

The Impact of Transitional Living Programs: Perspectives of Homeless Youth

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DISSERTATION

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This dissertation is dedicated to every young person who has ever wondered where home is. Most especially, to Kristian Schleick, con amor para siempre.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BCP	Basic Center Program
DHHS	U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
EHCY	Education of Homeless Children and Youth
HMIS	Homeless Management Information System
HUD	U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
LGBT	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender
NAEH	National Alliance to End Homelessness
PYD	Positive Youth Development
RHYA	Runaway and Homeless Youth Act
SOP	Street Outreach Program
TLP	Transitional Living Program

SUMMARY

Research in the area of youth homelessness has focused on identifying the characteristics and needs of the population, leaving a critical gap in our understanding of the usefulness of the current solutions being implemented. Transitional Living Programs (TLPs) are one of three core strategies executed by the federal government of the United States to address youth homelessness. The purpose of the study was to understand the impact, if any, of TLP services over time directly from the perspective of the youth who have participated in them. It is the first study in the United States to examine outcomes for youth beyond six months of exit from a transitional living program.

In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 32 young people who exited a TLP located in Chicago, Illinois between one and eleven years ago. Four primary research questions guided the investigation: (1) What are the experiences of youth after leaving TLPs? (2) What are youth perceptions of the impact, if any, of TLPs on their lives? (3) How do youth view the usefulness of specific services offered by the TLP? (4) What is the relationship between the meaning youth assign to their experience over time and the attainment of indicators of stability regularly used in the field, such as sustained housing, stable employment, educational achievement and health? A phenomenological approach to analysis was utilized in order to capture the depth and breadth of both *what* youth experienced and *how* they experienced it.

Participants believed TLPs to be an essential part of our solution to youth homelessness; however, a substantial amount of incongruence was found between youth perception of the program's effectiveness and their lived experience of housing, education, employment and health stability over time. Instead, participants reported the lasting benefits of the program to be directly related to outcomes not currently being measured or prioritized in our current service delivery

system: immediate safety; enhanced systems of emotional, informational, instrumental and appraisal supports; and opportunities for personal development.

The results of this study offer detailed guidance for TLP providers regarding implementation of services, from building design to staff hiring practices. However they also provide compelling evidence that we need to rethink our current funding and service delivery system for homeless youth in critical ways. The findings presented call into question generally accepted practices in areas such as: eligibility and exclusion criteria, length of stay requirements, documentation prerequisites and how we operationalize professional boundaries in the field. Additionally, they ask us to seriously examine the usefulness of tying funding to standardized outcomes based on attainment of future stability. While these outcomes are well-intentioned, they may be failing to (1) account for the structural roots of youth homelessness in the United States and (2) capture the most important role TLPs serve—preventing immediate harm, increasing systems of social support and nurturing young lives during their stay in a TLP.

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Brief Description

Young people experiencing homelessness face a multiplicity of threats to their health and well-being, and they require services prepared to respond to their needs quickly and comprehensively (Coates & Mckenzie-Mohr, 2010; Hopper, Bassuk, & Olivet, 2010; Levin, Bax, McKean, & Schoggen, 2005). Transitional living programs (TLPs) are one of three core strategies executed by the federal government of the United States to address youth homelessness, and research on their long-term efficacy does not yet exist (RHYA, 2008). The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the impact of the housing and support services provided by a TLP from the perspectives of formerly homeless youth. Specifically, this study investigated the experiences of youth after leaving the program in order to discover if, and to what extent, young people believe the services they participated in were effective, which services, if any, were beneficial, and in what ways the services were helpful to youth. This study also compares the experiences of youth after exiting services to their perception of the impact of the program on their lives. In doing so, the findings facilitate an understanding of the relationship between the meaning young people assign to their experience in the TLP over time and the attainment of indicators of stability regularly used in the field, such as sustained housing, stable employment, educational achievement and health. Data was collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 32 young people who exited a TLP located in Chicago, Illinois between 1 and 11 years ago. The study is guided by a phenomenological approach to qualitative research as well as a conceptual framework informed by ecosystems, social support and positive youth development theories.

B. Background, Rationale, Significance of the Study

The most current estimates available suggest that between 1.5 and 2 million unaccompanied youth experience homelessness each year in the United States (Congressional Research Services, 2007; Moore, 2006). Homelessness is a traumatic and dangerous experience (Goodman, Saxe, & Harvey, 1991). Research is clear that the lack of safe and stable housing exposes young people to a host of threats and conditions that jeopardize their safety, compromise their physical health and emotional well-being, and frequently force them to make dangerous decisions in order to survive (Hopper et al., 2010; Levin et al., 2005). The loss of one's home and the constant stress of finding somewhere safe to sleep and food to eat is harrowing in and of itself, and life for homeless youth often means facing more than just the peril of hunger and displacement (Goodman et al., 1991; Hopper et al., 2010). A study conducted by the University of Illinois at Chicago Survey Research Laboratory found 62 percent of homeless youth were victimized while on the streets; they experienced physical and sexual assault, harassment, and robbery (Johnson & Graf, 2005). Additional studies have found rates of victimization since leaving home to be as high as 83 percent (Stewart et al., 2004). Youth homelessness is a life threatening situation with mortality among homeless youth documented at a rate 14 times that of young adults in the United States general population (CDC, 2012; Roy, 2004).

For nearly 40 years, the primary federal response to youth homelessness in the United States has been the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA) which authorizes several programs administered by the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). Since its original passage in 1974, RHYA has been reauthorized five times, most recently by the Reconnecting Homeless Youth Act in 2008 (P.L. 110-378). The law currently authorizes federal funding for three core programs designed to meet the needs of runaway and homeless youth—

street outreach programs, basic center programs (emergency shelter) and TLPs. Transitional living programs were established during the 1988 reauthorization of RHYA to provide services for older homeless youth ages 16-21 who are unable to return home. The purpose of the program is to provide safe, stable living accommodations and a range of supportive services for up to 21 months to help young people develop the skills necessary to become independent (RHYA, 2008, P. L. 110-378, Title III, Part B, Section 322a). Services provided by TLPs include: housing, counseling, life skills development, interpersonal skill building, educational advancement, job attainment skills, and mental and physical health care.

Research has concentrated on understanding homeless youth –their needs, their experiences, the risks they face, and the etiology of their homelessness. Although important, this focus has resulted in a knowledge base almost entirely dedicated to understanding the characteristics of homeless youth rather than the service sector’s efforts to respond to their needs (Milburn, Rosenthal, & Rotheram-Borus, 2005). Researchers have recently started to respond to this void by taking two essential steps: first, understanding and detailing the structure of the service sector itself (Brooks, Milburn, Rotheram-Borus, & Witkin, 2004; Colegrove, 2010; Dworsky, 2010; Van Leeuwen, 2004); and second, asking youth currently experiencing homelessness to describe their needs, barriers to access, and satisfaction with the services they have received (Garrett et al., 2008; Kidd & Evans, 2011; Stewart, Reutter, Letourneau, Makwarimba, & Hungler, 2010). These next steps are critical. They provide a map of the breadth of services being offered and describe the perspectives of youth currently receiving those services as to their usefulness. With that said, few interventions with homeless youth have been formally evaluated, and although service outcome research in the area has recently begun to emerge, studies have generally been limited in scope and quality (Altena, Brilleslijper-Kater, &

Wolf, 2010; Milburn et al., 2005; Slesnick, Dashora, Letcher, Erdem, & Serovich, 2009).

Research on housing programs for homeless young people is extremely limited and research on TLPs is practically non-existent.

It is imperative we begin to understand if, and how, the services being provided by TLPs are helping young people successfully transition out of homelessness for the long-term and the time to do so is now. The consequences of youth homelessness are sobering, and several recent legislative decisions indicate they have rightfully captured the bipartisan attention of our nation's policymakers. In 2008 the fifth reauthorization of the RHYA passed the U.S. 110th Congress with the Senate voting to adopt it by unanimous consent and the House of Representatives passing without objection (National Network for Youth [NN4Y], 2008).¹ In 2009, the Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing (HEARTH) Act, a bill reauthorizing the McKinney-Vento homeless assistance programs, acknowledged "unaccompanied youth" for the first time in history as a distinct population in need of services (McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act as amended by the Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing Act [HEARTH], 2009). In 2010, the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness, which represents 19 federal government agencies, identified youth homelessness as a top priority in the nation's first-ever strategic plan to end homelessness (United States Interagency Council on Homelessness [USICH], 2010). This awareness and political momentum at the national level has resulted in cities across the country following suit, explicitly including, most for the first time, measures to address youth homelessness in their own local plans. In Chicago's plan to end homelessness, *Plan 2.0, A Home for Everyone*, youth homelessness is not

¹ In July 2014, the sixth reauthorization of RHYA (Runaway and Homeless Youth and Trafficking Prevention Act, S.2646) was jointly introduced by Senator Leahy (D-VT) and Senator Collins (R-ME) and was reported out of the U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee in September 2014, again with overwhelming bipartisan support (NN4Y, 2014).

only a priority, it is the *only* special population that is identified as such (Chicago Planning Council on Homelessness, 2012).

The level of imminent danger facing homeless youth demands we seize this unique period of current political will. We must begin to understand the impact of services so we are able to direct limited resources to the most efficacious solutions. In FY 2014, Congress authorized 43.65 million dollars to fund 200 transitional living programs across the United States (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [DHHS], 2014, March 14). These programs provide services to over 3300 homeless youth each year and are consistently at capacity with over 1200 youth on waiting lists that continue to grow (DHHS, 2014, October 14). Despite the demand for services and the prominent place of TLPs in our nation's plan to address youth homelessness, the effectiveness of the program as a service delivery model has yet to be formally evaluated beyond an understanding of immediate youth outcomes at the time of exit from the program (Milburn et al., 2005).² It remains unclear if TLPs are successfully helping youth transition out of homelessness over the long-term, and if so, what specific services are most effective in this transition. Recognizing the paucity of services research in the area of youth homelessness, and specifically of TLPs, the purpose of this study was to understand the perceived impact, if any, of the services provided by a TLP on the lives of formerly homeless youth directly from the perspective of the youth who have lived there.

C. Research Approach and Conceptual Framework

As the literature is characterized by variation in terminology referring to populations of youth in housing crisis as well as services, this section begins by defining the specific population and intervention being studied as well as terms relevant to the interpretation of findings.

² DHHS is currently conducting a study measuring TLP outcomes at 12 and 18 months, results expected in 2016 (DHHS, 2014, August 12)

Following this explanation, the research approach and conceptual framework guiding this study are discussed.

1. Definitions

For the purposes of this study any period of time without a fixed, regular nighttime residence is referred to as an experience of *homelessness*. This includes youth who are *couch surfing*, defined as temporarily staying with friends, relatives, or sometimes with complete strangers for brief periods of time. *Homeless youth* will be defined in this study as unaccompanied youth ages 14-24 without stable housing, no matter the circumstances of their displacement. This includes youth who left home without guardian consent (if under 18, these young people are often referred to in the literature as “runaways”), youth who were forced out of their homes by their families and guardians (frequently referred to in the literature as “throwaways”), and youth ages 18-24 who were unable to stay in their home or chose to leave for any other reason.

Also for the purposes of this study, the term *transitional living program* refers to a specific program model for homeless youth most recently authorized by the United States Congress by the Reconnecting Homeless Youth Act of 2008 (RHYA, P.L. 110-378) and regulated, monitored and funded by the United States Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). Transitional Living Programs provide residential and support services for unaccompanied homeless youth between the ages of 16 and 22 for up to 21 months. Services provided by TLPs include: safe, stable living accommodations; life-skill building; interpersonal skill building; educational opportunities; assistance in job preparation and attainment; and mental and physical health care (DHHS, 2014, March 14).

In addition to understanding the participants and services being studied, it is important to explain further what is meant by the term *perceived impact* as it is the central concept that guides the organization of the study's findings. *Perceived impact*, as a function of this study, refers to a participant's personal awareness, identification and interpretation of the outcome/s of the services they received during their time living in a TLP. In other words—what experiences in their lives since leaving services do young people believe to be related to their participation in a TLP? The term *impact* is used to capture the range of all physical, emotional and relational outcomes explicitly identified by participants and/or interpreted during analysis to be connected to the services participants received while living at a TLP.

2. Research Approach

The focus of this study is on the perceptions and experiences of young people who have lived in TLPs. It seeks to understand how this unique group makes sense of their experiences since leaving the program and how they view the role their time in a TLP has played in shaping their present lives. This objective requires qualitative methods that privilege the voices of youth who have participated in TLPs and capture the depth and breadth of both *what* they have experienced and *how* they have experienced it. To this end, this study utilized a phenomenological approach, a qualitative research method designed to provide “a deep understanding of a phenomenon as experienced by several individuals” (Creswell, 2007, p.62). The overarching purpose of phenomenological research is to synthesize individual experiences of a phenomenon in order to describe the collective essence of those experiences (Creswell, 2007). Participants are chosen because they offer insights from a position of shared expertise with regard to the phenomenon being studied—in this case, of having lived in a TLP—and they are asked open-ended questions intended to ultimately understand their common experiences. A

phenomenological approach facilitated the two-fold purpose of this study: first, to understand the experiences of participants since leaving TLPs, and second, to explore how young people make sense of those experiences and how they relate to their time in the program. No other research has yet been done to understand the role of TLPs in participants' lives after they have left services. To this end, a phenomenological study was employed to discover and describe the meanings a diverse group of former participants in TLP services assigned to the impact of those services on their lives.

3. Conceptual Framework

Although a phenomenological approach that is committed to fresh discovery was utilized, this study was not exclusively inductive in nature. Three existing frameworks were applied to ground both data collection and analysis. These included: ecosystems theory; the structures and concepts associated with theories of social support; and a positive youth development (PYD) practice model. An ecosystems perspective guided this research from design through analysis, allowing for a study that not only incorporates, but also fully respects, the complexity of human lives and the systems that surround us. Constructs from theories of social support and positive youth development were utilized during data analysis. While the findings were initially analyzed inductively with codes determined from the themes that emerged directly from the data, subsequent analyses were conducted utilizing constructs from theories of social support and positive youth development. These results were then used to further examine and refine the initial phenomenological analysis where appropriate. Each theoretical perspective and its applicability to this study is detailed further below.

a. Ecosystems Theory

To truly gain an understanding of the impact of TLP services over time, the multiplicity of factors that influence the lives of young people after they exit services must not only be considered, but also integrated into the design. Ecosystems theory, a blending of general systems and ecological theory, articulates the importance of an understanding of human lives as in relationship with an ever-changing, multi-layered context. General systems theory, originally articulated by von Bertalanffy (1968), describes systems as interactions between a range of elements, living and non-living, that comprise an organized whole. Each system is unique, has boundaries that distinctly define it and interacts dynamically with the larger environment adapting to each new context in order to achieve a sense of equilibrium, or balance (Friedman & Neuman Allen, 2011). When applied to social work practice, general systems theory suggests a movement away from understanding behavior as linear cause and effect to rather examining the reciprocal relationship between a person and his/her environment (Andreae, 2011). It is a method of organizing and understanding interacting components in order to holistically understand the behavior of people and societies.

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological perspective similarly outlines the mutual influence of individuals and their complex and layered contexts. Bronfenbrenner's model suggests all humans are engaged in five distinct systems:

- Microsystem – immediate environment directly experienced by an individual such as their family or neighborhood.
- Mesosystem – interaction between two microsystems, such as the interface between a child's home and school.

- Exosystem – interaction between two or more settings, at least one of which is not directly experienced by the individual, however the setting affects them, such as the effect of a parent’s experience at work on a child.
- Macrosystem –larger cultural context, such as belief systems, bodies of knowledge, socioeconomic status and oppressive structures.
- Chronosystem –events related to the passage of time, such as physiological changes as a result of aging as well as experiences related to one’s position in history.

Ecological theory assumes continuous dialogue between individuals and these five contexts where they are mutually-influencing one another and ultimately shaping our development over time.

Through a merger of principles drawn from both ecological and general systems theories, the ecosystems perspective ensures “that attention is paid to the case in its full transactional complexity, reducing the danger of artificially amputating the client system from its environment in assessment and intervention” (Mattaini, 2008, p. 357). Transitional living programs are an intervention intended to prevent future episodes of homelessness and prepare youth for a healthier adulthood. The services provided are designed to assist youth with the complex transactions they will experience with the world around them and therefore those exchanges must be incorporated into this study in order to effectively understand each youth’s perception of the impact of those services on their lives. To this end, an ecosystems perspective informed the design of this study from the purposive sampling of participants to the questions asked during research interviews. Further, it grounded the interpretation of findings as the experiences and perspectives of youth since leaving the program are inextricably woven with a range of contextual influences. These influences include: the families, neighborhoods, groups,

organizations and communities that youth are a part of; the built and natural environment that surrounds them; personal, collective, and structural oppression; and their human, social, ecological, spiritual and physical assets and needs (Mattaini, 2008).

b. Theories of Social Support

Cobb's (1976) seminal review of the benefits of social support found that in times of crisis, social support can protect people from a wide array of emotional and physical health risks. Theories of what exactly constitutes social support, and how and why it might be beneficial, are numerous (Barrera, 1986; Heaney & Israel, 2002). The underlying concept shared across differing definitions and theories of social support, however, is the idea that social relationships have the potential to provide protective buffering properties in times of stress (House, Umberson, & Landis, 1988). House (1981) categorizes these functional benefits of relationships into four types of supportive behaviors:

- Emotional support – providing empathy, love, trust and caring.
- Instrumental support –providing tangible aid and services that directly assist a person in need.
- Informational support—providing advice, suggestions, and information that a person can use to address problems.
- Appraisal support—providing information that is useful for self-evaluation including constructive feedback, affirmation, and social comparison.

For the purposes of this study, this conceptualization of the structures of social support as articulated by House (1981) were utilized to classify the range of program services offered by TLPs. Although House's understanding of these four constructs is intended to describe the functions of an individual relationship within a person's social network, it is used here to

differentiate and organize the myriad of services provided by a TLP as well as the range of benefits of these services as reported by participants. This study investigates a multiplicity of services offered by a TLP, and House's understanding of social support provides a valuable framework from which to examine participant responses regarding the effectiveness and meaning of those particular services to their lives. For example, utilizing House's categories of the four types of supportive behavior, young people citing the impact of housing or employment-preparation classes are interpreted as identifying types of instrumental support, while those who highlight the positive effects of a relationship with a certain staff member are understood as identifying the emotional support functions of the program and so forth.

c. Positive Youth Development

Finally, an understanding of a positive youth development (PYD) practice model was utilized to examine and classify the experiences and outcomes identified by participants. Positive youth development is an ecological, asset-based approach to social work practice that promotes healthy adolescent development through supportive, nurturing environments and services designed to foster meaningful connections to others and community (Hamilton, Hamilton, & Pittman, 2004). Positive youth development is widely supported as an effective practice approach with youth experiencing homelessness (Heinze, Hernandez-Jozefowicz, & Toro, 2010) and, as such, all federally funded TLP programs are currently required to implement the model. Youth development research demonstrates that services that enhance positive internal characteristics of young people such as social competencies as well as external assets such as positive support, enhance the potential for young people to not just survive the transition to adulthood, but to thrive (Leffert et al., 1998; Scales & Leffert, 2004). The approach is frequently

operationalized through a framework known as the 6Cs (Lerner & Israeloff, 2007; Pittman, Irby, Tolman, Yohalem, & Ferber, 2003):

- Confidence (a sense of mastery and future, self-efficacy and internal sense of overall positive self-worth);
- Character (a sense of responsibility, integrity, morality and self-awareness);
- Caring (a sense of empathy and sympathy for others and commitment to social justice);
- Connection (membership and belonging, a sense of safety and structure, and positive relationships with people and institutions);
- Competence (positive view of one's actions and abilities in areas such as social, cognitive, health, academic and vocation); and
- Contribution (active participant and decision-maker in a variety of settings and the desire to make a difference).

To this end, key features of PYD interventions include: consistent emotional and moral support; opportunities to develop healthy and supportive relationships and to contribute to the larger community; the acquisition of coping strategies and other protective factors; opportunities for skill-building and mastery; the development of personal autonomy; and the importance of having the voices of young people heard and understood (Hamilton et al., 2004). The goal of PYD-guided interventions is to help youth become healthy adults by fostering within them a sense of competence (being able to do something well), usefulness (having something to contribute), belonging (being part of a community), and empowerment (having control over one's future) (Wilson-Simons, 2007). These four intermediate outcomes offered a foundation for the interpretation and synthesis of data across participants and provided a useful approach to analyze youth perceptions of the overall impact of the services provided by a TLP. The incorporation of

these PYD goals into the conceptual framework guiding this study allowed for the inclusion of a range of youth outcomes to emerge that would have otherwise been neglected in a study focused only on indicators of stability traditionally utilized in the field, such as sustained housing, stable employment, educational achievement and health. An assessment of the attainment of the intermediate goals put forth by PYD in addition to these standard long-term outcomes provides a more holistic picture of the overall perceived impact of services on the lives of youth over time.

D. Theoretical Sensitivity

The interpretive nature of phenomenology lends itself to subjectivity, making the history and influences of the researcher salient. Creswell (2007) speaks to this challenge of phenomenological research calling attention to the value of bracketing, where researchers do their best to systematically peel away the layers of interpretation that are the result of their own subjective lens in order to get closer to the “true” phenomenon being studied. With this intention, it is critical to this study to discuss my own perceptions, beliefs, and the experiences I bring to this research. I have worked with homeless youth for 14 years, including nine years as the program director of the TLP where this study is being conducted. Although I am no longer in this role, I remain connected to the agency and several of the young people who have previously participated in services. I do not share the experience of living in a TLP as a young person who is homeless; however, my former relationship with the intervention being studied and research location and participants, in some regards positions me as an *insider* or someone who is from the community being studied. This positioning presented advantages as well as potential challenges that had to be addressed.

Chavez (2008) outlines several advantages to having some elements of an *insider* status when conducting qualitative research that I believe apply and have strengthened this study.

These include: expediency of access, economy of acclimating to the field, immediate legitimacy in the field, expediency of rapport building, and a nuanced perspective for observation and analysis. First, through my pre-existing relationships I had access to participants that would otherwise have been difficult to find. One of the major reasons that longer-term outcome data do not exist is simply because researchers are unable to locate youth after they leave a TLP (Kidd, 2012). By leveraging my relationships with former TLP participants and staff, I was able to reach youth that would have otherwise not been easily accessible. Second, I believe that these established relationships increased my credibility as a researcher among participants. The majority of participants (30 of 32), to varying degrees, were familiar with me. I believe this served to increase their level of comfort and safety in the interview process and allowed for credible and rich data to emerge. Third, my former role at the agency brought access. I did not have to gain entry into an unknown system, a task that can be a challenge researchers often encounter before the study even begins. I was a known quantity at the study location and had their expressed support. This significantly expedited and simplified both recruitment and data collection. Finally, as a former TLP director, I am intimately familiar with all facets of the intervention being studied. As discussed, TLPs represent a conglomerate of support services and I believe my thorough knowledge of each of these services enhanced my ability to isolate different facets of the intervention and more accurately interpret the findings.

As confident as I am in the value that my experiences brought to this study, it was essential for me to recognize and plan for the challenges also present as a result of my former role. In addition to the advantages, Chavez (2008) outlines the complications of insider positionality in qualitative research. Those of particular concern in this study included: bias in entering the field and establishing rapport, bias in selecting participants, overabundance of

impression management by participants to maintain rapport and/or identity, researcher's over-reliance on status, the rise of value conflicts as a result of both research and community member roles, selective reporting, and difficulty with recognizing patterns due to familiarity with community. First, in order to ensure that young people did not feel any obligation to take part in the study simply because I was the one who was asking, I was explicit with potential participants during recruitment that their participation in the study was completely voluntary and a decision not to participate would in no way affect their relationship with the agency or with me. I also reiterated this during the informed consent process, reminding youth they were under no obligation to participate and also that if they began and decided they would no longer like to be a part of the study, they could end the interview at any time.

Second, although as discussed previously I do believe my familiarity with most participants was an asset, I intentionally did not limit recruitment to a convenience sample of young people with whom I have strong relationships and/or who are easier to locate. Rather, I took measures to purposively select youth for the study based upon predetermined characteristics intended to represent a range of experiences in order to enhance the quality and credibility of the findings.

Third, it is warranted to suspect that social desirability bias would be of concern here. It was imperative that young people, as a result of our former relationship, did not report on their experiences and their perspectives on their time in a TLP with the desire to please me, the agency, or any other audience. With that said, it had been my informal experience that young people would not be hesitant to let me know what they think about the program or when things are not going well in their lives, and it is my belief that this was also the case throughout this study. Participants appeared to be forthright in their responses, offering an extremely candid

view into their experiences and perspectives. In this way, I believe my familiarity with participants was again an advantage as most viewed me as someone they could trust. With that said, I took steps to ensure that participants understood during both the recruitment and consent processes that I was longer in my former role with the agency and was only invested in finding out their genuine perspectives. I reminded them of confidentiality procedures and of the opportunity they would have to review the overall findings before they are published.

Finally, my role as a former TLP director inherently brings with it prior assumptions of how services operate in the lives of young people. To deny this would be inauthentic and therefore it was important for me to make these ideas and how they changed throughout the study explicit. To this end, I regularly recorded my thoughts, feelings and emerging impressions consistently during the study through a process of journaling. Keeping a journal throughout the study allows a researcher time to reflect, uncover assumptions and think critically about how to reduce bias (Cohen, Kahn, & Steeves, 2000). I used it to document the reciprocal influence of myself and the participants as well as between myself and the data and have incorporated selected thoughts into the discussion of the findings. In addition to journaling, in order to address potential complications of my former role, a transparent description and rationale of all steps taken in the study—including all decisions related to design, data collection, and analysis—was consistently recorded. This audit trail provides the detail required to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings (Tracy, 2010). Finally, a process of member checking, outlined in greater detail in Chapter III, was employed to further enhance credibility by providing participants an opportunity to verify, elaborate, and clarify their perspectives upon review of the study's overall findings.

E. Research Questions

The overarching research question this study examined is: What is the perceived impact, if any, of the housing and support services provided by a transitional living program on the lives of formerly homeless youth? The following four supporting research questions guided this investigation: (1) What are the experiences of youth after leaving transitional living programs? (2) What are young peoples' perceptions of the impact, if any, of transitional living programs on their lives? (3) How do young people view the usefulness of specific services offered by the transitional living program? (4) How do young peoples' perceptions of the impact of transitional living programs on their lives compare with standard indicators of stability utilized in the field such as sustained housing, stable employment, educational achievement, and health?

II. REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

A. Introduction

This qualitative study investigates the perceived impact of the housing and support services provided by a transitional living program (TLP) for homeless youth. The following review of existing literature in the area of youth homelessness synthesizes a vast body of knowledge describing what we know about homeless youth as well as assesses studies from a significantly less developed area of the field—what we know about how to solve the problem of youth homelessness. To this end, this review critically examines three distinct bodies of homeless youth literature: the prevalence and etiology of youth homelessness; the risks and consequences of youth homelessness; and, finally, what is known about services for homeless youth. This review of the literature includes articles published since 1980 with a focus on studies completed about youth homelessness in the United States. It includes relevant empirical research, theoretical writing, and policy and advocacy group literature.

This literature review begins by examining the prevalence and etiology of youth homelessness, including: (1) estimates of the incidence of homeless youth in the United States and barriers to knowing the full extent of the problem; (2) the characteristics of homeless youth; and (3) the causes and risk factors for their homelessness. The review continues with a synthesis of the literature describing the risks and consequences of youth homelessness. This section will examine the scope and magnitude of threats to the health and well-being of youth during experiences of homelessness. Finally, the review concludes with a summary and critical examination of the small but growing literature on homeless youth services, including: (1) a history and overview of homeless youth services; (2) an examination of what is known about the

effectiveness of specific interventions; and finally (3) a focus on transitional living programs for homeless youth.

B. Prevalence, Characteristics and Etiology of Youth Homelessness

The following section critically examines the literature outlining the prevalence of youth homelessness in the United States. It discusses barriers to obtaining accurate estimates and introduces other indicators that are useful in understanding the scope of the problem. Following this discussion of incidence, what is known about the characteristics of homeless youth and the causes for their situations of homelessness is examined.

1. Prevalence

It is not possible to know exactly how many youth experience homelessness. Estimates reported in the literature vary widely depending on a range of factors, including: the definitions of homelessness employed; the age ranges being utilized; the size, nature, and relevance of the locations selected for sampling; the time of year a count is conducted (e.g. there is greater service use and decreased street presence during colder months); and the procedures used to extrapolate annual prevalence from point-in-time estimates (Kidd & Scrimenti, 2004; Toro, Dworsky, & Fowler, 2007). Beyond these methodological considerations, the hidden, transient nature of the experience of homelessness inherently complicates the ability of any study to obtain an accurate count (Raleigh-DuRoff, 2004). Young people who are not engaged in services and/or disconnected from educational, child welfare, or juvenile justice systems are not likely to be included and this is potentially a significant proportion of youth who are homeless (Moore, 2006). Further, young people who avoid shelters and other service providers where most counts take place may also be likely to avoid researchers due to an increased level of mistrust for those who could be interpreted as authority figures and/or mistaken for representatives of law

enforcement or social services (Taylor, Lydon, Bougie, & Johannsen, 2004). These youth who remain uncounseled must be considered as the usefulness of different prevalence estimates are evaluated.

Recognizing the limitations discussed above, estimates of the annual prevalence of homeless youth in the United States range from 733,000 (Ringwalt, Greene, Robertson, & McPheeters, 1998) to 2.8 million (Greene, 1995) with most somewhere between 1.5 and 2 million (Congressional Research Services, 2007; Moore, 2006). One of the most frequently cited estimates comes from the National Incidence Study of Missing, Abducted, Runaway and Thrownaway Children (NISMA II) which combined results from three national surveys (the National Household Survey of Adult Caretakers, the National Household Survey of Youth, and the Juvenile Facilities Study) and reported an estimated 1,682,900 homeless and runaway youth annually in the United States (Hammer, Finkelhor, & Sedlak, 2002). This estimate includes youth who left the homes of foster parents, residential programs and juvenile justice facilities; however, it does not include young people over the age of 17.

Noting that the majority of estimates discussed above are now over a decade old, and many do not include youth over the age of 17, we must look to other sources to approximate a more current indication of the scope of homelessness among youth.³ One useful place to begin is with the number of young people who utilize homeless support services. The United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) tracks service utilization through a nationwide Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) database. According to HMIS approximately 150,000 youth ages 18-24 are served annually through the adult homeless services system monitored by HUD (National Alliance to End Homelessness [NAEH], 2012). Another

³ Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago is beginning to undertake a national study of runaway and homeless youth that will include an updated count.

50,000 homeless youth ages 16-24 accessed youth-specific services. While these numbers are useful, as discussed above, they do not include young people who are not accessing services and remain living on the streets, “doubled up” with friends and family or in other unstable or unsafe housing situations. Extrapolating from these counts to include these non-service utilizing youth, the National Alliance to End Homelessness (NAEH) estimates 550,000 unaccompanied youth up to age 24 experience a period of homelessness longer than one week annually (NAEH, 2012, March 6). Although this is certainly progress to have a more current estimate that includes youth over the age of 18, the methodology used by NAEH to extend the count data to include youth who were not sheltered or doubled-up with others is not explicitly stated.

In addition to tracking service utilization to obtain prevalence estimates, HUD conducts an annual point-in-time count of sheltered and unsheltered (unsheltered count only required every other year) street-dwelling homeless persons on a single night in January (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development [HUD], 2013). For the first time in January 2013, HUD modified the age categories utilized in order to capture information specific to unaccompanied homeless youth. Again, a point-in-time count is not able to capture youth who may be “doubled-up” in temporary living situations, working, or otherwise difficult to find at the time of the count, and the process is generally biased toward describing the chronically homeless adult population as youth homelessness is typically more episodic (Ringwalt, Green, Robertson, & McPheeters, 1998). With that said, the age modification is a significant improvement to the process that should enhance our understanding of the number of unaccompanied youth who live in emergency shelters, transitional housing and in places not meant for human habitation, such as the streets, cars or abandoned buildings (NAEH, 2013). The U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness agrees, demonstrating a strong investment in obtaining more reliable counts of the

number of homeless youth by launching *Youth Count!*, an initiative leading up to the 2013 HUD point-in-time count that worked with individual communities across the country to develop more effective strategies for specifically counting unaccompanied homeless youth (USICH, 2012). During the most recent count for which data is available (January 2014), there were 45,205 unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness on a single night in 2014 across the United States. Eighty-six percent (38,931) were youth between the ages of 18 and 24 and fourteen percent (6,274) were children under the age of 18 (HUD, 2014).⁴

In addition to estimates produced by HUD based upon service utilization and the results of the 2014 point-in-time count, other indicators, although not free from the limitations previously discussed, are important to understand as they too help to provide additional insight into the scope of the problem:

- During the 2008-2009 school year, the U.S. Department of Education reported 52,950 unaccompanied homeless youth receiving services through school-based programs (USICH, 2010).
- In 2013, the Department of Health and Human Services reported that 33,830 unaccompanied youth entered emergency shelters, 3,322 entered transitional living programs, and street outreach workers had over 668,165 contacts with homeless youth (DHHS, 2014).
- In 2013, the National Runaway Safeline (previously known as the National Runaway Switchboard) received 15,149 calls from runaway and homeless youth in need of crisis assistance (National Runaway Safeline, 2014).

⁴ Counts of unsheltered persons were not required in 2014. However, 78 percent of all geographic areas conducted unsheltered counts in 2014. For the other 22 percent, counts from 2013 were rolled over into 2014 (HUD, 2014).

- A 2010 study by the Urban Institute found that one in five youth have run away from home by the age of eighteen, and nearly half of those youth run away two or more times (Pergamit, 2010).

And of particular relevance to this study conducted with young people who had experiences of homelessness in Chicago, Illinois:

- A study conducted by the University of Chicago, Survey Research Laboratory that included a representative survey of service providers and of unaccompanied homeless youth estimated that 25,000 unaccompanied youth lived in Illinois in 2004, with nearly 2,000 youth homeless on the streets of the Chicago metropolitan area on any given night (Johnson & Graf, 2005)
- In 2010, eight programs providing housing to homeless youth in Chicago reported turning away 4,775 requests (may include duplicated youth) for housing from youth in one year (City of Chicago Task Force on Homeless Youth, 2011)
- In 2013-2014 school year, the Chicago Public School (CPS) system counted 2,647 unaccompanied homeless youth attending its schools. An analysis conducted in 2014 by the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless based on CPS system and other factors, estimated there were 12,186 unaccompanied youth ages 14 to 21, who accounted for 8.8 percent of Chicago's total homeless population (Chicago Coalition for the Homeless [CCH], 2015).

In summary, none of these estimates give us a precise understanding of how many young people experience homelessness each year in the United States. However, they do represent a few pieces of a much larger puzzle, and it is important that we start to fit them together.

Although the picture will never be complete, and of course the pieces aren't mutually exclusive,

synthesizing the information from these various stakeholders is perhaps as close as we can get to understanding and enumerating the scope of a phenomenon that is by nature fluid and often deeply hidden.

2. Characteristics of Homeless Youth

The same limitations that prevent obtaining an accurate count of homeless youth affect the entirety of what is known about them as a population. The literature, although not short of studies describing youth in situations of homelessness, is inherently limited to outlining the characteristics and experiences of those who are visible and accessible. It may be obvious that youth who cannot be found cannot be studied, but it is worth mentioning here once more before further findings are discussed. With that said, what we have learned about and from youth experiencing homelessness who *have* been studied is critical to understand if we are to implement useful and relevant solutions.

There is some ambiguity when it comes to describing the gender, racial and ethnic identities of homeless youth. A comprehensive review of the existing research literature on homeless youth found the reported distribution of gender among homeless youth varies depending on the source and age of the sample, with shelter samples tending to include either equal numbers or more females and with more males found in samples of older youth and street youth (Toro, Dworsky, & Fowler, 2007). Conflicting results were also found across studies when it came to the racial and ethnic identities of homeless youth. Some studies did not find any racial or ethnic differences while others found that racial and ethnic composition was tied closely to that of the surrounding area and still others found that racial and ethnic minority youth were overrepresented (Toro et al., 2007). While the exact racial and ethnic composition of homeless youth remains unclear, data from the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS)

indicates that nationally Black or African-American youth are overrepresented in the population of young people who access services. Non-Hispanic White youth represent 56 percent of the total U.S adolescent population (ages 14-24) and make-up 51 percent of youth in emergency shelters, 45 percent of youth in transitional living programs and 40 percent of callers to the National Runaway Safeline (DHHS, 2014; U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). Hispanic youth represent 21 percent of the U.S. adolescent population and make-up 19 percent of youth entering emergency shelters, 15 percent of those entering transitional living programs and 17 percent of callers to the National Runaway Safeline. Black or African-American youth, on the other hand, only represent approximately 15 percent of the total adolescent population (ages 14-24) in the United States but make up 33 percent of youth in emergency shelters, 38 percent of youth in transitional living programs and 30 percent of callers to the National Runaway Safeline.

Although there are conflicting reports of the gender, racial and ethnic identities of homeless youth across studies, there is substantial evidence that three particularly vulnerable populations are overrepresented in the homeless youth population –Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) youth, youth with histories of foster care, and young people who are pregnant and/or parenting. The National Gay and Lesbian Taskforce conducted a comprehensive review of the available academic and professional literature and found that that 20 to 40 percent of homeless youth identify as LGBT, well above the generally accepted estimate of 3 to 5 percent of LGBT-identified individuals in the general U. S. population (Ray, 2006). While there is not clear evidence as of yet that these estimates are accurate, there is general agreement in the field that LGBT youth are over-represented in the homeless youth population. There is also evidence that LGBT youth may experience greater levels of victimization at home and leave home more frequently than their heterosexual peers supporting the current concern for this

population being at greater risk for homelessness (Cochran, Stewart, Ginzler, & Cauce, 2002; Whitbeck, Chen, Hoyt, Tyler, & Johnson, 2004).

The prevalence of histories of foster care among homeless youth is also high, with estimates ranging from 11 to 33 percent at the low end to 62 percent on the high (Zlotnick, 2009). Of particular concern is the number of youth who become homeless after aging-out of foster care. The Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth, a longitudinal study following a sample of youth across three states as they leave foster care (n=732), found that by age 23 or 24, nearly 40 percent of youth reported they had been homeless or “couch-surfed” since exiting foster care (Dworsky, Napolitano, & Courtney, 2013). Additionally, although there are currently no comparable estimates of the number of youth who become homeless upon release from detention or incarceration, similar concerns of exiting to homelessness exist for the approximately 200,000 young people ages 10 to 24 released from secure detention or correctional facilities each year (Toro et al., 2007).

Finally, pregnant and parenting youth are also found in higher rates in the homeless youth population. A study comparing the lifetime rates of pregnancy of homeless and housed youth found that female youth living on the streets had the highest rates (48%) followed by youth residing in shelters (33%), with housed youth reporting a lifetime prevalence rate of less than 10 percent (Greene & Ringwalt, 1998). Although higher rates of pregnancy among homeless female youth may be related to why young people become homeless in the first place, it may also be connected to research indicating that homeless youth engage in riskier sexual behaviors including survival sex and erratic birth control use (Toro et al., 2007).

3. Etiology of Homelessness

While there are inconsistent findings regarding the demographic characteristics of homeless youth in the literature, there is substantial agreement as to the major causes of homelessness among youth. A study examining the factors associated with the lifetime experience of homelessness among young adults using a U.S. nationally representative, population-based sample (n=682) found that youth homelessness was associated with three primary experiences: poor family functioning, socioeconomic disadvantage, and/or separation from parents or caregivers (Shelton, Taylor, Bonner, & Van den Bree, 2009). These findings are consistent with those of three independent comprehensive literature reviews, each reporting that across studies the three most frequently cited reasons for youth homelessness are family conflict, residential instability, and economic problems (Edidin, Ganim, Hunter, & Karnik, 2012; Moore, 2006; Toro et al., 2007).

While histories of residential instability in the family and higher rates of poverty are perhaps expected pathways to homelessness, family conflict as a reported reason for homelessness is arguably one of the most notable distinctions between youth homelessness and that of single adults and families. A particularly troubling aspect of the family conflict commonly described as an antecedent to youth homelessness is the high rate of caretaker victimization of youth reported consistently and frequently throughout the literature (Whitbeck, 2009). The Midwest Longitudinal Study of Homeless Adolescents, a study of 455 homeless youth across four states, found 84 percent reported being pushed or shoved by a caretaker, 77 percent had been slapped in the face or the head with an open hand, 74 percent had been hit with an object, 43 percent reported having been “beaten up” by an adult caretaker, and 32 percent of young women reported that an adult caretaker had forced them to engage in sexual activity

against their will (Whitbeck, Hoyt, Johnson, Berdahl, & Whiteford, 2002). Reports of histories of physical and sexual abuse similar to those found in the Midwest Study are pervasive across the homeless youth literature (Edidin et al., 2012; Toro et al., 2007; Whitbeck, 2009).

Karabanow (2004) writes, “if home is defined as a safe haven, with people who love and care for you, most of these youth were homeless long before they left for the streets” (p.22).

Although the literature describing the etiology of youth homelessness focuses on individual characteristics of youth and their families, it is important to balance these findings with the perspectives of those who would argue that homelessness of any kind has structural, rather than individual, roots. Jonathan Kozol (2006) articulates this view when discussing the nature of homelessness in his book *Rachel and Her Children*:

Unreflective answers might retreat to explanations with which readers are familiar “family breakdown,” “drugs,” “culture of poverty,” teen pregnancy,” the underclass,” etc. While these are precipitating factors for some people, they are not the cause of homelessness. The cause of homelessness is the lack of housing. (p.14)

An anti-oppressive perspective on youth homelessness would agree with Kozol’s claim that it is the lack of affordable housing that causes homelessness. However, it would further elucidate how power is embedded in our economic systems and social structures and how the uneven distribution of this power results in the continued marginalization of disenfranchised groups, specifically women and people of color (Robbins, 2011). Structural and feminist perspectives would understand youth homelessness as a result of the oppression of marginalized groups that fuels sustained poverty and is directly related to the violence in so many families and communities (Dominelli, 2002; Mulally, 2007). From this paradigm, a society must do away with structural injustice before homelessness can truly end.

