

Empowering Homeless Youth: An Evaluation of a Participatory
Action Research Based Program

DISSERTATION

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Abstract

A large number of the nation's youth live on the streets, with estimates of up to 2.8 million. Homeless youth face numerous challenges including substance abuse and mental and physical health problems. Homelessness is embedded in a social system. Regardless of this, interventions for homeless youth have focused on individual characteristics associated with homelessness. The current study proposes to develop and evaluate an intervention for homeless youth, namely the Fogo process. Fifteen youth (between the ages of 18-24 years) were recruited from the streets and homeless service agencies in the Columbus area. Questionnaires were administered and a life history interview was conducted with youth. Information from interviews was used to develop a video. Three groups of two to four youth per group participated in approximately five sessions of video making. During the final video-making session, questionnaires were administered and a focus group interview was conducted with youth. The video was shown to five policy makers and a focus group interview was conducted afterwards. The purpose of showing the video to policy makers was to provide homeless youths' voices to policy makers. The findings of this study suggest that a variety of factors in homeless youths' ecological environment influence the onset and maintenance of homelessness. In addition, this study found that youth experience homelessness not only as a material loss but also as a loss of self. Further, the study details the strategies youth utilize in order to

persevere under adversity. Finally, this study found the significance of the video in influencing policy makers' perceptions about homelessness. This finding supports a bottom-up approach rather than a top-down approach to policy making.

Dedication

To my beloved mother, father, and husband

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When I first started the journey of obtaining my Ph.D., I was alone in a foreign land among foreign people. At the end of this journey, I find myself surrounded by so many beautiful people who enriched my life in many different ways. This is a sincere acknowledgement to the love and support of all those beautiful people.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Prevalence

Estimates of homeless youth range from 500,000 to 2.8 million each year (Cooper, 2006). According to one representative survey, the annual prevalence of adolescent homelessness is 7.6% of the total youth population (Ringwalt et al., 1998). Recently, the National Runaway Switchboard (2001) stated that “one out of seven children will run away from home before the age of 18 and that about 5,000 of such youth die annually from assault, illness, and suicide” (p.1). Research also suggests that it is during the period of adolescence that individuals are most at risk for experiencing homelessness (Robertson & Toro, 1999). Despite the prevalence of homelessness among youth, this is the least studied subgroup among the homeless population (Cauce et al., 2000).

Even among homeless youth, less research has focused on young adults between the ages of 18-24. Estimates suggest that each year approximately 750,000 to 2 million youth between the ages of 18-24 experience an episode of homelessness (National Health Care for the Homeless Council, 2004). In a sample of 2938 homeless people, the National Survey of Homeless Assistance Providers and Clients (NSHAPC) found that roughly

11% were young adults ages 18-24 (HUD, 1999). This study underestimated the number of homeless youth since it surveyed only those homeless individuals who accessed services and not those who lived on the streets and did not access services. However, this percentage suggests that nearly 385,000 youth between the ages of 18-24 experience homelessness each year (Lenz-Rashid, 2006).

Definition of Homeless Youth

There is little empirical evidence regarding the exact number of homeless youth, partly due to the transient nature of this population and partly due to the difficulty in defining homeless youth (Ringwalt et al., 1998). There is no single federal definition of what constitutes homeless youth (CRS Report for Congress, 2005). The term “homeless” has been defined differently in different contexts. However, most programs serving the homeless population use the definition provided by the McKinney-Vento Act (P. L. 100-70): A homeless individual is “a person who lacks a fixed and night-time residence or whose primary residence is a supervised public or private shelter designed to provide temporary living accommodations, an institution accommodating persons intended to be institutionalized, or a public or private place not designed for, or ordinarily used as, a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings” (CRS Report for Congress, 2005, p.1).

One of the important decisions in defining homeless youth is age (Robertson & Toro, 1999). The range most commonly used in the existing literature is between ages 12 to 21 but many studies of homeless youth also include young adults up to age 24 (Moore, 2005). In a sample of Los Angeles’ street living youth, Kipke et al. (1995) found that

91% of the sample were age 16 or older. Similarly, Slesnick, Bartle-Haring, Glebova, & Glade (2006) reported that 92% of the sample in their study included homeless youth who were 16 years or older.

Age & Gender

The period of 18 to 24 years of age is a transitional period for many young people. According to the World Health Organization and the Society for Adolescent Medicine, individuals between the ages of 10-24 are defined as adolescents (youth) wherein individuals between the ages of 18-24 fall under late adolescents (young adult) (National Health Care for the Homeless Council, 2004). This final stage of adolescent development- that is late adolescence or early adulthood- is crucial for healthy, responsible functioning in adulthood (National Health Care for the Homeless Council, 2004). In the westernized nations, among many other tasks, the major developmental task of this stage is to become self-sufficient (Arnett, 1998). However, a significant number of youth (between the ages of 18-24) who could contribute to the nation's economy (by becoming self-sufficient) become dependent upon the nation's economy for their survival. Homelessness not only poses threats to the well-being of adolescents who are facing it but also to the larger social system in which homelessness is embedded.

Research suggests that the older subgroup of homeless youth is of particular concern because they have longer histories of homelessness, more life disruptions and psychosocial problems, and is less likely to use traditional services (Robertson & Toro, 1999). Street living youth are usually older than shelter living youth (Robertson & Toro, 1999). Homeless youth are ineligible to access child welfare services and to utilize

shelters for adolescents due to age limits. Moreover, they are less likely to use traditional services or adult shelters for fear of predators and victimization (Robertson & Toro, 1999). In addition to this, supportive services such as health and education are not available to youth once they reach young adulthood. The National Health Care for the Homeless Council (2004) suggests that youth in late adolescence present an important opportunity to guide them away from the marginal life of homelessness and toward a productive life in adulthood.

Gender representation of homeless youth in different studies varies depending upon the source and age of the sample. Samples recruited from shelters tend to have more females whereas street recruited samples consist of more males (Robertson & Toro, 1999). Samples of older homeless youth tend to have more males whereas younger homeless youth sample tend to have more females (Cauce et al., 2000).

Substance abuse

Homeless youth report significant substance abuse problems. Challenges of street life along with the substance use deteriorate the health conditions of homeless youth. Two studies reported that almost three-fourth of their sample of homeless youth met criteria for a substance use disorder (Baer et al., 2003; Kipke et al., 1997). Rates of substance abuse vary depending upon the subcategories of homeless youth. Street youth were found to have the highest rates of substance abuse, followed by sheltered youth and runaways and finally housed youth (Greene et al., 1997). Rates of substance use also vary depending upon the age of the youth. At a community based clinic in Hollywood, older youth were significantly more likely to report use of alcohol, stimulants, narcotics

and injection drugs (Kipke et al., 1995). Drug abuse rates were also found to be significantly higher among males compared to females. Further, ethnicity was found to be significantly associated with substance use. African-American youths were less likely to abuse alcohol or drugs compared to Caucasian youths (Ringwalt et al., 1998).

Depression

Depression is the most commonly documented mental health issue among homeless youth (McCaskill et al., 1998; Smart & Walsh, 1993). Unger et al. (1997) surveyed 432 homeless youth recruited from the streets and service agencies and found that 64 percent of the youth reported depressive symptoms. In another street based sample (ages 13-21), 45 percent of the youth reported at least one DSM-III-R diagnosis for mental disorder with depression having the highest percentage among all other mental disorders. McCaskill et al. (1998) found that 33 percent of homeless young adults participating in their study met the DSM-IV-R criteria for depression. Similarly, Smart and Walsh (1993) found that one-third of the homeless young adults participating in their study reported chronic feelings of depression. It is unclear whether living on the streets exacerbates mental health issues among youth or whether streets provide a safe-haven for youth who had suffered maltreatment off the streets. No matter the issue, it is very likely that depression hampers youths' ability to find employment opportunities or stable housing, and might contribute to extended life on the streets.

Delinquency

Homeless youth are characterized as “deviants,” “delinquent street urchins” by many in public debates (Gaetz, 2004). Based on the review of literature, Robertson and

Toro (1999) stated that indeed many youth do report involvement in delinquent activities; however, they suggested that these delinquent behaviors may be their way of surviving on the street. Homeless youth report trading sex in order to meet their basic needs namely food or shelter. Homeless youth also report engaging in delinquent activities such as selling drugs or sex to generate income to meet their basic needs (Robertson & Toro, 1999). In a sample of 602 homeless youth from four Mid-western states, 23% reported stealing, 14% reported forced entry into a residence, 20% had used drugs and 2% had engaged in survival sex (selling sex to meet basic needs) (Whitbeck et al., 1997). Another study with 409 Los Angeles street youth (ages 12-23) found that 43% (46% of young men and 32% of young women) of the participants engaged in survival sex (Kipke et al., 1995). Many of these youth reported engaging in these illegal activities to obtain food or shelter.

Self-Efficacy

Albert Bandura's (1989) social cognition theory postulates that people use their agency to decide what direction their lives may take or which factors of their environment can exert influence on their behavior. This is called the triadic reciprocal causation where environment is not directly influencing the behavior; the cognitive processes that are taking place in an individual's psychology is mediating the relationship between environment and behavior (Bandura, 1989). The mechanisms through which agency operates is called self-efficacy. Self-efficacy theory postulates that people's beliefs about their capabilities to exercise control over the events that affect their lives are important determinants in their well-being (Bandura, 1989). Further, this theory suggests

that efficacy beliefs influence individuals' decisions regarding changing detrimental health practices (Bandura, 2005). By acting on beliefs that they can resist peer pressure, youth have been shown to reduce their likelihood of engaging in high risk activities such as substance abuse (Bandura, 2005). However, hazardous environments present opportunity structures that lead to antisocial activities (Bandura, 2005). Also, stressful environments may force people to lose their beliefs in their own capabilities. While struggling for their daily survival, searching for food, shelter and safety, homeless youth may eventually forget what their capabilities are. The longer they stay on the street the harder it could become for them to believe in their own abilities. On the other hand, some youth might find competence in dealing with the "street economy" and may become detached from prosocial activities because they have high costs (labor) and low rewards (low paying jobs).

According to Bandura (2005), youth need enablement programs that are focused on building competencies in order to escape the risky activities such as substance abuse and delinquency. Finding affordable housing in adverse conditions is another challenge that requires self-efficacy for homeless individuals (Epel et al., 1999). In a study of 80 homeless adults living in a shelter, Epel et al. (1999) found that those adults who had higher perceived self-efficacy spent more time searching for housing and employment. Despite spending more time in the search process, these adults were not able to find affordable stable housing. Based on the results, the authors concluded that homelessness is not a personal problem, but a social problem that requires social solutions. Further, Epel and colleagues (1999) suggested that with help and empowerment, people who are

homeless will be able to take control in pressuring the social system and thus improving their own condition.

Intervention choice

Early intervention is considered the most effective way to prevent future homelessness among homeless youth and to facilitate homeless youth becoming productive members of the society. Since the passage of Stuart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act in 1987, the number of interventions and programs that serve homeless youth are increasing (Toro, Dworsky, & Fowler, 2007). However, the literature unequivocally echoes the need for efficacious interventions focused on homeless youth (Robertson & Toro, 1999; Slesnick et al., 2008; Toro, 2007). In a recent report developed for the National Symposium on Homelessness Research, Toro, Dworsky, and Fowler (2007) mentioned that “we know relatively little about what works” in terms of interventions for homeless youth.

Previous research on homelessness among youth has primarily focused on individual characteristics associated with homelessness whereas homelessness is a social phenomenon (Haber & Toro, 2004; Shinn, 1992; Toro et al., 2007). The focus on individual vulnerabilities has limited our understanding in developing effective interventions and policies for homeless youth. In the United States, the focus is on individual level analysis (Toro, 2007) whereas in Europe the focus is at broader socio-cultural and policy level analysis (Shinn, 2007). The resulting differences can be seen in the lower rates of homelessness in many European countries, such as Germany, as compared to the United States (Toro, 2007).

Based on a review of literature, Robertson and Toro (1999) concluded that the existing literature has painted a disturbing picture of homeless youth, focusing primarily on their problems and deficits. According to these authors, research needs to focus on the strengths and competencies of this population. Further, the authors call for carefully analyzed qualitative interview data that attempts to assess the needs of homeless youth in the voice of the youth themselves. Effective interventions tend to build on people's strengths, involve elements of participation, and offer the least stigmatizing approach (Karabanow, 1999). Research also suggests that input from service providers and policy makers can inform research with this population (Acosta & Toro, 2000). The intervention used in this study not only attempted to examine the needs and strengths of homeless youth in their own voice but also acquired input from policy makers.

Theoretical Framework

Intervention for the present investigation was guided by Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological-developmental framework. This approach emphasizes the context in which people live and the complex interactions between personal, social, economic, and political environments that affect their well being (Bronfenbrenner, 1989). The ecological perspective identifies targets for change at multiple levels of social analysis, ranging from the individual to large scale social policies (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). There are various levels in an individual's environment which affects and are affected by the interactions taking place in the environment. These levels are Microsystem (individual and its immediate environment), Mesosystem (linkages between different Microsystems), Exosystem (systems in which individuals do not actively participate but those systems

affect an individual's life to a large extent), Macrosystem (the larger cultural values, norms, and laws of society) and Chronosystem (events that take place at different points of time in an individual's life). This approach is also called the developmental contextual approach. Hence, it not only takes into account individual's own developmental status, motivation, beliefs, and values but also the larger context which directly or indirectly influences individual's behavior. The ecological-developmental framework encourages researchers and policy makers to understand the lives of people at multiple levels of analysis (Toro et al., 1991)

Based on Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory, Toro et al. (1991) provided an ecological framework to guide research and intervention efforts on homelessness. According to Toro et al. (1991), a basic precept of the ecological framework is to create empowering relationships with those people and organizations for whom the intervention is designed. The present investigation was guided by ecological systems theory in the sense that it viewed the homeless youth embedded in a social ecology. In order to bring change, the intervention developed in this study, i.e. the Fogo process, targeted change at multiple levels of the ecosystem. The Fogo process (described on page 17) honored the views of homeless youth and attempted to build empowering relationships with the youth and the policy makers. The forthcoming section of research paradigms discusses the theoretical underpinnings of the Fogo process and the methodology used in this study.

