superhero. My father was Superman, Batman and Spider Man all rolled into one as far as I was concerned. He grew up, the youngest of six children raised by a single parent and he worked from the time he was six years old to help support his family. My grandmother

worked twelve hour days in a dry cleaners, then at night she scrubbed floors in office buildings in the seaport town where they lived. My father shined shoes in businesses at the docks, and when the storms rolled in as they do along the coast, bar owners would have him clean their establishments for pay rather than have him work outdoors in the rain. On Christmas Eves, while so many children enjoyed Christmas festivities, my father worked shining shoes, fully aware that there was no Santa Claus. Although they were very poor, my grandmother emphasized the importance of attending school and worshiping God in church, so my father walked my grandmother to the Pentecostal Church each Sunday morning and attended public school. A childhood memory cherished by my father, regarding church, was when a Sunday School teacher made a coconut cake and brought it to share with her Sunday School class for Easter. One of the few memories of his childhood that he shared with me, Dad would describe the cake and how much his Sunday School teacher's kindness had meant to him as a little boy. Kindness and generosity were important to my father, even as a child.

As a child, he often saw the man he knew to be his father drive to school, usually in a new automobile, while making a major production of giving money or school supplies to one of his women's sons. The child was typically dressed in new clothes and shoes. Occasionally, the man glanced at my father, but never once did he offer him lunch money or provide clothing for him. The woman accompanying him in the vehicle was dressed fashionably in the latest style of clothing. Although my father's clothes were rarely new, they were freshly laundered and pressed at the dry cleaners where my grandmother worked. In high school, my father owned four pair of jeans and four shirts

and lived in a garage with a dirt floor. With his clothes immaculate and his shoes shined, he was elected president of his class at school. My grandmother later became ill, so my father and grandmother had to live with his youngest sister and her family. A mattress with a clean top sheet placed on a freshly raked dirt floor, and a fan, served as dad's only furnishings in his bedroom in the old wooden garage at his sister's house. My grandmother remained in her daughter's home, helping to raise her grandchildren, because she was no longer healthy enough to work. My father fell in love with a girl he met in high school who had attended private Lutheran school before transferring to the local public high school. Years later they married. One of the greatest influences on my father's life was my mother's father, known as "Pop."

My maternal grandfather, Thomas Ezra "Britt" Johnson, grew up on a farm in Georgia. He had the responsibility of working and running the family farm in Georgia so he was unable to attend school beyond the third grade. At the age of thirteen, he negotiated loans with the bank for his family's farm. After helping to raise his siblings, he left the farm in their hands and went to work for the local oil refinery. He met a young lady who worked at her sister's boarding house and attended teacher's college. They married and purchased a small farm. Eventually they joined the community of houses leased to refinery workers and their families. When the refinery opened a new plant in Texas, my grandfather journeyed to Texas with workers who planned to relocate, then secured a home for his wife and children and sent for them to join him. He had arranged for his family to travel by train to meet him. Living in their modest home they found the Texas boom town to be wild and often outlandish, but this was where the

money was, this was where the future began, so this was where the young couple made a home.

Disappointed in the public school system, my grandparents paid for their daughters to attend a private Lutheran School. Each daughter also received piano lessons and wore specially made recital gowns at the annual piano recital. My grandfather divided their shotgun home into two separate dwellings, renting half of their home to boarders that grandmother cooked for in order to make ends meet. Their small yard became a family garden, and chickens provided fresh eggs for the family. There was a small wooden building near the garden that my mother and grandparents remodeled, transforming it into a modest furnished apartment. Newly sewed curtains flowed lazily in the windows of the apartment, rippling as the coastal breezes caught them in the open windows, and fans hummed rhythmically in the freshly painted rooms. Clean bed sheets were hidden beneath the comforter of the bed, and a home-made afghan draped along an overstuffed armchair. A lamp rested on a crocheted doily sat on the nightstand near the bed and a mirror hung on the wall above the modest wooden chest of drawers. Flowers from my grandmother's garden along the side of the house filled the Depression Glass vase, enhancing the decorative tablecloth on the table, which was bounded on either side by wooden chairs. This transformed outbuilding would later serve as a place for my father to live in and where he did his studying.

After meeting my father, my maternal grandfather went to work preparing the little apartment to be a home for him. My father and grandfather worked out an arrangement regarding payment for dad living in the apartment, because my dad was not

accustomed to accepting anything for free. My grandfather asked that my father help look after my grandmother, mother and aunts while he worked night shifts at the refinery and help him with work around the house, reducing the amount of money my father felt he should pay for residing there. My maternal grandmother prepared the family meals, so most of Dad's meals were shared at my grandfather's table with his family. My grandfather took my father shopping for clothes and made sure he had new shoes. Their relationship truly became one of a biological father and son.

Dad remained in school full time, graduating from high school as his mother and my mother's parents expected of him. He also worked, making sure to pay rent to my grandfather and gave his mother money. Following graduation, dad served in the Army during the Korean War while mother attended college to become a teacher. After serving in the military, dad joined mother in college, playing football for the university. Although they were engaged, my parents didn't marry until after mother had graduated from college. Married in the Methodist Church with a reception at a mansion rented for parties along the intercoastal canal, mother and dad celebrated their wedding. Gorgeous, elegant gowns adorned the bridesmaids escorted by groomsmen in black tuxes, as floral arrangements adorned the sanctuary, and cascaded through candelabras and decorated pews enhanced by white satin bows. Mother wore an original wedding gown designed by a seamstress who made wedding dresses for some of the finest weddings in this town filled with debutants and oil money. Mother was literally Bride of the Year, modeling her wedding gown in the months following their wedding. My parents' wedding and reception photographs rival any I have seen depicted in bridal magazines.

Mother taught school while dad worked and attended college. Although, my fraternal grandmother lived to see her son graduate from high school and begin his collegiate education, she died before my father graduated from college. Following graduation from the university, my parents moved to Houston, Texas where my father taught history and drove a school bus while mom taught music. In the evenings dad worked at the Port of Houston as a longshoreman and during the summers he worked as a carpenter, eventually becoming the foreman of a construction crew. Somehow, he made the journey to Sam Houston State University, in Huntsville, Texas where he earned his Master of Education. Although, he earned his superintendent's certification and continued his graduate studies, he was unable to pursue a Ph.D. because he could not afford to quit work in order to fulfill the requirements of teaching on campus. Dad taught school for eleven years before he was appointed an administrative position in education. As an educator he impacted countless lives, guiding young people with their dreams and encouraging them to remain in school and to graduate from college. Both of my parents have passed on now, taken from us prematurely due to illness. I rest assured that they are with God, hopefully holding hands as they wade in heavenly waters or picnic on heavenly shores as they did in their youth.

According to current guidelines in education would my father, as a child, have been considered "at risk?" If he attended school in a classroom in Texas today, would he be written off as a child who struggled, a child who might drift off to sleep occasionally after working until the early hours of the morning, a child who might have a modest lunch and who might be hungry, yet whom said nothing to the teacher? Would

my father have been considered homeless when he and my grandmother were forced to live with my aunt and her family due to my grandmother's health? Regardless of how the odds were stacked against him, my father prevailed. He is the epitome of resilience and he has always been my hero, my Superman!

My father's story was a compelling reason why I chose this topic for my dissertation. I wondered how some children and youth who experience homelessness during their education find paths to completing their high school education, either by graduating from high school or by earning their GEDs. How are they able to transcend the limitations of their circumstances, when so many others could not? I know my father's love for his mother, his faith in God and his determination to take care of his family drove him to remain in school while working to help support his family during his childhood and adolescence. What caused individuals who participated in this study to persevere and graduate or earn their GEDs? This question drove the study.

An Educator's Perspective

Throughout my tenure as an educator, I have had the honor of working with children from various socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds. What I have discovered is that each child really just wants to be loved, feel safe and have plenty of food to eat. How can a child truly feel safe while temporarily residing at a residential center, unaccompanied by parents and often separated from their siblings, while foster placement is found for them? I have worked with children living in just such situations, and my heart goes out to them. You try to educate them while they are processing all of

these changes in their lives, knowing that what they seek is assurance that everything in their lives will work out. Perhaps they are wondering when they will be reunited with parents and siblings, or when they will share a home of their own together. Often, about the time they become comfortable with their surroundings they are relocated, and as educators you usually are not allowed to remain in contact with them. I have worked with children living with foster parents and wondered what their lives will be like in the future. Some have been homeless, others abandoned or abused as they reside with a family that is not their own, usually estranged from siblings and of course from their parents or family. One year stands out in particular, as I had several students living in foster care or the emergency residential center for children and homeless while in the company of their single mom. That year, I said many prayers regarding these precious little ones. As I considered topics for my dissertation, I thought of these children and wondered what their lives would be like.

Me

Not too long ago, my little world fell apart. One moment I was working as an educator, going to Texas A&M University in pursuit of my Ph.D. and living in my three bedroom, two bath brick home in the suburbs. For Christmas, my house was trimmed with lights, a festive holiday wreath hung on my front doors as wooden gingerbread people, lollipops and candy canes lined the walkway to my home. Inside, the house sparkled with Christmas decorations accented by a tree laden with cherished ornaments, surrounded by carefully wrapped presents. Holiday dinners, Christmas parties, Easter

egg hunts and weekend cook-outs were celebrated among family and friends under the roof of my cozy home. Like most people, although I loved my job, precious moments shared with family and friends were what I lived for.

As the years flew by family members passed on, and although I felt their losses severely, I found refuge in God, His blessings, the solitude of my home, time shared with remaining loved ones and in my work. Diagnosed with a chronic illness, my home became the alternative to a hospital stay, as home health care nurses arrived and departed following my treatment schedules. The refrigerator was filled with IV bags, medical supplies littered the house, and an IV pole and monitor were ever near me. These lifesaving treatments were a blessing and I was grateful to God to be able to remain at home rather than in the hospital whenever possible. My Yorkshire Terriers were unusually quiet until they heard guests at the door. They remained by my side, vigilantly watching over me and keeping me company. Stacks of unread or partially read books rested on tables and end tables. Friends and family stopped by to add their warm wishes.

I remained financially solvent despite my extended absence from work, and believed that somehow things always worked out in the end for me. Then all at once things began to change. It really doesn't take long for ones' savings to be depleted and the best laid financial plans to be devastated when facing a long term, life-threatening illness. Eventually there was no nest egg, nothing to fall back on. Although, I initially continued teaching, eventually I had to quit working altogether and remain at home. Debts grew, both my health and my marriage failed, and I found myself alone, unemployed and facing foreclosure. However, through God's grace, I was able to return

to teaching. With most of my belongings boxed up and in storage, I temporarily moved into my dear friend's guest bedroom, taking only my two Yorkshire Terriers, a few clothing items and a couple of boxes of books labeled "Texas A&M" and "dissertation" with me. What a joke, I thought, having boxes laden with journal articles and poor writing samples outlining the research I had hoped to conduct labeled "dissertation." I had been packing when the utilities were cut off and my friend dropped by to check on me. She encouraged me to come and stay at her house and to take my time making life-changing decisions. She advised me to proceed cautiously. But I needed a job! I had no idea where I would be employed, and was uncertain where I could live. I needed to sell the house and I had to find a place to live. Relatives and friends helped get the house ready for sale, have a yard sale and offered emotional support, for which I am so very grateful. Yet moving in with a friend, even temporarily, was not something I had considered. My life a disaster, I attempted to hide the fact that I lived in a state of panic because for the first time in my life I had no home to call my own. I pretended to be confident about employment, but my self-esteem was at an all-time low. I clung to my faith in God and His benevolence as a loving Father, praying for him to guide me and keep my life in His hands.

I now live with my friend and pay rent in order to reside in her home, and I have been adopted as a member of her family. Boxes labeled "Texas A&M" have been retrieved from storage, unpacked, and their contents transferred onto shelves my friend and I put together and placed in my closet. Books and journal articles in binders are stacked in the computer room and in my bedroom. At times, library books and a

menagerie of reading material have covered the kitchen table and trickled into the family room. My friend's son has been on call for computer questions whether he realized it or not, and he has always been supportive. My friend's mother cooks lovely dinners on the weekends for us, making it easier for my friend to work weekends and saving me time that I can devote to my studies. My friend and her mom often drive to College Station with me to turn in drafts of my proposal or dissertation or to meet with Dr. Larke, my dissertation chairperson, or go to the library. When I have unexpected car trouble and must leave my vehicle to be serviced, she drives me to work and picks me up at the end of the work day. We go to her grandson's baseball games and take her grandchildren to museums. My nephew comes to visit and is spoiled by my friend and her mother. I drive to my brother's home and visit him and his family, spending cherished weekends catching up with all that's going on in their lives. I now spend holidays with my friend and her family or in my brother's home.

As I wrote this dissertation in memory of my parents and grandparents, I thought of how much they valued family and education. I realized that completing this academic journey was also a means of focusing on something other than my circumstances, helping me to escape for a time and redirect my thinking towards attaining my goal. Home, family and friends mean even more than they once did, as I am ever thankful for God's grace.

Definition of Key Terms

The following key terms are defined in order to clarify to words or phrases used in this study.

Abandoned children. Children who have lost connection with their family due to members of their family undergoing illness, incarceration, death or other circumstances.

Infants. From birth to the first year of life.

Children. Minors from the age of one to twelve years old.

Familial homeless. Families that include a child or children living with one adult (parent, grandparent, other individual biologically related to the child), two adults (parents, step-parents, adopted parents or other dyadic relationship). The familial homeless may reside in tents, abandoned buildings, automobiles, or shelters (Shane, 1996).

Homeless. The U.S. Department of Education (2002) defines children or youth as homeless if they meet one or more of the following criteria;

1. Children or youth who sleep in a homeless shelter
2. Children or youth who sleep in the home of a relative or friend because they have no permanent residence
3. Children or youth residing in a shelter prior to adoption, foster care, or other arrangement
4. Children or youth who sleep in a park, bus station, car, an abandoned building, or other location not considered appropriate living accommodations for human beings.

Resilient. This is defined as, “The ability to bounce back successfully despite exposure to severe risks” (Bernard, 1993, p.44). Rutter (1987) refers to resilience as the ability to cope successfully with adversity.

Runaway. Children and youth that leave home without parental consent.

Stewart B. McKinney Act, PL 100 – 99 (1987). This is a landmark federal legislation for helping the homeless, signed by President Reagan in 1987 (National Center for Homeless Education, 2006; Project HOPE–Virginia, 2009).

McKinney – Vento Act. This act provides for the reauthorization of the Education for Homeless Children and Youth Act affiliated with the No Child Left Behind legislation (National Center for Homeless Education, 2006; Project HOPE–Virginia, 2009).

Street youth. Homeless youth residing primarily on the streets.

System youth. A youth whose ties with family have been severed due to abuse or neglect and are in the care of state agencies.

Thrown away youth. These youth are homeless because their families have demanded that they leave home (Ringwalt, Greene & Robertson, 1998).

Unaccompanied youth. Homeless youth without daily adult supervision who have been told to leave home or have left home voluntarily.

Youth. A minor between the age of thirteen and seventeen.

Assumptions and Limitations

The study assumes that:

1. Participant testimonials were accurate descriptions of their experiences.
2. Participants did not embellish events and experiences, and responded as truthfully as possible.
3. The researcher transcribed participant interviews accurately, and did not add to or diminish participant testimonials.
4. The researcher followed the code of ethics regarding participant confidentiality.
5. The researcher complied with the agreements established prior to the interview process, as stated in the participant consent form.

There were several considerations regarding the limitations of this study. A single researcher investigated the phenomenon rather than multiple researchers. The study was limited to participants residing in Texas. There was the possibility of researcher bias. The study contained the experiences of students following graduation or receipt of their General Education Development (GED). It did not include testimonials of currently enrolled K-12 students while they were experiencing homelessness.

Organization of the Study

The study consists of seven chapters. Chapter I includes an overview of the study, a statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, the significance of the study, the research questions, and definition of terms. Chapter II reviews data as determined in previous studies pertaining to this study, and establishes the groundwork for the inquiry. Chapter III contains the research design, collection of data, and data analysis used in the study. Chapter IV provides a brief introduction to each of the seven participants. Chapter V, reports the participants' perceptions of their experiences. Chapter VI discusses the indicators of participants' success. Chapter VII provides the conclusion, which includes a discussion and recommendations for future research that emerged from the study.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Defining Homelessness

Who is homeless? Organizations working with homeless children and youth typically adopt their own definitions of homelessness, and thus there is no uniform, official understanding of the term. For example, The Department of Education through the Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program, Title VII–B of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, as amended by the No Child left Behind Act of 2001, defines homeless children and youth as;

- Children and youth who are:
 - sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason (sometimes referred to as “*doubled-up*”)
 - living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to lack of alternative adequate accommodations
 - living in emergency or transitional shelters
 - abandoned in hospitals
 - awaiting foster care placement
- Children and youth who have a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for, or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings

- Children and youth who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings, and
- Migratory children who qualify as homeless because they are living in any of the circumstances described above (United States Department of Education, 2004, p. 2).

The U. S. Department of Education's definition of homelessness, published in 2002, defines homelessness as;

- Children or youth who sleep in homeless shelters
- Children or youth who sleep in the home of a relative or friend because they do not have a permanent residence
- Children or youth residing in a shelter prior to adoption or foster care arrangement
- Children or youth who sleep in a park, bus station, car, an abandoned building, or other location not considered appropriate living accommodations for human beings (U. S. Department of Education, 2002).

The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force define homeless youth as:

Youth who are living on the streets or in shelters, runaways who have voluntarily left a dangerous or otherwise undesirable home environment, "throwaways," whose parents or guardians have kicked them out and adolescents who have aged out of foster care or state custody and have nowhere to go (National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, 2007, p. 9)

According to official nomenclature, homelessness is defined according to temporary living arrangements or the lack of living arrangements, not the duration of episodes of homelessness. A time elements with respect to number of days one has been homeless does not appear to be a consideration in defining homelessness at this time.

Policies and Legislation

The 1980s: The New Face of Homelessness

In the 1980s, family homelessness emerged at a level not realized in the United States since the Great Depression (Polakow, 1998), thus helping to shape the current definition of homelessness. According to Heusel, “the presence of rising numbers of women and children among the homeless is a unique characteristic of the 1980s” (1995, p. 18).

Beginning in the early 1980s, the number of homeless families grew dramatically. The face of homelessness became more diverse and began to include entire families, family members, racial, and ethnic minorities (National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, 2007). There is much debate among historians and scholars about the effects of the Reagan administration on the economy of the nation. Supporters of Reaganomics argue that the country benefited economically during Reagan’s presidency, while opponents blame Reagan for cutting social services and for maintaining an economy that was beneficial only to the wealthy. According to Sullivan (1997), Reagan requested that billions of dollars be cut from social programs. Programs that dealt with poverty and unemployment were the primary portions of federal monies

cut. During the early 1980s, many feared the onset of a massive depression reminiscent of The Great Depression. Attributes of the economy and the overall mood of the nation were considered to be reflective of the 1920s before the collapse of the economy in 1929. According to Torr, “not since the Gilded Age of the late nineteenth century or the Roaring Twenties had the acquisition and flaunting of wealth been so publicly celebrated as during the 1980s. Income became the accepted measure of one’s value to society” (Torr, 2000, p. 15).

As issues regarding families, children, and youth living as homeless were identified, Americans grew more aware of this epidemic sweeping the nation. During the 1980s, the shift in the homeless population resulted in an outcry from the homeless, their advocates, and care providers on a massive scale. Congressional investigations regarding the homeless population in America were a major element in developing federal intervention. The Community for Creative Nonviolence (CCNV) in Washington, D.C., was one of the most visible advocates for the homeless. Marches, demonstrations in Washington, “sleep ins,” Thanksgiving dinners served to the homeless, and tent cities referred to as “Reaganvilles” revealed the nations’ unrest. Often arrested during their nonviolent protests, advocates nonetheless made their voices heard. The CCNV served food retrieved from dumpsters behind restaurants to members of Congress in order to heighten their awareness of homeless Americans being forced to subsist in this manner. In response to the U.S. Supreme Court ruling against the homeless sleeping in parks, members of the CCNV fasted to bring attention to the need for the restructuring of a homeless shelter in the nation's capital. After these individuals fasted for eleven days,

the President agreed to renovate two buildings. Initiative 17, the Washington D.C. Right to Overnight Shelter, was passed in 1984 (Hombs, 2001). This program assisted in locating missing and exploited children as well and stimulated public awareness of the kidnapping and exploitation of children.

Stewart B. McKinney Act

Stewart B. McKinney, an honored member of the House of Representatives from Connecticut's Fourth District, was committed to social welfare programs. McKinney strove to maintain housing and assistance for poor and homeless families. A Harvard and Yale graduate, his determination to address the needs of homeless Americans was unprecedented. The Urgent Relief for the Homeless Act, which provided shelter, health care, and housing for the homeless, was passed in 1987. Authored by Representative McKinney, renamed the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act (P.L. 100-77), and signed by President Reagan, this landmark legislation was the turning point in addressing the needs of homeless Americans. McKinney died from AIDS on May 7, 1987 (Hombs 2001; Lundin, 2003). The Stewart B. McKinney Act was revised in 1990 and again in 1994.

Bruce Vento

Representative Bruce Vento from St. Paul, Minnesota was a member of the House of Representatives. Mr. Vento served on the Housing and Community Opportunity Subcommittee and was instrumental in, "leading congressional efforts to

assist homeless people by establishing the emergency shelter grants program and sponsoring legislation on homeless programs throughout the 1980s and 1990s” (Hombs, 2001, p. 51). The McKinney Act was renamed the McKinney–Vento Act in honor of Bruce Vento after his death due to cancer.

Homeless Policies in the United States: Twenty-First Century

The McKinney-Vento Education Assistance Improvement Act in the No Child Left Behind Act (P. L. 107-110), signed by President George Bush on January 8, 2002, replaced the McKinney Education of Homeless Children and Youth Program (Project HOPE-Virginia, 2009). This legislation states that homeless children and youth are entitled to a free, appropriate public education and that schools are required to remove obstacles to school success, enrollment, and attendance. Because they receive federal funding, school districts must ensure that these rights are not violated and that homeless children and youth are not discriminated against in public schools.

The Runaway and Homeless Youth Act programs were created to address the needs of homeless and runaway youth. The Basic Center Program for Runaway and Homeless Youth, Transitional Living Program for Youth, Street Outreach Program, and Positive Youth Development State and Local Collaboration Demonstration were established as methods for intervention and emergency assistance for youth. As reported by the National Alliance to End Homelessness (NAEH), “living in shelters or on the streets, unaccompanied homeless youth are at higher risk for physical and sexual assault or abuse and physical illness, including HIV/AIDS. It is estimated that 5,000

unaccompanied youth die each year as a result of assault, illness, or suicide” (NAEH, 2003a, p. 1).

The needs of runaway and homeless youth living on the streets are immediate and the Basic Center Program addresses these needs, “The purpose of the Basic Center Program is to establish or strengthen community based programs that address the immediate needs of runaway and homeless youth and their families, including outreach to runaway and homeless youth, temporary shelter, food, clothing, individual group and family counseling, and aftercare services” (NAEH, 2003b, p. 2). Providing youth the opportunity to reside off the streets and become self-sufficient is another area targeted by this legislation, “The Transitional Living Program funds are used to provide housing, skill training, and support services for youth ages 16 to 21 for up to 18 months” (NAEH, 2003b, p. 2).

Safe housing is an issue for runaway and homeless youth. “The Street Outreach Program can be used to help fund outreach to youth living on the streets and encourage their entry into safe and appropriate shelter or housing. Services include treatment, counseling, and information referral” (NAEH, 2003b, p. 2). Youth development is the focus of the fourth program established for runaway youth, “The Positive Youth Development State and Local Collaboration Demonstration Projects [were designed] to encourage collaboration among the State and Local (or Tribal) agencies and communities to increase opportunities for positive youth development. The local community or tribe must include an operating Runaway and Homeless Youth Program” (NAEH, 2003b, p. 2).

Homelessness has been a part of our nation's history since its inception, however the degree to which homelessness touches the lives of families, children, and youth appears to fluctuate, mirroring social, political, and economic circumstances. National and international economies, wars, governmental policies, and the political mood of society are factors that impact levels of employment, access to affordable housing or food, and to adequate medical care experienced for many Americans.

Causes of Homelessness

What causes individuals to become homeless? Poverty, loss of housing and a reduction in or loss of employment are listed among the primary reasons (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2009). Individuals living in poverty are in danger of becoming homeless, when financial limitations result in their inability to pay their mortgage or rent, "If you are poor, you are essentially an illness, an accident, or a paycheck away from living on the streets" (National Coalition to End Homelessness, 2009, p. 1). According to the National Coalition for the Homeless (NCH), of the 12.5% of Americans identified as living in poverty during 2007, 35.7% were children (NCH, 2009).

Foreclosures and the inability to pay rent have resulted in many Americans becoming homeless. Eviction from rented or leased housing and foreclosures results in families being displaced, to the streets, temporarily residing with family or friends and shelters.

Issues in Homelessness

Four Categories of Homelessness

Four major categories have been designated to distinguish child and youth homelessness: familial, unaccompanied, street youth, and babies. Familial homelessness includes whole families without homes. Unaccompanied youth are, “homeless minors without a parent figure. Some left home voluntarily (runaways); others have been ejected (thrown away) (Shane, 1996, p. 5). Unsupervised youth on the streets are referred to as street youth. Homeless babies are rarely recognized as a homeless population, although infants born to a homeless parent, abandoned, or removed from the custody of a parent or parents are considered homeless.

Unaccompanied youth comprise both ‘runaway’ and ‘throwaway’ children and youth. Chronic health problems and exposure to sexually transmitted diseases place unaccompanied youth as one of the fastest growing ‘at risk’ populations in the U.S. Physical and sexual abuse are frequent among youth who run away or are ejected from the home. Severe dysfunction in families, unwanted pregnancies, sexual orientation issues, and family trauma are cited as reasons that youth run away from home (NLCHP, 2004). Youth living on the streets of America are also at risk of becoming victims of violent crimes and abuse.

Blaming the Victim

Blaming the victim or believing that the homeless are deserving of their plight has been a barrier in providing increased funding and intervention for homeless families,

children, and youth, “According to national studies, even more Americans are at risk of homelessness. Millions of low-income American households pay more than 50% of their income for rent” (NLCHP, 2007). As individuals struggle to pay rent and utilities in order to remain housed, unexpected events such as long-term illness or loss of employment can cause them to lose their homes and depend on the kindness of family or friends for living arrangements. Others may end up on the streets or in shelter. Many homeless individuals are employed yet unable to pay for housing. This is a fact often overlooked by those who judge the homeless as deserving of their fate, “Almost half of the homeless population works but does not earn enough to pay for housing” (NLCHP, 2007, p. 1).

Unfortunately, access to shelters is limited and the number of families requiring shelter often surpasses the availability of shelters. Families struggle to remain together, but shelters often separate them, “During the past year, requests for emergency shelter increased in the survey cities by an average of 6%, with 70% of the cities registering an increase. Requests for shelter by homeless families alone increased by 7%, with 78% of the cities reporting an increase” (U.S. Conference of Mayors, 2004, p. 3). The U.S. Conference of Mayors discovered many commonalities among issues of homelessness in American cities. Families becoming separated in order to be housed in shelters were documented, as was a lack of shelters available for the homeless, “An average of 23% of the requests for emergency shelter by homeless people overall and 32% of the requests by homeless families alone are estimated to have gone unmet during the last year. In 81% of the cities, emergency shelters may have to turn away homeless families due to

lack of resources, and 81% of them may also have to turn away other homeless people” (2004, p.4). The nation’s homeless are too often the forgotten population, blamed for their situation by their housed peers. Misconceptions about who is homeless and how they became homeless cause many in our society to blame them for their situation, considering their fate to be a result of past mistakes or a refusal to be employed.

Shane (1996) stated, “Homeless youth are victimized. They are robbed, assaulted, raped and the like at high rates, often by other homeless people” (p. 46). He adds that youth living on the streets may trade sex in order to meet survival needs such as food or shelter, “Sexual assault and exploitation, as well as consensual, unregulated, and unprotected sexual encounters, are major health hazards for homeless youth” (p. 47). It is imperative to acknowledge that rape among homeless youth occurs among both the male and female population. It is speculated that the rape of female youth occurs more frequently than reported. Rape of male youth is reported even less frequently, although health care workers, social workers, and advocates hypothesize that it occurs regularly, “Just from the circumstances of vulnerability and exposure, one might imagine it probable that rape of males is not rare” (p.42). The frequency of sexual encounters combined with limited access to medical treatment creates an environment in which exposure to AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases flourishes.

Hombs (2001) reported that HIV/AIDS and crack cocaine dependency joined tuberculosis as “a major affliction of the homeless” (Hombs, 2001, p. 91). Adult and youth exposed to HIV infection struggle to maintain employment and acquire adequate medical treatment. Due to the stigma still associated with AIDS, assistance for housing,

shelters, and medical treatment for HIV-positive persons appears to be of minimal interest. Combined with the stereotypes associated with homelessness, HIV-infected homeless individuals find themselves in a particularly disadvantaged position.

Why Do They Run? Runaway Youth

Many homeless youth flee violent home environments only to be at risk for further victimization on the streets. Physical, emotional and sexual victimization at home are compounded as youth seek refuge in environments away from their home. Whitbeck and Simon's study focusing on the victimization of homeless youth identified three reasons youth leave home; poor parenting skills, violence and sexual abuse (Whitbeck & Simons, 1990). For those running from dysfunctional and threatening living environments, homeless youth may find that they are at risk of further abuse. Street life shows no mercy to young people as they struggle to survive. Having no education, no skills and lacking a support system, criminal activities often provide a means of support for runaway or thrown away youth. Whitbeck and Simons found that homeless youth are "prone to engage in deviant subsistence strategies such as selling drugs, prostitution, shoplifting, or robbery, which greatly increases the probability of victimization" (ibid, p. 123). They further documented that females tend to be more at risk for becoming victims of sexual exploitation, while males may engage in aggressive antisocial behaviors (ibid, pp. 123– 24).

Sexual abuse survivors are being identified more frequently in the field of counseling than they were in previous years. Survivors may seek counseling for

concerns that do not appear to be related to sexual abuse. “Because of repression and denial, sexual abuse survivors often seek counseling for issues other than the abuse itself,” (Ratican, 1992, p. 33). The child existing within the surviving adult may believe he or she was bad or deserved what happened to them. Therefore victims experience guilt and shame. Depression and anxiety may be symptoms of sexual abuse manifested in the life of the survivor, “Sex may become compulsive as a form of self-destructive behavior, a means of releasing anger, or a bargaining chip to obtain attention, money or security” (ibid, p. 36). Memories may be repressed as survivors struggle to maintain a semblance of normalcy in order to function in the world around them. Sexual abuse in the home is often referred to as a reason youth leave home, joining the population of runaway, unaccompanied youth. Blended households are defined as having “non-related parent figures” within the household,(McRee, 2008, p. 449). In such families the risk of abuse increases, “Households that included a non-related parent figure in residence revealed a heightened risk of sexual and physical abuse by a parent, compared to homes consisting of a single natural parent, two natural parents, or a natural parent and an adult relative” (McRee, 2008, p. 452).

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning (LGBTQ) Homeless Youth

LGBTQ youth are over represented among the homeless population. The National Alliance to End Homelessness stated that twenty percent of the homeless youth are LGBTQ (NAEH, 2010a). LGBT youth are in danger of becoming victims of physical and sexual violence while homeless more than their peers:

LGBT youth are at higher risk for victimization and suffer higher incidences of mental health problems and unsafe behavior than straight homeless youth. They experience an average of 7.4 more acts of sexual violence toward them than their heterosexual peers and are more likely to attempt suicide (62 percent) than their heterosexual homeless peers (29 percent) (NAEH, 2009, p. 1)

LGBTQ youth are often misunderstood by family members, resulting in domestic violence, being ejected from the home or the youth running away from home.

Homophobia, or the fear and resentment of homosexual individuals, can fuel arguments between LGBTQ youth and their families, “Oftentimes, homophobic families kick LGBTQ youth out of their homes, creating a subgroup of homeless youth dubbed ‘throwaways’ who have been rejected by their caregivers and are thus even more vulnerable to negative outcomes” (National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, 2007, p. 53).