C. Risks and Consequences of Youth Homelessness

Research is clear that homelessness exposes youth to a host of threats and conditions that jeopardize their safety, compromise their physical health and emotional well-being, and frequently force them to make dangerous decisions in order to survive (Coates & McKenzie-Mohr, 2010; Hopper, Bassuk, & Olivet, 2010; Levin et al., 2005). The following section reviews what is known about the risks facing young people in situations of homelessness. It outlines these threats through a discussion of: (1) the trauma and victimization associated with the experience of homelessness; (2) the dangers of survival strategies frequently employed by homeless youth; (3) threats to the physical and mental health of homeless youth; and finally (4) threats homeless youth face when it comes to their education.

1. Trauma and Victimization

Goodman, Saxe and Harvey (1991) present a theoretical argument for understanding the effects of homelessness as psychological trauma. The authors draw on trauma theory to illuminate the aspects of homelessness, which can lead to, or exacerbate, the effects of trauma and present a thoughtful case for integrating trauma-informed services into the homeless service system. The traumatic conditions of homelessness described by Goodman et al. include: the sudden or gradual loss of one's home; social isolation and disaffiliation; loss of control and safety; the on-going detrimental conditions and stressors of having to struggle to meet basic survival needs; and the persistent threat, and frequent occurrence, of victimization. Homeless youth research validates this premise with reports of victimization and other traumatic experiences after losing stable housing ubiquitous across the literature (Coates & McKenzie-Mohr, 2010; Johnson & Graf, 2005; Levin et al., 2005; Stewart et al., 2004; Toro et al., 2007; Whitbeck et al., 2004; Whitbeck, 2009).

A recent literature review synthesizing what is known about the mental and physical health of homeless youth reports there is evidence to suggest the relationship between histories of abuse and homelessness may be bidirectional in nature (Edidin et al., 2012). In other words, youth who experience abuse may leave home to escape it; however, homelessness may simply shift the types of victimization that they experience. By leaving situations where they are facing harm, youth are moving into circumstances with the high probability of further victimization and thereby are at risk for the increased detrimental effects of complex trauma (Bender, Brown, Thompson, Ferguson, & Langenderfer, 2014; Wong, Clark, & Marlotte, 2014). A report conducted by the University of Illinois at Chicago, Survey Research Laboratory found that 62 percent of homeless youth interviewed across the state of Illinois (n=169) reported being victimized within the last 12 months (Johnson & Graf, 2005). Although youth who were surveyed reported staying in a wide variety of locations during the past 12 months, it is important to note that the majority of participants (64%) were staying at a shelter, mission, or transitional housing program at the time of the study and victimization rates of youth not receiving housing services may be even higher. A study that interviewed street youth in Seattle, Washington (n=374) found that 83 percent were physically or sexually victimized after leaving home (Stewart et al., 2004).

2. Survival Strategies

Homelessness is an existence defined by the constant stress of having to locate somewhere to sleep, food to eat, and, as discussed above, be vigilant about one's safety and security. To successfully navigate such treacherous conditions, young people frequently employ strategies to survive that can put their health and lives at further risk. Some of these strategies are illegal which creates further vulnerabilities if youth become involved in the criminal justice

system. Others may not be against the law but are equally dangerous putting youth in situations likely to further compromise their physical and mental health.

Youth who are homeless often have few means of legitimate and sufficient economic support. In a study conducted with 428 homeless youth across four Midwestern states, although 34 percent of youth surveyed were employed, most reported their wages were not sufficient to support basic needs (Whitbeck, 2009). As a result, in the same study 42 percent of heterosexual and 48 percent of nonheterosexual youth reported they had sold drugs for money; 14 percent of heterosexual and 29 percent of nonheterosexual youth had panhandled and 23 percent of heterosexual and 19 percent of nonheterosexual youth had broken into residences/businesses and taken things to sell (Whitbeck, 2009). Youth described similar behaviors when it came to obtaining food, reporting frequent occurrences of panhandling, stealing, and searching through dumpsters for meals. These subsistence behaviors put youth at risk for victimization, arrest, and, in the case of searching refuse for food, serious health hazards. Additionally, as rates of victimization increase for youth so do rates of carrying weapons, another survival strategy that can put a youth in increased danger. One study conducted with homeless youth across the state of Illinois found that within the last 12 months 50 percent of youth reported carrying a weapon to protect themselves (Johnson & Graf, 2005).

In addition to the above precarious behaviors, a significant number of homeless youth report engaging in survival sex by exchanging sex for money, food, drugs, shelter or clothing (Walls & Bell, 2011). Using a nationally representative sample of shelter youths and a multicity sample of street youths (n=1,159), Greene, Ennett and Ringwalt (1999) found that approximately 28 percent of street youth and 10 percent of shelter youth reported having participated in survival sex. Further, engaging in survival sex was found to be associated with age, days away from

home, victimization, criminal behaviors, substance use, suicide attempts, sexually transmitted disease and pregnancy. In a more recent study, Walls and Bell (2011) set out to investigate the stability of Greene et al.'s findings over the years and found that 9.4 percent of homeless youth across 28 states (n= 1625) reported they had traded sex for money, food, drugs, shelter or clothing with similar correlates as to those found in the initial study by Greene and colleagues (Walls and Bell did not distinguish between shelter and street youth in their sample). Of note, agency street outreach staff approached youth about participating in the survey and the researchers cite that as a result of this sampling strategy there is likely an underrepresentation of homeless youth who avoid street outreach teams. This means the prevalence of survival sex among homeless youth may actually be much higher which is of great concern as youth who engage in survival sex are at increased risk of depression, sexually-transmitted infections, physical victimization and sexual assault (Walls & Bell, 2011).

3. Threats to Health

In their recent comprehensive review of the literature examining the physical and mental health of homeless youth, Edidin et al. (2012) found that across studies, histories of abuse, unstable and often dangerous living situations, limited financial and emotional resources, engagement in substance use and high-risk sexual activity, and irregular patterns of sleep and eating contribute to the poor physical and mental health frequently found among homeless youth. Youth experiencing homelessness have more advanced illnesses and higher rates of infectious and respiratory diseases (Beharry, 2012; Edidin et al., 2012; Feldmann & Middleman, 2003). Youth in shelters with a history of asthma have been found to be 2.2 times more likely to have visited an emergency room in the last 12 months than their housed peers (Feldmann & Middleman, 2003). Rates of HIV infection among homeless youth are two to ten times higher

than the rates reported for other samples of U.S. adolescents, and although rates for homeless youth specifically are unknown, rates of tuberculosis have been found to be as much as 20 times higher for homeless individuals than for the general population (Feldmann & Middleman, 2003). Other prevalent health concerns include: influenza, pneumonia, hepatitis, lice, scabies, sexually transmitted infections, diabetes, dental problems and malnutrition (Beharry, 2012; Edidin et al., 2012; Feldmann & Middleman, 2003; Kulik, Gaetz, Crowe, & Ford-Jones, 2011).

While the direction of causality is unclear, research has also found higher rates of mental illness in homeless youth with the lifetime prevalence of psychiatric disorders almost twice as high as their housed peers (Edidin et al., 2012). The Midwest Longitudinal Study of Homeless Adolescents followed 428 youth over three years in an effort to track the emergence of adult mental disorders and to evaluate their effect on the transition to adulthood (Whitbeck, 2009). Whitbeck and colleagues found that 89 percent of youth in their baseline interview met the criteria for at least one diagnosis, 35.5 percent of youth met the diagnostic criteria for post traumatic stress disorder, and rates of alcohol abuse and dependence were three times and five times higher respectively than their housed peers. Across studies, rates of substance abuse among homeless youth ranges from 70 to 90 percent and an increased length of time homeless has been found to be associated with greater use (Edidin et al., 2012). In a study of 66 youth residing in housing programs for homeless youth in Chicago, IL, the number of lifetime episodes of homelessness were found to be positively correlated with the number of psychiatric diagnoses (Castro et al., 2014). The consequences of these mental health challenges facing youth are dire. In a study that investigated the mortality rate of a cohort of street youth in Montreal, Canada, researchers documented a mortality rate of 921 per 100,000 persons (Roy et al., 2004). This is a rate exceeding 11 times that observed in Canadian youth in the general population, and it is

nearly 14 times that of the adolescent mortality rate in the United States general population (CDC, 2012; Roy et al., 2004). Notably, Roy and colleagues found that the most common causes of death for homeless youth were directly related to mental health with the majority of deaths overwhelmingly a result of suicide and drug overdose.

4. Threats to Education

Homelessness impacts the education of young people in a variety of ways, affecting their ability to enroll, attend and, ultimately, succeed in school (Moore, 2006). Residency requirements, guardianship requirements, delays in transfer of school records, lack of transportation, and lack of immunization records often prevent homeless youth from enrolling in school (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2009). Progress has been made towards addressing several of these enrollment barriers through the Education of Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) program first authorized by the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act in 1987. With that said, in an evaluation of EHCY programs across the country, the U.S. Department of Education found that issues of residential and school mobility, stressful daily life events, poor health, lack of food, clothing, and school supplies, and a lack of clarity, consistency, and sufficient funding continue to prevent homeless young people from attending school regularly (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2009; U.S Department of Education [DOE], 2002). Further, young people are frequently unaware of their rights and the services available to them under the McKinney-Vento Act and/or do not wish to disclose their homeless status to the school preventing them from accessing the support they need (Ausikaitis et al., 2015).

High rates of school mobility and absenteeism are common for homeless youth and are associated with poorer academic achievement, grade retention, and dropping out of school (Rafferty, Shinn, & Weitzman, 2004). A report prepared by the Institute for Children and

Poverty (1999) found that homeless children (including those with their families) were nine times more likely to repeat a grade, four times more likely to drop out of school, and three times more likely to be placed in special education programs than their housed peers. Interviews with 364 homeless youth in Washington revealed that approximately 75 percent of older homeless youth had dropped out of school (Cauce et al., 2000). A recent review of the literature found that additional studies mirror these findings indicating that as few as 20 to 30 percent of homeless youth graduate from high school (Edidin et al., 2012). While these estimates also represent youth who may have dropped out before experiencing homelessness, they indicate an alarming disparity between the dropout rates of homeless youth and those of the general U.S. population of 16 to 24 year olds, which is 7.4 percent (DOE, 2012). The connection between obtaining a high-school diploma and attaining economic stability in adulthood is well established (Institute for Children, Poverty, and Homelessness, 2011). Individuals without a diploma or high school equivalency are likely to have fewer job opportunities, work fewer hours, and earn lower wages—all conditions that complicate the road out of homelessness as well as increase the probability of return.

D. Homeless Youth Services

Recognizing the threats present to the health and well-being of young people in situations of homelessness, the following section of this literature review turns to understanding what is known about how providers are working to help move homeless youth out of harm's way and toward a healthy adulthood. It begins with a historical overview of homeless youth legislation and services in the United States and then critically examines what is known about the scope and effectiveness of the service response today. Finally, this review concludes with a focus on the

literature examining transitional living programs for homeless youth, the service intervention that is the focus of this study.

1. History & Overview of Homeless Youth Services

Unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness are far from a recent phenomenon. As early as the settlement of the original 13 colonies and ensuing era of westward expansion, there are accounts of adolescents who left home to seek economic opportunity (Libertoff, 1980). An organized service response, however, seems to first appear in the mid-19th century in New York City when growing numbers of poor, often immigrant children could be found on almost every street corner (Libertoff, 1980; Wendinger, 2009). In 1854 an estimated 10,000 orphans or otherwise homeless youth lived on the streets of New York (Shane, 1996). Thousands of children roamed the city seeking shelter wherever they could find it—in barrels, under steps, in boxes – and eating discarded remnants from where they lie (Wendinger, 2009). Poverty forced these young people to become active wage earners often to support their own early independence. Children would invest in stock or scavenge for items selling various goods to passersby (Staller, 2006). Possibly the most well-known of these young street merchants were newspaper boys, also called “newsboys” or “newsies.” The newsboys were not employees of the newspapers but rather purchased the papers from the publishers and sold them as independent agents (Nasaw, 1985). Though many children became newsboys, collectively homeless street children in general began to be referred to as ‘newsboys’ as so many were poor and on their own (Wendinger, 2009). The Children’s Aid Society (CAS), a private charitable agency, would eventually open a series of lodging houses for the young entrepreneurs (“The lodging-house,” 1854, March 20). Although a primary concern was to provide shelter and relief for suffering youth, of equal priority was to connect the newsboys to religious education and vocational training as a means to divert them

from criminal or, what was viewed at the time, as immoral, activities (Staller, 2006). CAS would go on to open half a dozen lodging houses in New York, with the last one in 1930.

Youth homelessness was first addressed on a federal level during the Great Depression when it was estimated that 30 percent of the homeless population were youth on their own without their families (Congressional Research Service, 2007). In 1933 the Federal Transient Relief Act was established to provide for those in need through state grants. The Civilian Conservation Corps opened camps and shelters for older youth, and President Roosevelt created the National Youth Administration to provide employment and cash assistance to the growing number of young people experiencing homelessness (Congressional Research Service, 2007). Youth homelessness would not officially be recognized again as a social problem until the 1960s although youth running away from home continued to be a serious occurrence (Staller, 2006).

With the exception of the above federal programs, from the early 20th century through the 1960s, the needs of runaway and homeless youth were handled locally through child welfare agencies and, as their behavior increasingly became seen as delinquent, through juvenile justice courts (Congressional Research Service, 2007). A handful of runaway shelters opened across the country in the 1960s in response to increasing numbers of young people on the street; however, lumped in with the 60s counter-culture movement, these agencies received almost no federal assistance (Staller, 2006). Although the primary purpose of the legislation was to provide federal support to juvenile courts, correctional systems and other stakeholders in juvenile justice, the Juvenile Delinquency Prevention and Control Act of 1968 (P.L. 90-445) authorized funding for four runaway centers from 1968 to 1972 setting the stage for the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (Congressional Research Service, 2007).

The 1970s marked a shift where the U.S Congress, in recognition of increasing numbers of unaccompanied runaway youth and agencies emerging to serve them, began to pass youth-oriented legislation (Staller, 2006). After conducting hearings in 1972 to understand concerns of, and about, runaway youth, the Senate Judiciary Committee would successfully pass legislation to support runaway youth in the Senate in 1972, with the House to follow two years later. In 1974, Congress passed the Runaway Youth Act as Title III of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (P.L. 93-415). Of particular note was the requirement that states decriminalize running away and provide services outside of the juvenile justice system in order to receive federal funds. This marked an important shift in philosophy for the country from viewing runaways as deviants to victims. The Act has since been reauthorized five times, most recently by the Reconnecting Homeless Youth Act (RHYA) in 2008 (P.L. 110-378). The law currently authorizes federal funding for three core programs—the Street Outreach Program (SOP), Basic Center Program (BCP), Transitional Living Program (TLP)—as well as a national hotline (currently operated by The National Runaway Safeline).

The three primary programs authorized by RHYA represent the framework for how services are currently provided for homeless youth in the United States. The street outreach program (SOP) provides street-based education, outreach, survival aid, and crisis intervention for young people who are homeless and often includes drop-in services and referral to more intensive support. The goal of SOP services is to engage young people in need of services (e.g. emergency shelter, meals, mental and physical health care) and connect them with those services in order to better protect them from the dangers of homelessness (DHHS, 2012, November 5). SOP services are particularly concerned about youth who have been, or are at risk of, sexual abuse and exploitation. The basic center program (BCP) provides emergency services for

unaccompanied youth under age 18. These services include up to 21 days of shelter, food, clothing, medical care, crisis intervention, recreation, and aftercare services for youth once they exit the shelter (DHHS, 2012, November 6). The goal of BCP services is to help youth return to their families whenever safe and appropriate. For older youth who are unable to return home, the transitional living program (TLP) model provides residential services for homeless youth between the ages of 16 and 22 for a period of up to 21 months (youth entering at age 16 can stay until their 18th birthday). TLP Services include housing, life skills, education and employment support, and mental and physical healthcare (DHHS, 2014, March 14).

2. Homeless Youth Intervention Research

As discussed earlier in this literature review, the experience of homelessness is dangerous and potentially life-threatening for young people. It stands to reason that the longer youth remain on the streets, the greater the risk; therefore, the sooner youth can secure safety and stable housing, the better their immediate outcomes (Walsh & Donaldson, 2010). One study followed 25 homeless youth over a year's time and found that youth who were able to avoid spending a significant amount of time on the streets by staying in youth emergency shelters took greater advantage of social services than those who spent more time on the street with homeless adults and/or deviant peers (Fitzpatrick, 2000). Similarly, DeRosa et al. (1999) conducted surveys with 296 youth aged 13-23 in Los Angeles, California and found youth who accessed shelter services were significantly more likely to receive other needed social services. However, youth who voluntarily choose to access services may already have different characteristics than their peers who do not and beyond removing youth from the risks faced on the street and providing access to a range of supports, we know little about the impact of the services being provided. Most research in the area has concentrated on understanding homeless youth –their needs, experiences,

the risks they face, and their pathways into homelessness. Although important, in their article calling for services research with homeless youth, Milburn, Rosenthal and Rotheram-Borus (2005) explain that this continued focus on the characteristics of homeless youth has resulted in a knowledge base severely devoid of intervention research.

Milburn et al. (2005) argue that “to understand the pathways that enable young people to exit homelessness and become safely housed... (there is a) need for better descriptive and evaluation information that accurately reflects the perspectives of service providers and clients” (p.1). The perspectives of youth and service providers are essential to understand. They offer guidance that may reduce barriers to service utilization and ensure that the support provided to youth is responsive to their self-identified needs. A few publications have taken initial steps toward this end. The first area of emerging research consists of reports detailing the services available to youth and describes specific housing programs for young people in order to provide examples of a range of housing-based service delivery models (Colegrove, 2010; Dworsky, 2010; Van Leeuwen, 2004). One qualitative study investigated service providers’ perceptions of the system of care for homeless youth in order to understand their view of gaps in services and barriers to service delivery (Brooks, Milburn, Rotheram-Borus & Witkin, 2004). Brooks et al.’s (2004) interviews with staff at 30 participating agencies serving homeless youth in Los Angeles, CA identified three primary barriers to adequately serving young people: geographic distance, lack of adequate funding, and poor coordination between service providers. Additionally, Brooks and colleagues (2004) found that although multiple types of services exist for homeless youth, adequate data reporting on youth outcomes related to utilization of those services does not exist. Brooks et al. argue this void in the literature prevents the determination of necessary standards of care that should be in place for future evaluation of services (2004, p. 449).

The second area of emerging research consists of qualitative investigations into the perspectives of youth currently experiencing homelessness regarding the usefulness of services they are receiving. Garrett and colleagues (2008) interviewed 27 homeless youth in Seattle, WA recruited from the streets and drop-in centers. Qualities of services that youth believed to be important in the transition from homelessness included the presence of caring staff, a nonjudgmental atmosphere and flexible policies. Stewart et al. (2010) found further support for these findings in their interviews with 35 homeless youth in Canada, reporting that youth preferred services that provided four areas of social support (instrumental, informational, emotional and affirmational) with a focus on emotional and affirmational support. Youth also reported they preferred services that were face-to-face, accessible, flexible, participatory, long-term and offered choice. Thompson and colleagues found similar results in focus groups conducted with 60 homeless youth recruited from a drop-in center to better understand barriers to service utilization (Thompson, McManus, Lantry, Windsor, & Flynn, 2006). Young people identified reasons they chose not to access services in the past, which included unsuitable and unsafe environments and providers who were disrespectful, rigid or had unrealistic expectations. Alternatively, Thompson et al. (2006) found youth expressed a desire for respectful, empathic, supportive and encouraging services.

Few interventions with homeless youth have been formally evaluated resulting in a significant gap in the literature around the impact of services on the lives of homeless youth (Kidd, 2012; Milburn, 2005). Two studies offer some evidence of the effectiveness of case management services for the population. Cauce et al. (1994) randomly assigned homeless youth (n=115) to either an intensive mental health case management model or standard case management and found that both groups demonstrated significant improvements in mental health

outcomes and social adjustment at a 3-month follow-up. Additionally, youth in the intensive case management program evidenced lower levels of aggression and greater satisfaction with their quality of life. Slesnick and colleagues (2008) also found support for the use of case management as well as therapy with homeless youth. Researchers followed 172 homeless youth who accessed case management and therapy treatment services through a drop-in center for one year and found significant improvements in substance abuse, mental health and percent of days housed (Slesnick, Kang, Bonomi, & Prestopnik, 2008). While this study did not utilize a control group and youth voluntarily elected to take part in services (which could indicate different levels of motivation, distress or experience with services in the past), the results provide preliminary evidence suggesting service models that contain case management and therapy may be of benefit to some homeless youth.

Several studies have examined interventions for reducing substance abuse among homeless youth. Xiang (2013) conducted a systematic literature review in order to summarize existing evidence on interventions intended to address substance use problems among homeless youth ages 12 to 24. Fifteen studies were identified and ranged from individual-focused therapies such as brief motivational intervention, community reinforcement, and knowledge and skills training to broader interventions such as family therapy, support groups and housing programs. Using the guidelines developed by the U.S Preventative Services Task Force Work Group, Xiang assessed each study on seven criteria: (1) clear definition of interventions; (2) initial assembly of comparable groups; (3) proper maintenance of comparable groups through the study; (4) follow-up rate of at least 80 percent; (5) use of reliable and valid measurements; (6) consideration of all important outcomes; and (7) for randomized controlled trials, using an intent-to treat analysis. Xiang found that participants across studies reported reductions in substance use regardless of

the type of intervention and concluded the superiority of a specific intervention was difficult to determine because of the challenges of meeting the above criteria in intervention research. Xiang's summary, although unable to identify distinctions between interventions, does indicate that a range of services could potentially have a positive impact on the lives of homeless youth. However, Xiang also found that studies rarely examined the treatment experiences from the perspective of the participants, explaining: "the effectiveness of a treatment may be of statistical significance when measured by standard instruments, but it might have little substantive significance for substance abusing homeless youth" (Xiang, 2013, p. 42).

One of the more frequently studied interventions for homeless youth to date has been emergency shelters; however, this is still a small body of knowledge consisting of only a handful of studies with somewhat conflicting results. Overall, researchers have found emergency shelters to have at least a short-term positive impact for young people (Slesnick et al., 2009). A prospective study of 106 young people receiving shelter services in New Orleans reported a significant reduction in substance use at discharge from the program (Steele & O'Keefe, 2001), and in a study of runaway/homeless youth utilizing shelters services at eleven agencies across four Midwestern states, researchers found youth experienced significantly fewer days on the run and fewer problems at school and work at six weeks following their exit (Pollio, Thompson, Tobias, Reid & Spitznagel, 2006; Thompson, Pollio, Constantine, Reid, & Nebbitt, 2002). Although these findings are promising, two studies assessing the impact of shelter stays for youth six months after they exited the shelter present mixed results. Barber, Fonagy, Fultz, Simulinas and Yates (2005) found reduced behavioral and emotional problems; however, Pollio et al. (2006) found the short-term gains observed for youth at six weeks following discharge appeared to dissipate when measured again at six months (Pollio et al, 2006). Slesnick, Guo,

Brakenhoff and Feng (2013) found these results to be even less promising for substance-abusing youth in emergency shelters. Within two years of exit, 64 percent of young people either returned to the shelter, ran away or experienced an alternate homeless living situation. It is important to note that none of these studies utilized a control group, which limits the ability to make any definitive statements about the effectiveness of emergency shelters.

Two recent comprehensive reviews of studies investigating services for homeless youth further articulate the inadequate quality and quantity of intervention research in the area of youth homelessness. Altena, Brilleslijper-Kater and Wolf (2010) conducted a systematic review of homeless youth intervention studies that focused on interventions that could be applied within the context of any service condition. Studies were included if they empirically examined the effectiveness of a general intervention of any kind for homeless youth and included randomized-controlled trials, quasi-experimental studies and studies utilizing uncontrolled pre-post tests. Altena and colleagues identified only 11 studies of any service intervention for this population conducted during the period of 1985 to 2008. While they did not include interventions that focused on family therapy, examined sexual health, were conducted in schools or were considered program evaluations, their results do illustrate the limited quantity of homeless youth intervention research. Further, using a modified version of U.S. Preventive Services Task Force Work Group rating system (same criteria utilized by Xiang (2013) discussed above), Altena et al. found “no compelling evidence of the effectiveness of interventions for homeless youth” (p.643).

Slesnick and colleagues included qualitative research and unpublished master’s theses and dissertations in their comprehensive review in order to provide a more complete picture of the current landscape of homeless youth services and intervention research (Slesnick et al., 2009). Studies were included if they focused on homeless, runaway, shelter, street or drop-in-

center recruited youth between the ages of 12 and 24 and if the focus of the study was on improving the life situation of participants through reducing identified problem behaviors. Slesnick et al. synthesized the findings of the 32 studies that met the criteria for inclusion and found three central results across studies: (1) interventions that target only one aspect of an individual's life are not likely to be effective; rather, a more holistic approach to intervention is required; (2) homeless youth frequently report poor coordination of services impedes their access to care, and therefore interventions that incorporate and synchronize services may be more effective; and (3) longer-term interventions are likely to be more effective as they will allow for the development of more trusting relationships with providers, as well as time to address the range of issues with which homeless youth present (Slesnick et al., 2009).

3. Transitional Living Programs for Homeless Youth

Consistent with homeless youth intervention research in general, what is known about TLPs is extremely limited. Currently, this knowledge base consists of four case studies.⁵ The New England Network for Child, Youth, and Family Services explored the perspectives of four TLP service providers with regard to how the program impacts the lives of young people (Bartlett, Copeman, Golin, Miller, & Needle, 2004). Researchers found that each TLP program had its own definition of youth success but all generally included an evaluation of progress while in the program, in other words, looking at where youth started compared to housing status, educational attainment, development of life skills, reduction in substance use and personal growth at exit. Notably missing from these definitions of success were an understanding of longer-term outcomes with providers citing the difficulty of not knowing what happens to youth

⁵ Preliminary results of a recent quasi-experimental study of a supportive housing program similar to the TLP model in New York found significantly lower rates of shelter stays and incarceration in the two years following entry/eligibility date among youth participating in the program as compared to a comparison group of youth who were eligible for supportive housing but did not receive it (Paving the way, 2014)

after they leave the program. Bartlett and colleagues conclude that understanding what happens to youth after leaving a program “is obviously a challenge, but developing a means to do it is important and necessary” (Bartlett et al., 2004, p. 42).

Giffords, Alonso and Bell (2007) and Nolan (2006) also conducted case studies of TLPs, investigating how two different programs in New York City are currently providing services and measuring their impact. Giffords et al. (2007) examined outcome data from 44 youth who participated in a TLP program in 2005 at their exit from the program. They found that 93 percent of youth in the program acquired or continued to practice independent living skills, 91 percent had attended school, participated in vocational training or were employed over the last quarter, and 87 percent of youth moved into an appropriate setting for independent living upon discharge from the program. Nolan (2006) collected data from all youth served by a TLP for homeless LGBT youth from 2000 to 2005 (n=40). Success was determined by the attainment of safe housing at exit as well as by progress made in the area of education. Nolan found that 77 percent of youth exited to a safe living situation, and 43 percent increased their level of education by obtaining a GED or attending a semester of college. Although both studies found promising support for the effectiveness of the TLP model for homeless youth, like the programs in New England examined by Bartlett et al. (2004), both studies lack an understanding of outcomes for youth beyond exit from the program.

Only one study has examined the impact of TLP services for young people beyond their discharge from the program. Rashid (2004) analyzed the outcomes of 23 former foster care youth in Northern California who utilized transitional living services after becoming homeless, examining outcomes six months after youth left the program. Although results are based on a small, non-random sample, Rashid found preliminary evidence that TLPs may be effective

interventions for former foster care youth who become homeless, reporting that 90 percent of the youth she was able to locate at six months (20 of 23) had remained in permanent, stable housing. Echoing the recommendations of the other TLP studies described above, Rashid concludes more research must be done to observe longitudinal outcomes that investigate the success of youth after they leave TLPs and live independently as adults.

E. Summary and Conclusions

Although it is difficult to accurately report the prevalence of youth homelessness in the United States, it is widely agreed there are large numbers of unaccompanied homeless youth in this country, and “those numbers are likely growing” (Kidd, 2012, p. 534). The imminent and enduring dangers to the well-being of homeless youth must propel us to provide services that meet the complex presenting needs of young people in situations of homelessness, and to do so in a manner that effectively responds to the combination of emotional, informational, instrumental, and appraisal supports that they are requesting (Stewart et al., 2010). Homeless youth are at increased risk for victimization, mental and physical illness, involvement in the criminal justice system, and threats to their education and future economic stability (Coates & McKenzie-Mohr, 2010; Edidin et al., 2012; Toro et al., 2007; Whitbeck, 2009). Young people need services that respond to the threats they are facing, but, further, research conducted with youth currently experiencing homelessness indicates that young people desire services that are provided in a way that respects their autonomy, acknowledges the trauma they have experienced and offers opportunities to build relationships comprised of trust and emotional support (Garrett et al., 2008; Slesnick et al., 2009; Stewart et al., 2010; Thompson et al., 2006).

There is a strong call from the field for intervention and services research (Kidd, 2012; Milburn et al., 2005). Research in the area of youth homelessness has primarily focused on

understanding the characteristics of homeless youth, identifying the causes of their homelessness and outlining the risks they face as a result of being without safe and stable housing. While this information is critical to the development and targeting of services for youth, a void remains in our understanding of how effective the services being provided actually are. There is some preliminary evidence that program models containing case management and therapeutic services may be beneficial (Cauce et al., 1994; Slesnick et al., 2008) and that youth-specific emergency shelters have at least some short-term positive effects although it seems that these short-term gains may dissipate within six months (Barber et al., 2005; Pollio et al., 2006; Steele & O'Keefe, 2001; Thompson et al., 2002). Beyond this, there is limited evidence pointing to the effectiveness of any specific service for homeless youth (Altena et al., 2010; Slesnick et al., 2009; Xiang, 2013). This absence of knowledge is understandable due to the inherent challenges of implementing rigorous, randomized and controlled designs in intervention research. These challenges demand the field also looks to other ways of creating useful knowledge about the effectiveness of services, and, in particular, that we turn to young people themselves and ask them to inform us of their experience of services. There are currently *no* studies investigating the perspectives of homeless youth after leaving services as to the perceived impact of those services on their lives.

While it is unclear if any particular service for homeless youth is beneficial over the long-term, across studies three common findings regarding service provision in general have emerged: (1) holistic interventions that target more than one area of a youth's life are necessary; (2) poor coordination of services among providers impedes access to services for youth; and (3) longer-term interventions are likely to be more effective (Slesnick et al., 2009). TLPs have the potential to offer an effective response to these findings. According to the guidelines established by

RHYA and DHHS, TLPs are intended to be holistic, offering not just housing, but also life skills, education, employment, mental health and physical health support (DHHS, 2014, March 14). These services are frequently offered on-site by one agency potentially addressing the barrier created by poor coordination of services among different providers (Brooks et al., 2004; Slesnick et al., 2009). Additionally, TLPs are longer-term (up to 21 months), in theory allowing for the time necessary for trusting relationships with staff to be built and complex presenting issues to be effectively addressed.

Although the guidelines for the program established by RHYA and DHHS indicate that TLPs have the possibility to be an effective solution, there is currently no information indicating whether or not they are, in fact, meeting this potential. Our knowledge of the efficacy of the program model beyond exit is limited to one study that followed 23 youth for six months after exit (Rashid, 2004). Although this is an important starting point, more research must be done. There are currently no data indicating what happens in the lives of young people beyond six months after they exit and the perspectives of youth as to the usefulness of services over time has not yet been investigated. In his commentary on the development of a coherent, strategic response to youth homelessness, Kidd (2012) writes:

There are also many programs and services offering highly innovative and effective (at least understood in an anecdotal sense) strategies that address youth homelessness that are not being studied or propagated. If specific, tangible, and promising solutions can be offered, rather than simply reiterating accounts of risk that cultivate a collective helplessness, I have every confidence that financial and social resources will materialize. (p. 541)

As Kidd articulates, the risks facing homeless youth are clear. Our attention must now turn to understanding how to best remove young people from harm's way and support them on their journeys toward a healthy adulthood.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A. Research Design and Method of Investigation

The purpose of this study is to understand the perceived impact of services provided by a transitional living program (TLP) from the perspectives of formerly homeless youth who have participated in those services. As outlined in the preceding literature review, youth experiencing homelessness are a particularly vulnerable group. They are young, have higher rates of mental illness, have often experienced victimization both before and during situations of homelessness, and are frequently coming from situations of poverty and family disruption. Gilgun and Abrams (2002) warn that the voices of disenfranchised populations, such as homeless youth, “are routinely suppressed within the many arenas in which their fates are debated and shaped” (Gilgun & Abrams, 2002, p.42). This study investigates what happens after youth participate in TLP services. This goal can only credibly, and justly, be achieved through the inclusion of the perspectives of youth who have participated in them. Qualitative research methods provide an opportunity to bring the voices of marginalized individuals to the center of the discussion. Unlike quantitative methods, they have the potential to empower participants to share their expertise with regard to the problem being studied and create space for the complexities of a human, lived experience to be appropriately incorporated into the research (Creswell, 2007).

The impact of the services provided by a TLP is a personal story that has unfolded over time—a story that can only be told by the young people who have lived it. A phenomenological approach to qualitative research was utilized in order to capture this lived experience of young people who participated in TLPs. Phenomenology is a strategy of inquiry that seeks to identify the shared essence of a phenomenon as described by a group of individuals who have experienced it (Creswell, 2007). With strong philosophical underpinnings, a phenomenological

approach posits that the phenomenon being studied exists only within the meaning, or “consciousness,” of the experience for the participant (Giorgi, 1997, p.236). In other words, to truly understand if, how, and to what extent TLPs have impacted the lives of formerly homeless youth after they exit services, the meaning participants assign to the role of the program in their lives must be explored. In phenomenology, multiple individuals who have experienced the same phenomenon—in this case, having lived in a TLP—are studied. Their common experiences and understandings of the phenomenon are integrated in order to create a holistic and descriptive response to the identified research question (Giorgi, 1997). With this in mind, a phenomenological approach facilitated the two-fold purpose of this study: first, to understand the experiences of participants since leaving TLPs, and, second, to explore how young people make sense of those experiences and how they might be related to the services they received while in the TLP.

In order to gather the data necessary to understand the perceived impact of TLPs, in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with former clients of a TLP who exited services between 1 and 11 years ago. Simply put, “if we want to learn from the experiences of other people, we must ask them to inform us” (Weiss, 2004, p. 51). In-depth interviews allow qualitative researchers to not only obtain the level of detail necessary to locate contextually complex problems and solutions; it does so by allowing the researcher to connect with others in profoundly personal and meaningful ways (Gilgun & Abrams, 2002). Effective interviewing requires much more than listening. In their framework for conducting community-based qualitative research, Stein and Mankowski (2004), speak to the “act of witnessing” which they describe as: “listening to and affirming the experiences of research participants...(the) focus of witnessing is on acceptance of what is heard and accountability for acting upon it” (p. 22).

Researchers must constantly be focused on the information that the study needs and through an established partnership help participants to provide that knowledge (Weiss, 1994). However, as Stein and Mankowski (2004) argue, they must also be accountable to the interpretation and representation of that knowledge; an imperative for social work research designed to help “the disenfranchised to gain power and access to resources or helping to disrupt the oppressive conditions perpetuated by those in power” (p. 23).

B. Sampling and Recruitment

1. Study Location

This study was conducted with young people who previously resided at a TLP operated by a non-profit agency serving homeless youth in Chicago, Illinois. The agency began in 1976 as a specialized housing program for wards of the state, and it started serving unaccompanied youth who are homeless in 1981. Since 2001, the agency has focused solely on homeless youth, annually serving hundreds of young people through a range of outreach, housing and support services. The organization was one of the first agencies in the country to operate a TLP following the genesis of the program model in the 1988 reauthorization of the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act, and the program has been at capacity ever since. It currently operates 24 of the 38 TLP beds in the Chicago area.

The TLP is located on the south side of Chicago, Illinois and although the program serves youth who are homeless throughout the city, an overwhelming majority originates from communities on Chicago’s south and west sides from neighborhoods often characterized by high poverty rates, gang violence and substandard housing. The program provides youth with basic needs (e.g. housing, food, clothing); employment, educational, and recreational support; life skills training; and mental and primary health care for a period of up to 21 months. The program

also continues to provide a range of support services to youth once they have left housing in order to help support and sustain their transition out of homelessness. Since 2004, the TLP has formally practiced a positive youth development approach (described in Chapter I), harm reduction, and the Sanctuary Model, a trauma-informed model of practice focused on creating an organizational culture within which healing from traumatic experiences can occur (Bloom, 1997). While the degree to which these three approaches were implemented consistently, and with fidelity, varied across the years, all TLP staff since 2004 was trained annually on these three models of practice. While staff composition changes (exact percentages of employee turnover across the years was not available), approximately 40 to 50 percent of the TLP staff identify as African-American and 10 to 15 percent identify as LGBT. Demographics of all youth served by the TLP during the years relevant to this study can be found below in Table I.

TABLE I
TLP YOUTH DEMOGRAPHICS

Fiscal Year	Total # Served	Male	Female	AA	W	H	O	LGBT
FY 04	35	17	18	28	4	2	1	no data available for these years
FY 05	42	20	22	38	3	0	1	
FY 06	44	22	22	42	0	0	2	
FY 07	49	26	23	46	0	2	1	
FY 08	53	24	29	47	1	3	2	
FY 09	51	25	26	43	3	3	2	
FY 10	52	31	21	40	5	5	2	13
FY 11	65	36	29	54	3	6	2	16
FY 12	58	26	32	52	0	3	3	13
FY 13	58	29	29	47	2	3	6	10
Total #	507	256	251	437	21	27	22	52
Total %		50.5%	49.5%	86.2%	4.1%	5.3%	4.3%	22.0%

As a result of my prior relationship with the agency, entrée into the study site was easily obtained. The board of directors approved the study in December 2012 and the chief performance officer submitted a formal letter of support for the research in May 2013 (Appendix K). Relationships with all key staff—the director of residential programs, the director of outreach, prevention and aftercare, the director of supportive services and the chief performance officer—were already established due to my former position with the agency. Each of these program gatekeepers was aware of the study and offered their expressed support with participant recruitment and data collection throughout the entire duration of this research. The agency also approved access to program sites during business hours for the purposes of study recruitment and data collection. These study sites included the actual TLP as well as the agency’s drop-in center, where I conducted interviews with three of the participants. Finally, the agency provided access to all participant client files at the main program site as well as in an off-site storage facility where many of the files had been relocated due to the length of time participants had been out of the program. All participants provided written consent for their file to be reviewed for the purposes of this study.

2. Selection and Sampling

A purposive sample was selected to represent a range of young people who participated in the program from 2003 to 2013. This time period was selected as the agency generally destroys records after ten years, precluding verification of program involvement for years before 2003, and 2013 was selected to ensure participants had been out of the TLP for at least one year. Purposive sampling occurs when individuals and sites for the study are selected because they can best inform an understanding of the research problem and phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2007). Maximum variation sampling is a type of purposive sampling that “aims at capturing and

describing the central themes or principal outcomes that cut across a great deal of participant or program variation” (Patton, 1990, p.172). It is based upon the logic that any commonalities that emerge from a heterogeneous sample are of “particular interest and value in capturing the core experiences and central, shared aspects or impacts of a program” (p.172). To this end, a maximum variation sampling strategy was used whereby eligible participants were selected to reflect a range of diverse individual characteristics of youth served by the TLP. These characteristics included variation in participant gender, race, sexual orientation, length of time in the program, nature of exit from the program and time out of the program. I continued recruitment until I determined through ongoing data analysis that the point of theoretical saturation had been reached. Corbin and Strauss (2008) define this as “the point in analysis when all categories are well developed in terms of properties, dimensions, and variations. Further data gathering and analysis add little new to the conceptualization” (p. 263). This point of saturation was reached after thirty-two participants completed interviews. Details of participant demographics and program characteristics according to the sampling criteria discussed above can be found in Chapter IV (Table II, p.75).

3. Recruitment

I utilized a range of recruitment methods in order to maximize variation in the sampling and to reach youth who may have been traditionally more difficult to find. In the first stage of recruitment, I worked directly with the director of outreach, prevention and aftercare at the agency to identify initial participants (from the approximately 500 youth served by the program over the last 10 years) who may be eligible and are still in contact with the program according to the sampling strategy outlined above. A waiver of consent (for recruitment purposes only) from the UIC Institutional Review Board was obtained for youth who had previously consented to

agency follow-up (consent for follow-up is typically completed with all youth during their exit from the program). The agency provided the most recent contact information they had on file for each potential participant I selected, and I then contacted them directly via phone, email or both with information about how to participate in the study (see script: Appendix E). Five participants were contacted through this strategy of which two participants were enrolled. Concurrently, as staff conducted routine follow-up efforts with youth for the agency's own evaluation purposes or met with young people for aftercare services, they informed individuals who exited the program at least one year prior of the opportunity to participate in the study and provided information for how to contact me should they be interested (Appendix F). Additionally, study flyers were posted in community areas of the transitional living program and drop-in center program sites as well as several staff offices throughout both facilities (Appendix J). Five participants contacted me to express interest in the study following a phone call or meeting with a current staff member of the agency, and one called after seeing a program flyer; all six were subsequently enrolled.

The second stage of recruitment involved snowball sampling, a chain-referral sampling strategy where accessible members of a population are identified and asked to use their social networks to locate and recruit additional members of the population who may be hard to find (Hennick, Hutter, & Bailey, 2011). This stage of recruitment was essential in order to have a sample that included young people who were no longer in contact with the program, as this could have potentially been both an indicator of greater stability as well as of poorer outcomes. Lack of contact with the program could also indicate a negative experience while in the TLP, which was a vital perspective in order to answer the identified research questions confidently. In this stage of recruitment, study participants as well as key informants that maintain contact with previous

TLP residents (e.g. current and former staff) were asked to inform potential participants of the study and provide my contact information should they be interested in learning more. Individuals reaching out to their contacts were provided a study flyer to distribute and/or a script developed to guide any telephone contact (Appendix F). Recruitment through participant snowball sampling began immediately following recruitment of the first participant in order to ensure that youth who have no current connection to the program or former staff were adequately represented in the study sample. Youth and staff reached out to their networks in person, via telephone and email, and also by messaging former TLP residents they were “friends” with on Facebook. Fourteen participants were enrolled in the study as a result of this phase of sampling: seven were recruited by other youth (a combination of text, Facebook and in-person visits) and seven were recruited by former staff members of the TLP (five through Facebook, one by telephone and one by a serendipitous encounter crossing the street between a former staff member who I had informed about the study and a youth who been in the program ten years ago).