Research Paradigms

Paradigms shape research at its most basic level (Broido & Manning, 2002). Paradigms are "a basic set of beliefs that guide actions" (Guba, 1990, p. 17). The concept

of paradigms, the worldview that underlies any research tradition, became familiar after the publication of Thomas Kuhn's (1970) "The structure of scientific revolution." A paradigm includes four concepts: axiology, ontology, epistemology, and methodology (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Axiology is concerned with ethics and values; epistemology refers to our ways of understanding the world (objectivism, subjectivism); ontology raises questions related to the nature of the reality and nature of our being in the world; and methodology focuses on the best strategies for gaining knowledge about the world (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Research can be understood as emanating from particular paradigms that inform our theoretical perspectives and that in turn shape choice of methodology, a general "strategy or plan of action" (Crotty, 1998, p. 7). These methodologies subsequently are then implemented through use of particular methods or techniques.

Generally, research methodology is placed into two opposing categories, qualitative and quantitative (Arminio & Hultgren, 2002) which misrepresents and oversimplifies our understanding of the world (Lather, 1991). Habermas's (1971) categories of knowledge more accurately represent the epistemological assumptions about the world: positivism that predicts, explains, or controls; interpretive, and constructivist research that aims to understand; critical, praxis-oriented research that seeks to emancipate; and poststructural that seeks to deconstruct (Lather, 1996). The theoretical perspectives that guided this research with homeless youth were constructivist and participative paradigms. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2000), elements of

constructivist and participative theory fit comfortably together. Both of these paradigms are discussed in some details below.

Social constructivism. Social constructivism emerged as a paradigm that challenged the fundamental beliefs of objectivism (Broido and Manning, 2002). “Subjectivism, on the other hand, does not come about from an interplay between researcher and participants but rather is imposed by the researcher-in light of critical examination of textual evidence” (Arminio & Hultgren, 2002, p. 2). The epistemology of social constructivist perspective postulates that truth and knowledge are not something which are “out there” or which can be “discovered.” In fact, social constructivists are indifferent to the notion of “world out there.” For them, there are multiple realities (Sipe & Constable, 1996). A major assumption of constructivism is that meaning occurs through engagement in the world. In other words, meaning is constructed. We make sense of the world by experiencing and interacting with the world. This knowledge is constructed against a backdrop of culture, language, practices and so on (Schwandt, 1996). Knowledge is not neutral; it is ideological and political (Rouse, 1996). Hence, for a community, meaning is arrived at by negotiations and shared understandings among its members. Knowledge is not separate from the “knower,” or in other words, from the researcher, but is rooted in the researcher’s mental and linguistic representations of the context. Researchers and participants are partners in the generation of meaning. The researcher joins the researched in order to understand the perspectives and worldview of the researched through a dialogue. The criteria for judging the quality of research is not

based on the positivist criteria of internal and external validity; it is dependent upon “trustworthiness” and “authenticity” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

Constructivism provided a foundation upon which the methodology of the current investigation was built. However, this framework, in and of itself, was not sufficient to address the real world problems of homeless youth. Rather, it served as a guiding philosophy. Reason (1998) introduced the concept of participatory world view which is characterized as the most appropriate and effective research approach with which to deal with real world problems. Work in the constructivist paradigm overlaps with the work of participatory action approaches (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

Participatory Action Research (PAR). This paradigm stems from “the radical needs of the oppressed” (Ross, 1979, p. 280) and has its roots in neo-Marxist approaches to community development (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2002). This research program is a descendant of Kurt Lewin’s (1948) action research. Action research directly addresses the problem of division between theory and practice. Instead of being a linear process of producing knowledge with the hope that it will be applied to a practice setting some day, action research combines the development of practice with the construction of research knowledge in a cyclical process.

Action research is closely linked by many researchers and writers (Diggins, 1994; Rorty, 1979) with the concept of reflexive practice which has its roots in the work of Dewey (1954) who saw one kind of reflection as leading to the testing of hypotheses in another practice. The Pragmatic philosophy of James, Pierce and Dewey (Diggins, 1994) is an important ground for the social research that is action relevant. Pragmatism seeks to

link theory and praxis (Diggins, 1994). Action researchers essentially engage in reflective practices. Action researchers are committed to a set of practices that produce radical transformation in the lives of those who are involved in the research. These practices involve democratic dialogue, participatory decision making, and representation of all relevant parties. Rather than being research on the people, it is a research by the people, for the people and with the people (Noffke & Somekh, 2004). Research participants become co-participants and stakeholders in the process of inquiry. Action researchers help transform inquiry into praxis or action (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Research becomes praxis – practical, reflexive, pragmatic action – directed toward solving real problems in the world. The problems do not come down from a grand theory, rather they originate from the lives of the research co-participants. Together, stakeholders and researcher create knowledge that is pragmatically useful and that aims to increase fairness, wellness, and self-determination.

Paulo Freire's (1970) "Pedagogy of the Oppressed" guides the framework of the Participatory Action Research perspective. Within Freirian research, the inquiry process itself is focused on empowering the participants. The inquiry process enables people to change by encouraging self-reflection and a deeper understanding of their particular situations (Lather, 1986). The central inquiry process is linked to solving practical problems in specific locations. Whether the "problem" is a social/ organizational/ educational one, the results of the process must be tangible in the sense that the participants can figure out whether or not the solution they have developed actually resolves the problems they have set for themselves. Action research is built on interaction

between local knowledge and professional knowledge. Whereas conventional research puts emphasis on professional knowledge, action research does not. Professional knowledge is important and can be valuable but local knowledge is a necessary ingredient in the research. Only local participants with their years of experience in a particular situation have sufficient information and knowledge about the situation to design effective social change processes. Action research aims to solve problems in a given context through democratic inquiry in which the professional researcher collaborates with local participants to seek and enact solutions to problems of major concern to the participants. This process is built on professional researcher-participant collaboration. Under the Participative paradigm, the researcher “works with people who are disadvantaged or oppressed as a way to help them solve practical problems and also reclaim their capacity to create their own knowledge” (Reason, 1998, p. 43). Participatory Action Research involves a “spiral of self-reflective cycles” of planning, acting and observing, and reflecting (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). The stages overlap and may result in replanning, acting, observing and reflecting. Hence, it is an iterative process. Through collective efforts, problems are identified at the local level and solutions are sought in ways that link this process to larger structural issues (Hall, 1981). The researcher’s role is “that of a catalyst who works with local participants to understand and solve local problems” (Lather, 1986, p. 73). The researcher attempts to evoke the desire of the participants to do things differently (only if the issues are of importance to the participants) (Lather, 1986). The researcher in this paradigm tends to locate foundations

of truth in specific historical, economic, racial, and social infrastructure of oppression, injustice and marginalization (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

Homeless youth are one of the most disenfranchised populations in the United States. The challenges of these youth need to be addressed both at the individual level and structural level. Participatory Action Research approach views homeless youth as “normal” yet forced by societal inequality to survive under difficult circumstances (Karabanow & Clement, 2004). The constructivist paradigm provided an approach which helped in constructing knowledge of the lives of homeless youth by engaging in a dialogue and by arriving at a shared understanding of their lives in the context they are situated. Participatory approach provided a guideline to address the social problems of homeless youth by engaging them in a collaborative process. Power gap was addressed between youth and the policy makers by utilizing video as a tool to share youth’s voices to the stakeholders. As such, Participatory Action Research provided an ideal research approach to address the use of video to seek a more equitable approach to influence policy for homeless youth in Columbus, Ohio.

Theoretical perspective informs the questions researchers ask, the assumptions we make, and the procedures, methods and approaches we use to carry out our research projects. In turn, the questions asked influence the data that are collected, how they are collected, and the procedures, methods and approaches we use to carry out our research (Pierce, 1995). The above mentioned paradigms, constructivist and participatory paradigms, guided the methodology of the present investigation. Methodology refers to the plan of action or process lying behind the choice of particular data collection methods

(Arminio & Hultgren, 2002). Based on the paradigms and the questions that were posed, case study and Fogo process were employed to guide the methods for this study.

Case Study. Case study derives its rationale and methods from many different theoretical traditions, situated in the social constructivism perspective of the social sciences (Stark & Torrance, 2005). In the United States, the methodology is most closely associated with The University of Chicago Department of Sociology (Tellis, 1997). Case study assumes that social reality is constructed through social interaction. It seeks to identify and describe before analyze and theorize (Stark & Torrance, 2005). Case study is defined by “interest in individual cases” (Stake, 1995). The strength of case study is that it can use multiple methods and data sources in order to gain a ‘rich description’ of a phenomenon from the participants’ perspective (Stark & Torrance, 2005). Yin (1994) suggested that people's experiences were best uncovered through case studies, which allowed researchers to make connections that would be too complex for surveys or experiments. The most commonly employed methods for conducting case study are interviews, documentary analysis and observation (Stake, 1995; Yin, 1994).

The Fogo Process. The Fogo process is a participatory video methodology that uses media technology as a tool for participatory action based research. The Fogo process was the first attempt to use film-making as a technique to affect policy intervention at the local level (Ferreira, 2007). In 1967, Donald Snowden partnered with producer Colin Low to produce a series of films about the impoverished fishing community on the Fogo Island in Canada (Ferreira, 2007). Donald Snowden led a process whereby community members were able to voice their concerns, ideas, and vision through the medium of film.

Through the films, the community was able to recognize that its members share common problems and this recognition led them to take action toward their problems through locally developed strategies. The film also became a medium through which community members delivered their message to policy makers who had little understanding of the reality of life at the island (Snowden, 1984). Since the 1970s, this process has been used in many developing countries, particularly to empower disenfranchised populations (Ferreira, 2007). Recently, the Fogo process was used as a way to influence government policy making in the context of five remote Aboriginal communities in Ontario, Canada (Ferreira, 2007). As a result of this study, digital video is now being used as “an evaluation and interactive policy-making tool” in those communities.

The Fogo process is an innovative approach that has its roots in Paulo Freire’s Participatory action research approach. Similar to the Fogo process, there were other approaches that were innovatively used with oppressed populations. The Theatre of the Oppressed developed by Augusto Boal (2000) is a form of a popular participatory theatre that uses theatre as a vehicle for participatory social change. Boal’s (2000) Theatre of the Oppressed, is directly rooted in the principles espoused by Paulo Freire. The theatre allows the spectators to become active participants and to explore all the possible ways to solve a problem.

Theatre has also been used with at-risk youth as a way to bridge the gap between research and policy. In a study aimed at increasing the well being of youth and bringing change at the local government level in a rural Australian town, a group of 10 at-risk youth participated in a ‘theatre group’ (Bradley, Deighton, & Selby, 2004). Regular

weekly meetings were held with youth for five months. Youth voiced their stories, concerns, and needs in those meetings. After three months, youth staged a public performance at the town's main venue. After this first performance, youth conducted performances at several different locations and reported many favorable outcomes in their well-being. Three months after the first performance, important changes were noticed in three group members' lives. One drug abusing drop-out youth stopped using drugs and resumed her studies, a second boy joined a prestigious Dance company in the state capital and a third member became inspired to join a performance-based high school in a large city. During the town council meeting, one of the group members voiced her story. Due to the strength of her story, a change in policy occurred and a youth coordinator/researcher was appointed for the town to address the issues raised by the youth.

Another innovative way in which Participatory Action Research was used as a research method was photovoice (Wang, Cash, & Powers, 2000). Photovoice is a community-based photographic documentary where community members take pictures, tell stories and inform policy makers about issues of concern to the community members. Twelve homeless men and women (ages 18 and older) living at a shelter in Ann Arbor, Michigan were invited to photograph their everyday health, work and life conditions. Participants attended three, four-hour workshops over a period of one month and learned the techniques of photovoice. Participants captured photographs with the cameras provided by the research team and subsequently participated in group discussions about their photographs and experiences. Through the photographs, the participants were able

to reflect on the strengths and concerns of their community. Participants selected the photographs which they liked best and participated in a gallery exhibition. Several hundred people, including policy makers, journalists, researchers, public health graduate students, and the public attended the exhibition. The exhibition enabled policy makers, and community people to ‘rethink’ issues from the viewpoint of homeless people. The participants reported enhanced self-esteem, peer status and quality of life as a result of participation in the project. The shelter where participants lived had a 60-day limit but 75% of the shelter residents requested an extension. However, 10 out of 11 participants of this study were able to leave the shelter without having to ask for an extension and moved in their own housing three months from the date of the project initiation. Possibly, increased self-efficacy occurred among the participants, which led to the positive outcomes. However, research is needed to investigate this possibility.

The participatory action research approach has been conducted with homeless youth as well. Poland, Tupker, and Breland (2002) used participatory action research as a way to reduce harm from drug use among street youth in Metro Toronto. Along with six peer interviewers, 60 street youth produced a 20- minute video to illustrate issues and strategies to reduce harm from drug use among street youth. Participants reported many benefits of participation including skills development, friendship, fun and pride of accomplishment (Poland et al., 2002). The participatory action research approach has also been applied to documentary photography with homeless youth. Jim Hubbard, a documentary photographer and founder of Shooting Back, a project with offices in Washington, D.C., and Minneapolis, taught photography and writing to homeless youth

and engaged them in representing their lives and realities through the medium of photography. This project empowered the participants and let the participants depict their stories in their own voices (Hubbard, 1991).

Interventions of this nature are said to increase youth's self-esteem and confidence (Karabanow, 1999). Further, trust is a major issue among homeless youth (Moore, 2005). Homeless youth distrust adults which makes it difficult for service providers to engage them in traditional interventions. Because of the distrust, homeless youth rarely seek assistance from the service providers (Moore, 2005). According to Pearce (1995), programs that offer a specific activity are most effective in establishing a trusting relationship. Once the relationship is established, the researcher may be able to refer the youth to appropriate social services which is a step towards breaking out of homelessness (Pearce, 1995). Participatory approaches attempt to not only empower the youth in changing their life circumstances but also aims to build a trusting relationship through which youth can be connected to services in the larger system.

The Current Study

There is very little knowledge about the experiences of homeless youth from the perspectives of homeless youth themselves. Moreover, there is a dearth of research examining the outcomes following youths' participation in specific intervention programs. The literature also suffers from lack of focus on policy related issues. The current study developed and evaluated an intervention for homeless youth, namely the Fogo process. The primary goal of this study was to empower homeless youth in reducing "problematic behavior" and achieving greater stability by intervening at

individual and policy levels of the ecological system. Fifteen youth (between the ages of 18-24 years) from Columbus, Ohio participated in this study and developed a video. The video was shown to five policy makers and a focus group interview was conducted afterwards with the policy makers. The purpose of showing the video to policy makers was to provide homeless youths' voices to policy makers. The purpose of the focus group was to identify the significance of the video in changing policy makers' perceptions about homelessness. The specific objectives of the present investigation were as follows:

Specific Aim 1. Using a mixed methods approach, identify homeless youths' strengths, resources, life context, and struggles.