Once on the streets, LGBTQ youth must struggle to survive, often engaging in survival sex in exchange for money or a place to stay. Such activities increase their likelihood of becoming victims of physical or sexual violence. LGBT youth are often victims of discrimination when attempting to receive services from homeless service providers (NAEH, 2010a). It has been reported that even in shelters designed to rescue youth from the horrors of street life, LGBT youth are targets of violence, “LGBT youth face the threat of victimization everywhere: at home, at school, at their jobs, and, for those who are out of the home, at shelters and on the streets” (National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, 2007, p.3). Temporary shelters, designed to be a safe haven for youth who have been thrown out of their home or run away from home, can be an extension of the

terror encountered on the streets as bigotry and violence lead to the harassment and even rape of LGBTQ youth, “Homeless and runaway LGBTQ youth too often are misunderstood and mistreated by the staff and other residents at temporary shelters. Harassment, assault and even rape within these facilities are common experiences” (Lambda Legal, 2010a, p.1). Transgender youth have been particularly targeted in shelters created to meet the needs of runaways and homeless youth, “Transgender homeless youth often are especially unsafe at runaway and homeless shelters that require them to be assigned to beds according to biological sex and not gender identity or expression” (Lambda Legal, 2010a, p. 2). The authors further explain that such policies increase the risk of transgendered youth becoming victims of abuse or rape. In 2002, President George W. Bush released federal funds to be distributed for faith-based providers (National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, 2007). Although faith-based providers, have played a dynamic role in advocating for homeless and runaway youth, anti-LGBTQ beliefs may impede intervention for LGBTQ homeless youth exists. Anti-LGBTQ beliefs may be subtle among some faith-based providers, while nonexistent among others. Determining if anti-LGBTQ sentiment exists within a service agency is imperative when placing LGBTQ youth in their care:

Many religious communities welcome and affirm lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered and questioning (LGBTQ) people, and many individuals are motivated by their religious faith to help LGBTQ youth in foster care. But the anti-LGBTQ beliefs of some religious traditions may create ideological barriers that undermine the professional obligation to create a supportive

system of care for LGBTQ youth (Lambda Legal, 2010b, p. 1)

The authors suggested that providers should consider the importance of LGBTQ youth being placed in faith-based service provider environments where they will not experience “religious condemnation or indoctrination” (Lambda Legal, 2010b, p.1). In addition to these horrific reports, The National Coalition for the Homeless reported that LGBTQ youth (67%) are more likely to commit suicide than their heterosexual peers (29%) (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2010). What is being done to ensure the safety of LGBTQ homeless youth? *National Recommended Best Practices For Serving LGBTQ Homeless Youth* (Lambda Legal et al., 2009) offers suggestions for providing a safe and supportive environment for LGBTQ youth. Staff training, equity in the treatment of LGBTQ youth and the importance of room assignments with youth who are not anti-LGBTQ were among these suggestions.

Homeless LGBTQ youth are at an increased risk for participation in sex work or survival sex. The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force states that, “survival sex is a desperate and risky behavior borne out of isolation and the lack of any tangible resources” (National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, 2007, p. 57). The National Gay & Lesbian Task Force profiled several homeless youth. Danny, a nineteen year old gay male in their study, lived in various foster homes and eventually was asked to leave his aunt’s home. Danny sought men interested in having sex with him in order to support himself, however he stated that he never considered himself a prostitute, “Danny’s situation caused him to seek out men looking for sex so he would have a roof over his head” (National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, 2007, p. 52). Akira, a nineteen year old

female, who self-identified first as a gay male then as a transgender female, was forced by her mother to leave home. Both Danny and Akira strove to survive after being exiled and cut off from support networks, “For Akira, survival has been muddled by drugs, sex work, unstable living conditions and an interrupted education” (National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, 2007).

Teenage Pregnancy and Homelessness

Unwanted and unprotected sexual activity is a concern for all runaway youth. Females in addition face the risk of finding themselves with an unwanted or unplanned pregnancy, “One third of unaccompanied female youth have been pregnant. Fifty percent of unaccompanied youth have had a pregnancy experience” (National Network for Youth, 2010, p. 1). A study pertaining to homeless teenage mothers conducted in a high school in the northeastern United States found that having a child care center in the high school or having institutional and personal support proved to have positive outcomes for both the mother and child. The child care center at the school described in the publication requires parents to participate in parenting classes daily (Meadows–Oliver, Sadler, Swartz & Ryan-Krause, 2007). The authors reported that homeless teenage mothers encountered more negative experiences than their housed peers due to major changes in their living environments and to housing complications. Life stressors for the homeless teenage mothers were primarily that of housing, not parenting (Meadows–Oliver et al., 2007). The program allowed mothers to continue their

educations, receive guidance and instruction regarding parenting and also provided a trusted and reliable source of day care for their children.

Whether young mothers become homeless as a result of being pregnant or whether they become pregnant while homeless, the sense of being alone, with no safe place to live, remains the same, “Note that some youth do not become pregnant because they are homeless, but rather, become homeless because they are pregnant and parenting” (National Network for Youth, 2010, p. 3). Families may refuse to assist the pregnant teen throughout her pregnancy or may be unsupportive of her decision to keep her baby, “In the United States, adolescent pregnancy and childbearing are considered premature and can have long-term negative implications for families and society” (Miller, Bayley, Christensen, Leavitt & Coyt, 2003, p. 418). In many nations, child bearing during adolescence is considered normal. However, in the United States teenage pregnancies are the unequivocal evidence that adolescent girls are having sex too young, “Around the world pregnancy and childbirth in the second decade of life are least common in highly developed countries, yet their occurrence tends to be considered much more of a problem in these countries” (Miller et al., 2003, p. 438). In the United States, teenage pregnancy may increase the likelihood of living in poverty and limits access to educational opportunities and employment, “Major consequences of teen parenthood for females include the increased likelihood of single parenting, poverty, and health problems, as well as reduced educational and employment opportunities. For males, teen parenthood has negative effects on their education and employment” (Miller et al., 2003, p. 439).

Post-Katrina New Orleans

The National Alliance to End Homelessness described the devastation of Louisiana due to hurricanes Katrina and Rita in 2005. Already struggling to meet the needs of those identified as homeless prior to Katrina and Rita, Louisiana was faced with the challenges of establishing emergency shelter and long-term housing for those who became homeless due to the hurricanes:

The 2005 hurricanes have created a new face of homelessness in Louisiana.

When the levees failed the southeast parishes in the aftermath of Katrina, the nation watched in horror as low-income, elderly, and disabled people struggled for survival. In an area with high rates of poverty, homelessness, and disability, over 1,600 people died. Hundreds are still missing over a year later. Further, no records exist to document the numbers of homeless people who died.

Compounding this unprecedented tragedy was the destruction left in the wake of Rita on Louisiana's southwestern coastline and inland communities. We have undergone what some have likened to tribulation experiences and Louisiana will be changed forever because of Katrina's floods and Rita's force (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2006, p.1)

Nan Roman, president of the National Alliance to End Homelessness (NAEH), testified before the United States House of Representatives regarding housing relief for survivors:

The disaster in New Orleans and on the Gulf Coast has created hundreds of thousands of homeless people. Some of these – the ones with resources and support networks, will relatively quickly find their own way back to housing,

although not without displacement, substantial financial consequences and tremendous personal anguish. Others, however, will need more help to get back into housing and on their feet (NAEH, 2005 p. 1)

Martha Kegel, the Executive Director of UNITY of Greater New Orleans, Louisiana described the current living conditions among New Orleans' homeless as being catastrophic. The most vulnerable among the homeless population continue to struggle to this day, requiring assistance with housing. Although there has been intervention on behalf of the homeless, there remains much work to be done:

Here in New Orleans, nearly five years after poorly designed levees broke, several thousand of the most vulnerable victims of Hurricane Katrina – most of whom have serious disabilities but were stably housed before the disaster – are living in third world conditions, squatting in New Orleans' 61,000 abandoned buildings filled with mold, rotting debris and gaping holes in the ceilings as though Katrina just happened... In the devastated areas innovative programs have been launched. But we and our partners still need help to finish the job of rescuing and re-housing vulnerable people (NAEH, 2010b, p. 1)

Kegel and her family were among those who evacuated New Orleans. She described her feelings as she and her family moved five times within a six week period following the devastation of Katrina as humbling:

For the first time, I experienced the mental confusion, the physical disorganization, the fear and hopelessness that people experience when they do not have a stable permanent home. Because of our prolonged displacement, New

Orleanians understood as never before the importance of home (NAEH, 2010b, p. 2)

While New Orleans struggles to provide housing for the homeless and redevelop their business community, the city is also faced with restructuring its public schools. School buildings damaged, educators and students displaced, New Orleans must meet the challenges of educating their children and youth, “Its students and teachers are scattered around the country. Many of its buildings are flood damaged and wind battered. But New Orleans is slowly returning to the business of educating children” (Vail, 2006, p. 29).

As families from New Orleans and other Gulf Coast states were relocated throughout the United States, children and youth faced the insecurity of homelessness as well as the challenges of adapting to new school environments in unfamiliar communities, “Already traumatized and faced with the loss of their homes and culture, youths of all ages have been uprooted multiple times, separated from their friends, and dropped into schools where cultural tensions and turf wars were inevitable” (Cook, 2006, p. 20). Uprooted from their homes, schools and communities, uncertain of when they would return, children and youth struggled to adapt. Texas welcomed more than 372,000 of the students who were displaced, many of whom later relocated across the country (Cook, 2006). Geneva Gay likened the exodus of evacuees to already overcrowded metropolitan areas to the early years of school desegregation, “The situation is reminiscent of early desegregation plans when poor urban African–American students were sent to upper middle class white suburban schools without any systemic

readiness preparation and instructional program reforms for either the incoming students or the receiving ones” (Gay, 2007, p. 57).

Cook (2006) described students effected by the Gulf Coast hurricanes. Terrance, an African American high school student and his family evacuated New Orleans, relocating to a shelter in Houston, Texas. Although, Terrance was accustomed to a smaller student enrollment in the high school he attended in New Orleans, he is reported to have adapted well. Terrance participates in the high school band and works at the shelter. Scarlett, a European American senior in high school and her mother, fled New Orleans and relocated to Dallas, Texas. Aspiring to be an actress and interested in the theater, Scarlett continues her involvement in extra-curricular activities related to the dramatic arts (Cook, 2006).

Teachers and administrators, also heavily displaced by the hurricanes, attempted to secure employment in other communities. Delays of records and certification information were mentioned as handicaps in securing employment. Warren Johnson, a former resident of New Orleans, his wife and family relocated to Houston. Both educators, Warren and his wife faced delays in obtaining employment while waiting for their records. A school was temporarily pened near the Astrodome where Warren's wife, a former assistant principal, was hired. However, when the school later closed she lost her job. She subsequently found employment as a tutor, and Warren has since secured a job teaching at a high school in Houston, Texas (Cook, 2006).

Human Trafficking

Human trafficking is reaching epidemic proportions. The Committee on Government Reform in the House of Representatives (2004) estimated that more than 27 million cases of human trafficking occur annually. Men, women, and children can become victims of this modern day slave trade. The U. S. Department of Health and Human Services reported that, “victims of human trafficking are subjected to force, fraud, or coercion, for the purpose of sexual exploitation or forced labor” (U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2010, p. 1). The economically disadvantaged, striving as they are to improve their quality of their lives, are frequent targets of slave traders and smugglers of humans:

Slaveholders trick and victimize innocent people into lifetimes of servitude by preying on the most economically disadvantaged members of society. These crimes lure hard working men and women attempting to make a better life for themselves and their loved ones... they are forced into domestic servitude, sweatshop labor, prostitution, and other types of compulsory labor (Committee on Government Reform in the House of Representatives, 2004, p. 5–6)

Debts for passage to their new lives must be repaid in the form of labor to the slaveholders. This period of indentured service may span the lives of individuals and likewise claim the lives of their children in order to repay the debt, “These indentured servants can spend whole lifetimes repaying debts as little as \$36 U. S. because of outrageous rates of interest placed on loans” (Committee on Government Reform in the House of Representatives, 2004, p. 6).

In his opening statements to the Committee of the Judiciary, United States Senator Lindsay Graham stated that he had been told that human trafficking was a 9.5 billion dollar business, and that “Commodities involved in this trade, this business, are men, women, and children who are smuggled, and they represent substantial profits for those people who decide to do this for a living” (Committee of the Judiciary, 2004, p. 2). As undocumented immigrants cross borders into the United States, they are at the mercy of those smuggling them into the country. United States Senator John Cornyn of Texas referred to the deaths of 17 “undocumented aliens” ages 7–91 years old who died in a trailer in South Texas while being smuggled into the U. S., and confirmed that 14 defendants had been charged in these deaths, “The criminals involved preyed on these families’ desire to come to the United States for a better life” (Committee of the Judiciary, 2004, p. 5).

Street Life

A Democratic Society – An Alternative to Shelter Life

What if individuals experiencing homelessness do not wish to receive assistance from a shelter? What if the individuals are concerned about the intrusion of charities in to the lives of those they assist, and they prefer to minimize that intrusion? Dignity Village is a community of homeless adults who seek to govern themselves. Originally established as a tent city, the 60 residents of Dignity Village have been using “hunting shanties” and “cottage-style” buildings as living quarters. Portable showers and a central water source are available for Village residents (Finley, 2003, p. 518). Bikes have been

donated to the community to assist with transportation, although residents also use buses. The community has united with Washington State University Vancouver (WSUV) to form a partnership in which educators perform fieldwork and provides educational opportunities as well as exposure to technology for Village members (Finley, 2003, p. 521).

Residing in shelters may result in the separation of family members, abandonment of family pets and in limited decision making for residents. Finley (2003) identified three advantages shared by Village members; residing in family units, the ability to choose alternative lifestyles as far as sexual practices, and couples being able to stay united and maintain pets while at the Village (ibid, p. 510). Inhabitants of this sometimes nomadic community are a diverse group. Some members struggle with substance abuse, others with issues of mental health. Multiple ethnic groups, religions and sexual lifestyles are represented among Village members.

Street Rats, a play created by Johnny Saldana, Susan Finley and Macklin Finley, was inspired by the fieldwork experiences of Susan and Macklin Finley when they worked with homeless youth in New Orleans. *Street Rats* is described as a portrait of “a day in the life of five of these young people facing problems with alcohol, drugs, pregnancy, and a lack of compassion from adults around them” (Saldana, Finley & Finley, 2005, p. 139). Homeless youth are portrayed as street poets grappling with their addiction to drugs and alcohol as they attempt to entertain passersby with their poetry in exchange for money or spare change (ibid, p. 145). The play's character of Mack, recites, “How many have been lost? How many mothers’ sons choke, gasp, and die as

three pennies fall like rain in the thunderous silence after?” (ibid, p. 149). Male prostitution, drug addiction and drug trafficking are topics of conversation between characters as they await individuals to cross their paths and ask for their spare change. The youth live in a squat, a place they have found to use as their home, where they set rules that govern the residence. The views of characters in the play represent issues faced by the homeless as they struggle to survive.

The Feminization of Homelessness – Homeless Women

Styron, Janoff-Bulman, and Davidson (2000) conducted one of the first studies to investigate experiences of family homelessness both from a qualitative perspective and from the perspective of women who are no longer homeless. The foundation of their research was based on the testimonials of female participants who resided in temporary shelters for homeless families in New York City. A recurrent issue among homeless women was domestic violence. Not only had most of the participants witnessed or experienced violence throughout their childhoods, but many continued to endure abuse as adults.

There is no singular path to homelessness. A myriad of contributing factors exist that can result in homelessness. Tessler, Rosenbeck, and Gamache (2001) examined these aspects of homelessness. Male respondents reported homeless episodes due to the loss of jobs, being discharged from an institution, mental health problems, or alcohol and drug problems. Female respondents reported homeless episodes due to evictions, interpersonal conflict, and someone no longer being able to help, “The reasons were as

follows: lost a job, lost income, increased expenses, eviction, building rehabilitated, condemned or sold, discharge from institution, disaster, interpersonal conflict, mental health problems, someone no longer able or willing to help, alcohol or drug problems or some other reason” (Tessler et al., 2001, p. 246).

Children and Homelessness

Children are impacted the most by traumatic life events. For some children, the predictability of the neighborhood shelter promotes stability. In fact, this may be the most stable aspect of their lives. Bassuk and Rosenberg’s (1990) investigation targeted the characteristics of children experiencing homelessness and children living in poverty, “Many [children] are spending their formative years without the fundamental resources necessary for basic development. Without attention to emotional, medical, educational, and social needs of these children, it is likely that many will continue to have significant problems that will cripple their ability to function” (p. 261).

The transient lifestyle of homelessness may be detrimental to the academic achievement of homeless children. The effect of a highly mobile lifestyle on homeless children was the subject of an investigation in an urban school district, “Findings support the hypothesis that children who are homeless or highly mobile are at greater risk for low achievement relative to other low-income students as well as more advantaged students (Obradovic, Long, Cutull, Chan, Hinz, Heistad & Masten, 2009, p. 512). Indeed, according to another study, “Homelessness remains one of the most misunderstood and least documented social policy issues of our time” (Nunez & Fox,

1999, p. 289). They added, “In this study, regarding homeless parents and children, homelessness may be a reoccurring theme among families. Some families have been homeless more than once. Young children are over-represented among homeless children” (ibid, p. 296).

A homeless child experiences multiple risk factors as compared to their housed peers. While housed peers may face one stressor, Buckner’s (2008) study indicates that a homeless child may face three, “Homeless children are potentially exposed to three different types of risk factors: risks that are specifically related to being homeless; risks that are shared by children from low-income families more broadly; and risks that all children, regardless of family income have in common” (Buckner, 2008, 7p. 723). Higher levels of stress can be found in homeless youth as compared to their housed peers (Buckner & Bassuk, 1997).

Sullivan’s (1997) investigation of the impact of homelessness found that, “for homeless children their lived experience is filled with an increased risk for physical, emotional, and developmental inadequacies. These risks in turn negatively affect the potential outcome for the child” (Sullivan, 1997, p. 5). She cites a lack of immunizations, abnormal mental and physical development, an increase in negligence, and abuse as problems faced by homeless children and youth. Sullivan’s research was designed specifically to assist medical personnel, particularly nurses, in meeting the needs of their homeless patients. However, the information gained from the study can be equally beneficial to educators. The limitation of role models and a stark living

environment, where even the most modest of needs may not be met, acts as a barrier to a healthy developmental process.

In his research Shane (1996) provided an in-depth examination of homeless children and youth in America. He cited that unaccompanied youth experience a much higher death rate than youth who are not homeless, “Homeless youth are vulnerable to exposure to the elements and [to] illness, often with inadequate conditions in which to recover” (Shane, 1996, p. 46). Vissing’s research (1996) is the result of years of investigation into the lives of homeless families in rural America. She observed depression, grief, anxiety, frustration, and self-destructive behavior as attributes of homeless children and youth in rural communities, “It doesn’t matter if you are a city kid or a country kid--when you are homeless, the cards are stacked against academic success” (p. 91). Vissing found that schools played a paramount role in the identification of the homeless and in addressing the needs of the at-risk child. However, the structure of schools and their policies also contributed to the children’s problems, and homeless students are at a disadvantage when it comes to producing quality work. Older students may have outside jobs that interfere with doing homework. Younger students may have to go to work with parents or assist in the care of siblings (Vissing, 1996).

Caring and Effective Teachers

Martin Haberman, a distinguished author and educator, has studied the difference in character between teachers who exhibit exemplary qualities and those who leave the field of teaching. Haberman defines “star teachers” among those working with children

who live in poverty. He states that star teachers, “believe problems are a part of their job” (Haberman, 1995, p. 3). Haberman equates problem solving with persistence, listing persistence as one of the functions of a star teacher, “Caring relationships with students, their commitment to acknowledging and appreciating student effort, [and] their willingness to admit mistakes,” are considered aspects of caring or star teachers (Haberman, 2004, p. 53).

Geneva Gay, a prominent author in the field of multicultural education, emphasizes the importance of curriculum and instruction designed to meet the needs of the diverse populations reflected in public schools. The power of caring is defined as imperative for student success. “It [caring] is manifested in the form of teacher attitudes, expectations, and behaviors about students’ human value, intellectual capability, and performance responsibilities. Teachers demonstrate caring for children as students and as people. This is expressed in concern for their psycho-emotional well being and academic success” (Gay, 2000, p. 45). In *Preparing for Culturally Responsive Teaching*, Gay further stated that “the knowledge that teachers need to have about cultural diversity goes beyond mere awareness of, respect for, and general recognition of the fact that ethnic groups have different values or express similar values in various ways” (Gay, 2002, p. 107).

Nel Noddings, a noted author in the field of education, encourages educators to establish a caring environment in schools. Noddings states that “caring is the very bedrock of all successful education and that contemporary schooling can be revitalized

in its light (Noddings, 1992, p. 27). Concern for students should form the frame upon which the educational environment is developed. “Students should be aware that their schools are conceived as centers of care—places where they are cared for and will be encouraged to care deeply themselves (ibid, p. 65).

Educating Homeless Children and Youth

Valerie Polakow (1998) refers to living in poverty and ultimately homelessness as living on the outside. Polakow shared the stories of two children living a homeless lifestyle. One, Michael, was an eight year old child who became homeless as a result of domestic violence. During one episode of homelessness Michael and his family, headed by his single mother, resided temporarily in a motel. Michael’s mother paid for a cab to take him to school so that he could continue his education uninterrupted. Michael was nonetheless frequently absent due to the family’s financial limitations. Polakow reported that Michael did not receive intervention at school. Monika, a seventeen year old girl, was ejected from her home by her stepfather following her mother’s death. Monika lived with an aunt and then with friends before making what is referred to as temporary unstable arrangements while waiting to see if she would be admitted to a group home. She struggled to remain in high school and complete her senior year, all the while maintaining a 4.0 Grade Point Average.

Polakow states, “schools and good teachers can make a significant difference in children’s stressed and desperate lives, creating a refuge where a child may experience sensitive and supportive intervention from teachers, principals and other support staff”

(1998, p. 17). The Thomas J. Pappas Regional Education Center in Phoenix was reviewed as a school that made a difference in the lives of homeless students in grades K–8. Lessons were designed specifically for homeless children, beginning and ending on the same day rather than being extended because students homeless students' attendance is known to be sporadic. Food and toiletries were distributed to children at school. A place for students to nap was provided on campus:

Breakfast, lunch and snacks are provided and there are supplies of clothing, shoes and personal items (shampoo, deodorant, etc.) available for students as well as, food boxes that can be taken to their families after school. A medical clinic staffed by a full–time nurse and volunteer pediatricians also attends to the health needs of the homeless children and provides a place for students to rest if they have been wandering the streets at night, or unable to sleep at the shelter (Polakow, 1998, p. 17).

Without a high school education, homeless youth find it difficult to support themselves, or to develop skills to be used as a means of support in the future. Lack of education is an impact of homelessness that can affect one's ability to sustain oneself and design a plan for the future, "The resulting lack of basic skills may be the most serious problem facing homeless youth, for it results in their being unprepared for jobs that require a minimum of a high school diploma" (Powers & Jaklitsch, 1993, p. 395).

Powers and Jaklitsch suggested three recommendations for educating urban homeless adolescents. First, they advocate that agencies working with the homeless youth and the schools they attend develop a collaborative relationship. Second,

community outreach is considered an aspect of an individualized approach designed for the homeless student. Third, school personnel are encouraged to become educated about homelessness. These suggestions are offered as a means for homeless students to transcend the boundaries of poverty and homelessness by receiving the education necessary for employment in the future. Such employment options are conducive to acquiring self-supportive lifestyles and further advancement in their chosen field of employment.

Educating children who live with violence has become a concern in the field of education. Rather than a refuge for children, the home environment has emerged as volatile and dangerous. Home has been described as, “The battlefield where domestic violence claims its victims – battered spouses and physically, emotionally and sexually abused children” (Craig, 1992, p. 67). How does one make learning meaningful to children who live with violence? Craig suggests modeling or demonstrating during instruction. An emphasis on predictability and routine are considered imperative to the presentation of lessons. Actively involving children such as in cooperative learning is considered an effective model to be used in the classroom. These suggestions regarding instruction and development of the classroom are made to assist in the cognitive development of children living with violence.

The trauma of homelessness and its effects on homeless children must be recognized in order to guide their educations. The complications of homelessness include a transitory lifestyle, living with family or friends, or residing in shelters. Children who are experiencing homelessness may act out, become restless, exhibit

aggressive or regressive behavior, become anxious, depressed or hyperactive or demonstrate learning or behavior problems in school (Linehan, 1992). Lineham stated that a child residing in a shelter is, “vulnerable to physical, mental and emotional maladies because the whole experience tends to erode the child’s primary protective structure – the family (Lineham 1992, p. 62). Recommendations for educating homeless children are reflective of effective teaching methods, “Many of the techniques that will help these children are characteristics of good teaching; providing structure and supervision, having appropriate expectations, setting limits, serving as a role model, emphasizing incentives and rewards rather than punishments, recognizing achievements, creating an atmosphere in which children are allowed to participate and are expected to be responsible” (ibid, p. 62). As educators design programs to meet the academic needs of the homeless child, understanding issues of homelessness and poverty are imperative. Providing a learning atmosphere of acceptance may well be one of the greatest attributes of the educational environment for homeless children.

Finley (2003) stated that at present the education of homeless children and youth is not socially just. Homeless students struggle just to find a place to study, and lack school supplies and are limited in opportunities to bathe or rest. The education of homeless children and youth is not equal to their housed peers. Implications for educators regarding the homeless student include hunger, moving from school to school, inadequate early childhood education, and closing the gap between missed work (Finley, 2003).

Education and Homeless Adults

The educational partnership between WSUV and Dignity Village incorporates educational opportunities for teachers and members of a community of homeless adults. Teachers conducted fieldwork and gained experience working with individuals living in poverty. The introduction of technology enabled Village members by providing them with a vehicle to use in searching for jobs, housing or educational pursuits. In 2002, 20 residents of Dignity Village, 15 graduate students and ten university staff members participated in a technology fair held at Washington State University Vancouver (Finley, 2003, p. 522). One community member became enrolled in college and was using the skills he had developed in technology to search for a scholarship.

Resilience

Resilient individuals choose to rise above adversity rather than succumb to it. Norman Garmezy, recognized as a pioneer in the study of resilience, defined resilience as “manifest competence despite exposure to significant stressors” (Rolf & Glantz, 1999, p. 7). Garmezy began his research in resilience by observing schizophrenic patients. His study of his patients led to Rolf and Glantz' investigations of children struggling with poverty or other stressful circumstances:

We decided to focus on children who despite impoverished backgrounds were manifestly competent. What were the roots of their adaptation? The term ‘resilient’ came in not as a simile for competence but as an extension of their competencies despite their early background of very high stress experiences.

That focus was the essence of resilience and that is the way we launched our research efforts (Rolf & Glantz, 1999, p. 7)

Garmezy emphasized his concern regarding the well being of children when he states that they are often victims of a society that does not protect them. He stated that children, “have been more often the victims of the slings and arrows of an uncaring society than recipients of its beneficent protection (Garmezy, 1983, p. 49).

Vulnerability and resilience are opposite ends of the spectrum of human behavior. Vulnerability suggests the potential inability to achieve a specific goal while resilience suggests that the goal is obtainable, “Vulnerability represents, on the one hand, a heightened probability for maldevelopment ostensibly because of the presence of a single or of multiple risk factors” (Garmezy, 1993, p. 379). Resilience may include the same risk factors but the outcome is different, “Runaway and homeless adolescents often suffer from exposure to chronic family traumas and encounter numerous hazards in their lifestyle. There are those, however, who do not just survive but [who] have figured out how to transcend their earliest adversity” (Williams, Lindsay, Kurtz, & Jarvis, 2001, p. 233). Williams and his colleagues examined the life paths of previously homeless and runaway youth and found that some were much more successful than others. The authors discovered four themes associated with resilient homeless and runaway youth, including “determination, meaning, and purpose to life, caring for self, and receiving help from others” (Williams et al., 2001, p. 242). How were some individuals able to rise above negative circumstances while others were not? According to the study, “the most resilient seemed to have learned how to recognize their own needs, find

constructive ways to get those needs met, and assertively protect themselves when those needs were being blocked” (Williams et al., 2001, p. 245).

Rutter’s (1987) research focused on the individual’s response to stress. Rutter introduces the idea of positive roles in relation to resilience. “Resilience is the term used to describe the positive role of individual differences in people’s response to stress adversity. Not only has there been a shift of focus from risk variables to the process of negotiating risk situations, it is in the context of risk negotiation that attention has turned to protective mechanisms” (Rutter, 1987, p. 316). Rutter determined that attributes of vulnerability or resilience could shift within an individual’s life experience. An individual who exhibits resilient characteristics during adversity may exhibit vulnerable attributes in circumstances in which the adversity is different. Protective mechanisms were found to result directly from adversity, “The protective process may even stem from a variable that itself provides risk to health or to social functioning. For example, the sickle cell phenomenon causes disease, but protects against malaria” (ibid, p. 318).

Rutter considered the importance of coping strategies, placing an emphasis on how people deal with adversity, “The mechanisms giving rise to resilience might be in personal agency, or coping strategies—that is, what individuals do in order to deal with the challenges they face” (Rutter, 2007, p. 205). Coping, or how one protects oneself, could be affiliated with what they do to handle stress. Rutter stated that, “the notion of resiliency focuses attention on coping mechanisms, mental sets” (ibid, p. 8).

Adults abused as children are considered to be at a greater risk for developing mental health problems. Another investigation pertaining to adults who survived

childhood abuse revealed that rates of resilience were, “considerably higher among adults reporting the presence of at least one parent rated as very caring” (Collinshaw, Pickles, Messer, Rutter, Shearer & Maughan, 2007, p. 222). Resilient adults were those that had not experienced psychiatric problems during the 30 year follow-up period of the study, “Further tests also showed positive adaptation in other domains such as health, inter-personal relationships and non-criminality in this non-disordered group, supporting the view that these individuals can be described as ‘resilient’ in the face of abuse” (Collinshaw et al., p. 223).

Bassuk, Rubin and Lauriat’s (1986) research documented the limitation of support networks for homeless mothers in fourteen family shelters, “About one-fourth of the mothers were unable to name any supports and 18% could only name one person” (Bassuk, Rubin & Lauriat, 1996, p.1096). The study further indicated that shelter staff and friends made at the shelter were documented as individuals providing support to the mothers. Minimal support appeared to be available for the homeless mothers participating in the investigation.

Resilience is also defined as positive adaptation in the face of adversity (Masten & Powell, 2003). Masten and Powell reviewed attributes of both the variable-focused approach and the person-focused approach in studies of resilience. The variable-focused approach considers parenting, intelligence and family resources, while the person-focused approach considers the personal choices made by the individual (Masten & Powell, 2003).

Masten (2009) described resilience as ordinary magic, stating that humans have the capacity to thrive during adversity when protective systems in development and adaptation work correctly, “Resilience does not require extraordinary resources in most cases, but instead is the result of what might be called ‘ordinary magic.’ It arises naturally from the interaction of basic adaptive systems that foster and protect human development” (Masten, 2009, p. 30). Masten stated that resilience can be promoted through reducing exposure to risks, and by providing additional resources and preventive intervention.

Masten’s “Short List” of commonly observed factors of resilience in young people considers positive relationships with adults, effective parenting and intelligence to be among the protective factors attributed to resilience. Implied adaptive systems include attachment, family and learning systems (Masten, 2008). Masten further stated that, “teachers, school counselors, and other staff function directly as promotive and protective factors in the lives of high-risk children while also nurturing the learning skills, knowledge, self-regulation skills, and self-protective skills that children need to adapt on their own” (ibid, p. 79).

Bonnie Bernard has identified four characteristics of resilience; “social competence, problem solving, autonomy and a sense of purpose and future” (Bernard, 1993, p. 44). Social competence relates to the individual’s ability to acquire and maintain relationships. Under the canopy of social competence is responsiveness, which is concerned with receiving positive communication. Also, beneath the umbrella, social competence is communication which encompasses expressing oneself in positive

manners even when standing up for oneself. Empathy and caring are considered elements of social competence, “Empathy not only helps facilitate relationship development, it also helps form the basis of morality, forgiveness, and compassion and caring for others” (Bernard, 1993, p. 15). Compassion, altruism and forgiveness, are the final characteristics of social competence recognized by Bernard, who defined compassion as “the desire and will to care for and to help alleviate another’s suffering,” (ibid, p. 16).

Problem solving is a skill that individuals employ daily. Whether addressing challenges in the work place, school or in our personal lives, problem solving is a necessary skill used to navigate our lives. Bernard refers to this skill as “figuring–things–out” (Bernard, 1993, p. 17). Planning is considered an attribute of problem solving. Flexibility, an attribute of problem solving, “entails the ability to see alternatives and attempt alternative solutions to both cognitive and social problems” (ibid, p. 18). Resourcefulness is a key component to problem solving, “Resourcefulness, a critical survival skill, involves identifying external resources and surrogate sources of support” (ibid, p. 18). Critical thinking and insight are characteristics of resilience within the category of problem solving skills (Bernard, 2004). While critical thinking incorporates higher level thinking skills, insight refers to the use of natural instincts when facing adverse or dangerous situations combined with wisdom. “Insight allows children growing up in great adversity to figure out that all fathers do not beat their children, that a schizophrenic mother’s bizarre behavior is not

normal, that many children do have enough food to eat and a safe place to sleep, etc.” (ibid, p. 19).