Seeing the success of Facebook as a tool for reaching out to potential participants, and wanting to make sure the sample included young people who were not directly connected to other participants and/or TLP staff members, I carefully examined what participant characteristics still need to be represented in order to properly maximize the variation of the sample and then paid a \$1/per message fee to send emails through Facebook to potential participants who met these criteria. Four youth were enrolled through this strategy. Two additional youth were enrolled when I was visiting the TLP for a purpose unrelated to the study and ran into them while in the facility, and finally, four participants were recruited through a private Facebook group of former TLP residents started by one of the participants (which is described in greater detail in Chapter V).

In total, 42 individuals were contacted to participate in the study and 32 were enrolled as outlined above (description of study sample is included as Table II. p.76). Four individuals expressed interest in participating in the study upon initial contact; however, they did not respond to several messages following this initial contact (two phone calls, two text messages and one email when email address was available, was sent to each of these four individuals following initial contact). Five other potential participants were contacted via email, telephone and/or Facebook, and I did not receive a reply, which I interpreted as the participants either not being interested and/or that the contact information was incorrect. Only one young person I attempted to recruit into the study explicitly declined, and she reported this to be a result of a busy schedule.

4. Eligibility Criteria

Individuals were eligible for the study if they were former participants in TLP services provided by the study site between one and 11 years ago, they were at least 18 years of age, and, through certain characteristics, they contributed to the intentional variation in sampling. As discussed above, in order to ensure the sample selected was diverse and generally reflective of the range of youth served by the TLP, eligible participants were selected for the study purposively by gender, race, sexual orientation, length of time in the program, nature of exit from the program, and time out of the program. Individuals were excluded from the study if they were unable to speak English well enough to participate in the research interview as this is a dissertation study, and I did not have the resources to translate documents and/or conduct the interview in other languages. Individuals were also excluded if they were currently incarcerated as the data required for the study could reasonably be collected from other eligible participants

who were not currently detained. No potential participants met either of these criteria, and therefore no individuals were excluded from the study.

C. Data Collection

1. Interviews

Semi-structured, open-ended interviews were conducted with 32 participants. I completed one in-person interview with 27 participants and one telephone interview with 5 participants who were currently living out of state (Kansas, Massachusetts, New Mexico, Oklahoma and Wisconsin). Interviews ranged in length from 35 to 150 minutes (average= 84 minutes). All interviews were recorded using a digital audio recorder, and participants provided written consent for me to record before the interview began. In person interviews took place in a variety of settings as I encouraged participants to select a location most convenient for them. Six interviews were conducted in participants' homes, six were conducted in a coffee shop, twelve were conducted in restaurants and three were completed at the study site's drop-in center. Participants were informed of the risk to their confidentiality should they elect to conduct the research interview on-site at the drop-in center as other staff and youth may be aware of the participant's purpose in meeting with me. However, for the three youth who selected to meet there, they were not concerned about this risk. They saw the drop-in center as a safe, comfortable space and had already informed others present about their intention to participate in the study. All participants received \$20 cash incentive upon completion of their interview as compensation for their time and expertise although it is important to report here that nearly half of participants attempted to decline the incentive, telling me to pass it on to someone else or to donate it to charity. They expressed they were participating in the study simply to help and not for the \$20. This was moving every time it happened. As discussed later in the findings of this study, overall,

participants were not financially stable and that so many would ask me to use the money to help someone else was inspiring. I declined all offers to give back the incentive and informed participants that it was theirs to keep and do with as they wished, which could include passing it on to others if they so desired. I did, however, mail one participant's incentive to his younger sister at his request.

Consistent with a phenomenological approach, the questions asked of youth in this study were intentionally broad and attempted to elicit as much information on the study topic as possible from each participant (Giorgi, 1997). They were written with the intention of stimulating responses from participants that would describe their experiences since leaving a TLP as well as the way they attach meaning to those experiences. The interview guide was developed in consultation with a formerly homeless youth who previously participated in a TLP program (see Appendix A). This young person reviewed an initial draft of the interview guide and then made suggestions related to the content and wording of questions in order to increase the guide's overall relevance for youth and therefore usefulness for the study.

All but two of the participants were young people who I had known during their stay in the TLP. To see them again after so many years, to hear about their lives, to hold their children and meet their partners was an extraordinary gift. I had thought of all of them at different points over the years, wondering if they were okay and quietly asking the universe to make sure they were safe and happy. What was emotional to discover through this process, however, was that many had thought of me as well. When I began to reach out to youth to recruit them for the study I received dozens of emails, voicemails and text message responses like this one: "Omg!!! This just made me cry!! I've missed you and I would totally be willing to help you. You've helped me so much over the years!" I was overwhelmed by the interest of youth, many who I had not been

in contact with for years, in being a part of this research and deeply affected by their genuine excitement to hear that I wanted to see them. What perhaps stayed with me more than any of these initial greetings, however, was something one of the participants said to me in the middle of our interview. Mid-response to an unrelated question, he paused, shook his head and said:

It's just crazy. I can't believe it. I thought I'd never see you again. I was just like man, I'm never going to see Casey again. At the house, honestly, when you said you was going to become a doctor, I'm like I'm so happy for you. Like I was worried about you. I didn't know what happened to you. I didn't know where you went. I'm just happy that you been here the whole time.

I have been reflecting on those words “I thought I'd never see you again” ever since he spoke them. The findings of this study will address at length this theme of building meaningful connections with others only to experience them prematurely terminated as a result of program exit. When I heard his words, although they were intended to be positive, I felt sadness and regret. I felt as if I had let this young man down through my own exit from the program. While the focus of this study is certainly not on my experiences as former staff member of the TLP, I identify these thoughts and feelings here as I believe it is important for those reviewing this study to understand the experience of being a part of a TLP can be just as significant for those who work there as it is for those who live there.

The participants in this study gave up hours of their extraordinarily busy lives to offer their wisdom, their honesty and their heart. It is my sincere hope that all three of these qualities come as vividly across these pages as they did when we were together.

2. Additional Data

Data related to participants' characteristics, stay in the program, and selected outcome indicators were obtained through the completion of a brief questionnaire directly following each interview (see Appendix D). Participant characteristic and program data was used to both

describe the sample (see Chapter IV, Table I) and, as discussed earlier, to ensure the sample was generally reflective of the range of young people who participate in the program. Data collected is limited to the following: gender, race, date of birth, sexual orientation, length of stay in the program, date of exit from the program, reason for exit from the program and types of services received. In addition, participants were also asked for their consent to review their case files for the purpose of verification of the above information only. This was necessary to confirm details a participant might forget over time such as date of exit from the program, length of stay, and services received. A separate consent to review case files was included in the informed consent procedures completed by participants prior to their interview (see Appendix B). Due to my position as the former TLP director during the time of most potential participants' stay in the program and in order to protect the confidentiality of study participants, the agency agreed to allow me access to client files without their knowledge of which youths' files I was viewing. All 32 participants consented to the review of their case files for the purposes of this study. The questionnaire completed by participants also included items related to participant outcomes since leaving the program. The responses to these questions were used during data analysis to describe participants' current housing, income, education, health and parenting status. These outcomes were compared to the perceptions of young people as to the impact of the TLP on their lives through a process explained further in the next section.

D. Data Analysis

1. Data Preparation and Management

All data from participant questionnaires and case files were assigned a participant ID and entered into a spreadsheet in Microsoft Excel, a computer software spreadsheet application. All qualitative interview data were transferred to digital audio files directly following each interview

and then deleted from the digital audio recorder. Each of these audio files was saved in a file named with their corresponding participant ID. Each interview was transcribed verbatim. Twenty-four interviews were initially transcribed by a hired transcription service; the remaining eight interviews I transcribed myself. After initial transcription, each interview was then reviewed in its entirety multiple times in order to ensure accuracy. Participants were given a pseudonym of their choosing, and any other names or information that could feasibly jeopardize their confidentiality was eliminated from the transcript. Each transcript was saved as an individual file by participant ID, and a linked list of participant information and assigned IDs was stored in a protected location. Once transcribed and de-identified, interviews were imported into a computer-based qualitative analysis software, MAXQDA (Version 11), in order to manage, sort and code the data.

2. Central Concepts of Transcendental Phenomenological Analysis

This study utilizes a phenomenological approach to inquiry. Specifically, the ideas of Moustakas (1994) as they relate to transcendental phenomenology have guided this investigation from the first interview through the writing of the findings. As such I will briefly review the four major processes through which knowledge in transcendental phenomenological analysis is derived as outlined by Moustakas.

- **The Epoche Process:** Epoche is similar to the concept of bracketing previously discussed in Chapter I (and the two are commonly used interchangeably). Epoche calls for researchers to set aside all prejudgments and remain open and receptive to any possibilities that may emerge throughout data collection and analysis. It is an ongoing process of clearing one's mind of anything other than the data as it emerges and remaining open to all potential explanations.

- **Phenomenological Reduction:** Through a process identified as horizontalization, phenomenological reduction considers every statement and experience related to the qualities of the phenomenon experienced, equally and singularly. These sections of dialogue are known as horizons. Repeating horizons are eliminated, and all non-overlapping statements are clustered into themes. A textural description is then created that describes qualities and experiences that are linked through these themes. Individual textural descriptions are then integrated into one composite description. It is this stage in the analysis process that asks: *what* is it that has been experienced?
- **Imaginative Variation:** The aim of imaginative variation is to create a structural description of the essence of the experience. It is this stage in analysis that asks *how* the phenomenon is experienced. It is a process that encourages researchers to consider multiple meanings and perspectives as they work to understand why, and under what circumstances, the experiences of participants occur. Again, individual structural descriptions are created and then integrated into one composite description.
- **Synthesis:** Finally, the composite textural and the composite structural descriptions are brought together in order to move toward an understanding of both what was experienced and how it was experienced.

3. Data Analysis

Data analysis occurred in four distinct phases beginning immediately following the first interview. Moustakas (1994) presents systematic steps for phenomenological data analysis that were followed during this initial phase. In line with a phenomenological approach, and specifically the Epoche process, this first phase of data analysis attempted to understand participants' experiences independent of any preconceived ideas, which included the previously

outlined conceptual framework for the study. First, each interview transcript was read in its entirety (often while also listening to the audio file) in order to get a global sense of the whole interview. Next, each transcript was reread multiple times for significant statements that provided an understanding of what participants had experienced and how they experienced it. Significant statements were identified and labeled with codes classifying the concepts being described. Instead of *eliminating* repeated statements as Moustakas discusses in the process of horizontalization, recurrent ideas were filed in the same folder in MAXQDA. These initial codes indicated potential areas to explore during subsequent data collection, and their validity was continuously reviewed by identifying if, and how, they were repeated across interviews with different participants (Charmaz, 2006; Hennick et al., 2011). This method of comparing the events and perspectives of one youth with the next allowed for the development of ideas and analytic categories that best fit the data and ultimately describe the shared experience of participants (Charmaz, 2006). As a result of this process, codes were modified several times as interviews continued, and the composite themes came into greater focus.

During the third step of this initial phase of analysis, the identified significant statements and codes were clustered into thematic categories that represented shared meanings within and across participants. Significant statements were then used to inform the creation of textural descriptions of each theme, detailing what each one tells us about *what* participants have experienced since leaving a TLP as well as structural descriptions which outlined *how* those events have been experienced. Finally, individual descriptions for participants were combined into composite descriptions that communicated the essence of the experience for the whole. These final amalgamated descriptions provided the initial findings for the study by offering a detailed understanding of the common experiences and meanings shared across participants. It is

important to note that the extent to which diverse perspectives and experiences emerged between participants is also essential to understand and is described in the study's findings when applicable.

In an attempt to maximize the preservation of the inductive nature of phenomenology, the next three phases of data analysis, which utilize deductive strategies, did not occur until all data were collected and the initial phase of analysis was complete. The second phase of data analysis utilized constructs from House's (1981) theory of social support in order to examine participant responses regarding the effectiveness and meaning of particular services provided by a TLP to their lives. Each transcript was reviewed specifically for statements that highlight individual services and supports received during their time in the program. These statements were then clustered into themes that represented the shared experience across participants. Next, these themes were compared to House's categorization of the functional benefits of social support, which includes emotional, instrumental, information and appraisal support. These results were then used to further examine and refine the initial phenomenological analysis where appropriate.

The third phase of data analysis was conducted utilizing the goals of a positive youth development (PYD) practice approach. The goal of PYD-guided interventions is to help youth become healthy adults by fostering a sense of competence, usefulness, belonging and empowerment (Wilson-Simons, 2007). During this phase of analysis, I again returned to the original transcripts, which were now read specifically for statements that related to these four intermediate goals of PYD. The decision to look deliberately for data that speaks to the attainment of competence, usefulness, belonging, and empowerment was made to promote the inclusion of a range of youth outcomes that may emerge and would otherwise be neglected in a study focused only on more traditional indicators of effectiveness. As in phase two, statements

from individuals were compared across participants and then clustered into themes as appropriate. If emerging themes were found to be consistent with the intermediate goals of PYD, they were again used to further examine and enhance the original analysis as appropriate.

Finally, the fourth phase of data analysis consisted of reviewing the participant outcome data collected from the brief questionnaire completed during each research interview. Four standard indicators of stability utilized in the field of youth homelessness—sustained housing, stable employment, educational attainment, and health—were compared to the findings obtained through the initial phenomenological analysis conducted in phase one. This comparison was first conducted within participants. The extent to which there was congruence between the survey indicators and the perceptions of participants of the impact of the program was then combined and used to write a composite description across participants.

4. Procedures for Ensuring Trustworthiness

Rigor in qualitative research is essential. It provides a standard with which the quality of a study can be assessed for the research consumer to ultimately decide what is worth paying attention to (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To this end, I employed several strategies to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings. Lincoln and Guba (1985) discuss four primary aspects of trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The methods utilized to attend to each of these are discussed below.

Credibility can be understood as how confident one is in the accuracy of the findings of a particular study for the participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Shenton (2004) identifies one way to promote confidence in a study's credibility through "the development of an early familiarity with the culture of participating organizations" (p. 65). This is related to Lincoln and Guba's (1985) notion of the importance of prolonged engagement with a study site and participants,

which they describe as useful when attempting to increase rapport, trust, understanding and comfort between researcher and participant. As a result of my former role as a TLP director, I had a preexisting relationship with the program site, the intervention being studied, and most of the participants who were interviewed. Although this role also presented challenges previously discussed in Chapter I, it was an asset with regard to the study's credibility.

Another method utilized to foster credibility was a member check. As the final phase of data analysis, I invited all participants to attend a focus group where I presented the study's preliminary findings. While only two participants attended the focus group, several others contacted me to let me know that they were simply too busy to attend but were excited the study was nearing completion. Scheduling the member check group was the only logistical challenge I faced during the implementation of this study. Participants had so much going on in their lives that it was difficult for them to know ahead of time when they would be available. Participants who did attend the group were presented with a summary of the study's findings and invited to discuss the degree to which these results were congruent with their experiences and perspectives. We discussed each of the major themes that emerged from the data, and participants were provided the opportunity to verify, elaborate and clarify the findings. The results of the member check offered strong support for the preliminary findings presented. The two participants present believed the themes identified were generally in line with their experience, and when there were points where their specific experience diverged from the findings presented, the participants indicated that although it was not true for them personally, they believed it to be consistent with the experience of many others they knew in the program. Most of the focus group was spent with participants sharing additional experiences they had not previously discussed in their interview that provided further support for each of the findings presented.

Finally, to further ensure credibility, two methods of triangulation were used. Shenton (2004) describes one form of triangulation as the purposive sampling of a wide range of participants, which allows for a range of “individual viewpoints and experiences to be verified against others” (p.66). This was achieved through the use of a maximum-variation sampling strategy previously described. The second method of triangulation was through the use of an additional coder during data analysis. Guba (1981) describes this approach when discussing the importance of triangulation, writing, “when possible the research team should be divided so that the perceptions of several investigators can be compared” (p. 85). To this end, I recruited a fellow social work doctoral candidate experienced in qualitative coding and trained in human subjects protections to act as a second coder on a selected number of interview transcripts. I randomly selected three participants and provided her with 83 pages of transcripts from these interviews. A comparison of our independent initial codes revealed a high-level of consensus regarding the major themes present in the data. There were no areas of incongruence to discuss; however, several of her codes helped me to further refine my understanding of the themes that were emerging and, as such, her work was invaluable in strengthening the credibility of this study.

A second aspect of trustworthiness is transferability, or the degree to which the findings may have applicability in other contexts or with other participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In order to ensure transferability, thick description has been utilized where appropriate to describe specific contextual details that will allow those reviewing the study to understand the degree to which the findings might also be useful for other settings and populations (Guba, 1981).

Dependability refers to the idea of whether or not the findings would be consistently repeated if the study were replicated (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In order to ensure dependability, a

transparent description and rationale of all steps taken in this study—including all decisions related to design, sampling, data collection, and analysis—were consistently recorded and are reported in this chapter. This audit trail provides the detail necessary for an outside researcher to evaluate the quality of procedures used and potentially replicate the study (Guba, 1981; Shenton, 2004).

Finally, the fourth aspect of trustworthiness identified by Lincoln and Guba (1985) is confirmability. Confirmability refers to the degree to which the findings are a result of the participants and free from the “biases, motivations, interests, perspectives, and so on of the inquirer” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.80). Whereas my preexisting relationship with the study site and participants enhances the credibility of the findings, it also presented challenges that needed to be addressed in order to ensure confirmability. My role as a former TLP director inherently brings with it prior assumptions of how services operate in the lives of young people. To address this reality, it was important to make these ideas, and how they changed throughout the study, explicit. I recorded my thoughts, feelings, and emerging impressions consistently during the study through a process of journaling as well as through the use of memos during data analysis. I also regularly consulted with the Chair of my dissertation committee to assist me with identifying any potential areas of bias that presented along the way. Further, the use of member checks and a second coder were also useful in this capacity as they provided additional reviewers able to identify potential biases that may be present and were not confirmed by the data.

E. Protection Of Human Subjects

This study was approved by the University of Illinois at Chicago Institutional Review Board (IRB) in order to ensure the protection of participants (see Appendix L). The purpose and procedures of the study as well as the risks and benefits were articulated to each participant

during recruitment and again before any data collection began. Before beginning each interview, I reviewed the Research Participant Information and Consent Form (Appendix B) in its entirety and answered any questions that arose. For interviews conducted over the telephone a waiver of documentation was obtained from the IRB. For these participants, I reviewed the Subject Information Sheet (Appendix C) in its entirety, answered any questions that arose, documented each participant's verbal consent, and mailed them a copy of the Subject Information Sheet. Participation in the study was voluntary, and participants were free to discontinue their involvement at any point without an impact on current or future services provided by the study site or the participants' relationship with the University of Illinois at Chicago.

All private identifiable information was kept confidential and was only used for research purposes. All participants were assigned a participant ID and pseudonym of their choosing that identified and linked their data. No identifying information was asked during the interview and any identifying information that came up was excluded/modified during the transcription process. Information provided during the interview has been quoted directly in the findings of this study; however, it is not associated with any identifying information beyond a participant's age and chosen pseudonym.

Only myself and a hired transcription service had access to the audio files and interview transcripts before de-identification. The transcription service signed a confidentiality agreement that is on file with both the IRB and the Jane Addams College of Social Work. All consent forms and eligibility checklists are stored in locked file cabinets separate from the study data. All electronic data files are stored on a password-protected computer that only I have access to that is also encrypted with PGP Desktop. In order to link participant data over time, a list connecting participant names, study IDs and pseudonyms is stored in a secure, locked file cabinet, separate

from the study data. This list and the audio files of each interview will be destroyed upon completion of the research, and audio files will not be used for any other purpose besides this study.

While this research involved minimal risk, there was a possibility that due to the personal nature of the topics discussed, participants could find answering some of the interview questions upsetting. To address this, participants were informed they could take a break, skip any questions or end the interview at any time they wished. Only one participant asked to stop the recorder near the end of our interview, and it was because she wanted to discuss the violence she was currently experiencing from her partner and was uncomfortable with this being recorded. Once the recorder was turned off, it quickly became clear this participant was in an extremely dangerous situation and needed immediate support in order to remain safe. We ended the formal interview at this point and transitioned into developing a safety plan for her, which she decided would include not returning to her current living situation. I placed a call to a former colleague who is now the director of a domestic violence shelter, and we were able to get her into emergency housing right away. This was the only situation that emerged at any point during this study that required immediate crisis intervention. However, all participants were provided with a list of resources should they need additional services in the future (Appendix M).

Finally, homeless individuals represent an economically disadvantaged population. Although the majority of participants were in stable housing at the time of their interview, some continued to experience housing and financial instability. Recognizing this vulnerability, I believe the financial incentive offered to participants is appropriate compensation for their time and expertise but not large enough to have resulted in coercion.

IV. FINDINGS I:

THE EXPERIENCE OF LIVING IN A TRANSITIONAL LIVING PROGRAM

A. Introduction

Thirty-two participants were interviewed from October 2013 through July 2014. Participants ranged in age from 20 to 32 years old, with an average age of 26. Gender, sexual identity and racial and ethnic identities of the sample closely mirror those of the transitional living program (see Table I, p.54). Participants included 19 females (59%) and 13 males (41%) (one male-identified participant is transgender). Twenty-one participants identified as heterosexual (66%), three as lesbian (9%), four gay (12.5%) and four identified as bisexual (12.5%). Twenty-eight participants identified their race as African American (88%), one as White (3%), one as Latino (3%), and two participants identified their race as African American and Latino (6%). Participants were selected to represent a range of reasons for exit from the program as well as exit destinations. At least one participant from each year from 2003 to 2013 was selected and length of stay in the program ranged from 61 to 659 days (mean = 250 days). Twenty-seven interviews were conducted in person, and five youth currently living out of state were interviewed via telephone. A brief sketch of demographic and program characteristics of each participant according to data collected from program case files is listed in Table II. Exit reasons and destinations by age are described in Table III and Table IV.

TABLE II
PARTICIPANT CHARACTERISTICS^a

Participant	Age	Gender	Race	Sex Or	Nights	Exit Yr	Exit Reason	Exit Destination
Omillie	20	M	AA	H	125	2012	Physical altercation	Emer shelter
					100	2013	Physical altercation	Brother
Cierra	21	F	AA	H	236	2012	Pregnancy	Father
Rupert	21	M	AA	H	516	2011	Self-discharge	Apt w/ brother
Chunky Chip	22	F	AA	L	474	2011	Rule violations	Friend
Anna	22	F	AA	H	61	2011	Altercat w/weapon	Friend
Ryan	22	M	AA	H	659	2010	Independent living	Subsidized apt
Zamiya	22	F	AA	H	65	2009	Drug paraphernalia	Emer shelter
					453	2011	Rule violations	Partner's mother
Melissa	23	F	AA	B	114	2011	Rule violations	Mom
					70	2011	Self discharge	Partner
Eshawn	23	M	AA	G	117	2009	Rule violations	Friend
					95	2010	Drug paraphernalia	Friend
Jacob	23	M	AA	H	90	2011	Self-discharge	Partner (DV)
					499	2011	Time limit	Grandmother
Rose	23	F	AA	H	432	2010	Did not return	Partner (DV)
					18	2011	Did not return	Partner (DV)
Chris Kringle	23	M	AA	H	98	2010	Alcohol on prop	Son's mother
					151	2011	Rule violations	Son's mother
Kennedy	24	M	AA	H	490	2010	Age limit	Aunt
Diana	24	F	AA	H	454	2011	Pregnancy	Other program
Chi Villa	24	M	AA	H	616	2009	Independent living	Subsidized apt
Renee	25	F	AA	H	494	2008	Independent living	Subsidized apt
Selena	25	F	AA	B	123	2009	Drug paraphernalia	Other program
					153	2009	Rule violations	Mother
Esmeralda	26	F	AA/H	H	363	2008	Independent living	Subsidized apt
M.G.	26	F	AA	L	220	2007	Rule violations	Friend
Marcus	28	M	AA	G	260	2006	Independent living	Subsidized apt
Austin	28	F	AA	G	329	2004	Independent living	Subsidized apt
Pizza	28	F	AA	H	264	2005	Pregnancy	Other program
Emily	29	F	W	H	196	2004	Independent living	Subsidized apt
Stephanie	29	F	AA	B	120	2004	Rule violations	Aunt
					154	2005	Independent living	Subsidized apt
Aaron	29	M (T)	AA	H	168	2003	Rule violations	Mother
					97	2005	Drugs on property	Friend
Toni	29	F	AA	B	526	2006	Age limit	Subsidized apt
Sophia	29	F	AA	H	254	2005	Independent living	Subsidized apt

Participant	Age	Gender	Race	Sex Or	Nights	Exit Yr	Exit Reason	Exit Destination
Free Spirit	30	F	AA	H	215	2005	Self discharge	Mother
Timothy	31	M	AA	H	355	2005	Independent living	Subsidized apt
Lukes	31	M	H	G	215	2004	Self discharge	Sister
Blythe	32	F	AA/H	L	87	2002	Self discharge	Partner
					84	2003	Self discharge	Partner
					66	2003	Independent living	Subsidized apt
Justin	32	M	AA	H	332	2003	Independent living	Subsidized apt

^a If youth had multiple stays in the program, each one is listed separately

TABLE III
REASONS FOR TLP EXIT^a

Exit Reason	Participants Ages 20 to 24 (n=15)	Participants Ages 25 to 32 (n=17)
General rule violations	3	2
Possession of drugs on property	-	1
Physical altercation	1	-
Altercation with a weapon	1	-
Did not return to housing	1	1
Self-discharge	3	2
Pregnancy	2	1
Reached program time limit	1	-
Reached program age limit	1	-
Independent living	2	10

^a If youth had multiple stays, most recent exit is reported

TABLE IV
DESTINATION AT EXIT FROM TLP^a

Exit Destination	Participants Ages 20 to 24 (n=15)	Participants Ages 25 to 32 (n=17)
Family member	5	3
Friend	2	2
Partner	2	-
Partner with history of domestic violence	1	-
Unsubsidized apartment with roommate	1	-
Subsidized apartment	2	11
Other housing program	1	1
Emergency shelter	1	-

^a If youth had multiple stays, most recent exit is reported

The purpose of this study was to understand the perceived impact, if any, of the housing and support services provided by a transitional living program (TLP) on the lives of formerly homeless youth over time. Four primary research questions guided the investigation:

1. What are the experiences of youth after leaving transitional living programs?
2. What are young peoples' perceptions of the impact, if any, of transitional living programs on their lives?
3. How do young people view the usefulness of specific services offered by the transitional living program?
4. How do young peoples' perceptions of the impact of transitional living programs on their lives compare with standard indicators of stability utilized in the field such as sustained housing, stable employment, educational achievement, and health?

The findings associated with each of these four questions will be discussed in two chapters. The first describes what happened for youth while in the TLP, and the second examines what has happened for youth since leaving.

This chapter will describe the experiences of youth and the meanings youth assign to those experiences while living in the TLP. It is a synthesis of the central themes participants discussed when reflecting on their time in the program. The findings are presented through the integration of composite textural and structural descriptions developed through the phenomenological analyses described previously in the methodology section and are organized into the following four themes: home, connection, personal development and holistic support. These descriptions are accompanied by quotations from individual participant interviews in order to both ground and enhance the composite descriptions of the whole. In order to protect the confidentiality of the study sample, all participants selected a pseudonym of their choosing and

when other youth are mentioned in their comments, they are identified by their first initial only.

The name of the specific program has been changed in all quotations to “the TLP” and all staff member names have been changed to “staff person” within quoted segments.

B. “There is No Place Like Home”: The Experience of Home While in the TLP

If you don't have a place to stay you do whatever you have to, to get what it is you need to get and in that moment not even thinking about that person, it's just ain't nobody out there helping me, so I have to get it like this. I have to. And when you get to that point, it's just like, you sit there and you think what is my purpose in life? What was I created for? What was I made, what was I brought here for? Was I here to go through these things, constantly, year after year and I keep trying and trying but you just living life and it keeps beating you up. Like was I created to go up and down, up and down, it's just like, I don't know, when you know for a fact that you are safe and you have somewhere to lay your head, there is nothing in the world like it. Just to know that at the end of the day, I have a key to the lock in my door to lay my head down and not sit up here and call this person, this person, and say “can I please stay the night?” or “can I please come to the shelter?” or “can I please just sit here for an hour?” Or you have to leave really early in the morning so nobody sees you or like I get stamps from the aid office but I have no where to cook, where do I cook? How do I use this? It's just like all of those questions come to your mind. I don't know, Casey; it's crazy. Let's just say there is no place like home. (Marcus, 28)

One of the most prevalent narratives to emerge across interviews in response to the research questions driving this investigation centered on the concept of home. Participants used it to describe the physical space of the program, but it also factored heavily into explanations for what policies and procedures were seen as beneficial and also those that youth felt were not useful and, at times, even harmful. It spoke to relationships built during their time in the program, distinctly labeling them over and over as familial and offered explanations for why certain elements of the program structure were seen as helpful and in a participant's best interest. At first glance, this might not feel surprising as this is a study of a residence where individuals lived, but it is in the meaning participants assigned to the concept of home that the central findings of this study lie. Home is first, as Marcus eloquently describes above, a stable place to “lay my head down.” It is a place that is yours to return to. It puts an end to the constant search

of somewhere safe to be. It is freedom from the dependence on others to survive. However, for the participants interviewed in this study, home was more than a structure that facilitated these functions. Young people did not use the word “home” to simply identify a place of physical residence, but rather they used it to mean a place of safety, belonging and permanency. Home was a feeling and an experience, not just a location. The idea of home went far beyond a place to sleep, and participants described how, over and over again, often through comparisons to emergency shelters:

In the TLP it was like, “I’m not in a shelter. Who’s in a shelter?” Like when someone would say, “You live in a shelter,” I’m like, “Who? No, I don’t.” And in reality it is, but I didn’t feel like that. I felt like I was in a place of empowerment, a place that was going to enhance me in a lot of ways and provide me safety, support, a home...and we grew as a family, literally. (M.G., 26)

We wasn’t treated like we was literally in no shelter. It was like okay, this is what you could call home. (The TLP) made it like it was a home...that wasn’t no shelter. I would feel very upset if somebody called it a shelter. I prefer you to call it a transitional living program, which is what it is because it prepared us for the real world because it’s not a shelter. It’s definitely not. (Zamiya, 22)

The following section examines this distinction between home as a location and an experience. I will describe how the theme of home manifested in participant interviews across four aspects of the program: physical space, program structure, family roles and discord with program policies.

1. Physical Space

Participants were asked if they could open their own transitional living program for youth, to describe what it would be like. They discussed a wide range of characteristics from architecture to staff qualities. The word “home,” while highly present in responses to all interview questions, was particularly salient here:

My dream place? A beautiful home. It's just like a regular house, so people wouldn't have to come in and out of a building and make it feel like you know, ugh, it would feel more like home. (Anna, 22)

In this comment, Anna is making a similar distinction as M.G. and Zamiya above. There was a clear separation for participants between having housing and having a *home* and participants felt the physical space played a significant role. Although each participant had individual ideas of exactly how the building would be set up, most described a space that to them would “feel more like home.” When asked what this would look like, participants described features such as warm colors, comfortable furniture and designated spaces for both privacy and community building.

Also useful in understanding what physical qualities made the program feel like home was understanding the opposite, or what qualities make a building *not* feel like home. While participants were asked to focus on their time spent at one particular TLP, 24 participants (75% of the sample) had experiences of staying in multiple housing programs operated by a range of agencies. This frequently led to a natural discussion of comparison between experiences of different programs in their responses. While this comparison extended to several issues beyond physical space, such as staff qualities and policies, it was particularly prevalent here. Through these comparative responses, participants provided a picture of what made the physical space of certain housing programs *not* feel like home. In the following comment, Eshawn speaks to some of these including uncomfortable sleeping arrangements, lack of privacy and fears for personal safety.

Yeah, you have to go to the church and the breakfast and then you have to sleep with itchy covers and you're in a bunk bed setting and everybody is all up in your business, you can't hide nothing; you're just out there. I hated it. It was so scary. It was so scary. I had to take showers and I was like oh my gosh, I hate this, I don't want to be here, I have to get out of here. (Eshawn, 23)

Additionally, in 2009 the TLP program moved from a four-flat residential multi-family greystone to a new construction with a more contemporary design (photos of both properties on p.84). While only four participants actually lived in both buildings, many who previously lived in the original building had since visited the new facility. This became another place of natural comparison for participants as they reflected on how they experienced the physical space of the two buildings in relation to the theme of home. Several youth described the design of their own program in relation to how they viewed the differences between the two buildings. While a few youth preferred the new design, seeing it as a more dorm-like setting that was on par developmentally with their college-bound peers, all of the participants who had lived in the old building felt the new construction lacked the feeling of home they repeatedly identified as critical to the program's success.

When you are in the new building, it just doesn't feel like home. Like in the TLP, you know the old house felt like a house, you know it really felt like home. And the new building, it just doesn't feel like that at all, feels like it is an office. You know like you can't walk around or get comfortable because there is always somebody here. It just feels weird. Just weird. I stopped going. I just think they took the home feeling out of it. It's not there. It's not there at all. It don't feel it. It doesn't feel like home. (Marcus, 28)

The fact that it felt like a home. The new building, it didn't feel like that. It was just like a building. Okay, yeah, ya'll stay here but it isn't a home. (Aaron, 29)

The importance of the physical design as it relates to the concept of home included privacy, safety and the ability to access traditional spaces found in a home such as kitchens and laundry facilities with convenience and flexibility. Most participants began their discussion of the physical design of their own program should they have an opportunity to create it by launching from the TLP as they knew it and making adjustments from there: "Like it would just be kind of like (the TLP) in the same way, just more, more of everything; like a bigger kitchen. Everything is bigger, bigger everything" (Jacob, 23). When participants spoke of changes they

would make to the design of the space, like Jacob, they generally they wanted to take the existing structure but make modifications so they could help more people. Most participants described increasing the number of beds but doing so thoughtfully and in a way that kept staff to youth ratios low and did not put too many people in one building in order to preserve the feeling of home. Often they designed multiple sites or campuses that had several buildings in order to strike this balance between maintaining the feeling of home but helping as many youth as possible.

A second area where the theme of home emerged in participants' discussion of the physical space centered on issues of access. Marcus (age 28): "I didn't always like the food situation, just that it was locked up. When you always have to come and ask someone to get it, just feels less like home." Aaron (age 29) also described the importance of everything being accessible at all hours of the day in the same way that it is to him now in his own apartment, including access to computers: "Cause I know I wake up out of my sleep sometimes and I just get on the internet and I just look for jobs. I don't care what time of the morning it is."

Participants were clear they understood the logic behind policies that restricted use of certain areas, such as preventing theft, making sure there was enough food for all, adhering to a schedule and staffing the space appropriately; however, they still acknowledged this as a feeling that reminded them they were in a program and were not able to experience "home" entirely. Being at home for youth meant the freedom to cook, eat, do laundry and access the internet without the common restrictions found in most housing programs.



Figure 1: Original TLP property



Figure 2: New construction built in 2009

2. Program Structure

The second aspect of the TLP where the idea of home was prominent in participant responses was in the discussion of the daily program structure. The TLP had a regular schedule that began with all youth receiving a wakeup call, and required them to be out of their rooms and ready for the day by a certain time each weekday morning. Youth were generally not permitted to return to their rooms during business hours on weekdays in order to encourage school and work attendance. Meals were served at specific times, groups and activities were scheduled throughout the day, and youth had to return to the facility by a set curfew. The times of this daily structure fluctuated over the ten-year period being studied, but the general structure of a wake-up call, being ready for the day and out of your room during business hours, set meal times and a curfew were consistent over the years. On Saturdays and Sundays there was no set schedule for wake up, and youth were free to remain in their rooms and community living spaces as they wished. Thirty participants (94% of the sample) expressed they appreciated all elements of this structure and would emulate it if they were to start their own TLP. I asked Renee (age 25) if she ever felt it was disrespectful as an adult being told when to wake up and come home: “I never took it that way. I always took it as they want better for me.” Most participants agreed with Renee. Melissa (age 23) describes why she believes the daily structure is so important:

Even though I didn't find my way home in time a lot of the times (laughter), I felt like it was great because with programs like that you just don't want it to become storage for most of the people. And you know, the people that are there day or night, they just have their things here, and they go where they need to. That's not fair to people outside that actually need to have an actual place to live. Getting up at a certain time I feel like is awesome. It preps people for work. It preps people for school, things like that. It just shows people responsibility...so yeah, I felt like it was pretty awesome.

Participants appreciated a high level of structure in the program and, unlike the issue of restricted access to certain spaces in the building discussed above which made the TLP feel like more of a

program, high levels of structure facilitated the feeling of home for participants. Like Renee, several youth expressed feeling the structure was in place because the program wanted the best for them. It was validating to know that someone was invested in their success and was going to hold them accountable. It reminded participants of what typical parents of teenagers would do, and while they may not have embraced the structure of the program at the time, participants saw this as also appropriate behavior for their developmental stage. In other words, most teenagers disagree with their parents about curfew, and in this way a policy that could easily make it feel more like a program actually made it feel more like what they envisioned home to be. Participants had frequently grown up in unsafe, chaotic environments and knowing there would be food on the table at a certain time, someone cared if they didn't make it home and there would be consequences for skipping school provided a sense of stability and safety. The following excerpt from my interview with Eshawn identifies several of the points participants brought up regarding the importance of program structure and how it relates to the feeling of home. It also touches on another critical aspect of the program identified by participants—mental health—which is explored further on in this chapter in Section E.

Yeah, you need to get up and not just lay in the bed because if I was given the choice most of the days at TLP I would have chosen to stay in the bed. I would not have gotten anything done. I would not have gotten anything done. I would seriously have slept the whole day away and end up waking up later on at night...Living in Chicago, Casey, I realize people shut a lot of stuff in. People stay in their square. It's constantly, I'm to myself, I don't trust anyone -- and I don't want to say that's not good but it's not healthy for them. It's not healthy at all because all that does is just --you push people away and you hurt people that you don't even know that you're really hurting. You're missing out on your opportunities. Yeah, more so you're hurting yourself. That stress that you're putting on yourself and keep it all locked in, you could be letting that be your job. You could be using that energy for something else, like to take your walk for the day for something, or anything other than trying to keep to yourself, okay. I feel like the only reason people do that is because Chicago has such a bad name but if what works, works, or when it starts to change over a new leaf, people will start seeing a change whether this be as one big group or as one person. You know if (the TLP) has this kind of setting, this home setting like I said, what the family does is installed in you. It's going to show off

on that teen. You're going to see something shining about that person or you're going to see that in that person and go 'wow, what is it that this person has?' So that's when the conversation starts about I'm in (the TLP) and this, that, forth, and the other and this is what we believe and they're going to see that that hope is in them. "Wow, this person is a really good person." (Eshawn, 23)

Participants felt strongly that the structure and corresponding accountability provided the motivation necessary to move forward at a time in their life when it was difficult to connect to the future and cope with the stress and sadness that accompanied the circumstances leading to their stays in the program. Eshawn identifies this structure as "what the family does" and discusses that this becomes internalized, leading to not only wanting more for one's life but to also letting others see the good and "hope" that is inside them. It is the idea that someone cared enough to get them on the right path, to make sure that they followed through and that someone actually saw them when they were coming from a place where they often felt invisible and without the personal power and efficacy to make any positive change in their lives.

Participants also spoke about the program structure being essential as part of their preparation for what was to come in the future. When youth are at the TLP, they are 17-21 years old and chronologically, in the stage of late adolescence, a unique period between youth and adulthood. This stage, now widely accepted as continuing on through the mid 20s, is distinguished by a young person's increasing preparation to take on adult roles. Ideally, during this developmental stage, youth are learning the skills required to manage the responsibilities necessary to become self-sufficient, productive contributors to society. Participants viewed the decision of a TLP to invest in this preparation as essential and intimately tied to the feeling of home. Participants felt that when housing programs do not address this type of preparation it not only neglects to prepare youth for the future, but as Melissa pointed out above it creates a program that no longer provides a sense of home and rather becomes just "storage." This is part

of the distinction between emergency shelters and transitional living programs that many participants described. Every one of the 32 participants expressed the importance of at least some level of structure and only 2 participants thought the structure they experienced in the program should be minimized. Blythe, now 32 years old, talked about how not having these expectations when you are younger impacts your future success:

One of the things I love the most about being an adult is that there is so much freedom involved. If I want to eat ice cream for breakfast, I can eat ice cream for breakfast. If I don't want to pay rent, I don't have to pay rent but guess what? There is a consequence to every action. If I eat ice cream for breakfast my stomach's gonna hurt all day and if I don't pay rent I don't get to live here anymore. Without having those expectations placed in front of you it's kind of shocking and alarming when the real world expects you to hold yourself up to a certain standard and you don't and you get knocked down a peg because you feel like you put forth all of this work and didn't get much out of it. It's like well you put in work but it wasn't consistent, you know what I mean? It's like unfortunately everybody, everybody wants to work from home in their pajamas and take a break half way through the day and take a nap. Everybody wants this, it's a completely understandable desire, but it's not the real world. (Blythe, 32)

Participants believed that preparation for “the real world” was a responsibility of the program in the same manner it is for parents. It was often the sole location where the opportunity to obtain the skills required to successfully transition into adulthood was available to them. The time spent out of the program contextualized this need, and while participants described varying levels of preparation provided to them during their time in the TLP, they universally believed in its importance.

3. Family Roles

If they didn't have a family to begin with that group will be their family. You will have somebody that like near yourself, or somebody who knows, would not know exactly what to say, who has a great feeling or know how to explain it: “hey you guys, we're here to help one another. We're not here to get each other down. (The TLP) is a stepping-stone for you to either go to your own apartment or to go to somewhere else yourself, you know, but while you're here under this roof, we are a family. We look out for each other. It's just like a football team. If we all don't work together we're not going to make it to the Super Bowl. And your goal right now is to make it to the Super Bowl. If you want to

get up to the Super Bowl, you need the rest of your family to get to where you're going.” (Eshawn, 23)

In addition to the physical space and program structure, a significant contributor to the experience of home at the TLP described by participants was the sense of family that emerged within the relationships built during their time in the program. Eshawn describes this idea of family as one where it is important to “look out for each other” and make sure that everyone gets where it is they are trying to go. Family in this sense is a group of people living and working under one roof who depend on one another and work together as a “team” to achieve their goals and, in this case, to transition to long-term stable housing. In this way, participants spoke about the concept of family as they perceived it *should* be and not necessarily as what they had experienced within their own family. It was about uplifting one another, providing for each other emotionally and financially, sharing information about the world, and having fun together. It was about an idealized view of the family that all children deserve. Most participants had complicated relationships with their childhood caretakers (which included biological parents, a range of relative and non-relative care givers, and staff of child welfare group homes) and siblings. They had experienced rejection, disappointment, neglect and often violence at the hands of their families, but they also continued to hold firmly onto the idea that the concept of family meant something. It was a bond created by birth, and the TLP created a similar bond, this time through shared circumstance. Family meant that it was okay to not always get along and implied a sense of longevity and sturdiness to relationships built within the program:

I think that was the best part, having people that you can – they can relate to you. I mean only if they like you if you don't, but at the end of the day we were all a family. Like and we was all cool, and the next week we still didn't like each other but we were a family. That's how family is. Sometimes you don't like them. You don't have to like them but you love them. (Selena, 25)

Youth homelessness is distinct from adult and family homelessness in the high rates of family conflict that precipitate situations of homelessness for young people (Edidin et al., 2012; Moore, 2006; Toro et al., 2007). As other studies have found, this conflict can result in youth seeking out opportunities to build a sense of family missing from their home of origin (Brueckner, Green, & Saggars, 2011; Stablein, 2011).

