AN INQUIRY INTO THE NATURE OF HELP
EXPERIENCED BY SEVEN CAUCASIAN PARENTS WHO COMPLETED
A COURT ORDERED PARENTING EDUCATION PROGRAM

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by

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The purpose of this study was to inquire about the nature of help experienced by parents relative to making changes to their parenting strategies after attending a court ordered parenting education program. Parents involved in this study had children who displayed disruptive behavior. The term disruptive behavior relates to status offenses, such as school truancy, breaking curfews, and failure to adhere to the rules and guidelines of their parents. Additionally, in this study, disruptive behavior relates to chemical substance abuse, negative peer involvement, and violent behavior towards others and their personal properties.

A qualitative approach was used to explore the experiences of seven Caucasian parents following their participation in the program curriculum of Parent Project. Five themes were relative to the parents’ experiences in changing their parenting strategies: parents’ recognition of helpful support systems, the expert help of the program facilitators, personal gains of understanding self as a parent, learning and understanding teenage behavior, and helpful parenting techniques.

The study was designed to determine the extent of help or encouragement parents experienced in making changes to their parenting of adolescent who displayed disruptive behavior. The determining design for this study related to the limited qualitative research
exploring the perceptions of parents following their attendance in a parenting education program. The study was conducted to add to the present literature relative to what parents found helpful in changing their parenting strategies.

The results of this study, based on the perceptions provided by parents, indicated that parents felt empowered and in control of their homes and their families with the help obtained in attending Parent Project. It is intended that this study supports and assists the design of future parenting education programs in extending help to parents who need support with their children.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

The study was designed to explore the nature of help experienced by parents relative to making changes in their parenting strategies after attending a court ordered parenting education program. Researchers have provided results on their studies of parenting education programs. Barlow and Stewart-Brown (2001) are among the researchers that have provided studies on the effectiveness of parenting programs. Their study on the Family Links Nurturing Program indicated parents experienced beneficial changes to their parenting strategies. Sanders and Turner (2005) conducted a research on the Positive Parenting Program (Triple P) and determined that dissemination was effective in the production of positive parent-child outcomes. Thompson, Grow, Ruma, Daly, and Burke (1993) conducted a study on the Common Sense Parenting Program and researched the effectiveness in helping parents to make changes. In their study, they reported on the improvement of child behavior problems, parent attitudes, and parent problem-solving skills. In a study conducted on The Growing up Fast Parole Program, Partridge, Gavazzi, and Rhine (2001) provided findings on the improvement of parent-child relationships and problem-solving skills. Schaffner (1997) conducted a study on Families on Probation, which provided court-ordered parenting skills classes. The results indicated that parents experienced help in making changes through the supportiveness of the other parents in the program.

C. J. Collins (1996) conducted a study on Parent Project, a court ordered parenting education program, which provided 16 weeks of educational sessions for
parents. Collins reported that as a result of the sessions, parents made changes in their parenting strategies that encouraged positive changes in their adolescent’s behavior.

Holzheimer and Davis (2009) and Stolz et al. (2010) are among other such researchers who have established the effectiveness of Parent Project as a parenting education program. Holzheimer and Davis and Stolz et al. found the program produced effective results for the parents who attended. Parent Project was chosen to facilitate this study because of its geographical availability, its relative accessibility to study participants, its program appropriateness, and its established effectiveness in supporting parents in making changes to their parenting strategies. Each of the fore mentioned studies reported on parenting education programs that parents experienced as helpful in assisting them in making changes in their parenting behavior and practices. Based on these studies it is clear that parenting education programs may be helpful in assisting parents.

**Research on Parenting Education Programs**

Barlow and Stewart-Brown (2001) conducted research, which indicated a limited number of qualitative studies in existence and conducted on parenting education programs. In conducting their study, Barlow and Stewart-Brown gathered information from parents that focused specifically on the nature of help experienced by parents enrolled in parenting education programs. Their study suggested that parenting education programs helped in providing support to parents, including mandatory parenting education programs. The parents in their study reported on their experiences and indicated beneficial factors. Specifically, parents reported that the program’s curriculum provided them with: (a) renewed control as a parent, (b) improved feelings of
effectiveness in parenting their child, (c) increased understanding of self as a parent, (d) improved understanding of their child, and (e) suggested options to parenting by other parents in the program.

Holzheimer and Davis (2009) researched and evaluated the effectiveness of Parent Project to increase the strength of parent-child relationships, and any help parents gained in strengthening their parenting strategies. The research findings by Holzheimer and Davis indicated an effective parenting education program, which provided helpful interventions to assist parents with their child. Holzheimer and Davis reported that through the use of the curriculum coursework, classroom sessions, and the parent support group, parents gained strength in: (a) recognizing problem areas, (b) requesting help, (c) learning effective parenting techniques, (d) enforcing behavior management skills to better manage their adolescent, and (e) utilizing the support system of other parents in the ongoing behavior management of their child.

Additionally, parents were encouraged to interact with one another by sharing personal ideas and techniques deemed helpful in managing the behavior of their child. In fact, a strong intent was to stimulate parent interaction to build a strong alliance of support outside of the program sessions. The parent support group was an extension of the parent curriculum and encouraged parent-to-parent interaction. The program facilitators were responsible for encouraging the parents to interact with one another. Although the study by Holzheimer and Davis (2009) reported on the positive effect of supporting parents to make changes, their study was limited in the nature of experiences that parents reported as helpful. The research findings by C. J. Collins (1996), Fry,
Mejia-Johnson, Melendez, and Morgan (2002), Moreis (2002), Murray (1998), Stolz et al. (2010) conveyed the effectiveness in helping parents to make changes, when they participated in the Parent Project. The consensus of the findings on these studies agreed with Holzheimer and Davis (2009) that curriculum topics, classroom sessions, and the parent support group offered positive and supportive help to the parents.

C. J. Collins (1996), Moreis (2002), and Murray (1998) provided studies that established the design of Parent Project specifically in strengthening the parents’ ability to manage destructive behavior of adolescents. Parents were provided with parenting techniques, problem-solving skills, current event topics related to teenage issues, and a parent support group designed to provide ongoing support during the program and after the program ended.

The Parent Project curriculum provided assistance by: (a) supporting parents in developing a positive working relationship with their adolescent, (b) suggesting the use of specific parenting techniques, (c) enhancing problem-solving skills, (d) encouraging parents to interact and engage with each other in changing their parenting strategies, and (e) providing an ongoing support system both during and after the program. The studies conducted on Parent Project by C. J. Collins (1996), Moreis (2002), and Murray (1998) established that parents received support and experienced changes in their parenting relative to the techniques and skills learned in the classroom sessions. However, there still remains a limited number of studies which provide a report of parents’ perceptions relative to the nature of the help they experienced by participating in the program curriculums that supported changing their parenting strategies.
Chapter I establishes Parent Project as appropriately selected to use in studying the nature of help experienced by parents who participated in the program curriculum to make changes to their parenting strategies. Additionally, Chapter I includes basic information related to an overview of the development of parent education programs over the decades. It comprises historical causes and factors contributing to destructive behavior in children and causal parenting behaviors and risk factors. Also, this chapter includes an overview of the help provided by parenting educations programs, a description of the Parent Project design, and the guiding research questions for the study.

The intent of the present study is to contribute to research by developing an understanding of the parents’ experiences relative to their report of the positive results that they found helpful in making changes in their parenting strategies. The study is designed to explore the experiences of parents relative to the nature of help they reported as supportive in making changes to their parenting, while using the program curriculum. Although researchers reported on the positive effect of being in parenting education programs, their studies are limited in providing the parents’ reports on the nature of help they experienced in making changes in their parenting. The following section begins the discussion of historical causes and factors contributing to destructive behavior in children.

**The Industrial Revolution**

The Industrial Revolution of the 19th century brought a flood of immigrants to the United States, which resulted in a large increase in the population of poor and disenfranchised families (Mays & Winfree, 2006). As people immigrated to the United
States, they experienced chronic economic instability, poverty, and an inability to financially take care of their families. The middle class population complained of the disappearance of traditional farm life, the destruction of positive family traditions, and the corruption of the political system. The city became overcrowded with adults and children living in poverty and plagued with diseases and illnesses (Wolcott, 2001). The instability created by immigration became a primary concern during this era, especially as it related to the crime and delinquency of children.

The Industrial Revolution was a primary contributor to the problem of crime and delinquency of children (Ferdinand, 1991; Gilfoyle, 2004). The middle class reformers complained about the urban corruption. Because of the increased population of diseased, sick, and impoverished immigrants, it was seen as the cause of deviant and criminal behavior in children and adolescents (Wolcott, 2001). Politicians felt it was impossible to reform children in an urban environment, when they were not given proper guidance from their parents or taught to respect the rights of others.

Scant research was conducted to determine why children were committing crime in their communities or why children were being unsupervised. In most instances, children were trying to care for themselves and their siblings while their parents searched for work or worked long hours to provide food and shelter for their families. As a result, some children began to steal in order to feed themselves and their siblings during the parents’ absence. Children were arrested and, in many cases, incarcerated for lengthy periods of time, without proper legal rights or legal processing, and without the parents’
knowledge of the child’s whereabouts (Scott, 2005). Disturbingly, children were imprisoned alongside serious adult criminals (Scott, 2005; Wolcott, 2001).

Children were arrested and placed into punitive facilities established for the general population. This situation created direct contact with the adult criminals, who initiated children in the learning of additional criminal behavior, which prompted them to commit even more serious crimes (Gilfoyle, 2004). During this time, the political doctrine of “parens patriae” came into effect, which allowed the legal system to take on the role of parent for children and adolescents displaying problematic behaviors (Ferdinand, 1991; Merlo & Benekos, 2003; Wolcott, 2001).

From 1899 to 1966, the term “parens patriae” meant that the punitive system undertook the parenting role and provided the delinquent child with whatever rehabilitation was deemed necessary (Rector & Gilman, 1976). Little to no indication of rights was given to the parents as the authority figures for their child. Ultimately, children were punished by whatever means the legal system determined fitting for the crime. Police officers and the judges became the surrogate parents (parens patriae philosophy), and enforced harsh, benevolent, or discretionary powers hoping to reform the destructive behavior of children and adolescents by assuming legal control (Rector & Gilman, 1976).

In 1899 the state of Illinois established the first juvenile court to address delinquent behavior of young offenders. In this system, not only destructive, delinquent behavior was addressed, but also parental neglect and abuse issues were addressed, as well. In the late 19th century, the juvenile court system was designed to serve young
offenders and protect them from the brutality of urban industrial life, but also resulted in unreasonable punishment for children and adolescents displaying problematic behavior (Wolcott, 2001).

In the juvenile system, young offenders were not necessarily seen as criminals, but more in need of adult guidance and care. Instead of adult jail, young offenders were remanded to reform schools or training schools and given rehabilitation and supervision for minor offenses. The major offenses of young offenders were eventually handled by the courts through the Eighth and Fourteenth Amendments to the U. S. Constitution, which addressed disproportionate punishment of children and guarded them from any cruel and unusual punishment of the courts (Scott, 2005). The system thought that parent supervision or the lack of supervision was a major cause of delinquent behavior in children. The next section discusses how parental supervision and practices during the 1800s affected children and contributed to their destructive behavior.

**Parental Supervision of Children During the Industrial Revolution**

Rector and Gilman (1976) described the immigration to America by poor and disenfranchised people from Europe as the primary catalyst in the development of the juvenile court system. Children were unsupervised during the day and into the evenings because of parents working long hours or parents spending time searching for work (Wolcott, 2001). Parents worked 12 to 14 hours or even longer (Wolcott, 2001). Older children were left to care for themselves and their siblings, and did so as best they knew how without the supervision of a parent. In many cases, they stole food to feed themselves and their siblings. Some children became involved in other crimes to provide
for the necessities of living for themselves and their siblings. Often these children were out on the streets late at night, and in the company of corrupt adults.

Such adults were intent on committing crimes and used children as pawns for their own protection from the law. The involvement of the legal system intended to support the parents in providing effective parenting to their child in an effort to rehabilitate and/or prevent delinquent behavior before the child entered situations of serious crime. The following section discusses social learning and addresses the socialization of children determined by the influences of the parent. Such influences allude to parental attributes and parental training that supports functional behavior considered acceptable in society.

**Social Learning**

Bandura (1977) stated that except for basic inborn reflexes, people have limited knowledge and skills to manage their behavior. Instead, he said that behavior is learned and that it can become an acquired response pattern either by direct experiences or by observations of other people or events. A basic principle of social learning suggests that direct experiences result from the positive and negative effects of actions produced by others or within an environment. Bandura suggested that experiences learned are considered reinforcements for which a mechanism automatically and unconsciously shapes a behavior by an immediate consequence. Bandura added that as people learn they perform responses and become aware of the effects produced. As they observe their various actions, information is developed relative to which responses are appropriate to
use in a particular setting or situation. The information then becomes a guide for future actions.

Bandura (1977) suggested that the expectation of a consequence being placed on an active behavior encourages an awareness that provides monitoring of one’s behavior. In providing a stimulus for a wanted behavior and creating an inducement that sustains the behavior, the behavior can be reinforced repeatedly. An increase in the wanted behavior occurs when it is determined which behavior will be rewarded. Bandura suggested that a prominent characteristic of social learning is the essential aspect of self-regulation, changing a behavior to receive positive consequences. The idea of self-regulation being encouraged in parents is a pivotal component to parenting education programs and assisting parents in improving their parenting skills.

Barth (2009) reported that the leading parenting education programs in America are based on the social learning theory. The social learning theory conceptualizes an underpinning approach to the idea that the parents must be self-regulatory relative to presenting positive attributes of parenting. A parent who is self-regulatory portrays a quality of self-efficacy, self-management, and believes that she or he can improve the behavior of her or his child through their own actions. Barth suggested that the parent attributes of self-efficacy and self-management indicates the parent’s confidence in making decisions and problem solving difficult situations with their child. Additionally, parents who learn to make decisions independently and without the assistance of others also learn how to utilize parenting skills and strategies that are helpful in managing their child.
Parenting and Children

Socialization of Children

The socialization of children by their parents has been identified in research literature as an attitude or behavior that parents extend to their child by their own personal interactions with their child (Barber, 1997; Maccoby, 1992). Maccoby stated that affective aspects, such as love, hate, fear, and empathy are emotions that can be central relative to the socialization process between parent and child. A study by W. A. Collins, Maccoby, Steinberg, Hetherington, and Bornstein (2000) discussed parental influences relative to the socialization process of parents on their child’s behavior and attitude. Furnham and Cheng (2000), Bradshaw, Glaser, Calhoun, and Bates (2006) added further research to the discussions on the effects of parental socialization. They stated that when parents displayed positive attributes and social skills towards their child, the child tended to learn from their parents and improved their behavior and attitude. The process seemed to support the parent-child relationship, which is essential to the successful growth and development of the child.

Parent and Child Relationship

Parents are considered a powerful, driving force; providing what is needed for a child’s learning experiences in life (Eyre & Eyre, 2003; Kumpfer & Alvarado, 2003). The relationship between a parent and their child is significant in regards to sharing mutual trust and respect. Yet there are a number of issues that can affect this relationship and the parent’s responsiveness towards their child’s needs.
Some dynamics negatively affecting parent-child relationships include: single-parenting, lack of sufficient income, physical and mental health issues, marital difficulties, substance abuse, care of other siblings or family members, and poor parenting skills (Hill, Bush, & Roosa, 2003; Webster-Stratton, 1990). These personal and social obstacles can affect the condition of parenting a child. Therefore, causing parents to lack the nurturing and responsive attitude that children need in order to grow and develop into maturing adolescents.

Eyre and Eyre (2003) suggested parenting could be considered one of the most rewarding, yet most challenging life careers experienced by any individual. They asserted parents who have a personal relationship with their adolescents are aware of their needs and available to help their children develop healthy behaviors. Castrucci and Gerlach (2006) and Barth (2009) indicated that a determinant to the relationship, which reflects a parent’s supportive and nurturing attitude towards his or her child depends on the parent’s self-management of being responsive, yet demanding of the child. These attributes are inclusive to the parents’ ability to experience a sense of feeling effective in their efforts as parents. An effective and supportive relationship by parents towards their children, and the children’s reaction to their parents can determine how the parents respond in providing the supervision and discipline needed by the children, as well as how the children react to the parents’ authority (Barth, 2009).

**Supervision and Discipline**

Eyre and Eyre (2003) declared supervision and discipline of a positive manner is a major practice parents need to provide to their adolescent in order to foster constructive
attitudes and behaviors. Parents who can provide appropriate and adequate supervision and discipline are considered a major determinant in preventing or changing destructive adolescent behavior (Jivanjee, 1999).

For example, a parent has the responsibility for setting curfews, scheduling regular bedtimes, knowing the whereabouts of the adolescent when not at home, and expecting their adolescent to adhere to parental demands and to follow legal sanctions. Parents, who use behavior management skills successfully, are paramount in the positive development of their children. If supportive parenting is not available, the child will lack valuable interpersonal and decision-making skills that can determine the child’s behavior well into adulthood (Loeber & Hay, 1994).

Adolescent Delinquency

The success of a parent-child relationship that is supportive of both depends on their attitude and interaction with each other. If the child displays hostile and/or obstinate behavior, the parent often follows by reducing his or her efforts to monitor and discipline the child. Hinton, Sheperis, and Sims (2003) and Tolan (1990) have distinguished several factors that have contributed to delinquent behavior in adolescents. Hinton et al. identified risk factors as: developmental, socioeconomic status, gender identity, environmental culture, and familial context.

Additionally, Hinton et al. (2003) stated that other causes of delinquent behavior in children and adolescents might point to undetected and untreated mental illness disorders. Parents often lack the skills and self-efficacy to manage the destructive behavior of children who have mental health issues. Tolan (1990) stated that the factors
contributing to delinquency in adolescents occurs in a multisystem, which includes the youth, the parents, and the community. Parents lacking a feeling self-efficacy also may lack the ability to provide or seek necessary support that their child needs relative to growth and development.

Loeber and Hay (1994) provided a developmental perspective to delinquent behavior. They viewed oppositional and aggressive behavior for children as natural during the toddler stage. Loeber and Hay stated that there should be a decline in antisocial behavior and an increase in prosocial behavior between the ages of three and six years. If the child’s prosocial and conflict resolution skills are not encouraged by the parent during this age period, the child will likely show aggressive and hostile behavior and develop inappropriately relative to their social skills.