Autonomy is the third major attribute identified by Bernard in her studies of resilience and is considered to revolve, “around the development of one’s sense of self of identity, and of power” (Bernard, 1993, p. 20). Within the category of autonomy exists the idea of positive identity, or the individual maintaining excellent self-esteem (Bernard, 2004). Internal locus of control suggests empowerment or being in control. Initiative is related to internal locus of control and is often viewed as an extension of internal locus of control. Not only does one experience a sense of being in control, the individual, may assess a situation, formulate a response and take charge, moving forward toward their objective. Self-efficacy and mastery are considered within the category of autonomy as well. Self-efficacy relates to the ability to strive toward an objective with every confidence that the individual will meet the objective, “Perceived efficacy plays a major role in educational success in terms of both motivation and achievement” (Bernard, 2004, p. 24). Mastery is related to self-efficacy, “mastery refers to feeling competent or experiencing the sense of doing something well” (ibid, p. 24). Adaptive distancing and resistance are included among the components of autonomy. Adaptive distancing is related to removing or distancing oneself from unhealthy or unsafe habits. For example, a child whose parents were addicted to drugs may make the conscious decision to refrain from using illegal drugs and from being in the company of those that do. Resistance is one form of adaptive distancing, “The refusal to accept negative messages about one’s self, one’s gender, one’s culture or race serves as a powerful

protector of autonomy” (ibid, p. 25). Self-awareness and mindfulness are considered aspects of autonomy in which the individual makes decisions on his or her own behalf. Bernard likens self-awareness and mindfulness to stepping back from and reviewing the situation prior to decision making. The ability to find humor in situations is also considered a manifestation of autonomy.

A sense of purpose and bright future are the fourth major attributes of resilience identified by Bernard, “This category of inter-related strengths ranges from goal direction to optimism to creativity to a sense of meaning and coherence – the deep belief that one’s life has meaning and that one has a place in the universe” (Bernard, 2004, p. 28). Direction in meeting personal objectives, a sense of purpose and sustaining motivation by consistently striving towards goals are the hallmarks of the resilient individual, “Achievement motivation is one of the key factors influencing behavior and performance” (ibid, p. 29). Special interests, creativity and imagination are aspects of a sense of meaning in one’s life. Special interests often include hobbies or cultivating skills in the arts such as dancing, theater arts, drawing, playing instruments or singing. These activities provide an escape, albeit temporarily, from the stressors of life and allow the individual to rejuvenate in order to address the challenges they must face. Optimism and hope are attributes of having a sense of purpose, “While optimism and hope each reflects a positive motivational stance and expectations toward the future, optimism is often linked to positive beliefs and cognitions and hope is associated with positive emotions and feelings (ibid, p. 31). Faith, spirituality and a sense of meaning are attributes defining of a sense of purpose and bright future. Bernard stated that, “some

resilient individuals draw strength from religion, others benefit from more general faith or spirituality, and others achieve a sense of stability or coherence by finding personal answers to questions about their sense of purpose or self worth” (Bernard, 2004, p. 32).

Drawing a sense of meaning from faith or religion provides the vehicle for hope.

According to Bernard, faith, spirituality and a sense of meaning, are final considerations with respect to achieving and maintaining a sense of purpose.

Drapeau, Saint-Jacques, Lepine, Begin and Bernard (2007) investigated resilience among youth in foster care. Resilient factors identified among participants were, “intelligence, social skills, self-esteem, locus of control, empathy, faith and hope” (Drapeau et al., 2007, p. 979). The study further investigated the presence of protective factors among participants, including “having a significant positive adult, particularly if he or she values education, having friends who do well at school, and having hobbies or interests” (ibid, p. 980).

Protective Factors and Protective Mechanisms

Norman Garmezy stated that he believed that, “there is no such thing as a single set of protective factors” (as cited in Rolf & Glantz, 1999, p. 13). Garmezy emphasized the importance of protective factors, particularly that of family as a protective factor with regards to a child or youth’s evolution into adulthood:

The image of the poor, and I’m sorry to politicize this, but the image of the poor in the eyes of middle and upper class people is really one of all too often of saying, “If you want to make it, you can make it.” But that isn’t quite so. One needs to have a great

deal of assistance in reaching positions of safety in this country. But the offspring of middle class people have a tremendous protective factor in their parents. They go off to high school, they go off to college, and they move in a different environment of safety and support and so on. But we are very spare in what we try to provide for people who are in poverty (as cited in Rolf & Glantz, 1999, p. 14)

In her research, Bonnie Bernard has identified four protective factors; environmental, family, school and community. Environmental protective factors include caring relationships, high expectations and opportunities for participation and contribution “Caring relationships are characterized by a sense of compassion—nonjudgmental love that looks beneath negative behaviors in search of their causes” (Bernard, 2004, p. 45). Clearly stated, high expectations are reflective of caring relationships., High expectations serve as an interpersonal factor through which young people internalize high expectations for themselves” (ibid, p. 46). Opportunities to participate may include athletics, the arts, or creative expression such as writing or storytelling. Other forms of participation may include the opportunity to contribute to the school or community through volunteering, “Giving back is a powerful ‘hook’ for all youth, especially those not used to thinking of themselves as successful. It helps them reframe their self-perceptions from being a problem and receiver of services to being a resource and provider of services” (ibid, p. 48).

Family protective factors include the importance of parents, the role of parenting, caring relationships with families, high expectations in families, opportunities for participation and contribution in families and family resilience. Parents are important in

the lives of children and youth. The role of the parent is imperative in the development of the child and in establishing the family as a powerful protector of the child or youth. Caring parents can be described as, “supportive and responsive, nurturing, warm, empathic, accepting, and unconditional” (Bernard, 2004, p. 54). Family expectations pertaining to the child or youth are imperative in their development and accomplishments, “High expectations in families can provide the guidance that contributes to a young persons’ safety, can communicate an attitude of believing in the child’s worth and competence, and can be the catalyst for helping a young person to find her or his strengths (ibid, p. 56). Opportunities for participation for children and youth within the dynamics of the family are reflective of parenting styles, “Parents who create opportunities for their children and adolescents to have some decision making power and to solve problems on their own help meet their children’s basic need for psychological autonomy” (ibid, p. 58). Family resilience recognizes the importance of family support programs, “Family support groups see that the best and most effective ways to foster resilience in youth is to foster it in the family caregivers” (ibid, p. 61).

School protective factors include the quality of the school environment, caring relationships in schools, high expectations in schools, opportunities for participation and contribution in school, and resilient schools:

While much of the recent research about effective schools focuses on students’ academic performances, the role of schools in young people’s lives is clearly broader than pedagogy and more important than test scores. Especially in the absence of positive family relationships, schools can provide an alternative

source of protective, nurturing support... On the other hand, when schools fail students, these young people could not be more at risk (Bernard, 2004, p. 63)

Quality school environments emphasize the importance of student achievement not only in academic pursuits but in their emotional and social development as well. Parent–school cohesiveness and a union between school and community is imperative in creating a quality school environment. Caring relationships in schools should affirm an environment of trust and safety. Caring teachers can encourage students and contribute to the positive development and achievement of the child or youth:

It is by meeting young people’s basic psychological needs to experience belonging and safety, to gain competence, to feel what they are learning is meaningful, and to develop autonomy that schools can tap this intrinsic motivation. Caring relationships with teachers and peers not only meet students’ affiliation needs, but also lend support when learning tasks are difficult or uninteresting. It’s no secret that children and adolescents will learn more readily from people they trust and respect, and in places they trust and respect (Bernard, 2004, p. 68).

High expectations in schools are an integral element in designing a caring learning environment for students, “At the core of caring relationships are clear and positive expectations that not only structure and guide behavior but also challenge students beyond what they believe they can do” (ibid, p. 73). According to Bernard, schools with high student expectations are described as providing individualized instruction, learning opportunities designed for student success, curriculum that

emphasizes art, music and outdoor activities and providing various clubs for students to participate in after school:

It is through having the opportunities to be heard in a physically and psychologically safe and structured environment—to voice one’s opinion, to make choices, to engage in active problem solving, to express one’s imagination, to work with and help others and to give one’s gift back to the community—that youth develop the attributes and competencies characteristic of healthy development and successful learning, social competence, problem solving, autonomy, and a sense of self and future (Bernard, 2004, p. 79)

Resilient schools are described as, “true caring community where teachers, families, and students connect through caring relationships, communicate positive beliefs about each other, and invite each other’s participation in a shared vision that all children are our children” (ibid, p. 87). Schools that move from risk to resilience encourage caring relationships, positive teacher behaviors and attitudes and culturally diverse curriculum designed to accommodate individual student needs. Community protective factors include the power of the community, caring relationships in the community, high expectations of the community, opportunities for participation and contribution in the community and resilient communities, “One of the major findings from resilience research is the power of informal mentors – neighbors, friends, parents, teachers, or anyone who takes the time to care – as protective factors in youths’ lives” (Bernard, 2004, p. 93). High expectations in communities emphasize programs for children and youth or community initiatives. Youth programs provide an opportunity for

youth to participate and contribute to the community, “In a resilient community, community members and organizations support and work in partnership with families, youth and schools” (ibid, p. 105).

Protective mechanisms developed by individuals act as buffers during crises. Buffers are defined as factors which enable individuals to overcome adverse circumstances. Garmezy, Masten, and Tellegen’s (1985) long-term study, conducted at the University of Minnesota, focused on “the building blocks for a developmental psychopathy, focusing on studies of risk, competence, and protective factors” (Garmezy et al., p. 97). This investigation defined stress resistance as the “manifestations of competence in children despite exposure to stressful events” (ibid, p. 98).

In 1985 Cohen and Wells described a buffering model used as self-protection against stressful situations. The model proposed that support is related to well-being primarily for persons under stress. The “buffering model” argued that support “buffers” protect persons from potentially pathogenic influences during difficult times, “Although stressful events may elicit needs for multiple resources, it is reasonable to assume that specific events elicit particular salient coping requirements. We posit that there must be a reasonable match between coping requirements and the available support in order for buffering to occur” (Cohen and Well, 1985, p. 314).

Emphasis on social support systems for children experiencing housing dilemmas was the emphasis of Torquati and Gamble’s research (2001). Participants were children ages six through twelve whom were currently experiencing a housing crisis. Six assessment instruments were used to determine the impact and

composition of participants' social support networks, including the Parent-Child Relationship Inventory (PCR), Parent Perception Inventory (PPI), the Children's Depression Inventory (CDI), the Revised Children's Manifest Anxiety Scale (RCMAS), the School Situations Survey (SSS), and the Child Behavior Checklist (CBC), "The main effect model posits that social support has a positive influence on psychological adaptation regardless of the stressors experienced" (Torquati & Gamble, 2001, p. 308). Results indicated that, for social support, "mothers were nominated over three times as often as anyone else. Fathers were nominated by less than half of the children. Brothers received 10% of the nominations, friends 9%, and sisters 5%" (pp. 313-314). Teachers, grandmothers, grandfathers, aunts, and uncles were also mentioned as providing social support for participants, "Teachers were nominated more frequently than extended family members, illustrating the role of potentially meaningful role play for homeless children" (ibid, p. 319).

Masten, Hubbard, Gest, Telegen, and Garmezy (1999) conducted a pioneering investigation of children at risk for maladaptation due to hazards, psychopathology, psychosocial, disadvantage, and loss. Defining the qualities needed for success is paramount in examining resilient and vulnerable populations. Frames of success and failure may vary according to the individual researcher and research study, as well as the participants' definitions, expectations, cultural expectations and criteria for success. Two specific themes examined by the researchers were "intellectual functioning and parenting quality" (Masten et al., 1999, p. 145).

Luthar and Zigler's (1991) research investigated the impact of stressors on the development of children, "In the face of life stresses, many children develop behavioral and psychological difficulties. Other children, referred to as 'resilient' or 'stress resilient,' defy expectations by developing into well-adapted individuals in spite of serious stressors in their lives" (Luthar & Zigler, 1991, p. 6). Their research yielded three specific categories of protective mechanisms, including dispositional attributes of the child, family cohesion and warmth and the availability and use of external support systems by parents and children. Intelligence alone was not found to be an indicator of resilience among participants. However, Luthar and Zigler did indicate that the ways in which intelligence interacts with stress in predicting adjustment is not completely understood.

Spirituality

Spirituality has become a recognized method of intervention used by counselors and social workers. Survivors of abuse and individuals attempting to be free of drug addiction may participate in counseling framed in spirituality, "A focus on spirituality has emerged as a substantive focus of interest in the field of social work in recent years" (Williams & Lindsey, 2005, p.20). Social workers have also recognized the role of spirituality among resilient youth. Williams and Lindsey investigated the role of spirituality among formerly homeless and runaway youth. Five themes emerged in the first wave of their study; a belief in divine intervention, an active relationship with a Higher Power including God, the role of prayer and a sense of receiving unconditional

love and acceptance. Often fleeing violence in their home environments, homeless and runaway youth may have found themselves at risk of becoming victims on the streets. Some participants stated they believed God or a Higher Power intervened on their behalf or they would have been dead. The Higher Power or God was described by some as providing forgiveness and unconditional love while others considered the Higher Power or God as dispensing punishment and judgment, “For the most part God was perceived to be outside or external to self and had a range of attributes such as a savior, a guide, and one who bestows love, hope, strength, forgiveness” (Williams & Lindsey, 2005, p. 28). Participants stated that God or a Higher Power helped them change their lives and choose a new direction in their lives. Prayer was viewed as a means of communication with God. Whether used in times of adversity, in response to a need or as a daily communication with God the importance of prayer was identified among participants. As a result of prayers, a young mother believed her baby’s life was spared. Most participants in their study indicated that they believed God answers prayers but that His answer may not always be immediately forthcoming.

Ganje-Fling and McCarthy (1996) investigated the role of spirituality in counseling survivors of childhood sexual abuse. Spirituality was defined by Fling and McCarthy as, “a complex, multifaceted construct that involves the ultimate and personal truths that individuals hold as invaluable in their life” (Ganje-Fling & McCarthy, 1996, p. 253). God or a Higher Power, religion and spiritual source are identified within their definition of spirituality. Conflicts or even the destruction of the development of spirituality are common among survivors of abuse. Spiritual issues were typically

identified following the first months of counseling. Four areas were identified when labeling spiritual issues in therapy; issues of power, trust, control and transformation.

Summary

In this chapter definitions of homelessness offered by various agencies were provided, as well as a description of legislative acts that specifically address the needs of homeless individuals. Some of these acts have implications for homeless children and youth, as they address access to schooling. Four categories of homelessness were detailed. Issues facing homeless children and youth include struggles with the unpredictability of knowing where one will sleep or when one might eat, and dealing with the dissolution of family units. Some homeless youth in addition encounter difficulties related to their sexual orientations, while others may grapple with teen pregnancy. The impact of caring teachers was shown to be a positive one, as were educational programs that address the specific needs of homeless children and youth. Resilience theory was discussed as a means of understanding how some homeless children and youth manage to succeed despite their difficulties. In the following chapter, information is provided related to the aims of the study, strategies used in locating participants, and the methods used to gather and analyze data.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to determine how individuals who underwent homelessness during their elementary or secondary schooling managed to either graduate from high school or earn their GED. Data was retrieved primarily through interviews with participants residing in southeast Texas. These resilient individuals provided testimonials of their educational and personal experiences as they simultaneously struggled with homelessness and the pursuit of academic credentials. Their narratives provide a glimpse into the lives of homeless students and the difficulties they face, providing insider points of view.

In this chapter, I will state why I choose the qualitative method for this study. I will additionally address why the case study design was used. I will discuss how participants became affiliated with this study and share information regarding this population. Finally, in this chapter, I will describe the procedures used in the study to gain access to participants and outline data collection and analysis methods.

Design of the Study

I choose the qualitative method for this study because it lends itself to a more open format between researcher and participant during the interview process. This provides an opportunity for participants' voices to be heard as the interview evolves into more of a conversational format. Bogdan and Biklen stated that, "for some, the process

of doing qualitative research can be characterized as a dialogue or interplay between researchers and their subjects” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 7). In this study the primary source, the individual who has been homeless while attending school, provided testimonials of his or her experiences. This is distinct from relying upon the views expressed by secondary sources such as care givers, medical professionals or social workers. In designing this study it was my hope that the participants’ perceptions of their lived events would be voiced and documented, “Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how they make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world” (Merriam, 2001 , p. 6).

Bogdan and Bilken (1998) identified five characteristics of qualitative study. The first characteristic is naturalistic qualitative in which the natural setting is emphasized. In this study three interview locations were chosen within proximity to the residence of participants or locations that were conveniently close to them in order to accommodate their schedules. The researcher’s residence, the home of a participant residing in a suburban community in southeast Texas about a ninety minute to two hour drive from my residence, and a residential shelter for homeless youth located near a thriving downtown area in a major city in Texas, were the three locations where interviews were conducted for this study.

The second characteristic of qualitative research is the rich, descriptive nature of the data, “The data collected takes the form of words or pictures rather than numbers. The written results of the research contain quotations from the data to illustrate and

substantiate the presentation” (Bogdan & Bilken, 1998, p. 5). In this study, I attempted to describe the participants as well as the experiences they shared in common. The pseudonyms chosen to mask the identity of participants were created either in order to reflect aspects of their personality, or comments they shared during their testimonials. Third, qualitative research is concerned with process or how, “people negotiate meaning” (ibid, p. 6). In this study, the perceptions of participants were key to documenting the phenomenal journey of each participant as he or she survived homelessness and overcame obstacles in the path to graduating or earning their GEDs. Fourth, qualitative research is inductive and has been described as “not putting together a puzzle you already know. You are constructing a picture that takes shape as you collect and examine the parts” (ibid, p. 6). Categories emerged from the narratives during the data analysis process from the testimonials of participants. Finally, meaning is emphasized in qualitative research, “Researchers who use this approach are interested in how different people perceive their lives” (Bogdan & Bilken, 1998, p. 7). The perceptions of participants regarding their lives and the identification of support networks become major themes that emerged in the analysis of the data.

Case studies are a type of qualitative research. Merriam (2001) identified three characteristics of case studies; particularistic, descriptive and heuristic. Particularistic means that the study “focuses on a particular situation, event, program, or phenomenon” (Merriam, 2001, p. 29). The phenomenons investigated in this study were the experiences of homeless students, homelessness and resilience. Second, descriptive research calls for a “rich, ‘thick’ description of the phenomenon” (ibid, p. 29). The

manner in which participants coped with homelessness or the road to homelessness was essential to understanding events that impacted participants. Direct quotes are incorporated frequently in order to allow participants' opinions to be shared verbatim. Finally, case studies are heuristic in that they bring “about the discovery of new meaning, extend the reader’s experience, or confirm what is known” (ibid, p. 30). Readers unfamiliar with issues of homelessness or resilience may gain new insights from reviewing this dissertation, while those familiar with these phenomenon may extend their knowledge. These characteristics of case studies confirm that the design is applicable to this particular project.

The research questions framing this study were designed to provide an opportunity for participants to voice their personal perceptions of what it meant to be a homeless student. The qualitative, case study design lent itself to the questions developed specifically for this research. The primary research questions utilized in this study were as follows:

What do the voices of adults who received a high school diploma or general education development equivalent tell us about their life experiences as a homeless student?

What do the voices of adults who received a high school diploma or general education development equivalent tell us about their educational experiences as a homeless student?

Identification of Participants

I became interested in the lives and accomplishments of homeless children and youth for many reasons. As an educator I have worked with children residing in shelters, residential facilities and foster homes. Several of these children had undergone homelessness. It has been my observation as an educator that even in what may be considered a good foster home, children and youth often struggle with either emotional or academic challenges. I began to wonder whether they would graduate from high school or go on to pursue higher education in a trade school or a college. In order to meet selection criteria, volunteers for this study must have endured homelessness during their elementary or secondary schooling yet earned either a high school diploma or received a GED. They also had to be 18 years old or older in order to be selected. They had to express an interest in participating in the study and be willing to relate their backgrounds as accurately as possible.

Originally, I solicited assistance from The Office of Education for Homeless Children and Youth (OEHCY) in Washington D. C. and the Texas Homeless Education Office (THEO) in Austin, Texas. I hoped to interview high school graduates including those who had applied for the National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth Le Tendre Scholarships. The Le Tendre Scholarship provides collegiate financial assistance for students who are high school graduates despite encountering episodic or chronic homelessness while pursuing their elementary or secondary public educations. As it turned out, I was unable to successfully gain access

to participants through the Office of Education of Homeless Children and Youth at the national or state level.

My next step was to contact two of my former students who had lived in foster homes via their former foster mothers. The foster family moved from her previous residence and my former students graduated from high school in another school district. After locating the foster parent's phone number I contacted her. She confirmed that both students had graduated from high school. One former student was recently married while the other lived in an apartment near a university she planned to attend in the city. The foster parent stated that she would contact my former students to see if they were interested in speaking with me, and suggested that I call her again in two to three days. I mailed copies of the consent form to the foster mother for her and the former students to review. During my follow-up phone call I discovered that my former student who had recently married was interested in volunteering. I also discovered that the location of the former student who resided near a university was unknown. The foster mother indicated that she and my former student's adult siblings were attempting to locate her. The foster mother asked if involvement in the study was limited to these two former students, or whether other individuals could also take part. I indicated that participation was not limited to these former students. This avenue proved to be unsuccessful in the end, as one former student indicated through the foster parent that she was supportive of the research agenda and wished to participate but was too busy at the time, and the second former student's location remained unknown. Furthermore, no other students who lived

in foster care as children or youth were referred for participation in the study through the foster mother.

I then contacted a fellow educator who had adopted one of her students. He had been a child in her elementary classroom who was absent for several days. As his teacher, she searched for him in the community and found him living on the roof of a local convenience store. She became his foster mother and eventually adopted him. She expressed interest in the project and related that her son was currently living in another country. She said that she would speak with him about the study. I sent a copy of the consent form and interview protocol for her to review and to send to her son if he indicated interest in the research. During a follow-up phone conversation, she said that she supported the dissertation topic herself but that it was not a good time for her son to participate. She thanked me for considering them and said she would be willing to give a testimony of their experiences. I conveyed that I appreciated her assistance and explained that for the purposes of this study, the formerly homeless child or youth must speak for themselves. Hence, this attempt to locate individuals whom I could interview was fruitless as well.

The Snowball Sampling Technique

The snowball sampling technique was used to identify potential participants for this study. Using this technique investigators may request that people refer other potential participants (Bogdan & Biklen, 1989). Just as a snowball gains momentum, increasing in size while rolling down a hill, the snowball sampling technique increases

the pool of potential participants and provides the opportunity for multiple voices to be heard. In this study, individuals who were aware of the study referred others in this manner.

As I searched for people who met criteria guidelines, an individual contacted me regarding someone who might wish to be included. That referral contacted me, confirming the individual's interest. I placed a copy of the consent form and interview questions for the study in a brown envelope, giving it to the young lady to deliver to the potential participant. I also provided my cell phone number so that the candidate could contact me. The following day, the young lady communicated that the individual had reviewed the information and confirmed interest in participating in the project. The potential participant further requested that I be given phone numbers that could be used to make contact. I spoke with him on the phone to describe my research interests and scheduled the interview to take place in my home.

I continued to make people aware of the population I wished to interview and was approached by a person who stated that he might know of someone willing to speak with me. He indicated that he would contact this individual and let me know if he was interested. I received a phone call the following day confirming interest in the project. The potential participant indicated that I could contact him by phone. My phone number was given to him as well. During a phone conversation, I briefly reviewed the purpose of the study and information contained in the consent form. I asked if he wanted me to send him a copy of the consent form and interview questions to review prior to the study. He stated that it was not necessary and tentatively scheduled the interview. After

reviewing his schedule, the potential participant confirmed a date and time for the interview, which took place in my home. The means used to locate Participants One and Two is depicted in Figure 3.1 below.

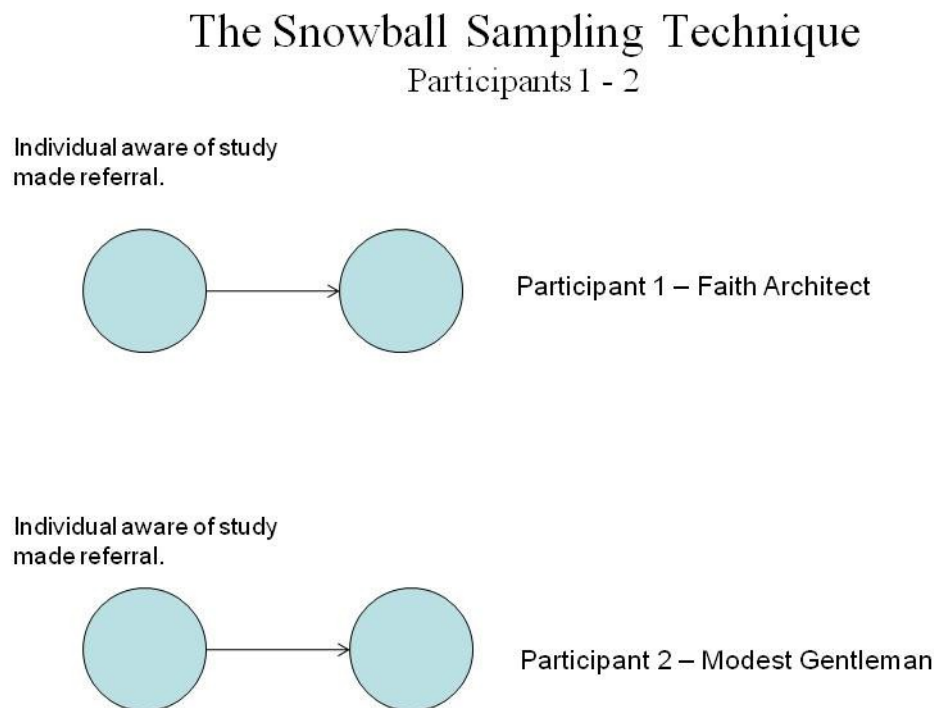


Figure 3.1 The Snowball Sampling Technique, Participants 1-2

I was contacted by another individual aware that I was searching for participants to interview regarding homelessness. I stated that my phone number could be given to anyone he believed might volunteer for the study and that they could feel free to contact me. I was reached by a woman who spoke with me briefly about the project. I arranged a meeting with her to discuss the research and placed a copy of the consent form and interview questions in a brown envelope for her to review. The meeting took place in

her home. She and her family were residing in a townhouse apartment complex in a small suburban community in southeast Texas while their home, destroyed by Hurricane Ike, was being rebuilt. She welcomed me into her home and stated that her family and several others whose homes had been destroyed or damaged in Hurricane Ike were considered displaced and temporarily lived in this community. Her cheerful demeanor revealed an inner strength and confidence that she and her family would one day move back into their home. For the time being, she exhibited a positive attitude, making the best of a devastating situation. She expressed that it was important to her to be a part of the study and shared some of her experiences as a child and youth experiencing homelessness. She stated that she could speak to other individuals who might also want to be involved. We scheduled the date and time for her interview, which took place in her home.

Prior to our meeting, this woman contacted me stating that she believed she knew of two more individuals who would like to share their stories. She related that both potential participants had been homeless while in high school. I placed consent forms and interview questions in brown envelopes for each potential participant to review. When we met for our interview I gave the envelopes to her, which she later delivered to the interested parties. The following week I spoke with these potential participants on the phone and scheduled interviews, which took place two weeks later. Both sessions took place on the same day in the home of the participant who referred them to me. The successful use of the snowball technique in locating Participants Three through Five is depicted in Figure 3.2.

The Snowball Sampling Technique

Participant 3 – 5

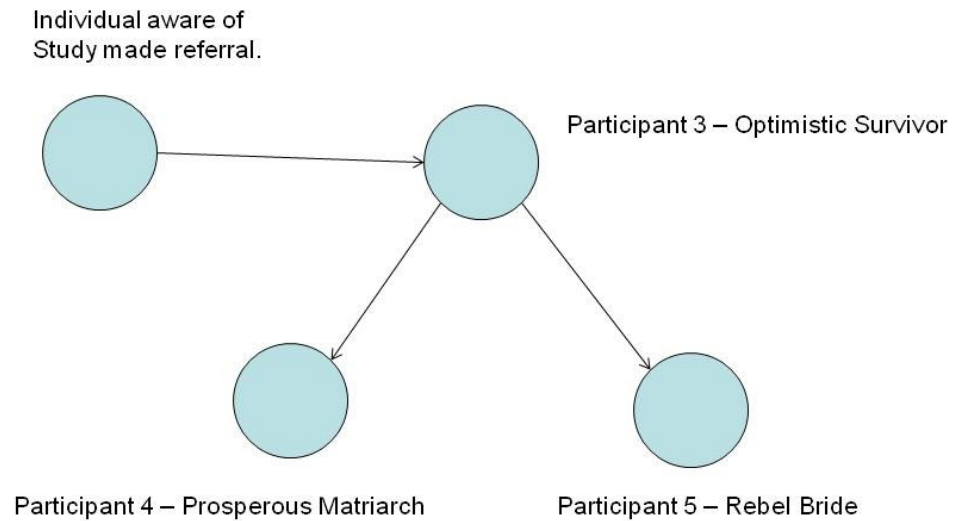


Figure 3.2 The Snowball Sampling Technique, Participants 3-5

A friend in the medical profession suggested that I contact area shelters in order to secure volunteers for the study. I began searching for information regarding homeless shelters and women's shelters in hopes of finding participants. One shelter for homeless youth expressed as desire to take part in the research. I sent copies of the consent form and interview questions through an e-mail attachment to my contact at the shelter for review. She scheduled four potential participants for me to speak to on two separate afternoons. Two of the four referrals were willing to be included in the study. I met with them in the library of the residential shelter. Resident advisers escorted the young people to the library and introduced them to me individually. The first potential

participant referred to me appeared to be likely to join the study until he was asked to sign the consent form. Although at that point he stated that he was not interested in participating in the study, he nonetheless spoke to me “off the record” for an about thirty-five minutes. As he left the library, he hesitated, turned back and spoke in a shy manner. He continued to speak with me, wishing me well before leaving. A young man scheduled to talk with me the following afternoon was waiting to see me. The residential adviser asked on his behalf if he could meet with me that afternoon, and I agreed. He was eager to be included in the project, listening intently to my explanation of the consent form, and appearing confident in his decision to be involved in the research. During the interview, he showed me a picture of his son. Following the interview we spoke and pleasantly parted company. A young lady scheduled to meet with me that afternoon was delayed due to job searching, and rescheduled our meeting for the following day.

The next afternoon, the young lady who rescheduled her appointment with me was introduced to me in the library. We spoke briefly regarding the study and reviewed the consent form. She indicated that she understood the information represented in the consent form before adding her signature to the document. She was the picture of elegance as she sat with perfect posture, nervously playing with the straps to her purse during the first moments of the interview. She began to relax, sitting back in the overstuffed chair and smiling occasionally as she spoke. Following the interview she slipped off to her room, retrieving a poem she had written. Returning to the library, she smiled as she showed her poem to me. Sitting in a relaxed manner, but with perfect

posture, she read her poem to me. She stopped twice momentarily as she read the poem, and then continued. After reading the poem and allowing it to be a part of the study, she talked with me casually about her plans for the future, her hopes and her dreams.

Almost reluctantly, she excused herself, disappearing through the library door into the lobby of the residential center.

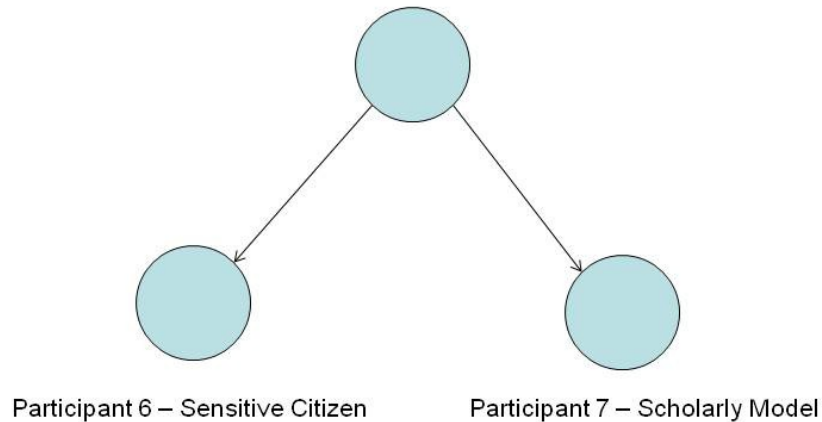
A young lady was introduced to me late in the afternoon. She carried herself with confidence and greeted me respectfully as we were introduced in the library. Appearing a little reserved, she cautiously spoke with me but in a casual manner. We briefly discussed my research focus and began reviewing the consent form, at which point she stated that she was not interested in being involved. She indicated that she was tired of speaking to people about everything, and just didn't want to be involved in another interview. I put the consent form on the table and listened as she further stated that she was tired of telling her story or talking to the media. I was aware that a local television station had been at the shelter the day before my first interviews had been scheduled. I reassured her that she did not have to participate. I thanked her for taking the time to speak with me and once again assured her that she did not have to volunteer to be interviewed. There was a momentary silence, followed by her apology for not participating. I responded that everything was fine and congratulated her on her accomplishments. She smiled and remained in the library, speaking with me "off the record" for about twenty-five additional minutes. She excused herself, returning to her busy life. She had graduated from high school, was working, and planned to attend college the following semester.