I actually, you know, K taught me a lot, man. That's why he's like family to me. That's why it's a lot of people – like J's my brother, too. Like J is family to me. You know what I'm saying? It's just like we kind of, that's my homies. You know what I'm saying? Anytime I get some money, I'll come over his house and I'll just give him some money because that is love. You know what I'm saying? While he's doing stuff for me my own momma aint doing for me. You know what I'm saying? He's told me stuff, my mother never told me. And I ain't never had a father. You know, my stepfather was abusive. You know what I'm saying? He wasn't really nothing. K taught me a lot. Like I don't think I would've been the same person if it wasn't for that dude, man... I just loved that basically we was family. I swear to God like you my sister. (Rupert, 21)

Peers and staff filled traditional familial roles in ways that biological family could not. Here Rupert makes the distinction between his biological family and the idealized version of what familial roles should be. He labels his two closest friends in the program as his brothers and describes how they mutually care for one another financially and how K, three years older than Rupert, functioned as a surrogate parent, teaching him and guiding him in a way that his biological (and step) parents had not.

The formation of familial roles while in the program was a common experience for participants and seemed to be particularly meaningful for youth who had been let down by their family of origin. Ryan (age 22) had been financially victimized by his mother and brothers throughout most of his life. He is the primary caretaker in his family and continues to remain loyal despite recent incidents that include his mother stealing his fiancé's engagement ring, his brother stealing \$3000 in savings hidden in his room, and his brothers causing him to be evicted from his apartment because they initiated frequent disturbances and refused to heed Ryan's pleas

for them to leave: “I loved my brothers so much. I gave them so many chances to help me out and nobody didn’t come through.” One might think that Ryan’s concept of family would be impacted negatively by these experiences of constant victimization; however, when I asked Ryan what he would do if he were to open his own TLP for youth experiencing homelessness, he responded:

It would be like a family. (The TLP) was like a family. We should have a family night when they would take us out to movies and stuff but it would be more than a movie, movies, games, all that, just talk and stuff, just have fun.

I then asked Ryan what made the TLP feel like a family:

Having fun. I mean because I can tell, just talking to K and S about anything. Also, we would be real, sometimes we would play but in serious mode, we would talk. We talked. We had fun together but like K and S were like my brothers, like better than my brothers. They wouldn’t do what my brothers did. They would do a little bit better.

The first phrase Ryan articulated when conceptualizing his own program for homeless youth was: “it would be like a family.” Like Rupert, Ryan identified two close friends to be like brothers, but he makes an important distinction between the role of brother by biology and the qualities of what he believes makes one a brother: having fun together and being able to confide, trust and depend on one another. In this way, the relationships participants built within the TLP frequently served to fill voids left by their families of origin. This development was interpreted as an important function of the program; for participants who did not have this experience during their time in the TLP, it was seen as a missing element:

Well the word that comes to mind, I don’t know how realistic it is, but I wish that we had a family. Not like I wish my mom would come back or I wish my dad wanted me but like we’re a bunch of people living in the same space with the same circumstances, slightly varied, but same circumstances and we either mildly tolerate each other or just cause havoc in each other’s lives. I didn’t understand why we couldn’t just find a sense of community. (Blythe, 32)

In addition to labeling relationships with peers and staff as familial (or identifying the potential for them to be), participants described the program itself as taking on traditional parental roles, including discussion of how the program “raised them.”

Okay, I’d say life is different. I have matured now, a lot of places because, you know, (the TLP) practically raised me. I was there when I was so young and I had to go through so many trials and tribulations there. (Zamiya, 22)

I always reflect on (the TLP) and the experiences I went through because I tell people I was raised by White people and wolves (laughter). I was. I was raised by white people and wolves. So like I tell people that for real. I was like, “My parents are White. I have 30 of them. They all have different names.” (Austin, 28)

Participants recognized the critical developmental stage they were at during their time in the TLP and felt that some of the most beneficial services delivered centered on providing guidance, instilling values and nurturing the adults they were becoming. Like most adolescents, they made mistakes. They broke rules. They had difficulty controlling their impulses and planning ahead. Participants appreciated the relationships they built with certain staff members in relation to how they were supported during these times. Austin, while using humor to make the point that she felt the parental influence of the program on her life, calls attention to the saturation of white females in the field of social work. The issue of race within relationships built among youth and staff during their time in the program is an important one and will be discussed later on in this chapter in Section C.

4. Discord with Program Policies

As a result of the experience of the physical space and program structure as home along with the perception of others as filling traditional family roles, there was a substantial amount of discord for youth in relation to their experience of having to leave the TLP, not being able to return after their exit and the program’s policies around children. Each are discussed in this section.

I went through a lot when I left (the TLP), a lot. Because you don't have this place you can call home no more. And for so long you been up in this program for all these years and you never had no family or no friends to take you in or care for you. And now that you're not in there no more, you thinking what's your next step? Where you gonna go now? And you're not gonna get treated like how you get treated at this place in no other place. It was different and I was so lost and I didn't understand that, and I was actually pissed off. (Zamiya, 22)

Zamiya describes feeling angry when she had to exit the TLP. Participants understood it was a time-limited program; however, this did not temper feelings of sadness, fear, and, for some, rejection when it came time to leave. They had built intimate relationships with individuals who they now viewed as family, and in one day everything changed because they reached the program time limit or age limit and were required to exit the TLP. This feeling was intensified when youth were involuntarily discharged from the program following rule violations; it felt like another rejection, for some, reminiscent of the time they were kicked out of their home and became homeless. This finding was consistent for youth regardless of their length of stay in the program. The temporary nature of the TLP did not align with the feeling of stability they had achieved within the relationships formed, and emotions connected to previous experiences of having to leave home resurfaced.

Beyond the initial feelings of sadness, fear and rejection discussed by participants, youth frequently brought up the issue of their perception of not being able to go "back home." They felt if they faced new challenges after having left the program and reached out to the TLP for assistance, they would be told they couldn't be helped and would just be given a list of resources. This fear of rejection seemed to also reflect mourning for the relationships and positioning of belonging that was lost after leaving the program. Youth who did return for assistance described feeling dislocated when they would encounter new staff and youth who did not know who they were. They became frustrated when the relationships they built were no longer intact and

disoriented when they realized they were now a stranger in a place that had not long before, felt like home. Marcus talked about how he wished that the program had followed up more after he left:

Like even after (the TLP), like if they just sent an email checking in after a while, just saying “hey we just wanted to see how you were, if you needed anything.” Just checking in. and now when you go back there, there is always somebody new and they looking at you like “who is you?” and I’m looking at them like “well, who is you?” And now I’m gonna have to tell you, someone I don’t know, my whole life to just get some help, and you’re getting tired of telling your personal life to different people so they will help you. And I’m like, I need help. I need help. (The TLP) is my home. You guys raised me and when things get rough and if I have a setback, knowing what kind of supports I have, just knowing that I can go back home if I need to. But right now it’s just like when you get out of the program you just assume they, you are doing good or you should be doing good. I haven’t heard of nobody call or email to check up, anything. “How you doing?,” giving a shout out, “I haven’t heard from you in a while.” And it would just mean a lot to know, like you would be excited that you thought about me, that you want to know how I am. (Marcus, 28)

During the economic crisis of 2008, like many across the country, Marcus had a cousin who was laid off from his job, was unable to pay his rent and had to move back in with his family. Marcus talked about how he didn’t have this option, that he too was laid off from his employer, and unable to pay his rent, but, unlike his cousin, he did not have a home to return to. Marcus, who had a traditionally successful graduation from the program into his own apartment with a full time job with benefits, would go on to experience homelessness for years following. He described this time in his life:

We need that support, even when I’m out of the program, to fuel me in my life, to make sure that I have a back up plan, like what if something happen like right now, what would you fall back on? What would you do? Because if I feel like you guys are my family then I need to be able to fall back somewhere. I think about it like, if I had been in my momma’s house, say I lost my job and I had to move back home, I was saying that to my cousin and I was like but when you homeless, where is home? If you don’t have a family. Where is home? Is home the train? Is home the bus? Is home a shelter, each day a different one? Is home someone’s car? Is home someone’s hotel room? Like where is home? How do I go back home? I can’t go back home. Why? Because I feel like as soon as I turned a certain age, I was out of the program. And now it’s like, where is home? I felt that when he said it. And that is why I said, there’s no place like home. (Marcus, 28)

This issue of “where is home” was salient for many after leaving the program. The combination of the experiences they had while there with the strength of the relationships built resulted in a substantial amount of emotional dissonance when the program was no longer accessible. In a rocky financial climate, it also resulted in logistical complications that prevented participants who were struggling from receiving the support they needed during challenging points in their lives after leaving the TLP. This is discussed further in Chapter V.

In addition to the conflict experienced between developing the feeling of home and eligibility and length of stay requirements, participants frequently discussed frustration with the program’s policies regarding their children. The TLP was for non-custodial parents only. Youth who became pregnant had to transition to other housing once their child was born, and youth who already had children could only visit with them at the facility in exceptional circumstances for brief periods and only during traditional business hours. These restrictions on time spent with children felt unnatural in a space that otherwise felt like home. It was an issue that participants, both parents and non-parents, raised frequently during interviews when they described how they would design their own TLP. The most common change recommended across participants was to incorporate families. Ryan (age 22) talked about how it was difficult for him to be in the program without his girlfriend and their two children: “It was hard for me, and for her, because I love my kids. I love my family.” Aaron puts this into further context, describing challenges some of his peers faced when having to leave their children in order to enter the program:

And I wouldn’t limit the programs just to single people. It would be for single mothers or single fathers that had children. Because I know a lot of people who came after me that had children but they had to leave where they once were staying just so they could get on their feet. And that wasn’t good because it’s just like you’re here all the time, you don’t never get a chance to see your children. So they shoulda been able to bring them too.
(Aaron, 29)

Participants felt it was not realistic for young people to have such limited contact with their children. They also felt it did not make sense for the program to be for non-parenting youth only. This critique is consistent with what we know about populations that are at particular risk for homelessness. Pregnant and parenting youth are consistently found in higher rates in the homeless youth population and programs that serve this population are in short supply (Greene & Ringwalt, 1998; Toro et al., 2007). It is also not consistent with most home environments, where multiple generations live together under one roof. While, as mentioned previously, this was an issue raised by many participants, not just those who were parenting during their time in the program, those who became pregnant while in the program and had to leave the TLP felt the impact of these policies in an especially profound way. Cierra found out she was pregnant shortly after entering the TLP. She describes how having to leave the program felt like the staff were giving up on her:

(The TLP) was good for me but it was bad at the same time because these are people that were supposed to help you and they weren't trying to help me because they felt like --I'll be honest with you, I was in there and a resident told me that because I was pregnant right after I got there that they weren't really going to help me because they felt like I was just a lost cause and I wasn't going to be nothing. I wasn't going to be nothing in my life and if I wanted to get back in school, that was my case manager at the time, and she told me that I just needed to focus on housing. (Cierra, 21)

The emotion in Cierra's response above was palpable during our interview. The rejection she described feeling was reminiscent of stories young people have shared with me over the years of being asked to leave their homes when their caregivers found out they were pregnant. Cierra felt the staff at the TLP treated her differently when she became pregnant, and she was deeply hurt by this. When asked how she would design her own program, housing for parenting youth was her focus:

I would still have that program and then I would have a branch off for single mothers with children, because just because if you come to (the TLP) and become pregnant that

doesn't mean that you're going to give up on life like it's the end of the world, and some people actually want to succeed, they're willing to work on that but now some people might not have a good place or positive place where they can go and be themselves so I would have it for like single mothers and then there's a certain period where they try, where they can save up and they have like case managers to make sure they're on the right path, that they're taking care of their child, and maturing into adulthood.

Like Cierra, many participants wished to design TLP programs that provided housing for parents and their children. However, participants also spoke to the incorporation of more inclusive policies that allowed for non-custodial parents to visit with their children. They described child-friendly spaces within the TLP and recommended greater flexibility with regard to when and for how long youth could visit with their children at the program. They saw parenting as a natural part of life that should be incorporated into TLP program design whenever possible in the same way that children are an active part of traditional homes in every corner of the world.

C. "Part of Something": Connection and Community in the TLP

Melissa: I know that people, they get into situations where they're homeless and they have no place to go, so they take the first thing that pops up, but I feel like with people being in those situations, they need to make sure that they go to a place that will help them grow and that will help motivate them in a place that they will feel they get what they lack in their personal life, like love or happiness or just someone to communicate with, someone to talk to. Those are things that people should look for, because it's small things in life that help you get to the big things.

I: And those are also pretty big things, love, happiness –

Melissa: Yeah, but with today's youth, those things are just irregular. It's not something that people really – they don't – what's the word? How do I want to put this? People don't take things like that as seriously as they should, 'cuz that's what helps mold people and grow people and make people into who they are. It's a way to express yourself instead of getting so angry all the time. If you aren't careful and you go into the wrong facility, you'll just add fuel to the fire that's already burning.

I: I think that's a really powerful point. It's something that I hadn't even really thought about, the choice of taking the first bed because you obviously want to get off the street and how different those programs can be.

Melissa: Yeah, some you just go into and you're just there. You're just a person or you're just a client, but I felt like my time in (the TLP), I wasn't just a client. I was Melissa. I was there. I was a part of something even though I was just a client. I just felt like I was part of something.

Before Melissa came to the TLP, she lived in an abandoned building where she was repeatedly robbed and assaulted. It is logical to assume that one would choose to leave those circumstances as soon as a bed became available no matter what provider was offering the service. This was not the case for Melissa nor many other participants who shared stories of how they would rather ride public transportation all night or have sex with strangers for a place to stay than enter a program that was not supportive. In the excerpt above, Melissa articulates what she believes youth in situations of homelessness need. She talks of a place that helps youth “grow” and a place that accomplishes this by meeting the emotional needs of young people such as having “love or happiness or just someone to communicate with, someone to talk to.” Like Melissa, participants talked about their time at the TLP as feeling as though they were “a part of something.” They described the importance of being seen, validated, motivated and included. They believed it was essential for young people to have somewhere they felt they belonged. They wanted to be present as *human beings* and not *clients*, and many described one of the most important functions of the TLP to be providing this opportunity for connection and community. The second central theme to emerge during analysis of what participants experienced when in the TLP and how they experienced it is this perception of being “a part of something.” Two distinct but closely related categories define this theme: (1) the individual relationships participants built with other young people and staff members; and (2) the sense of community created by the program as a whole.

1. Connection: Individual Relationships Built in the TLP

A primary experience for youth in the program centered on the acquisition of the individual relationships they built with both staff and youth. These relationships, beyond fulfilling familial positions described in the previous section, provided a general place of understanding, support and companionship. The relationships youth built in the program are the most prominent experience they shared. One hundred percent of the sample identified the relationships they developed as the most beneficial aspect of the program. It wasn't the bed or the food. It wasn't the clothes or the health care. Although each of these services was important to participants, the most influential experience they described centered on the relationships they built with others.

The best time, it was more than one time for me. Just knowing like the people that lived in the house, they had each other's back no matter if we went through hell and back, we were still there for each other. Like we were each other's support system. That's what I loved. If we couldn't go to the staff, we got each other. Because we all knew what it was like to be in that situation. (Aaron, 29)

Several important themes emerged across participant interviews with regard to the centrality of relationships. I will discuss them as they correspond with staff relationships and peer relationships separately.

a. Staff

Three major themes emerged in participants' discussion of relationships with TLP staff members: (1) it was the actual characteristics of the person and not just the service they provided that was helpful; (2) staff turnover was difficult and, at times, harmful; and (3) youth desired to work with staff who understood the struggles they faced. Each of these is discussed in this section.

When explaining the TLP they would create for youth experiencing homelessness, participants frequently described the program through the specific names of staff they would want present:

Selena: I would definitely need me a (staff person's name) in my place. I need one of those. Yes.

I: Like an education person?

Selena: Yeah, but not just the education person, I need a (staff person's name). I need one of them, okay?

While certain services were perceived as beneficial by the whole (discussed in Section E.), participants were clear that *who* provides a service is an essential consideration. Even participants who had exited the program nearly a decade ago recalled specific staff members and their contributions and characteristics with ease. As discussed in the previous section, they described certain staff members with familial roles, such as parents and siblings, but they also frequently referred to them as close friends, mentors and role models.

When participants identified specific staff members they connected to, I would follow-up with a question asking why –what was it about them that participants appreciated?

I liked the fact that both of them challenged me, kept me on my toes. They had me trying out things, keep at everything I was trying to do, keep after me. Like when it came to trying to get my LINK card, through all the trouble that was causing me (staff member) kept my back and helped me trying to keep going forward...And (second staff member), (she) kept me laughing and I kept (her) laughing. But she also kept pushing me as well, because she knew that I had a lot of potential, so she kept trying to push me. They seen that I had a lot of it, so they wanted me to keep going further and further and further, and to not try to revert back to all the old stuff I've went through...Basically, they wasn't really counselors to me, or YDS IIs (their position title), yeah, they was just really close friends that I could spill my whole heart and guts out to. (Jacob, 23)

They both went above and beyond. Those are two people that I felt like – a lot of the staff members could have gained from as far as how they interact with the clients. They was really awesome and they handled themselves pretty well. They were chameleons. They were able to adjust with anybody and talk to anybody. I can go to (staff person) with the most random question ever and he'll be like, "Oh, well such and such and such,"

and just talk to me about it. And I was just like – I can go to (him) with anything. I could, I can't believe he is gone from (the TLP). I know I could go to him and talk to him about anything... So, what can I say? I kind of think of looking at him like a mentor. (Staff person) is definitely a person that I'd like to keep in touch with long term. (Melissa, 23)

Her demeanor, her body language. Her personality, it just said I care. And you never felt like it was because she worked there. It wasn't just a job to her like you can tell it was genuine and that she was really passionate about talking to young people. And she was also just an all around fun person. She taught me how to the soulja boy dance. She is just a really fun person to be around. And I really do miss her because I realize now that she was a huge part of my life and it was only two years, which means that she made an impression. (Renee, 25)

Jacob, Melissa and Renee's responses to this follow-up question speak to several qualities participants identified when describing why they believed their relationships with certain staff members were beneficial. Participants described these characteristics as motivating, genuine, passionate, caring and fun. They highlighted the importance of the individual being accessible, willing to go above and beyond their job description, able to adjust to meet the needs of a diverse group of young people, and easy to talk to about a range of subjects, including those areas not directly related to the work they were doing together in the program. Participants had experiences with multiple staff members in the same role and frequently drew comparisons between staff members to highlight their belief that *how* a service was provided was directly connected to its eventual benefit to their lives. Positive relationships with staff were perceived to have a profound impact on participants' self-esteem, mental health, personal development and attainment of future goals.

As a result of the strength of the bonds formed between staff members and youth, participants identified high turnover rates in the TLP as a serious concern. Ryan shared how he felt when he learned that a staff member he was particularly close with was leaving the organization: "I was about to cry. I was just so mad because (staff person) is my guy. That's the

only person I can go up to and talk to about advice” (Ryan, 22). Participants described a sense of loss, sadness, frustration and fear when staff they had built relationships with would leave. They had taken risks to trust these individuals and shared intimate details of their lives only to have this person they had confided in disappear from their lives. When I asked Justin about how he would design his own TLP for youth experiencing homelessness, this issue of staff turnover was front and center:

It was a lot of transitioning going on around that time. I had to say that I had six case managers since I been there, and that's not stability whatsoever. It was like every week, they was like, "Yeah, you got a new case manager. Oh, you got a new case manager. Yeah, this case manager leaving, so you've got a new case manager." I think you was my case manager at one point (laughter)...But as far as building a new (the TLP) – There's really nothing wrong with the idea of (the TLP). The idea is there, it's all about stability, because you have to understand that the kids that come into the program, they're not living stable lives, you know. You've got kids that's dealing with, you know, parents that's probably on drugs; you've got kids that's probably dealing with sexual abuse; you've got kids that's dealing with all these ills in the world. And then once they come to this program, what they're expecting is stability. And then once they don't get it, it's like, "What's the point of coming here?" you know? (Justin, 32)

This response from Justin underscores the findings discussed in the first section of this chapter where youth identified the TLP as a place where they were seeking a feeling of home, a feeling defined by participants as the experience of stability. Participants faced an inordinate amount of loss in their lives as a result of homelessness: their actual homes, of course, but with it often also their families, schools, friends and neighborhoods. The experience of living in a TLP was one where they were asked to trust and confide in a group of professionals who they, too, would eventually lose. This situation created conflict for participants as they decided how and when to build relationships with staff. They understood the challenges of operating a TLP in uncertain financial climates as well as the desire for staff members to move forward toward their own goals which often meant leaving the program, but they also believed this was an area where organizations could make policy-level changes to decrease high-levels of staff turnover.

The other part to that, my second biggest problem being, okay say you do find this connection with someone on staff. The consistency was horrible, the turn around was horrible, and I don't think that you as a staff member, I don't think it's fair to take a job with kids who really just need stability if you're not gonna be there for two years or more. If you can't make a commitment for minimum of two years just find somewhere else to work. You could still even work in human services it just shouldn't be at a group home. Because pretty much all we've been taught – almost the only message that we have been taught at that point in our lives is don't trust anyone because as soon as you start to trust them they're gonna leave and then that's proven in the place that's supposed to pick you up off your feet. And then that just makes you more angry. So I would fix that. I would say that people need to make a commitment for two years. (Blythe, 32)

In addition to requiring time commitments from new hires, participants suggested increased levels of transparency within the organization so that to the extent possible vacancies would feel less abrupt, more financial and emotional support for employees to encourage lengthier tenure in their positions and intentional steps to eliminate case manager transitions whenever feasible.

While staff relationships were identified as crucial components of the TLP, not all staff members were perceived as helpful; in fact, several were identified as causing harm. These staff members were described as disconnected, judgmental, harsh and only “there for a paycheck.” They were perceived as not being able to understand and, therefore, empathize, with what youth experiencing homelessness were going through. As a result, participants felt more emphasis should be placed on the interview process for potential employees. They suggested that young people be a part of interviews and that candidates have trial periods where their work is observed before they are officially hired on.

Participants desired staff members who they could relate to and whom they felt understood the challenges they were facing. To facilitate this, they felt strongly that organizations needed to specifically recruit staff with previous experiences of homelessness.

Well, I would try to have as many staff that went through homelessness when they were youth. Just more understanding because I just felt like it was hard to communicate with some of the people at (the TLP) because they didn't ever live in a shelter and they never had to experience some of the things that we experienced (Cierra, 21)

Yeah. It's like how can you help somebody that's comin off the streets if you never endured this or you don't even wanna open yourself up to show that you really care. All it is just oh, this is where you sleep? Go upstairs to your room. Get outta my face. Nobody likes that. They would have to be empathetic to certain people's situations. Everybody would have to have – I wouldn't say that – it's not a requirement. I would want someone that's been there, that has life experiences just like the people that's coming in the door. Because truthfully you can go to school for social work all you want to but if you've never experienced it you really don't know what it's like. (Aaron, 29)

You know what, let me give you, let me paint a picture in your head. And I know this might be a bit extreme but it's going to paint the picture that I want you guys to think. I want you guys to have this visual and how deep it is. Let's just say we have a rape victim and they're going to somebody for help and this person, they've never been sexually assaulted, molested, touched, or anything and they're like, "Hey, be strong. Get over it." Are you serious? Whereas if you had someone who dealt with that it's not gonna be, "Be strong," it's gonna be, "You know what, it takes time. I've been through that. It's gonna hurt. You're gonna feel this way." It's more than what a book can give you. It's more than what that piece of paper, that degree can give you. Yes, it gives you a lot as far as a clinical sense or you know a more structured way to go about it but there has to be a real life factor there in order for it to be real. Other than that it's going to sound like you read this out of a book. Yeah, you completely understand that book but do you understand how that book applies to real life and that would be more effective; it really would. It has to be (genuine) and then not even to say that you have to experience it to be genuine. Be around those persons, those types of people. No, I've never been a rape victim but I've been around plenty so yes, I can go there on that level with them. Yes I can - I'm not going to say, "Man, you can get over it." That's not what I'm going to say. I'm going to say, "It's going to be hard. It's gonna hurt." There is some trauma there. But that's the thing is I didn't get that out of a book though. Now don't get me wrong, I did get a lot of the training from books and things like that - Which is why I'm able to even position my words that way but the real life factor has to be there; it has to be. (M.G., 26)

Participants did not believe that all TLP staff needed to have the experience of homelessness but felt that at least some formerly homeless individuals should be working in the program. They did, however, feel that it was critical for all staff to have the willingness to learn and the ability to identify with some level of struggle in their own lives.

I would try to make sure that the people that work with the youth that I work with, know their struggle. Like I wouldn't want nobody to come in with like a suit, and just, and have to do no hurdles. Like you just straight walking through your life. Now I'm not saying that I want Boo Boo, Kiki and Shawanda from the hood to come on in, you know? Because I feel like people from different backgrounds are going to do different things. Just because you're not Black, and you ain't been in the hood don't mean you ain't have

struggles, and you didn't have a story to tell, and you haven't been through nothing. I'm just saying that I want them - it could be a totally different - it don't even have to be homelessness, but just know that I'm going through something - And need some support, you know? So I would make sure that my staff are educated on how hard it can be out here. (Selena, 25)

Selena speaks to this issue of staff having some element of understanding from their own personal life as well as the importance of staff training—another component that participants felt was critical. Selena also raises the issue of whether or not the racial identity of staff is an important consideration. Participants did not see racial identity on its own to be a factor; however, they did connect race to uncertainty over if a staff member could relate to their experience of struggle. They described their initial assumption of White staff members before getting to know them personally as having had a relatively easy life and felt those staff members would not be able to understand them.⁶ Although not explicitly naming it as such, in this regard, young people were speaking directly to the issue of white privilege or the unearned advantages White individuals receive in life simply as a result of their skin color. As they would get to know staff members individually and began to build genuine relationships, participants reported that these initial assumptions and the racial identity of the staff person were no longer seen as relevant. It is important to acknowledge here, however, that I am a White woman and 97 percent of the participants in this study identified as persons of color. It is possible that participants may not have felt comfortable sharing negative feelings or concerns about White employees beyond this connection to questions concerning the potential for lack of experience with struggle.

Directly connected to the importance of being able to relate to staff was the issue of professional boundaries and, specifically, lack of staff disclosure of information. Participants appreciated the function of professional boundaries to keep them physically and emotionally

⁶ According to agency records, approximately 50-60 percent of the TLP staff identified as White during the years study participants resided in the TLP

safe; however, this need to be understood and to find connection with staff members led to frustration when staff would not share their own histories of personal challenges. Participants respected the need of privacy for staff and were clear that they did not believe it was appropriate for staff members to bring their own personal troubles to work with them. However, they felt that it would have been beneficial for staff members to share challenges from their past they had overcome. For example, they knew some staff members may have indeed experienced homelessness, but they just did not share this with the youth in the program. They felt knowing this and other past struggles of staff would not only let them know this individual could understand what they were going through, but it would also be motivating for them to have evidence it is possible to get through it: “so you can probably look up to them like well she was telling me that she had three kids and now she was doing all this with her life and if she can do it then now I can do it” (Cierra, 21). The belief that sharing this information could have a powerful impact on young people who are currently struggling has led many participants to want to pursue a career in social services and generally “give back” to others by sharing their own story. This outcome is discussed in detail in Chapter V.

b. Youth

I was going to say, actually, like really the people. Like that was the best thing there, because it was so many heads clashing at each other, but in the end, everybody was trying to do something. Yeah and when it comes down to it, the people and just friends that I had with it, I would say that was the best thing. Because I wouldn't ever had any of my friends like C. I would never had gone through a lot of stuff without like some of the guys there. Like I would have never known some of the stuff without some of the girls being there. Yeah, like the people, that was definitely my best experience, or the best thing there for me. (Jacob, 23)

Participants discussed the relationships they built with other youth in the program more than any other subject. When asked if they believed if their lives would be any different if the TLP did not exist, participants consistently commented on the relationships built with other

young people: “If I never went to (the TLP)? I would’ve never met the good friends that I met, they’re real supportive. I think about that every day” (Cierra, 21). Participants saw an important function of the TLP to be bringing together young people in similar circumstances. Youth in the program shared two critical experiences: homelessness and living in the TLP. These were two experiences that in other settings made them feel different, isolated and less than their peers. However, at the TLP the stigma that accompanies both homelessness and living in a program was eliminated. At a time in their lives where peer acceptance is crucial, at the TLP young people did not have to hide what was going on in their lives, and, further, if they wanted to talk about it, they had access to two dozen other young people who they felt would understand in a way that other peers could not. Participants described feeling a unique bond with other youth in the program as a result of these shared experiences. They also believed that knowledge of the challenges facing some of their peers not only provided a safe haven to share their own stories but also helped them to become more understanding and empathetic.

I think it shaped me, like because everybody is struggling in something in their life, and I think that when you hear other people’s stories, then you’re like, “Wow, I’m glad I never had to go through that. I’m glad I never had to experience that, and my life is not that bad,” you know what I mean? Like, there are people who have literally no one, and I think (the TLP) gave them that someone that they always needed. (Stephanie, 29)

Participants noted that connections with peers in the program often formed quickly and, to their surprise at times, with individuals they felt as though they might not have normally befriended. Eshawn, an open and confident gay man, talked about a few of the close connections he built with stereotypically heterosexual male peers:

That’s what I liked about (the TLP) too. I love the diversity. There were so many different people put together... You never would’ve expected that me and K would be cool because “Eshawn? Eshawn, I don’t be messin with” and we would chill, no disrespect, no, none of that and you would’ve never expected that. Half of the dudes at (the TLP) I wouldn’t have expected to get along with. S, that’s my man too. I love S with his big teddy bear lookin’ self. Oh, I love me some S but he was so cool and who else?

There was somebody else at (the TLP) that I would've never thought that I would - There was one more person...G. Me and G, I love some G. I haven't spoke with him recently. But I know when we were at (the TLP), he was so cool. (Eshawn, 23)

Participants appreciated the opportunity to live with people who understood the challenges they were facing but who at the same time were also different. They saw it as an opportunity to learn and to grow:

Coming from how I was raised and everything like that, I just assumed that everybody was raised that way, and everybody mama told them that, and everybody daddy told them that, until I got to actually meet people and see different backgrounds because I mean I wasn't exposed to some of the stuff that some of those other people were exposed to or living like that or just different backgrounds. And that's what makes the world a whole. (Sophia, 29)

While relationships with other youth were highly important, participants were clear that these bonds were not universal to all youth in the program. In fact, most participants discussed getting along with other youth as also one of the biggest challenges they faced when living in the TLP: "The very same that was the best thing was the hardest thing: all of the people. Different attitudes, different personalities. You're not going to always click with everyone who is there" (Renee, 25). Participants described how living with so many different people was difficult at the time but how it taught them skills they have found useful in subsequent living environments and workplaces:

I used to feel like (the TLP) taught me a lot how to deal with people, too, because before I could not deal with people. I still sometimes – I think I got a thicker skin from there. I'm able to deal with people now (Rupert, 21)

As is the case in most settings in our lives, participants felt part of making connections in the TLP was getting to know others and discerning who they wanted to be in their lives. Rupert talked about this process, explaining how he was triggered by peers who were confrontational and loud and made a choice to keep distance from them, rather than respond with physical and/or emotional aggression as he might have previously before coming to the program. He also

discussed how he found his two closest friends (whom he earlier described as family in the previous section)—friends, he believes, he will have for life:

But sometimes I had to tell them y'all need to stop yelling at me. Don't yell at me. That's a trigger and that's why I like, you know, from (the TLP) you just learned who was gonna mess with you, you know what I'm saying, just like whose personality, who you need to be around. Like K and J that's my homies. That's it, them my best friends. I think we gonna be old talking shit. (Rupert, 21)

Participants recalled the bonds they built with other youth with joy and gratitude, and as I will discuss in detail in Chapter V, these peer relationships remain an important source of support in participants' lives today.

2. A Sense of Community

One of the findings I found most surprising was that participants did not believe moving youth experiencing homelessness directly into their own apartments was beneficial. I anticipated most participants would express a preference for the privacy and freedom of an apartment over residing in congregate living programs like the TLP. This could not have been more wrong. Participants told me over and over that TLPs were a critical component of our solution to youth homelessness. Young people do believe independent living is also important but not right away and not in all cases. Participants cited not being ready to be on their own (discussed in greater detail in Chapter V), and they believed that having an environment where you are surrounded by others makes an important, and at times life saving, difference. They shared stories of struggling with mental health and substance use and being unsure if they would have made it through if staff members and peers had not been right there in the next room to support them. Free Spirit recalled a story of running into a peer from the TLP nearly eight years later:

This was two years ago with her husband and her two kids. She instantly hugged me and started crying because I stopped her from cutting herself. I had no idea I did that. She

said, “Your bluntness and your rudeness and spiciness by the way.” I was like, “Wow.” She was like, it made sense to me because she was cutting herself one day and I remember sitting on the back at the TLP stairs and she was talking about it crying. I didn’t really know her at that point, but my soul was like yelling at me. Like you go talk to her. You talk to her now. I was just like, okay. (Free Spirit, 30)

The TLP housed between 20 and 24 youth depending on which building participants lived in, along with anywhere from 2 to 20 staff members depending on the time of day. This arrangement resulted in consistent access to someone who would be available to listen, motivate, support, and surround youth when they would have otherwise felt alone. Marcus graduated from the TLP into the agency’s independent living program where he was provided with his own apartment. He describes the difference between the two programs as such:

I liked (the TLP) more than I liked (the independent living program). Just the life skills and the knowledge of the people and the staff. Just being around people all the time who worked in different fields and who could help you with different things. Anything that I needed or thought about, it was always somebody there that I can ask—what they think about it? Or what to do about something? Always somebody. I had the security of that and it was safe and comfortable. And people there for whatever I was going through. People who really knew personally what was going on and that support was there. People that would tell me: “oh you can do this” or “I know about this” or “I know about that,” people was always there to help. It was just that when something happened, I would have 15 people there to support me, to help me right there vs. me on my own having to call someone or email and wait for a response. I never had to worry about that. You don’t just need shelter, you need support. (Marcus, 28).

For Marcus, the distinction between shelter and support is directly related to the feeling of community. The individual relationships built with staff and youth discussed previously are key contributors to this experience; however, just as critical to this sense of belonging is the feeling of community participants experienced by simply being in the program. When I asked participants about this feeling of community and where it came from, their responses often centered on everyday rituals that for some would not seem to be so remarkable: “The weekends, getting up in the mornings and cooking breakfast. Yeah, like that” (Chris Kringle, 23). Or just having someone wish you good morning:

Oh, man. It was just like, if I didn't have the motivation – even just getting up, with the staff saying, "Good morning," smiling, things like that. Things like that motivated me, because before I came to TLP I was a loner and I didn't talk to anybody. You know, when you only talk to yourself in your head. Yeah. I'm just grateful. I'm definitely grateful for (the TLP). During the time that I was there, they helped me out a lot. I don't know. I've always been motivated to do things, but (the TLP) really, really, like you know, it just made me see – get back to who I was before I went through the homelessness. (Melissa, 23)

For participants, it was having others to hang out with on the weekends, to make breakfast with, to wish good morning. It was about being a part of a group and feeling valued and respected by that group. For some participants, the TLP was their first experience of being able to go home to others that cared about their wellbeing. This was true for Rupert who shared what life was like for him before going to the TLP and how he wishes today that he could return:

I see people be like damn, they so friendly. They go to Catholic School. Their mother's love them. They probably got everything when they get home, man. That shit's crazy, man. I didn't go home to nothing. You know what I'm saying? I ain't gonna go home to nothing. Ain't nobody gonna pay attention to me. Nobody gonna talk to me. You know what I'm saying? I don't know, man. I just wanted somebody to tell me that I respond to them. You know what I'm saying, because I was always, man. I wish I could just go back in time to when I was in there. I still would if I could, bro. Yeah, if I still could, I would go back. I wouldn't be depressed or nothing, bro, but I would come back because it's just incredible, man. Like I think that's energy, man. That helped a lot because--- because I learned so much from the kids in there, from the staff. I learned from everyone. (Rupert, 21)

Thirteen participants (41% of the sample) mentioned at some point during their interview they would go back to the program if they were eligible. They missed the tangible support, but they also missed the sense of community and the consistent emotional support and validation that accompanied it, or as Rupert called it, the "energy." The importance of a sense of community was also reflected in participant responses to the interview question asking them to design their own TLP. These descriptions, although highly nuanced and unique to each individual, universally included a balance of private and community space. Youth incorporated shared dining, cooking, living and learning spaces into their program designs. They envisioned game

rooms and outdoor areas where they could gather and simply be together: “Yeah, that was the good part; a lot of people to help out, hang out. More people get to know each other and people could do a lot of stuff together” (Jacob, 23). While most participants felt it was important to have private bedrooms, a few thought having one roommate when you first arrive would be useful to help acclimate new youth to the program and provide immediate companionship as youth exit a stressful experience into an entirely new environment. Stephanie described why she felt shared rooms facilitated a sense of community:

See, this is why I would do shared: So you could – I don’t know – so you could meet that person, so you could experience their life, and so you could get to know other people. And I feel like you’re getting something that you would never get someplace else, that quality of care, somebody who clearly cares about you, someone who you could trust. Like, I feel like living at (the TLP), we all grew to like kind of know everybody, trust people. We didn’t just talk to our YDS1s (staff position). We talked to everybody about anything that was going on in our lives, our roommate; if it wasn’t our roommate, the person across the hall, down the hall, on the other side, whatever. Like, and I feel like it should still be like that. I feel like you should live with someone to kind of see how stuff goes, because you’re never gonna always live by yourself. (Stephanie, 29)

Participants felt access to a community of peers and qualified staff provided the support they needed at a critical point in their life. They recalled times spent together as a community with a notable fondness and felt that more opportunities for this association, such as family dinners, game nights and holiday celebrations, should be incorporated into the TLP whenever possible.

D. “Built a Newer Me”: Personal Development in the TLP

I already had built a newer me when I had moved into (the TLP) because that’s when I really got the chance to be myself and find myself there. When I went there it gave me a whole other type of -- because it’s like okay, I’ve never been here before. How did I let myself get here? Why did I let this get me here and that I can’t really do nothin’ about it so I gotta make the best of the situation. Because when I been first got kicked out I had enrolled myself into outreach ‘cause I had already figured it was comin’. So I was like yeah, I need to setup some motions to begin somewhere. So (the TLP) was pretty much my outlet and it helped me grow as a person a lot really. (Chunky Chip, 22)

When reflecting on how their lives may or may not be different if the TLP had not

existed, participants discussed the role of the program in their journeys of personal development. Participants believed the experience of living in the TLP enhanced their self-awareness, improved their self-esteem and generally contributed to the qualities of their character. They described their time in the program as a period of learning, self-discovery and maturing; it was a period where they felt as though they “grew up.” Given the stage of development that youth are in during this age of 17 to 21, this is not surprising. They are biologically programmed to be carrying out this work of figuring out who they are and how they fit into the world. It is an incredibly exciting and, for many even in the best of circumstances, simultaneously stressful time of transition. Participants believed a TLP has an opportunity to be a support in this developmental process.

(The TLP) helped me realize, you know, be nice, be positive, it taught me a lot of things, helped me be a better person, the staff, you know. They have to grow up. Y’all teach them – (the TLP) was teaching people how to be better people and be successful. (Chi Villa, 24)

Like Chi Villa, several participants believed through their experiences in the TLP, they became “better people.” They described three primary areas where they felt this occurred: increased capacity for empathy, reevaluation of values and priorities, and movement towards self-actualization.

As discussed briefly in the previous section, participants described how the program taught them about empathy by enhancing their ability to understand and appreciate the struggles of others. Hearing the challenges that their peers in the program had faced put into perspective their own circumstances and fostered the ability to offer greater consideration, and as Stephanie identified, compassion:

I don’t think that I would be this far along in life. I don’t think that I would’ve experienced a lot of the things that I experienced. I don’t think that I would have like compassion for people when they’re going through stuff if (the TLP) never existed. I

don't think that my attitude would've changed at all if (the TLP) wouldn't have existed. I'd probably be some huge bitch that nobody ever likes, seriously. I mean, I know I wasn't the greatest person there, but I think it changes you. I think it makes you open your eyes to see like your life isn't that bad. There's somebody's life that's worse than yours, and to be grateful for the small things. Like, people complain about the smallest things, and it's like, "Dude, you could be someplace, living in a cardboard box, where no one loves you." I think it makes you care. If (the TLP) never existed, what? What type of life is that? (Stephanie, 29)

Empathy is generally understood as the socioemotional competency of being able to understand and identify with another's feelings and needs (Eisenberg, 2005). Numerous studies have identified the family, specifically relationships with parents and siblings, as the primary location where youth develop the capacity for empathy (Lam, Solmeyer, & McHale, 2012). Considering the findings outlined in the previous two sections of this chapter, it is consistent that young people would further develop this competency during their time in the program. The connections between empathy and prosocial behavior have also been well documented in the literature (Eisenberg & Morris, 2001). The relationship between the two surfaced repeatedly in interviews as participants shared stories of helping out others since they have left the program:

I just try to do good where people would do good to me because I have been in situations where I asked somebody for something on the train, I was in the transition of not exactly knowing where I'm going or coming from a shelter early in the morning and I know I only had one ride, and people actually wouldn't give it to me I guess because of how I dressed, or how I looked but you wouldn't have been able to tell that I was homeless because I don't—I'm not going to let you know my standing or my situation just from my outside appearance. You've got to get to know me and I'll tell you more so but I know how I hate that feeling when I have to put myself in that position where I'm forced or where I need to ask somebody and I don't get it. So whenever I see somebody and I know in my mind, they haven't even said nothing to me, I see it and I know what it is and then I talk to them and then they confirm it for me, I can't help but help... There's a whole lot of people that are going through that. It's a whole lot easier than what a lot of people are going through. I can sit here and tell you all about my bad situation or this, that, so forth and the other but at the end of the day I know somebody who knows nowhere at all to stay, who has no friends, who has no kind of job, who's actually wondering who they're going to sleep with just to find somewhere to stay at. And when I see where I can be at or where I could have been at, where I'm at, I'm cool. I just know I'm on my way. I know I'm not where I used to be at and I know I'm moving forward. I'm not going to go backwards either for nobody. (Eshawn, 23)

This theme of supporting others who were struggling was prominent throughout interviews and appeared for participants to be the result of a combination of an enhanced capacity for empathy along with gratitude for the assistance they received from the TLP. This theme of “paying it forward” is discussed in greater detail in Chapter V.