Deficiency in social skills would be the first determining sign of delinquency and problem behavior would begin in grade school (Loeber & Hay, 1994). The role of parents in providing proper nurturance, guidance, and discipline is an important area of success for children and adolescents (Eyre & Eyre, 2003). Parenting education programs have been reported as providing assistance to parents in gaining the self-efficacy and hopefulness so critical to parents who desire to encourage positive decision-making and social skills in their children (Holzheimer & Davis, 2009; Moreis, 2002; Stolz et al., 2010). The next section provides a discussion related to the development of parenting education programs.
A Brief History of Parenting Education Programs

Parenting education programs were established in the early 1800s in an effort to support parents with the problems that occurred in raising their children (Croake & Glover, 1977). Parenting education programs served as a source for parents to provide support to each other. Croake and Glover reported that based on a study by Bridgman in 1930, the first record of parenting group meetings in America dates to 1815 in Portland, Maine. These parenting groups primarily addressed the religious and moral improvements of their children and, at that time, were known as “maternal associations.”

Croake and Glover (1977) reported the first magazine to address parenting was Mother’s Magazine published in 1832. In 1888, the Society for the Study of Child Nature was founded and later became known as the Child Study Association of America. This organization was the oldest in the United States to have a continuous and ongoing parenting education program. Croake and Glover reported that in 1909, the White House conducted the first conference on Child Welfare and that the Children’s Bureau was created in 1912. Additional history included the beginning of the United States Public Health Service, which supported health oriented programs for parenting education.

Croake and Glover (1977) reported that the existence of parenting education programs in the 1800s were basically informal and unorganized. The efforts of educators, social workers, and parents requesting personal help supported the development and organization of parenting education programs. In 1929, preschool education was created and supported the continual growth of parenting education. The momentum began to decline during the 1930s to support parents in managing their
children (Croake & Glover, 1977), but public interest continued. In the 1940s, interest increased in parenting education, which expanded into the 21st century of modern society (Shulruf, O’Loughlin, & Tolley, 2009). From the early history of parenting groups, parents were provided with help in their parenting practices (Berger, 1991; Croake & Glover, 1977), yet the early research on the effectiveness of parenting education has been historically inadequate both in amount and quality (Croake & Glover, 1977).

In 1957, Brim conducted a brief survey of several research studies on the effects of parenting education. His study was directed towards the adequacy of available research on parenting education programs. Brim’s study included research that examined educational versus therapeutic procedures to address changing parenting behavior. He found that the major techniques used in parenting programs were exposure to (a) educational pamphlets on parenting, (b) leaderless or non-professionally led group educational processes, (c) educational counseling led by a counselor, and (d) several studies that used multiple aforementioned procedures. Brim reported concerns on the limited structure and techniques used to provide parenting programs, the lack of cumulative study results, and the variations in concepts and procedures of providing the programs for parents.

Brim (1957) summarized from the 23 studies researched that positive effects resulted from several of the parenting education programs, but some studies actually reflected no positive results at all. Brim suggested that although several techniques within the programs indicated positive effects, a focus on which techniques were effective would provide greater benefits to assisting parents in making changes in their
parenting behaviors. From Brim’s evaluations there appeared to be a difference between parenting groups managed by leaders and parenting groups that were essentially leaderless. The parenting groups that were leaderless appeared to encourage individualistic expressions by the parents and allowed for a tendency towards greater learning. Brim expressed hopefulness that future researchers would be directed towards the most effective means to assist parents and more efficient methods of research to evaluate parenting education programs and efforts to help parents.

During the 1970s and 1980s, the structure of the family unit began to change; instead of one working parent in a household, there was a shift towards two working parents in a household (Aguirre, 1998). Children became known as the latchkey children as many children were left at home on their own to manage the household and other siblings, while their parents worked (Robinson, Rowland, & Coleman, 1986). In some families, parental conflict and familial discord occurred due to the stressfulness of managing work responsibilities, marriage, children, and personal needs (Scarr, Phillips, & McCartney, 1989). Children exhibited the instability of the family by displaying delinquent behavior (Gove & Crutchfield, 1982). Delinquency of children is considered a product of family conflict, marital discord, poor parental supervision, and/or lack of positive parental interaction with the child (Hinton et al., 2003; Scarr et al., 1989).

In the late 1980s, arrests for juvenile crimes increased substantially and peaked in 1994. In 2004, United States law enforcement agencies estimated 2.2 million adolescents were arrested for various crimes, including those considered aggressive and violent (U. S. Department of Justice, 2006). Although these numbers reflected an increase in
delinquent behavior of adolescents, the U. S. Department of Justice reported the rate of juvenile crime actually declined during 2004. Could it be that during the past three decades a plethora of parenting education programs were designed in response to juvenile crime rates?

Over a span of several decades, an increasing number of family problems and juvenile crimes have created a continual expansion of parenting education programs, especially parenting education programs that address delinquent behavior of adolescents (Sanders & Turner, 2005; Schaffner, 1997; Smith, Sells, Rodman, & Reynolds, 2006). Parental issues such as: domestic violence, parental separation, mental health issues, divorce, and parental substance abuse were considered contributors to delinquent behavior (Boland, 1991; Davidson, 2007). The American Bar Association Center on Children and the Law (2001) reported that the court system began to order parents to attend parenting education programs for assistance in addressing problem behaviors of adolescents and to prevent or decrease delinquent acts.

Juvenile facilities were used to detain children for delinquent behaviors such as status offenses, petty crimes, misdemeanors, and sometimes felony offenses. As the juvenile facilities became overcrowded, the problem of the overpopulation prompted the courts to mandate parents to attend parenting programs. The family would wait for a court hearing to determine disposition in a delinquency case, and in some instances, they would be ordered by the court system to attend a mandated parenting education program.

Some of the earliest theorists, such as Baumrind, studied theoretical and practical influences of effective parenting practices (Baumrind, 1966; Darling & Steinberg, 1993;
Slicker, 1998). Yet, the practical aspects of helping parents with adolescents have continued to lack empirically based scientific investigations. Barlow and Stewart-Brown (2001) suggested that researchers should focus on gaining information about established parenting education programs; and what parents reported as most helpful in their experiences of parenting adolescents with problematic behaviors. Parenting education programs are designed to encourage positive attributes and feelings of self-worth and control within the parent’s experiences of self. Stewart-Brown et al. (2004) reported that many parenting programs are available, but more effort is needed to adequately help 21st century parents. The following section provides research about the effectiveness of parenting education programs in helping parents.

**Effectiveness of Parenting Education Programs**

Although parenting education programs are widely used and funded, not all programs are evaluated for their effectiveness and success in helping parents. Still the court systems have continued to mandate parenting education programs, usually based on recommendations of professional sources such as: teachers, counselors, community leaders, police and probation officers; thus confirming the continual need for parents to learn more about managing their children. Kumpfer and Alvarado (2003) and Schaffner (1997) have suggested that effective parenting of adolescents is one of the most powerful methods in reducing problem behaviors in adolescents. Additionally, Hinton et al. (2003) and Tarolla, Wagner, Rabinowitz, and Tubman (2002) suggested that the educational design of effective parenting education programs have focused on empowering parents by teaching them to use consistent disciplinary practices. Moreover, Hinton et al. and
Schaffner suggested parenting education programs, which are effective in helping parents to make changes in their parenting, may also be a contributing factor to the lowering of delinquent behavior. They acknowledged that support of behavioral changes within the parent encouraged changes in the parent-child relationship, which ultimately changed the adolescent’s behavior.

Barlow and Stewart-Brown (2001), Smith et al. (2006), Sanders and Turner (2005), and C. J. Collins (1996) reported on parenting education programs. They indicated problem behavior of adolescents declined once the parent began to use effective behavior management skills learned by through the utilization of parenting program curriculums and other program components designed to help parents. C. J. Collins (1996), Murray (1998), and Stolz et al. (2010) suggested additional research is needed to address what experiences actually helped parents in making changes in their parenting practices. The following section provides a discussion relative to the difficulties parents experience with their children and parents acceptance to being helped by parenting programs.

Parental Concerns About Parenting Education Programs

Schaffner (1997) suggested that parents are reluctant to participate in parenting education programs due to personal issues of privacy or concerns of being blamed for the behavior problems displayed by their child. In some cases, the parent’s reluctance resulted from concerns that the child may be removed from the home and that financial resources may be decreased or eliminated from the family, especially when outside assistance was received by the parent. Additionally, parents may fear that the legal
authorities will blame them for the child’s behavior and either eliminate or ignore the parent’s personal input to help his or her adolescent or negate the parent’s ability to be a positive influence.

The news media in the Ohio area reported on an initiative to enforce the parent responsibility law that requires parents be responsible for the legal infractions of their adolescent. It was reported in *The Plain Dealer* (Vinella, 2007, April 26) that a suburban area of Cleveland adopted the parent responsibility law of 2006. Since the law was adopted, a number of parents have been charged with crimes committed by their child that ranged from burglaries to robberies to assaults.

Parents can be charged with a misdemeanor under the parent responsibility law. Some parents of first-time offending adolescents were ordered to attend parenting education classes and pay court costs. A reporter wrote in *The Plain Dealer* (Vinella, 2007, April 26) about one father, who stated he was ordered to pay a $320 fine and attend a parenting program. His daughter was involved in a fight at a neighborhood park. The father stated he was unhappy about being made responsible for his daughter’s actions. Although he was frustrated with the court order, he did find the parenting program to be helpful. Partridge et al. (2001) suggested that focusing on the strengths and capabilities of parents encouraged changes in the destructive behavior of adolescents. They stated attention needs to be given to parents in terms of investigating the parent’s report of help based on their experiences of the curriculum and other components while attending a parenting education programs.
Schaffner (1997) reported on a court ordered parenting education program held in California. Parents were court ordered to Families on Probation, a parenting skills class. Parents were placed in this program due to the adjudication of their adolescent for status or criminal offenses. Some parents were involved in custody disputes; and some were waiting for reunification with their child, following an investigation of child abuse. Approximately, 10 to 15 parents attended each of the 10 sessions of the program. Ongoing classes were provided on a drop-in basis. A probation officer taught the classes and guest speakers were included in some of the class sessions. Videotapes were used to present various topics relative to drugs, sexual abuse, or school interventions. Parents signed in at the beginning of the class, and food was served to the parents prior to the start of the classroom sessions. A sign-in sheet was available to determine parent attendance and a packet of handouts and instructions in English were given to each participant. Some parents were bi-lingual. Those parents who did not speak English were given program schedules and provided with a facilitator who spoke in their language. The majority of the parents were working class or lower income status. Two-thirds of the parents in attendance were mothers, and one in five parents was African American.

Many parents displayed anger and resistance to the information offered by the facilitators. Some parents admitted a need for the program, agreed to comply with the advice, and attempted to make changes. Other parents had their own ideas about parenting and were unmoved by the information. Some of the topics that were addressed were:
• Disciplining and punishing your child
• Tough love
• Getting control as parent
• Communicating your authority
• Quality time
• Giving constructive criticism
• Autonomy for teenagers
• Showing love and affection
• How to provide nurturance to your child.

Schaffner (1997) provided descriptive objectives of the program and the program leaders regarding the efforts made towards changing parenting behavior and attitudes. In her study, the program leaders challenged the parents relative to their faults and shortcomings in parenting their adolescent. Parents were confronted about their lack of effort and submissive behavior in parenting their child. The program leaders were probation officers who provided limited engagement with the parents as a support person; instead the program leader displayed their authority to enforce legal regulations on the parent, if changes did not occur in their method of parenting.

Schaffner (1997) reported that although parents were told to be stricter with their adolescent, parents were concerned about displaying a strict and punitive attitude towards their child. They were concerned about losing their child’s love or their child running away from home. Some parents were concerned about the court’s ability to remove the child from their care. The parents thought it would be costly, if they did not comply with
the program in adopting the new behaviors and attitudes about parenting. As the program progressed, parents began to grow as a group, and became less resistant to the help provided to them by the facilitators. The parents connected with one another, shared camaraderie and learned strategies for improving their parenting practices. The social support of being with other parents with similar problems appeared to help parents recognize and understand the problems they experienced in parenting.

The results of the study by Holzheimer and Davis (2009) indicated that parents experienced emotional support from the other parents when they continued their participation in Parent Project until the program completion. The parents perceived that they gained a positive and hopeful attitude in their parenting abilities, which helped to support their involvement in the program. In addition, parents increased self-regulation and motivation relative to their behavior and attitude, which enabled better management of their child’s disruptive behavior. The parent worked with the facilitator and other parents to overcome past issues and barriers, whereby they were able to make positive changes. Parents experienced empowerment and the ability to take control through attending a parenting education program. Through this experience parents were motivated to make changes in their parenting strategies and become self-regulated in managing the destructive behavior that their child exhibited.

The following section provides an overview of the Parent Project, its format, curriculum, and other components.
The Parent Project

The Parent Project has been used by numerous juvenile court systems throughout the United States to strengthen and empower parents in their parenting role with their child. Parent Project has been available to court involved parents for many years, and appears to be a program that has been helpful in changing parents’ strategies in working with their adolescent (C. J. Collins, 1996; Moreis, 2002; Murray, 1998). The program was designed to help parents manage problem behaviors of adolescents. Although few studies of this program exist, the research that does exist acknowledges Parent Project as an effective program for parents (C. J. Collins, 1996; Holzheimer & Davis, 2009; Moreis, 2002; Murray, 1998; Stolz et al., 2010).

Parent Project is currently considered one of United States’ largest court ordered parenting education programs. This program was initially implemented in Los Angeles and is largely conducted in California and Idaho. Ralph Fry, a retired law enforcement officer, Susan Mejia-Johnson, an educator, and Roger H. Morgan, a clinical psychologist, established Parent Project in the late 1980s (C. J. Collins, 1996; Murray, 1998; Stolz et al., 2010). The program was developed to help parents intervene and prevent destructive behavior of their adolescents. Over the years, the program has been developed into a parenting skills and educational training program with a strong focus on behavior modification specifically designed to help parents with adolescents who display destructive behavior. While the program has been operating for many years, there has been limited research relative to the parents’ report of experiences related to the nature of help they received by attending the program. C. J. Collins (1996) suggested that
investigating the parents’ experiences of help might help sustain the program’s effectiveness and assist in its growth and funding options.

The objective of Parent Project is based on the parents’ own experiences in working with their adolescent, interactions with the program facilitator, and especially other parents in the program. The program appears to help parents share concerns, issues, and parenting practices used with their own adolescent. The parent’s participation in the program includes the offering of support to one another, and learning new techniques to decrease and eliminate the destructive behavior of their child. As the parents participate and interact with one another, the facilitators are able to interject effective and appropriate parenting strategies and behavior management skills. Through this process, parents are aided in expanding positive efforts towards working with their adolescent. Parent Project was developed on the premise that parents (a) care about their children and love them, (b) have significant influence in the development of their children, and (c) hold the greatest power of influence with their adolescent (Holzheimer & Davis, 2009; Murray, 1998; Stolz et al., 2010).

The design of Parent Project has helped parents to experience success while working with their adolescent, as opposed to feeling defeated and frustrated. Fry et al. (2002) designed the program curriculum to provide basic, tangible, and gradual strategies for parents to use in working with their adolescent. The structuring allows parents to discuss, role-play, and consider the use of new practices with their adolescent. This program has encouraged parents to acknowledge and display a sense of love, affection, and hopefulness in working with their adolescent, thus allowing parents to take
immediate steps towards changing their own behavior to provide what is needed by their child (Fry et al., 2002).

C. J. Collins (1996) studied Parent Project and reported it as an effective parenting program that assisted parents in decreasing destructive adolescent behaviors. The approach provided a positive effect on how parents perceived problem behaviors in their adolescents. Collins reported that parent behavioral changes relative to interacting with their child were appropriately needed for creating behavior changes in the adolescent. Additionally, the program provided the type of support and directives that parents needed to address the most critical parenting issues in managing destructive behavior exhibited by adolescents. By interacting with the program facilitator and the other participating parents, participants are offered practical and no nonsense solutions for working with their adolescent. In return, parents become self-regulated and aware of how their parenting strategies influence their adolescent to make behavior changes.

Sanders, Markie-Dadds, and Turner (2003) reported that parents who are self-regulated experienced feelings of self-sufficiency and self-efficacy; and display a capability of managing self in troubling or problematic situations. Parents learned to use self-management in providing for their child. Parents who are self-sufficient in their parenting and who realize self as an independent problem solver find support in trusting their own judgment and become less reliant on others while projecting basic parenting responsibilities. They experience confidence, resiliency, and knowledge in managing situations with their child, and become resourceful in finding help when needed.
The Design of the Parent Project Program

Parent Project is typically presented as a community service facilitated by school districts, law enforcement organizations, churches, and mental health agencies. The program is designed as a 10 to 16 week, behavior modification and activity based parenting education program. It was developed by soliciting information from parents regarding problems they encountered with their adolescents, and by providing responses to parents’ questions regarding how to manage their adolescents’ behavior. Fry et al. (2002) designed the program curriculum to assist parents, whose adolescent had became involved with juvenile court, usually for misdemeanors or status offenses such as: truancy, aggressive or violent behavior, use of alcohol/drugs, violations of curfew, sexual activity that is inappropriate, running away from home, and other behaviors that were non-compliant and/or disruptive. Over the years, the program has provided positive help for parents and has become known to non-court involved parents, as well (Holzheimer & Davis, 2009). The program facilitators provide a structure of learning and support through discussions on parenting techniques and skills, classroom activities, homework assignments, and specific topics pertinent to teenage behavior. The strategy has enabled parents to approach the use of practical and effective parenting practices with their adolescent.

Parent Project Facilitators

Parent Project facilitators are required to complete a 40-hour intensive training seminar. Facilitators are usually professionals from social service agencies, mental health organizations, and civic organizations such as: social workers, mental health
counselors, program directors, probation and police officers, juvenile justice employees, and teachers. At least two facilitators provide the parenting information and support at each class. The facilitators’ responsibility is to review the program and its curriculum with the parents, share the purpose of the program, and impart expected results of the parents’ participation.

At each of the 10 sessions the facilitator discusses the areas of learning, topics for classroom discussion, application of skills for parents, skill-building exercise, and homework assignments, and encourages parent-to-parent group interaction. The facilitator presents specific lesson plans from the teacher’s guide that corresponds with the parent workbook (Fry et al., 2002).

The program facilitator strives to support an alliance among the parents known as the parent support group. The alliance is meant to support the parents during the classroom sessions, and be a continuing support tool after the sessions are completed. The following sections provide a description of the parent curriculum, the parent support group, and a brief description of the adolescent curriculum.