The shelter staff member who coordinated the interviews met with me before I left. She wanted to make sure everything went well and that I was able to get the information I needed for the dissertation. I praised the potential participants and participants as I spoke with her. Their manners were impeccable; they were respectful and appeared to be motivated in the avenues the shelter staff had created for each. She stated that she couldn't believe that some of the youth referred to me had declined consent for the study, adding that they are accustomed to providing testimony of their experiences and future plans to the media. She asked if I had enough volunteers for the project, and I assured her that I had. Furthermore, I stated that I very much appreciated her organizing the meetings and working so well with me regarding potential participants. After reviewing the consent form again she stated that the individuals whom declined to be involved may have been uneasy with the official sounding wording of the consent form. The term "investigator," to the youth, may have implied a police investigation. She added that they may have believed I was working with the police department or that I was an undercover police officer attempting to gather information about their experiences while living on the streets. This may have been the reason two of the youth declined involvement. Figure 3.3 below illustrates the snowball sampling technique used in securing Participants Six and Seven.

The Snowball Sampling Technique

Participants 6 – 7

Residential Shelter staff coordinate potential participants



Snowballing – asking individuals to recommend participants (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998) or individuals aware of the study making referrals.

Figure 3.3 The Snowball Sampling Technique, Participants 6-7

Purposeful Sampling

Purposeful sampling was used in determining the population of this study. Individuals must have met the criteria of the study in order to be included. For the purposes of this investigation, the criteria were; having experienced episodic or chronic homelessness during their elementary or secondary schooling years, and having either graduated from high school or earned a GED. Purposeful sampling is indicative of choosing, “particular subjects to include because they are believed to facilitate the expansion of the developing theory” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 65). The experiences and perceptions of these participants were unique, providing insight into the lives of

homeless children and youth from primary sources who exemplified resilience in their personal lives. Thirteen potential participants met the criteria for the study, and of these seven choose to volunteer. The ethnicities of these potential participants were as follows; seven were African American, five European American and one was Hispanic. The population of the study was culturally diverse, as are contemporary student bodies in the research area. Three African Americans and four European Americans agreed to be a part of the research. Participants included males and females, ranging in age from 18 to 51 years old. Two people were interviewed in my home, three were interviewed in the home of another participant in a small suburban community in southeast Texas, and two were interviewed at a residential shelter for homeless youth.

Challenges in Identifying Participants

There were several challenges in locating participants for this study. First, it was difficult to identify individuals who had been homeless during their elementary or secondary school years. With the addition of graduating or earning a GED being a stipulation for selection, the process became more complex. The mobility of high school graduates who have been or may currently be homeless was a concern when attempting to secure volunteers. The Office of Education for Homeless Children and Youth (OEHCY) and the Texas Homeless Education Office (THEO) appeared to be excellent sources as far as possibly gaining access to participants. Although individuals I spoke with at these agencies were supportive and helpful, either time did not permit them to pursue locating former graduates or they reported to me that the interest level was not

high among potential candidates. One high school graduate referred to me expressed interest in the study but related that she was too busy at the time. She traveled to see a friend and was unavailable for several weeks. She did not have time to arrange a meeting for us to speak about the investigation either in person or over the phone. Second, among individuals suggested to me who had once lived in foster care, locating the individuals was a concern. One expressed interest in the study yet was too busy at the time to participate. The location of the second person remained unknown. Third, as in the case of individuals referred by the shelter, sometimes people just decided not to participant. Perhaps they feared an investigation into their lives on the streets, as the shelter coordinator had stated.

Research Population

The criteria for inclusion in this project was to have been homeless while in elementary or secondary school and to have either graduated from high school or earned a GED. Participants must also be aged 18 or older. The research population was made up of three men and four women who were 18 – 51 years old. Three participants were African American and four were European American. Three participants graduated from high school, while four earned their GEDs. Two participants experienced episodic homelessness while attending elementary and secondary school. Each of the seven participants experienced homelessness as a youth in high school. The age range of participants provided insight as to whether homeless youth experiences are similar among participants who were eighteen at the time of the investigation and those who

were reflecting back on their experiences of being eighteen. Would the experiences of participants who recently ran away from home as adolescents and were eighteen at the time of the study vary from those who ran away from home as adolescents and are now in the 20–51 year age range? Participants' stated reasons for volunteering included a desire to share their experiences to affirm their accomplishments, to simply voice their perceptions of their experiences or to help others in similar circumstances. Prior to the discussion of the data, brief biographical sketch of the lives of each participant are provided in Chapter IV. This information was included in order to familiarize the reader with the circumstances of the participants backgrounds.

Data

Two types of data were used in the study. One data set was comprised of various forms of documents. These included books, periodical, websites and other printed sources that were consulted in order to focus the investigation, provide a review of the literature and refine the research techniques. A second set of data set was generated by the researcher. This consisted of information provided by individuals who agreed to be interviewed for this project.

Documents

For the purposes of this study, documents could have included videos, letters, photographs, memorabilia, clinical records, and other forms of documents deemed pertinent to the study. Three categories were established in order to determine the

authenticity of documents: personal documents, official documents, and popular culture documents (Bogden & Biklen, 1998). Personal documents included letters, diaries, journals, or autobiographies pertaining to the participant. Official documents were defined as birth certificates, legal documents, personal files, or newsletters. Popular culture documents referred to data developed for commercial purposes in the media such as commercials, television programs, news programs, and audio-visual recordings (Bogden & Biklen, 1998). Determination of authenticity of documents considered the origin and history of the document, how I gained access to the document, the author, the purpose and bias of the document (Merriam, 1998).

One official document in a newsletter format was provided by a participant. The document reflected the community development organization the participant was involved with, and the community activities provided by the organization. One personal document in the form of original poetry created by a participant was submitted and served as an extension of her testimony.

Interview Procedures

I reviewed the informed consent form with each participant prior to requesting their signature on the document. A copy of the consent form, which also indicates whether they gave their consent to be audio taped, was given to the participant to keep for their records. Following Institutional Review Board protocol, a copy of the informed consent form is attached as Appendix A of this study.

I designed the interview protocol or instrument specifically for this study. The instrument was divided into two sections. The first section was devoted to the personal experiences of participants (See Appendix B). The second section was designed to reflect the educational experiences of participants (See Appendix C). The portion of the interview protocol pertaining to personal experiences began by asking participants to describe their families. Participants were asked to share an event or series of events that brought them great happiness in their personal lives as well as one that caused them sadness. Memories of homelessness and how that experience impacted their personal lives were incorporated in the protocol. Questions regarding goals of the participants and their plans to achieve these goals were included as well. The part of the interview protocol pertaining to educational experiences of participants initially request that participants share their experiences as a homeless student. They were asked if any teachers or staff members encouraged them during this time. Participants were encouraged to share an event or series of events that was particularly joyful in their educational experience. Conversely, they were requested to state their most painful educational experiences. The protocol was designed to provide participants the opportunity to state what they believed to be the most effective means of motivating students, as well as behaviors which they believed to be the least motivating.

The interview instrument was designed in order to provide each participant the opportunity to share his or her experiences and identify the protective mechanisms or social support networks motivating them to achieve their goals. Open-ended questions were used throughout the discussions. Participants defined their experiences in relation

to their individual cultural knowledge, revealing the knowledge of their culture as defined in Spradley's (1994) informant based research. It is imperative that the voices and cultural knowledge of the individuals be preserved. It was my intention to create a comfortable environment and to use a questioning format conducive to participants feeling at ease in sharing their personal and educational backgrounds. The primary goal was to retrieve information pertinent to the research questions. With consent, interviews were recorded on audio cassette tapes. This ensured that I could later review the entire conversation to make sure that I had not overlooked or misunderstood any statements. Each interview recording was transcribed into a written document to serve as a record of the discussions.

Following each interview I made notes while the conversations were fresh in my mind. I later found a quiet place to work and listened to the audio recordings of interview sessions as I transcribed the data. I color coded each participant's testimony for ease in reviewing their responses to particular questions so that each person was assigned a unique color. This procedure was beneficial when putting replies into folders by topic, making it easier to identify each persons' response to the questions. Line numbers were added to transcriptions to assist in finding quotes among participant responses to specific questions. When asked, none of the participants indicated that they wished to receive a copy of their interview transcription. Likewise, none were concerned with checking the transcriptions for accuracy, as is typically done as a member checking procedure.

Multiple interview sites were necessary due to the location of participants' residences within the state of Texas. Key elements of the observation included the description of the environment, participant behaviors, and the context of the interview to the environment. An emphasis was placed on participant responses such as body language. Hesitation in responding to questions was observed and documented, as well as subtle factors such as attire, organization of space, and nonverbal communication. I acknowledge that my presence altered the scene, as the researcher became a part of the environment. The verbal and nonverbal communications of the researcher, attire, and organization of interview questions became a part of the observation record (Merriam, 1998).

The Constant Comparative Method

As previously stated, data retrieved from participant interviews, observations, and document were transcribed. Audiotapes were transcribed, with line numbers embedded. File folders were created for each question of the interview instrument. Participant responses were cut out from the paper copies of the transcriptions, attached to computer paper and placed in the folder labeled with the appropriate question. Thus a folder was made for each question, and included all participants' replies to that particular question. Color coding was used to facilitate the ease of locating each participant's testimony. The file folders were subsequently divided into categories, providing a theory or framework of commonalities within the data. These categories were compared perpetually throughout the data retrieval and analysis phases of the study (Merriam,

1998). Charmaz (2000) stated that the constant comparative method compares differing views, compares data from an individual with himself or herself, and categories to categories.

The coding and retrieval methods were applied to the data as a form of data management. Coding the data served as a visual cue and allowed new themes and categories to emerge throughout the study, “Coding helps us to gain a new perspective on our materials and to focus on further data collection, and may lead us in unforeseen directions” (Charmaz, 2000, p. 515).

Specific themes emerged from the testimony of participants. Some themes were expected, such as homelessness, however themes such as the road to homelessness emerged from participant testimonies. I anticipated finding information about protective mechanisms and support networks that enable the participants to excel rather than succumb to the tragedy that is episodic or chronic homelessness. Therefore I was not surprised when support emerged as a primary theme in this study. The participant’s perceptions of their experiences and indicators of support emerged as the main themes in this study.

Summary of Research

Research for this study regarding the experiences of resilient, formerly homeless young adults who have achieved their high school diploma or GED was conducted by a single researcher, using a case study format within the discipline of qualitative research. The constant comparative method was used to compare transcription data. Participant

interviews were conducted in various environments commensurate with the location of the participants' residence. Participant identity was protected in accordance with the informed consent form reviewed prior to participation in the interviews. Data was analyzed using narrative analysis and each source was reviewed for accuracy. Findings of the analysis will be examined in the final chapter of the study Chapter VII.

CHAPTER IV

THE PARTICIPANTS: GETTING TO KNOW YOU

The purpose of this study was to investigate the personal and educational experiences of individuals who were homeless at some point during their public school educations, yet managed to meet high school standards for graduation from high school or to earn a GED. The seven individuals who contributed to this study will be introduced in this chapter. This brief biographical sketch of each individual provides a glimpse into the life of the participants, providing a context for the reader.

Individuals who were aware of this study referred participants. Some were referred by friends, others through a residential shelter for young people. Each volunteer underwent episodic homelessness yet graduated from high school or received their GED. Participants' experiences varied yet family relationships remained a constant factor in their lives, as did the desire to overcome the challenges of homelessness. Regardless of the turmoil in their lives, maintaining a course leading to graduation from high school or later returning to earn a GED was important to each participant.

Participants related their stories of their successfully overcoming obstacles in order to graduate or earn a GED. They also shared their goals and accomplishments since. I spoke with each participant before reviewing the informed consent form for the study with them in person. While reviewing the consent form, I tried to clearly define the expectations and rights of participants so they each could make an informed decision regarding enrollment in the project.

I hoped to establish a rapport with each participant and put them at ease if they seemed apprehensive. To this end, I attempted to create an atmosphere in which each person would feel comfortable and relaxed. Two participants were interviewed at my residence, three in the home of a friend, and two at a residential shelter for young people.

The first two participants were interviewed at my residence. I prepared cakes, fruit, vegetables, and cheese trays for one participant who arrived with his wife and young child. One participant met me in town, and then followed me to my residence. I provided a meal for him that I purchased from a fast food restaurant, and he ate lunch as we chatted prior to his interview. He maintains a busy schedule and was preparing to leave town.

One volunteer who resides in another city, offered her home as an interview location. The house was very quiet, as her children were visiting friends. Each participant was greeted in her living room. We spoke briefly in the living room before the interviews, and I believe that this put them at ease. Interviews then took place in another room. The atmosphere was informal and relaxed. Each of these interviews had the potential to become emotional, as participants were asked to share memories of their childhoods and youths. Individuals expressed the importance they attributed to being a part of the study and their hopes that their struggles and suggestions could be used to help others.

Two interviews took place at a residential shelter for youth in a thriving metropolitan area. The interviews took place over a two-day period. Upon arrival, I signed in at a designated area before being allowed to enter a restricted area. The first

day after signing in, I was allowed to enter the fenced courtyard of the shelter complex. Buildings of various sizes lined the concrete path, bounded by landscaped lawns and a small garden. I also walked across a secured parking lot before entering the residential building where the interviews were scheduled to take place. As I entered the multistory building, a resident adviser greeted me then escorted me to the library. Potential participants waited in the lobby before being introduced to me by resident advisers in the library. No one else was allowed in the library during the interview other than the participant being interviewed and myself. One potential participant arrived a day early for his appointment and requested to be interviewed at that time, if it was convenient. A second participant, delayed due to job searching, did not arrive for her scheduled appointment the first afternoon but arrived early the following day to see if she could still be included.

The second afternoon, I was again greeted respectfully by resident advisers and welcomed to the residence and escorted to the library. As on the previous day, resident advisers contacted those scheduled to meet with me and introduced us in the library. Participants listened intently as the informed consent form was reviewed. They appeared eager to tell their stories. All participants agreed to be audio taped. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 51 years old. There were three male and four female participants. Pseudonyms are used to refer to each participant. A summary of each person's demographic information is provided in Table 4.1. When quoted, participants are identified by P. 1, P. 2, etc. according to the designations in the table, and the line number(s) and page number(s) from the interview transcriptions are cited.

Table 4.1 Participants' Demographic Information and Educational Status

Participant	Age	Sex	Ethnicity	Pseudonym Used in the Dissertation
P. 1	26	M	AA	Faith Architect
P. 2	41	M	W	Modest Gentleman
P. 3	48	F	W	Optimistic Survivor
P. 4	51	F	W	Prosperous Matriarch
P. 5	24	F	W	Rebel Bride
P. 6	18	M	AA	Sensitive Citizen
P. 7	18	F	AA	Scholarly Model

Notes: M =Male, F = Female, AA = African American, W = White

Participant One: Faith Architect

Faith Architect is a 26-year-old African American male who overcame episodic homelessness throughout his junior and senior years of high school. He remained in high school, continued taking Advanced Placement courses, prepared to go to college, and graduated from high school with his graduating class. He attended college, and today continues taking educational courses related to real estate as he pursues his broker's license.

The phone rang as I placed the fruit and cheese tray on the kitchen table near a luscious Italian crème cake. Faith Architect, his wife and small son were on their way to my home and had called to confirm directions. Thirty minutes later, the young couple arrived early for our appointment. Dressed in jeans and casual attire, the young couple

and their little one were the portrait of a successful young family out and about on a Saturday afternoon. His briefcase in one hand and his son's diaper bag in another, Faith Architect beamed as he introduced his family.

Faith Architect sat a business-style binder on the kitchen table beside him while his wife followed behind their toddler, who was investigating this new environment. From the binder he removed the consent form and the list of interview questions. He had reviewed the consent form prior to the interview and made notes beside various questions. Faith Architect stated that he understood his rights as a participant and was prepared to sign the consent form. I asked if he would agree to be audio taped and said we could conduct the interviews without audio taping if he preferred. I explained that the audiotapes would be secured and that access to them would be limited to my dissertation chairperson and myself. I further stated that the tapes would be destroyed in three years, and kept in a locked box until that time. He seemed content with this explanation and gave his consent to be audio taped. We reviewed the consent form again. I knew Faith Architect had reviewed the consent form and was certain that he understood the information presented in the informed consent form; however, I felt that I should review the form with him in person just to be certain there were no questions or concerns I had not yet addressed. He stated that he had no further questions and was ready to sign the consent form. It was apparent throughout the interview that Faith Architect had given a great deal of thought to his responses. His peaceful demeanor and thorough explanations, reflecting wisdom and a spiritual dimension, were apparent in his comments. His faith in God, dedication to family, desire to help others, and his belief in

working hard in order to achieve one's goals were clearly evident. He thoroughly explained his experiences and shared them with a clarity that evolved into an explanation of his vision. One could easily follow his testimony of the events leading to his being homeless, as well as share in the celebration of his most joyful experiences and be in awe of his current success and plans for the future. His vision and his passion to intervene on behalf of those who struggle are sincere and heartfelt. Recently, he has been involved in building over 100 homes in a southeastern Texas metropolitan area. He is involved with building homes in other communities in Texas, areas that he describes as having been forgotten. His vision includes an international perspective as well, as he plans to one day build homes in countries such as Haiti.

Faith Architect was raised in a single parent household. His mother was very supportive. Although her income barely supported the family, he stated that he never remembered not having what he needed as a child. He shared that his mother was always present for school or community events to show her support and to encourage him. Faith Architect, his mother, and grandmother resided in a two-bedroom apartment. His older brother occasionally resided with them. Twelve years older than him, his brother was either away at college or residing apart from the family during these times. During his high school years, Faith Architect's aunt and cousins moved into their apartment due to his aunt's illness. Faith Architect's mother was the constant breadwinner of the family. Although they did not own an automobile and depended on the mass transit system for transportation, his mother made sure the family was in church on Sundays and on Saturdays for various activities. Faith Architect participated in track,

football, and the Junior Olympics and his mother always attended his events. He described a loving, supportive environment at home as a child and as a youth. His mother was responsible for keeping the family together and providing financial, emotional, and spiritual support. Faith Architect's memories of childhood were positive and he attributed this to his mother. When speaking of his mother, he often smiled. He said, "Growing up was fun. I had a supportive mother" (P. 1, line 9, 1).

As he spoke, it was as if he was seeing his past.

It was very positive. I was involved with church. I didn't realize until I got older that I was poor. It was because of the positive environment. My mother made sure I had what I needed up to a certain point. My grandmother lived with me my whole life. So it was my mother and my grandmother, and off and on my brother when he would come back from school (P. 1, lines 11-15,1)

Faith Architect's mother emphasized the need for education. He remembered how his mother attended every school activity. She would get off work early to come and show support for him. Her only transportation was the mass transit system, or perhaps friends who would bring her in their vehicles. Faith Architect stated, "she didn't make much money, but at the same time she would be there, at everything. She was very supportive of school. Education was number one" (P. 1, lines 138-140, 6).

Perhaps one of the most joyful series of activities described by Faith Architect was his participation in the Junior Olympics. He qualified for the Junior Olympics, running track when he was in the eighth grade. His mother was able to watch him compete in the Junior Olympics held in California. Relatives residing in the state

attended as well. He said, “It’s one step down from the Olympics. I made it there and qualified. My time was in the top three in the region, which is the state of Texas” (P. 1, lines 168-170,7).

It is apparent that the central most important person in Faith Architect’s life while growing up was his mother. She provided a home for his aunt and cousins when his aunt was ill during Faith Architect’s sophomore year in high school. When his grandmother was diagnosed with cancer it was his mother who became her caregiver:

My grandmother, she was sick as well. She had breast cancer, so my mother would take her to the doctor, take off work and go with her. She went into remission. But during that whole time, my mother had gotten breast cancer, but she didn’t tell anyone. She wanted to make sure that my grandmother was okay and then she went to receive treatment but of course that was ah... She passed away (P. 1, lines 78-82, 4)

The loss of his mother signaled the loss of the nurturer, the caregiver, the breadwinner, the person that held the family together - the person who provided a home, food, and clothing for the family. With Faith Architect’s mother's death, not only did he lose possibly the most important person in his life, he also lost his source of stability and security, “My cousin and my brother, they moved out. And it was me and... We ended up getting evicted from the apartment” (P. 1, lines 83-85). He added, “We couldn’t pay for the apartment” (P. 1, lines 85-86, 4).

Faith Architect and his brother then moved to a different apartment. During his senior year in high school, his brother lost his job. Faith Architect received money from

social security, which he used to pay the rent. His father also sent money to them for a while. He said, “I didn’t have any money so, my father had been sending money, but then he quit. He stopped sending money” (P. 1, lines 94-95, 4). Faith Architect described his experience as follows:

So, all the money that was coming in was coming to me but it was being used to pay the bills. That year I turned eighteen and there was no more money. That’s when it really got bad, so we got evicted from the apartment as well and then we kind of stayed at motels from scraping and saving, so that’s when the homelessness began because we didn’t have anything, so we were kind of doing nights in hotels here, trying to get thirty dollars here, staying in a hotel. Come home and do my homework and try to focus. You’re not going to be as focused as you were, cause there’s a lot going on at the time. We’d go to hotels, extended stay, little kitchenettes so we could eat. We’d go get thirty- nine cent cheeseburgers, McDonald’s. Couple of days we didn’t have anything but as much as we could, we tried to eat. But we weren’t going to a homeless shelter, we just... I refused and so we ended up not having enough money to pay for a hotel at one point” (P. 1, lines 96-108, 4-5).

A lady who attended his church temporarily welcomed him and his brother into her home. Faith Architect’s brother found another job and his father was able to send money again. “I was able to eat lunch at that point. I went through a period between my junior and senior year, eating lunch was kind of difficult, trying to scrounge enough money” (P. 1, lines 113-114, 5).

Throughout this time, Faith Architect was encouraged by his mother's desire for him to complete his education. Her concern regarding his education fueled his determination to graduate from high school and go on to college:

I knew there was no option of dropping out, no option of not going to college.

She told me that she was getting progressively worse. That if anything happened

I needed to go finish my education, so that was always in the back of my mind

(P. 1, lines 156-158, 7)

By graduating from high school with his class, Faith Architect was able to realize the goal his mother had set for him. Challenges not shared by his housed peers faced him as obstacles, roadblocks interfering with his ability to address his coursework. He missed the peace of mind that comes with the security of living in your own residence, "It was pretty rough. Simple things that, you know, you take for granted, like washing clothes. If you can barely afford to eat, you can't wash your clothes" (P. 1, lines 116-117, 5). Faith Architect remembers preparing to go to his prom amidst the barriers of homelessness. He and his older brother were living in motels and hotels near the high school he attended. He said, "I got ready for the prom in a Motel 6" (P. 1, lines 114-115, 5). Despite all this, Faith Architect was able to graduate from high school with his graduating class and he attended college "I knew I had to keep moving forward" (P. 1, line 159, 7).

Faith Architect set three goals for himself. He planned to participate in the Olympics, to have a family, and to give back to the community. Injuries that kept him from participating in football and track during his senior year in high school also

hindered him from realizing his dream of qualifying for the Olympics but he said, “The latter two goals I have been able to achieve. I’m married and we have a child and one on the way” (P. 1, line 217, 9). Faith Architect’s family is precious to him. He is already planning for his children’s future. He shared that he has a peaceful home, “Once I became a success, I wanted to give back. I wasn’t sure at the time how or what I wanted to do, but I wanted to try to make life easier, especially giving to my community because it’s rough” (P. 1, lines 211-213, 9). One way that Faith Architect gives back is by rebuilding communities. He is currently involved in redeveloping African American neighborhoods in urban areas. Faith Architect is interested in hearing about how communities once thrived, particularly from people who have resided in the areas. He enjoys discovering the history of the community and redeveloping it in order to make it attractive to businesses and residences once again. He said, “We’ve been building houses. We’ve built about 125 houses already, and we’re in the process of building 12 right now” (P. 1, lines 268-269, 11). His final comment to me was, “My life has come full circle, because I went from being homeless to building houses. That’s my goal” (P. 1, lines 273-274, 11).

Participant Two: Modest Gentleman

Modest Gentleman is a 41 year old White male who experienced episodic homelessness as a youth. Quitting high school, he left his home in the suburbs of a city in southeast Texas for the promise of employment on a boat docked in Miami, Florida. Rather than working on a boat in a tropical paradise, Modest Gentleman found himself

living on the streets of Miami, struggling to survive. He now has a successful career, and he has earned his GED. He and his family reside in a rural community in southeast Texas and he is the father of 16 year old and an eight month old daughters.

I waited in the parking lot of a local restaurant to meet Modest Gentleman. His occupation lends itself to travel and hectic schedules, but on this day, he was leaving town for a family reunion out of state. After meeting, I purchased a meal for him at a fast food restaurant and he then followed me back to my residence. We sat at the kitchen table and visited while Modest Gentleman ate his lunch. Much of our conversation was about family. Modest Gentleman and I reviewed the consent form and he indicated that he did not mind being audio taped.

Family is very important to Modest Gentleman. He shared that he and his parents are still very close. When speaking of his family he stated, “We’ve had a lot of love in the family” (P. 2, line 12, 1). His father worked in the oil fields and was away from home much of the time. His mother went to college after Modest Gentleman and his brothers were born in order to become a legal secretary. His family moved from Mississippi to southern Louisiana prior to his parents’ divorce. The divorce of his parents deeply impacted his life. Modest Gentleman and his brother resided with their mother until they were teenagers, at which point they moved to Texas to live with their father:

We all have gotten very close now that I went through my rebellious years. We stay in contact a lot. My mom and my dad aren’t just my mom and dad. It’s my mom and dad that are my best friends now (P. 2, lines 34-36, 2).

Modest Gentleman attributed the events leading to his first experience of homelessness to the promise of employment in Miami. He stated that at the age of 16, he didn't want to listen to his parents:

I guess I had to learn things for myself, you know, hardheaded. Stubbornness. I just didn't wanna hear what my dad said, and I had to go find out for myself. So I went down there and found out the hard way. Got into some trouble (P. 2, lines 48-53, 1-2)

His relationship with his father has grown over the years. Although he was away working in the oilfields much of his life, he knew his father loved him:

He loved us, but he was in the oilfield. Therefore, he went overseas. He was gone a lot. I didn't see him until he was out of the oilfield. Now, I see and talk to him a lot. I stay a state away, but I still talk to him at least once a week. If he's got a problem he calls me. If I've got any problems, I call him. You know, we kind of lace each other up. (P. 2, lines 84-87, 4)

This relationship has remained a constant in Modest Gentleman's life. He said, "It's great to have somebody to talk to like that. Everybody needs that" (P. 2, line 90, 4).

Modest Gentleman's experiences in Florida were not what he had expected. Without employment or a place to stay, he found himself at the mercy of the streets of Miami. Residing in cardboard boxes, guided by homeless men referred to as "winos" for advice about how to survive, he found himself desperate. Few people stopped to offer money for a meal:

To be honest with you, the winos are the ones that helped me. They didn't have... they didn't have much money at all livin' on the streets. For a few months there, they put me on point about what I needed to do and how I needed to do it. I've lived in cardboard boxes you know, here and there. In the corners and alleyways down there. (P. 2, lines 55-59, 3)

When reflecting on his experiences living on the streets as a teenager, he spoke of those who intervened on his behalf in some manner, and those who did not:

Humans are so self-centered automatically, they automatically think "me, me, me..." But there's some people out there that, even though you have to be that way these days, you have to think about number one, but they don't, they had it to spare, they had it to offer and it was very nice. It affected my life. It made me a stronger person. It made me the person that I am now (P. 2, lines 67-71, 3).

Modest Gentleman earned his GED after relocating to southeast Texas. He stated that his mother valued education. Although, she herself quit school in high school, she eventually returned to school, attended college, and now has a career as a legal secretary. Providing for his family and making a home are his primary concerns. Family is the focal point of his life. His happiest memories are the birth of his two daughters:

I've been so busy trying to provide for me and my family, I haven't had really time to go back into any college or anything, stuff like that. Paying the bills and putting food on the table is priority number one. Making it from place to place, making sure we have a place. Would I like to go back to school? Yes, I got my GED, General Education Equivalence diploma, and it'd be nice but I just don't

feel like I have the time, the bills are due, and somebody's always needing money, so I have to do what I gotta do (P. 2, lines 173-180,7-8)

Participant Three: Optimistic Survivor

Optimistic Survivor is a 48 year old White female. She experienced episodic homelessness both as a child and youth, which led to her withdrawing from high school. Later, she attended classes at a local high school in order to earn her GED. At the time of the interview, she and her family lived in a community in southeast Texas along the Gulf Coast. Hurricane Ike destroyed their home. Therefore she and her family subsequently relocated temporarily to a townhouse apartment complex. Several families in the apartment complex reside there because of the destruction of their homes during Hurricane Ike. Optimistic Survivor's home is being rebuilt.

Optimistic Survivor opened her home as a location for our interviews and prepared a quiet place for us to speak confidentially. We had spoken previously about the interview and I explained the consent form at that time. However, I reviewed the form again before we began the interview. We discussed the option of audio taping the interview and she agreed to be audio recorded. I was concerned about her sharing painful memories during the interview. In a previous conversation prior to the interview, she appeared to be nervous. She hesitated then spoke quickly, and she gestured as if to emphasize the emotions she expressed with her words. She was apprehensive and appeared uncomfortable as she spoke. She shared very personal and painful memories and was uncertain as to whether she should refer to them during the interview. At the time, I stated that she was not required to say anything that made her ill at ease. I

reassured her that if she decided she was uncomfortable with statements made during the interview, she could tell me and I would not divulge the information in the final document. After being told this, she was visibly more relaxed and appeared to be reassured. With this in mind, I anticipated an emotional interview and tried my best to create a supportive atmosphere.

When describing her family, Optimistic Survivor credited her mother with keeping the family together. She described both her father and stepfather as abusive, and her family as dysfunctional:

Growing up in my house was a challenge at best. It was very difficult, but I think it made us stronger people. When you see the kind of abuse that we saw growing up, how we lived growing up... The daddy won't keep a job, so the Catholic Charities are providing Christmas and our clothes and a roof over our heads and food on the table. It has a very deep emotional impact on a person. You either learned to tough it up and survive, or you're sunk. It wasn't easy, but we lived through it, obviously. It was not good (P. 3, lines 12-17, 1)

Optimistic Survivor stated that her father rarely kept a job and her mother was often unable to pay the rent. Her first memory of feeling truly homeless was when the family moved to Texas:

The first one I really remember was when we moved to Texas and when we got here, we had really no place to go when we got here. We came in a car with a little eight-by-ten U-Haul, and that's all we could bring with us. I remember sleeping a few nights in the car before we finally managed to find my uncle and

he let us stay there with him. I don't even know how long before we got our little rent house (P. 3, lines 48-52, 2)

After relocating to Texas, her parents divorced, and her mother remarried. Optimistic Survivor stated that her stepfather was also abusive. She left home and stopped attending school in high school. When she tried to return to school the following year, she stated that she had lost interest. School didn't seem relevant to her, "During this period, I ended up getting married and I got pregnant right after I got married and I was sick all during the pregnancy. Frankly, by that point, I had other priorities and had lost interest" (P. 3, lines 132-134, 4).

Optimistic Survivor later attended a local high school in order to earn her GED. She was interested in possibly pursuing a career in nursing and knew she needed to have her GED to attend college. She also wanted to prove to herself that she could meet graduation requirements as defined by the state of Texas. She said, "To know that I didn't graduate, but I went back and I met the requirements that the state of Texas had for me to say, yes, I finished this. And I needed to be able to finish that for myself" (P. 3, lines 183-185, 6). Optimistic Survivor emphasized the importance of family in her life. Her favorite memories were of time shared with family members. She is currently working at a job that she enjoys. Her goals are related predominately to her family life:

My future goals? I guess other than rebuilding my house, raising my children, the rest of my children, to be good, solid, citizens. Growing old with my husband, seeing my grandbabies, thirty years down the road, bringing me the

piece of toast with the grape jelly and the cup of tea, like we used to do for my husband's grandmother. That sort of thing. (P. 3, lines 226-229, 7)

Participant Four: Prosperous Matriarch

Prosperous Matriarch is a 51 year old White female. She experienced episodic homelessness as a child and was homeless during her senior year of high school. She remained enrolled in high school and graduated with her graduating class. Prosperous Matriarch lives in southeast Texas. She and her husband own their own business.