In addition to further developing empathy, participants described a process of change that happened within themselves during their time in the program that centered on the evaluation and prioritization of their values. By the term values, I refer to an individual’s sense of both what is important to them but also their moral development, or attitudes, beliefs and behaviors related to what they view as right and wrong. Participants frequently identified a feeling of entering the TLP in one state of mind and leaving in another. They talked about “growing up” in the sense that what had seemed important to them before no longer was viewed as useful. This change in values featured prominently when participants shared stories of breaking away from gang affiliations and abusive relationships with family and partners. Sharing his concerns for his younger brother who remains heavily gang-involved, Rupert talked about how things shifted for him during his time at the TLP:

So when that gangbanging stuff start it was funny because we in the same gang. I was tripping like, man, bro. I’m like we in the same gang and that was crazy because the gang where I’m from, I’m from S__. Where he from it’s all over by our house and I’m like they moved over there? They actually opened up a shop over there. And it’s just crazy. It’s just like, dude, I do not see a future in that stuff. I don’t see nothing. Ain’t no money in that. Ain’t no – the women that you be with out in the streets, they worthless, man. They not worth, anything that goes that easy is nasty and she got problems, too. I mean, we all got problems. No one’s perfect but c’mon man. You don’t care about yourself? That’s why I never been like yeah, man, I’m all up on that girl. Running trains on people? I can’t even do it. I’ve done it. I feel bad about it looking at hindsight. I just grew up, man. I was fooling myself. I had like a crazy train of thought. I was feeling myself sometimes. When you’re so used to being out there, man...He doesn’t know. He just living for the moment. That’s what it is. He living for the moment. I’m pretty sure from working in (the TLP) or your world experience - It’s people that just want to live for the moment. I can’t live for the moment anymore, man. (Rupert, 21)

Many participants shared stories similar to Rupert where they identified that at some point during their stay in the TLP what mattered to them changed. Some no longer wanted to get high or drink as much as before. Some wanted to make new friends who they saw as “positive” and “going places,” ones that were not associated with some of their previous behaviors. Others stopped stealing and selling drugs or decided to start going to school. Participants attributed these changes to their time in the TLP, specifically relationships that encouraged them to look at life differently, but they also acknowledged that emotionally and developmentally it was simply time to move on. They were tired of struggling for so long and knew it was time to make a change.

The third area of personal development experienced while in the TLP discussed by participants was the concept of self-actualization. Participants considered their stays in the TLP as a period in their life of moving towards the person they knew they could be—a time that, as Chunky Chip described in the introduction to this section, where they could *be* themselves as well as *find* themselves. I use the term self-actualization here in a general sense, referring to an individual’s ability to reach their full potential and to know their capabilities and to utilize them. I am not necessarily referring to the term as it is understood formally in popular theories of humanistic psychology (e.g., Maslow’s hierarchy of needs). It is possible the acquisition of basic needs, safety and relationships provided by the TLP allowed for participants to reach this stage of self-understanding. However, it is not my intention to suggest there is causation here, only to present the finding that this theme of self-discovery was present. To do this, I return to my interview with Rupert. Shortly after he discussed his concern for his brother and his own experience of solidifying his values, Rupert went on to share the following:

That’s why I got to help people understand. People don’t understand we all have limitless potential. We all have something we could be great at. You know what I’m saying? I can’t draw for money. You know what I’m saying? But there’s somebody that

can draw. I just realized that there's so many aspects of a human being like you never know. You could make the most delicious beverage out there. You know what I'm saying? That's not commercially released. It's just crazy, man, how much you sit down, you think. You're like wow, man, that's really crazy. It's just crazy. I just want people to realize their potential. You know what I'm saying? There are so many, like I said it took me so long just to figure out that I like making music.

I was one of the kids, you know, I always wanted to learn, like when I was in (the TLP), like people thought we was on Facebook all day. I was Googling stuff. I was Googling who's Picasso. Who's Jean-Michel Basquiat? Who is that? You know what I'm saying? I was learning. I wasn't sitting up in there like on Facebook all day. Sure, my Facebook tab was open. You know what I'm saying? So I was learning, man. That's when, I learned so much man, in that time. Because I learned so much from the kids in there, from the staff. I learned from everyone. I learned a lot about myself. I developed my passion. (Rupert, 21)

The juxtaposition of Rupert's discussion of his transition out of gang life against his desire to discover Picasso and Jean-Michel Basquiat perfectly represents this remarkable time in participants' lives. They were often physically and emotionally leaving one life behind in exchange for the hope of what they believed they *could* become. Consequently, participants believed the TLP has a powerful opportunity to provide young people with the knowledge about themselves and the world around them they are seeking: "Doing things to enlighten people. Just making sure that when they leave the program, they leave with a lot of knowledge and they leave with more" (Melissa, 23).

E. Not "Just a Shelter": The Importance of Holistic Support in a TLP

All 32 participants identified supportive services as critical components of a TLP. When designing their own programs and reflecting on what made a difference in their own lives, five services appeared most frequently: education, employment, health, life skills training and recreation. Youth understood the importance of having their basic needs met but generally felt that it was these other services that made the most significant and lasting impact on their lives. Like most nonprofit organizations, the agency operating the TLP experienced cuts in funding

throughout the years and had to make difficult decisions about what services would be reduced or eliminated in order for the program to stay operational. Several participants discussed frustration with the decision to cut support services when this would happen. In particular, in 2011 the program took a significant financial hit and all funding for recreation programming and a substantial portion of funding for education services was eliminated.

I begin this section with an excerpt from my interview with Kennedy (age 24), whose responses throughout our time together focused heavily on this concern of how funding is prioritized within TLP programs. Kennedy's comments summarize what many youth described as the core reason why the TLP was different than other programs and, in particular, what they felt made it distinct from youth emergency shelters. It outlines why participants felt it was critical for TLPs to understand the impact of the program depended upon much more than having a bed to sleep in. I have included a lengthier excerpt from my interview with Kennedy as he summarizes the theme participants frequently identified, which was the importance of holistic support. Kennedy was there in 2011 when the most significant funding losses for the program over the ten-year period studied occurred. Directly before he shared the following thoughts, Kennedy asked me if TLPs are funded proportionately to the number of youth residing in the building. When I asked why he was curious about that, the following was his response:

The reason I say it felt like that is because it's like why would the recreation program get cut? I think that education specialist that we had, I think they cut the program and just put it in with somebody else's program. That's how that works. What's the point? This is just a shelter after that. You know what I'm sayin'? When they cut that, that was – and I think that even though it got cut, I don't even think it was bein' put to great use. I don't think it was bein' used wisely when they did have it. It was like okay, this is not important. When you cut recreation and you cut education, I think that's part of the reason why I would say okay, yeah, our bodies are just worth money 'cause you're not helpin' us no more. You're just gettin' us off the street. The recreation, education is most important. I think that every shelter should have that. I think that's the most important thing. I think that if we don't have that, then there's no purpose 'cause once we leave

there we still gonna be people who don't know a little bit more. It becomes just a regular shelter.

I had the benefit of bein' there throughout the whole thing. I think it got cut right after I left, but I think the recreation, we need recreation because without recreation we not gonna know that you can have fun in other ways because when you're a youth you think fun is drugs, you think fun is alcohol, you think fun is gang bangin'. You don't know that fun is goin' out to play sports, fun is goin' to amusement parks, fun is goin' to museums. You don't know that. I think that that's what recreation is for. When you're a youth and homeless, school is not important. You don't go to school. You barely picked up a book. I know people who can't read. You know what I'm sayin'? I think that's something that they should be pushin' in (the TLP). So why cut those things? It's like you don't care no more. That's just like sayin' okay, we gonna stop giving ya'll food. It's just like that. Or we gonna take the beds out. We can't afford beds. Gotta sleep on the floor. It's just like that. It's just as important. It's those things is what I'm sayin'. Like I said, I don't know what they have. I don't know why they cut there, but I don't think that shoulda' been the things they cut. (Kennedy, 24)

Kennedy's statement of "you're not helping us anymore, you're just getting off the street" describes the feelings of a majority of the sample who saw the value of the program as intimately tied to the support they received in areas beyond basic needs. The following section outlines this theme of the importance of providing holistic support for young people in situations of homelessness. The five supportive services that participants identified as most critical for TLPs to have in place are described below: education, employment, health, life skills training and recreation.

1. Education

A majority of the sample identified support for educational attainment as the number one priority for programs. They frequently shared stories of how they believed the education support they received during their time in the program was valuable.

The most helpful part is school. When I told (staff person) I wanted to graduate, that was my first goal. I think that's on my file. That was one of my first goals - That was my goal. I wanted to graduate. That's where (the TLP) definitely helped me out, they helped me get in school, paid for everything, I was shocked because I thought they couldn't pay for it. I didn't think they could. I turned around and my counselor told me that it was already paid for. I was like what? (Ryan, 22)

I really, really think it offered us a lot because we had the education specialist and there was a lotta', lotta' people who didn't have their GEDs or their high school diplomas who really utilized that to the fullest to try to obtain that. I did myself and it worked out well for me. (Chunky Chip, 24)

They helped me when I was stuck with my homework. Helped me get back in school in the first place. (Staff person) was on it, she took me up there. (Diana, 24)

When I came in, I was at a point – I was trying so hard to get back into college. They kept saying they can't give me financial aid. I wasn't old enough to file as an independent. I came right into (the TLP) and they fixed it right away. They was like, "Well, you're homeless. You can file as an independent." They just – I don't know, they just made things so much easier for me. I got right into school... They helped me as far as schooling goes. I feel like as long as I'm in school – like right now, because I'm not in school, I kind of feel like a slacker, but as long as I'm in school I'm happy. When I go back to school, I know that my spirits are definitely gonna be way, much higher than they are now. (Melissa, 23)

Participants believed TLPs should dedicate more resources to education services. They discussed the importance of increasing capacity by expanding the number of staff and volunteers dedicated specifically to education-related services. They believed there should be credentialed teachers on staff and a cadre of volunteer tutors available with flexible hours. They desired support with enrollment and advocacy to ensure their rights were upheld as they returned to traditional high school environments and also valued assistance with admission procedures and financial aid as they transitioned to college. They believed the TLP should operate its own certified GED program to support youth who did not do well in and/or had previously experienced victimization in traditional school environments as well as for youth who no longer qualified for a high school diploma due to age and credit restrictions. Further, they thought physical spaces and resources dedicated to education in the TLP were essential, including quiet study areas, a computer lab, library and a classroom.

2. Employment

The second support service participants felt was vital for TLP programs to focus on was employment. While many had worked in the informal sector before coming to the TLP, most did not have previous experience with the process of obtaining formal employment.

Resumes. Employment stuff is a big one. Because sometimes, I wasn't clear about that. I didn't grow up in a neighborhood where people had every day jobs. My grandpa was the only one in my household who had a job and I never went to work with him so I obviously, I never knew how to interview, how to make a resume and stuff like that. (Renee, 25)

I would have someone, one staff member to help people write resumes because you know a lot of people have issues with it. Because I know I have. Sometimes I still struggle with doing a resume and I been doing this for quite a long time, but sometimes you need the extra help. And not just the basic resume, just something that's actually gonna get their employer's attention, like okay, well this person really wants a job the way that they had their resume set up. You know? Some people don't know how to speak so I would have someone come in to teach them okay like this is what you need to say. Just teach them overall. Some people don't know. (Aaron, 29)

Participants overall believed the employment services offered were helpful. In particular, they believed it was important to have dedicated staff to assist young people with a range of job acquisition and retention competencies, such as: finding job opportunities, creating resumes, building interviewing skills and dealing with challenges they faced with coworkers and supervisors. They appreciated a high level of support where staff would go beyond simply offering referrals or job listings (which were also seen as important) to brokering those connections by speaking with potential employers ahead of time, accompanying youth on the job search, and following up regularly, or as many participants described, "staying on them."

Employment was great. I think that employment program was great because (staff person), she took care of that. She handled that. She sent us to jobs. She got it setup where we could be seen. She got it setup where we didn't have to go up and ask, "Are you all hiring?" I think we just went straight to the interview. So I think that was useful. Some people got jobs. Even though education is something, I think jobs are really important, too, 'cause you can't pay no rent without no money. So yeah, I think that that was great. I think the employment program was great. (Kennedy, 24)

Participants also suggested enhancements to the employment services they received during their time in the TLP. Their ideas included: making sure job postings were updated daily and sent out electronically to all youth in the program; creating a business center in the TLP where young people would have access to a copy machine, fax machine and printing materials in order to facilitate their employment search; providing intentional career mentoring with volunteer professionals; and inviting regular speakers from a range of professions to share their career pathways:

I'd have like all different kinds of job corporations to come in. I'd have the owners of the companies...I just think they should just come out, you know, introduce themselves, how they got their success. Talking to a CEO of like Macy's or something, they gonna be inspired. (Chi Villa, 24)

3. Physical and Mental Health

The third service participants identified as critical for young people when they are in a TLP was support for their physical and mental health. These were services they had not received regularly before coming to the TLP and most reported they had a high need for health support in general, but also in particular, as a result of threats to their wellbeing faced during periods of homelessness. I will first discuss the findings as they relate to physical health services followed by a discussion of support for mental health.

a. Physical Health

The TLP had a small on-site health clinic that was staffed by a full-time nurse practitioner (NP). Through the on-site clinic, young people residing in the TLP had access to primary healthcare, health education, nutrition counseling, communicable disease screenings, pregnancy tests, vaccinations, and referrals for serious illness, vision, and dental care. Participants identified this to be of great value:

I liked it where (the TLP) had it to where if you were sick and you know, on site nurse, that's a good thing. I would totally do that because I felt (the NP) was like very, very helpful. Yes, that was awesome. I think that is one of the main, key things because whenever somebody was sick or didn't know what was goin' on 'cause somethin' done appeared or something, they ran to (the NP) with a quickness and I think that's good because we have helpful information and then we don't have to keep runnin' up medical bills. (Chunky Chip, 22)

It was important to participants that services were both free and on-site. Most participants did not qualify for Medicaid when they were in the TLP because they did not have a diagnosed disability and/or were not pregnant or parenting. As a result, the clinic was a critical lifeline to primary care health services that participants otherwise would have accessed through the emergency room, accumulating substantial debt, or they would have simply not received care at all. It is important to note the extension of Medicaid coverage authorized under The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act of 2010 may reduce the need for free health care services for youth currently in TLPs, but the Act was not in effect during the time the participants resided in the TLP so there are no findings with regard to how the importance of free services may have changed. Participants were clear, however, that having services on-site made a considerable difference in their likelihood of accessing care.

In addition to being free and on-site, consistent with findings discussed in Section C., participants felt the personal characteristics of the nurse practitioner made a difference. There have been only two nurse practitioners to staff the clinic since it first opened in 2003. Both of these professionals were highly regarded by participants in their responses:

The nurse, she always stayed on the patients. She was good. She was good at what she did. She made a lot of us healthy as far as stability, not so much prescribing medications and babying us but like having us check in with her when we needed things and stuff like that. She took care of us as a whole. I don't think really too many kids went in there and didn't come out better than when they went in. She kept them updated as far as what they needed physically but also seeing what they prescribed through other doctors. (Timothy, 31)

But (the NP) was awesome. Like I can go down to (the NP) with the craziest stuff, and she'll be like, "Oh, well, looks like you this and that." She was awesome. I felt like she took very good care of us. Anything that we needed, she made sure that we had to the best of her ability. She took us – she went above and beyond. She took us out of the facility to hospitals and things like that – with us to doctor visits that I felt like sometimes she didn't even have to do that. (Melissa, 23)

Similar to their feelings on the provision of employment services, participants appreciated a high level of brokering on the part of the nurse practitioner. Like Timothy and Melissa, many recalled times that the nurse practitioner coordinated care with other medical professionals and accompanied them to outside appointments and procedures. This level of involvement reduced anxiety and made participants feel cared for. Additional suggestions for health care services in a TLP offered by participants included: hiring a personal trainer to support youth with health-related fitness goals, housing an on-site pharmacy to increase access to necessary medications, employing more healthcare staff in general, and providing on-call support for youth who may need access to healthcare outside of normal clinic hours.

b. Mental Health

Participants also viewed mental health services as essential for youth residing in TLPs. Similar to physical healthcare, they believed accessibility to be of primary importance and desired services to be provided on-site at the facility. In 2004, the organization restructured the staffing plan for the TLP which included bringing onboard qualified mental health professionals who would provide therapeutic services for young people on-site. Youth who resided at the TLP before this change were often referred to mental health providers located on the other side of the city and they identified the lack of on-site access as a gap in services:

Cause you know how when we had a therapist we had to go all the way up north for that? Sometimes people's state of mind, they don't want to – they can't make it all the way up north 'cause something that could have happened to them, like they could have – something that triggers them to snap wherever they are. That's not good. They can just walk downstairs, make an appointment with a therapist and just talk to them. Cause I

know there were some days where I needed someone to talk to and I didn't wanna talk to any of you all but I didn't get that chance. It was like, "oh well, just you know, make an appointment." I didn't wanna do all that. That took too long. And I think had I had a therapist in the building, I probably wouldn't have went off as much as I did. (Aaron, 29)

I would say possibly having a therapist of some sort, like a psychologist or something like that, like for mental stability. I think that that would definitely be beneficial, because I personally think and feel that I may have benefited if I was going to therapy, so to speak, to resolve some issues that I had, you know, my reasoning for moving and not wanting to stay in touch with my mom and why I had issues with her, and you know, all these other issues that I had to deal with. I think that having a therapist or a psychologist or something like that there would be beneficial. (Emily, 29)

As discussed in the literature review, young people who have experienced homelessness have often also endured a significant amount of loss and trauma. They have higher rates of mental illness and frequently lack adequate, healthy coping mechanisms. Consequently, youth who have experienced homelessness stand to benefit from competent mental health services. With that said, in my role as a director of a TLP, young people would frequently dismiss the idea of engaging in counseling or therapy due to the stigma attached. As a result, while I believed mental health services might be identified by some participants as helpful, I never anticipated the prominence with which they would discuss mental health support and the emphasis they would place on their inclusion in TLPs. Participants who declined mental health services during their stay in the TLP shared a feeling of regret for not recognizing their worth at the time.

One thing I can say about youth is you need a lotta' counseling. When you hear the word counseling, or a doctor, or psychiatrist, it is something you run away from 'cause you don't wanna think you crazy, but something I've found to realize that yeah, I think I needed counseling. I think I *need* counseling. I think that a lot of them need counseling because they find other ways to cope whereas I think drugs is like a substitute for the medicine that our parents didn't get us. (Kennedy, 24)

I had a big, big, big problem with thinking that I didn't need to talk to somebody about my mental state but I want to say as I got older and I actually learned that I needed to talk and get some things off of my chest and it's helpful, very, very helpful. And I feel like by (the TLP) being based for younger kids or people in the younger age group, 18 to 21, that's a very, very vulnerable part of their lives, very, very vulnerable. So they're more so 'I want to be an adult, I want to be big, grown, I want to be this, that and the other, I don't

need this,' whereas something now, maybe you're like you thought crying was a bad thing but really it's not. You're just releasing yourself, you're releasing all the anger and frustration. It keeps you from going overboard. Usually when you're about to cry it's because you're overwhelmed with something and you should just let it flow. I really feel like, if they get the realization, if they get that, then they'll be more clear. (Eshawn, 23)

Participants were split on whether or not mental health services should be mandatory for all youth in the TLP but united in their belief they should be heavily emphasized and easily accessible. Participants commented on the stigma attached to receiving mental health support in general and several spoke specifically to this stigma within the African American community.

I would not make therapy optional, especially living in a group home setting. Never, because a lot of people you look at them and they can portray something very well but they might need that extra help and not feel comfortable coming for it. Maybe for like, background. Like me, in Black-- therapy is like, "you don't need therapy; you need church. Go pray." You like, okay? But no, you really do need somebody and that requires having to sit down and talk to and help you sort through a lot of the stuff you got going on 'cause even though we're adults at that age we're still kinda trying to figure out emotions and feelings. (Austin, 28)

Because everybody needs somebody to talk to. People think they don't. Especially black people think they don't need people to talk to, but it helps. It really does help to have somebody who you can talk to, who is kind of outside of the situation, who could give you an opinion or just listen, who won't judge you on whatever you're talking about. And it helps you to just get that release, and to not have somebody saying back to you, "Well, girl, you know you ain't supposed to be doing blah, blah, blah," 'cause you can't talk to your friends and family about everything, because you know they're gonna say something, and it's gonna be like, "Huh? What am I talking to you for?" But to have that one person who you can go and talk to, I think it's helpful. I think you can benefit from it. (Stephanie, 29)

Participants felt strongly they would have benefited from increased levels of mental health support during their time in the TLP. They described their own experiences of depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder as well as those they observed of their peers. They suggested increased resources for mental health services. They also felt it was important to integrate outside mental health professionals such as psychiatrists more into the community as a way to normalize mental health services and also so young people would have opportunities to

build relationships with providers as soon as they enter the program thereby facilitating their willingness to eventually engage in services.

4. Life Skills

The fourth support service provided by the TLP participants felt to be important was life skills training. In 2006, the program developed a formal life skills curriculum, Integrated Skills for Independent Living (I-SKiLS), where young people residing in the TLP attended mandatory life skills classes once a week throughout their stay. These sessions covered a range of topics including: health maintenance and nutrition; life planning and goal setting; consumer awareness and money management; housekeeping, home repair and household management; personal appearance and hygiene; interpersonal skills necessary to help youth develop lasting connections with peers, family, and other adults; and educational opportunities and studying skills. For participants who resided in the program before 2006, life skills training on these topics were provided individually by case management staff according to needs identified by the young person. Only two participants believed life skills training to be unnecessary in TLPs. Most of the sample (94%) saw them as a fundamental part of programming.

Another key thing that I didn't even say—life skills. That will be a good thing to have in transitional living because everybody don't have good common sense and wasn't raised the same way. So a lotta' people don't know about the proper way of cleaning things or hygiene and stuff like that. You know, life skills, sometimes it was a little repetitive, but it was helpful for people who didn't know these things – Some people be like, “Why is they teachin' me this? I already know this. I learned this growin' up.” But some people really didn't honestly, truly know this and it's good stuff people should be learning. (Chunky Chip, 22)

I feel that it helped me on some of the stuff I didn't know. It was just – like they was trying to help us get more independent with some of the stuff that we was learning. I felt like even though like some stuff like sexual activity and like cleaning up and knowing how to balance money, like it was basic. But a lot of people need to keep learning that. Like even if you know it – but I was kind of glad that it was mandatory, because like it's certain stuff I knew, certain stuff I didn't know. So it was a good way of learning. It was kind of like taking a refresher class. And everybody needs a refresher class from time-to-

time. So I found that it was kind of healthy to try and do something like that. So if I had a program, I would most definitely, hands down. Those are one of the mandatory things that I would have in a program. (Jacob, 23)

I'd keep I-SKiLS because there's a lot of stuff that I learned at I-SKiLS, especially about going to pick an apartment and how to cook and what temperature to cook your food in and how to wash your clothes because some people don't know that stuff. Make it mandatory. I wouldn't change nothing about I-SKiLS. I hated it when we had to go to it, but at the end of the day, I still got something up out of it. I got a lot of stuff up out of it so, I don't know, I would keep I-SKiLS. Like now I know where to go if I don't have the medical card to get free dental. That's stuff that we learned in I-SKiLS. I know what to do when I go look for an apartment. I wouldn't change nothing about I-SKiLS. (Zamiya, 22)

While participants were generally united in their view that life skills training was important, they were divided on whether it should be mandatory. Some believed that making it mandatory helped to reduce stigma attached to not knowing a certain topic, and therefore all youth should have to be present. For example, it could be embarrassing for a young person to attend a personal hygiene class and therefore they may avoid it if it isn't required and consequently miss critical information. Also, as Chunky Chip and Jacob describe, even when they were familiar with topics covered, they felt it was beneficial to have a review of the information. Renee pointed out there was always an opportunity to learn more:

Like I-SKiLS, people saying "I hated I-SKiLS" and I'm like no, I needed to know those things, nobody ever taught me those things. I think it is just a different experience for everybody...Because that's important, you have to assume if they are coming in that they might not necessarily know these things. So I would kind of play it like I do at work, if I have a new associate and I say hey I need you to do this but do you have the tools to do this? The first step is making sure that they have those necessary tools to do it. I wouldn't call it I-SKiLS, I would call it something workshops. I would make them mandatory because lets say you do know how to do laundry but there might be a trick or something that you didn't know. You might find out something you didn't know; I would all the time. Cleaning was a good one. I didn't grow up in the cleanest household. I thought the classes about safe sex were good. Believe it or not nobody ever sat me down and had that talk with me. Budgeting. General hygiene. (Renee, 25)

With that said, other participants felt that it made more sense for the training to be optional, noting they had many demands on their time, and some weeks it was challenging to make it to

class. Participants also suggested a compromise where youth would be able to receive exemptions from particular sessions through a pre-assessment that would identify if they already had the competencies that were going to be covered in the class.

Zamiya points out above she “hated it at the time.” The value of life skills training was not always present for young people while they were in the program, but participants reported over time they realized just how beneficial it was to their lives. The topics participants felt were most important were: financial literacy, including budgeting, banking and filing taxes; preparing and shopping for food; household maintenance; and safer sex practices.

5. Recreation

While participants cited education support as the number one priority for TLPs, recreation services were the most frequently mentioned supportive service by participants across interviews. Recreation services at the TLP were provided at both the individual and group level. They generally included a range of outings, group activities and exploration and support of individual interests and talents in areas such as art, music, literature, film and athletics. The quantity and intensity of recreation services offered at the TLP varied greatly for participants depending on the time of their stay in the program and the funding available during that period. Participants who had a great deal of recreation support valued it highly, and those who did not, desired more. As Kennedy articulates in the introduction to this section, recreation was one of the services participants felt set a TLP apart. The program’s investment in this type of support exposed them to places and activities they would have never explored on their own, helped them build stronger relationships with peers and staff members, made them feel cared for, facilitated engagement with other personal goals and supported their physical and mental health.

We did stuff that we would never do. It might’ve been (staff person), everybody took us someplace, but I remember this one time, (staff person) took us to this museum. I feel

like we probably drove to Wisconsin to go there. It was the dopest museum that I've ever been to, and I always wanted to like try to remember what was it, 'cause I wanna go. And it was something that I would never have thought to do, never have thought to have been. Tried food that I never would have thought to try. Like, I think that it's good. Like I said, people live here their whole lives and have never been out of the south side. Like, I've been living here my whole life. I have never seen the Sears Tower, and now it's called something else, stupid-ass Willis Tower [laughter], and I've never seen it. I've never even walked past it, but I've lived here my whole life. That's what I'm talking about. Like, those are trips that they need. Like, that's experiences that they need, 'cause it's never – it's something that you would never think to do, never. (Stephanie, 29)

I asked Stephanie why she thought this was so important:

'Cause they get so stuck on what they're doing. They get so stuck on what's happening in their little bubble. They need to venture out. They need to experience other things, learn new things. Like, it's learning. You'll never know unless you do it. You'll never wanna know, because you're just like, "Oh, I'm just –" some people don't do stuff because they're scared, and it's like what are you afraid of?

As Stephanie identifies, participants felt an important benefit of recreation programming was exposing youth to new places and activities. They talked about how most people they knew never left the community where they lived: "A lot of people have never ventured outside their neighborhood to do anything fun so it would show them that there's more than just the four corners of where they're accustomed to" (Aaron, 29). They also spoke to the importance of exposing young people to new experiences and repeatedly described the activities they engaged in as the first time they had the opportunity to try it.

I went camping and we climbed those rocks and all that stuff, and we slept outside. That was my first time doing it - So I would definitely implement I said, a lot of stuff. Sometimes we don't do stuff because we don't know - And a lot of times we don't like stuff because we don't know. (Sophia, 29)

Like certain activities and events that we had at (the TLP), I would've never enjoyed those. Like one of the trips when we had went to – what was that – it was a water amusement park we went to; I'd never been to any one of those before. If it wasn't for that, I would never have known the joy, and the pain (laughter), and the fun, and the constant walking of stuff like that: like going to zoos, going to other events, hanging out with other people that have like some means to their lives. (Jacob, 23)

Participants also saw recreation services as opportunities to build and strengthen relationships

with their peers and staff members. It provided an occasion for them to explore, learn and have fun together and helped young people to connect with others in new ways.

Like the recreation program we had before it got put on hold and stuff. It helped a lotta' the clients go out and do stuff that they didn't do before because of you know, living situations. It helped us bond a lot. It helped us get to know a lotta' staff individually because sometimes when (staff person) couldn't do it, it'd be another staff that'd take us out. So it helped us see the funner side of staff instead of us "grrr" at the staff all the time. So it'd be like, "okay, you know, you're pretty cool." Just key things like games and things around movie night, little events, and stuff like that to keep their attention and feel like you wanna be involved. (Chunky Chip, 22)

Participants also shared how growing up in poverty had limited their ability to engage in activities and experiences for enjoyment. As such, an investment in recreation services by the TLP made them feel special and, as Pizza describes, cared for:

You get to take them on a trip somewhere or some place that they never been before, that they – that they couldn't afford, and you just get to take 'em there. But I do remember going to, like, a little Halloween thing, and I remember going to, like, a little basketball thing. Because it gives people – it gives people an opportunity to experience something that they wouldn't have been able to experience because they didn't have, like, the luxury or the money or the means to do it. Yeah, it is – it is. It gives them, like, a sense of, like, somebody does care. 'Cause when you take a person somewhere and they don't have no money, it really makes them feel good inside. (Pizza, 28)

In addition to making them feel valued, participants believed engagement in recreation opportunities functioned as a bridge for young people to transition from previous behaviors that may have been unhealthy and high-risk to what they saw as more positive trajectories. It was an antidote to idleness, which they saw as a threat to the ability of youth to move successfully toward their goals.

You got to keep kids busy sometimes to help them. Because when kids is not busy, when they not busy, they stroll to trouble. They stroll to something. They never travel for anything. You know, anything can pop in their heads. But if they busy doing activities that have a full schedule, you know, they go to school, work, ain't nothing negative to think about but what's going on that you don't need so, always keep them in activities. That's what I think. (Chi Villa, 24)

Participants felt strongly that TLPs should have a full schedule of programming for youth for the reason that Chi Villa identifies above—they believed an important key to successful outcomes for youth resided in the solution of simply giving young people something to do. Being consistently engaged in a range of positive activities provides youth with otherwise nowhere else to be but on the street an alternative. As Chi Villa states: “You got to keep kids busy sometimes to help them.”

Finally, participants saw recreation services as directly connected to their physical and mental health. It provided alternatives to drugs and alcohol for risk-taking, fun, and bonding with friends. It enhanced their self-worth as they discovered passions and talents. It provided a forum to express emotions and feelings when talking was difficult or inadequate. It relieved stress and they believed certain activities such as sports, yoga and martial arts, directly improved their health through physical activity.

Yes, some musicians for piano, guitar lessons. Definitely have swimming coaches, you know, because you got a pool. You’d have a weight room. You know, say if you sad or anything or because you overweight or whatever’s going on, when you’re lifting weights or relieving stress, it can keep you calm, keep you not want to explode on nobody or lash out on nobody. Just lift weights and relieve your stress, you know. Even you can play basketball, tennis, swimming and that – earlier I was saying staying active and doing things. (Chi Villa, 24)

Participants felt an investment in recreation services by TLP programs was essential. They understood the difficult decisions programs have to make during challenging fiscal times; however, they felt strongly that many recreation services could be provided for little to no cost. While participants discussed a wide range of recreation opportunities they believed to be beneficial, the two most frequently mentioned were an annual camping trip that staff took youth on for several years and a music studio that was housed in the TLP. These two opportunities do require a financial commitment on behalf of the organization, but it is one that participants felt

warranted investment. They recalled time spent both in the woods and in the studio vividly and with pride. Although vastly different, these two activities increased a range of competencies, facilitated connections between staff and youth, provided an opportunity to face fears and have fun and helped young people discover and appreciate their talents.

V. FINDINGS II:

EXPERIENCES SINCE LEAVING A TRANSITIONAL LIVING PROGRAM AND PERCEPTION OF PROGRAM IMPACT

This chapter describes what has happened in the lives of participants since they exited the transitional living program (TLP) as well as the perception of the overall impact of the program from the perspective of participants. The first section examines the survey results completed by participants during their interview. This survey (Appendix D) included questions regarding housing stability, employment and financial stability, education attainment, health and child outcomes at the time of interview. Survey results are supplemented with interview responses related to each of these areas in order to breathe life into the numbers and ground them accordingly in the voices and lived experience of participants. The second section describes the impact of the TLP on the lives of participants as they view it. It outlines three themes related to participant outcomes that were prevalent across interviews yet not captured under the standard indicators of program effectiveness utilized in the field examined in the first section. The final section of this chapter presents the thoughts of participants regarding the overall usefulness of TLPs as a solution to youth homelessness.

A. Survey Outcomes and Related Participant Responses

I would definitely say that it has been a huge, a huge positive impact and influence in my life. I mean for the simple fact of, you know, again, taking a chance on somebody that they had no idea of, you know, a teen that was a transplant, basically, from that to helping me with finding a place of my own, to helping me through my pregnancy and through the adoption, and my first like real job out in life. I mean (the TLP) has helped me, (the TLP) has helped me in ways that other people that I grew up with would never have known. You know, they don't know how fortunate and how blessed I have been to have this type of connection. But also, in the same aspect, while there's those good things, you know, you – like I said, you can't just expect things to go your way, you're gonna have to work for things, you know. (Emily, 29)

The impact of TLPs is currently measured by agencies and funders through snapshot analyses of stability in the lives of young people after leaving. For DHHS-funded programs, outcomes are reported at exit from the TLP and again at six months after exit when possible to locate youth. These outcomes are currently the primary gauge of effectiveness of TLPs in the United States. A central part of the purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of youth who resided in TLPs over an extended period of time. This is the first study, to my knowledge, to examine outcomes for youth beyond six months of exit from a TLP. The amount of time since leaving the program for participants ranged from just over 1 year (395 days) to just over 11 years (4038 days) with an average length of time since leaving at 5.5 years (1990 days). The following section outlines outcomes for participants at the time of their interviews in the areas of: housing stability, employment and financial stability, education attainment, health and children.

1. “Where I’m Gonna Be at Tomorrow”: Housing Stability

TABLE V

HOUSING STATUS AT TIME OF INTERVIEW

Housing Type	#
Unsubsidized Apartment	11
• Living alone	(3)
• Married	(3)
• Living with partner	(3)
• Living with roommate/s	(2)
Section 8 Housing	3
Permanent Supportive Housing	4
Stably Housed with Family	3
Unstably Housed with Family or Friends (couchsurfing)	9
Homeless (emergency shelter or street)	2

According to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) data standards, an individual or family is considered stably housed if they are not:

- Homeless (residing in an emergency shelter or place not meant for human habitation);
- At imminent risk of losing housing (primary nighttime residence will be lost within 14 days, no subsequent residence has been identified and individual lacks resources to obtain other permanent housing);
- Considered homeless under other federal statutes (e.g. the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act, McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act);
- Fleeing domestic violence; or
- At risk of homelessness (annual income 30% of the median income of the area, does not have sufficient resources to obtain other permanent housing, and meets criteria for risk such as, but not limited to: history of two or more moves within 60 days, notice of eviction within 21 days, overcrowding in current residence, living in the home of another due to economic hardship) (HUD, 2014).

Pursuant to these standards, eleven participants (34% of the sample) were not stably housed at the time of their interview (see Table V).

It's a little rocky a little bit. I stay with my baby momma, we be getting into it sometimes. She tells me to get out of the house. She loves saying that, but other than that, if I need somewhere to lay my head, I can always go lay my head in my cousin's crib or somebody like that. (Chris Kringle, 23)

TABLE VI**FUTURE HOMELESSNESS AND REASONS FOR TLP EXIT^a**

Exit Reason	Experience of Homelessness after TLP exit (n=19)	No Experience of Homelessness after TLP exit (n=13)
Involuntary discharge	9	1
Self-discharge	4	2
Independent living	3	8
Reached program age limit	2	-
Reached program time limit	-	1
Pregnancy	1	1

^a If youth had multiple stays, most recent exit is reported

While the majority of participants (66%) met the criteria for stable housing as defined by HUD at the time of their interview, only six participants (19%) described their housing as completely stable since leaving the program. Most experienced multiple moves as a result of economic hardship and 19 (59%) participants identified subsequent periods of homelessness after exiting the TLP (see Table VI). The following is a collection of participant experiences of housing instability after leaving the TLP:

After I left (the TLP), I don't know. It was rough. It wasn't really *as* rough. It was rough because I wasn't going into my own. I was still practically homeless I guess you could say that. I wasn't necessarily homeless because I was able to stay with family. They was in a better situation than they was before I went to (the TLP)... I went to go stay with my auntie. I didn't like it there. Me and my auntie ended up fallin' out. Then I left my auntie house and I ended up havin' to stay at my girlfriend's sister house. I didn't like it there so I ended up leaving. When I left there – I can produce. I produce music. So I was stayin' in the studio. I was sleepin' in the studio for about a month. It was a studio, so no food, no running water and stuff like that. (Kennedy, 24)

When I did get discharged I decided ya' know, I'm just gonna go instead of just waitin' it out and then have to figure somethin' out when I already had somebody that was willin'

to take me in at the time. So I'm like okay, hey, that's fine. Let's do that. I didn't really wanna move in with them at that time because of their situation, but I didn't wanna go back home with my mom. I'm like no, I can't do this so I'll just go and move in there. (Chunky Chip, 22)

So I was stayin' with my grandmother. She (referring to daughter) was about two months when I finally moved back in with my grandmother. About two months old. And that timeframe stayin' at my grandmother's, I was also flip-flopping, flip-flopping back forth between her and him (partner) until his family finally got settled into their new apartment, and then I stayed with them for a while. (Diana, 24)

I was homeless and was at the mission on Roosevelt, you know, for a couple months. (Chi Villa, 24)

I've been in situations, but I don't want to say homeless, 'cuz I knew the difference being homeless, and I wasn't homeless. (Melissa, 23)

Nine. I'm gonna count this one as ten, so I've moved ten times for more than 30 days since then. (Austin, 28)

I didn't think that after (the agency's independent living program) I would be back in a shelter but you know, that's life. We all have to go through things. (Esmeralda, 26)

Participants described an ongoing struggle to maintain stable housing. For those who remained precariously housed or homeless, the challenges were consistent with those they faced prior to entering the TLP. For those who were in stable housing, however, many of these same challenges persisted. They talked about the stress of earning enough income to remain where they were. They feared looming end dates and frequently dealt with substandard conditions, slumlords and inadequate support systems.

While at least some difficulties continued for most of the sample, there was a notable sense of relief for those who were currently in stable housing. They described a feeling of respite from living in constant uncertainty. They no longer had to worry each day where they would sleep and were finally able to experience an element of permanence in their lives. They felt proud to have a space to call their own—a space they had worked tirelessly to obtain and

continued to work to remain in. Kennedy shared a conversation he had with his brother as they were getting ready to move into the Section 8 apartment they currently share:

The reason I am the way I am is because like I said, I lived in shelters so long, I was used to just pickin' up – it's so funny that we talkin' about this because I moved in two months ago. I was ready to move from there five months before I even moved. I was like okay, I've got to find me an apartment, this, that. Gotta figure out how I can do this and do that. I'm talkin' to my brother. My brother is 32 years old. Talk to him. "Okay, just let me know the day we move." Like okay, we packin'? like for real? We were so used to just gettin' up and leavin', man. I can't count on my hands how many times I have bought new furniture and just left it. That's how our life was. We'd leave stuff behind. So it was like packin', movin' truck? What we doin' all that for? We knew that this was what you're supposed to do, but that's crazy – It felt good to pack. It felt good to actually *unpack*. I was used to always been movin' that we gonna get, the first thing we gonna get is a air mattress so we can make sure we got somethin' to sleep on. Make sure you keep the TV 'cause we need the TV, and make sure you get some pots and some pans. Other than that we just gonna work our way back up. This couch was in my last apartment. These couches was in my last – I never – we never did and that's just how I am. It might be alright. You probably think, man, but I think that's kinda' sad personally. That's why I say at any point in time, man, I feel like they can just snatch this. Ain't nothin' too good to be true with me. And everything's too good to be true with me, you know. But it feels good to know that I don't have to worry about my rent. I won't have to worry about where I'm gonna be at tomorrow. (Kennedy, 24)

For Kennedy, the experience of taking his belongings with him and being able to *unpack* rather than constantly starting over was an important accomplishment, and one that allowed him to meet other goals such as finding stable employment, enrolling in college and providing for his family. Other participants shared similar feelings of pride in the stability they achieved since their time in the TLP.

I've been stable for the most part in finding an apartment, in keeping an apartment and paying my rent and all of that, minus being injured. And I've been in Chicago the whole time. I have not left Chicago – and this is another thing because I was the chick who constantly had \$150 in her duffle bag so she could go wherever she had to go. I have been in Chicago since I was 21, consistently, I have not moved. (Blythe, 32)

Well right now actually, besides the traumatic thing that just happened in my life, I am definitely a success story. I would love to – if (the TLP) has any old pictures of me then and now, I would love to show them I came from this homeless life of absolutely nothing to, I have my own. I had a five-bedroom, two bathroom house - You know, I mean like,

it's crazy. It's really crazy. I can't say I would've been able, or known anything about how to do it, if it wasn't for (the TLP). (M.G., 26)

For Blythe, stability was reflected through memories of an always-packed duffle bag, a bag she had not needed in over a decade. M.G. had recently returned from out of state following the tragic murder of her partner's son; however, until his death just months before our interview, she lived with her partner and their children for several years in a single family home they rented—an accomplishment she directly attributed to what she learned during her time in the TLP.