Specific Aim 2. Develop a participatory video with homeless youth using the information collected through specific aim 1.

Specific Aim 3. Evaluate the efficacy of the Fogo process on youth. Efficacy was assessed using self-efficacy, substance use, depression, and delinquency as outcomes.

Specific Aim 4. Explore the impact of the video on policy makers' perspectives on the issue of homelessness among youth.

CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY

Overview of Research design

The proposed study evaluated the efficacy of the Fogo process for homeless youth. Youth were screened for participation in the study in order to determine if they met the eligibility criteria. Those who consented to participate were administered questionnaires which assessed substance use, self-efficacy, depression, and delinquency. Next, youth participated in the Fogo process. In depth open-ended interviews were conducted individually with 15 youth in order to gain information about their daily struggles, needs, and life context. Emphasis was also placed on recognizing youths' strengths and hopes for their lives. Interviews conducted with seven youth were audio-recorded and with eight youth were both audio and video recorded. Information collected through interviews was utilized to develop a script which guided the story line of the video. Next, youth participated in video-making sessions. During these sessions, youth read the transcripts of their interviews, shared their stories with other youth and made decisions about the script of the video. There were approximately four video-making sessions per group. During the final video-making session, a focus group interview was conducted with youth to gain youths' perspectives on the Fogo process. Next, the same set of questionnaires that were given at baseline was individually administered to the youth to assess the efficacy of the intervention on the outcome variables. Upon

completion of the video making sessions and questionnaires, the video was edited into a 20-minutes long final video. Once the final video was made, a focus group meeting was conducted with policy makers. The purpose of this meeting was to provide homeless youths' voices to policy makers and to identify the significance of the video in changing policy makers' perceptions about homelessness. At the beginning of the meeting, a brief presentation was made in order to introduce the purpose and process of the current study. Following this, the video developed with the homeless youth was shown to policy makers. A focus group interview was conducted with the policy makers following the video screening. A semi-structured interview guided the focus group discussion and was created in order to gain insights into policy makers' thoughts about the efficacy of the video in influencing their perspectives.

Participant Recruitment. Fifteen youth were recruited from various sources such as soup kitchens, libraries, streets and outreach programs. A snowball sampling technique was also used in order to locate the youth. This method of sampling was chosen because it is ideal for those situations when potential respondents are not centrally located but scattered in different sites which is the situation with homeless youth. In a study conducted by Slesnick and colleagues (2006), to recruit and evaluate treatments for homeless youth in Columbus, of 95 youth enrolled in the program in 12 months, 31 (33%) were identified through outreach efforts and the remaining 64 (67%) were referred by other youth who had enrolled in the program. Purposive sampling was used to collect the sample of policy makers for a focus group meeting. Five policy makers were recruited to participate in this study. The advisor of the principal investigator and the director of the Youth Empowerment Program at the Coalition on

Homelessness and Housing in Ohio (COHHIO) were contacted in order to identify the names of the policy makers.

Inclusion criteria. *Inclusion criteria for youth was:*

1. Youth were between the ages of 18-24. Many consider homeless youth to include those up to the age of 24 (Moore, 2005). Also, parental consent for those under age 18 would be difficult to acquire since most minors do not have contact with parents or refuse contact (Robertson & Toro, 1999). Because this project involved video-making, there was a concern regarding including minors without parental consent.
2. Youth met the criteria for homelessness as defined by the McKinney-Vento Act as “lacking a fixed, regular, stable, and adequate nighttime residence” and includes “living in a publicly or privately operated shelter designed to provide temporary living accommodations, or a public or private place not designed for, or ordinarily used as, regular sleeping accommodations for human beings.”
3. Youth agreed to participate in the assessment and intervention.

Inclusion criteria for policy makers was:

1. Individual met the criteria for policy maker as defined by Ohio SAMI Code (2006) “Policymakers are those individuals who develop policies and procedures for funding and delivering services to persons in need”.
2. Policy maker was working on the issues related to homelessness in Columbus, Ohio.
3. Policy maker agreed to participate in the focus group meeting.

Screening and intake. A brief screening was conducted in order to determine whether youth met eligibility criteria, which took approximately 5 minutes. After this screening, the intake procedure was conducted which included informing youth about the nature and conditions of the study, reviewing and signing the consent statement. Letters and mailings were sent to the policy makers inviting them to participate in a focus group meeting. At the beginning of the focus group meeting, the policy makers were informed about the nature and conditions of the study. Following this, consent letter was reviewed and signed by the policy makers.

Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Table 1 illustrates demographic characteristics of the youth who participated in the current study. Participants included eight (53.3% of the sample) males and seven (46.7% of the sample) females. The average age of the youth was 21.0 years ($SD = 1.2$ years). Age ranged from 18 years to 23 years. Self-identified ethnicity included nine (60%) African American, two (13.3%) White, non-Hispanic, one (6.7%) Native American, one (6.7%) Hawaiian, one (6.7%) African National and one (6.7%) mixed ethnicity/race. Regarding sexual orientation, 14 (93.3%) youth identified themselves as heterosexual and 1 (6.7%) as bisexual. Of the 15 youth, 12 youth (80%) were single and 3 youth (20%) were cohabiting with a partner. Forty percent of the youth (2 males and 4 females) reported having children. Three youth were pregnant during the initial assessment. Regarding educational attainment, only one (6.7%) youth obtained some college education, four (26.7%) graduated from high school, three (20%) completed 11th grade, three (20%) completed 10th grade, three (20%) completed 9th grade, and one (6.7%) youth dropped out in 8th grade. None of the youth were legally employed. During

the initial assessment, ten (66.7%) youth were couch-surfing, four (26.7%) were living in shelters, and one (6.7%) was living on the streets.

Id	Name*	Age (years)	Gender	Race/ethnicity	Educational Attainment	Marital Status	No. of children
1	Sarah	22	F	African American	10 th Grade	Single	0
2	Carol	18	F	Hawaiian	9 th grade	Single	pregnant
3	Andrew	22	M	African American	12 th grade	Single	1
4	Eric	21	M	White, not of Hispanic Origin	One-year post-secondary	Single	0
5	Ana	19	F	White, not of Hispanic Origin	11 th grade	Single	1 pregnant
6	Harry	21	M	Mixed (Black & White)	12 th grade	Single	2
7	Iris	21	F	African American	8 th grade	Single	2
8	Robert	20	M	African American	10 th grade	Single	0
9	Tommie	21	F	American Indian	12 th grade	Cohabiting	2
10	William	23	M	African American	12 th grade	Single	0
11	Sandy	21	F	African American	9 th grade	Single	0
12	Carl	22	M	African American	9 th grade	Single	0
13	Ivan	22	M	African	11 th grade	Single	0
14	Tony	21	M	African American	10 th grade	Cohabiting	0
15	Erika	21	F	African American	11 th grade	Cohabiting	2 pregnant

*Note: Names of the participants were changed.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Homeless Youth

Measurement/ Instrumentation

The baseline and post-intervention included the same set of measures. Assessments were conducted in a friendly and engaging environment at the project office (Human Ecology House).

Locator information was obtained at baseline in which youth designated contact information as well as collaterals. Collaterals included friends, family members, probation/parole officers or social workers who would likely know where the youth would be if the principal investigator lost touch with them. Youth provided permission through signature for the principal investigator to contact collaterals for assistance in locating him or her.

A *Demographic Questionnaire* assesses variables that can be used to characterize participants included in the study. This questionnaire includes items such as age, gender, ethnicity, education, employment, and homeless experiences. Substance use and legal history was also assessed using the same questionnaire.

The *Self-Efficacy Scale* (Sherer et al., 1982) measures three main factors: willingness to initiate behavior, willingness to expend effort to complete the behavior, and persistence in the face of adversity. The scale consists of 23 items and the respondent rates his or her level of agreement with each item on a 14-point Likert scale. The questionnaire provides a score of general self-efficacy and social self-efficacy with Cronbach alpha coefficients of 0.86 and 0.71 respectively.

Delinquency was measured using the *National Youth Survey Delinquency Scale* (NYSDS; Elliot, Huizinga, & Ageton, 1985). NYSDS has established adequate test-retest and criterion validity (Elliott & Huizinga, 1983) and is widely used as a self-report

assessment of delinquent behavior (Krueger et al., 1994). Test-retest reliabilities for periods between 2 weeks and 6 months range from .75 to .98 and internal consistency alphas range between .65 and .92 (Moffitt, 1989). The NYSDS includes the following scales: general theft, crimes against persons, index offenses, drug sales, and total delinquency. The overall total delinquency scale score was used as a dependent measure in this study, as an overall measure of delinquent behavior.

The *Beck Depression Inventory-II* (BDI-II; Beck, Steer & Brown, 1996) was utilized to measure depressive symptoms. The BDI-II is the most frequently used self-report instrument for assessment of mood, cognitive and somatic aspects of depression, has been used with homeless youth (Meadows-Oliver, 2006; Slesnick, Prestopnik, Meyers, & Glassman, 2007), and has shown good psychometric properties. Estimates of internal consistency and test-retest reliability are high (Beck et al., 1996). Given high levels of depression within this population, the overall depression score was utilized in the current study as a dependent measure.

Detailed Study Procedures

Project Intervention (The Fogo Process). Fifteen youth were recruited to participate in the project intervention. The primary goal of this intervention was to examine the efficacy of the intervention (the Fogo process) on homeless youths' outcomes. The main emphasis of the Fogo process was to involve the group in video making sessions and then show the video to policy makers in order to bridge the communication gap between the two groups and bring changes at both the individual and policy level. The step by step description of the intervention is given below.

Assessment Interview. After reviewing and signing the consent form, the youth were asked to complete five questionnaires. Information about depression, substance abuse, delinquency, and self-efficacy was individually assessed with the youth using standardized questionnaires. Completing the questionnaires took approximately half-an-hour. Following this, an in-depth open ended life history interview was conducted with the youth. A semi structured approach was chosen to format the interview. This format allows the interviewer to modify the questions during the interview process (Ary et al., 2006). The interview covered a range of topics including: family experiences, school, friends, employment, struggles of everyday life, awareness of resources, personal strengths, and future hopes. The interview took approximately 60-90 minutes to complete. Homeless youth received a \$10 Target gift card as compensation for their time completing the assessments and the interview. The interview protocol was developed by the principal investigator in collaboration with her advisor who has extensive experience working with homeless youth. All the interviews were audio recorded using a digital voice recorder for sound quality and clarity. At the beginning of each interview, oral consent was taken on the audio recorder in order to ensure written as well as oral consent. The digital voice recorder can be connected to a computer. This facilitated the storage of data in one or two CD-ROMs. The files were stored using a code (participant ID in numbers) in order to maintain the confidentiality of the participants. After conducting interviews with the first seven participants, it was decided that the rest of the interviews would be both audio- and video-recorded. Video recording of the interviews allowed the researcher to capture both the verbal and non-verbal responses of the participants. The small hand-held video cameras were used to capture the interviews. The video cassettes

were also labeled using the participant IDs. The locator form given at baseline has this code which can identify the participant in order to locate the youth.

Transcription, Coding and Developing Themes. The recorded interviews were transcribed by the principal investigator or undergraduate research assistants. To maintain the anonymity, each participant was assigned a pseudonym. Any information that could identify the youth was eliminated from all transcripts. Data were hand coded, categorized and themes were developed based on the approach laid out by Erickson (1986) and Charmaz (2000). First, initial or open coding was utilized to examine individual interview transcripts. For the open coding, each line of the transcript was coded using action codes or by defining events within it. This form of coding helps the researcher to remain attuned to the participants' views of reality (Charmaz, 1986). The action codes also helped the researcher to use the constant comparative method of grounded theory analysis. For example, comparing different participants (views, situations, actions, experiences), comparing data from the same individual at different points in time, comparing a category with other categories.

Next, selective or focused coding was conducted. This form of coding uses initial codes that appear frequently in the data and helps in sorting the large amounts of data. Appendix B illustrates how part of my codebook looked after the second round of selective or focused coding. Examining closely the codes that were repeated in the data, I then looked for common themes across interviews which highlighted similarities in the experiences of more than one participant. Themes developed from the transcripts served as a story line for the script development. Once the major themes were derived, assertions were made largely through induction and were supported by warrants or evidentiary

quotes from the data. Data corpus was searched for both disconfirming and confirming evidence. If the discrepant cases outnumbered the ones that fitted the assertion, the assertion was not warranted by the data. My theoretical lenses – ecological systems theory and Freirian pedagogy of the oppressed- further provided me useful tools for interpreting, analyzing, and writing the data.

Video Making Sessions. Once the transcripts were developed and the themes were derived, the participants were contacted again for the video making sessions. Table 2 provides the dates of initial assessment interviews, video making sessions, and follow-up assessment interviews. The researcher could contact eleven out of the fifteen youth who participated at baseline. Out of those eleven youth, nine youth participated in the video-making sessions. The researcher was not able to locate four youth for the video making sessions and follow-up interviews. One youth was incarcerated, another one was hiding from the system (as reported by his mother), and two youth were not reached by the information provided on the locator form. In total, there were three groups (A, B, and C) of youth who participated in the video making sessions. The group size ranged from two to four youth per group. Table 2 also shows who participated in which video making group. Each group participated in approximately four sessions of video making.

Id	Name*	Date of Initial Assessment	Video Group	Date of Video Making session	Date of Follow-up Assessment Interview
1	Sarah	2/23/09	n/a	n/a	n/a
2	Carol	2/25/09	A	7/6/09; 7/7/09	7/7/09
3	Andrew	2/26/09	n/a	n/a	n/a
4	Eric	3/2/09	n/a	n/a	n/a
5	Ana	3/11/09	C	7/31/09	7/31/09
6	Harry	3/12/09	A	7/6/09; 7/7/09	7/7/09
7	Iris	3/19/09	C	7/31/09	7/31/09
8	Robert	4/8/09	B	7/23/09	7/23/09
9	Tommie	4/8/09	n/a	n/a	12/17/09
10	William	4/15/09	A	7/6/09	7/8/09
11	Sandy	4/30/09	A	7/6/09; 7/7/09	7/7/09
12	Carl	5/1/09	B	7/23/09	7/23/09
13	Ivan	5/6/09	n/a	n/a	11/10/09
14	Tony	5/18/09	n/a	n/a	n/a
15	Erika	5/27/09	B	7/23/09	7/23/09

*Note: Names of the participants were changed.