**Parent Project: Parent Curriculum**

The Parent Project is designed to educate the parent relative to the objectives designed for the core curriculum that is used within the classroom settings (Fry et al., 2002). A parent workbook designed by Fry et al. provides pertinent information, classroom activities, and areas for making personal notes. The parent workbook is divided in sections or parts.
Part I of the curriculum addresses main topics, which lay the foundation for change: (a) understanding our children, (b) addressing problematic behavior, (c) introducing a parent’s formula for success, (d) addressing adolescent drug use, (e) demonstrating the danger of gangs, (f) describing the out-of-control child, and (g) developing personal action plans. Part I of the curriculum comprises the first six weeks.

Part II of the curriculum addresses the topics, which supports change and improved parent-child relationships: (a) finding help and support; (b) learning the dynamics of change; (c) managing conflict in the home; (d) listening actively; (e) communicating parental views and feelings; (f) building positive self concepts; (g) imparting consistency, expectations, standards, and values; (h) promoting family unity; (i) putting it together and making it work; and (j) utilizing self-help parent support groups. Part II of the curriculum comprises weeks 7 thru 16.

As early as the first session, parents are encouraged to interact with one another as a form of preparation for the support group. During this portion of the program the facilitator encourages parent involvement and interaction and directs parents to utilize each other when parenting issues arise.

**Parent Project: Parent Support Group**

The program facilitator encourages the parents as early as the first session to formulate relationships with one another. In the classroom sessions, parents discuss behavior problems and strategies to employ in managing their adolescent. The group process involves discussions related to problem solving and role playing by the parents. The program facilitators are trained to guide the parents, yet minimize dictating what the
parents should do in managing their child. Instead the facilitators encourage the parents
to be supportive of one another in managing situations with their children. The program
curriculum is presented in a manner to encourage ongoing parent support. Holzheimer
and Davis (2009) reported that when parents provided the support instead of the
facilitator, parents felt less pressured and tried different approaches to managing the
disruptive behavior of their child. In using this approach, the parents become self-
motivated and creative, and parents stay engaged in the program.

**Parent Project Studies**

Holzheimer and Davis (2009) presented the findings of a study on Parent Project
at a conference in Royal York, Toronto. They first conducted a pilot study on Parent
Project in 2007, which found the program to be effective in helping parents. Although
Parent Project is a court ordered program, non-court involved parents attended the
program to address difficulties with managing their child. The research period was
between June 2004 and June 2006. Three hundred and seventy-five families were
referred to the Parent Project in Cuyahoga, Mahoning, and Stark counties in Ohio to
participate in this study. Of those referred families, 55% participated in at least one
Parent Project session and of the families that attended at least one session, 43% actually
completed the program. Non-court ordered families completed the program at a 40%
rate. The study did not report how many families were involved with the court. The
program sessions were two to three hours long and were scheduled for 10-16 weeks.

The study by Holzheimer and Davis (2009) provided descriptives on the
population of parents that were referred by the program facilitators to participate in the
research. In the study, 59% were male and 41% were female. The mean age of their child was 14.5 years of age. Seventy percent of the adolescent offenses were misdemeanors, which included drug related situations, domestic violence, or status offenses such as: unruly behavior, school truancy, or curfew violations. Forty-three percent of the adolescents had a prior juvenile offense. The objective of the study by Holzheimer and Davis was to evaluate the effectiveness of the program in helping parents make changes to their parenting strategies and decrease the destructive behavior of their adolescent.

The researchers used a qualitative approach to collect data related to the perceptions of the parents and conducted the study in each of the three participating counties. The data collected indicated that the parents who successfully completed the program made changes to their parenting strategies and were able to sustain positive changes over time. Parents reported that they:

- Demonstrated more frequently, love and affection towards their adolescent
- Reduced conflict and argument within the household
- Strengthened positive communication between parent and adolescent
- Increased family cohesion, family organization, family rules, and structure
- Experienced greater parental self-efficacy
- Experienced heightened levels of parental hopefulness and self-management
- Developed a structure for emotional support
- Experienced increased expressiveness and control in the family
- Experienced reduction in the frequency of destructive behavior from their adolescent

The findings from the study by Holzheimer and Davis (2009) showed that parents were able to improve their parenting techniques, by (a) expressing love and affection, (b) increasing structure and rule implementation, and (c) possessing a more positive, hopeful attitude as a parent. Parents perceived improvement in their (a) abilities to parent, (b) skills for communication, and (c) means to interact cohesively with their child. Both parents and adolescents reported a reduction in arguing. The study conducted by Holzheimer and Davis held similarities to the qualitative approach reported by Stolz et al. (2010) relative to methods used in gaining parents perceptions that reported on the extent of changes made to their parenting strategies.

In the research by Stolz et al. (2010), a qualitative approach was used to collect data related to the perceptions of the parents. Stolz structured her study to encourage parents to feel at ease in talking and expressing themselves freely relative to their experiences. The parents participating in the study were audio-taped. A moderator was assigned to present questions, while he or she facilitated a guided discussion with the parents.

The findings of the research by Stolz et al. (2010) indicated that parents who completed the assigned weeks of classroom sessions and implemented what they learned in the classrooms experienced similar positive results as the parents who participated in the 2007 study conducted by Holzheimer and Davis. Specifically, the parents acknowledged an improved relationship with their child, greater parent hopefulness, and
most importantly increased positive behavior in their adolescent. The comments made by parents eventually provided an understanding of the extent of help parents experienced in learning to improve their parenting strategies.

The present study introduces the use of Parent Project, a court ordered parenting education program, to facilitate the research related to the program. The researcher chose this program because past research indicated both court involved and non-court involved parents were helped with making changes to their parenting. The study uses Parent Project to facilitate a qualitative research study exploring what parents reported as the nature of help they experienced in making changes to their parenting strategies. The overall intention of this study was to allow parents to verbalize the nature of help they experienced relative to the help gained in improving and making changes to their parenting strategies.

**Guiding Research Questions**

In this study, Parent Project is used to facilitate the recruitment of study participants and explore the nature of help the participants reported experiencing in making changes to their parenting strategies. The intention of the researcher was to explore the experiences of the parents relative to improving and making changes to their parenting strategies. The guiding research questions for the study were:

Guiding Research Questions:

1. In what ways and to what extent do parents perceive and/or report being helped or encouraged to make changes to their parenting strategies?
2. In what ways and to what extent do parents perceive program components, structure, and format as helpful in making changes to their parenting strategies?

**Summary of Chapter I**

Chapter 1 provided an overview of the history of parenting and the development of parenting education programs over the decades. The chapter discussed the effectiveness of parenting education programs in assisting parents to improve their parenting strategies and relationship with their child. Studies have provided information related to the success of parenting education programs in helping parents, but further research is needed to better understand the nature of the help parents experience in making changes to their parenting strategies. For example, studies have indicated an improvement in parent-child relationships, but research is limited in providing findings on the experiences parents report related to the program content and the actual experiences that elicited the improvement. Brim (1957) suggested that focusing on what was most effective in helping parents would provide the most benefit in assisting parents to make changes in parenting their child.

Major difficulties still remain in our society related to the destructive behavior displayed by children and adolescents. Many parenting education programs are designed to assist parents in making changes to their parenting. The intent of this study is to contribute to the present research literature by adding additional information relative to what parents report about their experiences and the nature of help experienced in making changes to their parenting. The present study provides the experiences of parents related
to the nature of the help they received by making changes to their parenting and parenting strategies, while attending a parenting education program.
CHAPTER II

METHODOLOGY

Parent Project, a court-ordered parenting education program, was introduced in Chapter 1 as a selected program to facilitate the present study. Parent Project has been used worldwide to provide assistance to parents dealing with the destructive behavior of adolescents. Studies by C. J. Collins (1996), Holzheimer and Davis (2009), Murray (1998), Stolz et al. (2010), and Moreis (2002) have reported on the effectiveness of this program to help make changes in parenting strategies, yet input from the parents regarding their personal experiences of being helped while in the program have been limited.

The present study was designed to allow parents to provide a report on their perceptions relative to the nature of help they experienced in making changes to their parenting strategies. The study focused on how, and the extent to which parents reported the program as being helpful with parenting their child.

A Qualitative Research Design

A qualitative research design was used to explore the nature of help that parents experienced related to making changes in their parenting strategies. A descriptive approach was deemed appropriate to understanding the parents’ experiences, as well as what those experiences meant to them. The research design allowed the researcher to analyze information, and allowed insight and understanding relative to the parents’ experiences (Patton, 1990).
Qualitative research differs from quantitative research as it provides the researcher with the actual descriptive experiences of an individual and a specific event. In depth and detailed information is given in order to fully understand the situation researched (Patton, 1990). Parent Project addresses areas where parents are deficient in parenting skills due to their individual limitations and needs (Holzheimer & Davis, 2009). The program has provided appropriate support to parents through the educational topics in the parent curriculum and the support of the parent group. The parent curriculum and the parent support group educated the parents on methods for addressing issues that cause disruption within the family.

Social issues such as single parenthood, limited support systems, insufficient income, and inadequate education are often the cause of families becoming involved with the legal system. These social issues are plausible concerns, which are addressed by using a qualitative inquiry approach (Moreis, 2002; Murray, 1998). Creswell (1998) asserted that qualitative research has been an effective and appropriate holistic approach to gathering and analyzing data that involves social issues that cause disruption in one’s personal life. Creswell (1998) and Patton (1990) described the use of a qualitative research design in providing meaning to an experience. In this regard, parents participating in the present study were encouraged to verbalize and provide their experiences by sharing their perceptions, thoughts, and ideas.

Patton suggested that an event or occurrence could be described as an experience detailing: (a) how a person perceived the experience, (b) how the experience was described by the person, (c) how someone felt about the experience, (d) what judgment
the person had about the experience, (e) the person’s actual memory of the experience, (f) how the person made sense of the experience, and (g) how the person communicated with others about the experience. That intended, parents were given the opportunity to share thoughts about their experiences of being helped by attending Parent Project, how they felt about their experiences, and what aspects of their experiences were helpful.

Patton (1990) proposed that a qualitative research design makes an assumption that there is an essence or fundamental structure to an experience. He projected the use of a rigorous methodological process to distinguish the commonalities of the experience. In this study, the researcher was able to construct meaningful data units from the verbatim transcripts that represented the parents’ perceptions, thoughts, and ideas.

Creswell (1994) proposed that qualitative research that provided descriptives of the participants’ experiences was an appropriate tool to produce a thorough and clear description of a particular event, relationship, culture, or program. Creswell acknowledged that qualitative research allowed individuals to relate their experience of a situation or event to a human condition and describe its meaning relative to how their personal experience of that situation or event affected them.

The Researcher’s Role

Qualitative research relies heavily on the subjective experience of the researcher. The researcher’s identity and frame of reference are significant factors that can impact the process of a study. Therefore, it was appropriate to be aware of how my own frame of references and assumptions impacted the construction of the interview questions, the interviews sessions, and the interpretation of the statements made by the parents.
After years of living with an alcoholic husband, I divorced my first husband to provide a safe environment for my children. As a family dealing with alcoholism, we experienced many difficulties and problems. The divorce forced me into the role of sole breadwinner and head of the household. My four children (one girl and three boys) became latchkey children. They were responsible for managing themselves while I was not at home. I had no support systems to use for help. My second marriage produced new challenges. I became a stepmother. Soon after my second marriage my first husband died, which caused discord within the family unit. While I was still addressing separation issues related to the divorce and re-marriage, I had to then address his death.

When I decided to conduct this study, I knew I had biases; and that my personal experiences as a parent could influence the gathering and interpreting of data. As a parent and as a mental health counselor, I needed to be aware of my own personal experiences of parenthood. As I listened and interpreted the information of the study participants, I became aware of my own assumptions, viewpoints, and prejudices. Denzin and Lincoln (1998) proposed that “all research is interpretive, guided by a set of beliefs and feelings about the world and how it should be understood and studied” (p. 26). It was my responsibility as the researcher in this study to make an effort to monitor my viewpoint, so that information from the parents reflected their views and not mine.

The research was undertaken as a dissertation study. I facilitated the interviews to ensure adherence to a qualitative design and to reduce bias from other interviewers. As a parent and a professional counselor, I attempted to project a safe space for parents to share their comments. My presence facilitated rapport and trust as parents provided their
perceptions of the program openly and freely. Schaffner (1997) reported in her study parents tended to display reluctance, resistance, and suspicion. She added that parents felt they were being blamed for their child’s behavior, and that parents were usually angry, rebellious, and reluctant to communicate their thoughts and feelings openly with others.

As the researcher in the current study, I committed to making parents feel comfortable by listening while they shared their views. I did not judge or criticize their comments or concerns. I provided information relative to my status as a doctoral student at Kent State University preparing a research study on parenting education programs. During the study participants’ interviews my personal role as a parent was not discussed. As the researcher, I listened to parents’ responses to my questions and provided them with full access to sharing about their experience of the program and its components.

**Pilot Study**

A Parent Project program facilitator was approached by the researcher who was seeking parents for the pilot study. The researcher required parents that were willing to volunteer their perceptions related to participation in the program. Two female parents responded to the program facilitator, and volunteered for the pilot study interview. The interviews were scheduled once both parents completed the required sessions of Parent Project. The interviews were conducted in a quiet enclosed room of a local neighborhood library.

One mother was married and the other mother was a divorced-single parent. Both of the mothers held degrees and were employed. Both were Caucasian and resided in a
middle class community. The mothers agreed to be audio taped during the interview session. The researcher assured both parents of confidentiality prior to beginning the interview. During the interview, the mothers were asked to provide their perceptions and thoughts relative to the help received by attending Parent Project. Table 1 provides the questions presented to the parents who participated in the pilot study.

Table 1

*Interview Questions Presented to Parents Participating in the Pilot Study*

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**Interview Questions**

- What did you find about Parent Project to be helpful to you? How, or in what ways did you find it helpful? If not, in what ways was it not helpful?
- How was the classroom setting helpful to you? How or in what ways?
- What skills did you learn in Parent Project that helped you with your child?
- What about Parent Project helped you with your child? With your other children or family members?
- What about the program helped you to return weekly and finally complete the program?
- Is there anything else about Parent Project that you found helpful, and would like to share with me?
The interview questions, for the pilot study, were designed to reflect knowledge gained by the researcher from reviewing research literature on parenting and parenting education programs. The interview questions prepared intended to obtain the parents’ perspective on what they perceived helpful while attending Parent Project. The results of the pilot study provided the researcher with a frame of reference that added to the process of developing questions for the main research study. Additionally, the pilot study assisted the researcher in refreshing her interviewing skills while obtaining parent perceptions of the help received in attending Parent Project. The parents informed the researcher of their experience relative to:

- The partnership of the other parents and providing support to each other;
- The techniques and tools learn in the classroom to use with their child;
- The personal experiences and interactions with the program facilitators that were supportive;
- The personal management skills learned in parenting their child;
- The self-confidence gained in parenting and re-claiming authority and control over child’s behavior;
- The importance of being consistent in their parenting and the development of self-management in providing adequate consequences and interventions.

The researcher listened to the audio tapes and reviewed her interviewer’s notes compiling the statements of the parents relative to their perceptions related to the help received from attending Parent Project. The parents talked about personal successes that were helpful in strengthening them as a parent, improving their relationships with their
child, and learning about topics and techniques in addressing disruptive behavior displayed by their child.

The information provided in the pilot study interviews presented the researcher with a collection of comments that were helpful in designing the interview questions for the main study. The pilot study information added strength to the literature reviews and expanded the degree of details relative to what parents needed and wanted in addressing problematic behavior in their child. The information given by the two parents provided individualized and detailed experiences of the problematic situations that they as parents were able to address in a positive manner due to the help experienced in Parent Project.

**Sampling Procedure and Participant Criteria**

Miles and Huberman (1994) discussed gaining relevant and subjective qualitative data directly from participants. In addition, Patton (1990) and Miles and Huberman discussed how qualitative sampling was purposive rather than random. The principle objective of using purposive sampling is to work with a small number of participants in making an in-depth study, and to obtain rich, descriptive, information. By using this process the participants become informants by “providing rich descriptions of the experience being investigated” (Polkinghorne, 1989, p. 47).

Patton (1990) recognized 16 different sampling strategies under the category of purposive sampling. One of which is known as criterion sampling. Criterion sampling was the most appropriate strategy for this study, as parents met a “predetermined criterion of importance” (p. 176). The researcher provided the criteria for parent participation in the study. The program facilitator then reviewed those parents who met the criteria and
provided that information to the researcher. The criterions for parents were to (a) be first-time participants in the program, (b) attend at least 9 out of 10 sessions, and (c) agree to participate in two 30-60-minute interviews.

When the parents agreed to participate in the study, their names, addresses, and telephone numbers were obtained for the researcher to make contact with them; and the parents were given study packets. The parents were encouraged to return the study packet, which they received following the completion of session 10. When the packets were returned, parents were contacted for interviews. When two parents attended the program for one adolescent, both parents were allowed the opportunity to participate in the study; however, each parent was interviewed separately. The Institutional Review Board of Kent State University (Appendix A) and the Organization Invitational Letter (Appendix B) provided approval to pursue this study.

When qualitative research is conducted quality of information is more important than the quantity of information (Sandelowski, 1995). The sample size was seven participants for this study. The sample size of a study is usually determined by saturation. When saturation occurs participants begin to supply the researcher with redundant information as opposed to new information (Nieswiadomy, 2002). The goal of qualitative research is to describe and understand the experience of an event or occurrence through the personal statements of a limited number of individuals.

The sample size of seven parents provided a redundancy of information relative to the components of the program that parents experienced as helpful. Qualitative research is primarily used to explore the study participants’ experiences that have occurred in the
past (Moustakas, 1994); thus, it was appropriate to interview parents only after they completed the required sessions of the program.

**A Description of Parent Project Facilitators**

The Parent Project facilitators for this group consisted of: a social worker and two probation officers; and additionally, a prosecutor who made regular appearances at the sessions. At times the prosecutor was asked to provide professional information that parents needed to know about the court and their responsibilities as parents. Other professionals attended the group as speakers and provided expert knowledge. They were identified to the parents as a police officer and a mental health counselor from the Crossroads’ program. At some point, graduate parents of Parent Project were asked to speak and provide encouragement to the attending parents.

**Implementation**

The main research study was conducted through an extension office of a juvenile court located in a Northeastern county of Ohio. Parent Project was designed for parents ordered by the court to attend. Although parents are usually court-ordered, non-court ordered parents are allowed to attend, especially if they have asked for help. Parent Project provides parents with educational classes. The parents are supported in learning behavior management techniques and skills used to discourage disruptive behavior of adolescents.