The experiences of housing stability since leaving the TLP were varied for participants. However, most described at least some level of on-going stress related to maintaining a safe and stable living situation. This stress was directly related to their current income and general financial stability and is explained further in the next section.

2. "I'm on my own": Employment and Financial Stability

TABLE VII

INCOME STATUS AND SOURCE AT TIME OF INTERVIEW

Income Status and Source	#
Employment – Full time	7
Employment – Part time	11
TANF	3
SSI	2
No Income	10

At the time of their interview, 18 participants (56% of the sample) were employed. Of the 17 participants over the age of 25, 12 (70%) were employed, compared to only 40 percent of participants under the age of 25 (6 out of 15 participants). Of those employed, they were working an average of 27 hours per week and the average income for participants from all sources was \$811 per month. Several participants credited the TLP with helping them to obtain employment they were able to sustain for an extended period of time following their exit from the program.

I was working out there - At the airport 'cause I wanna say (staff person) had got me that job, and I worked there for two or three years, and then I left there, and then, I started working at the hospital 'cause I went and got my medical assistant diploma. (Sophia, 29)

I mean I wouldn't have gotten a job working at a law firm, I wouldn't have had the chance to have met two amazing attorneys who have given me this different outlook on life. They too took a chance on me because (the TLP) took a chance on me. (Emily, 29)

While a few participants like Sophia and Emily had been steadily employed and generally financially stable since leaving the program, most described experiencing significant financial challenges after leaving the TLP as a result of inadequate income. Justin, now age 32, has been consistently employed for several years, but he explained what it was like for him directly after leaving the program:

I don't think I was scared as far as paying my rent on my own. I think I was more – I was more scared because I was trying to do it and I wasn't working. And, you know, I couldn't go back to (the TLP). Well, for one, I was too old to go back. And some of the resources – So it was like, okay, I couldn't get the resources because – well, for one, I wasn't a teenager no more. So it was like, yeah, I'm on my own. So now I'm buying my own food, I'm practically trying to catch up with my rent, because now you just said, "Hey, you're on your own." And it was like, "Oh, no, I'm not working and I can't use the resources no more." So that part was scary. You know what; I tried to maintain as much as I can. And, you know, me and the landlord, we was talking and I just told him, "You know what –" So me and the landlord was fine. But, you know, eventually he had to evict me, you know. He was like, "The program was good, but I got a business I need to run and I can't keep having you come behind." So we went down to court, I settled, and then I ended up moving out, and I ended up living with my ex-fiancé at the time, which I think was the most horrible idea ever. (Justin, 32).

Justin not only describes the consequences of not having sufficient income—eviction and moving to undesired locations—he speaks to the theme raised in Chapter IV of not being able to return to the TLP for assistance. It was scary to be on his own not because he didn't know what to do, but because he did not have the material resources to do it. Exit from the TLP not only resulted in an emotional loss for participants but also the loss of concrete financial support. When facing a deficiency of steady and/or adequate income, participants also discovered the social service system they had previously depended on was no longer available to them. In particular for single men without children, the adult system, where they now had to turn for help, offered few options for assistance.

That's the thing I want most in life, is just that stable feeling but it's always this. It's always that. You give me numbers, saying call this, call that. I was at the point where I had a talk with one of my sisters where I was like let me take care of one of her children because that would be a support for me to qualify for a program to put a roof over my head. Because without kids you don't qualify for anything. Once you hit 24, 23, we can't do nothing for you. Because of my age. (Marcus, 28)

Fourteen participants were unemployed at the time of their interview, and each of those fourteen participants identified obtaining employment as their primary goal. Extended periods of unemployment led not just to concern over survival but also experiences of low self-esteem and depression.

That's why I'm trying to get a job. I'm tired of sitting around the house all day, by myself. They go to work, they go to school. It's just me here all day, by myself. There's a library down the street, I can go down there and read some books, but that's all I do. That's all I do. (Diana, 24)

Well UPS, I'm excited about 'cause it's a job. I'm really pretty much excited about any job that I can get right now because I haven't worked in so long; I haven't had an actual paycheck job. (Chunky Chip, 24)

With jobs in limited supply and unemployment at record levels in the city of Chicago through most of 2009 to 2013, participants who did find employment frequently had to accept

positions at great distances from their housing. They identified transportation to and from work as one of the primary challenges they faced in maintaining employment.

The other job I was working all the way in B__. I had to quit that one. I was losing money. I was making the same amount of money but I was losing money at the same time because I had to pay the guy to help drive me there in the week, drive me there and back. I had to pay him \$50. I was losing money on top of that so I had to quit that one because it was too far. I couldn't do it. My other job they let me go for no reason. So now I've just got this one job and hopefully I'll be working. (Ryan, 22)

Like if I, if I'm on the 8:40 train, I make it out there like 9:40. We don't start going in doing our work until 11:30. So I'll be out there in the meantime. I remember one time I missed my stop, fell asleep on the train. I was mad, I had like \$20.00 in my pocket and I had to owe \$20.00 to somebody, so I had to pay the cab man \$20.00. It was more than \$20.00 to get in the cab. He dropped me off back at that job. I made it down there about 1:00. (Chris Kringle, 23)

He's (boyfriend) been helping me out a lot. I didn't really have no bus pass or no money to really get back and forth to work. I go to a lot of food banks and stuff like that when the end of the month comes. (Pizza, 28)

I worked there for like two years. I worked like the nightshift, so I stayed out with my cousin. After I lost my apartment, I stayed with my cousin who's staying in like the suburbs. So sometimes I would have to sleep on the train because the buses wouldn't run at certain times... Yeah, on the Red Line, until I knew the buses started running. Then I'd get off the bus and go. (Toni, 29)

In addition to challenges with transportation, participants who were employed often had to work multiple jobs to earn enough income to meet their financial obligations.

Especially right now it's a struggle. I mean, two, three jobs and school and a side job that hopefully you can get some benefits out of just to make it in life, not to mention with a child. (Timothy, 31)

It's like I'm not making enough to be able to support me, my son, my momma, and then trying to save for my own place, so it is a little bit, too much. (Cierra, 21)

Like Cierra, many participants were taking care of not just themselves and their children but also other members of their family. In addition to the general expenses of living independently (e.g., housing, food, transportation, utilities, clothing) some participants were also in the process of paying off debt incurred from school loans, medical bills and money loaned to them over the

years from other sources. Those who received supplemental income assistance from TANF or SSI expressed a need for more sufficient income in order to meet all of their financial obligations but were concerned of losing assistance if they were to exceed income eligibility requirements for assistance. Finances, even for those with full-time employment or in a dual-income household, were universally described as “tight.”

For those who did have stable employment, they described the same feeling of relief and pride as when they discussed maintaining housing. Justin worked as an independent contractor before he recently took a new position with a different company as a full-time employee.

It's a running joke amongst my friends that like I got a raise and I haven't had a raise from a job in I don't know, what, six or seven years. So that's a running joke. It's like, "Yay, you got a raise!" and I'm getting paid by the hour. So it's like – it's even much more better that, you know, I don't have to worry about counting my money or, you know, the wife counting the money, trying to figure out how to finance – Yeah, it feels more stable. I don't have to worry about, you know, looking over my shoulder for a job, I don't have to worry about – you know, because the thing about contractor companies is that they can let you go at a drop of a hat. They don't have no obligation to you, they're not loyal to you; you're just a number to them. And that's a reason why so much high turnover for contractors. And, you know, with (current company), it's a union-based company, so I have someone to fight for me if anything goes wrong. (Justin, 32)

Receiving a raise, being paid hourly rather than on commission and belonging to a union were each important indicators of achieving greater levels of financial independence. With that said, most participants who were employed expressed the feeling of their current position being “just a job” and not what they ultimately dreamed of as a career. Unfortunately, the need to generate income frequently superseded the ability of participants to continue their education after leaving the TLP, thereby limiting their entry into their ideal fields of work. This is described further in the next section.

3. “I’m Dying to Get Back Into It”: Education Attainment

TABLE VIII

EDUCATION ATTAINMENT AT TIME OF INTERVIEW

Highest Level of Education Completed	#
Some high school/ No diploma or high school equivalency	4
High school diploma	7
Some college	20
Associates degree	1

Five participants were currently enrolled in an education program at the time of their interview. One was working towards an associate’s degree at a local community college in criminal justice with a minor in music, and four were enrolled in specialized training programs for: massage therapy, medical billing and coding, cosmetology and a insurance brokerage licensure. Many of the 27 participants who were not currently enrolled expressed a strong desire to go back to school but were in situations where they could not afford to do so.

It’s just the fact of I need someone willing to give me that chance to actually make me like – willing to do what they can. If they build a position around me where I can go to school and get my degree, like “Hey you know what we’ll give you five years to get your degree.” I can do it in less than five years but at least that would give me time where I can go to school part time and work full time. (Lukes, 31)

I’m gonna go back to school, man. I think I want to do political science. That’s what I’m thinking about, something where I can help people out, man... I want to go to college but it’s just like man. Like if I think about college, there’s some issues, man. It’s just crazy how it just gets because money will make you do stuff. (Rupert, 21)

So I went to business high school, some community college, got some certifications and I’m dying to get back into it. (Timothy, 31)

I would look forward to going to school and knowing that I'm in school for doing what I want to do for the rest of my life. Knowing that I'm in the process and this is the first step for getting to where I want to be. I would be excited. But when you can't afford to pay for it, no. I would love that but when you have to find a job and you have to work and you have to work twice as hard for what you making just to make ends meet, you know 12, 13 hours a day just to get by. (Marcus, 28)

As discussed in Chapter IV, participants felt strongly that education was a critical factor in achieving long-term stability as well as obtaining personal fulfillment. Those who completed education goals since leaving the TLP they described not just a sense of accomplishment but also realization of their own self- efficacy:

The only thing I regret, I kinda' regret not been taking it. I feel like my life would probably be in a better situation because one thing I'll say, I've never been as ambitious as I am now. I got a job. I go to school. I'm lookin' for another job. I've never been this ambitious before. So I'm thinkin' maybe if I woulda' got my GED a while back when I was in (the TLP) or maybe before (the TLP) then maybe I would be in a totally different situation now. Maybe I'd be halfway through with school. Maybe I'll probably be in my career. But my biggest regret is droppin' out of school in the first place... If you ask me, me gettin' my GED opened up doors in so many ways. It uplifted me. It made me feel like okay, I could do anything. (Kennedy, 24)

Like Kennedy, several participants expressed regret for not completing education goals sooner. They also discussed frustration with current barriers they faced such as student loan debt, lack of time and income, feeling inadequately prepared by their high schools for the rigor of college courses, and the inability to enroll as a result of continued housing instability.

And it was so hard. Oh my God. I never went to no class that was that hard before. So it was unexpected and I tried so hard to pass that class and I still kept failing. I was at the point, I don't know how I keep failing, I'm doing everything I know how to do and why am I still failing? I think they told me since you failed that class like that you gotta wait a whole year before you can get back to school or whatever. So now I'm just sittin' at home. (Diana, 24)

I should be graduating from college right now. It's crazy that I think bad, bro. It's been four years. I had my GED two months after my class graduated. I should've went to Harold Washington, got my associate's, graduated and gone to university probably Northeastern or even here. I should be doing that but I'm not. The reason why is I never had stable housing. I never felt like – you know what I'm saying – even in (the TLP). Even though I think my time there was so positive, I never felt like – I always knew that

day would come I would have to leave. I didn't know how that was gonna go down. Like I have to leave this program. I don't know how that's gonna go down. I do not know what's gonna happen, but I have to figure something out. (Rupert, 21)

In talking about his disappointment related to education attainment, Rupert again brings up the theme of eventually losing the support of the TLP. He describes the pressure of knowing the program would come to an end and his continued struggle since with housing instability. For participants, continuing their education was now a luxury most could not afford: "How can I go to school when I have to work to pay rent? And if I work part time, how can I pay my bills? Like what do I do?" (Marcus, 28).

While continuing their education after leaving the TLP was difficult, participants identified the education goals they met during their time in the program to be an important outcome. Consequently, as described in Chapter IV, a majority of participants cited education services as the most important support offered by TLPs, and most believed it should be a required component for any young person without a high school diploma or GED.

And (the TLP), bein' the program that it is, the only thing I had to do was come in, work towards gettin' a job or gettin' a diploma, which I feel if I didn't get into (the TLP) at that time and got back in school when I did I, wouldn't have my diploma now. I extremely feel that way. (Chunky Chip, 22)

Although the ability to pursue further formal education was not present for most participants at the time of their interview, in no way did this appear to hinder their dreams of returning to school someday in the future. While they continued to work toward the financial stability necessary for them to return to school, participants seized opportunities for continuing education elsewhere:

I'm taking everything that I possibly can from the office where I work and using it. I don't want to say using it to my advantage but just taking it and molding it to my own and trying to give it back to the people. Whew, I completely know that you understand me when I say that it is hard to continue pressing on, continue going on and stuff like that, and just not letting the worldly stuff get you down. But I know it's going to pay off. That's why I'm going to continue with my dreams and the stuff that I do and how I help people and the people that I'm reaching and people actually get me for what I'm actually

trying to get them, that's what's really going to like—it's the icing on the cake. But long-term—big, big degree under my name, psychology, something that would be dealing with the brain and things and building people's emotions because I am a very emotional person and I feel like I would be able to help people on that level more because I understand. (Eshawn, 23)

4. “As Healthy as Possible, As Happy as Possible”: Health Status

TABLE IX

PHYSICAL HEALTH CONCERNS REPORTED AT TIME OF INTERVIEW

Current Physical Health Concerns	#
Diabetes	2
Weight/Nutrition	2
Epilepsy	1
HIV	1
Herpes	1
Frequent headaches	1
Ongoing stomach problems	1
Recent gallbladder surgery	1

Twenty-five participants (78% of the sample) reported no current physical health concerns or diagnoses. Seven participants (22%) described a range of existing conditions listed above in Table IX. Timothy shared his ongoing battle to maintain his health with Type 1 diabetes:

It's the living conditions. I mean, right now it's a full house, a two-bedroom apartment. And the minimum amount on the link card depends on the size of the household nowadays. And so with an illness like diabetes and a lot of that is at stake, that stress. You can't calculate the number of foods you eat when it says you have foods based on that. We're a full household so it's hard. Only thing to do is keeping forward, keeping up with the program. But try to keep myself as healthy as possible, as happy as possible, healthy as possible. I'm maintaining work. I mean, I go through things like that, Type 1 diabetes since the age of four and I'm 32, since always and I know that a lot of – I go see

some different doctors; I'm not totally stable. I'm not at 100 percent. One day it's 70. The other day it's 50. Actually, I do have, I haven't lost any hands. I still got my eyesight and things like that. I'm gonna push for it. Everyone wants to succeed. I don't want to be a failure in life and now with my son and now for myself. (Timothy, 32)

Melissa described the challenges she was currently facing as an epileptic in a new work environment:

I told them that I had epilepsy, but unfortunately they are not the type of facility that communicates that to all the managers and to the staff. So, you know, I have to sometimes – I've only been there two weeks. I haven't worked with everyone yet. But it's like every single night for the whole two weeks, I had to let someone know, "Okay, have they told you my medical condition? All right, no. Okay." It's not my job. I just want to write it on the board, "Melissa has epilepsy. Watch it." So that you know, they can be attentive. 'Cause they put me on the drive thru and I have two different kinds of seizures. And if I just become unresponsive, you know, I would need someone to take over. Or if I have a seizure, a tonic clonic seizure or anything like that – I don't want them to do the wrong thing. (Melissa, 23)

Both Timothy and Melissa highlight important connections between physical health and economic stability. Timothy identifies a critical limitation of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program in that by the time he has purchased food for his family, there is little remaining for him to maintain the diet his diabetes diagnosis requires. He also recognizes the role of stress in exacerbating his condition by raising his blood sugar. The pressure Timothy faces each day working multiple jobs to provide for his family has not just emotional implications but also physical consequences. For Melissa, employment instability means that every time she begins a new job she must educate her colleagues on her condition. Melissa's new job was at a fast food restaurant. Limited employment opportunities can result in taking the first position offered, which for participants often means low-skilled positions with high employee turnover. For Melissa, this increases her fears that she may have a seizure, and those present will not be familiar with her condition and/or know the appropriate steps to take.

TABLE X

MENTAL HEALTH CONCERNS REPORTED AT TIME OF INTERVIEW

Current Mental Health Concerns	#
Periodic episodes of depression	7
Anxiety	1
Anger/Emotion regulation	1
Bipolar disorder	1

Twenty-two participants (69% of the sample) reported no mental health concerns or diagnoses at the time of the interview. Ten participants (31%) identified existing mental health issues, including seven who described sporadic periods of depressive systems. All participants who reported mental health conditions felt they were currently managing their symptoms and behaviors better than they had in the past:

Yeah, my anxiety kind of kicks in every now and again, you know. I know how to control it better now. So I just be working with that most of the time, but I've been pretty good. (Chunky Chip, 22)

Old me would have had lost it after the first one. I didn't want to go back. I never wanted to go back again and back to square one. And it's really funny, because I have a very, very strong temper. But through (the TLP), I ended up learning—thank God I ended up learning how to control my temper a lot more; otherwise I would have been a short-fused person and would have ended up snapping on every little thing that somebody did. (Jacob, 23)

In addition to the reported conditions (see Table X), eight participants had experienced a significant death since leaving the TLP, and all eight discussed the challenges they faced at the time of this loss as well as those they continue to deal with in moving beyond their grief. Three had lost their mothers, one his younger brother, one her best friend and three participants had lost

children—one through a late miscarriage, one to SIDS and another whose stepchild was murdered.

That's actually something that just happened recently is July my mother passed away. And I – it totally – I completely crashed and couldn't function in life anymore. So it's because of that that I ended up suicidal and everything just turning dark. This was – actually it happened in July she passed. Yeah, I completely – I mean I had a complete breakdown. So it – but I'm better now. I am actually 100 percent better. It's just keeping myself busy that's making me happy. (Lukes, 31).

I still deal with it on a daily basis but I try my best to use it as good energy and not let it lose me too bad because of the simple fact that it's a process that a person has to go through, you know. It was bad but like I say he was just pushing me. He was just constantly pushing me and I couldn't just lay there and wallow in my sorrow. I wanted to. I wanted to feel bad, I want to feel hurt, I wanted to beat myself up but no matter how much I tried to think those thoughts they kept on changing. They kept on changing and I'm like 'uh, why don't you leave me alone?' You love somebody so much but then you have to realize that you have to lose them at the end of the day and no matter how bad we love them, no matter how much you want a relationship, you have to let them go...I just try my best to keep that focus and the energy that I want to cry and the energy that I want to feel bad I just convert it and I just push on and go, go, go and use that to feed off to other people and I think that's how a lot of people feel me and they understand where I'm coming from because I'm so—I'm being as real as I possibly can be. (Eshawn, 23)

Although moving through their grief continued to be a daily challenge, participants who had experienced the death of a loved one also described how this loss motivated them to work even harder to achieve their goals and taught them to embrace life in a new way.

Honestly I think the turning point for me is my best friend died three years ago and I was like there's no time to waste on being miserable. You have to live your life and you have to, you have to fix what is ailing you so that you can live happy. Or you give up on yourself and you become toxic to the other things around you. So everything happens for a reason and his death brought a lot of us back to life. (Blythe, 32)

5. “I Don't Want This for Her”: Children

Just over half of participants (53%) were pregnant or parenting at the time of their interview. Fifteen participants had one or more children and two were pregnant with their first child. Of those who were parenting: seven had one child, five had two children (one was pregnant with her second child), one had three children, one had four children, and one had six

children (five living). Parenting participants described their children as their greatest joy and shared stories of their growth and accomplishments with pride.

You know, as far as my daughter goes – I mean because I didn't get a chance to see my son, you know, during his growing up, because I became a father to my son when he was three. And, you know, to see M_____ the way that she is, it's like the little things amaze me from her; and it's like she's now getting to a point where she's completing sentences. It's like we're having a conversation, and it's like, you know, at first, it was just garble, and I'll be like, "Yeah, okay." ...But now, it's like, "Yeah, daddy, can we do this, can we go there?" ...At one point when me and her mother got together, I wasn't working. So I had those opportunities to spend time with her when she was a baby, so I enjoyed those. I didn't mind doing those things for her, I didn't mind – if she went to daycare, she went to daycare. But, you know, some days I just wanted to be around her, so I'd be like, "You know what; don't worry about her. I'll take care of her today and we'll just, you know, hang out." And I enjoyed those days. I mean I can't put her in a snuggly now, but I thought it was fun just to have her in a snuggly. Like I used to just walk around the house with her in a snuggly and I used to tell her like, "As long as we got this thing, you'll always be in it." Yeah. It's like first, I can't believe somebody trusts me with a baby. *[Laughs]* And, you know, to be there from the point of birth – I'm trying, that's all I can do; I can try. I'm trying. I'm trying to get to a point where M_____ don't have to want for anything, don't have a need for anything. I mean, you know, whatever she wants she's going to get. I'm spoiling her, her mother sees it, and I'm like, "That's my princess; of course, I'm going to spoil her." And so I mean, that's how it is. (Justin, 32)

Children were a powerful source of motivation, and parenting participants described an unwavering commitment to making sure they had everything they needed and did not face the same high-risk situations and adversity they had known growing up. They were committed to protecting their children for as long as they could from any negative encounters.

Her spirit is just – when we're walking down the street anywhere, going on the bus, everyone has to say something to her or compliment me on how she acts or behaves. It was like you could just feel it. She's just like she gets on, "Hi sir. Hi ma'am." She just loves everybody. Her spirit is so felt that you hate that you know as she gets older she's gonna realize the world isn't what it is and it's like ah, enjoy it now kid 'cause when you get there you're gonna realize everything's not peaches and cream or channel 11 (local PBS Kids network), but for now I try to keep her in that world. I protect her from all that. (Free Spirit, 30)

Parenting participants were also determined to sacrifice their own needs in order to ensure their children never went without. Providing safe and stable housing for their family was a primary motivation to keep going in difficult times:

I am determined to have a new apartment by Thanksgiving. I would like him to be able to look at his first Christmas tree. I want to see his face when he sees it. I call him bright eyes; he has such bright eyes. (Anna, 22)

Including Anna, four of the fifteen parenting participants were mothers raising their children without any support from the child's father. Selena described the complexity of balancing the need for financial support from her daughter's father with the desire to discontinue all contact with him as a result of his history of perpetrating violence.

You know but if things don't go—like I don't want this for her. Give her what she needs. Like I'm okay. If I don't eat, if I - like my hair ain't been done in I don't know how long. I just got my nails done because I got a little money. You know but I make sure she's okay, and if - it's like she didn't ask to be here. Take care of her, we good. And like people ask me all the time like "Well if he got himself together, would you?" I want my kids to have a family, you know because I didn't have that. But I feel like I don't want different people around my kids either. Especially her, she's a girl, and I know things that I went through with my mom and men she was with. And I've grown, and in my heart I forgave. But I know what I been through. So I'm more protective over her, so I know that I can't have people around her. So of course I want it to be her father, but I'm not going to put myself in a bad situation either. Just to have a family for my children. (Selena, 25)

Like Selena, several parenting participants were resolute their children would not experience the same victimization they had suffered as children. Protecting their children from harm was without exception their number one priority. However, beyond preventing harm, parenting participants also expressed the importance of their children always knowing they were wanted and loved.

My mother wasn't on drugs. She drunk a lot of alcohol but wasn't nothing wrong with my mama and she stayed with the job but something was wrong with her mentally and emotionally and she was not there. And when you not emotional with your kids, it's so hard that it'd mess them up physically for real because you don't know how to show no feelings to your kids or you don't know how to say "I love you" to your kids. That's hard.

Yeah because I could be here today and gone tomorrow and I need for my kids to know that it's unconditional love. I don't want my kids to wonder if I loved them or not, for real. I don't even remember the age I was when I heard my mom say "I love you." God rest her soul but I mean, I'm speaking the truth. She was not an emotional person. She held everything back and that's why it was so hard for me to show my emotions because she was mean as hell and they went by that down south remedy. I'm not raising my child like that for real, for real. You show emotion and love, to me it makes everything better. She ain't got to go out here in the streets and look for it. I give it to her all at home. (Zamiya, 22)

As discussed in Chapter IV, participants cherished the connections built during their time in the TLP often because they had not experienced such relationships in their own families and homes. Zamiya describes how her relationship with her mother impacted her emotional competencies and also makes a connection between this lack of emotional nurturance and high-risk behaviors. For parenting participants, raising their own children offered the opportunity to do it differently. It allowed participants a chance to build the bonds with family they never had.

While participants were clear they viewed their children as positive additions to their lives, they were also straightforward about the further challenges they faced as a result of having children. Already stressful financial circumstances were intensified. Children made it more difficult to work as childcare was expensive, employers were often not understanding, and there was simply not enough hours in the day to get it all done.

Yeah, I, because I take the bus and I'm a single mother and I can't really afford to pay people to baby sit because I'm trying to save up for my place and so yeah, it's pretty hard. (Cierra, 21)

And so I tried every possible scenario to work that out and to try to do a shift accommodation and to say hey, if you can give me either Wednesday or Thursday, the days off that you gave me and let me have Saturday off and I'll work one of those days, you know, I can do that. Tried every possible route and they just didn't want to work with me on that. (Emily, 29)

So it was a constant struggle, and it was like, you know, I'm being a contractor and now I need to support my family. I mean it was fine when I was by myself. But now it's like – it's a whole 'nother game, because now I've got four kids that I need to support, and it's like, you know, things are different. So it's like I can work almost 16 hours a day, but I'm

taking away from my family time. You know, my family needs their time, and then my wife needs time—it has to be balanced. (Justin, 32)

One of the most heartbreaking descriptions of the challenges of parenthood came from Pizza whose newborn son died from what she reported as SIDS and subsequently her other five children were removed from her care. This included her most recent child, who she had to relinquish custody of in the hospital:

After my son passed away, DHS took my kids from me. My three older kids is in Chicago with their dad, and I am working on a treatment plan to get my kids back. So I have to – I have to go to classes. I have to do counseling. I have to get a job, which I have. I have an apartment, and that was something on the ISP (individual service plan) plan that I needed to get. So I got all those things now, and all I'm waiting for is just for DHS to come and approve my apartment so my 7-month-old – I have a 7-month-old now, and her name is G _____. It really is hard because I couldn't leave the hospital with her. I had to – I had to basically go home without my baby, and I didn't like that at all. But I get to see her – I get to see her every Wednesday from 4:30 till about 5:30 – I mean 5:50. So now I'm going to be able to see her longer because one of the parents have offered to drop me and my – drop me and my boyfriend off at our home so we can stay longer with our baby... Yeah, so that's basically what my life has been like since I left (the TLP). Yeah, I just been getting up doing that. I mean, my motivation is my kids. I can't feel my babies, so I have to keep doing what I'm doing. I can't stress that enough, like that is my motivation, my kids. (Pizza, 28)

Pizza's son died in 2012. She had been working to get her children back for nearly two years at the time of the interview. Although she spoke with them almost daily on the phone, she had not been able to see her three oldest children for over a year as they were relocated out of state to be placed with their father. She cried when she spoke of her children, and the pain in her voice was profound. However, Pizza also spoke with great strength and resolve as she outlined the steps she was taking to regain custody of her children.

B. Youth Perception of Program Impact

But, you know, they need guidance and I think that is what (the TLP) is, is striving for and to achieve, is to give those children, those teens out there that don't have a place to call home, that don't have a friend to call a true friend or those that don't have any hope left, they give them that hope, they give them that friend, they give them that roof over their head and that chance to live, that chance to thrive and to become somebody and to make their mark in this world. (Emily, 29)

While the first section of this chapter examined standard indicators utilized in the field to evaluate program effectiveness, this section outlines three additional outcomes participants identified as directly related to their participation in the TLP: Safety and Survival, Permanent Connections and Giving Back. These three areas were identified by participants as highly significant upon reflection of the program's impact on their lives. The findings presented in this section are of particular import as they were pervasive across participant interviews, and none are currently included in standard evaluations of the efficacy of TLPs.

1. "The TLP Saved My Life": Safety and Survival

The most sobering outcome participants attributed to their time in the program was simple yet of unparalleled magnitude: their lives.

I can guarantee you that if (the TLP) didn't exist I would not be alive right now. That's, there is no question about that because okay, so I went there, I went there at 18 because I was familiar with the BYC (drop-in center) 'cause I volunteered for them. That was a starting point for me but literally when I came and lived at (the TLP) the last time and they fast tracked things for me I had just come out of doing a stint at Reed for attempted suicide, which it later came to be that manic depressive patients should not be on Zoloft and it got recalled for that purpose because it puts them in a manic phase. I didn't – I thought I was invincible. I wanted to walk off the roof not 'cause I wanted to hurt myself but because that flag looks pretty and I want to go touch it. But that being said, coming out of that I had nowhere else to go. I was literally sleeping on the dirty clothes pile in my friend's closet. I wasn't at bottom in the sense that I have slept in worse conditions but I was at bottom in the sense that I was emotionally drained and didn't want to do this game anymore. (Staff person) kind of changed the rules for me and was like well come back, we're gonna fast track you and we're gonna make this happen. I, (the TLP) saved my life. That's all there is to it. (Blythe, 32)

I firmly and strongly believe that I would be dead. I do. If it wasn't for (*the TLP*), I firmly believe that I would not exist today. You guys took a chance on me. You opened up your heart and your arms to somebody that you had no idea who they were, no clue. You didn't know any information about them, and I was welcomed with open arms and, you know, not only that, being welcomed into this program and given a chance to succeed and a chance to thrive in life. (Emily, 29)

To be honest with you, I don't even think I'd be living because before I went to (the TLP), I was going a lot of places with a lot of different people and all type of stuff was happening to me as a little girl. And when I went to (the TLP), I was well-grounded.

And I told the agency that I was with that took me to (the TLP), this is where I want to come back to. This is, I know I could make something out of this and, true enough, I did. I maybe didn't get into (independent living program), but I had got a lot of other stuff out of that program. Oh no, life would've been much harder for me if there wasn't no (the TLP). Honestly, it would've, because that's the only place in Chicago that I know of that a youth could call home. (Zamiya, 22)

Having worked in the field for some time, I thought I adequately understood the profound dangers young people faced both before and during periods of homelessness. With that said, I was unprepared to hear from nearly half of the participants they believed there was a good chance without the TLP they would be not be alive today. To contextualize these beliefs, participants described the threatening circumstances they were coping with before entering the program. They experienced violence at home, on the street and in intimate relationships. They were struggling with addiction. They were sleeping in perilous conditions. They were putting their lives at risk constantly in order to survive. When they got to the TLP, they found respite. They found safety. They found they wanted more for their lives.

A lot of bad things happened to me before (the TLP), that's why I often say that it's the best thing that ever happened to me. Just wanting more, just wanting more for yourself, just not wanting to go down that same path that your grandmother or your mom went down. I just didn't want to make the same mistakes...I was homeless for four years before I got to (the TLP). And that goes beyond couchsurfing, it was riding on the train, sleeping on the train and in parks. That stuff was really dangerous. (Renee, 25)

Oh wow, if I didn't have (the TLP) my life would—I think I would be a crackhead. I'm not going to lie, I was already addicted to drugs when I went into (the TLP). Not as far as crack or morphine or nothing but as far as weed, I would smoke so much weed, like \$50 a day. I had a liquor habit; I was an alcoholic. If it wasn't for (the TLP) I do think that eventually I would have went more for a stronger drug because at the time, it's because of (the TLP) I changed all that. I stopped drinking. I stopped smoking. I wanted to do something, even though all of the hurt in my life, and nobody being there for me. I wanted to turn it into something other than being depressed, it was either choose to continue to live a miserable life or I could choose to do something positive with it and take all of my anger and animosity and move it towards motivation. And I chose motivation because I had a team behind me that knew that I could do better than smoke and drink every day. That knew that I could make it. It was a place over my head that gave me the time to go to school and to recreate and redesign my whole way of thinking. I was a real bad cutter before (the TLP). I would cut every time I would get stressed and I

was horrible at it, it was just something to ease the pain. (The TLP) was a positive place; it has positive team members, a positive outlook. It had a different way of life. And different surroundings. It basically had surrounding myself with positive people rather than the negative people I had in my life because I'm so used to the ghetto and my family is like an unorganized, kind of chaotic family so to put myself in a predicament where there is nice people, help with transportation. I have a team and they're all positive and they're in school and they are doing something with themselves. It motivates you to say, okay I could have this life. So (the TLP) helped a lot. A lot. A lot. (Esmeralda, 26)

Unquestionably, the TLP supported the survival of participants most directly by providing safe shelter. However, as outlined in the findings presented in Chapter IV, just a bed was not enough to accomplish this outcome. As Chapter IV as well as the above responses describe, participants found a sense of home and connection in the TLP. They experienced personal development and received holistic support. Without these conditions, participants expressed they would not have remained in the program and would have returned to the same high-risk situations they were experiencing before the TLP. It would be impossible to overstate the gravity of an outcome so consequential as that of saving a young person's life. That so many participants directly attributed their survival to their time in the TLP is worth our full attention.

2. "They're Not Going Anywhere": Permanent connections

While saving their lives was arguably the most poignant outcome participants discussed, the most prevalent was that of permanent connections. Many of the relationships participants built with their peers and staff members during their time in the program (described in Chapter IV) have persisted through the years. Thirty of the 32 participants (94%) currently had regular contact with at least one other peer or staff person they met at the TLP. Thirteen participants (41%) identified their current closest friend as another former resident of the TLP they met during their stay. Two participants were currently engaged to a partner they met in the TLP, and two participants asked friends from the TLP to be godparents to their children.

So I kind of feel like with the people that I met, I have people to talk to. I feel like I have people in my corner. I have a support group out of that. So I met people that I still - that are really true friends today. (Selena, 25)

Besides that, getting to know a lot of the (the TLP) clients, some that was new there, now getting to know them and all that. So end up hanging out and adding them to the whole collection of people that I know from (the TLP) that I'm now friends with still to this day. (Jacob, 23)

But I'm glad that it did exist because I woulda never met the people that I became friends with, actually family with. I'm still friends with K, M, E. Those are my three best friends. They're not going anywhere. (Aaron, 29)

The bonds built between young people during their time in the TLP proved robust, lasting for most well beyond their exit from the program. They provided one another with ongoing emotional support but also a range of instrumental support including but not limited to: housing, childcare, food, clothing and financial assistance. When participants experienced the housing and financial instability described above in the first section of this chapter and no longer had the TLP to return to for support, they turned to one another. Participants believed their time in the TLP led directly to a strengthening of their network of social support; a network that most described as continuing to play a critical role in their lives.

It was just hard. But once I got into (the TLP), everything just started looking up. I don't know. I got to meet new people I'm still in touch with. We were really close. J, K, R, M. I was talking to A for a while at one point. But you know, those were people that were there in the transitional stage of my life. We all are at different points in our lives right now, but no matter what we just all come together and we just have a good time. It's almost like we're just like one big family. When I separated from my partner, K was really, really helpful to me, extremely helpful. It was – we kind of look out for each other, that little group that was there. We really do. (Melissa, 23)

During my interview with Aaron (age 29), he shared with me that he and another friend from the TLP had recently started a Facebook group to reconnect with others they had known during their time in the program. The name of the group was “Where Are They Now” and it had over 20 members that Aaron had known during his time in the TLP nearly ten years ago. Aaron

invited me into the group and while I was initially hesitant, not wanting to enter a space where young people might feel I didn't belong, he insisted. Contrary to my fears, when young people saw I was invited into the group, immediately greetings arrived to welcome me, tell me I was missed and ask how I was. Entering this space they had created in order to sustain relationships with one another was a powerful gift. It was incredibly emotional to reconnect with so many youth I had known over the years—to see they were okay and to know that they had each other.

In addition to the enduring relationships they built with one another, fifteen participants (47%) were still in regular contact with a staff member from the TLP. When participants faced difficult circumstances after leaving the TLP, they often turned to these staff members for support. Likewise, staff members continued to check in with participants in order to help sustain their stability after exit. Chunky Chip describes a period of psychiatric hospitalization following her exit from the TLP:

(Staff person) came to see me out there. Oh my God. If it wasn't for (staff person) I probably wouldn't have survived in there. She really helped me out with that and she really helped me out when I'm lookin' for my apartment 'cause she was really pretty much the whole reason why I got my furniture, especially my bedroom stuff. She looked after me, too while I was in there -- Yeah. A lotta' people looked out for me. Even after I left (the TLP) and she left (the TLP) and everything, she still looked out for me. To the fullest looked out for me as far as my bed, my food. She even bought all of my groceries one time and I had the money for it. I was baggin' 'em up and she just swiped her card. I was like, "What happened?" She was like, "Nothin'. Just keep baggin', darlin'." I'm like, "Okay, (staff person)." I don't know what happened, but alright, that made me so happy. I was like, "Wow. You're just totally awesome." It's like even when I had disappeared with the whole (hospital) thing, I called her and told her where I was. She was there in under 30 minutes; very fast. (Chunky Chip, 22)

Participants and staff members continued relationships built in the TLP even when the program and organization was no longer present to financially support it. They had built genuine, lasting connections with one another—connections that even a decade later provided an important source of emotional support.

I was pregnant, I didn't know I was pregnant, and (*the TLP*) helped me through that. I mean I still talk to (staff person), my buddy, every once in a while. I mean I talked to her yesterday and, you know, I mean there is new obstacles that I'm facing today because of my decision to place my son and things like that. (Emily, 29)

Of course, this was not true for all participants and again feelings related to program termination in light of the strength of relationships built surfaced in participant responses. When describing how she would design her own TLP for youth experiencing homelessness, Austin focused on this issue of ensuring that young people remained connected:

I think a lot of times we forget; after they age out, we forget about them. So like nobody ever really follows up. I'll say, "Hey Austin, you know it's been about two years. You okay? You need any adult services?" And sometimes the lack of adult services, they don't understand that those homeless adults were homeless kids that just transitioned into a homeless adult. Because after you stop getting the support you kinda lose it... we're not just gonna – we're not just gonna completely cut the limb off like you didn't exist. You're part of a body of people. (Austin, 28)

Austin's analogy of leaving the program as reminiscent of cutting off a limb unmistakably communicates the feeling of loss so many participants experienced after leaving. As described in Chapter IV, participants had physically and emotionally become a part of a community; no longer having contact with that community felt unnatural and completely avoidable. During my interview with Renee, I asked her what she thought she needed the most from the TLP when she walked up to the front door six year earlier. She responded:

Somebody who gave a shit. That was the biggest part of it. Even to this day, that's still the one thing. That's why I've stayed so close to (*the TLP*) because I need to know that somebody cares. It's more the fact that somebody cared and they shared that they cared. (Renee, 25)

The most important thing Renee believed she needed then, and continues to need now, is to know someone cares. She explains this to be the reason she continues to maintain relationships she built with staff and stays "close to the TLP." The importance of affirmation and social connection to our survival as human beings is well documented in disciplines spanning from

anthropology to neuroscience (Cacioppo, 2008). As discussed in Chapter IV, participants believed the TLP played an important role in building relationships with others that would provide these critical functions. That for some these relationships persist for years following exit from the program is noteworthy, suggesting the TLP may impact the actual survival of youth well beyond the duration of their stay in the program.

3. “Pay it Forward”: Giving Back

People that was working at (the TLP), you know, they saw something; they saw potential and they gave me a chance. And I tell my husband every day that I want to pay it forward because somebody – I was helped, somebody helped me and I want to pay it forward, and if I ever come across a situation where somebody needs help that I can relate to, I want to pay it forward, I want to help them because I know I would not be where I’m at today if it wasn’t for (the TLP). (Emily, 29)

The third outcome participants directly attributed to their time in the TLP was the desire to now help others facing similar circumstances. Despite varied experiences with stability since leaving the program described in the first section of this chapter, they were overwhelmingly grateful for the support they received in the TLP and wanted other young people to have the same assistance.

I do regret living like that for a little bit but at the same time it woke me up to a lot of stuff. It really did because of the simple fact of the matter, the way I look at it, I was put in those situations to wake other people up. I got fortunate enough to be put where I could get out of my situation basically. I got saved in way to, like I got a life jacket or a lifesaver thrown at me and now I'm just more so very, very careful like hey, I need to get this message out here of you can slip and you can lose complete control. You can really go under and not even realize when you're coming back up. You need to take advantage of the time that you have the energy to swim as far as you can. (Eshawn, 23)

Eshawn described his time in the TLP using the analogy of a life jacket. He believed the program brought him to safety and kept him afloat when he felt he was drowning. Later in our interview Eshawn explained how he now attempts to give others this same protection:

Females, males, it don't matter. If I see that you're sitting on the train with a bag or three or four bags, I automatically know you're homeless - Or you're in the transition of going

somewhere where you're having to—man, Casey when I tell you it's so much—when you're on the train if you just pay attention to what people have around them or what they have on them you can actually tell who's in that situation and who's going through rough time or who's even just had bad experiences and need a little bit of encouragement. But what I tell people is there is a place on (TLP's location). I tell them exactly how to get there... They will help you get jobs, they will help you get food—whatever it is that you need, they will help you with it. You just have to want to do it yourself. (Eshawn, 23)

Every one of the 32 participants had at some point informed another youth of the program and encouraged them to access the services it provided: "I've given people advice about (the TLP). I tell people all the time about (the TLP)... I would love to help somebody who went through the same thing I went through" (Kennedy, 24). In this way, participants were not only still taking care of their fellow residents after the program, as described above in the previous section, but they were also impacting the lives of strangers. By their account, the 32 participants in this study had directed over one hundred youth experiencing homelessness to services as a result of their stay in the TLP. They provided information on how to get in contact with the program and about services provided. They offered motivation by sharing their own personal stories of coping with homelessness and assuaged fears by describing what the experience of the TLP was like. Sometimes, they even paid for a youth's transportation to get there or accompanied them right to the door: "I keep telling them, you get ready to go there, I will go with you" (Diana, 24).

This outcome of wanting to give back was present in not only participants' desires to informally reach out to other youth in dangerous circumstances and connect them to safety and support, but it also led several to pursue professional careers in social services. Jacob is currently employed as a street outreach worker for the same organization that operated the TLP:

Like the fact that we're actually helping people out there. Like people come up and be like, "Thanks, man, I really need this," or, "Such-and-such in my family really needs this." Like they're going through hard times and like such-and-such happened, so I'll definitely give them a call and give this to my such-and-such. Yeah, and a lot of the reaction from people really helps out, because it'll be like maybe like a bunch of bad weather and everybody kind of feeling off. But then when somebody comes to us and

they start, they try to ask about the program, talk about the program. That lets me know that constantly somebody trying to really get involved with the program. Yeah. Like I was even considering the idea kind of to become a YDS I (staff position in the TLP). (Jacob, 23)

Although Jacob was the only participant currently employed by the organization housing the TLP, several participants expressed a desire to work in the social service field and specifically at the TLP.