A friend opened her home in order for me to conduct the interviews with Prosperous Matriarch. I was particularly concerned about her interview because of the nature of some of her experiences, which she had shared with me in a previous meeting. Prosperous Matriarch's memories of her childhood and youth were far from pleasant. I told her that she didn't have to tell me anything that made her uncomfortable, and that she could skip any questions if she wished to or could have me delete portions or all of her testimonial from the record. She seemed satisfied with my explanation. When Prosperous Matriarch arrived for the actual interview, she seemed cheerful and smiled. Our initial conversation was casual and relaxed. Although I had verbally described the informed consent form previously, I reviewed it again. She indicated that she agreed to be interviewed and gave her written consent. She agreed to be audio taped as well.

Prosperous Matriarch's childhood memories included not knowing if there would be food to eat or whether her family would have a home. She witnessed her mother being abused by her father, and she was abused by him as well. Prosperous Matriarch

and her family experienced repeated episodes of homelessness as the family struggled to survive over the years. When she was 12, her family moved to Texas because they were unable to pay for their home. Eventually, her mother and father got divorced. She described her family prior to her parents' divorce:

My family, first of all, was a blended family because there was my half-brother and then us three girls. My dad... was an alcoholic. My mom worked. She had to work. Lots of times there was food in the house. Lot of times there wasn't. Dad always favored my brother, because his family put a real importance on boys. There was a lot of physical abuse. My dad used to beat my mom. So we saw all of that and lived through all of the fights and the separations and back at that time it was hard for women who had children to make it on their own, and my grandparents were of the belief, their famous saying was, "You've made your bed and now lay in it." We did the thing of having to hide from bill collectors and that whole nine yards. We didn't know half the time whether we were gonna have a home or not, or food (P. 4, lines 9-19, 1)

Prosperous Matriarch's mother remarried. Her stepfather did not allow her, her sisters, or her mother to have any friends. She described the man as being controlling and abusive. When she was 16, her mother suffered from depression. Her older sister married and left home when Prosperous Matriarch was 17, and it became her responsibility to manage the household. She juggled school, serving as an officer in a school organization and being a member of the honor society, while paying the bills, doing the family shopping, cleaning the house, and preparing the family's meals.

Against her stepfather's wishes, she met and planned to marry the young man who later became her husband. Her stepfather then began abusing her. Prosperous Matriarch described her stepfather's obsession with her as she embodied her mother's role in the family:

I was running the house. I was doing all the grocery shopping and cooking. I went and paid bills, you know, did the whole nine yards, and he just kind of moved on in there and I guess he fantasized that... I was the woman of the house or something. (P. 4, lines 47-49, 2)

As his obsession with her increased, her stepfather's jealousy over her relationship with her boyfriend flared. Prosperous Matriarch received an invitation to her boyfriend's aunt's wedding. She asked her mother and stepfather if she could attend. The result was an altercation that included her stepfather brutally attacking her:

That's the first time I ever stood up, and not just been this total obedient person, and so he got all mad and like I said, knocked the crap out of me. I went to school the next day with a black eye and busted lip and scratches all over me (P. 4, lines 62-65, 2).

Prosperous Matriarch left home after this brutal assault and stayed for a few weeks with her boyfriend's family. She remained in school and confided in one of her teachers. She related, "I lived with my teacher until I graduated. And matter of fact, she's the one that altered my prom dress for me and all that kind of stuff" (P. 4, lines 68-69, 2). Prosperous Matriarch graduated as an officer in a school club, a member of the honor society, and then received her license as a cosmetologist following graduation.

After graduation, she lived with her best girlfriend and her husband until she and her boyfriend married a few months later. She described school as her escape from her home life, saying, “I threw myself into school, which was like I said, I think a saving grace for me” (P. 4, line 102, 3). Prosperous Matriarch and her husband now have three children, and they own a successful business.

Participant Five: Rebel Bride

Rebel Bride is a 23 year old White female who endured homelessness during high school. She quit high school and earned her GED at a local college. She has since been working in her family’s business. She purchased her own home and is planning to get married. Rebel Bride shared that she had a happy childhood. Her parents made sure that she and her siblings never did without. She stated that she is very close to her family, “We have a very close knit family. Everybody talks to everybody. We have, I guess, the average problems you’re going to see in any family” (P. 5, lines 8-9, 1).

Rebel Bride was 17 when she left home. She attributed her experience of homelessness to her being rebellious. She stated that she didn’t want to listen to anyone, and that she just wanted to do what she wanted to do, “I was the rebellious one. I was always the bad girl. And I just... I became out of control. I really did, at some point, because I didn’t want to listen to anything” (P. 5, lines 33-35, 2). Rebel Bride described calling her mother to let her know she had left home, “I actually left in the middle of the night one night, whenever, I was living with my boyfriend, called my mom, let her know that I was gone. She was, she was devastated. I know she was (P. 5, lines 36-38, 2).

Rebel Bride stated that she suffered from depression while in high school and that she was taking medication to help her deal with the condition. She was also experiencing problems at school. She was told that more coursework was required before she could graduate, and that her graduation would be delayed another year. After leaving her boyfriend's home, Rebel Bride moved in with friends. She resided with friends for a week and then moved into her sister's home. She remained in her sister's home for several months. She had quit attending high school about two weeks after leaving her boyfriend's home, and ended up never returning. While residing with her sister she was mandated by the court to earn her GED, and so she attended GED classes at a local college. "I got my GED. And actually, I think the reason that I got it so quickly was that it was a court order" (P. 5, lines 125-126, 5). Rebel Bride earned her GED in just a few months. She has since attended college, pursuing a career in the medical field. She shared that she currently is working in her family's business. She plans to run the family business in the future. She added, "I have a house and I'm getting married" (P. 5, line 107, 4). When reflecting on her experiences pertaining to homelessness, Rebel Bride stated that she regretted her decisions, but she believes that she learned from them, "I made mistakes that I wish I wouldn't have, but I learned from them and I think I'm a better person for it" (P. 5, lines 142-143, 5).

Participant Six: Sensitive Citizen

Sensitive Citizen is an 18 year old African American male and a resident at a shelter for homeless youth when I spoke with him. He was born in the Bahamas, and he and his family moved to the United States to live with his younger siblings' father and his family. His siblings' father and the man's family both abused both Sensitive Citizen and his mother. He stated that they were treated cruelly because he and his mother were not citizens of the United States. The experiences he shared pertaining to his childhood and youth were of being abused and unwanted. He experienced episodic homelessness as a youth. He stated that the first time he ran away from home he returned only because he was hungry.

Nestled among grassy knolls and tree-lined streets, in the shadows of the towering skyscrapers of the downtown metropolitan area, the shelter complex exists as a safe harbor in the storm. Buses traverse these streets providing transportation for pedestrians, and access to job sites for youth residing in the shelter. On the day of our meeting, automobiles lined the streets, and were parallel parked one after the other around the complex. After parking my car, I walked to the building where I was scheduled to sign in. Upon receiving admittance, I was instructed to proceed to a multistory building beyond the gated area. I walked along a path bounded by a modest garden and a grassy lawn until I entered the secured parking area leading to the residential center. Residential advisers greeted me at the entrance of the building and escorted me to a waiting area. A residential adviser spoke with me regarding the

schedule of potential participants and suggested that the library might be a quiet place for the interviews to take place. He escorted me to the library.

Although he was not scheduled to speak with me until the following afternoon, a residential adviser stated that Sensitive Citizen was prepared to speak with me now. I agreed to see him, and soon the residential adviser returned with him. Sensitive Citizen nodded a welcome, shook my hand, and smiled as we were introduced. The resident adviser spoke very favorably about Sensitive Citizen before he excused himself. As he sat in a chair across from me, I explained the purpose of the study. He agreed to participate and to be audio taped. I stated that a pseudonym would be used to refer to him in the study. He was accustomed to the use of pseudonyms when speaking to people regarding the shelter. Sensitive Citizen described abuse in each memory he shared regarding his family:

We came out here. It was okay, but we're brought up kind of hard. I've seen my Mom get thrown out a window, hit in the face with vases, beat up daily, pushed outside naked. Where me and her both was naked and had to sleep on a big ole two-by-four board, and had to sleep outside on an ant bed. It was kind of hard growing up. What don't kill you'll make you stronger (P. 6, lines 11-16, 1)

Sensitive Citizen further explained that his family was not a supportive family that shared holiday traditions or get togethers for family gatherings. There was no bond uniting them. He explained, "Me and my family aren't like a family, we're an if you bother me, I'll stab you, kind of family" (P. 6, lines 41-42, 2).

Sensitive Citizen first left home when he was 15 and he stated that he only returned home because he was hungry. He left home again at the age of 16. When his mother discovered he was living at a friend's home, she demanded that he return home or she would contact the police. While he was at the library one day, the police found Sensitive Citizen and returned him to his home. When he was 17, he was thrown out of the house following an argument between him, his mother and her husband. The argument was about him not being allowed to sleep on beds at the house:

She told me I was not allowed to sleep in the beds no more. There were only two beds in there, she had a two bedroom apartment, there was two beds. I slept in one, my brother slept in one and my sister would sleep on the couch, but she stayed up all night watching cartoons. She finally told me I wasn't allowed to sleep in the beds no more. So I go and sit on one of the beds. She said, "Didn't I, didn't you hear what I just told you? Get up!" And her husband said, "that fat b---- wanna play? Tell his a-- to get the f--- out!" (P. 6, lines 55-60, 2)

Sensitive Citizen then stayed in the homes of friends. At age 17 he was arrested, and while in jail he attended GED classes. He stated that during five years of high school he only earned eight credits toward graduation. He made the decision to pursue his GED while he was in jail. Sensitive Citizen passed the GED during the first test administration. He was impressed that the GED could replace all the credits he needed to earn in order to graduate. Although he was proud of his accomplishment, he stated that he regretted not getting to attend prom and graduate with class of peers from high

school. Currently, Sensitive Citizen is pursuing citizenship, and he hopes to soon acquire gainful employment..

Participant Seven: Scholarly Model

Scholarly Model is an 18 year old African American female. She experienced episodic homelessness during her youth, and graduated from high school while residing at a shelter for homeless youth. I returned to the shelter complex and awaited the arrival of potential participants. A residential adviser opened the door of the library and said Scholarly Model was ready to speak with me. A slender young lady entered the library, and extended her hand to shake mine as we were introduced. Her manners were impeccable, yet her demeanor was serious when she spoke. Her attire was very stylish and she carried herself gracefully, with perfect posture. She sat in the huge overstuffed chair holding a petite purse and nervously played with the purse straps as we spoke.

Scholarly Model listened carefully to my explanation of the informed consent form before signing. She had no objection to being audio taped. She watched the tape recorder as I turned it on and I asked again if she minded being audio taped. She stated that she did not mind. Scholarly Model appeared to choose her words carefully and was very serious about her responses. Eventually she appeared to relax, as she ceased fidgeting with her purse straps.

Scholarly Model described her family as dysfunctional. She stated that her mother had been abused as a child that the woman in turn beat her frequently. She remembered being beaten daily when she was in the third grade, "I used to get beat

every day. Every single day... and I don't trust nobody. I don't trust my family. I don't trust anybody 'cause they let me down" (P. 7, lines 11-13, 1).

Scholarly Model described living with several different relatives throughout her life. She grew up in her mother's home, but she wanted to get away from her mother. Her first experience with homelessness was when her mother threw her out of the house. She moved into a friend's home. She hoped to reside with her friend until graduating from high school, but transportation to school from her friend's home was a problem. There was no mass transit system available and the distance was too far to walk. She stated that she had problems passing the TAKS test. Her mother believed she would not pass and therefore would never graduate, but she was determined to pass the TAKS test and graduate from high school. During her senior year, she attended three different high schools, "I went to three different schools and I was running back and forth from my mom's to my granny's then I finally stayed with my granny until she kicked me out because of a boyfriend" (P. 7, lines 98-100, 4).

Scholarly Model eventually passed the TAKS test. She then became a resident at the shelter and attended school at a local high school that she described as being very supportive. She stated that the school was like a family. The principal paid the fees for her to attend senior activities. She graduated and received her high school diploma. Scholarly Model has set several goals for her future. She wants to find a job and attend college part-time:

I'm trying to get a job, 'cause you have to get a job. Once I get this job, whatever job this might be, I'm going to try to go to school part time. I'm trying to be a model part time too.(P. 7, lines 155-157, 5)

She no longer resides at the shelter. Scholarly Model aspires to becoming a model.

Each participant is extraordinary. While they have homelessness in their pasts in common, their experiences and lived events were as unique as they are as individuals. However, a certain bond unites them: They have struggled with homelessness, yet managed to either earn their high school diplomas or GEDs. I hope that others can learn from the testimonies these volunteers shared and join me in celebrating their accomplishments. Review Table 4.2 for information regarding participants' homeless experiences as related to elementary and secondary education and their educational triumphs.

Table 4.2 Participants' Periods of Homelessness and Educational Achievements

Participant	Name	Academic Achievement	Time During Which Homelessness Occurred
P. 1	Faith Architect	Graduate	Secondary Education – High School
P. 2	Modest Gentleman	GED	Secondary Education – High School
P. 3	Optimistic Survivor	GED	Elementary Education – Childhood Secondary Education – High School
P. 4	Prosperous Matriarch	Graduate	Elementary Education – Childhood Secondary Education – High School
P. 5	Rebel Bride	GED	Secondary Education – High School
P. 6	Sensitive Citizen	GED	Secondary Education – High School
P. 7	Scholarly Model	Graduate	Secondary Education – High School

CHAPTER V

MIRROR IMAGE: WHAT DO THE VOICES OF ADULTS WHO EARNED A HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA OR GED TELL US ABOUT THEIR LIVES AS A HOMELESS YOUTH?

In previous studies, the experiences of homeless children and youth have been reported predominately through their mothers, caseworkers or other social services providers. While these investigations have provided valuable information and insight into the lives of homeless children and youth, they generally have reported these individuals' experiences and perceptions only indirectly and thus have been filtered through particular lenses. For example, governmental agencies may be concerned with particular results and report these in the form of numbers or statistics. All too often, the actual people who are the focus of such research become lost.

In contrast, the participants of this study related their personal recollections of their lives directly to me, in their own words. One of the hallmarks of qualitative research is that it provides the opportunity to gather thick descriptions. Typically this means that the qualitative researcher faces copious amounts of data to be analyzed, and must discern which portions of the data are most salient when reporting results. In order to allow the opinions of the participants of this study to shine through, I have made abundant use of direct quotations in order to allow the reader to gain an understanding of the discussions, and to hopefully allow the voices of participants to be included in this important conversation.

Two research questions were developed to provide a framework for this study. The first question pertained to experiences as viewed by the individual. The first question will be the focus of this chapter: What do the voices of adults who received a high school diploma or general education development tell us about their life experiences as a homeless student? While investigating this question and analyzing interview data, several categories emerged. These categories were; the family, the road to homelessness, and homelessness. Refer to Figure 5.1, which displays these categories.



Figure 5.1 Participant Experiences

Family

The Influence of the Mother

The importance of family, whether supportive or destructive, is a major theme that emerged in the data analysis. Mothers in particular played key roles in the families. Although Faith Architect's mother passed away while he was in high school, his determination to complete high school was fueled largely by his mother's desire for him to graduate. Modest Gentleman and his parents were close and their divorce was a pivotal time in his life. Modest Gentleman stated that his parents really weren't happy together and he lovingly described their differences, but he added that their divorce was the saddest event in his life. After having grown up in his mother's home, Modest Gentleman and his brother were suddenly sent to live with their father when he was a teenager. Modest Gentleman stated that this move was due to their misbehaviors at home. Eventually he refused to listen to his father and left that home in search of employment in Florida. Nonetheless, Modest Gentleman described a loving relationship with both of his parents and referred to his parents as being his best friends. He said he came from a good family and that he does not blame his parents for his having to leave their households. Rather, he considers his experiences to be the consequences mistakes he made because he was rebellious. Although, his relationship with his mother was strained as a youth, he described his current relationship with her as a loving one.

Like Modest Gentleman, Rebel Bride reported having a good family that was very close. She attributed her homeless experiences to being rebellious and not wanting to listen to anyone. Modest Gentleman and Rebel Bride both stated that they regretted

leaving home, and each indicated that they know they caused their families to worry about them at the time. Rebel Bride spoke of her mother and her concern that her mother would be worried when she left home. She stated that she knew she caused pain to the ones she loved by leaving, particularly to her mother. This is something she continues to regret.

Although Optimistic Survivor and Prosperous Matriarch both survived abusive fathers and stepfathers, they described their mother as the one who intervened on their behalf. Prosperous Matriarch's mother stayed with her violent husband until she discovered that he abused their daughter, at which point she divorced him. After remarrying, Prosperous Matriarch's mother found herself once again married to an abusive man who forced her to submit to rigid demands. He controlled whom she spoke to, where she was allowed to go, and what she was allowed to do. She was not allowed to work or retain friendships. She was cut off from the world around her. Prosperous Matriarch's mother eventually suffered from depression, and as the abuse progressed, her mother became dependent on her to help with managing the house. Finally, when Prosperous Matriarch wanted to attend a wedding, there was a catastrophic family argument. Prosperous Matriarch reported that her mother and stepfather argued with her. Ultimately, her stepfather brutally attacked her. Prosperous Matriarch finally reached a point where she could no longer tolerate witnessing and experiencing such abuse, and she left home. She described her mother as the one who intervened to attempt to feed and shelter her and her siblings, yet she described her mother as suffering from

depression, being heavily medicated, and unable to run the household when Prosperous Matriarch was a youth.

Optimistic Survivor described her mother as “awesome.” She said that her mother was the rescuer, the one who held the family together in spite of being abused in front of her children by both Optimistic Survivor’s father and her stepfather. While Optimistic Survivor and Prosperous Matriarch both described their families as dysfunctional when they were children and youth, they praised their mothers for having the strength to provide for them.

Scholarly Model’s testimony differed from Optimistic Survivor’s and Prosperous Matriarch’s in that she described her mother as the abuser. Scholarly Model described her family dynamics as dysfunctional. According to Scholarly Model, her mother was abused as a child and therefore she abused Scholarly Model when she was a child. She stated that her mother beat her daily in third grade and that she has spent much of her life trying to get away from her mother. In Scholarly Model’s life, her mother was not the rescuer or the savior. She was the aggressor whom sent her on a path to homelessness.

Initially in his testimonials, Sensitive Citizen’s relationship with his mother was one of shared abuse suffered at the hands of both the father of his younger siblings and his family. Targeted by this man and his family, he and his mother were both abused. Yet as Sensitive Man shared his experiences as a youth, he described his mother as being supportive of her husband rather than her son. For example, his mother would not allow Sensitive Citizen to sleep on beds, nor did she intervene when her husband kicked him out of the house.

The Influence of the Father Figure

Faith Architect's father was rarely mentioned. Following his mother's death, Faith Architect's father sent him money for a brief period of time. He stopped sending money, then began sending money again, and as a result Faith Architect was able to eat more often, so dependent was he upon these small remittances.

Modest Gentleman's father worked overseas in oil fields while Modest Gentleman was growing up. He was described as a hard working man and a good father. Although he was away from home for much of Modest Gentleman's life, he said he knew that his father loved him. Modest Gentleman stated that he came from a good home but that his parents' divorce greatly impacted his life. Modest Gentleman and his brother were sent to live with their father in Texas due to their misbehavior as teenagers. There was some conflict and Modest Gentleman stated that he didn't want to listen to his father and so he left home. He said that this was a mistake on his part, and attributed it to his own stubbornness. Modest Gentleman and his father's relationship survived those turbulent years and he now speaks with his father weekly, sometimes daily, and travels to see him when he can. He still considers both his father and mother to be his best friends.

Optimistic Survivor stated that her father was an alcoholic who frequently lost jobs and did not provide for the family. She described her father as abusive to her mother. Her parents divorced when she was a child, and her mother later remarried. Optimistic Survivor's stepfather was also revealed to be an alcoholic who was abusive.

Prosperous Matriarch likewise described her father as an alcoholic who was abusive to her mother, a man who couldn't maintain employment and was unable to

support the family. He began abusing Prosperous Matriarch sexually when she was 12 years old. When her mother discovered that Prosperous Matriarch's father had been abusing her, she divorced him. Prosperous Matriarch's mother later married again, and her new stepfather molested and beat her when she was in high school.

Rebel Bride described her family as a good family. Although she left home, she did not mention any conflict with her father. Rebel Bride stated that she regretted worrying her family when she left home.

Sensitive Citizen's father was not discussed. He reported that one of his sisters went to live with her father and in return Sensitive Citizen, his mother, and siblings were able to come to the United States. In America they resided with his siblings' father. Sensitive Citizen and his mother were abused by his siblings' father and the father's family. Eventually, Sensitive Citizen's mother remarried, and he was ejected from the house by his stepfather when he was a teenager.

Scholarly Model was abused by her father when trying to speak with him. Her mother blamed her for the abuse. Scholarly Model's brothers, stepfather, and her mother's boyfriends all sexually abused her when she lived at home.

It is evident from their stories that the participants had widely varying domestic backgrounds. Unfortunately, some of them suffered physical and/or sexual abuse at the hands of either family members, extended family, or familial relations. Often such abuse was the single most compelling factor in their leaving home or becoming homeless. Other participants described their home life in glowing terms, and specifically stated that parents or siblings were the people most responsible for their successes. In either case,

whether positive or negative, the influence of family resonated through each of their narratives, and thus family emerged as prominent theme during data analysis, as depicted in Figure 5.2 below.

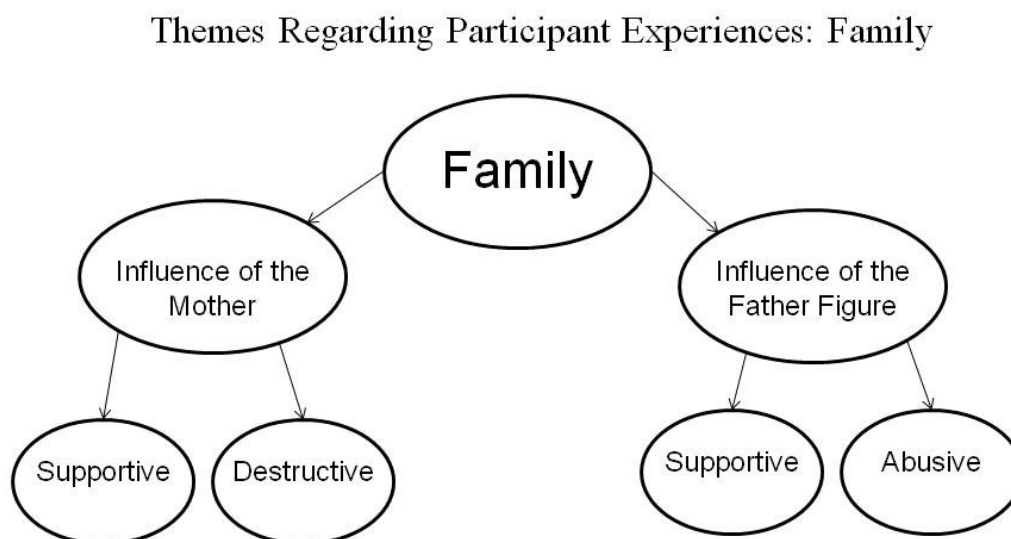


Figure 5.2 Participant Experiences: Family

The Road to Homelessness

Shane's Four Categories of Homelessness

Homeless children and youth were defined by Shane (1996) as falling into four categories; familial, unaccompanied, street youth, and babies. Of the four categories of homelessness mentioned by Shane, three apply to participants of this study. These categories are familial, unaccompanied, and street youth. Familial homelessness

pertains to being homeless with an adult. Unaccompanied homeless children and youth are not in the company of an adult. Runaway youth who voluntarily leave home and thrown away youth who are told to leave home are both included in this category. Street youth are homeless youth residing on the streets. See Table 5.1, which reviews the categories of homelessness each participant experienced.

Table 5.1 Participants' Categories of Homelessness.

Participant	Categories of Homelessness	Elementary/Secondary
P. 1	Familial	Mother died Brother lost job Senior year (high school)
P. 2	Runaway Unaccompanied youth Street youth	Sought work in Miami Age 16 (high school)
P. 3	Familial Unaccompanied youth (Runaway)	As a child (elementary) As a youth (high school)
P. 4	Familial Unaccompanied youth (Runaway)	As a child (elementary) As a youth (high school-senior year)
P. 5	Unaccompanied youth (Runaway)	High school (junior year)
P. 6	Unaccompanied youth (Runaway & "thrown away") Street youth	Age 16 (high school)
P. 7	Unaccompanied youth (Runaway & "thrown away")	High school

Three participants shared stories of familial homelessness. Faith Architect and his brother were evicted from their apartment following a series of deaths in the family, including the death of their mother. Unable to pay for the family's apartment, Faith Architect and his older brother were evicted. Optimistic Survivor and Prosperous

Matriarch shared childhood memories of their families being forced to leave their homes because they could not pay the rent or bills.

Other than Faith Architect, each participant in this study was also unaccompanied while they were homeless. Modest Gentleman left home at the age of 16 in an effort to get a job working on a boat in Miami. The promised job fell through and he ultimately lived on the streets of Miami as an unaccompanied runaway youth, where he managed to survive for several months. Living in a cardboard box, he found himself at the mercy of strangers for meals and money.

According to Shane's definition (1996), Sensitive Citizen and Scholarly Model can be considered unaccompanied youth because both were ejected from their homes. Following an argument with his mother and her husband, Sensitive Citizen was told to leave his home when he was 17 years old. Scholarly Model lived with her mother, and her grandmother for much of her life. Her grandmother ejected her from her home following an argument about a boyfriend.

Optimistic Survivor, Prosperous Matriarch, Rebel Bride, Sensitive Citizen, and Scholarly Model have all been unaccompanied, runaway youth. Rebel Bride said she left home because she was rebellious. She lived with several different friends before finally moving in with her sister. Optimistic Survivor, Prosperous Matriarch, Sensitive Citizen and Scholarly Model left home because of abuse. Sensitive Citizen ran away several times. He described how his mother had the police bring him home once:

And when I was 16, I ran away. I ran away, I tried to run away for good. My mom found out where I was by going places that she knew I hung out in. She

found me at a friend's house and told me if I don't come back she was calling the cops. I went to the library and the cops came and got me. They tapped me on the shoulder, called her and she came and picked me up. She had put a warrant. She had put a missing person's report out on me (P. 6, lines 45-50, 1)

See Table 5.2 for causes of homelessness among participants. It is evident that for many of the participants, conditions at home were so intolerable that they necessitated their leaving. Others chose to leave home because they did not care for the demands parents/guardians placed upon them. Two of the study members stated that they left home because they were rebellious and did not want to be told what to do with their lives, a decision they seemingly regret in hindsight. In the case of some participants, parents forced them to leave home. Once they left home, each did the best he or she could to obtain temporary residences and to make ends meet. Table 5.3, which follows in the text, refers to the causes of homelessness among the female portion of the study population in particular.

Table 5.2 Causes of Homelessness Among Participants

Participant	Gender	Causes of Homelessness
P. 1	M	Eviction (Mother's death/ Brother's loss of job)
P. 2	M	Runaway
P. 3	F	As a child (family unable to pay rent) Runaway (as a youth)
P. 4	F	As a child (family unable to pay rent) Interpersonal conflict (runaway youth)
P. 5	F	Runaway
P. 6	M	Interpersonal conflict (runaway/thrown away youth)
P. 7	F	Interpersonal conflict (runaway /thrown away youth)

Shattered Dreams: Sexual Abuse

The road to homelessness may have appeared to have been a road to freedom for many of the female participants. Sadly, the majority of the women were molested by either a father, stepfather, or mother's boyfriend, and they left home in order to escape horrific circumstances. In addition, one had a mother who routinely physically abused her. Optimistic Survivor stated that she wasn't sure if her stepfather molested her siblings, but that he did molest her. She left home in high school, married, and eventually quit school. She stated that school had no meaning to her anymore, adding, "My family was very dysfunctional. My biological father was an alcoholic... and physically and emotionally abusive. My stepfather wasn't any better, he was a drunk. He was physically and emotionally and verbally and sexually abusive to us" (P. 3, lines 6-9, 1).

Prosperous Matriarch was molested by her own father as a child. The family had recently moved to Texas and she was “the new kid” in school. She soon began having problems in school:

We lost our home there in [state not mentioned] and had to move out in the middle of the night because there were bill collectors after us. That’s when we moved to Texas. My dad just... My dad was a drinker and after we moved to Texas, I was 12 I guess, and he sexually abused me. And I went through a real bad time in school because I kept it in for a long time. And whenever I started having problems in school, the school contacted Mom (P. 4, lines 20-24, 1)

After Prosperous Matriarch confided the situation to her mother, her mother divorced her father. Eventually her mother remarried. While Prosperous Matriarch was in high school, her mother suffered from depression so severely that she could not contribute to the household finances or even prepare meals for the family. Prosperous Matriarch, a senior in high school, managed the household, cooked, paid bills, and kept the family together. During this time, her stepfather began molesting her. He also did not allow her to have friends or to date, and he became so jealous of her fiancé that he repeatedly threatened to have him killed. She said, “My step-dad. Yeah, my step-dad... And that was kind of... I’d gone through it with my dad, you know. I never could understand that because he knew... My step-dad knew what had happened” (P. 4, lines 37-39, 2).

After a family argument, Prosperous Matriarch left home. She stated that her stepfather stalked her, walking the halls at her school to make sure she was not walking

to class with her fiancé, until her high school principal threw her stepfather out of the building. She came to school battered and bruised, her eye blackened from her stepfather's fists, scratch marks on her body. Prosperous Matriarch told her teacher what had happened, and her teacher spoke to the principal. She then lived with her teacher and her teacher's husband until she graduated from high school. Following her certification as a beautician, Prosperous Matriarch and her fiancé married.

Scholarly Model's birth father attempted to molest her. When she confided in her mother, Scholarly Model's mother believed she was lying. Scholarly Model could not understand why her own father would molest her. Her mother blamed her for being raped:

The first time that I ever like, really talked to my dad, he tried to rape me and I was, I was hurt. I was like man, you know, he played it off so well, 'cause he knows, he was talking to me like I'm his daughter and I'm talking to him like he's my dad and I didn't think nothing of it cause you know he never tried to do anything like that to me until that night he tried to rape me. And then, my mom, she blamed me for it. That's not the first time she blamed me for a grown man trying to molest me, 'cause my brothers had did it to me, for a long, a long... a long time. And she blamed me and I just started crying 'cause it's just like a cycle. A cycle that keeps going and then my grandmother, she believed it but she didn't want to let me go stay over there when I was about to get kicked out of there and I really needed her. She always does that. And my aunt, she just didn't believe it. She thought I was making stuff up and I was, and I was like "Why

would I make anything up like that?” I wouldn’t want to send nobody to jail by me lying, and that just hurt me. But I just, I just wrote a poem about it, let God handle it. That’s what I do to cope with it (P. 7, lines 112-124, 4)

Scholarly Model was also molested by her brothers, and even her mother’s boyfriend attempted to molest her. She lived with her grandmother temporarily, then went back to live with her mother, and later returned to her grandmother’s home. Scholarly Model often wrote in her journal about her experiences. Her mother read what she had written and argued with her about it. Finally, Scholarly Model came to live at a residential shelter for homeless youth.

Table 5.3 outlines the factors in the female participants becoming homeless. Their stories indicated a high incidence of physical and/or sexual abuse. Three of the four women (75%) interviewed had been victims of abuse at home.

Table 5.3 Causes of Homelessness: Female Participants

Participant	Gender	Causes of Homelessness
P. 3	F	As a child (family unable to pay rent) Interpersonal conflict (runaway - as youth) Molested by stepfather
P. 4	F	As a child (family unable to pay rent) Molested by father Interpersonal conflict (runaway – youth) Molested by step father
P. 5	F	Runaway Interpersonal conflict (runaway / thrown away – youth)
P. 7	F	Attempted rape by father Attempted rape by men Brothers “did it” to her Thrown away – Grandmother ejected her from her home

Following our interview, Scholarly Model went to her room and brought back a copy of a poem she had written. She shared her poem with me in the library of the shelter. The following is an excerpt from her poem, entitled *The Untold Story of Me*:

I try to forget about the past so I can last a little bit longer.

My attitude can't change. It's like an ongoing hunger.

Needing something to feed on.

Sometimes it's positive energy, sometimes it's negative.

People see my outer shell and think everything's okay,

But if they look deep enough my life looks like the color grey.

Molested at an early age, all I have inside is rage.

I never knew a talk with my dad, and when I did he wanted to take the

Little innocence I had.

I tell myself I can go through it.

I prayed.

I know there is a God, so now I care,

Listening to people.

But it goes in one ear.

I struggle on the inside.

My mom didn't have to say it point blank.

I knew she blamed me for what had happened.

She started yelling.

I felt like I was seven.