Table 2. Timeline for Initial Assessment and Video-Making Sessions

During the video making sessions, youth were actively engaged in the script development. The transcripts were shared with the youth in a group setting. After reading the transcript, youth decided which aspects of the story they wanted to keep in the final video. Homeless youth are the “experts” of street life and their knowledge is critical to the participatory process (Chavez et al., 2004). The final script was developed with the collaborative efforts of the researcher and the group. Story of the video was based on the script developed through the participants-researcher collaborative effort. Youth were provided a \$10 McDonald’s or Wendy’s gift card for each video making session they

attended. It was proposed that by participating in the video- making sessions, youth would gain a better understanding of the challenges that are common to all homeless youth. Also, it was hoped that they would be able to learn about different prosocial strategies to combat those challenges. During the final phase of the video making, a focus group was conducted with youth. A focus group is a group interview which centers on a particular issue (Ary et al., 2006). The purpose of the focus group was to gain youths' perspectives on the Fogo process. The audio-recorded data from the group sessions were transcribed. Any additional information obtained through the group sessions was included in the script for the video. Next, the same set of questionnaires that were given at baseline was individually administered to the youth to assess the efficacy of the intervention on the outcome variables. Youth received a \$10 Target gift card for completing the questionnaires. The final video was developed by the researcher with the editing assistance received from a video producer/director at Classroom Digital Media Distribution at the Ohio State University.

Focus Group with Policy Makers. The policy making environment comprises of community organizations, government agencies and political bodies (Ferreira, 2007). This research is about influencing the policy makers whose decisions and policies affect the lives of the youth who are on the streets. Purposive sampling was used to collect the sample of the policy makers for the focus group meeting. The advisor of the principal investigator and the director of the Youth Empowerment Program at the Coalition on Homelessness and Housing in Ohio (COHHIO) were contacted in order to identify the policy makers. Upon identification of policy makers, letters and mailings were sent to

the policy makers inviting them to participate in a focus group meeting. The policy makers were asked to provide their acceptance of invitation through e-mail or phone.

Five policy makers accepted the invitation and participated in the focus group interview. The focus group interview was conducted in the academic department of the researcher. Table 3 shows the description of the policy makers. Of the five policy makers, three were females and two were males. Two females were White Caucasian and two males and one female were African American. The group of policy makers consisted of a City Council Member, a legislative-aide to City Council Member, a staff attorney at the Legal Aid Society, a youth advocate, and a director of program planning at a non-governmental organization that oversees the funding and service delivery for homeless persons.

Participant ID	Gender	Ethnicity	Policy making role
F 1	Female	African American	City council member
F 2	Female	White Caucasian	Staff attorney, the Legal Aid Society
F3	Female	White Caucasian	A youth advocate
M1	Male	African American	Legislative aide to city council member
M2	Male	African American	Director of Program Planning at a non-governmental organization for homeless people

Table 3. Description of Policy Makers

After the policy makers reviewed and signed the consent form, a brief presentation was given to the policy makers to introduce the purpose and process of the current study. Following this, the video developed with the homeless youth was presented. After the video screening, the policy makers were asked to participate in a focus group interview. A semi-structured interview was created in order to gain insights into participants' thoughts about the efficacy of the video in influencing their perspectives. Lunch was provided during the focus group interview. All the responses from the focus group interview were audio-recorded, transcribed and analyzed using the same procedures described in *Transcription, Coding and Developing Themes* section on page 33.

Internal Validity. The steps that were taken in order to establish trustworthiness or validity of qualitative research data were member checking and triangulation. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), "The member check, whereby data, analytic categories, interpretations, and conclusions are tested with members of those stakeholding groups from whom the data were originally collected, is the most crucial technique for establishing credibility" (p. 314). Participants are placed in a key role in the research. Given that this research was based upon participatory action research, participants were mostly at the forefront of the research. Unstructured member checking occurred during the video sessions with homeless youth. The youth were provided the interview transcripts and were asked to provide feedback regarding the clarity and accuracy of the transcripts. Built-in member checks were also conducted during the interviews to verify participants' perspectives. Triangulation or cross-checking of views,

facts etc. were done by involving the use of multiple methods. Data were collected by interviews and surveys that helped in triangulating the data.

This research used a one group pre - post test design. This kind of design presents a risk to internal validity. There was no control group used, and it would be difficult to assume that the change between pretest and posttest was due to the intervention condition. However, it was noteworthy that the purpose of administering questionnaires before and after the intervention was to triangulate and supplement the data. The intervention primarily used a participatory action research based approach in which emphasis was given to participants' voices.

Data Analysis. The qualitative data in this study (from interviews and focus groups) was analyzed using the grounded theory approach. The details of the analysis are provided in *Transcription, Coding and Developing Themes* section on page 31. The efficacy of the Fogo process was assessed using self-efficacy, substance use, depression, and delinquency as outcomes by comparing the two conditions pre-test and post-test (N= 15). The same subjects' scores were used at pre-test and post-test and hence it was proposed that t-test for dependent samples would be used. The data for self-efficacy, substance use, depression, and delinquency was tested for normalcy. Since the data for all these variables were not normally distributed, a nonparametric Wilcoxon Sign-Ranks test was used to determine if there were significant differences between mean rank scores on the pre- and post-intervention. A *p*-value of < 0.05 was regarded as statistically significant. The data analyses were conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for Windows (version 11.00, 2002, SPSS, Chicago).

CHAPTER 3: FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to gain an in-depth understanding of homeless youths' lives and to intervene at the individual and policy levels of the ecological system. Specifically, the objectives of this study were to identify homeless youths' struggles, life context, resources, and strengths; to create a participatory video with homeless youth; to evaluate the efficacy of the Fogo process on youth; and to explore the impact of the video on policy makers' perspectives. In this chapter, I report my findings in three sections. The first section provides an in-depth understanding of homeless youths' lives; the second section details the findings from the video making sessions and examines the efficacy of the Fogo process on youth; and the third section describes the impact of the video on policy makers' perspectives towards homelessness among youth.

Section 1: Understanding Homelessness among Youth

In this section, I explore three major findings that emerged from the life-history interviews with youth. First, the findings provide an understanding of the pathways to youth homelessness. Next, the experiences of homelessness among youth are documented. Finally, the ways that the youth persevere under the adversity of homelessness are described.

Pathways to homelessness.

(Sandy) Well, when I was about five I moved to Youngstown and I stayed with my aunt. I always got straight A's and I was like a quiet child...I never got into

any trouble. Then, my aunt she got too old, it was me and my two other sisters, my aunt got too old and sent them back to North Carolina and she kept me. Then I went to my aunt's house, my other aunt, and she didn't take care of me right...so I ended up running away from there, after my mom died I had to run away from there. I stayed with my sisters and then I went to the group home. I was there for about a year and then I got raped and.... Um... I started running away more. And then...then I stopped going to school and was basically living in the streets.

In this section, I examine the pathways to homelessness among youth. Data analyses revealed that a variety of overlapping and intertwined factors led to homelessness among youth. These factors are categorized into four broad categories: (a) vulnerable families, (b) association with delinquent peers and dropping out of school, (c) ineffective social service system, (d) unprepared youth, limited job opportunities, and unaffordable housing costs. These categories are certainly not mutually exclusive. In the sections that follow, each of these categories will be described in detail.

Vulnerable families. This section provides information about the families of homeless youth and the suffering youth faced in their homes. The majority of the youth participating in this study reported growing up in vulnerable families. The findings show that 26.7% of the participants were raised by both of their biological parents, 33.3 % were raised by single mothers, 26.7 % were raised by birth mother plus partner, and 13.3 % were raised by other family members including grandparents, uncles, aunts or siblings. The average number of persons living in the home while growing up was 5.5. Out of the fifteen participants, twelve youth did not have biological fathers present in their lives. Of these twelve youth, five youth reported never seeing their fathers. Seven youth reported inconsistent presence of the father in their lives. Either the fathers left them at a young

age or the fathers reentered their lives after a long absence. Only three participants reported living with their biological fathers.

Father's absence affected the emotional well-being of the youth. Tommie, who claimed that nothing could break her down, burst into tears when she was asked about her father who left her at an early age. William reported at the beginning of his interview that he never missed his father and said that "When you grow up without something you don't really miss it because you never had it." However, when asked about the most painful thing in his life (toward the end of the interview) William stated,

I am trying to think, like, of something that really, really, really affected me. My father...how I never see mine. I see people all the time whose parents don't really get along...whose father never really did much for them or couldn't really provide too much for them, but the only thing that they were capable of doing was being around...if nothing else. You couldn't give me nothing else in the world, but time and conversation. I felt like he abandoned me at an early....I felt like he abandoned me at birth really. I never really had a chance. I feel like I don't know who my father is. I *know* who he is...his face, his name, but I couldn't tell you my father's personality, what makes him smile, what makes him happy, what makes him sad.... I couldn't even tell you the things about me- that me and my father have in common. Like I said, I know nothing of him, you know what I mean. That always bothered me.

Mothers were most often responsible for raising the youth participating in this study. Few mothers were employed outside the home whereas others were on disability or were receiving welfare. Parents who were employed spent the majority of their time trying to earn money to support their families. A large number of youth came from low-income or working-class families. Many reported growing up in ghettos or in poor neighborhoods. Approximately 40 % of youth reported at least one parent's substance

abuse or addiction and one youth reported that her mother died due to drug (crack) addiction.

The majority of youth reported suffering in their families. Youth looked up to their families for love, comfort, support, and security. Instead, many youth received maltreatment. This maltreatment took a variety of forms: psychological abuse, physical abuse, and sexual abuse. Although the three forms of maltreatment can be differentiated, often there was an overlap between two or three different forms of abuse. For example, youth who suffered physical abuse also reported suffering from psychological abuse. The following sections give details of the abuse described by youth.

Psychological abuse. Psychological abuse was the most common form of abuse among youth. Psychological abuse included actions such as humiliation, alienation, scapegoating, or terrorizing. At times, psychological abuse was accompanied by physical abuse. Most often, mothers perpetrated psychological abuse to the youth. However, sometimes other family members also participated in the psychological abuse of the youth. Here is an example from Andrew who reported being psychologically and physically abused by his family since a young age. The psychological abuse perpetrated by his family members created feelings of alienation for Andrew.

(Andrew) As a young kid, my mom spit in my face and told me she wished she never had me and tell me she hate me and wished she never had me, calling out my name. Calling me a bitch, bitch is a female dog, you know... Basically, as a child when I did something wrong. My momma wouldn't feed me for like a day or two. She would make me sit in my room all day long, sometimes she would tie me up... hands and feet and close the closet door or I might, you know when you're a kid you'd be scared to go to the bathroom because you think it's a monster or boogie man... my brother and sister used to watch Freddy Krueger and Jason and I used to think they were real, so you know. So I would be scared to go to the bathroom... so I might just pee on the sink. My mom used to put me

in the tub and pour bleach on my private parts or make me drink 2 or 3 bottles of hot sauce. Or, she might call my brother and sister for dinner...and not call me and then later on call me...and then I would come in and sit down and my brother and sister would be eating and my little sister would be smiling and picking at me...and I was treated like a dog, an animal when I was little.

Several youth reported that they were being treated differently from their siblings.

This feeling was especially prevalent if the youth was a middle child or a second-born child. These youth suffered psychological abuse in the form of humiliation, scapegoating, and alienation. In addition, youth reported being blamed by their family members for mistakes that they did not commit. Ana was a second-born child in her family. Both of her parents were alcoholic. She reported suffering from humiliation and being blamed by her family.

(Ana) I have an older sister and a younger brother and it always seemed like she wanted to do more for them and just being stuck in the middle was pretty hard. She always had something negative to say...something that I was doing wrong or something that I should be doing. She used to tell me that I should be like my sister and she, I mean, always brought me down and talked about me behind my back and just from that I couldn't find a way to get along with her and deal with that. I mean, looking back now, I can see that she kind of hurt me and I wish we could have had a relationship, but just the way she acted it just doesn't go along with the who I am...Once I did *one thing* wrong, every time something would happen it was like it was me.

PD: Give me an example, how?

(Ana) Like for instance, say...One time, for instance, I was at home and let's say it was me, my sister, my mom was there, my dad, two of my cousins, my aunt and my uncle, and my brother... we were all there and I guess my mom found some money missing and she straight up just blamed me and was like, "Where's my money?" and I was like, "What are you talking about?" And come to find out my cousin took it and she *blamed me* for a whole week saying that I took her money and she had told me to get out of her house. My dad told her that she can forget that idea and he kind of *made* her let me stay there and so she just kept blaming me and blaming me and blaming me until we found out that my cousin did it. Then, she didn't have anything to say. It's like nothing changed, you know? She stopped mentioning it of course because she knew it wasn't me, but she never said "I am sorry for blaming you" or anything like that.

Psychological abuse resulted in feelings of alienation among a majority of the youth. These youth reported feeling like an outsider in their own families. The following excerpt shows the psychological abuse and the resulting feelings of alienation suffered by Ivan.

(Ivan) They would lock me in a room when everybody went to school and stuff and while everybody was eating... I got pictures that I was carrying around. Everybody was eating and partying and stuff...I would be upstairs, maybe locked up in a room or I would be behind that couch...just peeking and looking around... PD: So they did not even feed you properly?
(Ivan) I was eating. I survived. But really, I would say that they didn't like me as family...they treated me like an outsider. Like someone who was not among the family...it was clear.

Physical abuse. Physical abuse was evident in those instances when an individual was hit, punched, or choked. The youth reported being physically abused by biological parents as well as other relatives. Physical abuse was mostly perpetrated by biological fathers, mothers and extended family members. Physical abuse by fathers and extended family members was more violent in force and intensity than physical abuse by mothers. Two participants reported being physically abused by their fathers. Both of these youth did not have a consistent presence of a father in their lives. According to these youth, physical abuse was used by their fathers as a disciplinary practice to punish the child for his/her "mistakes." Here is the excerpt from one of the youth.

(Ivan) So my dad was like ok and he looked at me like that and I know what was going to go down. He was going to beat the shit out of me (laughs). Ok. "So are you doing this? Are you sure?" I can't talk. I don't look into my dad's eye or anything...if I am guilty or not guilty I am not able to say because of the fear. I am too scared of him to even say a word. So, he pulled out his belt and beat the shit out of me- bop bop bop bop. You know, the belt broke into pieces and he started to use his hand...his leg. Then, he went into his room and he brought a gun and said, "I am going to kill you. I'm going to kill you. Why do you do this?" You know. Then, my stepmom came in and was like, "You kill him and you

know what is going to happen to everybody? You know what is going to happen to everybody?” So, he dropped the gun. So, I believed that god saved my life that time (laughs). So my head was like...my mouth was like hanging open. I couldn’t go to school for like...two weeks or something because if I would go to school people would ask what happened to you....and I would be forced to tell them what happened and he would definitely go to jail because of the way I looked...the way he beat me.