I told her I'm like "If you hear of a job I will drop everything and move back. I will take my next check and I will drop everything and move back." Yeah, if it meant I could go back into the field that I love and I'm so passionate about, I will drop everything. I don't care, I will pay whatever I need to pay to get out of my lease; I will do whatever I need to do. It's where my heart lies; it's what I'm very passionate about. (Lukes, 31)

It helped me be who I am now. I left there and I went to school and all that. I'm not just sitting on my butt not doing anything. I left there with a sense of there's everyone in life who has it worse than you. So shut up, get up and do something. I'm complaining about me, yeah? This girl over here got raped by her father every night. What is your excuse? There is no excuse. (The TLP) taught me that. I went back a few years ago and seen it before when they had just changed. I haven't seen it since, but no one probably remembers me, but I'd like to go in there, look at this is my history and I want to bring my child there and see this is where it started. My cousin, I brought her there. She brought a friend there. Look now what she's doing. She's elevating. She's the manager now doing that... I would love to work for them. I promise you I would. I would love to work for (the TLP). (Free Spirit, 30)

Free Spirit not only talks about the young people she directly brought into the program as well as her desire to work at the TLP but she also describes the responsibility of youth to take action in their lives. This theme emerged repeatedly throughout interviews and is discussed in greater detail later in this chapter. It is important to mention it here, however, as participants' desires to help others was always expressed in tandem with a firm belief in personal agency.

I just give back to people, man. That's what I want to do. I want to help people, but I also learned you can't help nobody if they don't help themselves. So I'm gonna tell people straight up look, man, I will help you but don't waste my time. Don't waste your time. That's more important. You could waste my time. You know what I'm saying? But I want to help you. I want to see you ten years from now helping somebody else, and that's what I feel like, man. I feel like I could do it. It's crazy, man. (Rupert, 21)

The discussions with participants about their experiences of giving back revealed that TLPs may actually have a reach well beyond what is currently being measured. Most social service agencies are well aware that word-of-mouth is an essential strategy when it comes to dissemination of information about available services, and many even track this as part of an analysis of referral source. However, rarely do organizations interpret the desire of participants to bring others into services as an outcome. The findings here suggest that as a result of the TLP participants are building community (thereby strengthening *actual* communities), sharing resources and potentially saving countless additional lives. These are arguably outcomes of great consequence.

C. Transitional Living Programs as a Solution to Youth Homelessness

The crux of this study was to understand from the perspective of young people if transitional living programs are an effective strategy to end youth homelessness. The first section of this chapter examined outcomes typically assessed in the field. The second section explored three additional outcomes found to be important to participants but not normally measured by TLPs or funders. This final section summarizes the findings in relation to the direct question of whether or not participants believe TLPs are a useful component of an overall approach to youth homelessness. The findings will be discussed in three parts: why participants believe TLPs are important; youth responsibility in outcome attainment; and finally, thoughts from participants on the dissonance between their positive experience in the program and their continued instability once leaving.

1. “They Are Not Ready”: Why TLPs are Important

People are not ready. They are not ready, because they’re thinking, “I just want my own space to get away from people,” but people don’t really know like everything that it takes to keep that up and maintain it, and they don’t appreciate it. I feel like when you go through all of that, with living there and having those rules and learning those things that

are happening like in the little courses that we have, and meetings, it helps prepare you to live on your own, and it makes you appreciate it. Like, people don't do it now. Like, people work these jobs and save up this money, and they're like, "I'm getting my own place." They get their own place, and they're in their own place for like three months, and they're evicted, and they're back living with somebody, because they just saw, "I want my own place." They didn't see, "I'm gonna have to pay this bill, pay this bill, clean up this, go to the store, do this by myself, no help." They weren't prepared. They just saw "my own place." They didn't see the other stuff that comes with it. (Stephanie, 29)

Participants believed TLPs to be a critical part of our solution to youth homelessness. In Chapter IV, I described the desire of participants for the sense of community and easily accessible assistance provided by a TLP. Participants felt 24-hour access to staff members and peers in the program provided important social supports they would have otherwise never experienced. They described the provision of holistic support as an imperative part of the program, one that set it apart from emergency shelters. Young people experiencing homelessness were not only in housing crisis but had often experienced significant trauma that participants believed TLPs are in a unique position to address.

Self-sufficiency should also be about the mental basically; it's important. Like I want to deal with that too. I just don't want to get into an apartment, have my own keys, have my own lease, and then I'm still hurting on the inside. It's more like adult homelessness is more, from what I've seen, it's choices that you make. Really—drugs, bad relationships, things like that. For youth, it's like my parents don't accept me because I'm gay. I can't be – they put me out or I just can't be here. Or I'm not doing this way in school – my parents – like or they just don't love me. They have, but it's like – oh my mama boyfriend wanted to touch me and I don't want him touching me. It's so – it's just different. And it's more – with youth it's like I'm homeless and I'm dealing with these issues. It's not like I'm just homeless and I need a home. (Selena, 25)

However, participants also believed TLPs to be essential for a different, yet equally relevant reason: at the time of entering services, they were not developmentally or financially prepared to be on their own. As Stephanie describes above, young people were understandably drawn to the freedom of having their own apartment but were ill-equipped to sustain it. During our interviews, participants shared numerous stories of their own failed attempts of maintaining

independent housing when they were unprepared to do so as well as observing friends and family members lose their housing for similar reasons.

A year, a year and then I let stuff get out of hand like money and people coming and staying with me, helping other people out and not paying like the rent and stuff. I had lost the one job but I got another one. Just trying to do what I wasn't supposed to have been doing. I'm always trying to help people out. After I lost my apartment, everybody else skedaddled and then, after that, I ended up moving in with my cousin. (Toni, 29)

In addition to the TLP, the organization operated an independent living program that participants frequently referenced as a comparison when discussing what they believed to be the unique value of TLPs. The independent living program provided subsidized, scattered-site individual apartments for youth for up to two years. All but two participants (94%) did not believe it was effective for young people experiencing homelessness to move directly into their own apartment, even when that apartment was fully subsidized. Rather, participants believed it was important for young people to gradually transition into being on their own in order for there to be any possibility for long-term success.

As far as when you're at (the TLP), it teaches you how to deal with stuff in (independent living program) as far as budgeting your money, as far as the life skills. We used to help (staff person) with the food pantry and cooking and all of that stuff, so you definitely need that step one before you go to step two (independent living program) - In order to make it to step three which is ultimately being on your own without all that. So you can't start at two and then go to three. Especially if you don't know anything about budgeting. Like I said living at (the TLP) I learned that common sense was not common for everybody. That's something I wouldn't have learned if I hadn't been there. You know what I mean? I took that with me onto step two. The whole budgeting thing, I took that with me. (Sophia, 29)

The thing about it is if we already had the proper tools we needed to be successful at (independent living program) we wouldn't be coming to you guys for (independent living program)... To eliminate (the TLP), it would be tragic. It would be tragic. What people are failing to realize is the only reason why you guys were effective is because you guys were there on the daily to constantly remind me, "M.G., this is important. Hey, I-SKiLS. Hey this, hey that." I mean it's around the clock and then you have 24/7 support. A lot of the overnight staff we would have talks and they would reinforce positive energy. 24/7 you know, having someone to talk to. Yeah, you can take away from this transitional living when everyone's living together and do it on an independent basis with

(independent living program) but then I would have to come meet with you for maybe an hour a week. You're not going to drive anything in my head in an hour a week for me to be ready for (independent living). You learn from interacting with other individuals. With such and such, you share real life situations. "Well hey, this is what I did to get this job," or "You know what, I'm going for (independent living program). I was where you were once." Those are all different things, experiences that you exchange with those others while you're in (the TLP). (M.G. 26)

Participants felt the TLP provided a necessary bridge to independent living. As Sophia articulates, "You can't start at step two." Participants agreed that young people enter the TLP with a wide range of experiences, skill sets and readiness for self-sufficiency. As such, while they believed the TLP to be an important first step for all youth exiting homelessness, they thought it was appropriate for programs to make individual determinations on when youth were ready to transition to independent living based on observed competencies:

If you have these things – like there are people coming to (the TLP) who already had a job, one that they'd held down for quite some time. So if you have these skills and these expectations lined out go ahead and modify them slightly. As you do intake for each individual, hey if you can complete this – and there should probably be a minimum of like a week or two at least of someone having to be at (the TLP)- like setting so that you can get a full assessment of what they're going through. But if you can get all this stuff proven to me in a week that you already know how to cook without setting the house on fire and that you've had your job for two years and have never been written up or anything, by all means you've shown that you have the skills to take care of yourself you just found yourself in an unfortunate situation. But if you can't do these things, if you got paid the last two weeks and you only showed us \$10 in your bank account, I can't trust you with your own apartment. I think that that's completely fair to say this program is based on what you put into it. We will give you this, this, this and this but you've got to do your part. You can be out of here in a week or you can be here for six months. (Blythe, 32)

As previously discussed in other chapters, youth homelessness tends to differ from adult and family homelessness in several critical ways. One of the most significant distinctions, obviously, is age. Young people entering the program are 17 to 20 years old and with rare exception have never lived on their own before. While they possess a broad range of extraordinary competencies and survival skills, most have not had opportunities to practice

responsibilities related to tenancy. Tasks such as paying utility bills, filling a refrigerator, completing general home maintenance and repair, and navigating relationships with landlords are new, and without ample preparation difficulties can arise quickly. In addition to their lack of experience with living on their own, young people are developmentally-primed to be spending as much time with peers as possible and frequently doing so while engaged in high-risk activities. The excitement and autonomy associated with having one's own place at a young age can lead to the issues described by participants above and ultimately eviction. Consequently, participants believed the TLP provided an essential opportunity for young people to both further prepare for independence as well as be with peers in a safe, nurturing environment.

2. “You’re Gonna Have to Work For Things”: Youth Part in Outcomes

As Blythe describes in the previous section, participants felt strongly that a key element of experiencing success in the TLP was directly related to what youth decided to do with the assistance they received. In other words, from their viewpoint, program outcomes were closely tied to youth motivation to utilize services.

You know, you’re gonna have to work for things and you are gonna have to step up to the plate and do what is expected of you. You know, there’s rule and regulations for everything in life and every business and everything that comes with it, there is expectations and you’ve got to meet those expectations to get anywhere. You can’t just float by in life thinking that everything is just gonna drop into your lap. (Emily, 29)

It’s like this, if you wanna help yourself, you’re gonna get up in the morning, you’re gonna do what you have to do. If you wanna stay in the house all day and do nothing with your life, that’s on you but at the end of the day after 30 days of you’re not progressing then we’re gonna sit down, we’re gonna talk and figure out what’s best for you. Sitting in the house every day, that’s not gonna cut it. You’re not gonna progress your life just sitting in one spot. A job is not gonna come to you that way. They should have 30 days to do something like get in school, get a job, like I said if they’re not doing anything then we’re just gonna have to sit down and figure out what needs to happen next. I’m not gonna just kick them out because they’re not doing anything. Sometimes you need to figure out where someone’s mind is at in order to help them. Because at the end of the day what they’re doing – if that’s gonna hinder them from progressing, that’s on them. Because the program is doing what we’re supposed to do by providing them

shelter and the necessary things for them, you know to get, to move forward. If you don't wanna utilize that, if you wanna jeopardize that, that's on you. (Aaron, 29)

Participants felt the TLP provided the range of services they needed and generally did so with an appropriate level of support. However, they also consistently expressed the belief that it was up to each individual young person to take advantage of the resources offered in order to receive the intended benefits. This belief frequently led them to question their own decisions to not engage more intensively with the program while they were there.

One thing I could say I regret doing was not utilizing all the services that was at (the TLP) and just leave. I left and I regret that. It was real hard for me. I was basically out on the streets just going anywhere, doing any and everything. It was hard. It was real hard. (Zamiya, 22)

I'd have employment. I'd have childcare. Classes. GED School. Parenting classes. Everything. People need that stuff. I regret not doing it. I really, really do. I don't have my GED yet and I still have to go to school to become what I want to become. (Anna, 22)

It's just I feel like sometimes people just need a little push and a lot of kids at (the TLP), not really knowing their exact story, but most of them did come from a broken home so they do need a little bit of 'hey, you need to know that this is like, you need, not some kind of authority but you need some tough love in life. You need to know this is real. Yes, you got a good opportunity by coming in here but just don't take advantage of the opportunity. Don't let it fly by you and then you thinking years later dang, I really should've took advantage of that because of the simple fact of the matter is once it's over and once it's gone, there's nothing you can do about it. You don't need to look back and be like wow I wish I would've taken advantage of that. I don't know how many times I beat myself for not taking advantage of things while I was there... I was just basically trying to live life for that moment and that time being, rather than thinking about what do I have to do next week or what do I have coming up. (Eshawn, 23)

As Eshawn describes, while several participants expressed regrets about not engaging more fully with services provided, they understood this to be a result of a combination of their life stage of adolescence, the circumstances they had grown up in, and the nature of the acute crisis they were experiencing at the time they came into the program. Eshawn, however, also postulated an additional theory about the self-efficacy of young people—one that he masterfully articulates and is directly connected to the themes of the experience of living in a TLP discussed in Chapter IV:

Yeah, it works for some people, but then you have those ones who have actually been through a whole lot more - Yeah and actually really physically, mentally think ‘oh, I’m not worth it. This is just—I lucked up on this.’ You did not luck up on this. This is actually by your faith that you needed to be in this program and what you’re going to get from this program is: you can do it and we’re here to help you. You just have to want to do it and understand that you’re worth pushing yourself. You’re worth to have it. You need it. Not only are you worth it, you’re entitled to it because where in your lifetime does it say that you’re not entitled to have your own place, or you’re not entitled to live the life that you want to live, or you’re not entitled to love yourself the way that you want to love yourself? The same way that you say you want love from this fellow man or this fellow girl, love that for yourself. You don’t need nobody to prove to you or show you that you’re lovable. You need to know it yourself and I’m here to tell you. (Eshawn, 24)

Eshawn directly connects the decision of young people to engage with the program more fully with a belief in their own self-worth. He explains that youth must understand their value and judge themselves as deserving of love and stability. For participants, the idea of personal agency in the achievement of goals was important; however, they consistently communicated its dependence on adequate emotional support. At the end of each interview, I asked participants if there was anything else we had not talked about they thought was important for me to know.

Blythe’s response to this question was the following:

People always – one of the questions people like to ask me a lot is if I could do things all over again if I would do things differently. I always say no. Sometimes I’ll think about it and I’m like man maybe I would but I always come out to no because if I did even the slightest thing differently I wouldn’t be who I am today and I think I’m amazing. Like I am so strong and so healthy because I made all of these mistakes and because I overcame them and because, because, because. Being in (the TLP), it’s like I don’t know, I guess just having someone believe in me that I could do those things made me believe in me, you know. I’m like, I needed that, I really needed that, so yeah. That’s what I would say. (Blythe, 32)

This need for affirmational support—to have others remind you of your worth and believe in you when you are unable to on your own—connects directly back to Chapter IV’s findings related to the importance of connection. Participants explained they had to be the ones to ultimately take action toward their goals but they also understood the critical role of being surrounded by an adequate support system in order to fuel their journeys forward.

3. “A Gift and a Curse”: Thoughts on Continued Instability

Okay, (the TLP) is like a gift and a curse. The reason I say that is because it's like it's one thing to get somebody off the street, but it's another thing to get 'em off the street and not prepared to get back on the street because when you go to (the TLP), okay, yeah, you get housin' for a little while. You ain't gotta pay no rent. That's good. That's all great. You know what I'm sayin'? But it's not strict enough. It's like just as well as they givin' it to you and it's a good thing, they givin' it to you is a bad thing because when you get a chance to breathe, what you gonna do? You gonna breathe. You not gonna still struggle no more 'cause one thing I learned growin' up that strugglin' actually teaches you how to hustle. When you get to a point where you don't have to struggle no more, you gets comfortable and (the TLP) made us really comfortable. (Kennedy, 24)

As discussed in the first section of this chapter, a majority of participants continued to face housing and financial instability following their exit from the program. As Kennedy describes, the TLP was able to support young people during their time in the program, but the reality is they had to one day leave and reenter a society plagued by the same structural inequities that resulted in the situation of homelessness in the first place. Kennedy warns of getting “comfortable.” He knows that no matter what takes place inside the walls of the TLP, what is happening on the outside of those walls will persist, and one day youth have to return back to communities where in Kennedy's circumstances as a young man of color he will continue to be marginalized, victimized and oppressed: “I think if you don't have a plan, man, you are lost. Especially these days, man, especially with Black people. I think that we just born with the odds against us” (Kennedy, 24).

Participants were acutely aware of what it meant to be a youth of color trying to survive. They shared experiences of discrimination in housing, employment, education and numerous other settings. They understood what it meant to cope with unjust treatment and victimization.

Like I read this book. It's called *Countering the Conspiracy to Destroy Black Boys*. I learned where – I'm telling you I never learned so much from a book in my life. And it just told me how America like it's how the American education system is. It's not designed for me to succeed. And I was always smart, but it's like socially they try to cripple you socially. They couldn't cripple me here (putting to his head). You know

what I'm saying? They couldn't cripple my mind because I was always smart. I was one of the kids, you know, I always wanted to learn. I didn't even grow up in that bad of a situation, man, and it's crazy how much – I feel like they just got this stipulation for black kids. It's horrible. It's just like ain't nobody—you know what I'm saying? It's crazy. It's crazy how you go through stuff. (Rupert, 21)

However, while some participants referenced the power of structural oppression generally, most did not explicitly attribute their continued experiences of poverty and financial and housing instability to external causes. In fact, for participants who had experienced great success during their time in the program, only to return to homelessness and struggle a few short years later, they expressed a feeling of failure and shame. They had made significant gains in their lives while in the TLP, yet the progress they made seemed fleeting as they once again were back to wondering where they would sleep tonight.

Every now and again, I sit back and I think if I could go back what would I do, you know, what did I do wrong, I retrace myself and think what mistakes did I make? My life has been you know, I was so young, but those was my happiest days in (the TLP). I felt great about who I was and what I was doing and when I lost it, it was like it would never go back to being the same. (Marcus, 28).

Personally, this feeling was one of the most heartbreaking findings. Participants were confused by the dissonance experienced when they evaluated the accomplishments they achieved while in the TLP against the losses incurred since leaving. They internalized fault and blamed themselves. Like Marcus, they found themselves wondering “what did I do wrong?” Marcus describes the TLP as his happiest days; he left the program nearly eight years ago. As discussed in Chapter IV, participants had been moving toward greater self-actualization and building meaningful connections with others. Many found home, family, a place where they finally belonged. For those like Marcus who were still struggling, it was difficult to understand how such substantial movement forward had been so rapidly derailed.

VI. DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to understand the perceived impact, if any, of the housing and support services provided by a transitional living program (TLP) on the lives of formerly homeless youth over time. Four primary research questions were examined through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 32 participants who previously lived in a TLP: (1) What are the experiences of youth after leaving transitional living programs? (2) What are young peoples' perceptions of the impact, if any, of transitional living programs on their lives? (3) How do young people view the usefulness of specific services offered by the transitional living program? (4) How do young peoples' perceptions of the impact of transitional living programs on their lives compare with standard indicators of stability utilized in the field such as sustained housing, stable employment, educational achievement, and health? The first section of this chapter examines the results of this study in relation to each research question and connects these findings to theories of social support, a positive youth development approach to practice, an ecosystems perspective and structural social work. The second section of this chapter identifies the implications of these findings as they relate to youth homelessness policy and practice as well as implications for social work education and future research. Finally, this chapter concludes with a discussion of the study's limitations.

A. Research Questions

1. The Experiences of Youth After Leaving the TLP

Since leaving the TLP most participants continued to experience financial and housing instability. While the majority (66% of the sample) were in stable housing at the time of their interview, for most, the road there was filled with continued financial stress as a result of inadequate income. The economic challenges facing participants led to eviction, couch surfing

(temporarily staying with friends, relatives, or sometimes with complete strangers for brief periods of time), moving to undesired locations, and for 59 percent of the sample, subsequent experiences of homelessness. Participants struggled to find employment with wages sufficient to meet all financial obligations and frequently had to take positions at a great distance from their residence and work multiple jobs to make ends meet. Expenses increased as participants became responsible for family members who were also struggling and/or had their own children who they needed to support. The stress and time accompanying ongoing efforts to regain stability left little time and no financial resources to further education goals leaving many participants farther than they anticipated from the careers and futures they dreamed of while in the TLP.

2. Participant Perception of the Impact of the TLP on Their Lives

On the whole, participants continued to struggle after leaving the TLP; however, most described the program as playing a significant and positive role in their lives today—no matter how difficult the days since leaving had continued to be. They described their time in the program as one of the happiest of their lives. They were proud of what they accomplished while in the TLP and grateful for the relationships they built while there. They described their time in the program as a moment in their lives when they could finally breathe. A time where they had respite from the victimization and uncertainty they had faced before and during homelessness. A time they felt as though they were a part of a community—a community that provided strength, a range of critical supports and a place where they felt they finally belonged. Participants felt a sense of home and family while in the TLP and believed they grew substantially as a person as a direct result of their involvement in the program. Further, nearly half of participants believed without the TLP they would not be alive today and nearly all participants continued to receive support from relationships built with staff and youth during their time in the program.

These findings are consistent with theories of social support. While multiple theories of social support exist, they are united in the premise that social relationships offer critical protections in times of vulnerability. As outlined in Chapter I, House (1981) categorizes supportive behaviors into four types: emotional support (empathy, love, trust and caring); instrumental support (tangible aid); informational support (advice and information); and appraisal support (feedback, validation and affirmation). The results of this study indicate that while in the TLP, participants experienced all four of these support types through their individual relationships with staff members and peers, their membership in the community as a whole and the concrete services provided by the program. For many, elements of these supports persisted through permanent connections they built with individual staff members and peers who remain in their lives today. With that said, the loss of the intensity of social supports offered by the TLP after exiting the program left youth again feeling vulnerable and, in some instances, abandoned. The hub of their emotional, instrumental, informational and appraisal supports was no longer accessible to them, and there did not seem to be a commensurate replacement.

3. The Usefulness of Specific Services Offered by the TLP

Despite for many the continued struggle to remain stable and the sense of loss experienced after leaving, participants universally believed TLPs to be an essential strategy in our work to end youth homelessness. They understood the needs of unaccompanied young people in housing crisis as distinct from those of older adults and families. Most had experienced significant trauma before entering the program, and none had ever lived completely on their own before. They saw the TLP model of congregate living and therefore 24-hour access to support from staff and peers, as a critical step toward emotional health and self-sufficiency. Most participants believed young people need time to adequately prepare for independent living.

Equally important was the opportunity to do so surrounded by others who can identify with their circumstances and provide a range of supports intended to assist with their transition to stability and wellness. They appreciated the structured nature of the program and felt it provided the consistency and guidance they needed but had not experienced before coming to the TLP.

In addition to the utility of a group shared residence housing model, participants believed the support provided by the TLP beyond the provision of basic needs to be critical. They described the importance of holistic services that incorporated all parts of their lives and believed this to be an essential quality of an effective TLP, frequently drawing comparisons with other housing programs that lacked focus on this type of assistance. This support included a range of education, employment, physical and mental health, life skills and recreation services. Without these services, participants did not feel the program would be useful. While a safe place to sleep and consistent meals were critical, it was the opportunity to receive more comprehensive assistance individualized to their unique goals that participants found most valuable. When this support was not present in other programs, participants felt they became just a number, and their humanity was ignored. The only service participants felt was missing from the specific TLP they had lived in was more intentional supports for parenting youth. Most participants (with and without children) believed there should be additional opportunities for children of TLP residents to be included more thoughtfully into the program.

These findings are consistent with a positive youth development (PYD) approach to youth work. As discussed in Chapter I, the goal of PYD-guided practice is to support the transition of youth into a healthy adulthood through the cultivation of a sense of competence, usefulness, belonging and empowerment (Wilson-Simons, 2007). Positive youth development represented a significant paradigm shift in youth services where the field moved from a focus on

problems and deficiencies to one dedicated to preparation and strengths. The elements of a TLP identified by participants as most useful directly correspond to the six characteristics associated with PYD practice (the 6 Cs) discussed in Chapter I. Participants provided numerous examples (see Chapter IV and Chapter V) of how through the services provided and relationships built the TLP directly fostered their sense of confidence, character, caring, competence and connection. They also described their desire to now make a difference in the lives of others (the 6th C for contribution) by paying it forward through their support of their friends, assistance to strangers in crisis and interest in careers in social services. During their time in the program they found the environment and support necessary to allow them to become the people they wanted to be. They received services that brought futures they had not before envisioned as possible into focus, and experienced connections that made them believe they were worth love and validation from others and, perhaps most importantly, from themselves.

4. Perceptions of the Impact of TLPs in Comparison to Standard Outcomes

Many funders, and therefore TLPs, measure program success through an assessment of a young person's housing and financial stability, education attainment and general health at their times of exit from the program and for a specified period of time following their exit when possible to locate youth. These are undeniably critical outcomes to both understand and to work toward. As this is the first study to investigate the experiences of youth who exited a TLP more than six months ago (DHHS is currently conducting a study measuring outcomes at 12 and 18 months, results expected in 2016), it is particularly meaningful to examine these indicators for a group of young people who have been out of the program between 1 and 11 years. Unfortunately, the results are not encouraging. The findings of this study as they relate to these outcome indicators pose an important question for those of us concerned about the well-being

and futures of youth experiencing homelessness: If young people believe their time in the program was so highly beneficial, why are they still facing significant levels of crisis and instability years after leaving?

Ecosystems theory (described in Chapter I) locates the experiences of participants at the center of intertwining and reciprocal contextual influences such as families, neighborhoods, schools and structural oppression (Mattaini, 2008). What has happened for young people since leaving the TLP is influenced by personal events such as the birth of a child, a health condition or a move to a new location; however, it is also impacted by systemic factors such as a national financial crisis and institutional racism. Young people are leaving TLPs and continuing to live in a range of complex environments and systems that, for this sample, included: years of high unemployment across the country, hitting record levels for youth of color; a national crisis related to a lack of affordable housing; and living (at least initially upon exit from the TLP) in the most racially segregated city in the country—three conditions with well established connections to limiting housing mobility and therefore, stability (Arnold, Crowley, Bravve, Brundage, & Biddlecombe, 2014; Fogg, Harrington, & Khatiwada, 2015; Glaeser & Vigdor, 2012).

Arguably, it is the intention of a TLP to supersede all of these contextual influences to successfully move young people to permanent safety and stability no matter what circumstances they may encounter along the way. The participants in this study, 97 percent identifying as persons of color, overwhelmingly believed the support provided by the TLP to be consistent with their needs at the time but would largely go on to experience continued financial and housing instability. Although the small, non-randomized sample and study design utilized in this research preclude any definitive conclusions, the findings presented here suggest that for this particular

group of young people, certain states and conditions such as poverty and racism may be too pervasive and too embedded in our country for a TLP as it currently functions to effectively surmount them. I am drawn back to Kennedy's words: "I think if you don't have a plan, man, you are lost. Especially these days, man, especially with Black people. I think that we just born with the odds against us" (Kennedy, 24). The question becomes: Is it *possible* for a TLP to implement services that can better prepare youth to surmount challenges they encounter in the future as a result of the macro- and chronosystems they are a part of and if so, what must a TLP do differently?

Structural social work theories direct our attention to the dramatically uneven distribution of power in the United States and its role in the creation and sustainment of conditions such as poverty and homelessness (Mulally, 2007). A structural perspective understands the charge of social work as two-fold: first, caring for the victims of oppressive structures; and second, taking action to create the social, economic and political changes required to eliminate them (Mulally, 2007). According to the particular sample of youth in this study, TLPs appear to be successful in tackling the first of these; however, if we are to truly end homelessness for young people, it stands to reason that we must also address the second and work to change the conditions that led to their situations of homelessness in the first place. A structural perspective demands we work for social and economic justice for all human beings. This involves not just the immediate care of individuals who are suffering but also includes a charge to work toward the equal protection of our fundamental human rights and the redistribution of wealth required to truly end the continued marginalization of excluded groups. With that said, the findings presented here suggest we need TLPs while we complete this work. Participants in this study believed that TLPs provided a vital break from victimization; a break they directly attributed to saving young lives.

TLPs appear to serve a critical function by keeping young people safe, supported and nurtured, a purpose of great value while we continue to work toward comprehensive social change. Further, the results of this study suggest young people need the relationships and competencies they build in a TLP to bolster their continued survival once leaving—to keep them going until the social change required finally comes.

B. Implications

The findings from this study have important implications for social work practice, policy, education and future research. They are described below.

1. Recommendations for Policy and Practice

The findings of this study have concrete implications for providers and policy-makers concerned about the welfare of young people facing housing instability. As funding, program requirements, services provided and eligibility criteria for TLPs are directly authorized through legislation (Reconnecting Homeless Youth Act [RHYA], P.L. 110-378) the policy and practice implications for TLPs are heavily intertwined and as such, will be discussed together in this section. I will first describe what the results of this study indicate the field is doing well; second, I will discuss areas where they suggest modification to current practice is indicated.

a. What's Working

The findings of this study suggest young people perceive TLPs to be a successful model of housing for youth in situations of homelessness. Participants reported that in general TLPs provide the right intensity, quality and range of supports young people require when facing housing instability. With the exception of recreation services, all other supportive services identified by youth as critical (education, employment, life skills and health) are mandated by the RHYA and therefore provided to varying degrees by TLPs across the country. Guidelines

released for programs from DHHS explicitly focus on providing services that enhance safety, well-being and permanent connections for youth—three outcomes also highlighted by participants as essential.

b. What Needs to Change

While the general structure and services provided by TLPs appear to be beneficial, the findings of this study suggest the consideration of several modifications and service additions in order for TLPs to more closely align with the lived experience of those who participate in them.

Eligibility and Exclusion Criteria: The age range for youth in TLPs should be extended and length of stay limitations should be eliminated. According to an analysis of U.S Census Bureau data by the Pew Research Center, in 2012, 56 percent of young people ages 18 to 24 and 16 percent of individuals ages 25 to 31 resided at home with their parents (Fry, 2013). Further, a study conducted by Clark University surveyed a nationally representative sample of 1006 parents of children ages 18 to 29 and found that 74 percent continued to provide financial support to their adult children (Arnett & Schwabb, 2013). Participants indicated, like their peers across the country, they were not ready to live on their own at age 21—a finding that is in line with not just the above economic and generational trends but also a growing body of research on adolescent brain development (Strauch, 2004). Increasing the age of eligibility and eliminating length of stay requirements would allow a TLP to provide more years of protection and support for young people vulnerable to continued instability, not only as a result of their age, but also potentially due to ongoing experiences of oppression. Doing so would respond to participants’ concerns regarding independent living, allowing more time for youth to gradually transition into their own apartments and providing a safety net for them to be able to return to the TLP, should they face challenges after leaving. Of course, while these changes are indicated to be useful, a lack of

resources available for programs to sustain services is a realistic hurdle for agencies operating TLPs. Over 1200 youth were on waiting lists for TLPs in 2014 (DHHS, 2014, October 14). Funding levels must be increased for TLPs to support an extension of services and an increase in beds, otherwise doing so would result in less youth being served.

In addition to eligibility and exclusion criteria, documentation of homelessness prerequisites for youth entering TLPs are prohibitive. While DHHS does not require a youth to provide proof of homelessness to enter the program, agencies must frequently leverage funding with other sources that do in order to operate the TLP. For example, HUD requires all individuals receiving housing services to provide written documentation of homelessness, ranging from certification from a social service professional to court orders and eviction notices (HUD, n.d.). While certainly providers can, and do, find workarounds to meet eligibility documentation requirements in order to ensure individuals can enter housing, the fact they exist at all is troublesome. The experiences of the participants of this study underscore the importance of understanding homelessness as a situation young people who are struggling may move in and out of, rather than a distinctly defined population. Housing instability is not something easily, or accurately, certified by stipulated time periods or specified sleeping environments. When the first thing a TLP does is ask an individual to prove they are deserving of help, arguably the program fails to understand and respond to the possible structural roots of homelessness discussed earlier, and conceivably, also directly contributes to the further victimization of young people by preventing them from accessing services they need due to fear of ineligibility or stigma.

Funding for Outcomes: More and more funders are moving to performance-based funding models in social services. While this reflects a well-intentioned effort to support programs and services that are making a difference in the lives of others—and likewise,

eliminate those found to be ineffective—continuing to focus on outcomes centered on attainment of future stability as the primary, and often sole, measure of effectiveness is problematic. As the findings presented indicate, doing so may be failing to: (1) account for the possible structural roots of youth homelessness in the United States that may be preventing young people from achieving future stability and (2) capture the most important role TLPs serve from the perspective of youth—preventing immediate harm, increasing systems of social support, and nurturing young lives during their stay in a TLP. There is an emphasis in the field on preparing youth for independence and self-sufficiency. It is written into the RHYA legislation and as a result is a program outcome for TLPs across the country. The results of this study suggest its primacy may warrant reexamination. Young people certainly need to obtain stability. Programs should strive to support youth as they work to acquire the skills necessary to be successful tenants, employees and students. I would argue based on the findings of this study, however, that stability for youth leaving TLPs is not achieved through a state of self-sufficiency generally understood as self-reliance but rather that true self-sufficiency is dependent on strengthening one's community of support. As we know from theories of social support, other people are how we survive. They provide encouragement. They help us make rent during the months where no matter how many hours we work, ends simply do not meet. They call us when we are struggling through difficult days. They share meals with us and help us weigh our options when we don't know how to move forward. They provide the resources, opportunities and nurturance required to survive. It is quite possibly a focus on the concepts of independence and self-sufficiency that landed us in this state of such massive economic and social inequality in the first place. Somewhere along the way, we stopped taking care of one another and began to define success as a state of complete self-reliance. According to the participants in this study, successful TLPs are

building lasting connections, encouraging personal growth and developing competencies. As such, useful performance measures for TLPs should not only examine future housing, employment, education and health stability for young people but also prioritize and value these intermediate outcomes of building relationships, proficiencies and self. Doing so would allow for the evaluation of the effectiveness of TLP programs that shifts the focus from one of achieving independence to one of strengthening interdependence, thereby responding to what participants in this study articulated to be the enduring benefits of the services received in the program over time.

Add Elements of Structural Social Work Practice: Staff working in TLPs can reduce stigma and feelings of shame by helping young people understand the links between their housing instability and oppression by societal structures. Further, they can provide the tools youth need to effectively respond. Workers can accomplish this by: providing information to young people about structural oppression and their rights; encouraging youth to question unjust policies and practices; coaching them to defend themselves against victimizing systems, places and people; connecting young people to others who are experiencing similar struggles; partnering with youth to provide resources and support when they choose to take action; and sharing power with youth with regard to decisions being made both in their work together as well as in the TLP and the organization as a whole (Hick, Peters, Corner, & London, 2010). These strategies can be implemented within individual youth - worker relationships, however, the structure of a TLP also provides a perfect opportunity to practice these strategies through group work. More opportunities for group work would allow young people to engage with one another, strengthen their sense of community, address their own needs and those of others, and work together toward individual goals as well as collective change. Additionally, agencies can support

movement toward greater social change by providing staff working in TLPs with information, time and opportunities to join existing advocacy groups in their work to promote policies that protect the rights of young people facing poverty and housing crisis.

Increased Education and Employment Support: Without a comparison or control group, it is impossible to know the effectiveness of specific services provided by the TLP, in particular if participants might have fared differently without having received those services. However, an understanding of the systemic challenges young people will continue to face throughout their lives suggests that if we can do more to equip youth with the skills, experiences and credentialing required to more effectively compete for employment that offers a living wage, we should. Participants reported limited opportunities to pursue education once they left the TLP as a result of lack of time and resources. TLPs can capitalize on the period youth are in the program by emphasizing and supporting continued education during a youth's stay. Additionally, programs should also move beyond the work of building job readiness skills to creating supportive employment opportunities, both in the agency and community, that young people can move into immediately in order to practice new employment skills while simultaneously building their resume. It is not enough to make sure that youth are job-ready; we must also do our part as providers to make sure that jobs are available.

Enhanced and Intentional Aftercare: Required standards for aftercare for DHHS-funded TLPs can be satisfied by simply indicating the program provided a youth exiting the TLP referrals to other assistance and/or offered exit counseling before they left (National Clearinghouse on Youth and Families [NCYF], 2006). This is insufficient and, in many cases, harmful. Young people coping with poverty move in and out of situations of subsequent homelessness and crisis and need ongoing support. While they may not be able to reenter

housing, youth should be able to return to the TLP for emotional, appraisal, informational, and to the extent feasible instrumental assistance no matter how long it has been since they left. This is the very definition of a permanent connection, and if DHHS is invested in promoting this as an outcome, they must encourage TLPs to offer more substantial aftercare support and provide the financial means for programs to do so. Young people are building deep relationships with staff members and should be afforded every opportunity possible to continue those relationships after leaving housing. Paul Farmer, a physician and global humanitarian, calls for a change in how we understand the work of supporting others from that of providing *aid* to rather providing *accompaniment* (Farmer, 2013). He writes: “The companion, the accompagnateur, says: ‘I’ll go with you and support you on your journey where it leads. I’ll share your fate for a while’” (Farmer, 2013, p. 234). Our work must be more than that of providing temporary assistance. We must find ways to truly accompany young people as they move through life after leaving the TLP—to continue to walk beside them for as long as they need us. An important part of this accompaniment should be connecting youth to a community of support that includes individuals and resources outside of the TLP that will be available to support them for years to come.

Further, TLPs should develop a formal process for regular follow-up with all participants for as long as it is possible to reach them. Programs could send annual birthday cards via email, and set a schedule to call or email twice a year to check in, see if youth need any additional support, and most importantly remind young people they remain a valuable member of the community. Also, in the age of social media, staying connected with youth is easier than ever before (Rice & Barman-Adhikari, 2014). The program could create a Facebook page and/or Twitter account operated by the TLP for participants only. This would allow the program to

maintain a presence in the lives of young people in a way that is easily accessible, not time-intensive and effective even when addresses and phone numbers of youth change.

Evaluate Professional Boundaries: While professional boundaries should remain an area of practice determined solely by each individual social worker and their organization (and of course, the code of ethics), the findings suggest it might be useful to reevaluate some of our generally accepted practices in this area. For example, being able to maintain relationships with staff members after leaving the program proved to be an important source of social support for youth. Many organizations do not allow staff members to share private contact information with those they work with and/or to continue their relationship after program exit. When youth form relationships with staff so meaningful they are described as family members, such a policy feels prohibitive and unnatural. Also, social workers are commonly instructed by social work educators and supervisors not to share personal information. According to the participants in this study, such a policy can prevent genuine human relationships from forming, contribute to young people feeling further stigmatized as “the client,” and reinforce power imbalances within the relationship. Instead, young people believed it was important for staff to be themselves and share their lives with youth as equal members of the TLP community. They did not believe it was healthy or appropriate for staff to discuss their personal problems, and they appreciated boundaries designed to keep them physically and emotionally safe. However, they were excited to see pictures of staff members’ children, hear stories of their triumphs, and know that they too desired to build an authentic and lasting relationship.

2. Recommendations for Social Work Education

The implications discussed as they relate to policy and practice are equally relevant for social work education. This study provides educators with an example of how an ecosystems

perspective and structural lens can be used in practice to understand and address problems facing those we work with. It offers a fully illustrated example for students of why just caring for those victimized by oppression may not be enough. It also offers social work students a more holistic understanding of how the services they provide may impact the lives of the individuals they will be working with and on behalf of by emphasizing what young people perceive to be most valuable about the services they participated in rather than solely focusing on externally defined measures of success. Additionally, this study can be used by educators to encourage students to question unnecessary and potentially harmful policies, procedures and practices in their field settings. Finally, it is my hope that this research will encourage the next generation of social workers to demand that the voices of those they serve are not only heard, but privileged, when it comes to decisions that directly impact their lives.

3. Recommendations for Future Research

This study responds to a direct call from scholars in the area of youth homelessness for services research (Kidd, 2012; Milburn et al., 2005). Inquiry in the area has primarily focused on identifying the characteristics and needs of the population, leaving a critical gap in our understanding of the usefulness of the current solutions being implemented. Future research must continue to respond to this void. It is also imperative that we investigate the effectiveness of the interventions being provided directly through the voices of young people who have participated in those services. This is essential if we are to design and provide services that are consistent with youth recommendations. It is equally crucial that future research also explores these questions through prospective cohort study designs, when possible with randomized, controlled trials and quasi-experimental methods, to determine the internal validity of findings, and replicate with representative samples to increase the generalizability of the findings, something

this study is not able to do. Finally, as discussed later in the next section of this chapter, this study was completed at one site in a large urban city with a sample that was 94 percent African American. It may be useful for future research to replicate this study with participants from more than one TLP, a more diverse sample and/or in a rural area.

C. Limitations

This study has three primary limitations. First, as mentioned above, the study is restricted to participants from one site located in an urban area. This element of the research design was intentional; the site was purposively selected because as discussed in Chapter III, I believe my prior relationship and familiarity with the program was an asset in participant recruitment as well as with regard to the credibility of the analysis presented. However, as a result of this decision findings from this study are limited to the selected sample of youth who previously experienced homelessness in the city of Chicago and participated in the TLP operated by the chosen study site. Additionally, the results of this study are limited by the sample selection method utilized and participants may not be representative of all young people who received services from the TLP. The transferability of these findings to other contexts and/or participants is dependent on consistency with both the selected sample and specific study site.

Second, my prior relationship with the program and a majority of participants may have introduced both social desirability and researcher bias into the study. In order to reduce social desirability bias—where participants might inaccurately report behaviors so that they are viewed more favorably by others—I took steps to ensure youth understood during the recruitment, consent and data collection processes that I am no longer in my former role with the agency operating the TLP and am only invested in finding out their genuine perspectives. I reminded them of confidentiality procedures and provided all participants an opportunity to review the

findings before they were published. Steps taken to reduce potential researcher bias and ensure the trustworthiness of the findings included strategies described previously (and in more detail) in Chapter III, such as: maximum-variation sampling; conducting a member check; employing a second coder; using thick description; journaling; and frequent consultation with the chair of my dissertation committee.