I'm not fussing at you,

Tears poured down and went to an empty bayou of my unheard cries.

Tears washed away by a daze.

(P. 7, lines 303-327, 10-11)

Homelessness

Living Temporarily with Friends or Family

Six of the seven participants stated that they had lived with friends or family while homeless. In most instances the living arrangements were temporary. Although residing primarily in hotels and motels, Faith Architect and his brother also stayed in the home of his godmother temporarily. Optimistic Survivor lived with friends before she was married. Prosperous Matriarch lived with her boyfriend's family, her high school teacher, and a recently married friend before marrying her fiancé. Rebel Bride lived with friends before coming to live with her sister. She lived temporarily with her sister and then moved back to her parents' home. Sensitive Citizen lived with friends periodically. Scholarly Model lived with friends and her grandmother.

Living on the Streets

On the streets of Miami, 16-year-old Modest Gentleman found himself living in a cardboard box. Addicted to alcohol and living on the streets, homeless men he referred to as winos helped him. Sharing what money they could find, they guided

Modest Gentleman as to where to find food and how to survive this harsh existence. Modest Gentleman struggled for a few months on the streets in Florida. Eventually, Modest Gentleman said he got into trouble. His vision of an adventurous life aboard a boat crumbled in what he had hoped would be his tropical paradise. The streets proved to be dangerous harbors for predators whose reign of terror awaited young men, and those alone with no means of support. Opportunities are limited on the streets, unless one wishes to participate in criminal activities in order to support oneself. Modest Gentleman shared very few details of these times, other than the fact that he struggled to survive and that when he felt things were the most desperate, someone would provide him with money or a meal so that he could eat. As an adult, Modest Gentleman underwent episodes of homelessness while living in a major metropolis in southeast Texas:

I've had hard times when I've been homeless [refers to city in southeast Texas, too, just livin' from day to day, minute to minute actually. Don't know where my next meal's gonna come from and always it seemed like, you know always it seemed like somebody's a, maybe a Godsend, I'd call it, would intervene if something would happen. Something good would happen, you know, I'd be able to get a meal one day, or meet a nice person that would help out. Help somebody that doesn't have it as good as you do or something. (p. 2, lines 61-71, 3)

Sensitive Citizen lived on the streets for awhile and had to steal food. He returned home after running away the first time because he was hungry. Sensitive

Citizen said he didn't like stealing food because it didn't make him feel good. In fact, he stated that stealing underscored the fact that he was homeless and further depressed him.

Figure 5.3 below depicts the participants' various routes to homelessness.

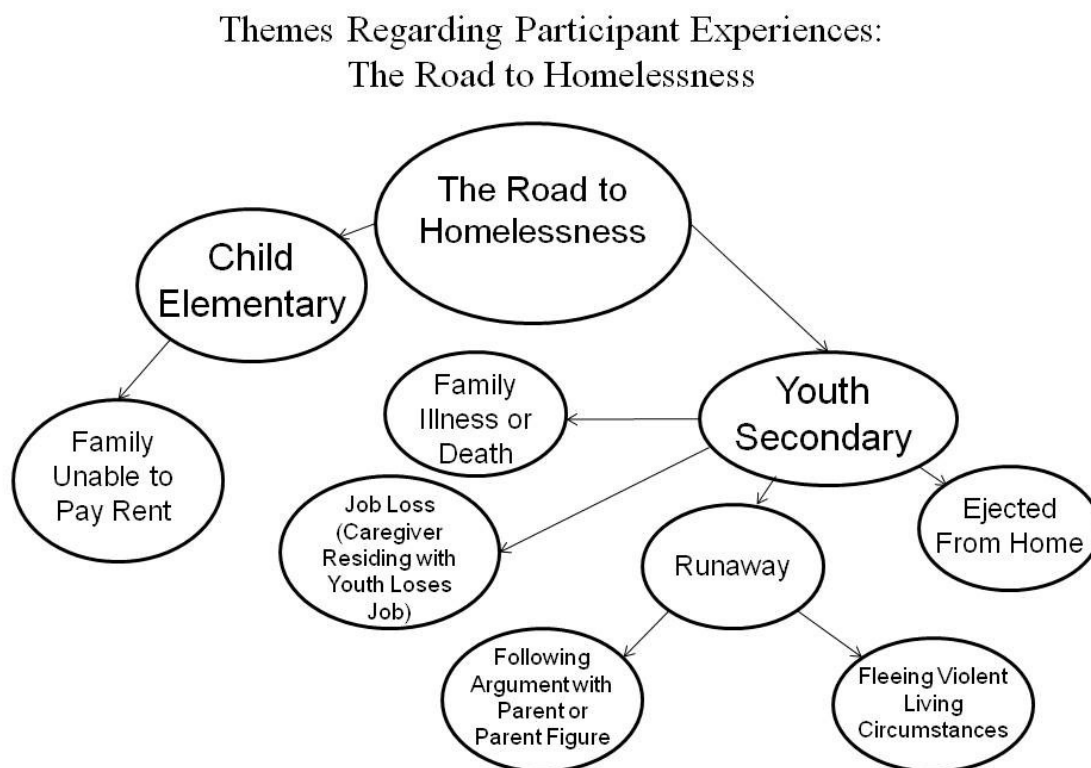


Figure 5.3 Participant Experiences: The Road to Homelessness

School Experiences While Homeless

Faith Architect remained enrolled in the same high school he attended prior to his mother's death. Living in hotels, motels, and occasionally with friends, he continued to

go to school. Faith Architect stated that while at school his life appeared much the same. He continued to progress in his Advanced Placement classes but stated that he wasn't as focused, and his grades dropped. Faith Architect and his brother had no idea when or what their next meal would be, they had limited access to washing their clothes. Faith Architect shared one particular memory that took place in an A. P. history class:

I was in an A. P. history class. And I remember this guy, he was number four in our class that, it was funny he was, he was like, "You reek!" You know, he said I stunk and it was just, "I'm sorry." And about the time graduation came, we found another apartment (P. 1, lines 120 – 123, 5)

Faith Architect rarely ate lunch because there was not enough money. He would go to the gym and work out, or make up excuses for not ever being in the cafeteria. Although he was eligible for free lunches at the time when he became homeless, he had not been at the beginning of the school year and thus was not officially able to take advantage of the free lunch program. Faith Architect received social security until his 18th birthday. He was still a student in high school when he was 18. The assistance he received from social security had helped him to secure a place to live following his mother's death and the loss of his brother's job.

During the time she was homeless Prosperous Matriarch was an officer in a vocational organization representing her school at the district level, and she was a member of the national honor society. She took cosmetology classes at her high school, and worked toward passing her state board exams as a licensed cosmetologist. She said, "I did all the extra things, like joined, ran for school offices. Did competitions and was

in the honor society. So I threw myself into my school, which was, like I said, I think a saving grace for me” (P. 4, lines 101-102, 3).

Prosperous Matriarch was responsible for managing the family home. Prosperous Matriarch’s stepfather began molesting her when she was in high school. She had also been molested by her father as a child. Prosperous Matriarch’s mother divorced her dad when she discovered what had happened to her daughter. She later married Prosperous Matriarch’s stepfather. When she was seventeen, her stepfather began molesting her:

But he had this thing about, about White girls for one, because he was a Mexican. And you know I was blonde, I was petite. Mom was going through some real bad depression, you know, at that point because he did the... the typical thing where he separated her from all her friends. She wasn’t allowed to work. He didn’t like her having friends unless they were his friends. People that he brought around. And Mom went through a real bad depression and she was on a lot of medication at that point (P. 4, lines 39-44, 2)

Prosperous Matriarch stated that her older sister had recently married. While she was managing the household responsibilities of cooking, cleaning, and paying bills, she became the focus of her stepfather’s obsessive behavior. He was jealous of her boyfriend and forbid her to see him. According to Prosperous Matriarch, “He just kind of moved on in there and I guess fantasized that ... that I was the woman of the house or something. And so then that started. By then I had been through enough already” (P. 4, lines 48-50, 2).

Prosperous Matriarch stated that her stepfather followed her and even came to school and roamed the halls looking for her until he was told to leave the building by school administration. Finally, an argument led to Prosperous Matriarch's stepfather aggressively assaulting her:

It was the first time I had ever stood up and not just been this total obedient person and so he got mad and like I said, knocked the crap out of me. I went to school the next day with a black eye and busted lip and scratches all over me. I had a teacher, my cosmetology teacher. I had confided some of the things in her (P. 4, lines 62-66, 2)

Prosperous Matriarch left home after this. She lived with her boyfriend's family for a few weeks. Finally, she moved in with her cosmetology teacher. She stated that her teacher and her teacher's husband had never had any children. They provided a home for her until she graduated from high school.

Scholarly Model was determined to graduate from high school. She left home and moved in with a friend, but the friend's home was too far from the school for her to walk and she did not have reliable transportation. She moved in with her grandmother and lived with her mother sporadically. Scholarly Model stated the following about school, "I didn't do anything. My mom kicked me out. She had no control of me... I didn't do any school work, I just went to school, got counted there, I did warm ups for a daily grade" (P. 7, lines 173-178, 6). Finally, while residing at the shelter, Scholarly Model found a high school that welcomed her. She found a faculty that she respected

and that took the time to work with her. The building administration was supportive of her:

Even though I was new there, I thought people were going to be mean to me.

But I fit in so, I just loved it. It makes me want to cry. I just love the school. It's like God blessed me to go to that school. Because I love that school (P. 7, lines 205- 207, 7).

Scholarly Model graduated from high school while a resident of the shelter. Her high school principal was very supportive of her. He made sure she got to participate in all the senior activities. Scholarly Model said, "And I graduated. I was happy. They said, 'You're gonna walk across the stage!' and I went, 'yes!'" Oh! and another one. My principal, he paid for my prom dress, prom ticket" (P. 7, lines 228-229, 8). She added, "He paid for everything. That was about the most exciting thing ever. He paid for all of my senior trip. Everything like that" (P. 7, lines 231-232, 8). Refer to Figure 5.4 for a review for homeless experiences.

Themes Regarding Participant Experiences: Homelessness

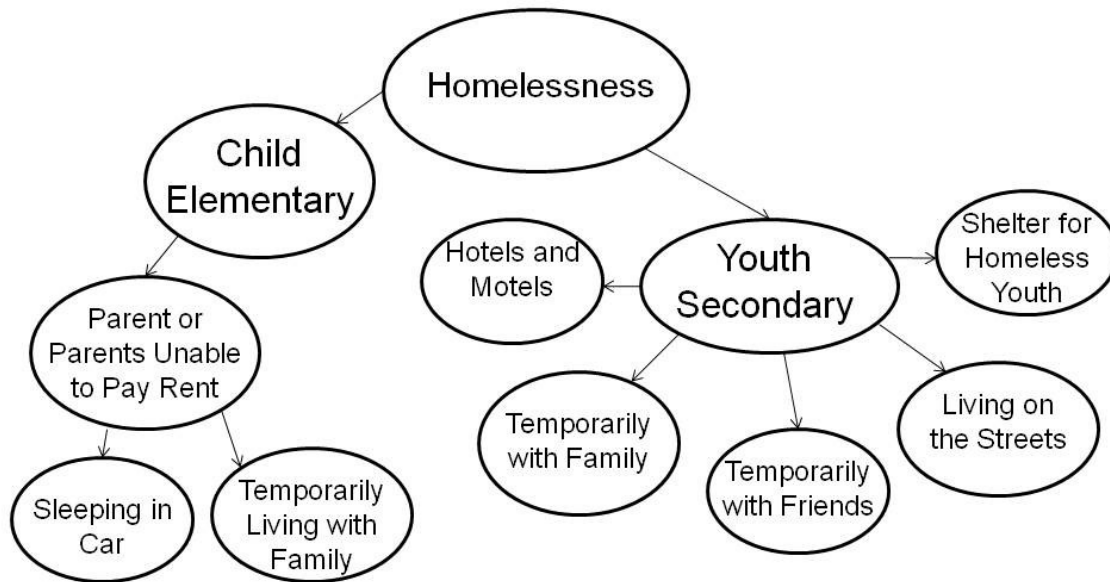


Figure 5.4 Participant Experiences: Homelessness

High School Graduation

Three participants graduated from high school. Faith Architect remained enrolled in the same high school that he attended prior to becoming homeless and earned his high school diploma. Prosperous Matriarch was homeless during her senior year of high school yet managed to graduate with her class. Scholarly Model attended several high schools during episodes of homelessness until she finally managed to graduate while she was a resident of a shelter.

GEDs

Four participants earned their GEDs. Modest Gentleman earned his GED when he was an adult, years after dropping out of high school. Optimistic Survivor earned her GED at a local high school. She hoped to pursue a career in the medical profession and either a GED or high school diploma was a prerequisite. Optimistic Survivor also wished to earn a GED for her own personal satisfaction. She wanted to know that she had met high school requirements. Rebel Bride was ordered by the court to pursue her GED because she was a minor and was not attending school. She earned her GED from a local college while residing with her sister. She pursued higher education as well. Sensitive Citizen earned his GED while in jail, which was his choice and was not court mandated.

Summary

Each participant stated that they had learned from their experiences of homelessness. Most indicated that they are grateful for the blessings they now enjoy in their lives. They have taken these experiences and developed an appreciation for all that they now have and they have developed a desire to help others. Modest Gentleman stated that one impact of homelessness was being unable to meet the simplest needs that we usually take for granted:

Being without the things that you need, things people take for granted like a simple drop of shampoo to wash your hair with, or a bar of soap, or a place to take a bath. It's ... made me realize that things could be a lot worse than they

really are (P. 2, lines 149-151, 6).

Participants shared that they relocated frequently while living homeless and that most had fled negative home environments. Extended family members and friends were relied on for temporary shelter. Physical and sexual abuse was common among females as reflected in the testimonies of participants. Despite enduring the uncertainty of homelessness, participants overcame a multitude of obstacles as they graduated from high school or later earned their GED.

CHAPTER VI
EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES

Self-Motivation and Determination

Imagine not knowing where you will find shelter, what your next meal will be, or when you will have the opportunity to bath or to wash your clothes. Now envision attempting to complete your homework, study for examinations, and maintain passing grades in your classes at school. The participants in this study lived through these types of events, yet managed to transcend homelessness and graduate or earn their GEDs. Whether graduating from high school or returning to school to earn their GED, these individuals surpassed their circumstances, persevered, and accomplished their objectives. Self- motivation and determination were key elements in the lives of participants as depicted in Figure 6.1.

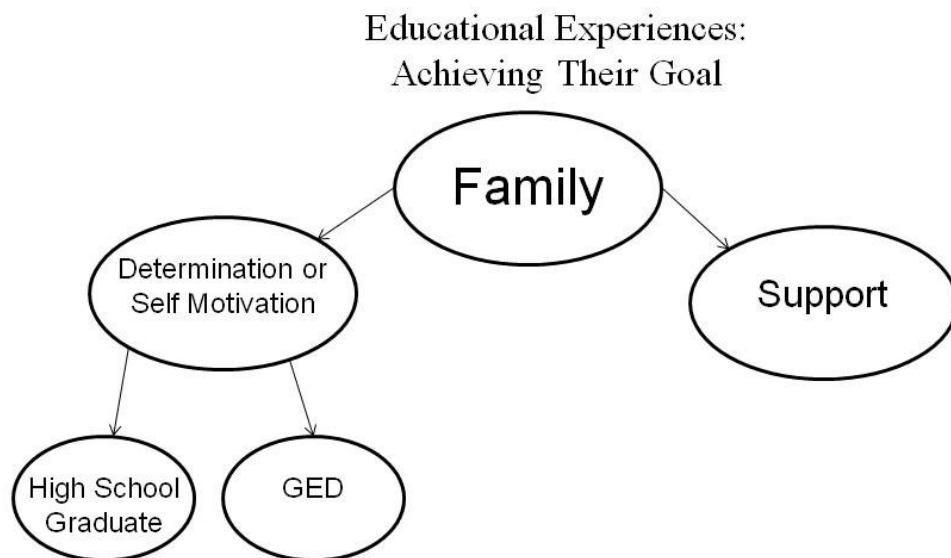


Figure 6.1 Educational Experiences: Achieving Their Goal

The Promise

The progression of events leading to homelessness for Faith Architect began during his sophomore year of high school. Due to illness, his aunt came to live with him, his mother, and grandmother in their two bedroom apartment. Then Faith Architect's aunt died, his grandmother was diagnosed with cancer, and his mother became ill while caring for his grandmother. The death of his mother was devastating. In addition, he, his brother, and grandmother were evicted from their apartment. Although his grandmother went to live with other relatives, Faith Architect and his

brother found themselves struggling to survive. Living either temporarily in an apartment, in the home of a member of their church, or in motels and hotels, Faith Architect and his brother frequently found themselves homeless. The loss of his brother's job, combined with Faith Architect's social security benefits ending due to his eighteenth birthday, resulted in their being evicted from their apartment.

As an athlete, Faith Architect had participated in extracurricular activities at school and in the community. He described an injury that kept him from participating in sports during his senior year:

I had broken my ankle in five places and had a ruptured tendon. So I was pretty much done at that point, with athletics. I had arthritis in my ankle. At that point, that went away, so I was more focused on the next phase of my life. I was still thinking maybe I could get to it or figure out a way to continue with sports. That coping mechanism wasn't there.(P. 1 lines 60-64, 3)

School played a major role in Faith Architect's life as he pursued coursework in Advanced Placement classes. No longer able to participate in athletics, his focus became survival and academic achievement, with aspirations of one day attending college. He struggled to complete his homework and study in the evenings in hotels, motels, or wherever he and his brother found shelter for the night. He was concerned that his grades were not as good as they had been prior to his episodic homelessness, and he felt he would have done better if he had not had to wrestle with the tragedy of homelessness while in high school.:

I was trying to figure out what I could do to help my situation. It was difficult to

figure out, what am I doing wrong or what can I do to change this? Education-wise, it was difficult. It's hard to focus when you're hungry (P. 1, lines 55-58, 3)

Faith Architect shared that there were times when he was unable to eat lunch at school because there was simply no money for school lunches. As he and his brother endeavored to save enough money to live in hotels or motels, they struggled to have enough money left for food or simple items such as laundry detergent. Paying for access to washing machines and dryers was an extravagance the brothers could rarely afford. He related, "It was pretty rough. Simple things that you know, you take for granted like washing clothes. If you barely afford to eat, you can't wash your clothes" (P. 1, lines 116-117, 5).

Faith Architect's testimony indicates that he was consistently trying to solve the problem of homelessness in his life. Before his mother's death, she spoke with him about completing his education. His promise to his mother of completing his education became a driving force in his determination to earn his high school diploma. He explained, "We were taught that education is the key to everything" (P. 1, line 142, 6).

Faith Architect's mother was a high school graduate and emphasized the importance of education to her family. He drew from his mother's experiences as a source of inspiration and a resolution to achieve in his own life. His mother had faced opposition, sometimes from within her own community, while she was trying to achieve her educational goals. Faith Architect likened her experience with watching crabs pull one another back into a barrel:

We were taught that education is the key to everything. And seeing that she

finished high school and she took some college classes, she never got the opportunity, being from a small town. There are factors in small towns, when people didn't give you certain information to get to where you wanted to go. It was a lot of... I don't know if you've heard the phrase of crabs in a barrel? One, if you ever have seen crabs in a barrel, if you notice one climbing out, one will grab the other one and pull it down. A crab will climb out and then the other one will grab him and pull him down, so that's why they can leave crabs in a barrel and not put a top on it (P. 1, lines 142-149, 6).

He elaborated,

That's how the community was where she was from. It's just a little small town, nice people and everything. But it was just jealousy. If you weren't the right family, or know the right people, they... So that's what she said (P. 1, lines 151-154, 6-7)

Faith Architect explained that despite discouragement in her home town, his mother believed in the power of education to open doors:

She always thought that if you get an education, they can't do that to you. So, I knew dropping out of school and not going to college was not an option. She told me that she was getting progressively sicker, that if anything happened, I need to go finish my education. So that was always in the back of my mind. I knew that I had to keep moving forward (P. 1, lines 155-159, 7)

Faith Architect attended his high school prom and graduated from high school despite all the chaos of homelessness. He kept the promise he made to his mother.

Self- Motivation

Prosperous Matriarch was a member of the national honor society and an officer in a vocational organization at school while simultaneously managing household responsibilities. Her stepfather's obsession with her grew to the point that he became enraged at the mere mention of her boyfriend:

He took the opportunity at that point, ya know to... He decided that I was, because I was doing all the things at the house, I was running the house. I was doing all the grocery shopping and the cooking. I went and paid bills and you know, did the whole nine yards, and he just kind of moved on in there and I guess fantasized that... that I was the woman of the house or something. And so then that started (P. 4, lines 45-50, 2)

Prosperous Matriarch's stepfather molested her when she was in her senior year of high school. She was invited to attend her boyfriend's aunt's wedding, but her stepfather forbade her to go. The invitation became the catalyst for a family argument in which Prosperous Matriarch's stepfather brutally beat her, and she arrived at school with a busted lip, scratches all over her body, and a black eye. She confided much of what happened to her cosmetology teacher. Prosperous Matriarch left home and lived temporarily with her boyfriend and his family. Then she moved in with other friends, and finally, lived with her cosmetology teacher until she graduated from high school:

For me school was my refuge, my safe place. I loved school. I did all the extra things like joined clubs, ran for offices, and participated in competitions. Was in honor society. So, I threw myself into school, which was like I said, I think a

saving grace for me (P. 4, lines 101-102, 3)

Prosperous Matriarch refused to allow the abuse she had endured at the hands of her stepfather, or her leaving home and becoming homeless, to detour her from graduating from high school. Living with one friend, then another and finally with her cosmetology teacher, she had no stable residence. Prosperous Matriarch stated nonetheless that being homeless did not impact her education. She averred, “It didn’t. That didn’t impact it really because my determination was so big at that point and I loved school so much that, you know, you weren’t going to keep me out of school” (P. 4, lines 271-272, 8). Following graduation, Prosperous Matriarch completed her cosmetology training and passed the state exams for her license. She had realized her dream of graduating from high school, and was on the road to a career.

Determination

Scholarly Model was determined to pass the TAKS test and graduate from high school. She spoke of her concern about passing the TAKS test throughout the interview. She shared that her mother did not believe she could pass the TAKS test; however, she knew that she could:

I passed the TAKS test and I was not trying to get a GED, ’cause I didn’t make it to the eleventh grade to drop out of school just because my mom is making me, if she would have took me, I would have enrolled in another school when I was eighteen. Starting over. I would have graduated class of 2010 or either way I would have gotten a diploma, somehow (P. 7, lines 73-77, 3)

Scholarly Model lived with her mother or with her grandmother during much of her high school education. Eventually, she was ejected from her grandmother's home. During her senior year, she attended three different schools. Scholarly Model finally realized her dream of graduating from high school while she was a resident at a shelter for homeless youth. The school she attended as a resident of the shelter was supportive and welcoming. The principal in particular was supportive, ensuring that she not only graduated, but that she was able to celebrate this accomplishment with her peers at school. He purchased her prom dress, her prom ticket, her cap and gown, and paid for her participation in senior activities.

Somehow Faith Architect, Prosperous Matriarch, and Scholarly Model were able to transcend the deprivation of homelessness and earn their high school diplomas. They continued attending classes, met the requirements for graduating and accomplished their goals. A common theme of each of these participants was their determination to graduate. These individuals decided not to give up, but to persevere.

GED Recipients

Pursuing a GED is a courageous undertaking. A person who has been absent from school for a while may feel socially stigmatized or different than his or her peers. Whether returning to school after many years or just a matter of months, the journey back to the classroom requires inner strength and fortitude.

No One Else Can Do This for Me

Modest Gentleman's parents divorced when he was a child. Although he and his brother resided predominately with their mother, they were sent to live with their father when teenagers. High school in Texas did not appear as appealing as life in tropical Miami to Modest Gentleman. This adolescent boy refused to listen to his father, quit school, and then journeyed to Miami accompanied by a friend. Unable to find work on a boat or in related industries, he found himself living on the streets of an unfamiliar city. For several months in Florida, he resided in alleys and cardboard boxes:

I can't remember what happened exactly to set it off. I think I was nearly seventeen years old and I had a buddy of mine that I hooked up with, and he was talkin' about goin' down to Florida around Miami area. There was work down there. We could get on a boat and work and do you know different odd-ended jobs. I took off outta here. I guess I had to learn things for myself, you know hardheaded. Stubbornness -- I just didn't wanna hear what my dad said; I had to go find out for myself. So, I went down there and found out the hard way. I got into some trouble, and ended up in jail, you know up there, you know. And I lived, you know actually, I lived on the streets (P. 2, lines 45-54, 2-3).

Although, he divulged minimal information about his experiences, Modest Gentleman said he also endured episodic homelessness as an adult. He has maintained a close relationship with both of his parents and commented that he simply did not want to listen to their advice or be guided by them as a youth. He further stated that he hopes he

can share what he has learned with his children, so they can refrain from having similar experiences:

I just want to pass down information to my kids, ya know hopefully and guide them around the things I didn't want to be guided around when my mom and dad tried to tell me. I had to learn 'em on my own (P. 2, lines 79-81, 4)

Many years after quitting high school, Modest Gentleman studied in order to obtain his GED, which he successfully earned.

I Need to Do This for Myself

Optimistic Survivor quit school during her high school years. She attempted to return to school but shared that, from her perspective, school had no purpose for her:

Couldn't bring myself to do it. It was... It was like, without a steady home, as dysfunctional as mine was, it was more like a feeling of, well, it was a constant state of confusion. I guess there was no purpose in it for me, is what I am trying to say. There was just no reason. Everything else was in turmoil, why not that too (P. 3, lines 126-130, 4).

Optimistic Survivor married and soon became pregnant. She said she was sick throughout her pregnancy and that school was a complication she no longer found of interest. GED classes were held two evenings a week at a high school in the community where she resided with her husband and two children. Although, she already owned her own home, was raising her children and taking care of her family, Optimistic Survivor courageously decided to return to school twelve years after quitting:

I had been out of school probably about twelve years. And I had been helping to take care of my father-in-law that was ill at that point I had decided that maybe I wanted to go to nursing school and do this for a living. And I knew I had to have my GED. I also, I mean I did it for those reasons, but I did it for me too. To know that, I didn't graduate, but I went back and I met the requirement that the state of Texas had for me to say, "yes, I finished this." And I needed to be able to finish that for myself (P. 3, lines 180-185, 6)

Optimistic Survivor lacked a supportive adult in her high school. Educators did not intervene on her behalf, encourage her to remain in school, or make school appear relevant to her life. She found a more nurturing environment throughout her GED coursework, describing an atmosphere that encouraged student achievement, and a teacher that she described as "awesome:"

He would spend extra time if we needed it. Math was my weak subject in the whole GED process, and he would help me with what I was having... and he did it with the whole class. If we were having trouble with any particular area, he would put that extra little effort to try and help us understand it. He let me, which he didn't have to, he let me tape record all the classes so that I could go back later and say, "Okay, this is the problem; this is how he explained for us to do it," and that is what, that is, I believe the only reason that I was able to pass the GED test (P. 3, lines 191-196, 6)

Optimistic Survivor believed the GED coursework was relevant to her life. The goal of obtaining her GED not only met the requirements pursuant to enrolling in college, it

fulfilled her desire to complete her high school education. She proved to herself that she could achieve the same standards as those required for obtaining a high school diploma.

Court Ordered

Rebel Bride left home and dropped out of school as a junior in high school. After living temporarily with various friends, she moved in with her sister. While residing with her sister, she attended GED classes at a local university in response to a court mandate. Rebel Bride stated that she believed she was motivated to achieve this goal because she had no choice; she had to earn her GED:

I got my GED. And actually I think the reason that I got it so quickly was that it was a court order. At the time, I was unmarried, I was a minor, and so I had to do it or else they would have taken me. So I went and I got my GED (P. 5, lines 125-127, 5)

Rebel Bride stated that while she was in high school she might stay up all night with her friends and decide not to attend school the following day, but attendance at GED classes was not optional. She described the GED teacher as being very professional:

The teacher that we had was more like a college professor would be. "It's your job to do it. If you don't, you're gonna be the only one who pays. In the long run it's gonna be something you're gonna regret. I'm not gonna write you a discipline slip. I'm not gonna give you detention, or I'm not gonna do that because you're not doing something I want you to do. You've gotta want to do it too." And that's putting the ball in your court and whenever you're in control,

that's your independence. You know, you have that and you're gonna do what you're gonna do and if that's really what you want to do then it's a win-win situation (P. 5, lines 220-226, 8)

In high school, Rebel Bride often felt left out because she believed her teachers favored certain students. She described teachers as being overbearing and intolerant of students other than those they favored:

They showed a lot of favoritism to a lot of people, like athletes and that kind. I was never that kind of a student. I was always, like I said, the rebel. That was who I was, and I felt like a lot of the teachers, like they could kind of understand but they were just overbearing. They were just really bad about it (P. 5, lines 184-187, 7)

During this time, Rebel Bride was diagnosed with depression. Her teachers were aware of this diagnosis, and were aware that she was taking prescribed medication for the treatment of depression as well. Rebel Bride stated that she believed her teachers did not consider how this condition impacted her, and were cruel:

You know, you see someone, you know, here they are, they're on medications because they're depressed. There are reasons for it. You don't sit back and bad mouth them and tell them they can't do something or they shouldn't do something. Try and support them. That's your job as a teacher; you should be there to teach someone how to overcome certain things. You should be there to teach them how to deal with certain things and still be able to accomplish the goals that they have set for themselves. And they don't do that. In high school

especially, they don't do that. They're in it to get a paycheck (P. 5, lines 239-247, 8-9)

Rebel Bride further stated that the teachers showed favoritism if they were acquainted with the parents of their students, especially if the students were neighbors of the teachers or if their parents were friends of the teachers. She testified that she believed teachers did not like how she and her friends dressed, and that was another problem with their perceptions of them. During her junior year, Rebel Bride was told that she would not graduate with her class. Furthermore, she would need to retake much of her coursework in order to even graduate. She said she was already clinically depressed and could not imagine redoing her coursework and not graduating with her class. Rebel Bride remembered a painful conversation with her school counselor in which the counselor actually advised her to quit school. She said, "It was really painful. And it really impacted me. That was sitting in the counselor's office my eleventh grade year and being told by the counselor, it would just be better for me if I dropped out" (P. 5, lines 198-200, 7).

The counselor's comments were pivotal in Rebel Bride's decision to withdraw from school. She was appalled that an individual in a counselor's position could make such comments to a student:

I can't stand the thought of somebody being able to tell, at that time a child,
"Sorry, you'd be better off, we'd be better off, we'd be better off without you."
And that did happen. And that, at that point, I was going to show them. I was,

“Okay, I’ll show you.” Because I had planned on going back to school (P. 5, lines 202-205, 7)

She continued:

At that point in time, I was, “Forget it! I’m leaving!” And then you take a little bit of a cooling down period and its like, “You know what, I’m gonna show you! I’m gonna get back, because I’m going to be the thorn in your side.” Didn’t happen that way, but... (P. 5, lines 207-208, 7)

Rebel Bride said there was a big difference in the teachers she encountered in high school and those she encountered in her GED coursework. She described the GED classes as providing a friendlier atmosphere, and said she was much happier in her GED coursework than at high school. Rebel Bride’s successful acquisition of her GED was due to the court mandating she attend GED classes, and to the positive atmosphere she found within the classroom and among educators.

I Have to Depend on Myself

Sensitive Citizen’s experiences in high school were not positive. He only attended school in order to be with his friends. He stated that he deeply regretted not participating in the senior prom and receiving his diploma during commencement ceremonies with his friends. Sensitive Man repeatedly experienced problems in high school. When asked to evaluate his experiences in high school he responded, “I’m gonna be honest with you, I was a horrible student” (P. 6, line 133, 6). Within a five-year period, Sensitive Man said he earned only eight credits toward graduation. His

narrative regarding high school was predominately about problems he had in school.

During his freshman year, he said he was kicked out of school for starting a riot.

Sensitive Citizen stated that the principal told him he was worthless. Whether fulfilling the principal's expectations or simply rebelling, he reacted in violence. He explained, "It made me sick in the head 'cause I was told this at home. I don't know everything just went down the hill. I set my school on fire twice (P. 6, line 138, 6).

Once when Sensitive Citizen asked to go to the office because a student in class was bothering him, his teacher's reaction was to insult him about his weight.