Physical abuse by extended family members such as aunts was common. The abuse took place while the youth were staying with them. Sandy, who was taken away by children’s services at the age of 5 years because of her mother’s drug addiction, suffered physical abuse while staying with her aunt. Sandy was often called ‘punishment queen’ and was frequently abused by her aunt.

(Sandy) She beat me with an extension cord and she left marks on me. My teacher went and told my counselor and the counselor told her. And I got in trouble when I got home.

William was sent to his aunt’s place by his mother while he was facing difficulties in his school work. William reported the difficulties in the school were due to the struggles in his personal life. Instead of figuring out the issues, he reported that his mother sent him away to live with his aunt for a year and half. During this period, William experienced severe physical abuse by his aunt. Here is an excerpt from his story.

(William) At one point in my life I felt like my mother.....like I think that I have abandonment issues and my mother, when I started acting out in school or things started feeling like they were getting tougher, she sent me to go live with my aunt for like a year and a half. Because my grades in school- I was getting straight F’s. I was having disciplinary problems in school. I got left back a year, in fifth or sixth grade. Instead of like figuring out what was going on, she sent me to live with my aunt. When I went to go live with her, she was a strict disciplinarian. I was abused, like literally abused. She cut my face with a Math book because it took me too long to get a math problem. She threw the book at me...like a paper bag cover on the book...she threw it at me and it cut my face. She used to pull

knives on me and tell me that she didn't bring me in the world, but she could take me out because.... I would start crying and saying I wanted to go home to my mother. She used to put me in my underwear and leave me in the basement for hours. She used to beat me with all different types of stuff like, boarder hoses and paddles and waffle bats and spatulas and switches...all kinds of shit.

For a few youth, the physical abuse by family members resulted in youth using force on the family members. This force was used as an attempt in self-protection. Ana, who was being psychologically abused by her mother, also reported being physically abused by her mother. In an effort to protect herself, Ana used force on her mother even though she did not want to use the force.

(Ana) A couple of times we have gotten into physical fights. Well, the first time she just got so mad and she hit me and I just pushed her onto the couch and just kind of held her there...cause I didn't want to hit my mom, you know?

Sexual abuse. Out of the fifteen youth, six youth (two males and four females) reported the experience of childhood sexual abuse on the intake form. Males did not provide any details about their sexual abuse during the interview. The female youth reported that their abuse began when they were seven or eight years old. The perpetrators were mostly extended family members or acquaintances such as friend's father or mother's boyfriend. Youth felt powerless against these perpetrators and endured sexual abuse for a long time during their childhood. When youth finally came out to the family members about the abuse, the first reaction of the family members was disbelief. Next, the family members blamed the youth for the abuse. No serious consequences were brought to the perpetrators. In addition to the sexual abuse, the distrust and the blame by the family members affected the psychological well-being of the youth. As a

consequence of sexual abuse, the majority of the female youth felt depressed, tried to commit suicide and ran away from their families. Iris's story represents the stories of other female youth who suffered the sexual abuse while growing up. Iris grew up in a low-income mother-headed household. Iris's mother was struggling to make ends meet and did not have any funds available for childcare. She gave the responsibility of child care to Iris's uncle who sexually abused her.

(Iris) When I was a kid I used to get molested by my uncle when my mom was at work trying to pay the rent and stuff like that cause we didn't have help, and we needed a babysitter because we couldn't stay there by ourselves of course and the one person that she trusted he really took advantage of me and violated me in very many different ways. Growing up with that trying to keep it to myself it really did something to me inside. I stayed angry for a long time not at him, just at myself because I thought that I you know if anything I would be the one to say no I don't want this to happen to me, I didn't have that kind of power. He had a lot of power over me, I was powerless against him... It started when I was about seven, and I didn't tell anybody until I was 15. It was Christmas Eve, and he actually raped me. He used to just make me give him oral sex, you know, from when I was seven until I was about 15, and then on Christmas Eve, two weeks after my grandma passed away is when he raped me, actually had sex with me. And yeah, I did tell on Christmas Day, and some people in my family, they hated me for it, and they still do hate me for it, because they think that I lied and ruined their Christmas and just... so I try to stay away, as far away as I possibly can.

PD: How did that make you feel?

(Iris) It hurt me. It hurt me a lot. It hurt me a whole lot. My grandma had just passed away, I just told a secret I had been holding in for seven, eight years, and they're worried about their Christmas, and if I was lying and... he went to jail, but my mom and my grandpa bailed him out, and they didn't take me to testify against him, and it hurt me a whole lot.

Abuse, in any form, affected the emotional and psychological well-being of the youth. As a human being, youth wanted connection and a relationship with their families. Despite their need to feel belonging and connected, these youth were often rejected by their families. Abuse not only affected their emotional and psychological well-being, it

also affected the academic experiences of some youth. Andrew, who suffered abuse in his family, mentioned the impact of the abuse on his academic experiences.

(Andrew) The things that I went through as a kid made me very very very hateful and very very angry in school... So, the abuse that I received from home from my mother, several step-fathers, and my older brother, and my little sister you know... verbal... mainly verbal abuse from her. When I would go to school I would act out, you know...

The majority of the youth experienced pain and anguish because of the relationship problems and abuse in their family. However, a small number of youth also talked about their parents in a positive light. All of these youth reported having a difficult temperament, a desire for autonomy, and parents' controlling behavior. According to these youth, their parents provided them encouragement and advice. However, they regretted not listening to their parents and not taking their parents' advice. While reflecting on their lives, youth mentioned that they would be in a better position if they had followed their parents' advice.

PD: Did anyone give you encouragement to continue your education?

(Carol) Yes, my parents did. I didn't take their advice at the time but I regret a lot of things like I should have listened to my parents, I should have done lot of things, I could have done better things like that.

Some youth, particularly those whose family was in extreme poverty, reported that their mothers took care of them as best as they could. Iris, whose mother was not able to take care of her responsibilities, started engaging in prostitution at a very young age to pay the rent. Iris also took care of her younger siblings while trying to earn money through prostitution. Iris talked about her mother's struggle to balance between the demands of motherhood and the economic concerns of the family.

I've never known my father and my mom, she's stay-at-work. From the time that she wasn't smoking dope, she, she was, she stayed at work constantly, and I can't hate her for making the decisions she made because she took care of us the best way she knew how. She never got child support from any of her babies' fathers. She never did any of that. We did the welfare and her, and her, and her paycheck, and that's how she did it. All of us, none of us have our father. I don't question why he was never around. Sometimes I think about it, but it's like the least you can do is help, you know, the least you can do is try to help.

In general, the maltreatment in the family led the youth to go through many transitions in their lives. Many of the youth found the association of other youth who were involved in illegal activities. A large number of youth ran away from home because of safety concerns. Approximately, 73.3% youth reported running away from home before the age of 18 years. The average number of runaway episodes was 5.64 episodes. Some youth were placed in the foster care and group homes; while others went back to their biological parents. Often, youth who went back to their biological parents or were placed in foster care or a group home reported running away again. While going through these transitions, the majority of youth left unprepared for adulthood and ended up being homeless. The following section details their journey from being in a home to being homeless. Although these findings are presented in separate sections, it is noteworthy here that the transitions were overlapping which means youth might have gone through several transitions simultaneously.

Association with delinquent peers and dropping out of school. Due to the lack of connection and attention in the family, youth started searching for connections in other places. The majority of the youth associated with peers who were involved in illegal activities. Youth felt a sense of belonging with their peers. Oftentimes, friends became

more important than family. Tony, who did not feel connected to his family, prioritized his friends over his family.

(Tony) How other people think of as family, that is how I think of my friends. Then, family would drop down to what other people would...like family would always be the lowest thing on the list, for me at least...

Iris further highlighted the experience that a lack of attention and connection in the family motivated her to find connections in other places. She reflected upon the reasons why her younger brother joined a gang and got engaged in the street economy. In addition to the economic prospects, Iris mentioned that the lack of connection with her family led her brother to join the gang.

(Iris) My mom wasn't ever there; his dad wasn't barely around. We didn't have much and he felt like he could get more off the streets 'cause that's all, where he's always wanted to be. He's always wanted to be in a gang because I think that if he feels that the gang had more attention for him and time for him and can offer him better things, like that he can go out and take something from somebody rather than my mom working hard for it for weeks and weeks and then come and give it to him. He can get it just like that and go take it. You know, so that's what I think it is. I think it's the fast money, all the attention, and they say they love you in a gang. That's what I think it is, and he get caught up.

The association of these peers led the youth to get involved in illegal activities such as being a gang member. Four youth in the current study reported having a gang membership. Even if the process of getting into the gang is excruciating, as evident from the excerpt below, these youth wanted to belong to the gang. Once these youth fell into the trap of illegal activities, it became extremely difficult for the youth to get out of those activities. In the following excerpt, Harry described the process of getting into a gang and the difficulty of getting out.

(Harry) I ended up getting into gangs with one of my friends that lived in the city. Um, he encouraged me and eventually I gave in. I mean I was like “What the heck can happen; let’s do it.” And I ended up getting beat down by seventeen black guys. I mean I was hit by a baseball bat. I was kicked in the ribs. I had three broken ribs. Both of my eyes were swelled shut. I was shot once in the side of my leg. They cut me, they kicked me, they hit me with all different kinds of objects, one after another. But I made it through it and that’s pretty much how I eventually got beat into the Red gang and I have been a Red ever since then. Now there is a point that once you are in, you’re in and the only way you getting out is unless you die.

Another illegal activity that was frequently mentioned by the youth was drug use.

The association of delinquent peers along with the easy availability of drugs in the neighborhood influenced several youth to use drugs at a very young age. Once youth started using drugs, it became a means for them to deal with the pain and emptiness in their lives. In the following excerpt William described his initiation of drug use.

P: So when was the first time that you started doing drugs?

(William) Mm..... the only drug that I have ever done is marijuana...and I started smoking weed when I was about 13 or 14. Me and my god-brother.

P: God brother. When you were in New Jersey?

(William) Yeah.

P: What was going on at that time?

(William) We were in school...having fun and just... easy availability and curiosity. Like in the neighborhood...the neighborhood where I grew up there was a lot of people selling drugs. We would walk past and smell it all the time and see it all the time, and we were just curious. What was it? What did it smell like? What did it feel like to smoke it? How did it make you feel like? Then I tried it and I liked it.

The association of deviant peers and involvement in the illegal activities resulted in academic difficulties for some youth. Youth started to skip school, fell behind in their homework, and eventually dropped out. This difficulty was particularly salient for those youth who did not feel connected to their school. The majority of these youth reported alienation by the peer group in school and a lack of a sense of belonging to their school

environment. Sarah, who reported using drugs and dropped out of school at the 10th grade, described her school experiences in the following excerpt. Sarah reported that no one could help her from dropping out of the school because no one knew what she was doing (using drugs).

(Sarah) I could never fit in. Everybody had their own clique. They knew each other. They seemed more popular than me and I just always felt like an outcast even though I was seeing certain group that I wanted to belong, be a part of but I could never be a part of it.

Although some youth felt disconnected from school, others felt a sense of belonging to the school. For these youth, school was a stress-free zone. However, these youth were involved with partners who were engaged in delinquent activities. These youth found solace in the relationship with the partner but the relationship became dysfunctional over time. While being in the relationship, some female youth reported that they got pregnant at a young age. The increased responsibility of child care, school work and personal issues led the youth to drop out of the school. Here is an excerpt from Erika, who ran away from her home because of the conflicting relationship with her mother.

(Erika) That's when I came about leaving home and I ran away with my boyfriend and then getting pregnant myself...at 14, then turned 15 and had a son.

Ineffective Social Service System. Forty percent youth reported being placed in a foster home, 46.7% were placed in a group home, 13.3% were a ward of the state, 26.7% were kept in juvenile detention, and 53.3% were kept in jail overnight. Only one youth reported having positive experiences in the foster care. The majority of the youth who were placed in foster care or group homes faced further struggles in their lives. Carol,

who was placed in a foster home following her runaway episode, describes her experiences of entering and exiting the foster care system.

(Carol) I felt relieved because like I wanted to see how another family would treat me and see if they can communicate better. I like living with other individuals and to see how their family is. Things like that. But went into this foster care, they had worse problems than my family did, but we communicated. We did a lot of things that we wouldn't be allowed to do at home.

PD: What was worse?

(Carol) Their family argued. Like when her sons would come over they would argue. Things like that. I was like "oh my god, we didn't argue this much." I felt uncomfortable, and I thought I would go back home. But when I went back home things just started happening again.

Sandy who was taken away from her mother at the age of five years was placed in her aunt's care. In addition to being physically abused by her aunt, she was also raped by her cousin. In the following excerpt, Sandy reported her experiences of living with her aunt.

(Sandy) She used to never buy me anything, only her and her daughters stuff with my, cause we used to get a check, with my check. And used to tell me that she would get me the check next time...and then the next time would come and she would say next time...and the next time would come and she would say next time. There would never be a next time.

Iris was placed in foster care and group homes. Based upon her personal experiences of being in the foster care and group home system, Iris concluded:

(Iris) Children services is not always the best answer and I know that from personal experience You know because I was in a foster home I was in a group home and it's not always the best situation because whatever happens at home can happen in a foster home and it can definitely happen in a group home.

While going through the transitions of various systems such as foster care, group homes, juvenile detention, and independent living programs, the majority of youth left

unprepared for emerging adulthood. Here is the experience of Sarah who went through various systems and eventually found herself in the prison system.

PD: How did you feel about going to foster home?

(Sarah) I felt like if I do good at this foster home before I get 18 maybe I could get my own place or something but didn't work out like that and I am suffering very heavily from it.

Unprepared youth, limited job opportunities, and unaffordable housing costs.

The majority of the youth found themselves unprepared for the developmental tasks of emerging adulthood such as continuing their education, finding employment, or establishing a relationship. In addition to being unprepared, the limited job opportunities and unaffordable housing costs increased the likelihood of youth becoming homeless. Two participants in the current study were push-outs. They were asked to leave home because they turned 18 and their parents were unable or unwilling to take care of them further. These youth left home unprepared and were unable to find employment. Hence, they became homeless and moved into shelters. Here is an excerpt from one of the youth.

(Robert) I was staying with my mom, then you know you become 18 then you have to move out of your mom's place. So, my mom told me I have to find some other place to go... and "I can't keep you, you have to grow up and be a man."... So, it started like that and I just left when I was 18. I couldn't get an apartment because I didn't have a job, so I just went to the shelter.