Twenty-seven parents attended the Parent Project program relative to their child’s involvement with the juvenile court system. Twenty-six of the parents were Caucasian; one parent was African American. The program facilitator spoke with parents during the
first session and offered the opportunity for participation in a research study related to the program. The researcher provided the facilitator with a Facilitator’s Script (Appendix C), which the facilitator presented to the parents during a session. The script introduced the researcher and offered the opportunity for parents to participate in the study. In addition, the researcher provided a Parent Project Study Flyer (Appendix K) to distribute to interested parents. The Facilitator Script and the Parent Project Study Flyer were provided to the program facilitator to use at class session number seven of Parent Project.

During class session number seven of Parent Project the researcher was introduced to the parents. The researcher spoke with the parents about the opportunity to participate in the study, when the last session (session number 10) of Parent Project ended. At class session number eight, the researcher revisited the classroom, and again offered parents an opportunity to participate in the study. Potential participants were told that those persons who displayed an interest in the study would be asked to provide their contact information at the 10th session. A research study packet would be provided to them before leaving session 10. The contact information requested would include the: mailing address, telephone number, email address, if available, and the parent’s preferred method of contact. The researcher informed the parents that a $25 incentive would be provided to those parents who participated in the study.

After the researcher’s third presentation at session number 10, 12 parents came forward expressing an interest to participate in the study. From the 12 parents, six parents (five Caucasians and one African American) displayed an interest in the study.
Five of those six parents scheduled and attended the two interviews. The one parent (African American) declined participation, and stated that his schedule was too busy.

The researcher provided parents interested in the study with a study packet. The contact information was documented on an index card. The researcher retained the index card. An identifying number (e.g., 1 through 10) was placed in the corner of each index card and all paperwork within the study packet instead of the participant’s name. The parent was protected against disclosure of his or her identity if the parent happened to misplace any of the research study material. The researcher had access to the index cards and study packet information. The original contact information forms were kept by the researcher and stored in a secured filing system.

The study packet which was provided to the parents at class session number 10 included: (a) a Cover Letter To Participants (Appendix D) to explain the research study and the screening procedure, (b) a Participant Form (Appendix E), (c) a Demographic Questionnaire (Appendix F) to confirm that the parent met the criteria for the study, and (d) an Interview Question Guide (Appendix G) to provide the parent with prior information regarding the questions that would be asked at the first interview meeting. The parents were required to return all forms in a self-addressed, pre-stamped envelope, which was included in the study packet. An assigned number from the initial contact with the parent was coded on the forms to ensure confidentiality. The screening and demographic forms were designed to ensure that the parents met the criteria for the study. All answers on the forms were kept confidential. The forms and questions referred to in this section are presented and discussed further in the Instrumentation section.
The researcher contacted the parents by telephone within 24 hours of providing the parents with the study packet to encourage them to return the packet within the next 48 hours. The researcher provided the parents with a self-addressed, pre-stamped envelope, in which to return the completed forms to the researcher. After the researcher reviewed the returned screening form and demographic questionnaire and confirmed that the parent met the criteria for the study, the researcher contacted the parent to schedule the first face-to-face interview. The interview was scheduled per the day and time most convenient to the parent. The locations of the interviews were held at the facility where the parents attended and completed the Parent Project classes.

Prior to beginning the first interview, parents were given the opportunity to review the Parent Participant Consent Form (Appendix H) and Audiotape Consent Form (Appendix I) and to ask any questions about either the forms or the research study. After the consent forms were signed, parent questions addressed, and any revisions made to the screening form and demographic form, the researcher started the audiotape for the interview.

The researcher recorded personal thoughts and reactions to the parent responses and the interview process on the Interview Observation Form (Appendix J). The form was used later as a supplement in the transcription process. The review of the Interview Observation Form was completed after each interview. The researcher reflected on emerging themes and the overall process of the interview. The transcription of the audiotape began within 24 hours of completing the first interview.
The researcher began the preliminary stages of the data analysis before the second interview occurred in order to capitalize on time. The process included reviewing the transcript, identifying relevant statements, and then compiling them into categories related to the parents’ experiences.

The second interview was scheduled after the researcher completed the transcription and the preliminary analysis of the first interview session. At the second interview, the researcher reviewed the transcript with the parent. This procedure allowed the parent an opportunity to confirm the accuracy of the transcript derived from the first interview session and to add additional thoughts.

The process of confirming the parents’ responses included discussing themes that the researcher identified during the transcription and the preliminary analysis process. The process used to confirm the parents’ responses is known as a member check. The member check process confirms the meaning placed on the parents’ experiences. Additionally, the second interview allowed a debriefing for the parents relative to the interviewing process. If they had any concerns or issues about being interviewed, they could communicate them.

Creswell (1998) reported the use of the member check as a valuable tool in gaining the essence of the parents’ experiences. The member check is described in more detail in the Trustworthiness section. At the second interview, the member check allowed the researcher to verify themes identified while discussing the transcripts of the first interview. Similar to the first interview, an audiotape was used.
Initially, 12 parents volunteered to participate in the study. Seven parents declined participation during the interview scheduling. At the point of analysis the five participants that remained in the study were considered a limited number for the saturation process. The researcher then sought two additional parents. Of the two parents found, one parent was from the initial group approached for the research study. The other parent had been involved in the pilot study. The two additional parents brought the number to seven participants, which increased the possibilities for saturation of information.

Factors Causing Parents’ Involvement With Parent Project

The parents reported that the disruptive behavior of their child caused their attendance in Parent Project. Vic and Ollie reported their daughter’s diagnosis of Bi-Polar disorder contributed to her disruptive and at times violent behavior. Their daughter’s problems were both at home and at school; both parents became court involved following a violent situation between the child and the mother. That incident was reported to the researcher by the father, Vic, and not by the mother, Ollie.

Ellis and Char reported that they became court involved following false allocations made by Ellis’s son against Ellis and the stepmother, Char. Ellis stated that his ex and his son were trying to manipulate a situation; purpose being for the child to return to his mother’s residence. The allocations caused the Children and Family Services to become involved, which later included the juvenile court system.

Iris’s daughter was a status offender. She had constant problems at school and at home, but especially at home. Iris reported her daughter being violent, out-of-control,
and destructive, causing damage to personal properties. The mother felt she had no control over the violent situations that occurred and shared concerns for the safety of the home. Iris’s daughter became involved with Crossroads and later with the juvenile court system. Crossroads is a youth behavioral health organization that offers a comprehensive system of services for youth and their families, which includes a continuum of services from prevention, outpatient counseling, and intensive services such as partial hospitalization and therapeutic foster care for children and adolescents. Iris’s daughter was found to have a chemical substance addiction. Additionally, Iris was concerned about negative peer influences on her daughter’s behavior.

Holly reported her daughter being out-of-control and defiant relative to following home rules and disrespecting her parents. There was constant disruption in the home because of the daughter’s behavior. Holly’s daughter attempted to control her parents to get her own way. The daughter was a status offender, which included curfew violations, non-compliance to her parents’ rules, and negative peer influences.

Una reported her problems as multiple issues stemming from gaining legal custody of her three sons. Una stated that her sons had difficulties adjusting to her rules after residing with their father who had provided little to no structure. Her oldest son became involved with juvenile court due to status offenses, such as school truancy, non-compliance to home rules, and involvement with negative peers.

The Interview Process

The researcher-interviewer conducted an open-ended, informal conversational interview with the parent participants. The researcher used an interview question guide
approach (Patton, 1990). The guide provided eight questions that were designed and established for inquiry relative to effective components of Parent Project. The questions developed for the main research study reflected two sources of reference: (a) the informed literature related to successful components of established parenting education programs, and (b) the perceptions of the participants who were a part of the pilot study.

The interviewer used non-verbal and verbal encouragers to prompt the parents in their communications (Ivey, 1994). Non-verbal encouragers were used to communicate to the parents that “I am listening” and included the interviewer nodding her head, leaning forward towards the parent, smiling, and making eye contact. The verbal encouragers used by the interviewer were verbalized by using: “umm,” “uh-huh,” or “ok.”

The researcher intended that the parent experience the interviewer actively listening and understanding what the parent had to say about his or her experiences. The researcher/interviewer projected a non-judgmental, empathic, and patient demeanor with the parent while conducting the interviews. The researcher was challenged during the interview. Although the parents talked openly and freely, at times, they provided information unrelated to the study. The researcher had to concentrate on her interviewing skills relative to keeping the parent focused on the question being asked.

The researcher scheduled two individual interviews with each parent. The first interview obtained the parents’ personal thoughts, ideas, and opinions relative to the nature of help that parents experienced from the program in relation to making changes to their parenting strategies. The second interview provided parents with the opportunity to
review the transcription of the first interview and to verify and expand on their responses. Both interviews were semi-structured and provided open-ended questions to allow the opportunity for parents to express and provide information, confirm their responses, and speak about what their experiences meant to them.

The process allowed parents to define the meaning of their experiences. The interviews were provided following the completion of the classroom sessions, which allowed the opportunity for comments to encompass the entire program. After the completion of the interviews the researcher began processing the parents’ interviews into transcripts to prepare for the coding process.

**Coding Process**

Basit (2003) identified the process of data analysis as a difficult aspect of qualitative research, and added that the coding process is significant to analyzing and organizing textual data. The purpose of analyzing qualitative data is to determine the categories, relationships, and assumptions that inform the participants’ viewpoints, and the topic being studied. Initially, the researcher used the Microsoft® Word program to generate the data units. The researcher planned on using a manual process of sorting the data units into categories, but later decided to use the software NVivo 8. The researcher felt that the manual process would become cumbersome relative to the volume of material, and that using NVivo 8 would ease the workload produced in determining the data units. NVivo 8 is a software package designed to aid with the analysis of data. The software package used was a revised version of NUD*IST (Non-numerical Unstructured Data, Indexing, Searching and Theorizing).
Basit (2003) discussed a method of creating codes known as a provisional start list, which Miles and Huberman (1994, p. 58) reported as a viable tool for use in the analytic process. The start list is derived for a conceptual framework, list of research questions, hypothesis, problem areas, and key concepts. In the present study, the researcher conceptualized the reading of the literature, and considered the content of information from the report of parents to reflect on determining data units and categories.

The coding process for the present research study began with analyzing the data gathered from the interview transcripts and observation field notes. The researcher read through the transcripts several times, scanning for data units of meaning. Data units were sentences and paragraphs identified by the researcher and coded relative to concepts. The researcher coded text that related to behavior, events, activities strategies, relationships, and significant meanings that parents placed on their experiences.

The researcher questioned herself about the data as she coded, in an effort to qualify the significance of the content as reported by the parents. The questions the researcher asked herself were: What is going on with the parent(s)? What is this parent really saying? How does the context support, maintain, or change the actions and/or statements made by the parents? Each of the seven interview transcripts were processed and analyzed in the same manner.

In performing the process, the analytical tools (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) the researcher used were: (a) questioning herself relative to coding data units and assigning data unit descriptors, (b) conceptualizing the data units to identify categories, and (c) categorizing concepts to determine themes. After the process of coding the data and
identifying the categories was accomplished, the researcher compared the similarities and differences of the coding and collapsed categories that overlapped. The researcher then initiated a cross interview analysis to address and validate the patterns of experiences reported by parents through the content of their transcripts. The researcher continued the process of working with the data to determine if the data supported and addressed the intent of the study. Once the researcher confirmed that process, the conclusions were developed relative to the themes.

**Instrumentation**

The following three information-gathering items were used for this research study: a participant form, a demographic questionnaire, and an interview observation form. This section reviews each of these forms.

**Participant Form**

The participant form was designed to gather information about each parent to determine if he or she met the criteria for the study. The study criteria required parents to complete at least 9 out of 10 sessions of the program. This form was given to all parents interested in participating, following the completion of class session number 10. All answers on the form were held confidential. Additionally, the form required parents to provide a list of days and times they would be available for the first interview. The parents were requested to respond to the questions on the form and contact the researcher if there were any concerns. The parents were given a flyer that provided information about the study including the telephone contact number for the interviewer.
**Demographic Questionnaire**

The demographic questionnaire was designed to gather information about the parent and to confirm that he or she met the criteria of the study. The form served to establish rapport with the parent and collect additional information. The information included: gender, age, marital status, educational background, current occupation, and ethnic or racial background. Additionally, the information included the age of the adolescent, the problem behavior experienced, and any additional children in the family.

**First Interview Questions**

The interview questions were used to inquire about the nature of help parents experienced while attending Parent Project. The questions used in the first interview were intended to allow the parent to give candid responses regarding their experience. The interview questions were influenced by the review of the research literature on parenting education programs and the perceptions provided by the parents from the pilot study. The questions for the first interview were:

1. Tell me about your experience of using the techniques or methods suggested by the facilitator or other parents in the program to help with your parenting strategies. Were there any other experiences that helped you in your parenting strategies?

2. Tell me about your experience or experiences of the facilitator that helped you in making changes to your parenting strategies. Tell me about your experience or experiences of the other parents that helped you to enhance your parenting strategies.
3. Tell me about your experience or experiences in relationship to the multiple topics discussed in the classroom sessions. Tell me about the help you experienced relative to using the information about the topics discussed in class.

4. Tell me about your experience or experiences of help related to having your spouse participate in the program with you. What about that experience was helpful to you? Explain. Was it not helpful? Explain.

5. Tell me about your experience or experiences that helped you to return weekly to complete the program.

6. What thoughts do you have relative to your experiences of making changes to your parenting strategies that were helpful in strengthening your role as a parent?

7. In making changes to help with your parenting strategies, what experience or experiences would you say were most helpful to you?

8. In your experience was there anything about making changes to your parenting strategies that was not helpful to you?

Question eight was included to allow the parents to speak on anything within the program that they felt was not helpful to them. The first interview between the parent and the researcher included prompting questions or statements related to the parents’ responses to obtain in depth information. Whenever the parents’ responses were unclear, the interviewer sought to clarify the information by reflecting the statement back to the
parent for clarifying or through additional questions to clarify their statement. All seven parents were asked the same set of questions at their first interview.

The second interview was conducted primarily to serve as a member check and to obtain any additional information from each parent. Member check is considered a technique to ensure credibility of the study (credibility is discussed later in this chapter). Member checks allowed parents an opportunity to assess the meaning of their responses, generate any corrections to the transcript, and furnish new information during the second interview (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The member check provided the researcher with an opportunity to summarize themes that emerged during analysis (from the first interview) and obtain each parent’s reaction to the results (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

In addition, the second interview allowed the parents to view the transcribed statements they made during the first audio taped interview with the interviewer, allowed the parent to expand on or clarify what was meant by any particular statement, and provided an opportunity for the parent to add additional information during the second interview. The following are the questions presented to parents during the second interview:

1. Are the statements complete that the interviewer (I) transcribed as your responses for the questions during the first interview?
2. Is there anything in your statements that you would like to clarify or expand on in regards to the questions asked?
3. Do you have any other thoughts that occurred for you about our first interview session that you would like to add?
Upon the completion of the second interview, the interviewer debriefed each parent to ensure that there was not residue distress from the interviewing process. Joanides, Brigham and Joanning (1997) suggested that the debriefing process served to enhance a rich and thick flow of information and facilitated collaboration between the participant and the interviewer.

For the debriefing process, the interviewer used an open-ended question to allow the parent to respond in his or her own words to the lead question. Audio taping was used during the debriefing process. The lead question for the debriefing process was:

1. Is there anything you need to say to feel complete about participating in the study?

After the question was asked for the debriefing process, the interviewer listened for any concerns or distress that the parent might have experienced. The interviewer mentally assessed any situation that warranted further action. If more action was required to handle the parent’s concern, the interviewer attempted the necessary process. Based on the parent’s needs, the interviewer used appropriate and/or timely means to assist or address concerns. The interviewer made sure that emergency numbers, such as the police or social services, were readily handy to address any serious concerns or situations as required by the Human Subjects Review. See contact information for a local Mental Health Agency (Appendix L).

The transcription of the second interviews was completed, and included with the data from the first interviews. All transcripts were used in the data analysis. The
researcher used a reflexive journal to verify the themes and the adherence to using a data analysis procedure.

**Interview Observation Form**

The interview observation form was used during the first and second interviews. The interviewer used this form to log information observed during the interviews. The form allowed the interviewer to take brief notes on observations, thoughts, or ideas that occurred during the interview process.

The interview observation form was used to record the date, location, name of the interviewer, and a brief description of the project, and provided an area for making notes on the responses made by the parent to the interview questions. The interviewer was able to use this form to record reflective thoughts about the interview, as well as provide a summary of the interview to include in the process of developing themes (Creswell, 1998).

**Trustworthiness**

Lincoln and Guba (1985) indicated that qualitative research is judged to some extent by the trustworthiness of the information presented by study participants. They stated that credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability encompassed the concept of trustworthiness within a research study. The factors composing trustworthiness and a description of how each factor was met in this research study are described.

In the present study, parents participated strictly voluntarily and because they wanted to provide their input. Parents participating with that level of intent and honesty
provided a quality to their report relative to the nature of help they experienced. Parents reported that parenting education programs such as Parent Project are helpful, but need more exposure so that parents who seek help can find programs for assistance. The parents spoke openly and freely about their experiences and their gain in making changes to their parenting strategies.

The use of a reflexive journal increased the overall level of trustworthiness of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher’s reflexive journal included the researcher’s observations of the study participants’ behavior, attitudes, and experiences, personal reflections on the data analysis and procedures, the logistics of the study, and decisions made regarding the methodology. Most importantly, the researcher’s reflexive journal aided in the development of the second interview question, and included summaries of discussions with the dissertation committee advisors. Overall, these techniques provided a higher level of trustworthiness for the research study.

**Credibility**

Credibility ascribes to the researcher’s competence to exemplify the experiences expressed by the participants. The researcher used the member check and reflexive journaling to enhance the credibility of the study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that the most critical technique that enhanced credibility was the member check. The technique of member check included the reviewing of the transcription from the first interview with each parent and discussing the emerging themes that derived from the data analysis during the second interview.
**Transferability, Dependability and Confirmability**

The researcher aimed to receive a rich, thick description of the nature of help parents experienced by using the program to make changes to their parenting strategies. A rich, thick description is defined as “providing enough description to contextualize the study such that readers will be able to determine the extent to which their situation matches the research context, and hence, whether findings can be transferred” (Merriam, 2002, p. 31). It is by this description, that a future researcher may be able to judge if this experience can be transferred to a similar context (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Dependability pertains to the reliability of the research findings and confirmability pertains to the level of the researcher’s objectivity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher’s use of the member check assisted in increasing the levels of dependability, thus ensuring reliability of the consistency between the product and the process. Additionally, confirmability refers to both the process and product of the research and indicates the degree to which the researcher demonstrates that interpretations are neutral.