Before leaving the classroom, he threatened the teacher. He told her:

"You like jokes! I got a joke for you. Here, are you ready? Let's see if you can get out of the classroom at 3:05." At 3:03, I set her classroom on fire with her students in there. I didn't really care at that point because you [his teacher] dissed me, you just blatantly disrespected me and that hurt. Cause I didn't disrespect you (P. 6, lines 43-146, 6)

Sensitive Citizen believes that the way educators speak to their students does not motivate them to achieve, rather it is insulting and may attribute to low self-esteem. His statements reflected his concern that students are often devastated by the comments of educators rather than encouraged by them. Teachers are not assisting in student achievement, rather they are facilitating an environment in which students fail and ultimately drop out of school, "The way teachers talked to people. Teachers nowadays talk to us like we're beneath them. Some will say, I got mine, you better get yours. But

that's not how you are supposed to talk to students" (P. 6, 213-215, 9). Sensitive Citizen described how he was wounded by the negative opinions of school personnel:

A lot of us students have low self-esteem, and that really hurts when you hear a principal calls you worthless and tell you you're not going to be nothing in life. If teachers and principals would stop doing that to us; I think that we would have a higher rate of graduation and a higher rate for passing at school. Instead of a higher rate of dropouts because, of the simple fact that you talk to students like that, that only makes us not want to come; we don't want to come to school as it is (P. 6, lines 218-223, 9)

High school was not a safe haven for Sensitive Citizen; in fact, his testimony revealed that high school was often another source of adversarial conflict with adult authority figures. Teachers and administrators did not intervene on his behalf. Instead, they insulted him and discouraged his attendance at an institution which he already did not wish to belong. He also grew accustomed to verbal abuse and violence at home. As a child, his mother's boyfriend and the man's family mocked him because he was not a citizen of the United States. As a youth, his mother's husband insulted Sensitive Citizen about his weight, and insulted with profanity. Thus neither school nor home was described as welcoming or nurturing by him. Eventually, Sensitive Citizen was incarcerated. While in jail he was asked if he would like to participate in GED classes and he decided to pursue his GED:

So I got locked up, they asked me did I want to join the GED program? I said,

“Yes!” immediately, without question. They said, “We have to call your mom.” I said, “No! Don’t ask her!” I was seventeen at the time. I got in the GED program and I passed with flying colors on my first time (P. 6, lines 197-200, 8)

Sensitive Citizen was thrilled with his accomplishment. He shared that he thought about the eight credits he had earned in high school, and the fact that he would have had to take his high school course work again in order to graduate, and compared this to earning a GED. Pursuing the GED was the way he chose to meet the standards for high school equivalency. He said, “I decided to do it [pursue a GED] because, what would it look like, I’m twenty years old in the ninth grade? I shouldn’t even be in high school. I should be on my way to college (P. 6, lines 208-209, 9).

Sensitive Citizen stated that he depended on himself to meet his needs:

I depend on myself, I can’t depend on nobody else to do the things that I need to do for me, because of the simple fact that I’m grown now. If I need food in my stomach, ain’t anybody else fixin’ to go out there and get it for me. I gotta work or do whatever I need to do to get what I need to get. And I have a son now (P. 6, lines 92-95, 4).

Participants who earned their GED cited various reasons for dropping out of high school, and earned their GEDs at different stages in their lives. Whether returning to the classroom as an adult to earn the GED or earning one in lieu of returning to high school as a minor, participants valued this experience. In many instances, the GED classroom environment was considered more welcoming and the teachers more helpful than those participants encountered during high school. All participants attained their aspirations of

meeting high school standards for graduation either by graduating from high school or by earning their GEDs. Figure 6.2 depicts how determination or self-motivation acted as a driving force in the participants completing their educations.

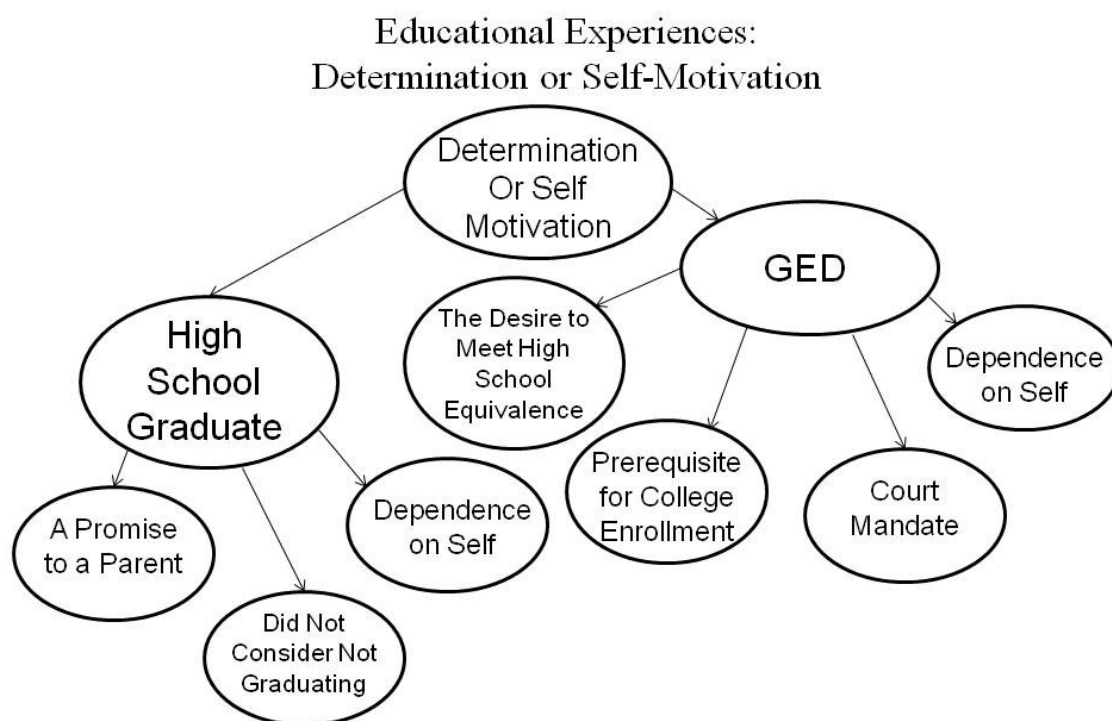


Figure 6.2 Educational Experiences: Determination or Self-Motivation

Support Systems

During periods of adversity, whom can one rely on? Often, the support systems that we believe to be in place may not be opened to us. Family, friends, or teachers may

or may not provide a haven of support. Ultimately, shelters may be the only source of assistance available.

Family

Evicted from their apartment following their mother's death, Faith Architect, his older brother, and his grandmother moved to another apartment. Within a year, they were evicted from this apartment as well. When his grandmother eventually moved in with his cousin, he and his brother moved into another apartment. When his brother lost his job, their struggle continued and they eventually became homeless. Faith Architect stated that his brother made decisions that were not productive for their family and these decisions contributed to their financial dilemma. His brother remained by his side throughout the time they were homeless. While he was in school, Faith Architect's brother attempted to secure employment in order to support them. His brother made sure that the hotels where they sought refuge were primarily in the attendance zone of the high school he attended. The brothers struggled with homelessness together.

Rebel Bride stressed the importance of family throughout her interview. She maintained that she came from a good family, whose members were very close. She further communicated that they were very lucky and that many families were not as fortunate as they were. Rebel Bride quit school and wrestled with the insecurities of homelessness. After leaving home and seeking temporary residence, she found herself living with her sister. While residing with her sister, Rebel Bride was court ordered to

attend GED classes and she earned her GED. The support of her sister provided a home and an atmosphere conducive to attending GED classes.

Friends

When they were unable to afford an apartment or motel room, a member of the church Faith Architect and his brother attended since childhood allowed the brothers to reside temporarily in her home. She was also considered to be his godmother and she provided a safe place for the brothers to live. They had food to eat, a place to bathe, to wash their clothes, and a place to stay at night.

Prosperous Matriarch lived temporarily with friends when she quit school and left home. She lived with her fiancé and his family for two weeks, and lived with other friends for a while. Following graduation, she lived with her best friend who was recently married. Prosperous Matriarch lived with this young couple until she married her fiancé.

Sensitive Citizen and Modest Gentleman each lived with friends briefly after running away from home. Scholarly Model left home and lived with a friend while she was in high school. Unfortunately, the friend did not have an automobile and the man who often provided transportation for her friend was unable to take her to school. Because her friend's home was too far from the school for her to walk, Scholarly Model was unable to attend school.

Typically, participants in this study did not elaborate about their experiences living with friends. They stated in a matter of fact manner that they temporarily lived with friends, but did not provide much detail about those experiences.

Teachers

Educators played a paramount role in supporting Prosperous Matriarch when she was homeless. Beaten and abused by her stepfather, she confided in her cosmetology teacher. Her teacher then spoke to an administrator who prevented her stepfather from harassing her at school:

I worked for one of the principals as an office aide. And he knew, he and my cosmetology teacher were real good friends and she looked out for me, and at that point he caught my stepdad walking the halls one day, following me around the halls and he put him out of the school, and told him he'd better not come back in the school. And that kind of thing. So fortunately for me, I had people at the school. You know, I had teachers and administrators that were very protective and that looked out for me. I was real close to my cosmetology teacher (P. 4, lines 86-92, 3)

Eventually, after living with friends, Prosperous Matriarch completed her senior year of high school while residing in the home of her cosmetology teacher:

They just, I mean they were there, they were there for me and thank God I had them. You don't find them like that a whole lot anymore, nowadays, because there are so many liabilities they place, I think on teachers now. Nowadays, if

one of my kids had gone to live with one of their teachers, you know, that probably never would have happened because of the liability. You know, being scared you were going to get sued for something or you know someone, but teacher's hands aren't you know, they're tied, in I think a whole lot of ways that they shouldn't be they are. And I think that tends to make them a little bit more distant. Not as ready to put their self on the line, the way mine did

(P. 4, 294-301, 9)

School was a place of safety for Prosperous Matriarch, a place where she found support. She said, "School was my get-away" (P. 4, line 272, 8).

Ejected from her grandmother's home after an argument about a boy, Scholarly Model became a resident at a shelter for homeless youth in a metropolitan area in Texas. Scholarly Model attended three different schools her senior year before she enrolled in a high school affiliated with the shelter where she resided. Scholarly Model was surprised to find that the educators at this high school were positive and supportive of her. She was welcomed by her peers as well, and stated, "Even though, I was new there, I thought people were going to be mean to me. But I fit in so, I just loved it" (P. 7, lines 206-207, 7).

Scholarly Model spoke fondly of her experiences at the high school, even smiling slightly as if reliving some of her experiences when she shared them during the interview:

Like the teachers, they actually taught real stuff that's happening in the world. Instead of like... They didn't teach out of the book, they taught life skills, like

basic life skills, like how to survive. They also taught schoolwork and stuff. It's just, I don't know, I just like the teachers. They're real cool. They never pass anybody up, 'cause if you fail, you fail. You can come in for tutoring to work on some extra credit to push your grade up or something. But they... I like the school (P. 7, lines 213-217, 7)

Scholarly Model's most joyful educational experiences were related to graduation and senior activities. Receiving her class rank, confirming that she would graduate, and participation in senior activities such as prom were mentioned among these experiences. She described them enthusiastically, saying, "I got my class rank. I think I was like number 96 out of 289" (P. 7, line 226, 8). She added, "I graduated, and I was happy. They said, 'You're gonna walk across the stage!' And I went, 'Yes!'" (P. 7, lines 228-229, 8).

Scholarly Model's high school principal played a pivotal role in providing the opportunity for her to participate in senior activities. His intervention resulted in her experiencing events that have become precious memories. As she spoke of how her principal intervened on her behalf, she literally beamed. It was the only time during the interview that I observed such an outpouring of happiness, "My principal, he paid for my prom dress, prom ticket, and cap and gown (P. 7, line 229, 8). Scholarly Model continued, "He paid for everything. That was about the most exciting thing ever. He paid for my entire senior trip. Everything like that (P. lines 231-232, 8).

The intervention by Scholarly Model's principal was something that greatly affected her life. She referred to her senior activities as some of her most joyful

experiences throughout her education. Her principal played a key role in making those memories so special. Scholarly Model stated that the staff at the school welcomed her and were supportive of her. Although few educators were mentioned by participants as playing a supportive role in participants' lives, both Prosperous Matriarch and Scholarly Model stated that educators were instrumental in assisting them in the acquisition of their goal, a high school diploma.

Residential Shelters

Located in the shadows of magnificent urban skyscrapers, the residential shelter is a safe haven in the midst of a busy metropolitan area. Trimmed lawns and tree-lined avenues surround the buildings that encompass the shelter complex. City buses and various automobiles pass the complex as people go about their daily routines. Established in order to provide shelter for homeless youth and based on Christian beliefs, the shelter is a calm in the storm, a safe haven amidst the dangers of street life and the uncertainties of homelessness.

Sensitive Citizen earned his GED while in jail before becoming a resident at the shelter. At the time of the interview, he was waiting on paperwork that would allow him to seek employment in the U.S. He also has hopes of becoming an American citizen. Once he obtains a job, the shelter staff can begin assisting him in making the transition to living in his own apartment and supporting himself. Without their support, Sensitive Citizen could be forced to seek shelter on the streets.

Scholarly Model attended high school while living at the shelter. The assistance

she received at the high school was essential in helping her achieve her goal of receiving a high school diploma. Scholarly Model was searching for employment when I interviewed her, and had plans to have her own apartment and attend college part time. In addition to providing shelter for the homeless, the shelter staff has been instrumental in assisting residents in finding employment and becoming self-supportive.

Spirituality and Faith

Spirituality, or the belief in God or a Higher Power, has been recognized by counselors and social workers as a key factor in recovery and treatment methods. How did spirituality affect the lives of participants of this study? Faith in God and a life grounded in Christianity resonated in Faith Architect's testimonies. Church services and activities on Sundays and Saturdays laid a foundation for his life. Throughout his interview, Faith Architect referred to members of his church intervening on his behalf. One member provided the financial resources for him to participate in the Junior Olympics, and another provided temporary refuge for him and his brother while homeless. During the interview, he described an internship or apprenticeship relationship with his pastor, in which he is being trained to take over the pastor's work redeveloping "forgotten" communities and overseeing the grant that is used on behalf of developing the community. His ambition to help others, to restore communities, and to build homes stems from his faith. Other participants also stated that they are appreciative of what they have and are interested in helping others. They expressed these aspects of spirituality by stating that they were lucky, or that they had been blessed.

Whether determined to graduate from high school or to receive their GEDs, whether via self-motivation, for self-fulfillment, or due to a court mandate, each participant achieved his or her objectives. Assistance may have been available from family members, friends, educators, or a residential shelter for homeless youth during these pivotal periods of upheaval in the lives of participants. One participant was able to fulfill her dream of graduation through the joint efforts of an area high school and the residential shelter. Spirituality and faith, united with the desire to keep a promise he made to his mother, were instrumental in guiding one participant during his struggle to remain in high school and graduate. Aspects of spirituality were also voiced by other participants as they described their backgrounds, particularly in regards to their desires to help others. Figure 6.3 depicts support networks participants used when navigating the educational system.

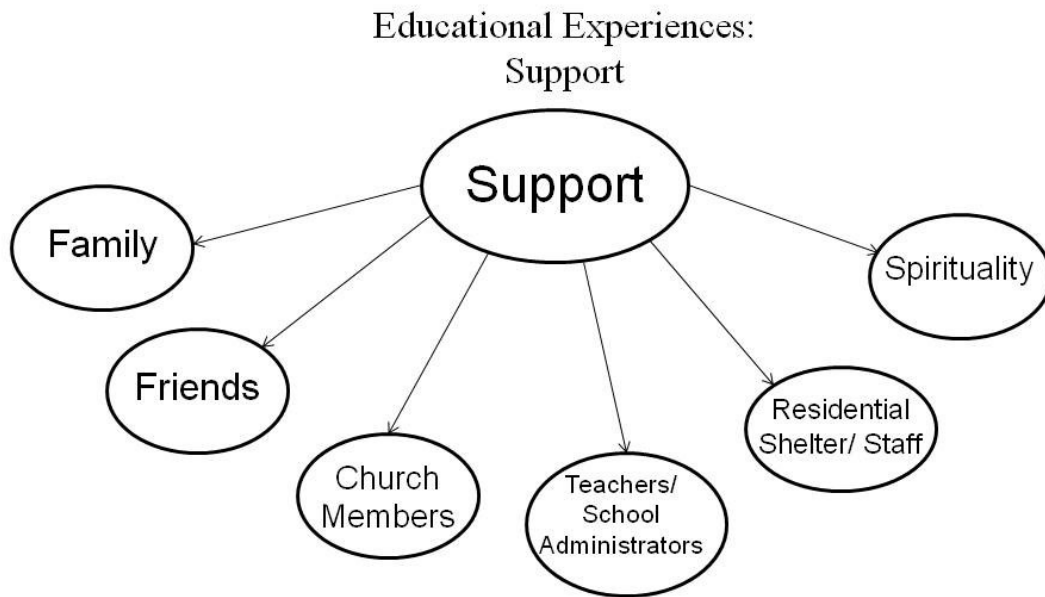


Figure 6.3 Educational Experiences: Support

CHAPTER VII

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Since the acceleration of family homelessness that occurred in the 1980s, children and youth have struggled with homelessness at a staggering rate. Of the three million Americans identified as homeless each year, 1.3 million are children, (National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, 2007). Much of the research regarding homeless children and youth has depended on the testimony of care givers, medical professionals, social workers and mothers rather than homeless children or youths themselves. Individuals who have undergone homelessness as children or youth, yet have graduated from high school or have returned to school, and earned their GEDs have rarely been the subject of research.

Studies regarding resilience began with investigations related to patients who persevered regardless of their medical or psychological challenges. Norman Garmezy (1993), a founder of studies in resilience, first became interested in resilience when investigating the coping skills of schizophrenic patients. He began studying the invulnerable child and expanded his investigation of resilience to children living in poverty. Masten's (2009) investigations of resilience have led her to believe that qualities of resilience exist within each of us. Bonnie Bernard (2004) identified categories that serve as descriptors of the resilient children and youth. Protective factors contributing to the resilient child or youth being able to excel regardless of their

challenges were identified as well. Whether referred to as protective mechanisms or buffers, these factors act as an insulating shield for the resilient child or youth.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to provide an opportunity to listen to the voices of adults who received their high school diploma or earned their GEDs despite being homeless as students. Seven individuals between the ages of 18 and 51 participated in this study. Three participants graduated from high school and four earned their General Education Development (GED) equivalent. Participant narratives chronicled their experiences and identified support systems contributing to their accomplishments. Interviews were held in various locations throughout southeast Texas. Two participants were interviewed in my home, three in the home of a friend in another city and two in a residential shelter for homeless youth.

Two research questions provided the framework for this study. This open-ended question format provided the basis for the investigation, allowing the development of further questions and providing a voice for participants. The research questions guiding this study were:

1. What do the voices of adults who received a high school diploma or general education development equivalent tell us about their life experiences as a homeless student?
2. What do the voices of adults who received a high school diploma or

general education development equivalent tell us about their educational experiences as a homeless student?

Discussion

Question One: Life Experiences as a Homeless Student

Three categories that emerged regarding participant perceptions of their experiences were family, the road to homelessness and homelessness. Family was divided into two sections; the influence of the mother and the role of the father figure. Five participants' mothers were considered supportive, while two were considered to be destructive. Faith Architect's mother had been his sole provider and encouraged him to pursue academic and athletic achievements. Rebel Bride was concerned about her mother being hurt by her leaving home. Optimistic Survivor recalled her mother as attempting to provide for the family when her husband spent the family's money. Prosperous Matriarch praised her mother as the parent that attempted to pay the bills and provide food and housing for the family. Although Modest Gentleman and his brother were sent to live with their father as teenagers, they had lived with their mother most of their lives. He referred to his experience as a street youth as being the result of not wanting to listen to anyone. He did not mention any negative comments pertaining to his mother, and spoke of her with reverence and respect. He currently maintains a close relationship with his mother. In contrast, when she was a child Scholarly Model's mother physically abused her frequently, particularly during the third grade. She stated that she has spent much of her life trying to get away from her mother.

The role of the father figure is divided into sections defined as supportive and abusive. Three of the seven participants referred to having a positive relationship with the male role model in their family. Two participants referred to the male father figure as supportive. Faith Architect's father sent money to him sporadically following his mother's death. Faith Architect and his older brother struggled through homelessness together, his brother seeking employment while Faith Architect remained in school. Modest Gentleman spoke with pride and admiration regarding his father. Four participants in this study revealed that the father figure in their lives was abusive. Three female participants were molested by a male role model or father figure. Sensitive Citizen's father was not mentioned, however he was physically and emotionally abused by his sibling's father when he was a child. His mother's husband spoke to him in a insulting manner and ejected him from his home as a youth.

The second category, the road to homelessness, was divided into two sections; childhood or elementary school and youth or secondary school experiences. The inability to pay rent was the cause of childhood homelessness for two participants. There were four contributors to the road to homelessness experienced by participants as youth. These contributing factors were; family illness or death, job loss of the caregiver, running away or being ejected from their home. One participant experienced both family illness and the death of family members. Faith Architect's aunt, grandmother and mother became ill. His aunt and grandmother lived with Faith Architect and his mother. His aunt and mother died. Job loss of the care giver was experienced by one participant.

Faith Architect's brother became unemployed following his mother's death. Six of seven participants ran away from home. Two contributing factors were considered as leading to participants running away. These factors were leaving home following an argument, usually with a parent or parent figure or fleeing violent living conditions. Three female participants fled such abusive homes. Each had been molested by a family member, extended family member or friend of the family. Two youth were ejected from their homes. Sensitive Citizen and Scholarly Model were told to leave their family home and thus became residents at a shelter for homeless youth.

The third category that emerged in the study was that of homelessness. Two sections within this category were child and youth homeless experiences. Childhood homeless experiences were due to parents being unable to pay rent. As a result these families slept in their cars or temporarily resided with family members. Homeless youth were identified as seeking living arrangements in five categories. These categories were; hotels and motels, residing temporarily with friends, residing temporarily with family, living on the streets and residing in shelters for homeless youth. Faith Architect and his brother resided in motels and hotels temporarily while homeless. Rebel Bride eventually lived with her sister. All seven participants lived temporarily with friends. Two participants lived on the streets and two lived at a homeless shelter for youth.

Question Two: Educational Experiences

Two categories emerged as participants shared their educational experiences as homeless students. These categories were determination or self-motivation and support. Determination or self-motivation was divided into two sub categories; participants who graduated from high school and participants who earned their GEDs. Three participants graduated from high school and four participants earned their GEDs.

Faith Architect never considered not graduating from high school. Following his mother's death, Faith Architect was determined to keep the promise he made to his mother and fulfill her expectations of him. Faith Architect remained in school and did not entertain thoughts of quitting school. Prosperous Matriarch also did not consider dropping out of high school. She reported that school was where she went to escape the terror and abuse in her life. Prosperous Matriarch's cosmetology teacher and an assistant principal were supportive of her and assisted her in providing a safe learning environment and ultimately a place to live while completing school. Scholarly Model was determined to graduate from high school and pass the TAKS test. Although she moved several times during her senior year, she graduated from high school while a resident at a residential center for homeless youth. The thought of not graduating was never a consideration for Scholarly Model.

Three contributing factors for participants who earned GEDs were; depending on themselves, the desire to meet high school equivalency standards and goal of one day enrolling in college. Four participants returned to school and earned their GEDs. Modest Gentleman and Sensitive Citizen stated that they had to depend on themselves.

Each of the four participants who earned a GED stated that he or she wanted to prove to themselves that they could meet high school equivalency standards.

The second category that emerged was support. Family, friends, church members, teachers and school administrators, residential shelter staff and spirituality were sources of support for participants. Family was a source of support for Faith Architect. His brother sought employment in order to pay their bills and made sure they could temporarily reside in hotels or motels in the attendance zone of the high school Faith Architect attended. Friends were a source of support for each participant, often providing temporary living arrangements for them while homeless. Church members were a source of strength and support for Faith Architect. As a child, a church member paid for him to participate in the Junior Olympics in California. While homeless, a church member opened her home temporarily to Faith Architect and his brother, providing food, a safe place to bathe, to wash clothes, and to sleep.

One teacher and several school administrators were supportive of Prosperous Matriarch when she left home. She resided temporarily with her teacher until she graduated from high school. An administrator refused to allow her step-father to stalk her while she was at school. Scholarly Model was welcomed by the high school principal and staff of the school she attended while residing at a shelter for homeless youth. She felt that the teachers taught her skills that were useful and important, and stated that she was thankful she had been able to attend the school. Her principal purchased her prom dress, prom ticket, cap and gown for graduation and paid for her to participate in senior activities. A residential shelter for homeless youth was instrumental

in providing support for both Scholarly Model and Sensitive Citizen. The shelter offers assistance in completing school, obtaining employment and in helping them transition into their own apartments. Spirituality was a source of support in several participants' lives. Faith Architect maintains a life grounded in faith, attending church and giving back to others. His faith in God is a precious aspect of his life. Scholarly Model thanks God for the school she attended prior to graduation from high school. Modest Gentleman stated that when things looked particularly dim, someone would intercede on his behalf, giving him money or food while he was homeless. He stated how much he appreciated this, and referred to such acts of kindness as Godsend.

Perceptions of Homelessness

Participant narratives provided insight into the life experiences of homeless children and youth. Much of the information known about the lives of homeless children and youths have been provided from the perspective of secondary sources such as mothers, medical professionals and social workers. This study provided the unique perspective of the primary source, the formerly homeless child or youth. As adults, participants can articulate their experiences with firsthand knowledge of the struggles encountered by homeless children and youth. Participants shared the factors and events that lead to homelessness. As their lives spiraled out of control and they were unable to stop the madness that is homelessness, these young people began a journey of uncertainty, unsafe temporary living conditions and insecurity. Their likelihood of witnessing or becoming victims of acts of violence such as sexual abuse, physical abuse

and/or emotional abuse increased. The search for shelter, even temporary ones, entailed adopting a “survival of the fittest” mentality. The streets are harsh places to attempt to survive, and even finding temporary shelter does not insure safety.

The Road to Homelessness

Two participants experienced familial homelessness as children due to their families’ inability to pay the rent. They spoke of carrying few belongings with them as they left in the middle of the night in order to avoid creditors. For example, Prosperous Matriarch hesitated as she gazed at the curtains of the room where the interview took place. She was quiet for a moment before speaking. As if she were reliving her past, Prosperous Matriarch spoke in a matter of fact tone of voice. It was as if she were distancing herself from her past to assure herself that she was now safe and could no longer be hurt by them:

We did the whole thing of having to hide from bill collectors and that whole nine yards. We didn’t know half the time whether we were gonna have a home or not, or food...

We lost our home... and had to move out in the middle of the night because there were bill collectors after us. That’s when we moved to Texas. My dad just, my dad was a drinker and after we moved to Texas, I was twelve I guess and he sexually abused me (P, 4, lines 18–23, 1).

I watched Prosperous Matriarch speak, attempting to picture her as a child, understanding that they were forced to leave their home and were uncertain of what their

futures would be. I imagined her as a child, riding in her family car, wondering what they would do for food or if they would have a home again. I have reviewed her statements again and again, wondering what the correlation is between the loss of her family home and being sexually abused by her father. The literature states that homeless children and youth, especially those living on the streets, are more vulnerable to sexual and physical abuse. However, Prosperous Matriarch was homeless while in her parents' care and her own father was the one who sexually abused her.

Optimistic Survivor remembered her father's inability to maintain employment and her mother's attempts to provide for the family. Unable to pay the rent, it was common for her and her family to either be evicted or have to leave their family's residence:

We came in a car with a little eight by ten U-Haul and that's all we could bring with us. I remember sleeping a few nights in the car... I don't even know how long before we got our little rent house (P. 3, lines 49–52, 2). Optimistic Survivor spoke candidly regarding her first memories of homelessness. I envisioned Optimistic Survivor as an eight year old child, sleeping in her family car, not knowing what each day might bring or whether they would find a home. Not having a stable home is one reason Optimistic Survivor stated that she values her home and family today.

While two of the participants underwent homelessness as children, all seven of the participants in this study experienced homelessness as a youth. Faith Architect experienced familial homelessness as a result of his mother's death and his brother's loss of employment. At the age of eighteen his social security benefits were canceled,

making it even more difficult for the brothers to secure housing. They lived in hotels, motels and temporarily in the homes of friends and church members until they were able to afford their own apartment. According to the literature, loss of employment is often a cause of homelessness, particularly among men (Tessler et al., 2001).

Six of the seven participants ran away from home. Participants in this study identified reasons for leaving home as being either the result of a family argument, or as a survival tactic to flee violence in the home. The literature reports three reasons youth run away from home; poor parenting, violence or sexual abuse (Whitbeck & Simons, 1990). These causes were reaffirmed in this study.

Sexually molested by family members or friends of the family, three of the four participants in this study ran away from home. For Scholarly Model, an encounter with her birth father resulted in his attempting to molest her. Scholarly Model was molested by both males in her family and male friends of her mother throughout her life. She was frequently beaten by her mother, who did not believe she had ever been raped.

Prosperous Matriarch was sexually abused by her father as a child and by her step father as an adolescent. Her step-father also physically abused her in an attempt to assert his power over her and her family. She fled her family home following a brutal beating from her step- father and never resided there again. Optimistic Survivor was sexually abused by her step-father as a youth. She ran away from home to escape the abuse, “My biological father was an alcoholic... and physically and emotionally abusive. My step-father wasn’t any better, he was a drunk. He was physically and emotionally and verbally and sexually abusive to us” (P. 3, lines 7 –10, 1).

A final contributor to youth homelessness for the participants was being ejected from their homes. Participants who resided in the homeless youth shelter at the time of the interviews had been kicked out of their homes, resulting in their most recent episodes of homelessness. Scholarly Model and her grandmother argued over Scholarly Model's boyfriend, which resulted in her grandmother asking her to leave. Sensitive Citizen was thrown out of the house by the current male role model in his home due to an argument in which he was belittled and taunted.

Homelessness

Homelessness typically brings to mind the image of transient alcoholic or a drug addicted male asking for spare change. During the 1980s family homelessness emerged as the new face of homelessness (Duffield, 2001) in what has been called "the new poverty" (Nunez & Fox, 1999, p. 289). Families, women and children are homeless now more frequently than at any other period in our nation's history since the Great Depression.

What causes homelessness in the United States? The National Coalition for the Homeless (NCH) has stated that poverty, loss of housing and reduction or loss of employment are primary causes of homelessness (NCH, 2009). Each of these elements has been affirmed as contributing to homelessness by participants in this study. The death of Faith Architect's mother, his brother's loss of employment and the subsequent eviction from their apartment resulted in the brothers becoming homeless. Prosperous Matriarch's family was unable to pay rent and her father was unable to sustain

employment, resulting in their loss of housing. Optimistic Survivor's family was likewise unable to pay the rent and hence they became homeless.

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning (LGBTQ) individuals are over represented among the homeless. LGBTQ youth in particular are at higher risk of experiencing physical and sexual violence while homeless. The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force stated that, "LBGT youth face the threat of victimization everywhere: at home, at school, at their jobs, and, for those who are out of the home, at shelters and on the streets (National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, 2007, p. 3). LBGTQ youth are at increased risk of becoming involved in survival sex in an attempt to acquire a place to sleep, food or other basic human needs. None of the participants in this study related that they were Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or questioning individuals.

Teenage pregnant homeless youth currently comprise one third of the homeless female population (National Network for Youth, 2010). Pregnancy during adolescence is considered taboo in American culture, even as it is welcomed in many cultures around the world. The stigma attached to U.S. teens having babies results in young mothers seeking abortions, putting their child up for adoption, or keeping their child and facing the reality that they may be asked to leave their family home. Whether thrown out of their home for being pregnant or leaving home, pregnant teen mothers are faced with the dilemma of caring not only for themselves but for their child without job training, job skills, a high school diploma or GED. Without intervention, the inability to obtain employment that would sustain mother and child leaves their small family hovering between poverty and homelessness. School programs making it possible for teens to

continue their education, to attend parenting classes and that provide safe, caring day care for students' infants are a means of guiding young mothers through the process of caring for their children, completing their high school educations and eventually becoming able to support their children. In this study, pregnancy was not a stated reason why participants became homeless, although one participant did marry and become pregnant after dropping out of school. When she later returned to school while pregnant, this individual did not consider anything she was learning to be productive or beneficial to her. She was very ill due to morning sickness and eventually quit school again. A program like the one previously mentioned and highlighted in the literature was either not in existence at the high school she attended or was not made available to her.

In the wake of hurricanes Katrina and Rita, “a new face of homelessness” (NAEH, 2006, p. 1) was created. Residents of New Orleans were encouraged by authorities to flee their homes in 2005, as Katrina approached their picturesque community so admired by tourists. The city still endures the lasting effects of this natural disaster. Martha Kegel, the Executive Director of Greater New Orleans, Louisiana stated that, “In New Orleans are 61,000 abandoned buildings filled with mold, rotting debris and gaping holes in ceilings as though Katrina just happened” (NAEH, 2010b, p.1). When residents of New Orleans fled the city, they sought refuge in cities located throughout the United States. Forty-six states welcomed evacuees of New Orleans as residents (Cook, 2006). School children whose families had lost their homes and belongings were uprooted from their communities and relocated in unfamiliar cities.