Two other youth, who left home at the age of 18, got enrolled in college or found employment faced difficulties in dealing with the increased responsibilities of emerging adulthood. In the absence of adequate support and opportunities, these youth became homeless. One of the youth, Eric, had received a fellowship at a local community college to continue his education. Eric needed to enroll full-time in the college to receive the

fellowship. In order to enroll full-time in the college, Eric needed to find a way to pay his rent. In the absence of financial support from his family or the larger society, Eric started selling drugs to pay his rent. Very soon, Eric found himself using the drugs instead of selling the drugs. Eric suffered financial loss and the loss of his apartment. Eventually, he dropped out of college. Here is an excerpt from Eric's story.

(Eric) (I) just used to sell...sell pills and stuff just to get money and that's when I used to pay for my own place. I was doing good then and that's when I first started going to school, then I guess I started using. I never really knew I had a problem until everybody I used to get the drugs from went to jail, except for me... and then I realized I had an addiction still. I was using, but I wasn't making any money... it was coming out of my own money. So, I guess I had a dealer's habit, I guess you could say.

Experiencing homelessness.

(Ivan) When you are homeless, that is a struggle itself. I am jobless. That is a struggle. I can't call my mom. I don't have a phone to communicate with nobody. That is a struggle. I don't even have a dollar in my pocket. That is a struggle.

The story of experiencing homelessness is a story of struggles and suffering. All of the youth participating in this study reported suffering because of the struggles of homelessness. The interviews conducted with youth revealed that suffering comes not only because of the difficulty in meeting material needs; suffering comes because of the loss of self. The sections that follow will provide details about the experiences of homeless youth in terms of their struggles and resulting suffering.

Struggles. The primary struggle of being homeless was to find a place to stay. After leaving home, the majority of the male youth went to local shelters to find abode; whereas female youth started couch surfing at friends', partner's or relatives' houses. Youth, who went to the homeless shelters, struggled with the shelter environment, shelter

rules and policies. Dealing with the unhygienic shelter conditions, low-quality food, lack of privacy, fear of safety, shelter rules such as time limits (90-day stay), and curfew were some of the concerns of the youth living in the shelters. Here is an excerpt from Andrew who struggled with the shelter environment.

(Andrew) I can't shower in privacy... the shower is nasty. It smells. People are constantly coughing around you... and releasing their bowels, you know passing gas, blowing smoke in your face. You know, it's like an uncomfortable environment. It's not comfortable to be there.

Because of the dehumanizing conditions in the shelter, some youth compared shelters to jail or prison. Eric had spent some time in the shelter but later he moved out of the shelter and stayed with friends. Eric talked about his experiences in the shelter in the following excerpt.

(Eric) I cannot believe that people live like that. I was just temporarily eating at shelters and food pantries and things like that. I mean, you can survive; you won't go hungry because there are places that feed you and stuff, but I mean it is just not a good feeling. It is almost like jail... staying in shelters with all those people there. All those bunks above you... people next to you. You have to share a shower, it sucks. I mean, you have to be in it at 9 o'clock at night and you're a grown person, you know what I mean? It's awful.

It is of note here that the Midwestern city where the research was conducted did not have any youth shelters in the city. The shelters were utilized by people from all different ages and backgrounds. Additionally, the shelters were located in high crime neighborhoods. Physical safety was a concern for the majority of the youth living in the shelters.

(Andrew) I'm in a shelter and I'm around drug addicts. I'm around alcoholics. I'm around mentally ill people. They have guns, knives, it's no telling what's in that shelter. It's filthy. It smells. The staff I feel they care, but then I don't. It's in

the middle of the ghetto. Police station right next door. Everyday, when I wake up and I just have to pray to god to protect me and cover me with his shield because aint no telling what can happen in that shelter. It may not look like it and I'm not trying to go Hollywood or Disney World, but I know for a fact aint no telling what will happen. You've got the park next door... people drinking, smoking, whatever they doing. People from all over. People from all walks of life come through there... from different states, different counties, cities. So you never know what you're up against.

Once youth left the shelter, either because of the 90-day time limit or because of the fear of safety, they struggled to find another place to stay. Some youth found friends to stay with while others moved to the streets. Youth who left for the streets, first took shelter in abandoned buildings. However, living in abandoned houses had its own hazards especially during the winter months. Youth mentioned the struggles of living in abandoned buildings with no electricity or heat while it was snowing outside. Youth also reported the risk of getting physically injured in the abandoned buildings. Here is the excerpt of Robert, who moved back and forth between different shelters, streets, and abandoned houses.

(Robert) You just gotta watch out for the ones that's real old, like the abando houses that's over thirty years old. Them the ones you might have some problems with, um like, like laying on the floor or something it might be real messy or they ain't got carpet then it got like rotten wood in there, well you can, you can cut yourself at any time in there. Being in abandos is a, is a real hazard...

Further, youth reported the difficulty of finding an abandoned house because of the "competition" on the street. The majority of the abandoned buildings were already occupied by other homeless people. Youth needed to compete with other homeless people on the street to get shelter in abandoned houses. Even if youth were able to find shelter in an abandoned building, they were forced to leave those places because of the

harassment by law enforcement officer. Harassment by the police or the fear of getting arrested by police was a common theme in the stories of youth who stayed on the streets. Eventually, these youth moved to a hidden corner on the street or under a bridge to find “shelter.” Harry, who chose to live on the streets instead of shelter, further struggled with the climatic conditions, police harassment, and health problems while living on the streets.

(Harry) I mean, you just can't go and sleep anywhere without getting arrested. You can't go in a park after dark and just crash, you will go to jail. Um... if you don't eat in the places they feed you at you will starve... you'll lose your energy, you'll get very sleepy, you'll get tired... after awhile you just get tired of walking and your feet become sore. You get very tired and it's hard to move. When it gets cold outside, you get very cold. You just want to walk in somewhere warm and there are a lot of places that don't let you do that. You just can't go in there anywhere and just go to sleep. Um... you can call the cops and the cops will take you to a homeless shelter... but like I said I refuse to stay in a shelter. I mean if you don't eat you will dehydrate yourself. You will lose energy and you will get tired. I mean you just can't go in any restaurant and go to sleep. You just can't go lay down anywhere you want without going to jail. I mean, if you don't find an abandoned house...and you don't have clothing and blankets in a place... you are going to freeze, like frostbitten or you are going to get very sick. I mean it is just hard out here on these streets because there is not enough shelters for us young teens out here. There is not enough places that will help you get off these streets ... they are just out to feed you and shelter you and that's it! And they only give you a couple months of doing it and there is just not enough help for us young adults.

The dehumanizing conditions of living on the streets were further elaborated by Robert who lost his place in the shelter and could not stay in the abandoned buildings because of police harassment. Robert mentioned his painful experience of sleeping on a cardboard. According to Robert, a mattress was his primary need over other needs.

(Robert) You may have your cover, and your little blanket and your cardboard, but sometimes lying on that cardboard, it gets old too. Your back and your body start hurting and then your back and your body ain't meant to lay on hard materials

like that. So you need that, that support. You be like, “Aw, I need a mattress.” You, you, you’ll wanna, you’ll want a bed more than you want some money.

Youth who were couch surfing at friends’ or relatives’ houses struggled with other challenges. The majority of them lived a transitory life while moving back and forth between different friends’ or relatives’ houses. Because of the transitory life, youth suffered from a lack of stability in their lives. In addition, youth struggled with the challenges of having to depend on others. Youth reported being oppressed by those who offered them shelter. Here is an excerpt from Erika who suffered from the struggles of couch-surfing. Erika experienced homelessness as a family. She had a boyfriend and two kids and was pregnant while being homeless.

(Erika) I consider myself homeless and I have not had my own place since November of ’08. So it has been seven months and we are just living wherever we can... and that’s in hotels and that’s in the beginning of the months when I know I’m going to be getting my check...and after that, once the money is all gone, it is just house-hopping...from family members’ houses or friends’ houses...It is very hard when you have two kids and everyday you have to pack everything that you can and just move from one house to the next house...and then it’s like how are we going shower or how are we even going to *cook* food. So, it has just been hard. I just have been trying to deal with that.

In addition to struggling with finding a place to stay, youth struggled with other basic needs such as food and clothing. The majority of the youth expressed worries about finding food. “Where am I going to get my next meal from?” was a question that lingered in the minds of several youth who struggled with homelessness. Due to the absence of the food, some youth reported getting used to not eating. Oftentimes, these youth did not feel hungry when the food was available to them. Although some youth reported receiving food stamps, many struggled with the bureaucratic process of submitting the paperwork

and providing different kinds of documents in order to get the food stamps. Others reported that food pantries and shelters were the main sources of food. The food served at these places was low in nutrition, taste, and quality. In order to remain healthy, some youth tried to make healthy food choices such as eating fruits, if and when those choices were available to them. Here is an excerpt from a youth who was staying at a shelter.

(Andrew) Seriously, they don't bring food all the time. The majority of the time they bring it, but sometimes they don't. So sometimes you eat leftovers. If they ain't got no leftovers then you eat sandwiches or something. You know what I mean, the nutrition most of the time at the shelter I don't eat because the environment I don't like it. So the food is like a stench from the food and a lot of the time they bring good food like desserts and stuff. But my appetite is not like it used to be. It's not like it used to be, but I'm a healthy person though. Um... with the nutrition, like getting vitamins and stuff like that,... I try to every time they serve like if they serve bananas and oranges any type of fruits.. If I don't eat I at least eat the bananas and oranges and I try my best to drink as much water as possible. I need to start drinking more.

Clothing is a basic human need that youth reported struggling with. Clothing was needed to protect their bodies from harsh weather. In addition, clothing was also needed to present themselves in the social situations and to find a job. The lack of appropriate clothing was one of the barriers for the youth to get a job. However, the majority of the youth did not have financial resources to purchase clothes or undergarments.

(Harry) I am trying to find people that will help with clothes ... I mean, basically clothing, like shoes, socks, underwear, coats. Like I said with winter almost being over...clothing is still a need...out on these streets, especially when you are looking for a job, you can't be out here smelling and stinking and feeling funky because they aren't going to hire you. I mean, it's just trying to find people that will help you out here on these streets.

Youth also reported struggling with transportation needs. Transportation was needed to travel from one place to another place and to find jobs and resources. In the Midwestern city where this study was conducted, the primary means of public

transportation was the bus. The majority of youth reported struggling with paying for the bus fare which was \$3.50 for a two-way ride. Due to their inability to pay for the bus fare, youth reported walking long distances. As one youth reported, “walking long distances takes a toll on you.” Some female youth reported walking long distances even while being pregnant. In addition to the physical pain of walking long distances, youth also suffered from a lack of job opportunities due to the transportation issues. Oftentimes, jobs that were available to the youth were not located on the bus route. In the following excerpt, Eric reported his struggles finding the transportation.

(Eric) I am limited to like the bus route... it's like the only place I can look for a job. You know what I mean? Say there was a job up North, but I couldn't work there anyway because I don't have a way to get back and forth. I never had a problem finding a job or anything as long as I had a car, but now that I don't have a car it's hard. I mean, you get a job and the buses only run till 10 o'clock at night. What do you do when you get off at midnight and it's snowing out? I mean are you supposed to walk home. I don't know. It sucks...

One of the major struggles of the youth was finding employment. None of the participants were legally employed during the first interview. The youth reported working aggressively on finding a job. Some youth reported making strategies for the job search such as writing the contact information of all the businesses while riding the local bus. Youth filled out applications at various places. Despite their efforts, they were not able to find a job.

Several impediments hindered the job opportunities for the homeless youth including the current economy. While this study was being conducted, the world economy was going through a recession. Several youth reported that the economic crisis affected them severely. Youth could not find even a low-paying job. Some youth applied

for temporary services that provide temporary jobs to people. However, since several people were competing for these jobs, youth were not always successful in finding a job through temporary services. Female youth who had children reported that the difficulty of finding an affordable and quality child care prevented them from finding a job. Having a criminal record further prevented the youth from being able to get a job. Youth, particularly those who had been to jail or prison, found it extremely difficult to find a job. Some youth reported that they had a criminal record because of their inability to pay for court fines. When youth were unable to pay for the court fines, these fines turned into warrants. As a consequence, youth were forced to go to jail. Going to jail and having a criminal record, further deteriorated youths' chances of getting a job. Further, youth did not have a support system or social network. The lack of social network or social contacts was an impediment for the youth to find a job. Erika, who was pregnant, reported that her boyfriend was not able to find a job at a State Fair. However, when referred by Erika's caseworker, he immediately received the job. This example shows the importance of having social network in finding an employment which, generally, youth who were on the streets did not have.

In the absence of a legitimate job, youth looked for other means of earning money. The majority of youth reported donating plasma in order to get money. The frequency of donating plasma reported by some youth was twice a week. A few youth also reported suffering from internal bleeding of veins, known as hematoma, because of poor needle insertion during the blood donation. Several youth reported resorting to illegal activities in order to earn money for their survival. These activities involved drug

dealing, theft, selling stolen items, or engaging in survival sex. In the absence of a legitimate job and a support system, youth were unable to find any other means to survive except engaging in illegal activities. Here is an excerpt from Sarah, who was incarcerated for two years and was unable to find legitimate means of survival. She discusses the alternatives she had available to earn money and the consequences of those alternatives.

(Sarah) I don't have no income unless I go out here and sleep with somebody for a little bit of money or go sell some drugs or something that's the only way or steal for my next dollar, it's the only way I know how to get something and it's scary because then I am looking at the prison time, another setback, more years taken off of my life and my future, me going to school and all that. I am new to jail and if you ain't got no family, no money or nothing, you don't have nobody, no support system you really ain't don't have nothing. It's ten times harder.

William reflected upon his condition of joblessness and the larger society.

William reported being wrongfully fired from his previous job. Since then, he was unable to find another job. For William, being a male symbolized being a provider. When William was unable to fulfill the role of the provider, he resorted to delinquent activities to buy food and other necessities for his and his girlfriend's survival. Although he experienced a lot of guilt due to his actions, he was unable to find any other alternative. Based upon his experiences, William concluded that the unemployment in society influences the rate of crime. Here is an excerpt from his interview.

(William) Having no money influences crime. If you can't get a job, you have no money... that doesn't stop your needs, your wants, and your must-haves. You know, you have to figure out a way to meet those needs. Make ends meet, you know.

Suffering. The above section detailed the struggles of homeless youth. The current section will focus on the suffering experienced by the youth due to homelessness.