**Summary of Chapter II**

Chapter 2 provided an overview of the conduction of a qualitative research study. The information provided in this chapter described the process and procedures that were used to obtain the report of parents relative to the nature of help they experienced in making changes to their parenting strategies through participation in the Parent Project.

The guiding research questions for the study were:
1. In what ways and to what extent do parents perceive and/or report being helped or encouraged to make changes to their parenting strategies?

2. In what ways and to what extent do parents perceive program components, structures, and format as helpful in making changes to their parenting strategies?
CHAPTER III

RESULTS

Chapter 3 presents the findings of a qualitative research study. The results section provides an introduction of the study participants who consented to individual interviews. In addition, the chapter presents the descriptive statements parents made relative to the content of information provided during their interview. The information parents provided addressed their experiences of the help received from attending Parent Project. The analysis of the contents derived from the interview transcripts revealed the presence of narrative themes. Chapter 3 provides a description of the themes developed from the data.

Parent Participants

The research sample for this study included seven Caucasian parents, five females and two males. Of the seven parents two were married couples which included both the husband and wife in attendance (4), and two single female parents (2). One married female parent participated in the study (1); her husband participated in Parent Project, but did not participate in the study. The parents attended the program as a result of their teens’ disruptive behavior. Parents needed to attend 10 classroom sessions as a requirement to participate in the study. Five parents were interviewed at the community center where they attended the parenting program. Two parents were seen at their home due to scheduling difficulties. The parents were recruited from two different Parent Project groups. An introduction to the seven parents follows.
Char

Char is a 41-year-old, Caucasian female. She is employed as a court deputy clerk in a northern county of Ohio. Char is married to Ellis, another participant in the research study. There are three children in the home; two biological children of Char’s from her first marriage, and a child of Ellis’s from a previous relationship.

Ellis

Ellis is a 36-year-old, Caucasian male. He is self-employed as a home remodeling and construction entrepreneur. Ellis is Char’s husband. Ellis has two step-children with Char. He has a son and daughter from a previous relationship. His daughter resides with the biological mother. The son resides with Ellis and Char.

Holly

Holly is a 57-year-old, Caucasian female. She is employed as a pediatric nurse in a local hospital. Holly and her husband attended Parent Project. They have three daughters, which includes a set of twins. Holly stated that one twin was the “good” twin, and the other twin was the “bad” twin.

Iris

Iris is a 40-year-old, divorced, Caucasian female. She is employed as a billing clerk. Iris has two daughters. Iris disclosed problems of domestic violence prior to and after her divorce. Her oldest daughter presented with disruptive behavior.
Ollie

Ollie is a 37-year-old Caucasian female. She is employed as a surgical technician. Ollie is married to Vic, another participant in this research study. Ollie has two children: a boy and a girl.

Una

Una is a 40-year-old Caucasian female. She is employed as a medical technician at a local hospital. Una is divorced and has three sons. Her sons lived with their father until several months prior to Una attending Parent Project. Una won parental custody of her boys. She reported all three sons as problematic. The oldest son was the most disruptive.

Vic

Vic is a 38-year-old Caucasian male. He is married to Ollie. Vic is employed as a computer programmer. This is his first marriage. He has two children with Ollie: a boy and a girl.

Introduction of the Five Themes

Five themes present what parents experienced as helpful relative to making changes to their parenting strategies. An analysis of the data revealed descriptive narratives which defined the relative themes of the study. The narratives represented the nature of help experienced by parents in making changes to their parenting strategies. The narratives given by parents included words synonymic to being helpful; such as: beneficial, worthwhile, important, enjoyable, nice, good, and supportive. For example, parents used the words beneficial or worthwhile in the context of learning and/or using
components of the program. The themes that were determined as helpful were related to: recognizing support systems, the interaction with the program facilitators, parenting behaviors, teenage topics, and techniques/tools for improving teen behavior.

The Five Themes Determined From the Data

Theme One: Recognizing Helpful Support Systems

Theme one related to the parents’ experience of gaining help relative to the support systems within the program. The support systems included the facilitators, the other attending parents, and attending spouses. The parents spoke of listening and relating to the other parents as helpful in understanding their own situations. All seven of the parents reported feeling connected relative to difficulties experienced in parenting a teen. Parents spoke of gaining help from the facilitators relative to the information given during the classroom sessions. The parents reported that the facilitators provided leadership, direction, and advice. The parents who were married spoke of the importance of having their spouse attend the program. Spouses were recognized as a support system as the parents learned to work together as a family unit. Each of the married parents, and the two parents who were divorced provided their experiences of help related to the support system within the program.

Holly commented on the support she received from the other parents in the program. She was able to relate to problems that other parents talked about, and she experienced that as helpful in understanding her own difficulties. She said:

It was interesting no one had peace in his/her home [relating to the other parents].

And so, we all related very, very well. At the end, we had a sharing group where
you [I] could talk about how things went over the week. And people [the parents] would offer their suggestions. And I really enjoyed listening to what people [other parents] had to offer . . . So, I learned from them [other parents], too. I think everyone learned from each other.

Ellis spoke of his experience of gaining support from the other parents. He acknowledged that each parent was different in their method of parenting and how that helped him in learning different ideas and techniques for parenting. Ellis stated he experienced help by talking and listening to the other parents. He talked about the other parents and the help he received which made him successful in making changes to his parenting strategies. Ellis said:

Each parent was different. The parents got to know each other and started to share [talk] more and more about their situations. As a parent, when we all sat in that circle and we did our thing [talked and interacted with each other], we knew that other people [the parents in the group] were listening to us. People started to share more the second week and you [I] started to hear more about different ideas and techniques and, at that point I said, “Wow,” it’s not bad. The next week you [I] came back and you [I] shared about [talked about] your [my] success stories, what happened, and how it came about happening.

Ellis made comments about understanding the importance of giving and receiving support. Ellis recognized the support of the program and other parents as helpful for getting through difficulties. He said:
Ellis spoke about communicating problems.] When a parent [I] can come to honor and really start to share emotionally and show what I am feeling. What I am going through, I know that I am comfortable. I am in a safe place finally. No one is going to be mad at me for what my child did or for my child being this way. No one is judging me. I’m in this class. I’m here to grow. I’m going to tell you what I’m thinking. And when I share it with you [what I’m thinking], you share with me your comments. Your [my] kid beats [me] you down over the week [emotionally exhausted], it [Parent Project] was a place to come and feel good again. We were all there for the same reason. You are parents, and you are at your wit’s ends [need help].

Char commented on the experiences of gaining support from the other parents in the program. She expressed feeling a connection with the other parents and that a relationship grew from the connection. Char spoke about her experience of being supported and how it helped her through the program. Char said:

There was very much camaraderie; where you [I] genuinely looked forward to the class. You [I] really did get relationship. I never expected to end up with the camaraderie. A lot of the things that we [Char and Ellis] do now, we were doing before. But we didn’t have anyone to back us up [give support] . . . with the other parents supporting you [us], it was so much easier.

Char reported her experience of having a spouse in the program. She spoke about it being helpful in setting rules and disciplining her stepson: Char said, “because then you [we] both are on the same page [doing the same thing].” “Both learning the same
techniques.” Char voiced her disappointment that the biological parents of her children and stepson were not involved in the program. “It would be beneficial to have both biological parents attend [Parent Project] together.”

Vic voiced negative comments about the program because he was resistant to attending Parent Project. Yet, he was adamant about the importance of both parents attending the program together. Vic said, in his opinion:

Parents have to be on the same page, or it’s [the program] not going to work, I mean from that part [perspective] it’s absolutely imperative. You have to [attend] together. But the one thing for sure is that the parents have to be on the same page. Always, work together.

Una spoke about her experience with the facilitators. She stated the facilitators were good about giving information that was helpful, she said:

They [the facilitators] were there to help you [me]. . . . They [the facilitators] were good about giving us a list of other resources and stuff [information] that was available, that I didn’t have a clue was available to us [me].

Ollie responded by using the words enjoyable and nice when asked about her experiences relative to the other parents. She spoke about seeing the other parents every week. Ollie expressed her experience with the group:

It was enjoyable to see them every week and be able to share [discuss] with them, and be able to listen to them. That was always nice. I would say it was all positive to interact with them [the other parents in the group].
Iris spoke about her experience of gaining support from the facilitators in understanding her legal rights as a tenant. Iris stated while living in her apartment she experienced incidents of domestic violence. She said the incidents occurred with her husband, after their divorce, and with her daughter. Iris stated the apartment management threatened her with a statement saying; “any more disturbances and I would be kicked out.” She reported that she was encouraged by the facilitators to call the police when her daughter became destructive, regardless of the threat from the apartment management.

Iris continued talking about this issue by saying the facilitators were helpful in giving her information that she was unaware existed. Iris said:

Because I told him [the facilitator] I was concerned about the police coming to the house [apartment]; I could potentially be kicked out [evicted]. He [the facilitator] gave me a number to call [for tenant legal assistance]. He [the facilitator] said “no” they [apartment management] are not allowed . . . to do that [threaten her or evict her because of her daughter’s behavior].

Iris stated that after receiving that information, she did call the police again when she had problems with her daughter. Additionally, Iris commented that she gained support from a friend who was in Parent Project, too. Iris stated:

Often when I would get stressed out and not sure how to handle certain situations; she [my friend] would talk to me. What she said made a lot of sense. On the other hand she [my friend] would call me when she was having problems and ask for suggestions.
Parents reported on the support that they experienced from the facilitators, the other parents, and/or their spouse. All seven of the parents reported that it made an impact on them relative to making changes to their parenting and their strategies of managing their child. The parents acknowledged the efforts of the facilitators to support parental changes.

**Theme Two: Parents’ Experience of the Program Facilitators’ Expertise as Helpful**

Theme two represented the parents’ experience of the facilitators. All seven of the parents remarked on the facilitators’ professionalism and sensitivity to the parents’ needs. The facilitators in this study were professionals in the field of social work, mental health counseling, and criminal justice. They were identified as professional relative to their backgrounds and the roles that they projected within the Parent Project. The facilitators offered professional and legal information, as well as access to outside sources of help for the parents. The parents spoke about the facilitators’ willingness to provide individual help and guidance, as well as professional interventions. All seven of the parents stated the facilitators were knowledgeable in their field of work. All of the parents provided their experience of the facilitators as professionals. Holly commented on a facilitator and that his approach was helpful in keeping her involved in the program:

The main guy he worked in the court, Shawn was excellent. He was very good, very good. He brought a lot of personal stories, he wasn’t just reading out of a book. He lived it. He wasn’t just saying this is what you need to do. So that made you [me] feel comfortable. He wanted to move you [me] forward and the only way to do that was to hold you [me] accountable. And they [the facilitators]
always did [hold us accountable] in a very soft spirited way. You really felt like they [the facilitators] knew what they were talking about, absolutely.

Holly had additional comments about the facilitators supporting her in feeling more at ease in making decisions as a parent. She said they helped her to believe in herself that she could make positive changes and support positive changes in her teen:

These were professional people [the facilitators] who were not angels when they were children and they turned out to be really good adults. The facilitators’ stories, their own experiences were very helpful [in believing that change could happen for her].

Holly said that the facilitators were “straight forward” in their approach with the parents. “So they [the facilitators] were really, really helpful.” “They [the facilitators] really knew what they were talking about. They [the facilitators] were prepared.”

Char appreciated the professionalism of the facilitators, as well as their academic background, and expressed her admiration for their professional and academic backgrounds. Char thought the facilitators were creditable, she said:

It was great, and all of them [the facilitators] through Kent State University. So, that [their credentials] helped and that [the program] was more inviting and interesting to me because it was backed by academia. I had more respect for them [the facilitators]. Their [the facilitators] credentials kind of helped me anyway.

The team [all of the facilitators involved with this group] was very organized.
Char spoke about the different dynamics relative to the facilitators’ personalities, and how she as a parent related to them. Char spoke in terms of the development of the relationship between herself and the facilitators. She said:

I felt very comfortable with L. because she was very easy to talk to. She brought a much different dynamic and a softer side by being a woman. It was nice to have S. He was very young. He was probably younger than us [Char and Ellis] with a brand new child and a wife. So that was a very nice dynamic. His position in the courts provided inside information [that was helpful]; I thought he was fantastic. He brought so much depth to what he shared. He did a very good job keeping on track because it was very easy [for the group of parents] to get off track.

Ellis provided his experience of the facilitators. Ellis stated that he developed relationships with the facilitators which helped him make personal changes as a person and as a parent. Ellis said:

They [the facilitators] each brought their own point of view and after you got to know them [the facilitators], in enough classes you got to see which one was bringing what to the table through their conversations. I thought S. was phenomenal [extremely good]. When he was not there I missed him because he [S.] always said that one thing that would catch you [me] up [make me feel important]. Call me [S. wanted to interact and showed his interest in the parents]. I want to hear about that [whatever the situation happened to be]. I want to learn about that. I want to know more about that. It made a huge difference [Ellis felt supported]. It wasn’t them [the facilitators] telling you [me] theories. They [the
facilitators] had been in the trenches. They [the facilitators] had been dealing with these things [problem issues of parents and teens]. They [the facilitators] knew from experience; they [the facilitators] knew how they [situations] affect you [me] as a parent. I think they [the facilitators] all did a great job.

Iris talked about her experience of the facilitators. She said, “The facilitators were very good. They were well prepared. They were helpful. A lot of stuff [information] that they gave [me] was good information.”

Una spoke about her experience of the facilitators relative to providing information on helpful resources. She reported being unaware of the resources available to her and that the facilitators provided her with the help needed in gaining useful information. Una said,

I thought they [the facilitators] were good. . . . one thing that they [the facilitators] were good about was giving us a list of other resources and stuff that was available I didn’t have a clue was available to us [me].

Ollie commented on her experience of the facilitators. She reported, “I think they [the facilitators] all had the best of intentions. I think they [the facilitators] all knew the material very well.”

Although Vic had complaints about the format and structure that the facilitators used in conducting the classrooms, he also had comments that were positive reactions to the facilitators. Vic stated:

I think all the facilitators were very enthusiastic and believed in what they were doing. I think they [the facilitators] were definitely dedicated. They [the
facilitators] always offered that if anyone needed any help outside [of the classroom sessions], or had any questions, they [the facilitators] were available. And, I believe they [the facilitators] all believed in what they [the facilitators] were doing.

The parents reported on how the facilitators impacted their lives by providing support, education, and suggestions to improve and strengthen their role as parent. The parents reported that the facilitators were an important factor to them making changes and experiencing confidence in parenting their child through problematic situations.

**Theme Three: Program Helped in Learning How to Parent a Disruptive Teen**

Theme three represented parents’ experiences of learning about their parenting behaviors and attitudes. Parents recognized their own behavior related to their parenting and gained a better understanding of themselves. In doing so, they were able to make changes to their parenting strategies that supported changes in their teenager. The parents gained an awareness of how they related to their teenagers, which helped improve their parent-child relationships. Five of the parents spoke about the helpful experiences they had in making changes to their parenting strategies, gaining confidence, and recognizing their own personal attributes and strengths as a parent.

Ellis said he was concerned about his parenting. He reported that he always wondered about his approach and was never sure about how to parent his children. Ellis stated that through the manner in which the facilitators conducted the classroom sessions, he was able to have experiences about himself that were helpful. In particular, Ellis
learned he did not listen as well as he thought and especially not to his son. Ellis reported:

I am a very good listener, but I don’t know if I’m a very good listener when it comes to my kids. It was a good idea to learn from that class, that if you are [I am] not listening [to others], then you are [I am] also not seeing [things I should see]. If you are [I am] not listening to what they [my children] are talking about, what they [my children] are sharing and what is bothering them. Then you are [I am] not going to see what they [my children] are doing to deal with the issue. You need [I needed] to stop and listen. If for no other reason but to just listen; . . . people [my children] just want to be heard.

Ellis learned that listening meant more than just hearing someone talk, it meant understanding what the other person has said. He learned to listen to his son and gained a better understanding of the parent-child issues that had damaged their relationship. Ellis also spoke about having a new perspective on parenting. Ellis stated, “I reflected on how I was parenting. Am I giving him rules? Am I giving him guidelines? Are there consequences? I felt like a powerful parent again, when I was done with that class.”

Char spoke of her experiences related to understanding and managing her role as a stepparent. She stated she had concerns about disciplining her stepson and developing a relationship with him. Char reminisced about her childhood and how her mother treated her as a teen. She realized she could not duplicate the same type of disciplinary parenting with her stepson. Char stated the guidance given in the class relative to the use of techniques and tools allowed her to examine her own perspective about parenting:
As a stepparent it is hard to figure out what my boundaries are. What line I can cross and what [lines] I cannot.... Maybe I am an over protective parent or maybe I am expecting too much. Maybe this is not a big deal [situational teen behavior] and I don’t need to worry about it.

Char continued relative to her experiences in the program being helpful in that she began to reflect on her concerns as a stepparent:

I mean, he is 15. He is a young man, you know. How far can I push it? How far should I push it, when I think something is up [when stepson’s behavior is questionable]? And it was validating to know that, no, these are issues you should be worried about because if you don’t pay attention to these issues and “nip them in the bud” [put a stop to them early] they are going to end up issues.

Char expressed a gain in her self-confidence in making parenting decisions, and managing herself as a step-parent. She experienced a developing relationship with her stepson, whereas he began to listen to her as his parent.

Holly spoke about her experience in learning new strategies to parent her daughter. She said the problems she had with her daughter was a situation she never wants to revisit. Holly stated she literally prayed for help prior to attending Parent Project. She reported that after attending the program, she was able to understand the importance of changing her parenting strategies. Another significant gain was her ability to work with her husband in a parenting partnership focused in changing disruptive behavior displayed by her daughter. Holly stated:
I was on my knees, and said, “Lord, you got to help me.” So it started with us [Holly and husband]. My whole life changed when we went to this [Parent Project]. We [Holly and husband] worked hard. It was hard work. It seems easier to ignore what is going on [problematic behavior with teen]. It seemed easier to just say it is not worth it. But we worked very, very hard. Her [the daughter] behavior changed because we changed, we had to change first. So it [Parent Project] gave me the strength to do what I needed to do.

Holly reported she began to understand how as a parent she had not handled situations appropriately, and that she gained confidence in how she managed herself and followed through with rules and consequences. She stated:

As parents [Holly and husband], we created an environment that she knew, we did not trust her. She would say, “You do not trust me,” and we would say, “You bet we don’t” (laughing). And, I do now. But I am still on my guard. You [I] have to always tell yourself [myself] it starts with you. Be careful what you [I] say, careful what you [I] do because she is going to respond by your [my] words and your [my] actions. You [I] got to put a lot of responsibility on yourself [myself]. And it is exhausting, but it is all worth it.