Although citizens of New Orleans are returning, many are choosing to remain in the cities where they have relocated. Homelessness conditions in New Orleans have been compared to living in a Third World nation, (NAEH, 2010b), as homeless residents attempt to live in abandoned buildings. None of the participants in this study were refugees of Katrina. However, one participant and her family were living in a townhouse among other displaced families whose homes were damaged or lost during Hurricane Ike. At the time of the interviews, this participant and her family were attempting to rebuild their home along the Texas Gulf Coast.

The transitory lifestyles of homeless children may contribute to low achievement and increased risk factors (Obradovic, et al., 2009). The impact of homelessness in previous literature considered homeless children has been linked to physical, emotional and developmental problems (Bassuk & Rosenberg, 1990; Shane 1996). Homeless children are more likely to suffer violence than their housed peers (Buckner, 2008; Craig 1992). The findings of this study are supportive of the literature.

Two participants of this study experienced episodic homelessness as children. One remembered sleeping in the family car after her parents were unable to pay the rent. Another shared that she and her family resided temporarily with family members who reluctantly allowed them to stay in their home until her family found a house to rent. As homeless youth, various participants shared that they either lived temporarily in hotels and motels, in the homes of family members, in the homes of friends, on the streets or in homeless shelters. Although one participant lived in hotels or motels while homeless, the literature typically refers to welfare hotels or motels where homeless families live

while receiving federal financial assistance. This setting is much like residing in a homeless shelter. The participant in this study did not reside in this type of hotel. He and his brother actually saved their own money in order to spend nights in hotels or motels until they were able to pay apartment rent. The narratives also revealed that participants resided temporarily with friends or family members when homeless as children or youth. This is commensurate with the experiences of homeless youth in the literature. Two of this study's participants lived on the streets while homeless. Their experiences were likewise reflective of those mentioned in the literature (e.g., Saldana, Finley & Finley, 2005). Two participants of this study resided in a residential shelter for homeless youth. The shelter provided an alternative to living on the streets where youth could reside while completing school, searching for employment and learning to be self-supportive.

Determination and Support

Resilience can be described as the positive reaction to invasive stimulus or negative circumstances. Coping or responding in a constructive manner to challenging situations is in many ways a choice. Participants in this study chose to transcend the limitations of homelessness rather than succumb to them. Self-motivation or determination and a support network contributed to their success.

Determination

Each participant of this study chose to meet the high school equivalency standards established by the state of Texas. Although each experienced episodic homelessness while in school, he or she either remained in school and graduated or returned to school and earned a GED. The literature defines determination, meaning, purpose to life, caring for self and receiving help from others as attributes of homeless youth who were more successful than their peers (Williams et al., 2001). How people cope with adversity is an emphasis of resilience investigations (e.g., Bernard 2006; Masten 2008; Rutter, 2007). These attributes were reflected by participants in this study. A participant's promise to his mother and his choosing to continue to move forward rather than to review the past compelled him to graduate from high school. Participants who graduated from high school stated that they had not ever considered dropping out of school. Participants who returned to school to earn their GEDs were motivated, knowing that no one could achieve this goal for them; they wanted to prove they could meet high school equivalency standards or they required a GED to enroll in college.

Support

Support was a contributing factor that enabled the participants to survive homelessness and graduate from high school or earn their GEDs. Family, friends, church members, teachers and school administrators, residential shelters and spirituality framed the support systems available to participants in this study. The literature suggests that the disposition of the child or youth, family relationships and support are paramount

in contributing to resilience (Luthar & Zigler, 1991; Masten & Powell 2003; Rutter, 2007). The importance of family relationships, particularly the mother, has been established in the literature (Torquati & Gamble, 2001). Faith Architect and his brother struggled together with homelessness. Rebel Bride found a haven of support in the home of her sister, where she resided while attending GED classes at the university. Modest Gentleman's relationship with his family appears untouched by his departure to Miami in search of employment as a teenager. He maintains a supportive relationship with them today. Each participant resided temporarily in the home of friends while homeless. Prosperous Matriarch's friend, although recently married, welcomed her into her home following graduation until she married. Church members played an inspirational role in the life of Faith Architect. One church member opened her home to him temporarily when he was homeless.

Teachers and administrators were particularly supportive in the experiences of Prosperous Matriarch and Scholarly Model. The literature states that educators can make a significant difference in the lives of their students (Masten, 2008; Masten, 2009; Polakow, 1998). This was definitely the case for Prosperous Matriarch, whose cosmetology teacher welcomed her to live in her home until graduation. Her teacher even altered the prom dress that she wore to the senior prom. A school administrator refused to allow her step-father on campus when he was found walking the halls in search of her during the school day. The educational staff at the school Scholarly Model attended while residing at the shelter made an impact on her life. She was thrilled when she received her class rank and confirmation that she would graduate. She praised the

teachers for their methods of instruction, emphasizing that they made education have meaning. This is reflective of the literature regarding effective teachers, particularly Haberman's star teachers (Haberman, 1995; Haberman, 2004). Scholarly Model's principal established a culture of caring and he made sure she would participate in senior activities (Masten 2008; Masten, 2009; Noddings, 1992). In both examples, educators exceeded the expectations of caring schools as they intervened on behalf of their students (Gay, 2002; Gay, 2007). Six of the seven participants were able to provide an example of an educator who was helpful to them in some way during their educational experience. Faith Architect was the only respondent to report that no educator encouraged him while he was a homeless student. Modest Gentleman stated that a teacher in his GED coursework was concerned about students learning. Optimistic Survivor remembered an English teacher who made English appealing to her. Although Rebel Bride felt as if her teachers favored other students, she mentioned one teacher that urged her not to be discouraged and treated her as if she were an adult. Sensitive Citizen reported that interaction with his principal and teachers was typically confrontational. He set fire to his classroom while his teacher and fellow students were in the room because his teacher insulted him. However, there was one educator at his school whom he could talk to or go to for help.

The residential shelter for homeless youth was a support system for participants who lived there. The staff at the shelter was assisting Sensitive Citizen in obtaining work papers so he could be employed. They are also assisting him in becoming an

American citizen. The shelter provided a safe place for two participants to live while becoming independent and self-supportive.

Spirituality was a source of support evident in the lives of particular participants (Williams et al., 2001, Williams & Lindsay, 2005). Faith in God or a Higher Power is the essence of spirituality. Faith Architect's life has been founded in church and his faith in God. Although he has built over one hundred houses this year and rebuilds communities, he continues to search for ways to give to others. Modest Gentleman praises God for sending a kind stranger to bring him food or the money to buy food while he was homeless. Scholarly Model stated that she was thankful to God for enabling her to attend the high school where she found support and graduated. Through her poem, or perhaps her prayer, Scholarly Model cried out to God for help:

Molested from an early age all I have inside is rage.

I never knew a talk with my dad, and when I did he wanted to take

The little innocence I had.

I tell myself I can get through it.

I prayed.

I know there is a God, so now I care, (P. 7, lines 310–316, 10– 1)

Characteristics reflected in spirituality include a belief in intervention from God, a relationship with God, the importance of prayer, unconditional love and acceptance,(Williams & Lindsay, 2005). These aspects of spirituality confirmed in this study support those cited in the literature.

Resilience Theory

Bonnie Bernard has identified characteristics of resilience referred to as personal strengths: social competence, problem solving, autonomy and a sense of purpose and future, (Bernard, 2004). Participants in this study as a whole displayed characteristics of autonomy and a sense of purpose more frequently than social competence and problem solving. Social competence is reflective of an individual's ability to seek out and maintain relationships. The very nature of homelessness is that of being removed from familiar people and places as one loses his or her home and moves to other locations, seeking a means of securing a personal residence. Therefore the essence of social competence with respect to experiences of homelessness leaves the homeless child or youth at a disadvantage. One might refer to relationships established while homeless, although possibly fleeting in nature due to the transitory lifestyle of homelessness, with respect to children and youth who experience homelessness. Modest Gentleman befriended the homeless men or winos on the streets of Miami as a youth. They advised him as to how to survive on the streets and shared their modest meals with him. Faith Architect maintained relationships with church members and at school with his peers while he and his brother were living homeless. Optimistic Survivor maintains a relationship with the young man she married and continues friendships established prior to homelessness. Prosperous Matriarch exhibited social competence in her ability to communicate with her teacher and assistant principal regarding her home life. She was welcomed into the home of her cosmetology teacher, where she remained until after she graduated from high school. Rebel Bride maintained relationships with friends and

ultimately her sister, who allowed her to reside in her home and pursue her GED.

Sensitive Citizen valued his friendships, stating that his friends were the only reason he attended school. Scholarly Model made new friends and got along well with staff at her new high school while residing at a residential shelter for homeless youth.

Responsiveness, within the category of social competence, is the ability to “elicit positive responses from others” (Bernard, 2004, p. 14). Faith Architect met with his high school counselor regarding college while he was homeless, and interacted with his classmates at school and his teachers in a positive manner. None of these individuals realized he and his brother were homeless. The majority of the participants of this study elicited positive responses from others. Prosperous Matriarch maintained positive relationships with teachers, school administration and her peers while homeless. Scholarly Model got along well with staff and fellow students at her new high school while residing at the shelter.

Communication is a key to relationships. “Social communication skills enable all of the processes of interpersonal connection and relationship building” (Bernard, 2004, p. 15). Participants in this study exhibited the ability to communicate well with others. Empathy and caring, are attributes of social communication, consistent with, “morality, forgiveness, and compassion, and caring for others” (Bernard, 2004, p. 15). Each participant in this study expressed the desire to help others. The general consensus among participants was that through their testimony, perhaps others could be helped. Several expressed the need for mentor programs and counseling for teens experiencing

homelessness as well as a place to wash clothes, bathe and relax. Compassion, altruism and forgiveness are characteristics of social competence.

These characteristics are particularly apparent in the testimony of Faith Architect, who has dedicated his life to rebuilding communities and building homes. He has expressed the desire to help others in this manner not only in the United States, but internationally as well.

Problem solving is the second characteristic of resilience identified by Bonnie Bernard. Individuals engage in problem solving daily. Planning is an attribute of problem solving. When individuals are homeless, immediate survival needs are their primary concern. Attempting to arrange shelter, have access to food and take care of basic human needs are paramount concerns. Faith Architect stated this concern very eloquently:

If all you see is darkness, you're going to do what people who are trying to survive do, because when you are trying to survive, the future is not your thought. You're thinking about the present. And that's one of the definitions of being poor, not necessarily monetary, it's your vision of the future. You worry about the present. You're trying to fulfill those physical needs. And you're not seeing the future. Your self-actualization, you're not seeing your fulfillment. You're not seeing opportunities that are out there that you can achieve if you just keep moving (P.1, lines 538–545, 22)

Although Faith Architect described the darkness of homelessness and the fact that every moment is devoted to immediate survival, it is important to realize that he continued attending classes, meeting with his counselor regarding preparation for

college. Modest Gentleman stated that he, “didn’t have time to set many goals... “I was just livin’ life the best I could, where I could... I just make the best of what I had” (P. 2, 11 lines 39–141, 6). Modest Gentleman echoed Faith Architect’s statement that while homeless, most people are just trying to survive. Planning was not an area emphasized among participants of this study, other than in attempting to find a way out of homelessness.

Flexibility or the “ability to see alternatives and attempt alternative solutions” is a component of problem solving (Bernard, 2004, p. 18). Scholarly Model made a personal commitment to pass the TAKS test and graduate from high school. Although she attended several high schools, she did pass the TAKS test and graduated while residing in a shelter for homeless youth. Resourcefulness is a component of problem solving, and is recognized as a survival skill. Prosperous Matriarch’s teacher assumed the role of a parent, inviting her to live with her family, helping with her prom dress and providing the opportunity for her to complete high school. Rebel Bride’s sister provided a home for her while she was attending GED classes. Sensitive Citizen received assistance from the homeless shelter in acquiring work papers so that he can hopefully obtain employment while applying for U.S. citizenship.

Critical thinking and insight are aspects of problem solving. Optimistic Survivor decided that she would make sure that her family does not experience what she did as a child and as a youth. Prosperous Matriarch emphasized the fact that she has provided a very different life for her children than the one she herself experienced as a child. She has ensured that they have a home where they know they are loved, where they can be

secure in knowing that they will not have to move because they cannot pay the mortgage. They have plenty of food and enjoy a good life. Sensitive Citizen requested admission into the GED classes while in prison. Modest Gentleman worked to provide a good life for his family, and he hopes they will learn from his experiences.

Autonomy is the third personal strength identified by Bonnie Bernard. Each participant in this study exhibited a strong perception of self. Each has expressed confidence in their abilities regardless of how shaken they may have been by the trauma of homelessness. Modest Gentleman stated, “If I don’t put out the effort, get out there and shake the trees, it doesn’t happen” (P. 2, lines 146–147, p. 6). Positive identity is a component of autonomy. While suffering abuse, losing their homes and security, participants in this study managed to retain a positive self-identity. Prosperous Matriarch continued to be an officer in her vocational club, attended the senior prom and graduated from high school. Rebel Bride, although wounded emotionally by the cruelty of teachers and school staff that dismissed her as unimportant, continued to have confidence in herself, her abilities and her identity.

Internal locus of control or initiative are other aspects of autonomy. Each participant took the initiative to complete their high school educations. Whether they graduated from high school, pursued their GED while adolescents or completed their education through a GED program years later, each participant made the decision to accomplish this goal and did so. Self-efficacy and mastery are additional components of autonomy. Bernard stated that, “perceived efficacy plays a major role in educational success in terms of both motivation and achievement” (Bernard, 2004, p. 24).

Motivation played a key role in participants reaching their educational goal. Faith Architect's promise to his mother encouraged him to graduate from high school. Prosperous Matriarch was determined to graduate, and refused to allow her step-father's abuse to keep her from achieving her dreams.

Adaptive distancing and resistance are aspects of autonomy. Participants removed themselves from situations where they were physically, emotionally and sexually abused. They left these dangerous environments, distancing themselves from unhealthy habits and behaviors. Although thrown out of his house, Sensitive Citizen left home repeatedly in search of a haven where he would not be verbally and emotionally abused. As a child he and his mother were physically abused by his siblings' father and their father's relatives. All of these years of abuse overflowed within the young man at times sending him to seek refuge in the streets. Scholarly Model was thrown out of the home as well. She too tried repeatedly to leave abusive family circumstances as both a child and as a youth. At the time of her interview, she was seeking employment and hoping to attend college part time. Prosperous Matriarch likewise left her violent home, finding refuge with friends and her teacher until she married. She was determined that her children would not suffer as she did. She distanced herself from her stepfather, enlisting her teacher and assistant principal's support to keep him from harassing her at school.

Self-awareness or mindfulness is another aspects of autonomy. Participants did not report, taking a step back from their lives to review their situation specifically,

however. Sensitive Citizen's decision to take GED courses while in jail may have been the result of self-assessment.

When I was in high school, I was in high school for five years with eight credits. In that five year period I only had eight credits. I looked at that and I'm . . . No! This is not going to work. So when I got locked up, they asked me did I want to join the GED program? I said, "Yes!" (P. 6, lines 195–197, 8). Humor is considered to be an attribute of autonomy. In this case, participants of the study did not appear to find any humorous side to their experiences of homelessness.

The fourth characteristic of personal strengths identified by Bernard is a sense of purpose. Goal direction is a component of a sense of purpose. Faith Architect's purpose in graduating from high school was to keep a promise he made to his mother and to serve as a catalyst for acceptance to college. Optimistic Survivor attended GED classes in order to prove to herself that she could achieve this goal and as a prerequisite to college. Prosperous Matriarch graduated from high school and passed her state exams in order to earn her certification as a hair dresser.

Special interests, creativity and imagination are additional attributes of a sense of purpose. Scholarly Model wrote poetry for pleasure and to express her pain. She kept a journal of original poetry she had written and offered to show me the poem she had written about her life. With her permission, that poem is included in this study. She shared that she would like to become a model or attend college to take courses in writing. No other participants shared that they enjoy a hobby. Optimism and hope are also components of a sense of purpose. Most participants appeared to be optimistic

about their futures. Rebel Bride stated that she had a job, a house and a car. She was considering returning to college. Faith, spirituality and a sense of meaning are paramount among the components of a sense of purpose. Modest Gentleman thanked God for any assistance he received while homeless. Faith Architect's faith in God led him through homelessness and encouraged him regarding future goals. Rebel Bride was thankful for having had a good childhood in which she never wanted for anything.

Bernard's Protective Factors

Bonnie Bernard identified four protective factors that buffer the resilient child or youth; environment, family, school and community. Environmental factors include "giving back" (Bernard, 2004, p 48), particularly as a volunteer, "Giving back is a powerful 'hook' for all youth, especially those not used to thinking of themselves as successful" (ibid, p. 47). Faith Architect indicated that he hopes to one day be able to give back to the community. Family protective factors emphasize the importance of parents and the role of parenting. In this study parents played a role either by extending help and encouragement or, at the opposite extreme, in being detrimental and abusive.

School protective factors include caring relationships and high expectations. The high school Scholarly Model attended while living at the shelter for homeless youth created a caring atmosphere, making her feel welcome. The principal's support was without question a high point in her life, as he purchased her prom dress and paid for her involvement in senior activities. Prosperous Matriarch's assistant principal threw her step-father out of the building, not allowing her to be harassed at school. Her

cosmetology teacher became a source of strength for her, as her teacher welcomed her into her home.

Community protective factors suggest involvement in youth programs and the importance of mentor programs. Faith Architect, Prosperous Matriarch and Rebel Bride suggested that the development of counseling programs would be an asset to intervention on behalf of homeless students. Faith Architect mentioned the importance of mentor programs. A member of Faith Architect's church invited him to temporarily reside in her home. This is the only community protective factor identified in this study.

Recommendations

Recommendations for future studies have emerged from this study. The first area would be to divide the participants into two distinctive groups according to age. Participants in one group would be ages 18–25 years old. This would include young people living in residential homeless shelters. A second group could be established for participants aged 26–50 years old. Participants should be high school graduates or GED recipients. The research could investigate whether programs were in place to assist them and if they had taken advantage of these programs.

Future inquiries should focus on the experiences of LGBTQ youth who have been or are currently homeless. After researching the literature regarding LGBTQ homeless youth, I was appalled to discover that LGBTQ youth are harassed and abused in shelters for homeless youth and by service providers. These institutions should be a refuge from the horrors of the streets, not a continuation of them. Investigations into the

harassment and abuse of LGBTQ youth should take precedence over other research topics.

The experiences of homeless pregnant teenagers' deserve further study. The literature regarding homeless pregnant teens is limited and should be expanded. Investigations should include whether pregnant teenage mothers are thrown out of their homes or run away. Homeless parenting teenagers should also be a topic of future projects.

In addition, individuals who grew up in foster care should be provided the opportunity to voice their experiences and concerns. One might compare the experiences of children growing up in foster care with those who grew up experiencing episodic familial homelessness. How would experiencing homelessness accompanied by family members be different than being raised in foster care?

The literature suggests that experiences of men and women vary. A study that is gender specific would be a beneficial investigation. The causes of homelessness have also been identified as different for men and women (Tessler, Rosenbeck & Gamache, 2001). What other aspects of homelessness exist with regard to gender?

The perceptions and opinions of educators who work with homeless students should be another future topic of scrutiny. Within this area of focus, three separate studies could be conducted. The first group could include teachers of homeless children and youth who are asked to share their attitudes, beliefs or experiences. This in itself would be a comprehensive study. A second study could include the attitudes, beliefs and experiences of school counselors. Counselors may need to be separated according

to elementary or secondary assignments for the purposes of the investigation. Due to the grade level of the students, counselors' experiences may differ. Finally, administrators could share their attitudes, beliefs and experiences regarding working with homeless students.

An investigation related to how many formerly homeless individuals attend college would be an excellent area for future inquiry. A second study within this area would be; how many formerly homeless individuals actually graduated from college? Perhaps we could learn something from such models of success. The findings of such investigations could be used to gain a better understanding of the overall experiences of homeless children and youth. There is a need for continued studies in this area to better assist individuals experiencing homelessness or individuals who have experienced homelessness during their school years.

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APPENDIX A

CONSENT FORM

A Case Study of the Life Experiences of High School Graduates/General Education Development (GED) Recipients in Texas Who Experienced Homelessness During Their Public School Education

Introduction

The purpose of this form is to provide you information that may affect your decision as to whether or not to participate in this research study. If you decide to participate in this study, this form will also be used to record your consent.

You have been asked to participate in a research project study. The purpose of this study is to investigate the personal and educational experiences of individuals who have been homeless during their public school education and graduated from high school or received their GED. You were selected to be a possible participant because you graduated from high school or received your GED although you have experienced homelessness during your elementary or secondary education. This study is being conducted by a graduate student from Texas A&M University.

What will I be asked to do?

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to engage in two interviews. The first interview will be for forty – five minutes and the second interview will be for sixty minutes. Your participation will be audio recorded.

What are the risks involved in this study?

The risks associated with this study are that the participant may recall memories that are painful when sharing personal and educational experiences. The risks associated in this study are minimal, and are not greater than risks ordinarily encountered in daily life.

What are the possible benefits of this study?

The benefit to the participant is the opportunity to share his or her experiences. The benefit to society is to learn how the participant was able to overcome his or her personal and educational challenges as related to homelessness and graduate from high school or receive his or her GED.

Do I have to participate?

No. Your participation is voluntary. You may decide not to participate or to withdraw at any time without your current or future relations with Texas A&M University being affected.

Who will know about my participation in this research study?

This study is confidential. A pseudo name will be assigned to protect the privacy of the participant.

The records of this study will be kept private. No identifiers linking you to this study will be included in any sort of report that might be published. Research records will be stored securely at 339 Harrington Office building, College Station, Texas 77842-4232 and only Ruth Reider, the investigator and Dr. Patricia Larke, the dissertation chair person will have access to the records.

Your participation may be audio recorded with your permission. Any audio recordings will be stored securely and only Ruth Ann Reider, principal investigator and Dr. Patricia Larke, dissertation chairperson will have access to the recordings. Any recordings will be kept for three years and then erased.

Whom do I contact with questions about the research?

If you have questions regarding this study, you may contact Ruth Reider, (281) 541 – 5620, ruth-ann-reider@tamu.edu or rareider@academicplanet.com or Dr. Patricia Larke, (979) 845-2171, plarke@tamu.edu.

Whom do I contact about my rights as a research participant?

This research study has been reviewed by the Human Subjects' Protection Program and/or the Institutional Review Board at Texas A&M University. For research-related problems or questions regarding your rights as a research participant, you can contact these offices at (979)458-4067 or irb@tamu.edu.

Signature

Please be sure you have read the above information, asked questions and received answers to your satisfaction. You will be given a copy of the consent form for your records. By signing this document, you consent to participate in this study.

_____ I agree to be audio recorded.

_____ I do not want to be audio recorded.

Signature of Participant: _____ **Date:** _____

Printed Name: _____

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent: _____ **Date:** _____

Printed Name: _____

APPENDIX B
PARTICIPANTS' PERSONAL EXPERIENCES

Question	Participant #1	Participant #2	<i>Participant</i>				Participant #6	Participant #7
			Participant #3	#4	Participant #5			
<i>Tell me about your family?</i>	Supportive single mother	A good family, Divorced parents	Very dysfunctional alcoholic father/stepfather	Alcoholic father, Mom worked, Abusive father & stepfather	A close-knit family	My family is a kind of dysfunctional family	Mother abused by father of younger siblings & his family	
<i>What was it like growing up?</i>			mom was awesome			Abusive mother, sexually abusive father, stepfather, and mom's boyfriend	Participant abused by the same	
<i>Where have you lived?</i>	Texas	Texas	Multiple states, Texas	Another state, Texas	Texas	Another country, Texas	Texas	
<i>What is your favorite holiday?</i>	Christmas	Christmas	Thanksgiving	Thanksgiving	Christmas	New Year's Day	Halloween	
<i>What makes this holiday so special to you?</i>	Family	Watching expression on children's faces and talking with them	Family	As a child we always had enough food	Seeing things at holidays Not all people are as lucky	We've been through 525,600 minutes I can get drunk		
<i>Does your family share a special holiday tradition?</i>	Singing Everyone has to sing	Not really	Preparing Thanksgiving meal with daughter		Everybody gathering around and passing out presents	No	Memorial Day, Surfside beach	
<i>What was your first experience of homelessness?</i>	Senior year in high school	16 years old	Moving to Texas	Leaving home	17 years old	Me and my family, we're if you bother me, I'll stab you, kind of family	Mom kicked me out of the house	
<i>How did this impact your life?</i>	Mother's death Brother unemployed	Quit school to go to Florida	Sleeping in car		Left in the middle of the night	Ran away from home (age 15)		

Question	<i>Participant</i>						
	Participant #1	Participant #2	Participant #3	Participant #4	Participant #5	Participant #6	Participant #7
<i>Is education considered important in your family?</i>	Extremely My mom would come to everything I was involved in	Yes My mom pushed for us to go	Absolutely	It was very important to my mother	Yes	Yes (to mother)	Yes
<i>What levels of education have members of your family achieved?</i>	Mother – High school graduate Brother – 18 hours short of Bachelor’s Degree	Father – dropped out Mother – dropped out, then returned to school and went to college	High School – (Sibling) Parents – did not graduate from high school	Parents – did not finish high school	High School diploma GED	He has GED	Mom – High School & College Graduate
<i>Was there an event or series of events in your life that brought you great happiness?</i>	Participating in the Junior Olympics	When sixteen years old, daughter was born When eight months old, daughter was born	Meeting husband and husband’s family Building a family with husband and his family lives and at this point even in my grandchildren’s lives	When I got married Birth of daughters	Playing softball	Son was born	No
<i>What made this event or these events so special?</i>							
<i>Was there an event or series of events in your life that caused you to be sad?</i>	A series of deaths in family while he was in high school	Divorce of parents	Entire childhood	Mother’s death	Grandmother’s death	What happened between me and my mother	Father trying to rape her
<i>What was this event or series of events?</i>	Particularly sickness and death of his mother					Getting my heart broken all the time	
<i>Did you set any goals for yourself at that time?</i>	Go to the Olympics(as an athlete)	No	Marry a good man Have children		No	Not letting the past effect me	To graduate from high school and stop skipping school
<i>What were these goals? How did you plan to meet them?</i>	Become successful and give back (to the community)		Be a good mother Not to see my children abused the way we were				

Question	<i>Participant</i>						
	Participant #1	Participant #2	Participant #3	Participant #4	Participant #5	Participant #6	Participant #7
<i>Was your plan to achieve these goals successful?</i>	Successful career Community developer building homes for people		No plan				Yes, I graduated from high school
<i>Do you find that you depend on yourself in order to meet your needs?</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes and her husband	Yes	The majority of the time	Yes	Yes
<i>What impact has homelessness had on your life?</i>	Help people Be happy Have a stable home	Made me realize that things could be worse than they really are	Stability in her life, children's lives and grandchildren's lives It made me have this insatiable desire for stability in my life, for stability in my children's lives	It did very much make me, determined to raise my kids different	It was a huge wake-up call for me	See things in a different light	Shelter for Homeless Youth Searching for employment
<i>What is your situation today?</i>	A two parent home	Have home Working musician	Great family Job she loves	Own home, business and married	Own home, car and getting married	Resident at shelter for homeless youth	Resident at shelter for homeless youth
<i>Are you still dealing with homelessness?</i>	Money is fine Church life		Not homeless, displaced due to hurricane Ike				

APPENDIX C

PARTICIPANTS' EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES

Question	Participant #1	Participant #2	Participant #3	Participant #4	Participant #5	Participant #6	Participant #7
<i>What were your experiences as a homeless student?</i>	At school everything pretty much the same Living off & on in motels Rarely money for lunch	Quit School	Quit School	Lived with teacher Engaged/ fiancé working Stayed in school	I got my GED in college	Went to school to get GED	Grades mixed up
<i>How did homelessness impact your schooling?</i>	Tried to, focus on school & going to college	Quit school GED later	Lost purpose	It didn't	No one to make her go to school	No	It didn't do anything
<i>How do you evaluate your school experience as a homeless student?</i>	No help	No help	No help	Support from teacher & admin.	No help	Insulted by teacher, so I set fire to her classroom	Don't just pass students
<i>Tell me about the most recent school you attended?</i>	Real Estate Classes	GED Classes	GED Classes	Computer Class at College	Cert. School Phlebotomy Class	GED	(While living at Residential Shelter for Homeless Youth) High School in Texas
<i>Where there any teachers or staff members who particularly encouraged you?</i>	No	Yes	One English teacher	Lived with teacher	Yes-One teacher treated you like an adult	One lady "She helped me a lot"	(While living at Residential Shelter for Homeless Youth) High Yes, like a family (At High School in Texas)
<i>How did they encourage?</i>	-----	Cared about student learning	Made English come alive	Lived with teacher	To keep my Head up and know that people do care	He knew he could call on her for help	The teachers they actually taught real stuff—that's happening in the world
<i>Where there any particular programs at school that was helpful to you?</i>	No	No	No	No	No	No	No

Question	Participant #1	Participant #2	Participant #3	Participant #4	Participant #5	Participant #6	Participant #7
<i>How were they helpful?</i>	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
<i>Where have you attended school?</i>	Texas	Another state, Texas	Multiple states Texas Multiple schools	Another state –Texas (Multiple Schools)	Texas	Houston, Texas (Multiple Schools)	Houston, Texas (Multiple Schools)
<i>Was there an event or series of events that was particularly Educational experiences?</i>	No	-----	Drama Club	Vocational Classes Club Officer National Honor Society	Cosmetology Class	Friends	When I got my Class rank (No. 96 out of 289 students)
<i>Was there an event or series of events that was particularly painful in your educational experiences?</i>	Seeing my grades not at the level that they could have been	-----	No	Not having school supplies A hatful teacher	Teachers showing favoritism to certain people Teachers being overbearing	Not being able to attend prom and graduate with his class	Not really
<i>Is there a particular school experience or event that has impacted your education?</i>	Unable to participate in athletics due to injury Homelessness altered his focus	-----	No	(Participant enjoyed school and was determined to graduate	Getting GED	-----	-----
<i>Do you consider either of these events a "turning point" in your education?</i>	It's taken me probably until now to get back into the groove of just going. Being excited about doing the things I'm supposed to do,	-----	No	Getting involved with organizations	GED	In school— 5 years with eight credits	No
<i>When did graduation or completion of your GED become your goal?</i>	Graduation —never stopped being a goal	-----	Wanted to go to nursing school Needed GED first Personal satisfaction	Never stopped being a goal	Mandated by court to get GED	GED	Continued being a goal (graduating)

Question	Participant #1	Participant #2	Participant #3	Participant #4	Participant #5	Participant #6	Participant #7
<i>How did you plan to meet this goal?</i>	Stay in high school	Attend GED Classes	Get GED	Stay in high school	Attend GED Classes	Attend GED Classes	Stay in high school
<i>If you had the opportunity to meet with a group of educators, what would you suggest as the most effective way to motivate students to achieve?</i>	<p>A mentor program</p> <p>A place to wash their clothes</p> <p>Someone to help outside of academics</p> <p>Help get ready for college</p>	-----	Finding the fine line between being too lenient and too rigid	<p>To look at each kid.</p> <p>Different kids have different needs</p> <p>I have a real issue with the amount of testing the kids are crammed down their throats...</p>	<p>Don't be so insensitive to things that are very obviously right in front of your face.</p> <p>You know, you see someone, you know, here they are, they're on medications because they're depressed.</p>	<p>Don't belittle students</p> <p>Teachers are a joke to me</p>	<p>Don't sugar coat anything with grades and don't bring them down either</p> <p>(Don't tell them they won't be anything in life)</p>

VITA

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EDUCATION

Ph.D. 2011	Educational Curriculum and Instruction (Multicultural Education) Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas
M.Ed. 1996	Secondary Education Stephen F. Austin University, Nacogdoches, Texas
B.A. 1989	Elementary Education Generic Special Education Sam Houston State University, Huntsville, TX

EMPLOYMENT HISTORY

2006-present	Aldine Independent School District, Houston, TX Special Education Teacher, grades K, 1, 2, 3, 4
1989-2005	Aldine Independent School District, Houston, TX Special Education Teacher, Elementary & Secondary

PRESENTATIONS

Larke, P. J., Carter, N., Alidou, H., Melcon, B., Willis, J., Vasquez, C., Reider, R., Hawkins, T., Albert, G. Saah, L., & Grisby, B. (2003, January). The Aldine cohort: Responding to the shortage of professors of color in teacher education. American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education Annual Meeting. New Orleans, LA.

Larke, P. J., Carter, N., Meloncon, B. Willis, J. Reider, R., Ibrahim, E., and Melcher, P. (2003, February). The Aldine cohort: Developing diverse leaders in teacher education. Association of Teacher Educators Annual Meeting. Jacksonville, FL.