Suffering was experienced by youth through the loss of freedom, loss of dignity, loss of social support, loss of security, and loss of hope. The following section describes each of these losses in detail and provides an understanding of suffering in homeless youths' lives.

Loss of freedom. The majority of youth reported suffering due to the loss of freedom. Many youth were couch surfing at friends', relatives', or partner's places. Living with others restricted youths' freedom over their own lives. Youth were not allowed to make any decisions or to speak their minds. Youth were forced to live according to others' rules. Many youth reported being taken advantage of while living with others. Further, youth did not have a job, house, or money. The possession of those things was considered necessary for the youth to feel independent. However, the absence of those things developed feelings of dependence upon others. Some youth reported feeling as if they were locked up in jail because of their homelessness. Here is an excerpt from one of the youth.

(William) When money is in your pocket, it is freedom. Freedom to decide you can do anything you want to do. You're even capable of helping somebody else out in their situation- having no money just makes you feel powerless. You can't decide what you want to eat, where you want to eat. You can't decide when you going to sleep or where you are going to sleep. It is different things, man. Having no money is almost like being locked up- somebody is telling you what to do all the time.

Loss of dignity. A majority of the youth suffered from feelings of embarrassment because of being homeless. Several youth reported that the situation of homelessness was demeaning and degrading. The embarrassment came from being an adult and not being able to support oneself. The embarrassment was also felt due to the disconnection

between youths' real self and the ideal self. Ideally, youth wanted to accomplish things in their lives. As human beings, these youth also had goals and dreams. Their current situation was in contrast to the goals they had set for themselves. This disconnection brought feelings of shame and embarrassment. Here is an excerpt from Sarah who suffered intense pain because of being an adult and homeless. As the interview progressed, Sarah described herself as a 'bum'.

(Sarah) When I was younger, I made, you know I understand I made goal for myself. By the time I get 21, 22 or whatever I wanna have my own stuff and being in living in this reality everyday waking up in the morning no job, nowhere to go it just hurts and it's just hard, I just try to survive and go on well but it really is hard. I really do deal with a lot of emotional abuse; it's that because you know what I am saying I am just a grown adult with nothing, it's hard, sorry I had to get that out.

PD: What is the most painful thing about being on the streets?

(Sarah) Always just having, wondering where my next dollar is gonna come from, my long term stability, my future is the most painful thing about it because this is my future, my future is here now and I literally a bum and it's just hurt and that's the most painful thing. I just see other people get by and drive their nice cars and stuff and me having to freeze and lay on the bus. As a grown woman, it's downgrading to me and it's demeaning, it gets to me.

The feelings of embarrassment affected youths' dignity and pride. Many youth viewed themselves as a provider for their family. They felt pride in taking care of their family. However, when youth were unable to provide for their children or partners, it resulted in suffering due to loss of pride. Erika felt ashamed because of being unable to provide for her children. The embarrassment resulted in feelings of suffering.

(Erika) My son is about to be six and he understands and it hurts me and that's when I can't cry....because when he asks me, "Mom can we go do this" or "Why can't we..." It is just always "why can't we" or "can we..." and I can't do it for him and when he understands that, it is just hard. I never want him to see that we are going through this much problems and like a child is supposed to grow up and have memories, good memories to tell people...not growing up to say that we

were house-hopping all the time or I never really got to play with other kids because I never kept a stable home or like he is not in a school right now because I don't have a permanent address to give to the school....like he is not really having a childhood.

The feelings of embarrassment not only affected youths' pride but it also affected their relationship with others such as with friends, children, and romantic partners. Here is an excerpt from Eric who wanted to be involved in a romantic relationship. However, because of the embarrassment brought by his situation, he was not able to be in a relationship.

(Eric) I mean say if I met somebody ... you cannot even have them come over your house or anything. It is kind of embarrassing. I mean that is why I am not really trying to be in a relationship or anything right now. Because I couldn't... if I met a girl I couldn't be like "Hey, you wanna come to my house?" I'm not going to bring her over to my *friend's* house, you know? It's kind of embarrassing. That is probably the worst thing.

Loss of social support. The majority of the homeless youth did not have any social support in their lives. As evident from previous sections, these youth longed for connection and belonging. However, these youth often found themselves lonely and isolated. The lack of social support was the cause of suffering for a majority of the youth. At the beginning of his interview, Ivan reported that he does not get hurt easily. However, when asked about the most hurtful thing in his life, he replied: "Nobody is there for me." The suffering due to lack of social support was evident in the interview with Sarah.

(Sarah) To this day, I could say I really don't have anybody I can call up on and say, "Hey! Can I get \$20 or something?" I don't have really nobody I could call up and I feel like it's not right because growing up I was there for other people, I did my part, I put my work in to have something to fall back on.

Some youth reported having friends or relatives who could support them.

However, a majority of the youth reported losing that support system over time because of their homelessness. Ana reported that the first time she was “kicked out” by her mother, she had a support system to go back to. However, the second time when her mother ‘threw her away,’ she was left with no support system.

(Ana) I would have to say the most painful one was, umm, probably the second time that I was on the streets when my mom kicked me out when I lived over here.

PD: Not the first time....

(Ana) No, when I called everybody I knew and I went to people’s houses. I tried to find somewhere where I could sleep for the night. That’s all I asked, just somewhere for the night and nobody would let me stay. I mean, I didn’t have anywhere that I could go. Finally, I talked to this guy I used to know down the street and he had a van... he stayed with some other people, so he couldn’t let me stay there...but he had a van and he said that was the only thing that he could really offer me, but that was the only place that I could go. It was the middle of the winter. It was *really* cold outside. So, I ended up sleeping in this van and there was a window busted out of it and I got really sick. I got the flu, bad. I had it for 13 days and I ended up going to the emergency room.

Loss of security. Several youth reported suffering because of the loss of security while being homeless. Youth were insecure about their existence. The insecurity for survival came from the fear of predators in their environment and the difficulty in meeting their basic needs. The fear of predators was greater for the youth who were living in the shelters or on the streets compared to those who were couch surfing. Harry left a shelter because of the fear of predators and moved to the streets. While living on the streets, Harry felt further insecurity about his life. Harry had suffered gun shots in the past and was apprehensive about his life in the present. Harry believed that his life was ephemeral.

(Harry) I've been shot seven times. I have a fear that I am eventually going to get shot again, but the next shot could possibly kill me. I mean because there are so many things that could happen. I mean I have a fear of getting shot again and possibly not making it because all it takes is the right person to shoot you the right way and it can be it.

Loss of hope. When asked about their hopes, a majority of the youth were able to mention their hopes for the future. However, a careful examination of the interview transcripts showed the subtle feelings of hopelessness and despair among youth. Statements such as "you are not promised tomorrow" or "anything can go wrong at any time" show the feelings of despair or hopelessness among the youth. Youth who had been to prison or who were using hard drugs most often reported feelings of hopelessness. Here is an excerpt from Sarah who had spent two years in prison and who was also using drugs. The loss of hope in her life was excruciatingly painful for her.

(Sarah) Ever since I messed up and went to the prison and got that felony, I can't be a doctor, I can't be a lawyer, I cannot be a teacher, I feel like I have no future because it limits me you know it limits you for doing so much and I feel like what I am looking forward to. I never going to have no career nothing because I am not allowed to so what the hell is it I am going to be doing when I am in my 30s or something. And, it hurts because I would have loved to have been a doctor or lawyer or something. One simple mistake like that just that my future just gone. I might have to work at a fast food restaurant for the rest of.... I know the truth, I may have to work at a fast food restaurant for the rest of my life or have to work at a minimum wage job, I'll never have the chance of being that, you know it hurts every time like sometime when I really sit think about how I didn't mean to do what I did. It just happened when I was young and don't nobody understand how I was young and just out there and just made a mistake and I don't feel like I have to pay for my whole future.

Eric was addicted to opiates. Eric wanted to get help with his addiction. However, Eric reported being unable to pay for the cost of the treatment. He mentioned that even if he applied for financial assistance, he would have to wait to get treatment because of the

long waiting line. The long waiting period might further deteriorate his condition. When I asked Eric about his hopes, he replied:

(Eric) I just try to think of a day at a time right now. You get disappointed if you start thinking ahead too much. You just start thinking “Oh, man look at all this stuff that is happening...” I just try and figure out what I can do today or tomorrow.

Some youth reported that hopelessness was also pervasive in the environment that they lived. This environment was composed of their family members, relatives or other individuals who were living in similar situations. Some youth tried to escape the miserable environment whereas others felt affected by the hopelessness in the environment. Andrew, who was living at a homeless shelter, reported the hopelessness in his environment and his efforts towards leaving that environment.

(Andrew) I’m constantly trying to leave that place because everybody, the majority of people are just sitting around and just stuck in misery because that’s all they know is that they are miserable. So they want you to be miserable too... The environment itself is the most painful thing. Its like when people see that you’re trying to make something of yourself... it makes them angry because they don’t want you to succeed. Because they done gave up on their life... or they are too old to accomplish the things someone my age is going to accomplish.

Perseverance under adversity. It is apparent from the above two sections that homelessness is an extremely stressful and painful situation. This section details the factors that helped the youth to persevere under these adverse conditions. These factors are categorized into four themes: finding meaning in life, valuing oneself, finding support from external sources, and engaging in self-destructive behaviors.

Finding meaning in life. Finding meaning in life was one of the important factors that helped youth to persevere under adversity. Some youth found meaning in their

existence whereas others found meaning in their relationships. A majority of the youth, regardless of their gender, found meaning in their children. In this study, 40% youth reported having biological children. Youth, who had children, reported that children gave them meaning and a purpose to live. Youth who were abused and consequently attempted to commit suicide in the past reported that having children prevented them from committing suicide again. Youth did not want their children to go through the same experiences they had been through. Several youth reported that because of their children, they engaged more frequently in positive things such as, staying away from risky behaviors, enrolling in school, and trying to find a legitimate job. Here is an excerpt from Tommie who was involved in a gang and delinquent activities in the past but tried to change herself for her children.

(Tommie) Since I have my kids I've been trying to get up on my feet and get a job and all that...trying to do something positive... If I didn't have my kids, there is no telling what I would be doing out here on these streets. Honestly, I wouldn't care. I would probably be getting into trouble and wouldn't even care about going to jail and all that stuff like that...

In addition to their children, some youth found meaning in their existence and the struggles of homelessness. Finding meaning gave them hope for the future. Ana, who attempted to commit suicide multiple times in her past, reported that finding meaning in her struggles gave her strength to persevere in her life.

PD: What keeps you going?

(Ana) Well, now my daughter and to take it back before I had my daughter.... After the last time I tried to kill myself... I realized that if I was supposed to die than it would have happened by then. So, I kind of started to think that there must be a reason that everything happens and maybe I just wasn't supposed to understand it. I was supposed to keep trying for some reason. I still don't get it to this day, but I mean, I guess we all have a purpose. I figured that it is easy to do

bad and it is hard to do good. So, I must be trying to do something really good if my life is so hard.

Valuing oneself. Several youth reported that valuing themselves helped them persevere under adversity. Youth found strength in themselves that helped them to keep moving against all odds. These youth reported having a strong will, determination and belief in oneself to accomplish things and this belief helped them to move forward. Some youth also reported that their dreams, optimistic attitude, and the possibility of a better future helped them to keep motivated. The ability to engage oneself in hobbies such as music or writing was also valued by some youth. One youth, Sandy, even shared her poems during the video making sessions (See Appendix C). Youth mentioned that despite their involvement in illegal activities, they had helped other homeless youth or friends. This altruistic quality about oneself helped the youth to feel that their lives were meaningful.

Finding support from external sources. Support from external sources includes support from other human beings or an external belief system. Although a majority of the youth did not have any support system, a few youth, who had some friends or relatives, reported that having support helped them to persevere under adversity. Some youth also relied on spiritual beliefs to help them navigate through their situation. It is of note here that the majority of youth reported not having any religious or spiritual beliefs. However, the few who had spiritual or religious beliefs, reported that this belief was a source of strength for them. Here is an excerpt from Andrew that describes his support system.

PD: What keeps you going?

(Andrew) Well yourself of course... and the people you are tied and connected with. These people here. God first and foremost because he is the reason we are

sitting here today. My case worker at the shelter. My advocate, He, I'd rather not say... He tries and is trying...but I think that the pressure from other clients make him lack with me.

Self-destructive behaviors. Although a majority of the youth reported persevering in difficult situations, some youth also reported 'feeling stuck' or trapped in those situations. These youth were actively involved in self-destructive behaviors such as drug use or suicide to deal with their destructive situations. Approximately, 53% of the youth reported using drugs. Drug use was a way for the youth to cope with the stress and difficulties in their lives. Youth who were imprisoned in the past or had a mental illness reported extreme difficulty while being homeless. These youth believed that going to prison destroyed their present and their future life. These youth were unable to find any meaning in their life outside of the prison system and were unable to see any hope for a better future. Although prison life was perceived as destructive for their future, these youth contemplated returning to the jail or to the prison system. Here is an excerpt from Sarah who was released from prison a few months prior to the initial interview with her. The following excerpt is taken from the initial interview. After the interview, I observed many changes in her life. She informed me that she had started going to drug treatment. She also reported trying hard to make positive changes in her life. However, her living situation was very stressful. She was staying with her elder sister who was also abusing drugs. When I tried to contact Sarah again for the video making sessions, I found that her attempts to improve her life failed and she was incarcerated again.

(Sarah): Going to jail messed up my life and I feel like I might as well go back because there ain't nothing out here for me. At least I lived better in the jail, three meals a day, saying we go by programs and stuff in jail, programs and stuff. And, I know people down there, I had some type of life you know some type of

purpose where as now, I get out of the prison and come out to the outside world and it's a whole different thing after being locked up for so long like two years, it's like okay wake up in the morning, go to work, where you wake up and go to school, go somewhere that's supposed to be doing and when I can barely do that because one if I wake up and I can't even pay to get on the bus, I don't even have three dollars and fifty cents, that hurts, that hurts me.

Section 2: Video-making Sessions and the Efficacy of the Fogo Process

The findings from research objectives two and three are described in the following section. First, the findings from the video making sessions are provided. Next, the efficacy of the Fogo process on youth is described using both quantitative and qualitative analysis.

Video-making sessions. The video-making sessions were semi-structured. The researcher merely acted as a facilitator for the video making sessions. During the video-making sessions, youth shared their stories, struggles, and strengths with each other. In addition, youth checked the accuracy of their transcripts and discussed the script for the final video. The majority of the discussion among youth was geared towards their current struggles. These stories and struggles reaffirmed the information obtained through individual interviews with youth.