Una said she learned about her weaknesses as a parent, “I was very erratic in my punishment process.” “It took a long time for them [her sons] to get acclimated to actually having rules and structure.”

Vic made a positive comment about his experience of understanding parenting issues he faced. He said he could see the changes the program provided to parents. The
parents were able to understand what was happening with their teen and what needed to be done to make changes in their parenting strategies. Vic said, “We [he and wife] could see in the classroom that it [Parent Project] changed a lot of people.” He continued by saying:

Parents know that there is a light at the end of the tunnel. If we don’t give up, it is going to turn around, and that is what happened. That is what happened in the class . . . the program starts when you make changes to your parenting.

Parents began to recognize their strength as a parent and their ability to be a change agent for their child. Parents experienced self-confidence and learned that they could manage their self and their family by making effective decisions and engaging in interventions, setting rules, identifying teen issues, and giving consequences.

**Theme Four: Understanding Teenage Behavior and Learning to Identify Teenage Topics of Concern**

Theme four related to the selection of teenage topics that were presented to the parents such as: school attendance, improving homework, setting house rules, identifying alcohol and drug use, and gang involvement. The parents were provided with strategies to approach their teens’ disruptive behavior and guidance for setting rules, identifying problems, and supporting decision-making skills. Parents learned about using motivators with their teens to either change or improve behavior.

All seven parents experienced gains in learning about teen behavior and problematic issues that teenagers encounter. Although some parents felt the information was unwarranted, some literally found it helpful, whereas others thought it important to at
least know about existing topics. Five of the seven parents reported that the topics of
alcohol, drugs, and gangs were not an issue in their community, but acknowledged the
information was helpful to know. During the program, two parents experienced actual
problems with their teens relative to drugs, alcohol, and gangs. The two parents gained
strength in re-directing the behavior and activities of their child.

Ellis spoke about his experiences of the program being helpful relative to
recognizing teen issues that affected his son. He stated that learning to listen helped him
learn about teen issues that were problematic for his son. He was able to provide the
guidance and re-direction his son needed to make changes to his behavior. Ellis reported:

A lot of times I caught myself, since the class, he [his son] would talk about
something, and then I would think about it, and then I would see him doing
something. Well, then I would know that [his son’s behavior] was related to what
he [son] was talking about. [Ellis would think] that is why he is doing what he
does. That is why this is going on.

Ellis added that he began to look at his son’s behavior differently. He said, “as a
parent you create paying attention to your child [their behaviors and needs]. So, what is
more important? What are some more extremes? Which behaviors can I change? That
was a big eye opener for me.” Ellis also stated the class helped him to learn about
motivators and consequences to use with his teenage son. He learned when to reward
behavior and when not to reward behavior. Ellis added:

Your child does not have rights to some of that stuff [X-Box, iPod’s, cell phones,
car keys]. It is something that they [his son] can earn from you [me]. They [his
son] can earn privacy, but they [his son] have no rights to expect it. It was something that was huge for me [the learning experience].

Iris stated her experience of the teenage topics was helpful related to learning about teenage alcohol and drug use. She learned about existing problems with her daughter relative to using alcohol, marijuana, and possible gang involvement. Iris reported:

We had the one class that the [facilitators] talked about drugs. How to spot your kids on drugs? It was helpful because I found out for the first time when we [Iris and her daughter] went to the probation officer . . . that my daughter had smoked “pot.” I had her drug tested. I didn’t think it [her daughter’s drug usage] was that often. But when we went to the probation officer, I found out she had been smoking “pot” three times a week and drinking alcohol. I felt like crap. I thought, how could I [not know]. This is my kid. How could I not spot that she was doing this. So, in the class, they [the facilitators] tell you what to look for [teen behavior related to drug and alcohol use]. I did not know what “pot” smelled like. They [the facilitators] are talking about the smell, and saying you [the parent] can tell in their [the teen’s] eyes. I never knew what to look for [prior to the class].

Iris also stated she learned about gangs which was helpful too. She said she had concerns about the kids her daughter had been “hanging around.” Iris stated, “I liked the class about how to look for gang involvement. She stated she [Iris’s daughter] does tend
to hang around big groups of people which concerned me.” Iris stated she spoke with her daughter about her choice of friends. She shared about doing that:

I don’t know if it is right or wrong, but I know from the class you [I] cannot choose their [her daughter’s] friends. Well I tend to choose them [daughter’s friends] for her. There are a couple of people that I told her to not have come to our house. I do not want to hear their names. I do not want them calling. I have also told her several times that she needs to make new friends because her choice of friends is not that great [poor choices in the friends she interacts with]. And I have told her several times, I know there are certain people I see you getting in trouble with. I am trying to tell her, I think if you steer clear of certain people . . . you will be o.k.

Iris made gains in her self-confidence and how she began to manage herself as a parent. The changes she made caused more problematic behaviors in her daughter, but because of the confidence that Iris gained; she was able to approach doing something about problematic situations and to follow through on her actions.

Holly stated the class on alcohol and drugs was helpful to her, although, initially, she thought the discussion by the facilitators was extreme. Holly said she learned from another parent about a potential situation of making alcohol available at a teen party. Holly stated her daughter had wanted to attend that party. Holly stated that because she learned about the intention of making alcohol available to the teens; she was able to thwart the intention of those responsible by confronting the situation. Holly stated:
Well at first, I thought, boy, are these things really extreme [the discussion about alcohol and drugs]. Like the one about the drugs . . . I thought, I do not need to go to that class. But you know what, I was glad I went, because . . . there was a situation, where I heard there was going to be an alcoholic (teen) party. And they [the facilitators] had taught me how to look for the signs. And, so even though I thought it did not pertain to me, hey, [I found] you can always be prepared.

This situation was a confidence builder for Holly because other parents felt she was overreacting and did not believe there was a potential problem. By being in the program Holly learned to trust her judgment and make decisions that did not always follow the normal agenda. She was rewarded with learning she could make decisions and follow through, which made a difference for her child’s behavior and attitude, as well as their relationship.

Una was another parent who made positive comments pertaining to learning about alcohol, drugs, and gangs. She was another parent that did not believe the topic pertained to her situation, but she made comments relative to the information being helpful to her in monitoring her son. Una provided her response to the topic on alcohol, drugs, and gangs. She said:

They [the facilitators] talked a lot about drugs and gangs, which I thought was real good. It did not pertain to me so much. But it was definitely eye opening. I did not know it was that much going on in schools [the facilitators provided a discussion on drugs in the school].
Although Una did not think it was related, she found it was an issue in the schools, which made her, more aware of monitoring her son’s peer influences and activities outside the home.

Ellis made a similar comment on the topics of alcohol, drugs, and gangs. He stated the topics were helpful, but did not relate to him. He said, “I cannot say they [the topics] were not helpful, they [the topics] are there in the back of your [my] mind, I guess, if you [I] might be in that situation, you [I] would be prepared for it.”

Vic commented about the topic and alluded to the information being helpful. Vic said, “I know a little about gangs, but they [the facilitators] gave us a little more information about the full extent of it. It was kind of interesting to know.”

The parents appreciated the information on various topics that were provided to them. Although some of the parents felt it did not pertain to them, they still embraced the knowledge of the topics. Other parents who encounter problematic situations were able to monitor or use effective interventions to support their child in making better decisions and decreasing disruptive behavior. They reported feeling effective in their efforts to help their child.

**Theme Five: Learning Techniques for Managing Teenage Behavior and Being Consistent in Parenting Teens**

Theme five related to the various techniques and tools suggested to parents for their use in encouraging positive behavior and attitudes with their teens, as well as the adherence to house and family rules. TEASPOT [Take Everything Away for a Short Period Of Time]; spot checks [checking on your teen’s whereabouts when away from
home]; checking cell phone contents and usage, peer relationships, iPod contents, computer usage, and appropriate wearing apparel are included in theme five. For some parents taking a personal “time out” assisted them in making better decisions in their interaction with their children. Six of the parents commented on being helped by learning about techniques to use with their teen.

In addition, theme five related to the parents’ experience of being helped in learning strategies for setting rules for their teen, ensuring their teen adhered to the rules, and setting appropriate consequences. Parents were guided in using consistent parenting behaviors and following through with rules and expectations placed on their teen. All seven of the parents agreed that being consistent was an important factor of parenting. The parents experienced being helped in learning to set rules and practicing being consistent. Six parents commented on their experiences with the techniques of being consistent.

Una spoke about her experience of using the techniques and how it was helpful to her. Una said:

It started right off the bat [it happened quickly] and it worked right away [TEASPOT]. It is easy to remember [the technique, TEASPOT], which is; there is no negotiating. There is no deciding what thing you are [I am] going to take away. It is so easy. So, yeah, it definitely gave me control. And I was like, yeah, I can do this. It was huge for me because it gave me another tool to use to remind my kids [of their behavior]. They [her sons] all know when they are on a TEASPOT.
Ellis stated he experienced the use of TEASPOt as a helpful tool with his son. Ellis said, “I can take away his clothes and give him an orange jumpsuit to wear, or whatever. The parents [I] have that right. I can get his behavior to change pretty quickly that way.”

Ellis talked about another technique that he learned to use that was helpful with his son. Ellis said the technique was using the statement, “Nevertheless and/or regardless.” Ellis added:

My wife uses those words [nevertheless and/or regardless] every day. When you [I] make your [my] rules. And they [children] want to say . . . this, this, and this [complain about the rules]. You [I can] come back and say, nevertheless or regardless of that situation, this is the rule. Regardless of this, and . . . it is really . . . just two simple words. So, I am giving him rules, and I am giving him guidelines; and there are consequences.

Holly spoke about her experience with using the tools learned in the classroom as being helpful. She also found working on the classroom homework assignments and using the parent notebook as useful. Holly said, “So it was very important to follow through and do the homework. The notebooks were very helpful. If you did not do the homework, you could not proceed to the next level.”

Holly also spoke about other techniques that she experienced being helpful in making changes to her parenting strategies. She said:

I did those . . . spot checks, where you just show up [unannounced where your teen said they would be]. They are [the teen is] going to the show, and you [I]
follow up to see that they [she] go there. But it is like showing up to see if they are really where they said they are going. And what is going on is really going on [what she said she would be doing]. I used to just drive by in the car and see if . . . [she was] there.

Holly talked about a technique she learned that was helpful relative to finding out if a teen that is getting home late has used alcohol. She said she found this technique to be a helpful method to use with a teen. Holly said:

Other things that were very helpful were: how you [I] monitor a situation to see if something is going on with them [like drinking alcohol]. They [the facilitators] suggested that when your kid comes in at 11 o’clock or 12 midnight, give them a hug because you can smell them for alcohol. They [the teen] will not know what you are doing. It could be like going through their [her] bag or their [her] cell phone. So those very specific detailed points were very helpful. Also, now I got a car to take away from my daughter, but that does not hurt as much as the phone. The phone is her lifeline. So, the technique for us [Holly and husband] is to stop her and say this is not appropriate [behavior], you are not going to do this [behavior]. It was very beneficial.

Char spoke of a tool she experienced being helpful for making changes to her parenting strategies. Char reported:

One of our assignments one time [in Parent Project] we had to go home and go through and listen to music on their [son’s] iPod, see what kind of music he had,
you know, what were the lyrics. Homework is I have to listen to your music

[Char said to her stepson].

Char said it was a helpful tool to use in monitoring her stepson’s music and behavior. She stated it was a good experience for her in making changes to her parenting strategies with her stepson. Char said she was strengthened by the techniques learned and that she looked forward to each class. “I actually looked forward to what the next tool [would be] to learn.” She stated the techniques were helpful and prior to the program she would have never attempted to use the strategies learned. Char spoke of another helpful technique she learned:

We [Char and husband] had to go through his [stepson] clothes and look for drug paraphernalia and stuff like that. I really felt that I was violating his privacy going through his room. I would have never thought that that was ok. I would have thought that was a violation. I thought that more with him [stepson] just because he is not mine [not her biological child].

Char embraced her ability to manage herself in working with her children. She found that she could be creative in disciplining practices, by encouraging her children to use their own instincts of being appropriate and using good judgment. This was important to her as she struggled with managing her younger children and her stepson. Char felt it paramount that her stepson exhibit himself as a positive role model for his younger step-siblings.

Iris talked about a technique she used prior to attending Parent Project. She stated that she used it as a technique during the program because the technique worked at an
earlier time (the facilitators encouraged parents to create workable techniques that encourage positive behavior in their children). Iris stated, although she experienced the technique to be helpful, she was unable to use it consistently. Iris talked about the technique. She said:

We [she and her daughter] used to say to each other all the time, [I love you]. If we [she and her daughter] were on the phone, or I dropped her off at school . . . So after that class [Parent Project] I started saying it to her, again. I would text message her, I love you. It does not always work.

Vic shared a technique he experienced as helpful. He said it was funny because he used it to support his wife with their daughter, but forgot to use it for himself during a situation with another of his children. Vic said:

The other thing they [the facilitators] talk about related to when you get into a heated discussion [with my child], I should try to stay calm. They [the facilitators] called it taking time out or break or something where you cool off for a few minutes. Like a “time out” from talking. You are talking and you get into a heated debate, or it starts getting to a point where I might start arguing, I just walk away, I say, ok, I am just going to walk away and come back in a few minutes.

Sometimes when it would get heated like between my wife and daughter, I would just walk in there and suggest that they take a little break or what have you. And then it was funny because my child that is not a problem, and I got into it [had an argument] and my wife walks in and said maybe you two should take a little break.
The parents talked about their experiences that were helpful to them in making changes to their parenting strategies. In reference to social learning, the parents learned to be self-regulated, which provided gains in being empowered and in control as a parent. They experienced self-efficacy, which gave them a sense of being effective, and able to manage their own family situations, which gave them a sense of being an effective decision-maker. It also supported the parents in experiencing a sense of enforcing rules and being consistent. Although two of the parents were not pleased with having to attend Parent Project, they did provide some positive information on certain components of the program that they experienced as helpful.

**Summary of Chapter III**

Chapter 3 provided the results of a qualitative research study. A description of the themes indicated what parents stated were helpful experiences for them. The parents used words that were synonymous of the word help or helpful in describing their experiences. Parents’ comments during their interviews reflected the nature of help they experienced in making changes to their parenting strategies and helping their children make changes to their behaviors and attitudes.

The seven parents were introduced and relevant interview quotations indicative of the themes they experienced were presented. The statements made by the parents were related to their experiences of being helped with changing their parenting strategies. Each of the parents had a different home or family situation that contributed to their individual perception of their experiences of being helped in making changes to their parenting. Six of the seven parents in this study began the program resistant, angry, and
frustrated. Yet, each of the parents was able to find an aspect of the program that provided help to them as a parent. One parent denied any negative emotions regarding attending Parent Project, stating that she needed the program.

The questions in the interview question guide were presented to all seven of the parents. Some level of response was made by each parent regardless of whether or not they felt they experienced being helped. Two parents were reluctant to acknowledge any personal gain for themselves; although they did, eventually and inadvertently, express that the program was helpful. Both negative and positive comments were made by the parents and were based on their individual and personal needs.
CHAPTER IV
DISCUSSION

The purpose of Chapter 4 is to provide discussion of the findings from Chapter 3. Chapter 3 provided the parents’ related experiences in making changes to their parenting strategies. Parents expounded on the nature of perceived help they received through Parent Project. Themes were determined and presented based on the parents’ descriptive information. In Chapter 4, the themes are discussed, as well as the implications of the findings of the study. In addition, a discussion is presented relative to the contribution that the present study makes to the literature, limitations of the study, and recommendations for future research.

The research provided a description of seven Caucasian parents. The information gathered through the individual parent interviews provided the data for the development of the themes of helpfulness parents reported experiencing as a result of participation in the Parent Project program. As a result of analyzing the data, themes developed relative to the nature and extent of help parents experienced in making changes to their parenting strategies. The research answered the two questions which guided this study. Many of the conclusions in this study parallel the current research in the field whereas some of the conclusions stimulate a point of interest for future research studies.

The Themes Related to the Nature and Extent of Help Experienced by Parents

Five themes were identified relative to the nature of the help experienced by parents. The themes that were identified related to parents using the program to make changes to their parenting strategies. The assumption basic to the nature of the help
parents experienced hinged on the parent acknowledging the changes made in their parenting strategies and actually putting those changes into affect with their children. As parents discussed their experiences, they defined help synonymously with other words, phrases, and descriptions; such as: beneficial, worthwhile, important, enjoyable, nice, good, and supportive. For example, parents used the words beneficial or worthwhile in the context of learning and/or using components of the program. The themes that were determined as helpful were related to: recognizing support systems, the interaction with the program facilitators, parenting behaviors, teenage topics, and techniques/tools for improving teen behavior. The following section discusses the themes that were determined significant in helping parents make changes to their parenting strategies.

**Theme One: Recognizing the Helpfulness of Support Systems**

Fry et al. (2002) designed a component of Parent Project to encourage support systems for participating parents. The parents in this study recognized the support they received that assisted them in making changes to their parenting. The support systems that developed for them became an important factor in making changes to their parenting strategies. The parents reported that the support experienced from other parents, their spouses, and the facilitator helped them to return to the program each week.

**The parent group was helpful.** In her study, Schaffner (1997) reported on the resistance of parents who were court ordered to attend a parenting education program. Schaffner said that when the parents began to relate with each other, they began to build camaraderie. She discovered that the camaraderie connected the parents and helped to
develop a support system with the other parents. The parents learned that despite their differences, they all dealt with the same issues of parenting.

It was through the parent group sessions that Ellis discovered his resistance to listening to others. As he participated in the parent group, he learned to be patient and a better listener. Ellis reported that the group helped him with his listening skills and supported him in developing a relationship with his son. In the study by Schaffner (1997) parents found that through listening to one another, they shared similarities and differences that supported change in their parenting strategies. Ellis learned the importance of being a good listener and that it was helpful in building relationships, and that was a valuable experience for him. As Ellis learned to listen to others and their similar issues, he gained help in developing his parenting skills and his relationship with his son.

**Having a spouse in the program was helpful.** A review of the history on parenting education programs suggests that such programs were originally designed for parents intending to separate or divorce (Pollet & Lombreglia, 2008). The programs mandated both parents to attend for the benefit of the child. Since court orders were established to provide visitation rights for both parents, they were both ordered to attend the parenting education program determined by the courts. Although Parent Project is a mandated program for parents, no apparent mandate identifies each involved parent must attend.