Finally, as a qualitative study there are limitations present when it comes to drawing conclusions about the effects of TLP services. This research is not able to state the efficacy of TLPs as an intervention for homeless youth, and this is not its intention. Rather, the purpose of this study was to understand the impact of services from the perspectives of the young people who have participated in them.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A YOUTH INTERVIEW GUIDE

(Note: As the title indicates, the following questions represent a guide for the principal investigator from which to structure the interview; however, as is typical of qualitative interviewing the exact wording and order of questions will remain flexible in order to be responsive to the natural flow of the interview)

Complete informed consent procedures

PI: Thank you for agreeing to talk with me today. We are going to be discussing your life since leaving the transitional living program—how you are doing now and your experiences leading up to this point. I will also be asking you some questions about how you feel about the services you received when you were living in the transitional living program. I expect that this interview will take about one to two hours. I will be using a tape recorder during the interview in order to make sure that I get everything you say; however, please feel free to turn it off at any time. When I write up the study I may quote certain things you say but I will not identify you in any way. Do you have any questions before we get started?

1. To begin, can you tell me a little bit about yourself? Tell me about what a typical day for you looks like. (e.g. What did you do yesterday?)
2. Beginning with when you left the program, tell me as much as you can, and are comfortable with, about how your life has been since leaving the TLP.
3. If the TLP did not exist, would your life be different? If so, how? If not, why not?
4. How would you describe your experience in the TLP to a friend who was considering staying there?
5. Knowing what you know now, if could go back and design a TLP for yourself at the time you needed it, what would it look like?
 - a. What would you keep the same?
 - b. What would you change?
 - c. What would you add?
6. Was there anything I didn't ask you about that you've thought about while we've been talking and would like to share?
7. Thank you so much for participating in this study! That's all the questions I have. How was this experience for you

APPENDIX B: RESEARCH PARTICIPANT INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM

University of Illinois at Chicago Research Information and Consent for Participation in Social Behavioral Research The Impact of Transitional Living Programs: Perspectives of Homeless Youth

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Researchers are required to provide a consent form such as this one to tell you about the research, to explain that taking part is voluntary, to describe the risks and benefits of participation, and to help you to make an informed decision. You should feel free to ask the researchers any questions you may have.

Principal Investigator Name and Title: Casey Holtschneider, Doctoral Candidate
Department and Institution: Jane Addams College of Social Work, University of Illinois at Chicago
Address and Contact Information: 1040 W. Harrison St., Chicago, IL 60607

Conflict of Interest

The principal investigator, Casey Holtschneider, receives money from Teen Living Programs for work (e.g., grant writing) that is not related to this study.

The Institutional Review Board has determined that the possibility of benefit to the researcher is not likely to affect your safety and/or the scientific quality of the study. If you would like more information, please ask the principal investigator.

Why am I being asked?

You are being asked to be a subject in a research study about the perceived impact of transitional living programs (TLPs) for homeless youth.

You have been asked to participate in the research because you previously resided in a transitional living program between one and ten years ago, are at least 18 years of age, and possess characteristics that will maximize the variation in the study sample.

Your participation in this research is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future dealings with the University of Illinois at Chicago or Teen Living Programs. **If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.**

Approximately 40 subjects may be involved in this research at UIC.

What is the purpose of this research?

The purpose of this research study is to understand the perceived impact of the services provided by TLPs on the lives of young people. This study will be the first to understand the outcomes of TLPs through the experiences and voices of the young people who have lived there.

What procedures are involved?

This research will be performed at a location that is most convenient for you. You will need to come to the study site one time at the agreed upon date and time. The study procedures include participation in one interview lasting approximately 1-2 hours that includes a brief questionnaire. During this interview you will be asked questions related to your time living in a TLP as well as your experiences since leaving the program. If you choose to be contacted in the future, you will be invited to participate in a focus group at a later date where you will have an opportunity to review the study's preliminary findings.

What are the potential risks and discomforts?

To the best of our knowledge, the things you will be doing have no more risk of harm than you would experience in everyday life. However, some of questions you will be asked during the interview are personal and therefore there is a possibility that they may make you feel uncomfortable. For example, you will be asked about how your life has been since leaving the TLP and how you feel about your time in the program. You are free to skip any questions that you prefer not to answer, take a break, or end the interview at any time. There is also a risk of a loss of privacy (revealing to others that you are taking part in this study) if you should choose a Teen Living Programs' site as the location for your interview. Therefore you may choose any location that is most convenient for you including your home, school, work, or public space such as a park or café. Finally, although precautions will be taken to minimize this risk, it is possible that a breach of confidentiality (others may find out identifiable information collected or disclosed during the research) could occur.

Are there benefits to taking part in the research?

This study is not designed to benefit you directly. This study is designed to learn more about transitional living programs for homeless youth. The study results may be used to help other people in the future.

What other options are there?

You have the option to not participate in this study.

What about privacy and confidentiality?

The only person who will know that you are a research subject is the principal investigator and potentially a hired transcription service that will be required to sign a confidentiality agreement. However, study information which identifies you and the consent form signed by you may be

looked at and/or copied for the purpose of monitoring the research by the UIC Office for the Protection of Research Subjects and State of Illinois auditors. Otherwise information about you will only be disclosed to others with your written permission, or if necessary to protect your rights or welfare or if required by law. When the results of the research are published or discussed in conferences, no information will be included that would reveal your identity.

Your private, identifiable information will be kept confidential and will only be used for research purposes. However, if the researcher becomes aware that you may cause serious harm to yourself or others, the researcher may report this to the appropriate authorities without your consent. You will not be asked any identifying information during the interview and should any identifying information come up, it will be excluded/changed during the transcription process. Information you provide during the interview may be quoted directly in the findings of the study, however it will not be associated with any identifying information. You will be assigned a pseudonym (fake name) of your choosing during the interview that will identify your data. The researcher's dissertation committee, comprised of faculty supervising the study, will have access to the data only identified by pseudonym.

Only the researcher (and potentially a transcription service) will have access to the audio files and interview transcripts. All consent forms and eligibility checklists will be stored in locked file cabinets separate from the study data. All electronic data files will be encrypted and stored on a password-protected computer that only the principal investigator has access to. In order to link your data over time, a list connecting your name, participant ID and pseudonym will be stored in a secure, locked file cabinet, separate from the study data. This list will be destroyed once data collection is completed. The audio file of your interview will be destroyed upon completion of the study. Only the principal investigator and potentially a hired transcription service will have access to this audio file and the audio files will not be used for any other purpose besides this study.

If you choose to participate in a focus group to review the study's preliminary findings, although we ask everyone in the group to respect everyone's privacy and confidentiality, and not to identify anyone in the group or repeat what is said during the discussion, please remember that other participants in the group may accidentally disclose what was said.

What are the costs for participating in this research?

There are no costs to you for participating in this research.

Will I be reimbursed for any of my expenses or paid for my participation in this research?

You will receive \$20 cash for your completed study interview to compensate you for your time.

Can I withdraw or be removed from the study?

If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time. During the interview, you may choose not to answer a question or discuss specific issues. You may also take a break or end the interview at any time. Also, the researcher may end

the interview if circumstances arise in which this would be in your best interest. In the event you withdraw or are asked to leave the study, you will still be compensated as described above.

Who should I contact if I have questions?

Contact the researcher Casey Holtschneider at 773-875-6800 or cholts2@uic.edu or her faculty sponsor, Mark Mattaini at 312-996-0040 or mattaini@uic.edu if you have any questions about this study or your part in it, and/or if you have questions, concerns or complaints about the research.

What are my rights as a research subject?

If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or if you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, including questions, concerns, complaints, or to offer input, you may call the Office for the Protection of Research Subjects (OPRS) at 312-996-1711 or 1-866-789-6215 (toll-free) or e-mail OPRS at uicirb@uic.edu.

Remember:

Your participation in this research is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without affecting that relationship.

Signature of Subject

I have read (or someone has read to me) the above information. I have been given an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this research. I will be given a copy of this signed and dated form.

Signature

Date

Printed Name

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

Date (must be same as subject's)

Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent

Permission to Record Interview

It is okay to make an audio recording of my interview for the purposes of this study.

Signature

Date

Signature of Researcher

Date (must be same as subject's)

Permission to Review TLP Case File

It is okay to review my TLP case file to verify information regarding my: length of time in the program, services received while in the program, nature of exit from the program, and time I have been out of the program.

Signature

Date

Signature of Researcher

Date (must be same as subject's)

Permission to Contact Participant in the Future

It is okay to contact me in the future to inform me of opportunities to review the preliminary findings of this study and to ensure that I feel my identity has been adequately concealed.

Signature

Date

Signature of Researcher

Date (must be same as subject's)

Participant Telephone #

Participant Email Address

APPENDIX C: SUBJECT INFORMATION SHEET

**University of Illinois at Chicago
Subject Information Sheet
The Impact of Transitional Living Programs: Perspectives of Homeless Youth**

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Researchers are required to provide a consent form such as this one to tell you about the research, to explain that taking part is voluntary, to describe the risks and benefits of participation, and to help you to make an informed decision. You should feel free to ask the researchers any questions you may have.

Principal Investigator Name and Title: Casey Holtschneider, Doctoral Candidate
Department and Institution: Jane Addams College of Social Work, University of Illinois at Chicago
Address and Contact Information: 1040 W. Harrison St., Chicago, IL 60607

Conflict of Interest

The principal investigator, Casey Holtschneider, receives money from Teen Living Programs for work (e.g., grant writing) that is not related to this study.

The Institutional Review Board has determined that the possibility of benefit to the researcher is not likely to affect your safety and/or the scientific quality of the study. If you would like more information, please ask the principal investigator.

Why am I being asked?

You are being asked to be a subject in a research study about the perceived impact of transitional living programs (TLPs) for homeless youth.

You have been asked to participate in the research because you previously resided in a transitional living program between one and ten years ago, are at least 18 years of age, and possess characteristics that will maximize the variation in the study sample.

Your participation in this research is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future dealings with the University of Illinois at Chicago or Teen Living Programs. **If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.**

Approximately 40 subjects may be involved in this research at UIC.

What is the purpose of this research?

The purpose of this research study is to understand the perceived impact of the services provided by TLPs on the lives of young people. This study will be the first to understand the outcomes of TLPs through the experiences and voices of the young people who have lived there.

What procedures are involved?

The study procedures include participation in one interview lasting approximately 1-2 hours that includes a brief questionnaire. As you are currently living at a distance greater than 100 miles from Chicago, Illinois, a telephone interview will be arranged. During this interview you will be asked questions related to your time living in a TLP as well as your experiences since leaving the program. Additionally, if you choose to be contacted in the future, you will be invited to participate in a focus group at a later date where you will have an opportunity to review the study's preliminary findings.

What are the potential risks and discomforts?

To the best of our knowledge, the things you will be doing have no more risk of harm than you would experience in everyday life. However, some of the questions you will be asked during the interview are personal and therefore there is a possibility that they may make you feel uncomfortable. For example, you will be asked about how your life has been since leaving the TLP and how you feel about your time in the program. You are free to skip any questions that you prefer not to answer, take a break, or end the interview at any time. There is also a risk of a loss of privacy (revealing to others that you are taking part in this study) if you should choose a Teen Living Programs' site as the location for your interview. Therefore you may choose any location that is most convenient for you including your home, school, work, or public space such as a park or café. Finally, although precautions will be taken to minimize this risk, it is possible that a breach of confidentiality (others may find out identifiable information collected or disclosed during the research) could occur.

Are there benefits to taking part in the research?

This study is not designed to benefit you directly. This study is designed to learn more about transitional living programs for homeless youth. The study results may be used to help other people in the future.

What other options are there?

You have the option to not participate in this study.

What about privacy and confidentiality?

The only person who will know that you are a research subject is the principal investigator and potentially a hired transcription service that will be required to sign a confidentiality agreement. However, study information which identifies you and your Subject Information Form documenting your verbal consent may be looked at and/or copied for the purpose of monitoring the research by the UIC Office for the Protection of Research Subjects and State of Illinois auditors. Otherwise information about you will only be disclosed to others with your written permission, or if necessary to protect your rights or welfare or if required by law. When the results of the research are published or discussed in conferences, no information will be included that would reveal your identity.

Your private, identifiable information will be kept confidential and will only be used for research purposes. However, if the researcher becomes aware that you may cause serious harm to yourself or others, the researcher may report this to the appropriate authorities without your consent. You will not be asked any identifying information during the interview and should any identifying information come up, it will be excluded/changed during the transcription process. Information you provide during the interview may be quoted directly in the findings of the study, however it will not be associated with any identifying information. You will be assigned a pseudonym (fake name) of your choosing during the interview that will identify your data. The researcher's dissertation committee, comprised of faculty supervising the study, will have access to the data only identified by pseudonym.

Only the researcher (and potentially a transcription service) will have access to the audio files and interview transcripts. All subject information forms and eligibility checklists will be stored in locked file cabinets separate from the study data. All electronic data files will be encrypted and stored on a password-protected computer that only the principal investigator has access to. In order to link your data over time, a list connecting your name, participant ID and pseudonym will be stored in a secure, locked file cabinet, separate from the study data. This list will be destroyed once data collection is completed. The audio file of your interview will be destroyed upon completion of the study. Only the principal investigator and potentially a hired transcription service will have access to this audio file and the audio files will not be used for any other purpose besides this study.

If you choose to participate in a focus group to review the study's preliminary findings, although we ask everyone in the group to respect everyone's privacy and confidentiality, and not to identify anyone in the group or repeat what is said during the discussion, please remember that other participants in the group may accidentally disclose what was said.

What are the costs for participating in this research?

There are no costs to you for participating in this research.

Will I be reimbursed for any of my expenses or paid for my participation in this research?

You will receive \$20 cash for your completed study interview to compensate you for your time.

Can I withdraw or be removed from the study?

If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time. During the interview, you may choose not to answer a question or discuss specific issues. You may also take a break or end the interview at any time. Also, the researcher may end the interview if circumstances arise in which this would be in your best interest. In the event you withdraw or are asked to leave the study, you will still be compensated as described above.

Who should I contact if I have questions?

Contact the researcher Casey Holtschneider at 773-875-6800 or cholts2@uic.edu or her faculty sponsor, Mark Mattaini at 312-996-0040 or mattaini@uic.edu if you have any questions about this study or your part in it, and/or if you have questions, concerns or complaints about the research.

What are my rights as a research subject?

If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or if you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, including questions, concerns, complaints, or to offer input, you may call the Office for the Protection of Research Subjects (OPRS) at 312-996-1711 or 1-866-789-6215 (toll-free) or e-mail OPRS at uicirb@uic.edu.

Remember:

Your participation in this research is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without affecting that relationship.

Verbal Consent of Subject

The researcher has read to me the above information. I have been given an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this research. I understand that I can be mailed a copy of this form at my request.

Printed Name of Participant Indicating Verbal Consent

Date

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

Date

Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent

Permission to Record Interview

It is okay to make an audio recording of my interview for the purposes of this study.

Printed Name of Participant Indicating Verbal Consent

Date

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

Date

Permission to Review TLP Case File

It is okay to review my TLP case file to verify information regarding my: length of time in the program, services received while in the program, nature of exit from the program, and time I have been out of the program.

Printed Name of Participant Indicating Verbal Consent

Date

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

Date

Permission to Contact Participant in the Future

It is okay to contact me in the future to inform me of opportunities to review the preliminary findings of this study and to ensure that I feel my identity has been adequately concealed.

Printed Name of Participant Indicating Verbal Consent

Date

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

Date

Participant Telephone #

Participant Email Address

APPENDIX D: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION QUESTIONNAIRE

Participant ID	
Age	
Gender	
Race	
Sexual Orientation	
Length of stay in TLP	
Date of exit from TLP	
Reason for leaving TLP	

Which services did you participate in while at the TLP?

Meals		Individual education support		Individual recreation support	
Clothing/ basic items		GED classes		Activities	
Case management		Individual employment support		Music studio	
Counseling		Employment preparation program		Other:	
Psychiatrist		Life skills		Other:	
Health clinic/NP		Nutrition counseling		Other:	

Participant Reported Outcomes

Employment/Income

Are you currently working? Yes No If so, where? _____

For how long? _____ How many hours did you work last week? _____

What is your monthly income? \$ _____

Do you have other sources of income besides employment? _____

Education

Are you currently enrolled in school? Yes No If so, where? _____

What is the last level of education you completed? _____

Housing

Where have you lived since leaving the TLP? (attach additional page if necessary)

Location: _____ Length of time: _____

Location: _____ Length of time: _____

Location: _____ Length of time: _____

Location: _____ Length of time: _____

Have you experienced homelessness (defined as not have a fixed, regular nighttime residence, include couch-surfing) again since leaving the TLP? Yes No

If so, how many times? _____ For how long each time? _____

Health and Family

Do you currently have any physical health diagnoses or concerns? Yes No

If so, what are they? _____

Do you currently have any mental health diagnoses or concerns? Yes No

If so, what are they? _____

Do you have any children? Yes No If so, how many? _____

Leave box empty - For office use only

APPENDIX E

PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT SCRIPTS FOR PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR (PI)

Telephone script for when PI contacts potential participants:

Hi, is this (first name)? IF YES: Hi, my name is Casey Holtschneider. You might remember me from when I used to work at Teen Living Programs. I got your contact information from the aftercare program there because I wanted to tell you about a study that I am doing for my dissertation research at the University of Illinois at Chicago and see if you might be interested in participating. The purpose of this research is to understand how formerly homeless youth who lived in transitional living programs like Belfort House believe that that experience has impacted their life today. I am hoping to talk with people like yourself who have been out of the program for at least one year to see how you are doing now, what your life has been like since leaving the program and how you believe that your time in the program has or has not impacted your life today.

If you decide to participate you will complete one in-person interview that includes a brief questionnaire at the time of the interview. I expect it will take between one and two hours to complete both the interview and questionnaire. I will be using a tape recorder during the interview in order to make sure that I get everything you say; however, you will be able to turn it off at any time as well as take a break or end the interview at any time should you choose to. Also, when I write up the study I may quote certain things you say but I will not identify you in any way.

The interview involves minimal risk to you and your participation will be confidential. There are no costs to participate and participation will have no impact on your services or relationship with anyone at Teen Living Programs or UIC. You will receive \$20 to compensate you for your time and I will come to any location that is convenient for you. If you are currently living farther than 100 miles away from Chicago we can also arrange to complete the interview over the phone.

If you would like to participate in the study you may inform me now, later by phone at (773) 875-6800, or by email at cholts2@uic.edu. We will then set up a time to discuss the study more in-depth, go over the informed consent process, and complete the interview. Do you have any questions now?

If you would like to take some time to think about whether or not you would like to participate and/or have questions later, please contact me by phone at (773) 875-6800, by email at cholts2@uic.edu, or you may contact my advisor Dr. Mark Mattaini by phone at (312) 996-0040 or by email at mattaini@uic.edu.

Telephone script for when potential participants contact PI:

Thank you so much for calling! I am thrilled that you are interested in the study! First, I just want to confirm that you are eligible (*complete Participant Eligibility Checklist with caller*).

IF ELIGIBLE ask how they learned about the study.

Great! Let me tell you a little about the study and answer any questions you might have. You might remember me from when I used to work at Teen Living Programs. I am now at the University of Illinois at Chicago and this study will be the focus of my dissertation research. The purpose of this research is to understand how formerly homeless youth who lived in transitional living programs like Belfort House believe that that experience has impacted their life today. I am hoping to talk with people like yourself who have been out of the program for at least one year to see how you are doing now, what your life has been like since leaving the program and how you believe that your time in the program has or has not impacted your life today.

If you decide to participate you will complete one in-person interview that includes a brief questionnaire at the time of the interview. I expect it will take between one and two hours to complete both the interview and questionnaire. I will be using a tape recorder during the interview in order to make sure that I get everything you say; however, you will be able to turn it off at any time as well as take a break or end the interview at any time should you choose to. Also, when I write up the study I may quote certain things you say but I will not identify you in any way.

The interview involves minimal risk to you and your participation will be confidential. There are no costs to participate and participation will have no impact on your services or relationship with anyone at Teen Living Programs or UIC. You will receive \$20 to compensate you for your time and I will come to any location that is convenient for you. If you are currently living farther than 100 miles away from Chicago we can also arrange to complete the interview over the phone.

If you would like to participate in the study you may inform me now, later by phone at (773) 875-6800, or by email at cholts2@uic.edu. We will then set up a time to discuss the study more in-depth, go over the informed consent process, and complete the interview. Do you have any questions now?

If you would like to take some time to think about whether or not you would like to participate and/or have questions later, please contact me by phone at (773) 875-6800, by email at cholts2@uic.edu, or you may contact my advisor Dr. Mark Mattaini by phone at (312) 996-0040 or by email at mattaini@uic.edu.

Leave box empty- For office use only

APPENDIX F

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SCRIPT FOR SNOWBALL SAMPLING

Telephone script for when participants and agency staff inform potential participants of study:

Hi (first name of potential participant). This is (first name of caller). I am calling to let you know about a research study that you might be interested in participating in. The purpose of this research is to understand how formerly homeless youth who lived in transitional living programs like Belfort House believe that the experience has impacted their life today. The researcher is from UIC and used to work at the TLP and you might remember her, Casey Holtschneider. She does not work at the TLP anymore and she really wants to hear your honest perspective about how your life has been since leaving the program and what your experience in the TLP has meant to your life now that you have been gone for some time. It is a really important study that will allow your voice to be heard and potentially help improve services for youth who are homeless in the future. To participate you will complete one interview and a brief questionnaire that will take about one to two hours and you will receive \$20 for your time. If you are interested you should contact Casey at (773) 875-6800 or email her at cholts2@uic.edu. She will tell you more about the study and how to get involved.

Leave box empty- For office use only

APPENDIX G

EMAIL RECRUITMENT SCRIPT

Hi (first name). Hi, my name is Casey Holtschneider. You might remember me from when I used to work at Teen Living Programs. I got your contact information from the aftercare program there because I wanted to tell you about a study that I am doing for my dissertation research at the University of Illinois at Chicago and see if you might be interested in participating. The purpose of this research is to understand how formerly homeless youth who lived in transitional living programs like Belfort House believe that that experience has impacted their life today. I am hoping to talk with people like yourself who have been out of the program for at least one year to see how you are doing now, what your life has been like since leaving the program and how you believe that your time in the program has or has not impacted your life today. It is a really important study that will allow your voice to be heard and potentially help improve services for youth who are homeless in the future. To participate you will complete one interview and a brief questionnaire that I expect will take about one to two hours and you will receive \$20 for your time. If you are interested contact me at (773) 875-6800 or cholts2@uic.edu and I will tell you more about the study and how to get involved.

Leave box empty- For office use only

APPENDIX H

SOCIAL MEDIA (FACEBOOK) RECRUITMENT POSTING

ATTENTION FORMER BELFORT HOUSE RESIDENTS! Help improve services for homeless youth by letting your voice be heard. If you lived at Belfort House at any point during January 2003 and June 2012. We want to hear from YOU!

Casey Holtschneider, a researcher from UIC, is conducting a study on transitional living programs and needs your help! Participate in one interview and complete a brief questionnaire and receive \$20 for your time (it is expected to take about one to two hours). To learn more about this research and how to get involved contact Casey directly at 773-875-6800 or cholts2@uic.edu.

Leave box empty- For office use only

APPENDIX I: PARTICIPANT ELIGIBILITY CHECKLIST

Name of Potential Participant: _____

Eligibility Criteria (all four criteria must be met for study inclusion):

☐

Potential participant understands and speaks English well enough to complete informed consent process and study interview

☐

Potential participant is at least 18 years of age

☐

Potential participant exited the TLP between at least one year ago

☐

Potential participant will contribute to variation in the sample with regard to at least one of the following categories: gender, race, sexual orientation, length of time in the program, nature of exit from the program, and time out of the program

Eligibility Determination:

☐

Yes

☐

No

APPENDIX J: STUDY FLYER

Attention former Belfort House residents!!!!

If you lived at Belfort House at any point during January 2003 and June 2012.

I want to hear from YOU!

Help make services for youth experiencing homelessness better by letting your voice be heard. Participate in one in-person interview and receive \$20 for your time.



Here's what I want to know:

- * How has your life been since leaving Belfort House?
- * Would your life be any different if Belfort House did not exist?
- * What would you tell a friend who was thinking of staying there?
- * How would you design your own transitional living program for youth in situations of homelessness?



To learn more, contact Casey Holtschneider at 773-875-6800 or cholts2@uic.edu

Casey Holtschneider
773-875-6800
cholts2@uic.edu

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Casey Holtschneider
773-875-6800
cholts2@uic.edu

APPENDIX K: AGENCY LETTER OF SUPPORT



162 W. Hubbard St. Suite 400 Chicago, IL 60654 • T 312.568.5700 • F 312.568.5701 • E info@teenliving.org

May 16, 2013

Casey Holtschneider
Jane Addams College of Social Work
University of Illinois at Chicago
1040 W Harrison St.
Chicago, IL 60607

Re: Research study on transitional living programs for homeless youth

Dear Ms. Holtschneider:

It is a pleasure to offer my endorsement and support for your research on transitional living programs for homeless youth in Chicago. As the Chief Performance Officer of Teen Living Programs, I would like to express the willingness of the agency to work with you on this important research. For the duration of your study, Teen Living Programs is pleased to support your research in the following ways:

1. Provide contact information for former transitional living program clients who have previously consented to agency follow-up
2. Inform potential participants during routine follow-up calls about the study and how to contact you should they be interested
3. Post flyers about the study in program locations where potential participants might visit
4. Provide access to transitional living program files for former clients who consent to have their file reviewed for the purposes of the study
5. Provide space for interviews with youth should they choose Teen Living Programs as a preferred location

We look forward to collaborating with you on this important work.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Betty Bogg", is written over a horizontal line.

Betty Bogg
Chief Performance Officer
Teen Living Programs

APPENDIX L: IRB APPROVAL LETTER

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT CHICAGO

Office for the Protection of Research Subjects (OPRS)
Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research (MC 672)
203 Administrative Office Building
1737 West Polk Street
Chicago, Illinois 60612-7227

Approval Notice Initial Review (Response To Modifications)

August 1, 2013

Cathleen Holtschneider, MSW
Jane Addams School of Social Work
1040 W Harrison Street
M/C 309
Chicago, IL 60607
Phone: (773) 875-6800 / Fax: (312) 996-2770

RE: **Protocol # 2013-0625**
“The Impact of Transitional Living Programs: Perspectives of Homeless Youth”

Dear Ms. Holtschneider:

Your Initial Review application (Response To Modifications) was reviewed and approved by the Expedited review process on July 25, 2013. You may now begin your research.

Please note the following information about your approved research protocol:

Please remember to submit a copy of the transcription agreement, including language regarding confidentiality, when available. Transcription agreements must be accompanied by an Amendment form when submitted to the UIC IRB.

Protocol Approval Period: July 25, 2013 - July 25, 2014

Approved Subject Enrollment #: 40

Additional Determinations for Research Involving Minors: These determinations have not been made for this study since it has not been approved for enrollment of minors.

Performance Sites: UIC, Teen Living Programs

Sponsor: None

Research Protocol:

- a) The Impact of Transitional Living Programs: Perspectives of Homeless Youth; Version 1; 06/12/2013

Recruitment Materials:

- a) PI Scripts; Version 2; 07/10/2013
- b) Snowball Script; Version 2; 07/10/2013
- c) Email Script; Version 2; 07/10/2013
- d) Social Media Posting; Version 2; 07/10/2013
- e) Flyer; Version 2; 07/10/2013
- f) Eligibility Checklist; Version 2; 07/10/2013

Informed Consents:

- a) Participant Consent; Version 2; 07/10/2013
- b) Subject Information Sheet; Version 2; 07/10/2013
- c) A waiver of consent for recruitment only has been granted under 45 CFR 46.116(d) (minimal risk; access to agency records for identification of potential subjects; information will not be retained if subjects are not interested in enrolling; consent will be obtained at enrollment)
- d) A waiver of documentation of consent for subjects who opt to participate in interviews via telephone has been granted under 45 CFR 46.117(c)(2) (minimal risk; subjects will be verbally consented using a document with all of the elements of consent and will be offered a copy of the information sheet via mail; all other subjects will sign a written consent document)

Your research meets the criteria for expedited review as defined in 45 CFR 46.110(b)(1) under the following specific categories:

- (5) Research involving materials (data, documents, records, or specimens) that have been collected, or will be collected solely for non-research purposes (such as medical treatment or diagnosis),
- (6) Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes., (7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including but not limited to research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Please note the Review History of this submission:

Receipt Date	Submission Type	Review Process	Review Date	Review Action
06/17/2013	Initial Review	Expedited	06/20/2013	Modifications Required
07/17/2013	Response To Modifications	Expedited	07/25/2013	Approved

Please remember to:

→ Use your **research protocol number** (2013-0625) on any documents or correspondence with the IRB concerning your research protocol.

→ Review and comply with all requirements on the enclosure,

"UIC Investigator Responsibilities, Protection of Human Research Subjects"

(<http://tiger.uic.edu/depts/ovcr/research/protocolreview/irb/policies/0924.pdf>)

Please note that the UIC IRB has the prerogative and authority to ask further questions, seek additional information, require further modifications, or monitor the conduct of your research and the consent process.

Please be aware that if the scope of work in the grant/project changes, the protocol must be amended and approved by the UIC IRB before the initiation of the change.

We wish you the best as you conduct your research. If you have any questions or need further help, please contact OPRS at (312) 996-1711 or me at (312) 996-2014. Please send any correspondence about this protocol to OPRS at 203 AOB, M/C 672.

Sincerely,

Sandra Costello
Assistant Director, IRB # 2
Office for the Protection of Research

Subjects

Enclosures:

- 1. UIC Investigator Responsibilities, Protection of Human Research Subjects**
- 2. Informed Consent Documents:**
 - a) Participant Consent; Version 2; 07/10/2013
 - b) Subject Information Sheet; Version 2; 07/10/2013
- 3. Recruiting Materials:**
 - a) PI Scripts; Version 2; 07/10/2013
 - b) Snowball Script; Version 2; 07/10/2013
 - c) Email Script; Version 2; 07/10/2013
 - d) Social Media Posting; Version 2; 07/10/2013
 - e) Flyer; Version 2; 07/10/2013
 - f) Eligibility Checklist; Version 2; 07/10/2013

cc: Creasie Hairston, Jane Addams School of Social Work, M/C 309
Mark A. Mattaini (faculty advisor), Jane Addams School of Social Work, M/C 309

APPENDIX M: RESOURCE LIST FOR PARTICIPANTS

Homeless Youth Resources in Chicago

Youth over 18 years old may also access adult shelters and emergency shelters by calling "311."

*Indicates options available for youth who are pregnant and/or parenting

Drop-In Centers

Do you need a safe place to go during the day?

NORTHSIDE: **Neon Street Dorms** – 4506 N. Sheridan Road (2 blocks east of the Wilson Red line stop). 773-433-1290. M-F 9a-7p. Youth 18-20.

NORTHSIDE: **Broadway Youth Center** – Wellington Avenue United Church of Christ, 615 W. Wellington (at Broadway) 773/935-3151. MTHF 12p-3p. Youth 14-24.

NORTHSIDE: **Center on Halsted** – 3656 N. Halsted (Corner of Halsted and Waveland, Near Addison Red line stop). 773/472-6469. M-Th 9a-7p. Youth 13-24.

WESTSIDE: **Casa Corazon** – 3543 W. North Ave (on North Ave and Central Park Ave). 773/276-4900. TuTh 12:30p-7:30p Youth 16-21.

WESTSIDE: **Vida/SIDA Generation L** – 2703 W. Division (Division and California Ave). 773/278-6737. Tu-Sa 12p-9p. Youth 18-24.

SOUTHSIDE: **Garfield Community Services Center** – 10 S. Kedzie (Madison and Kedzie). 312/722-3885. M-F 9a-5p.

SOUTHSIDE: **TLP Drop-In Center(temporary location)**- 3619 S. State, Suite 300. 866/803-8336. MWF 10a-7p, TuTh 11a-6p, Sa-Su 1p-6p.

SOUTHSIDE: **La Casa Norte** – 1736 W. 47th Street (opening in September 2013). 773/276-4900 x 241. M-Thurs 11am-8pm and 9am-6pm Fri. Youth 18-24.

Street Outreach Programs

Street outreach programs provide youth with basic services such as access to food, hygiene supplies

NORTHSIDE: **The Night Ministry's Street Outreach Events** – Corner of Belmont and Halsted. Tu/Th 8:30pm-10:30pm.

SOUTHSIDE: **Teen Living Program's Street and Community Outreach**- call 866/803-8336 for dates, times and locations.

City Warming Centers

A Warming Center is a heated facility where you can go to find safe refuge from extreme weather if the temperatures dip below 32 degrees. Open MTuThF 9a-5p and W 11a-7p

NORTHSIDE: **North Area** – 4740 N. Sheridan Road (3 blocks east of the Lawrence Red line stop). 312/744-2580

WESTSIDE: **Trina Davila** – 4357 W. Armitage Ave (Kostner and Armitage). 312/744-2014

SOUTHSIDE: **Englewood Center** – 1140 W. 79th Street (79th and Racine). 312/747-0200

SOUTHSIDE: **Garfield Center** – 10 S. Kedzie Ave (Madison and Kedzie). 312/746-5400 **OPEN 24/7**

SOUTHSIDE: **King Center** – 4314 S. Cottage Grove (43rd and Cottage Grove). 312/747-2300

SOUTHSIDE: **South Chicago** – 8650 S. Commercial Ave (87th and Commercial Ave). 312/747-0500

City Cooling Centers

Call this hotline for locations around the city:
800/843-6154 MTuThF 9a-5p W 11a-7p

NORTHSIDE: **North Area Community Service Center** 4740 N. Sheridan Rd

WESTSIDE: **Garfield Community Service Center** 10 S. Kedzie

WESTSIDE: **Trina Davila Community Service Center** 4357 W. Armitage Ave

SOUTHSIDE: **Englewood Community Service Center** 845 W. 69th St

SOUTHSIDE: **South Chicago Community Service Center** 8650 S. Commercial Ave

Emergency Housing Options

Do you need a safe place to stay tonight?

These are places that you can stay for the night. You do not need to call in advance but you do need to arrive by a certain time.

NORTHSIDE: **The Crib** - 835 W. Addison Street @ the Lakeview Lutheran Church (2 blocks east of the Addison Red line stop). Arrive by 8:30p, staff will let 20 young people in at 8:45p. If there are more than 20 youth, staff will conduct a lottery. Anyone turned away receives a CTA bus card. Youth 18-24.

NORTHWEST SIDE: **La Casa Norte** – 1940 N. California Ave. 773/276-4900. Doors open at 9:00 pm. Youth 18-24.

WESTSIDE: **A Safe Haven** - 2750 W. Roosevelt (on the northeast corner of Roosevelt and California). Hot meal, shower, laundry, bed 773/435-8300. Arrive at 7:00p. Youth 18-24.

SOUTHSIDE: **Olive Branch Mission*** - 6310 S. Claremont (one block east of Western and 63rd). 773/476-6200 x10. Doors open at 5p and close at 11p. No food, no drugs, no alcohol, no cigarettes, no lighters on the premises. 18+.

Homeless Youth Resources in Chicago

Youth over 18 years old may also access adult shelters and emergency shelters by calling "311."

*Indicates options available for youth who are pregnant and/or parenting

SOUTHSIDE: La Casa Norte – 1736 W. 47th Street (opening in September 2013). 773/276-4900. Doors open at 9:00pm. Youth 18-24.

SOUTHSIDE: La Casa Norte - Overnight shelter for pregnant and parenting youth ages 18-24. 773/276-4900. Call for intake process or email Shanavia@lacasanorte.org.

SOUTHSIDE: Ujima Village – 7320 S. Yale. Arrive by 8:00 pm, lottery held at 8:15 pm for 24 beds. Doors close at 8:30 pm. Youth 18-24.

Interim Housing Options

Do you need a safe & stable place to stay for a few weeks to a couple of months?

These are places that you can stay for a short time.

NORTHSIDE: Open Door Shelter* – 1110 N. Noble Street (4 blocks southeast of the Division Blue line stop). 773/506-4100. CALL FREQUENTLY FOR OPENINGS. When a bed is available, it can be held for 2-3 hours. Youth 14-20. 4 month maximum stay. Transitional Living Program available to clients in the interim program.

NORTH-SUBURB: Hilda's Place – 1458 Chicago Avenue, Evanston (3 blocks north of the Dempster Purple line stop). 847/424-0945 x10. 18+. 4 month maximum stay.

WESTSIDE: Joshua's Center for Women – 330 W. Carroll Avenue (8 blocks northwest of the Ashland-Lake Green and Pink line stop). 773/722-0179. Females 18+. 4 month maximum stay. Attend drop-in services M-Th 9-2:30pm to get on the waiting list. Must continue to access drop-in services to remain on the waiting list.

WESTSIDE: A Safe Haven – 2750 W. Roosevelt (on the northeast corner of Roosevelt and California). 773/435-8300. 18+. Call to schedule intake appointment.

Transitional Living Programs

Do you need a long-term safe & stable place to stay?

These are programs that allow young people to stay for up to a year or two. Most transitional living programs have waiting lists and an application process. It is best to get on as many waiting lists as possible.

LOOP: Mercy Home – Boys Campus – 1140 W. Jackson (6 blocks northwest of the UIC Blue line stop). 312/738-6364. Call to begin the application process. Males 18-22.

NORTHSIDE: Neon Street Dorms – 4506 N. Sheridan Road (2 blocks east of the Wilson Red line stop). 773/769-3561. Call to schedule an intake assessment to be put on the waiting list. Must access drop-in center service (9a-7p) at

least twice a month to stay on the waiting list. Youth 18-20.

WESTSIDE: La Casa Norte – 3533 W. North Ave (on North Ave and Central Park Ave). 773/276-4900. Call to be put on the waiting list. Males and Transgender Youth 16-21.

WESTSIDE: New Moms* – 2825 W. McLean Avenue (1 block northeast of Armitage and California). 773/252-3253. Call to complete a telephone intake. Call once a week to remain on the waiting list. Single mothers 18-22 who are at least 7 months pregnant and/or have a child. Free parenting classes available for non-residents. *Waitlist is currently closed

SOUTHSIDE: Olive Branch Mission – 6310 S. Claremont (one block east of Western and 63rd). 773/476-6200 x10. No food, no drugs, no alcohol, no cigarettes, no lighters on the premises. Males 18-24. To get into the program, you must stay in the emergency housing.

SOUTHSIDE: Unity Harmony Village* – 7923 S. Maryland (1 block east of Cottage Grove). 773/783-9200. Call to complete a telephone intake. Youth 17-21.

SOUTHSIDE: Teen Living Programs– 3745 South Indiana. 866/803-8336. Call to complete a telephone intake. Youth 17-21.

FAR-SOUTHSIDE: Mercy Home – Girls Campus – 11600 S. Longwood Drive (116th Street and Longwood Dr). 312/738-6364. Call to begin the application process. Females 18-22.

SOUTH-SUBURB: Aunt Martha's TIPS Program – 15 W. 137th Place (in Riverdale). 708/849-2818. Call to set up an interview time. Youth 17-20.

Hotlines

-National Runaway Safeline

1-800-RUNAWAY (786-2929)

-Statewide CCBYS Information Line (24-hour Crisis Intervention Services for homeless minors)

1-877-870-2663

-Illinois Domestic Violence helpline

1-877-863-6338

-Chicago Domestic Violence helpline

1-877-863-6338

1-877-863-6339 (TTY)

-Stop It (Salvation Army/Human Trafficking)

877-606-3158

-LGBTQ Crisis Hotline

773-871-2273

-Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee rights hotline

855-435-7693

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Research Assistant, 2012 - 2015
Jane Addams College of Social Work, University of Illinois at Chicago
Project: Child Welfare Stability, Permanency & Disproportionality Project
Funded by the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services
PI: Sonya Leathers

TEACHING: Adjunct Instructor, Jane Addams College of Social Work, University of
Illinois at Chicago
Community Health and Urban Development: Practice IV, Spring 2015

Adjunct Instructor, Jane Addams College of Social Work, University of
Illinois at Chicago
Generalist Practice with Families, Groups and Communities: Practice II,
Spring 2014

Adjunct Instructor, Jane Addams College of Social Work, University of
Illinois at Chicago
Child and Family Policy: Policy II, Fall 2013/ Fall 2014

Teaching Assistant, Department of Psychology, University of Illinois at
Chicago.
Introduction to Psychology, Spring 2013

PRACTICE: Grant Writer (Contractual)
 Teen Living Programs, Chicago, IL, 2011 – 2014

Clinical Supervisor (Contractual)
 Teen Living Programs, Chicago, IL, 2011 – 2012

Associate Director of Programs
 Teen Living Programs, Chicago, IL, 2008 – 2011

Manager of Stable Housing & Government Grants
 Teen Living Programs, Chicago, IL, 2004 – 2008

Youth Development Specialist III
 Teen Living Programs, Chicago, IL, 2003 – 2004

Case Manager
 Teen Living Programs, Chicago, IL, 2003

Treatment Counselor
 Youth Outreach Services, Chicago, IL, 2002

Youth Specialist
 Ozone House Youth and Family Services, Ann Arbor, MI, 2001 – 2002

HONORS: Fahs-Beck Scholar, Fahs-Beck Fund for Research and Experimentation,
 The New York Community Trust, New York, NY, 2014 – 2015

Ed Marciniak Bright Star Award, Bright Promises Foundation, Chicago,
 IL, 2011

National Youth Worker of the Year, National Network for Youth,
 Washington D.C., 2005

PRESENTATIONS: An Overview of Youth Homelessness in Chicago
 Institute of Global Homelessness. DePaul University, Chicago, IL,
 2014

Understanding Threats Facing Runaway and Homeless Youth
 Phi Alpha Honor Society
 Indiana University Northwest School of Social Work, Gary, IN, 2009

Sanctuary Program Model in a Transitional Living Program Setting
 National Pathways to Adulthood Transitional and Independent Living
 Conference, Pittsburgh, PA, 2008

A Trauma-informed Approach to Transitional Living Programs
National Network for Youth Annual Symposium, Washington D.C., 2008

Sanctuary Program Model in a Transitional Living Program Setting
Daniel Memorial Institute National Independent Living Conference,
Denver, CO, 2007

The Journey from Residential Milieu to Personal Independence
Runaway and Homeless Youth Providers Region V Conference
Chicago, IL, 2007

MEMBERSHIPS: National Association of Social Workers (NASW)
City of Chicago Mayor's Task Force on Youth Homelessness, 2010- 2011
Chicago Coalition for the Homeless Youth Committee, 2004 – 2011
Chicago Alliance to End Homelessness Youth Providers, 2004 – 2011

CERTIFICATIONS: Licensed Clinical Social Worker, Illinois