In the present study there were seven parents—two single parents (2), two married couples (4), and one (1) married parent whose spouse participated in Parent
Project, but not in the research study. All seven parents expressed their thoughts relative to experiencing the help gained in having a spouse attend the program. Those parents attending the program with a spouse said it was supportive to have their husband/wife attend because it put them both “on the same page.” One couple (Vic and Ollie) reported that they used the time traveling home to discuss topics and suggestions provided during the session and how they could implement them or not implement them with their child. The parents in this marriage agreed that it was paramount that all involved parents attend so that each parent would be working with the other to help the child. Another couple (Ellis and Char) in the study agreed on the importance of having all parents involved (including the step-parents in both family units) and stated it should be mandatory.

The program facilitators were helpful as a part of the support network. In the research by Holzheimer and Davis (2009) the parents acknowledged the development of a facilitator and parent relationship that supported the parents’ effort to make changes to their parenting. In the present study, the relationship between the parent and the facilitator developed as the program progressed and parents became confident in applying strategies to making changes in their parenting behavior. The parents learned to listen and learned to apply the suggestions and techniques provided by the facilitators.

The professional backgrounds and past experiences of the facilitators with families strengthened their knowledge in supporting the parents. As the parents learned and were supported by the facilitator, the parents were able to experience changes in self that caused changes in their child. Although the facilitators are established professionals,
they are required to attend 40 hours of training to lead the classroom sessions (Holzheimer & Davis, 2009).

In Parent Project, the facilitators presented techniques and topics pertinent to parents learning new parenting strategies. As the facilitators worked to provide parents with information, they would encourage or confront the parent depending on the situation. The facilitators were recognized by all of the parents as helpful relative to being someone to talk with about issues, providing suggestions and support, and for providing additional information on other resources and services.

**Theme Two: Parents Experienced the Program Facilitators Expertise as Helpful**

Program facilitators are critical to an effective program Long et al. (2004) and especially when parents are reluctant and difficult to engage into the program curriculum. Even the parents who are actively engaged can be challenging in their participation from time to time. Facilitators can make the program manageable for the parents by projecting a professional and knowledgeable image. The facilitators in this study were professionals in the field of social work, mental health counseling, and criminal justice. They were identified as professional relative to their backgrounds and the roles that they projected within the Parent Project. As the facilitators, they offered professional and legal information, as well as, access to outside sources of help for the parents. The parents seemed to have appreciated the social worker’s “soft touch.” The parents felt she was willing to listen and provided professional information for problematic situation.

Ellis spoke about the social worker/facilitator and how she provided him with professional assistance when a problematic situation occurred with his daughter. He
spoke about the interventions, techniques and tools that the facilitator offered in approaching the problem with his daughter. Ellis was thankful for her professionalism in discussing interventions and the confidential manner in which she assisted him.

Ellis talked about the two probation officers and how they provided the structure and constricts of the program. Iris was grateful for the legal information that was provided to her related to individual problematic situations and needs. Char was pleased with the knowledge and understanding of the prosecutor relative to the assistance offered by the court and other intervention programs. Una especially felt that the mental health professionals provided professional information relative to helping parents to understand their teens’ behavior. All of the parents felt the police officer who attended as a speaker was informative about criminal issues and concerns in the community relative to gangs and illegal substance use. All of the parents considered each of the facilitators knowledgeable relative to the legal system and issues of parental rights.

Iris spoke relative to how she learned about her rights as a tenant and how the court could actually help her with her daughter. She felt the social worker provided interventions and services to help her daughter with the alcohol and drug problems. Holly found the facilitators were knowledgeable about using particular techniques and tools as strategies to effectively detect harmful situations to teenagers and how to best manage teenage behavior.

The relationship between the facilitators and the parents developed, as the parents acknowledged the facilitators knowledge of family issues, as well as, presenting professionalism in teaching the program curriculum. The parents spoke about the clear
and professional manner in which the facilitators communicated to them on using techniques, setting rules, and enforcing consequences with their teens. Some parents spoke on how the facilitators were able to maintain professionalism, as they connected with the parents by sharing different aspects of their personal and professional life experiences. In addition, parents reported that they appreciated the facilitators for being professional in providing support and encouragement.

**Theme Three: Program Helped In Learning How to Parent a Disruptive Teen**

In the study by Holzheimer and Davis (2009) parents were strengthened in learning how to organize and control their homes, while expressing love and affection for their child. In the present study, the parents learned about managing themselves while exploring ways to encourage positive behavior from their teen. Holzheimer and Davis reported that parents used adult time-outs as a technique for managing their frustration in situations with their child. That was something that parents reported as a helpful technique to use in working with their children. Vic and Ollie, the couple who appeared the most resistant to being in the program, acknowledged the use of the adult time out technique. They reported it being effective and something both of them used with the other children in their home.

Parents learned to recognize negative emotions within themselves and how to appropriately manage their feelings, while addressing a disturbing situation with their teen. As parents learned to use techniques, they became aware of the personal insights and gains received in making changes to their parenting strategies. Parents spoke of learning to listen, learning to set rules, learning to give consequences, and learning to be
consistent in practices that previously had been difficult for them. The parents experienced being empowered and strengthened as they learned to enforce techniques and use effective strategies with their child.

Holly found that she and her husband used different parenting styles, which caused conflict and confusion in their home. Iris stated that she learned she needed to take charge as a parent, something she admitted neglecting in her parenting. Char realized she was fearful of being a stepparent and had difficulties in setting rules. She learned to use creative strategies in managing her stepson’s behavior, while still presenting herself as a loving and caring parent. In addition, Char found she was able to use her creativity learned in Parent Project to help manage disruptive behavior within her younger children. She shared the techniques she used, and talked about how pleased she was with that experience. Vic spoke of his willingness to use tough love in calling the police when his daughter became violent. Ellis connected listening to being able to see problematic situations for his son and being able to address them before disasters occurred. Additionally, Ellis shared about the development of a positive relationship with his son that he did not have prior to attending Parent Project. All of the parents reported a better understanding of their teen’s behavior and techniques that they could use as a parent to encourage more positive behavior from their child. Additionally, the parents had a realization of their rights and responsibilities as the parent, which added to their feelings of self-efficacy and ability to make and enforce decisions.
Theme Four: Understanding Teenage Behavior and Learning to Identify Teenage Topics of Concern

Holzheimer and Davis (2009) reported that educational topics on teenage issues were helpful to the parents in their study. In the present study, the facilitators presented various topics on teenage behaviors and issues. For Holly and Iris the information on alcohol, drugs, and gangs made them aware of an existing situation with one child and an impending situation with another. Both parents were able to utilize what was learned in the program, and apply it to helping their children to make changes in their behavior.

The other parents reported some topics as being more helpful than others such as: school attendance, completing homework assignments, and improving grades. Although the parents stated that alcohol, drugs, and gangs were not pertinent to their situation, they still listened and remained open to learning about the topics. All the parents spoke of the improvement with their teen’s school performance, as a result of the parent being consistent in setting rules and expectations.

According to Eyre and Eyre (2003) and Kumpfer and Alvarado (2003) parents are accountable for providing love and nurturing, as well as discipline, and when that happens mutual trust and respect develops. Holly reported she experienced a renewed relationship with her daughter that was empowering for both of them. In the present study, parents made a strong effort to understand their children and motivate them to improve their attitude and behavior, while projecting love and respect. The parents were empowered though the process of the program and the knowledge they gained by
attending, which influenced them to continue the class and receive the help that was available to them.

Parents began to acknowledge their weaknesses and identify their strengths and how their relationship with their child was affected by their performance as a parent. As parents grew and became stronger in their parenting, they reported looking forward to attending the classes. Parents admitted the growth they felt within themselves, and their willingness to return weekly to learn new techniques, to help continue with the improvements experienced within their families. Empowered was a word used by parents to express their feeling of being helped.

Parents spoke about their personal experience related to the alcohol, drugs, and gang topics, and acknowledged that learning about the topics helped in unexpected situations. Iris reported that she never realized her daughter used drugs and alcohol, but became suspicious after attending the class in which the information was presented. She stated that after learning about these topics, she recognized behaviors in her daughter to be consistent with the information given in the classroom sessions. The information prompted her to act on seeking help for her daughter. Iris reported understanding her responsibility in addressing the problematic behavior of her daughter because of the information she learned in the program.

Holly reported that she found the topic about alcohol and drugs monumental in preventing a potentially bad situation that would have involved her daughter. Holly was able to thwart a teenage alcohol party because of learning about teen substance use, and how to handle situations of concern. Holly was surprised that something learned in the
class which she had considered unwarranted information became helpful. She reported being pleased about the help she gained in addressing the safety of her child.

**Theme Five: Learning Techniques for Managing Teenage Behavior and Being Consistent in Parenting Teens**

Research by Holzheimer and Davis (2009) provided positive results on the techniques taught to parents while in the program. They reported that the techniques most acknowledged by parents in making changes in their parenting strategies were: TEASPOT, positive conversations, monitoring homework, adult time outs, expressing feelings of love, and spot checks. The same techniques were identified in the present study as significant contributors to parent effectiveness with making changes in their parenting strategies. Additionally, parents embraced the program facilitators’ suggestions on including the use of TEASPOT, spot checks, and the checking of appropriate computer use and IPods to further enhance parenting strategies.

In more difficult situations of aggressive or violent behavior, parents were encouraged to contact the police. This was something that Iris learned to do to establish her parental power with her daughter. Iris learned to ask for help, use the help received, and follow through with interventions intended to help her daughter. Iris was among those parents who needed to use the support of the police to get control of her home and her child. Vic and Ollie used the police to get control of their daughter and their home, too. Vic reported on the huge change that occurred with his daughter after she was ordered to the detention center for a short stay.
All seven of the parents used TEASPOT and found it effective, if they as the parent could project consistency in managing the situation. The concept of TEASPOT was to take all of the most used and enjoyed items away from teens for one to two days. For example: their television, cell phones, iPods, or anything enjoyed and used on a regular basis. The parents found TEASPOT helpful if used for a limited amount of time. If the parent used TEASPOT for more than two days, the teen became accustomed to the punishment and only briefly adjusted their behavior. The parents who really followed through with carrying out the technique said it was helpful in getting their teen’s attention and changing disruptive behavior.

Some parents were challenged in using TEASPOT, and found it difficult to monitor their child while using this technique, mainly due to lack of consistency. This encouraged them to become creative in using additional techniques of their own, as well as enforce the use of TEASPOT. The parents reported feeling strengthened and empowered knowing there were options to their parenting strategies. Some parents added incentives for their child, which assisted the successful use of TEASPOT. Parents provided certain incentives such as: extending bedtimes, allowing them to go out with friends, permitting the use of the car, allowing the child to listen to their iPods, permitting them to make calls on their cell phones, letting them play with their X boxes, and permitting television viewing. Basically, TEASPOT was a helpful technique for parents to use as a strategy, and everyone reported its use at some point of managing the behavior of their child. In some cases, the use of TEASPOT was not enough for aggressive or violent behavior and parents needed to call the police.
Spot checks were another technique that parents used and experienced as helpful. Parents used this technique to confirm the whereabouts of the teen. The parent would go to the place the teen was to be and find out if they were really there. Holly stated this technique was helpful in building trust with her daughter because the teen knew her mother would make a spot check. Knowing the parent would be checking made the teen more responsible about keeping her word. This technique helped develop responsibility and trustworthiness in her daughter; and in the parent-child relationship. Holly reported that she continues to use the technique to monitor her daughter’s trustworthiness.

Once the 10-week session was completed, the parents were given the option of two additional classes and topics of their choice. One of the topics chosen was consistency. Consistent parenting was something that all the parents in this study felt was needed and used when making rules and setting limits. Consistency was discussed in the classroom sessions as a means to enhance parenting strategies. Mostly, parents thought that being consistent was difficult to incorporate into their parenting strategy. But, they found it could be done and it was effective in putting control back into their home. The parents who were able to improve in this area made significant changes in their strategies; and reported positive behavioral changes in their teen. Learning to be consistent was an accomplishment that helped parents who previously had difficulties.

Much of the renewed strength that parents reported experiencing was due to feeling in control of their household. The program empowered them and strengthened their ability as a parent; it gave them back their confidence and their power. The support and suggestions given by the other parents and the facilitators helped rebuild trust in the
parent’s judgment. It meant a new awareness in parenting their teen, newfound strength as a parent, and a feeling of empowerment to achieve positive results in their teens’ life.

**Contribution of the Present Study to the Literature**

The intent of this research study was to contribute to the literature related to what parents experienced as being helpful about making changes to their parenting strategies. The present study sought to augment the literature relative to what has been identified as helpful to parents who are dealing with disruptive behavior of teens. Researchers have reported that parenting education programs are effective in helping parents make changes (Holzheimer & Davis, 2009). Yet, past research has provided limited information on the extent and nature of help that court-ordered parenting education programs provided to parents, particularly from the parents’ perspective.

Brim (1957) reported that more research was needed on how to best help parents. He stated that the parents’ input relative to their experiences of being helped should be considered important in designing parenting education programs. Yet, there is limited information represented in the literature that considers the personal experiences of parents who attended parenting education programs and found it effective in managing their teen. In the present study, parents were given an opportunity to report on the nature of help they experienced in making changes to their parenting and parenting strategies in managing their child. Parents reported on their personal experiences that helped them in learning, strengthening, and empowering them to make changes in their parenting strategies, which expanded to helping their child make changes to their behavior.
The court system has ordered parenting education programs such as Parent Project to provide help to parents (Schaffner, 1997). Such programs serve as a supportive structure for helping parents feel empowered and in control as a parent. Parenting education programs that are court ordered are available to parents who are seeking help on their own and are not limited to parents who are ordered to attend by the court system. Parent Project supports parents who represent both those who are ordered by the court and those who seek help voluntarily.

The research conducted by Holzheimer and Davis (2009) presented findings of their study that confirmed a court ordered program such as Parent Project can be helpful for parents; who have been court ordered to attend, as well as the parents who have sought to attend the program on their own. The results of the report by parents on the nature of help that both groups of parents received confirms that parents can achieve the motivation and encouragement needed to be empowered to make changes in their parenting and parenting strategies.

Parents in the present study learned to be nurturing and loving while expecting their child to be respectful of the rules and consequences they as parents applied to improving the behavior of their child. As the parents provided a loving and nurturing attitude towards their child, they found that their positive attitude supported a positive attitude in their child. The love that parents projected towards their child was felt to be returned by the respect of the child to honor and embrace the relationship with their parent. This was something that Castrucci and Gerlach (2006) reported as being an important aspect of parenting.

Castrucci and Gerlach (2006) suggested that quality time was important and that being attentive and listening to your child was another necessary behavior to improve the
parent-child relationship. In the present study, Ellis reflected that when he learned to listen and hear that his son’s conversations pertained to teenage issues, he was able to better understand his son’s motives. Ellis stated that the relationship between the two of them improved, as they began to better communicate with one another.

Barlow and Stewart-Brown (2001) reported on the helpfulness of parenting education programs. Parents participating in this study reported that they experienced a renewed control in the role of parenting. Parents discussed their experience of being helped in learning techniques, identifying teen issues, and better understanding their teen. The parents in the present study stated that the techniques and tools, topics on teenage issues, support of other parents, spouses, and the facilitators were helpful in re-gaining their self-confidence as parents in making decisions and managing the behavior of their child. The parents stated they experienced the ability to manage and maintain peace and control in their homes with their teen.

Other researchers, C. J. Collins (1996), Moreis (2002), and Murray (1998) found that the design of parent education programs appeared to strengthen parents in their ability to manage their teen’s behavior. The program helped to improve their overall parenting skills, empowered them that they could manage situations with their child, while interacting in a positive and loving manner. The researchers’ studies also identified that parents experienced the support of other parents as helpful, reported that positive changes were made in the parenting practices, and indicated positive changes were made in their teen’s behavior and attitude, as well.

Furthermore, Barlow and Stewart-Brown (2001) indicated their findings addressed the support that parents received from the other parents. In the present study, the parents
constantly spoke about the support received from other parents in the program. The married parents whose spouses attended the program made especially strong and positive comments about having their spouses in the program with them. They stated that having their spouse attend the program with them was important in regards to feeling supported and empowered in the management of their child.

Parenting education programs have been developed to help parents learn how to become effective in addressing the behavior of teenagers. These programs normally address faulty parenting practices and support the parents in learning effective parenting skills and strategies to provide a supportive structure in changing the problem behaviors of their adolescents (Schaffner, 1997). Some parents may think that they are being punished by the court system, when an order is made for their attendance at a parenting education program (Schaffner, 1997). But ultimately, once participating in a supportive and effective parenting education program, parents become engaged in the rewards and benefits of learning behavior management techniques and skills to use in working to improve the behavior in their child (Schaffner, 1997). Parents especially appreciate feeling in control and capable of managing situations in their own household, independent of the court system, or other legal services.

The findings of the present study are fairly consistent with the research that has already been completed on parents making successful changes to their parenting and their parenting strategies. Although many of the research studies report on the benefits that parents received, those studies are mainly reviewing non-court ordered programs. The findings of the present study adds to the research because it reports on a court ordered
parenting education program, and provides the parents experiences indicating the nature of help they received, regardless of their resistance to attending the program.

Parenting education programs have been identified as successful in helping parents in making changes to their parenting strategies, yet there is limited information that represents the parents’ personal experiences of the program and the positive changes parents made for themselves by embracing the help provided to them. The present study will add to the limited research that addresses the personal experiences of parents. The information provided by the parents in this study could be helpful in entertaining a conversation to include additional aspects of information that parents would find helpful.

**Parents’ Experience of Helpfulness**

The parents’ personal experiences of Parent Project reported that the program provided the help needed to make changes in their parenting strategies. The report of parents on the nature of help gained by them was reflected in their personal experiences that they shared related to recognizing changes within themselves and their child. Holly realized she could set rules and expect her daughter to respect and obey those rules. Before Parent Project, Holly struggled with setting rules and being consistent in managing the disruptive behavior of her daughter. Holly and her husband were in constant disagreement about their parenting strategies, which nearly cost them their marriage.

Ellis was able to develop a communication with his son that enabled the two of them to have a positive relationship, which was not present prior to Parent Project. Ellis realized he had not been listening and giving his son the attention he needed. Ellis
reported that his participation in the program helped in learning to listen and communicate with his son. It developed their relationship and ended several problematic issues involving both the parent and the child.

Char learned how to manage her parent-child relationship with her stepson. Prior to attending the program, she felt she had to be cautious of how she approached and related to her stepson. Char improved the parent-child relationship and realized support from her husband, Ellis, that she thought she was not possible. She became empowered as a parent and began to feel comfortable in her relationship with both her stepson and her biological children.

Iris made a positive effort to improve her parenting strategies, although she struggled with being the authority figure in her home. She learned that she had recourse and did not have to accept her daughter’s disrespectful behavior and attitude towards her. Iris also discovered that her daughter had a chemical substance problem that needed to be addressed. Before attending the program, Iris had no idea about the topic of teenage alcohol and drugs. After attending the program and learning about the topics, she was able to seek services to help her daughter with her alcohol and drug problems.

Una learned she could be a strong parent that she could get control of her sons. She learned and realized that the problems her sons had were because they had not been given structure while living with their biological father. Una was able to provide a positive structure for her sons, gain control of their behavior, and recognize positive changes in their behavior and attitude, which supported her in continuing a consistent pattern of discipline with her children. Una felt empowered and was delighted to know
she could do something about the disruptive behavior of her son. She reported her pride in her oldest son and his academic accomplishments since the program.

Ollie resisted the help; she felt she had learned all she needed in another program which offered similar components to Parent Project. Her perception of experiencing personal help from the program was limited, but she did recognize the program being helpful to the other parents. She thought the program did improve and help strengthen the parents, and that the program helped parents change their parenting strategies. In some aspects of her participation with Parent Project, she did admit the program was helpful.

Vic was also resistant to Parent Project. He made a point of stating the program did not offer any changes in his parenting strategies. But towards the end of his interview, he did point out a strategy he learned from Parent Project that was helpful to both him and his wife. That strategy was taking an adult timeout instead of arguing with his children. Also, he found that the court system had authority, which could support setting restrictions on his daughter that he and his wife could not accomplish on their own. The short detention stay that Vic’s daughter experienced was helpful to the child and the parents in getting her back on track and amenable to her parents’ authority.

Five of the parents provided narratives that addressed their accomplishments in getting back the control of their household. Two parents resisted the idea that Parent Project offered them any additional help, although they admitted the other parents did gain help in improving their parenting skills and strategies. In some aspects, they did admit the helpfulness of the program for themselves, as well, but definitely for the other
parents. The parents that acknowledged and reported their experience of Parent Project as a helpful experience were able to improve their parent-child relationship, improve their communication with their spouse and their child, experience feeling empowered and in control, and recognize the gain of new strengths as a parent.

**Advantage and Limitation of Having a Homogeneous Group of Parents**

The advantage of having a homogeneous sample could be a favorable one because the diversity of the responses from the parents could be perceived as meaningful. On the other hand, the limitations of having a homogeneous sample could be that a more diverse group of parents may have offered more diverse responses. A more diverse group of parents may have made similar responses, as well.

Additionally, an increase in Parent Project classroom visitations by the researcher may have allowed parents to feel more at ease, which may have produced additional parent volunteers for the study. If more parents had volunteered it may have expanded the information on personal experiences of parents and added to the dimension of the study.

In addition, the researcher could have benefited by specific training relative to conducting in-depth interviews with resistant and angry parents. In the study by Schaffner (1997), parents complained about being forced to attend the program. Their complaints were generated by anger. Mainly, the parents in Schaffner’s study felt they were being punished for their teenager’s poor behavior. They complained about the scheduling and formatting of classroom sessions. The parents who were resistant in this study complained about the same areas of the program, scheduling and program formatting. Vic and Ollie reported complaints
towards the facilitator’s management of the program, and the inconvenience to their schedule and family time. Yet, the same two parents provided input in certain areas regarding the program being helpful.

**Future Research**

Future research on the experiences of parents attending a court-ordered parenting education program could be conducted by using both quantitative and qualitative research methods. A study conducted with parents from within an inner city population might provide a different perspective on the experiences thought to be helpful, and would likely encourage a different dimension to the program. Additionally, a study using a case study approach might provide extended and in-depth information from the parents’ perspective, and pertinent information relative to the design of the program.

A research methodology, such as a case study, may allow parents more in-depth discussion relative to the nature of the help they receive in making changes to their parenting and parenting strategies. Additionally, an ethnographic qualitative study may provide even more in-depth information and allow the researcher to observe a parenting situation from a position of invisibility.

Parents in the 21st century have an increasing number of social issues to approach while raising their children (Shulruf et al., 2009). Shulruf et al. suggested that parents need increasing support from social service systems including the courts. Researchers and other professionals would provide a needed service to parents if more services and programs could be made available relative to assisting parents with helpful interventions. Scholarly materials are available to the academic and professional sectors, but
information for lay-persons such as parents is not readily accessible. This is something that parents in the present study suggested would be helpful in assisting parents to find support and information on managing their child. As professionals continue to grow in their work, hopefully more will be accomplished to assist parents with their children.

Additionally, further research is needed to investigate what can be initiated in establishing supportive after care services for parents once a program has been completed. Parents reported a need for a strong ongoing parent support group or after care service that would help them to maintain the benefits of the program.

**Summary of Chapter IV**

Chapter 4 presented a discussion on the five themes that developed from the individual interviews conducted with seven parents who attended Parent Project. Parents in this study reported being strengthened and empowered in their parenting, and that they learned to take control and manage their households and their children. They reported feeling in control of their home and gaining power in channeling their teens’ behavior in a positive and productive manner.

As parents utilized the techniques, tools, and support of the program, they found it helpful in making changes to their parenting strategies. The techniques and tools that were presented to parents by the facilitators became helpful aids in developing the parents’ confidence. The most noted technique parents used in obtaining control was the TEASPot. Spot checks were also identified as helpful in monitoring the behavior of their teens. The parents who were able to follow through on these two interventions reported having experienced monumental gains that were helpful in changing their
parenting strategies. The most helpful aspect of the program was the support systems that were available to the parents.
APPENDIX A

KENT STATE UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL BOARD REVIEW APPROVAL LETTER
Appendix A

Kent State University Institutional Board Review Approval Letter

April 10, 2008

Sandra M. Jones
ACVI-CHSN

Re: 08-866: "The Parent Project: Parent Perceptions of the Helpfulness of a Court-Ordered Program for Parents of Adjusted Adolescents"

Dear Ms. Jones:

I am pleased to inform you that the Kent State University Institutional Review Board has reviewed and approved your Application for Approval to Use Human Research Participants in Level II research. This application was approved on April 10, 2008 and is effective for a twelve-month period, expiring on April 10, 2009.

Federal regulations and Kent State University IRB policy require that research be reviewed at intervals appropriate to the degree of risk, but not less than once per year. The IRB has determined that this protocol requires an annual review and progress report. The IRB will forward an annual review reminder notice to you by mail or e-mail as a courtesy. Please note that it is the responsibility of the principal investigator to be aware of the study expiration date and submit the required materials.

Please submit review materials (annual review form and copy of current consent form) one month prior to the expiration date.

HTHS regulations and Kent State University Institutional Review Board guidelines require that any changes in research methodology, protocol design or principal investigator have the prior approval of the IRB before implementation and continuation of the protocol. The IRB must also be informed of any adverse events associated with the study. The IRB further requests a final report at the conclusion of the study.

Kent State University has a Federal Wide Assurance on file with the Office for Human Research Protection (OHRP), FWA Number 0001813.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me at 330.672.2004 or fredericke@kent.edu.

Sincerely,

Tonya Frederick, R.N., BSN
Research Compliance Administrator

CC: Dr. Martin Jancius
    Dr. Donald Huberger
APPENDIX B

ORGANIZATION INVITATIONAL LETTER
March 30, 2006

Sandy Jones
Ohio State University

Dear Sandy,

This letter is invite to you the 4th class of Parent Project Program on April 7, 2006 at
79012 Parma Avenue, Wednesday. The class starts at 2pm and ends until 7pm. I
understand that you will be talking to the parents about the resources you are
considering in tone, this can enable them to participate. You are more than welcome to
take the class. After you are done talking to the class for a few minutes. If
you have any other questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to call me at 419-448-3568.
See you on Wednesday.

Sincerely,

Lisa Slivano-Miller MSA, LSW
Parent Coordinator
Science Educator
Parent Project Director

OSU Extension, The Ohio State University, and Lake County Extension Cooperating.
APPENDIX C

FACILITATOR’S SCRIPT
Appendix C

Facilitator’s Script

Background of Researcher:

Sandra Jones, a Kent State University doctoral candidate in the Counseling and Human Development Program, is conducting research relative to the parent’s experience of attending the court-ordered program, Parent Project. Her main objective is to interview parents regarding their perceptions of the helpfulness of Parent Project in working with their teen that has displayed disruptive behavior, and/or has become involved with the juvenile court.

Overview of Research Study:

Ms. Jones’s Ph.D. dissertation topic focuses on Parent Project’s helpfulness to parents in managing their teens’ behavior to reduce court involvement. She wants to conduct research with parents attending the court-ordered program Parent Project, and who would agree to participate in 2 separately scheduled individual interviews. During the interview, ideas, and experiences related to the helpfulness of the Parent Project program will be discussed.

Details of Participation:

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to meet with Ms. Jones in 2 separately scheduled individual interview for about one hour. If you do decide to take part in this project you will be given the opportunity to stop at any time. Confidentiality within the limits of the law will be maintained throughout the study. Parents choosing to participate must complete all sessions of Parent Project. You will be given a gift certificate to redeem at a local grocery store or discount department store.
APPENDIX D

COVER LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS
Appendix D

Cover Letter to Participants

Dear Participant:

My name is Sandra Jones and I am a doctoral student at Kent State University. I am currently working on my dissertation in the Counseling and Human Development Services Program. The purpose of this letter is to contact parents who recently completed the Parent Project. I would like to ask about your experience of the helpfulness of the program, Parent Project. I hope that you may be interested in participating in this study.

This packet includes several forms for you to complete and mail back to me if you decide to take part in this research study. If you are interested in participating in this study, please return the completed forms back to me in the enclosed self-addressed, pre-stamped envelope. Please do not write your name on these forms; this is to ensure your confidentiality. After I receive your information and confirm that you meet the criteria for this research study, I will contact you to schedule the first interview. Be aware that even if you meet the criteria for the study, you may not be scheduled for a first interview depending on how many parents respond to participate in the study.

This packet also includes a list of questions to be asked during the first interview. This form provides you with the opportunity to know what will be discussed during the first interview. You will be requested to give your consent to the study and to be audio taped at the first interview. All information will be held confidential. A second interview will be scheduled to discuss what I learned from our first meeting and to allow opportunity to provide new or additional information.

You will receive a $25.00 gift certificate to a local grocery store or discount department store at the end of the second interview. If you have any questions about the study or any of the enclosed forms, please do not hesitate to contact me at (216) 323-1147 or sunset472003@yahoo.com. You may also contact my dissertation advisors, Drs. Donald Bubenzer at: (330) 672-7977, Martin Jencius at: (330) 672-2662, or Rhonda Richardson at: 330-672-2026.

The Kent State Institutional Review Board has approved this study. If you have any questions about the rules for research at Kent State University, you may contact Dr. John L. West, Vice President and Dean, Division of Research and Graduate Studies at (330) 672-2704.

Sincerely,

Sandra M. Jones, M.Ed.
Doctoral Candidate
Appendix E

Participant Form

Instructions: This form is designed to gather information to determine whether you will meet the criteria for the proposed research study. Please answer all questions with a checkmark or by filling in the blank. All answers will remain confidential. Please do not write your name on this form. Please contact me if you have any questions or concerns about this form (216-323-1147). Thank you.

Participant number: _____

Screening Questions:

1. How did you hear about this study?
______________________________________________________________________________________

2. Are you 18 years-of-age or older?
   Yes _____ No _____

3. How many sessions of Parent Project did you attend? ___________

4. Did you complete all required classroom sessions of Parent Project?
   Yes _____ No _____ (If you answered no, please stop filling out this form, and return the packet to me.)

5. Would you be able to participate in 2 interviews, each lasting approximately 60 minutes each?
   Yes _____ No _____

6. Would you allow me to audio tape the interviews?
   Yes _____ No _____

Please list the days/ times most convenient for you to meet for the first interview:

Monday_______________________________________________________________________________
Tuesday _                                                                                       
Wednesday ____________________________________________________________________________
Thursday ______________________________________________________________________________ 
Friday ________________________________________________________________________________ 
Saturday ______________________________________________________________________________ 
Sunday _______________________________________________________________________________

The interviews will be held at the agency or a local library.
APPENDIX F

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE
Appendix F

Demographic Questionnaire

Instructions: This questionnaire is designed to gather important information about you. Please list your answers. All answers will remain confidential. Please do not write your name on this form. Your answers may be explored further during the first interview. Thank you.

Participant number: _____

1. Gender M F
2. Age: _________
3. Education completed: (check which applies to you)
   High School _____
   Technical Institute _____
   Two-Year College _____
   Four-Year College _____
   Graduate School _______
4. Marital Status (check which applies to you)
   Married ___________
   Divorced __________
   Single ___________
   Separated __________
   Engaged ___________
   Other ___________
5. Racial/ Ethnic Identity: (check which applies to you)
   African American _______
   Caucasian ______
   Asian _______
   Hispanic _______
   Other _______
APPENDIX G

INTERVIEW QUESTION GUIDE
Appendix G

Interview Question Guide

1. Tell me about your experience of using the techniques or methods suggested by the facilitator or other parents in the program to help with your parenting strategies. Were there any other experiences that helped you in your parenting strategies?

2. Tell me about your experience or experiences of the facilitator that helped you in making changes to your parenting strategies. Tell me about your experience or experiences of the other parents that helped you to enhance your parenting strategies.

3. Tell me about your experience or experiences in relationship to the multiple topics discussed in the classroom sessions. Tell me about the help you experienced relative to using the information about the topics discussed in class.

4. Tell me about your experience or experiences of help related to having your spouse participate in the program with you. What about that experience was helpful to you? Explain? Was it not helpful? Explain?

5. Tell me about your experience or experiences that helped you to return weekly to complete the program.

6. What thoughts do you have relative to your experiences of making changes to your parenting strategies that were helpful in strengthening your role as a parent?

7. In making changes to help with your parenting strategies, what experience or experiences would you say was most helpful to you?

8. In your experience was there anything about making changes to your parenting strategies that was not helpful to you?
Interview Question Guide for Second Interview

1. Are the statements complete that the researcher (I) transcribed as your responses for the questions that you were presented with during the first interview?

2. Is there anything in your statements that you would like to clarify or expand on in regards to the questions asked?

3. Do you have any other thoughts that occurred for you about our first interview session that you would like to add?
APPENDIX H

PARENT PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM
Appendix H

Parent Participant Consent Form

The Helpfulness of Parent Project

I am a doctoral student who has an interest in learning about the experience of parents attending Parent Project, a court-ordered parenting education program. I am interested in the perception of parents regarding the helpfulness of the Parent Project, parents’ experience of the program, and how parents incorporate the use of the program. This research is considered a dissertation research. If you decide to participate in this research, you will be asked to participate in two interviews, each lasting approximately 60 minutes. These interviews will be audio taped and will be scheduled at a time most convenient for you.

All audiotapes will be destroyed at the end of the research project. Only limited demographic information and your chosen name will be included in the dissertation. All confidential information will be kept in a secure location and will only be accessed by this researcher. The findings of this research will be published in a doctoral dissertation in Counselor Education and Supervision Department, at Kent State University. It may be submitted to a scholarly journal, and for a proposal at a state, regional, or national presentation.

If you take part in this project you will have the opportunity to reflect on your experience of attending Parent Project and how the program was helpful for you in working with your adolescent. The interview questions are intended to allow you to reflect on this experience. Examples include: “What was the most important part of the program?” and “In what ways did you strengthen your role as a parent?” Taking part in this project is entirely up to you, and no one will hold it against you if you decide not to do it. If you do take part, you may stop at anytime.

If you want to know more about this research project, please call me at 216.323.1147 or my dissertation advisors, Drs. Donald Bubenzer at: (330) 672-7977, Martin Jencius at: 330.672.2662, or Rhonda Richardson at: 330-672-2026. The project has been approved by Kent State University. If you have questions about Kent State University’s rules for research, please call Dr. John L. West, Vice President and Dean, Division of Research and Graduate Studies (Tel. 330.672.2704). As a study participant, you will receive a copy of this consent form.

Sincerely,

Sandra M. Jones, M.Ed., Doctoral Candidate

CONSENT STATEMENT (S):
I agree to take part in this project. I know what I will have to do and that I can stop at any time.

Signature ______________________ Date ______________________
APPENDIX I

AUDIO TAPE CONSENT FORM
Appendix I

Audiotape Consent Form

I agree to audio taping at___________________________________________________

On__________________________________________________________  _____________

Signature                          Date

I have been told that I have the right to hear the audio tapes before they are used.

I have decided that I:

______want to hear the tapes ______do not want to hear the tapes

Sign now below if you do not want to hear the tapes. If you want to hear the tapes, you will be asked to sign after hearing them. The tapes will only be used by: Sandra L. Miller Jones, and only for the purpose of researching Parent Project.

__________________________________________________________  _____________

Signature                          Date
APPENDIX J

INTERVIEW OBSERVATION FORM
Appendix J

Interview Observation Form

PROJECT: AN INQUIRY INTO THE NATURE OF HELP EXPERIENCED BY SEVEN CAUCASIAN PARENTS WHO COMPLETED A COURT ORDERED PARENTING EDUCATION PROGRAM

Time of Interview:
Date: 
Place: 
Interviewer: 
Interviewee:

Briefly describe the project:

Observations and reflections of the interviewer:

1. Starting the interview:

2. Parents willingness to speak openly and freely:

3. Ending the interview:

4. Particular area of the interview:

5. Did the parent bring the curriculum workbook? Did it appear the workbook was used by the parent?

6. Concluding ideas:

(Thank the parent for participating in this interview. Assure the parent of confidentiality of responses and potential future interviews.)

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APPENDIX K

PARENT PARTICIPATION STUDY FLYER: PARENT PROJECT
Appendix K

Parent Participation Study Flyer: Parent Project

If you have completed all classroom sessions of Parent Project, you may be interested in volunteering in a research study for a doctoral dissertation in the College of Graduate School of Education, Health and Human Services at Kent State University.

For more information, please contact: Sandra L. Miller-Jones, M.Ed. at: (216) 323-1147 or Sunset472003@yahoo.com.

All selected participants who complete the 2 60-minute interviews for the study will receive a complimentary $25.00 gift certificate to a local grocery store or discount department store.

This study is approved by the Institutional Review Board of Kent State University.
APPENDIX L

MENTAL HEALTH AGENCY INFORMATION
Appendix L

Mental Health Agency Information

Bridges Mental Health
2709 N. Ridge Road
Painesville, Ohio 44077
440-350-9922

Crossroads
8445 Munson Road
Mentor, Ohio 44060
440-255-1700

Laurelwood Hospital
35900 Euclid Avenue
Willoughby, Ohio 44094
440-953-3000
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