During the discussion, youth reported the changes in their life situation since the initial interview. Of the nine youth who participated in the video-making sessions, three youth reported moving into independent apartments; one youth moved back to her parents' home and reported having good relationships with her family. One youth, who had been staying at a shelter, moved onto the streets because he could not get a bed in the shelters. Of the nine youth, two youth, who were already enrolled in the school, reported

continuing their education. Two other youth reported enrolling in school. One of these youth completed her nursing degree and was applying for jobs at hospitals. Another youth, who had reported suffering from partner violence at the initial interview, went for counseling to seek help with her relationship. As a consequence of counseling, this youth reported having a positive relationship with her boyfriend. Another youth, who was pregnant at the initial interview, gave birth to a daughter a week before the video-making sessions.

During the video making sessions, youth were asked about the resources that were available to them in the community. A majority of the youth reported a scarcity of resources in the community or the lack of information about the existing resources in the community. Some youth, who were more knowledgeable about the existing resources, shared this information with other youth. During the final session of video making, a focus group was conducted with youth. The purpose of this focus group was to gain youths' perspectives about the Fogo process. The following section utilizes the findings from the focus group session and describes the impact of the Fogo process on youths' perspectives.

Feedback from the youth. During the final video making session, youth were asked to provide their feedback about the Fogo process. All of the youth, who participated in the group interviews, found the Fogo process useful. Several youth reported that the research process was liberating for them. The statement that “It releases stuff off your chest, so you feel better,” was prevalent in several youths' feedback. Some youth even compared the group session to group counseling. Here is an excerpt from Ana

who particularly liked the component of sharing stories with other youth who were facing similar situation.

(Ana) I liked it, I mean because umm... I sat here SO many times and umm well not here but you know just sat so many times and just talked about what was going on and then a lot of the people that I run into or that I know are like completely out of that state of mind they don't understand the situation, like I mean they like I mean pretty much don't know that those types of problems exist, you know. And so just kind of feel like, I'm you know talking to somebody but I'm not talking to anybody. It good to share insights instead of just project them and have somebody with a false sense of "oh yeah I understand." It's better when you can talk with someone than to talk at someone. You know it's a big difference.

Several youth reported that the research process provided them an opportunity to express themselves. Additionally, many youth found the group sessions very enjoyable. Even those youth who did not like talking to other people described the positive experiences of participating in the research process. Here is an excerpt from Iris, who did not provide much information during the first individual interview, shared many intimate things during the second meeting.

(Iris) Actually umm since I talked to you the other day I knew I wanted to come in anyways you know just because I know the first time I came after I left I felt a whole lot better even thought I know I still had to face my problems. So when I came today it was umm.. I was kind of nervous, kind of freaked out a little bit, umm it was fun, when she got here and we all talked and I really enjoyed myself and especially expressing some of the ways that I felt and also learning some new things from both of yall. And um I really did have fun and I really hope this works out. So Thank You.

Robert mentioned that the research process helped him gain better insights about his life and motivated him to plan for his future.

(Robert) Just realizing what you been through its helps you, helps you figure out what you gonna do in the future, in the future however its gonna be.

During the video making sessions, youth exchanged information about resources in the community. Several youth reported that the group sessions helped them learn about resources available to them.

(William) The more people you surround yourself with positively, the more positive people you'll meet, the more positive things'll be brought to your attention, you know what I mean, like... like being around, us being here together right now being in the similar situation, I've found out a couple different resources that I didn't even know about... I never knew about these places until we sat here and we talked.

Some youth reported that the individual interview helped them to be more comfortable with themselves. The interview provided them new insights about themselves. As described earlier, many youth had mentioned loss of pride because of their situation. However, the interview helped them to regain their pride. Erika, who was embarrassed to tell anyone about her situation, felt that she could open up more about her situation.

(Erika) It helped me come out more, cause like in a group with people I guess that understands what's going on, umm... cause last session I think I would have been nervous because to let people know what's going on with me cause I was embarrassed of the situation that I was in. I just think it helped cause it made me feel more comfortable.

Erika's change in her self-concept was quite evident during the video making sessions. Erika made several changes in her life after the first interview such as enrolling in the school, finding independent housing, and getting help with her relationship. The change was also visible in her interviews. In the first interview, when I asked Erika about

her strengths, she could not identify any strength in herself. However, during the follow-up interview when I asked her the same question, Erika replied:

(Erika) I just think that my strong point about myself is having a strong mindset, just having a mind that goes strong without breaking down without yeah... Just umm I don't know, knowing how to survive day by day.

PD: And, what is special about you?

(Erika) I don't know I think I'm independent now (giggling)

Finally, Tommie who was unable to attend the group sessions called to schedule the follow-up assessment. When I asked her about her experience with the research process, Tommie said that the interview gave her the hope to live. Further, she said that the interview made her realize that her life was not over.

Quantitative Efficacy Results. To assess whether the Fogo process was effective in reducing delinquency, depression, and substance use and improving self-efficacy among homeless youth, data from pre- and post-intervention were compared. The Wilcoxon's signed ranks test for paired comparisons was used to make this comparison. Table 4 shows the results of the Wilcoxon's sign ranks test for the six non-dichotomous variables. Of the 15 youth, 4 youth did not complete the post-intervention follow-up assessment. One youth was incarcerated, another one was hiding from the system, and two youth could not be contacted using the information provided on the locator form. Amongst the completed questionnaires, no missing values were found. The results showed that between the pre- and the post-intervention homeless youths' scores on delinquency, depression, and drug and alcohol use improved. However, none of the scores reached statistical significance which suggests that a larger sample is needed in

order to increase statistical power. As a pilot study, the trends observed in the hypothesized direction are encouraging.

Variables	Range	Pre-intervention n = 15		Post-intervention n = 11		Z Score	Wilcoxon's Test (P value)
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Depression (BDI Total Score)	2-45	19.0	13.6	16.8	10.9	-.80	.42
Delinquency (NYSDS Total Score)	0-119	16.5	32.5	7.7	12.6	-.56	.57
General Self-Efficacy Score	36-82	62.2	14.3	59.6	15.3	-.22	.82
Social Self-Efficacy Score	10-27	20.1	4.8	19.6	3.7	-.15	.87
Number of days alcohol used in the past 15 days	0-15	4.1	6.3	3.8	6.3	-.84	.40
Number of days any drugs used in the past 15 days	0-15	4.9	6.8	3.7	5.4	-.84	.40

Table 4. Comparison of Variables assessing outcomes at pre- and post- intervention

Section 3: Impact of the Video on Policy Makers

Section three focuses on objective four. Objective four was to understand the influence of the participatory video on the perspectives of policy makers. Therefore, policy makers were shown the video and their responses were gathered in the context of a

semi-structured focus group interview. Policy makers were asked a number of open-ended questions designed to gather information of how viewing the video impacted their perspectives about homeless youth.

The categories of responses that emerged were: (1) the video *influenced* policy makers by providing an understanding of homeless youths' lives; (2) the video was seen as a valuable *resource* for policy related work; (4) the video initiated a *dialogue* about shortcomings in the current policy environment; (5) the video *motivated* policy-makers to make an action plan. The following sub-sections describe these categories in more detail.

Influence. The policy makers reported gaining a deeper understanding of the struggles, strengths, background and the impact of the larger economy on homeless youths' lives. The ability to see or hear people who were seldom seen or heard from allowed the policy makers to realize how much work needed to be done to help the homeless youth. One policy maker stated that the video reinforced some of the issues that she had identified as contributors to youth homelessness. However, seeing the video helped her to realize the amount of effort that needed to be made in order to help the youth.

Several policy makers were amazed to see the strengths of homeless youth. A majority of the policy makers were not aware of the strengths of homeless youth. Hearing the voices of homeless youth provided them a strength-based perspective about homeless youth. Here is an excerpt from a policy maker whose views are representative of other policy makers in the group.

(M2) I guess it, one level is just amazing to me how they can still be so resilient and still hold onto their hopes and dreams and, and they still wanna try.

After viewing the video, one policy maker reported that the video changed his perception about homeless youth and that the video has the potential to change other people's perceptions about homeless youth. He acknowledged that there is a lot of stigma associated with homelessness and he felt that the video had the potential to break those stigmas in the society.

(M1) The thing that really stuck out to me was just how articulate, um, the folks were that you were interviewing in, and how a lot of the stigmas behind homelessness would be broken down if a lot more folks could have access to young people like that, uh, and understand, um, you know, just how articulate and how vibrant they really are. They have dreams just like the rest of us and, and they have goals just like the rest of us and uh, these are folks that are just like us and they are not some offset other. They are just like we are.

One youth advocate who had been working with homeless youth for several years and who had been involved in policy related work realized the urgency of this issue and the urgency of providing help to the youth. Watching the video strengthened her dedication to impact young people.

(F3) So, do we have this opportunity to impact young adults now versus we're gonna be chronically homeless forever because if you hear what they're saying, they're saying five years, four years, two years, the, the other young lady said since two-thousand and, November of 2008, and those all fit definitions of chronically homeless and, and all of the other issues, multi-issued older adults, um, and, and that just like reinforces to me a dedication to try to be, um, maximizing our impact as early as possible, and to recognize that even though they're young people, they're still dealing with chronic stability issues, whether it's drug and alcohol treatment, mental health, housing... and that we can't just push them aside because of their age, because once you listen to them...they're, they're having those same struggles.

Resource. The video was seen as a valuable tool to impact decision makers. One policy maker reported the disconnection between the policies and the realities of this marginalized population. The policy maker suggested that the video could serve as an important tool to influence the decisions of policy makers by showing the realities of youth who were facing difficult situations.

(F3) just having us to be able to, to use those resources like the video, um, because it does put a face with it, um, and also to, to just value the reality, and to be able to to say that it's just bad, I mean there's just no, It's bad, and just to acknowledge that I think it's important, and then, if it's baby steps, at least it's something.

Another policy maker elucidated the importance of hearing stories of the people for whom the policies are made. Given that the youth struggling with various issues might not be able to go the policy meetings to raise their concerns, the policy maker considered the utility of the video as a great tool.

(F1) If I'm dealing with all of these struggles, I mean I, I, I get upset with organizations, whether it's educational institutions or health care institutions or social service agencies or policymakers, when they say well, you know, why didn't they come to the meeting and voice their concern. Well why didn't they do this or why- well if you had all these struggles you didn't know where you were going to sleep from night to night, are you gonna go to a seven o'clock meeting when you have to be at the shelter by a given time in order to get a bed? I mean come on, you gotta deal with the hierarchy of needs, and its food, clothing, shelter, my opinion, health care and a job. Um, so those are what they're zeroing in on. I mean I'm glad we got to hear from them, but it's like, where are they gonna find the time, they don't have child care; who's gonna watch their child when they come and provide some testimony, provide some insight, be part of an advocacy team, their voice is needed, this is a great way to get the voice, um, to, to catch the young people where they are, to get them to share their, their struggles with us.

Dialogue. Responses to the video initiated a discussion about the shortcomings in the current policy system. Several policy makers acknowledged the lack of resources and

support in the system for youth who are struggling with homelessness. Policy makers recognized that the funding for youth is not available, but they also reported that the motivation to help young people is not present in the policy environment. One policy maker reported that, in general, policy makers prefer to work with other population where they can get fast results. Since the homeless youth have multi-faceted issues, these youth were often excluded from the policy discussions. The policy maker mentioned that the way funding is allocated indicates how much youth are really valued in the society. Here are two excerpts from the policy maker identifying the shortcomings in the current policy environment.

(F1) It's, it's funding, it's uh, a will to do what's necessary um, to protect young people who are being abused. It's, you know, for me it's always been, you know, it's easy to talk but it's harder to do and, you know, we keep saying how valuable our young people are but how we spend our money and where we prioritize our policies really tell us how important young people really are. I mean, you know, when I look at these young people that are adults, young adults, are they really ready to be out fully on their own, and you know, I don't know the total backgrounds of these young people, but do they even have a home to go back to? Um, most of us still rely on mom and dad and so if you don't have a home to go back to, you know, some of them might have been in foster families and shifted from home to home, or group homes. They don't have a support system to go back to so, you know, all of us need support.

(F1) ...a lot of times policymakers in, in general, not, not specifically but in general, um, go for the easy targets, you know, what is easier and not as difficult, um... to accomplish, or to get the results. Uh, as the young lady said, starting with those who have the least, have the most issues or problems, uh, is difficult because it's multi-faceted and you have to be willing to spend the time and resources in order to change things. Um, it's easier to do for those who need less or to develop policies for those...at the higher end of the economic, education ladder. Um, I think what's, what's really difficult is to kind of peel apart the onion to see, you know, what has contributed, what are the causes, how can we go back to get the root cause eliminated for homelessness and it's, and it's multi-faceted, particularly for young people.

Several policy makers reported the scarcity of resources especially for those youth who are between 18-24 years of age. These youth are not qualified for services that are available for minors. Youth in this age group are not eligible to get help from children's services. Since there are not enough resources to house them, these youth are left on their own. In addition, the policy makers also talked about bureaucratic reality where youth get tossed over from one place to another place to find the resources. Here is an excerpt from a youth advocacy policy person.

(F3) There aren't resources. So, and on one sense, it's great because there are some resources, like where to go get food, where to go- but when it comes to housing, especially when it comes to youth housing, um, I promise you, last week I got two calls from ODJFS caseworkers and I said, you're an ODJFS caseworker, I am a youth advocacy policy person, I can't help your client. You're gonna have to know what's going on. So, so there is that other level when, especially when it comes to youth, um, in that age range, whether it's you know, seventeen, usually like seventeen to twenty-four year olds, and we can call Children's Services all day, but they won't deal with the seventeen year old. They, they won't do anything so they're stuck in this year of...so, and that's something-

Another policy maker, who was a principal of a school in the past, reported that many issues for youth could be identified in the school system and youth can be connected to appropriate resources to help them with their needs. However, due to lack of funding, there are no professional individuals in the school system that could identify the issues of the youth and provide appropriate help to them.

(M1) We do have a, uh, a void there when it comes to resources like this because at the school level we can identify a lot of the problems that a child may have outside of school but then do we have professional, trained individuals that can identify those problems and then put the youth in touch with, uh, whatever solution may, may be there. Uh, we have organizations, uh, that kind of work towards those goals, like communities in school, uh, social services agencies that's here, that does that sort of thing but as we have with all the other social services agencies, they're under-funded, they could do a lot more if they had a bit

more resources as well, and so um, it's, it's really kinda tough to get to every nook and cranny down there to find every child and, and keep them propped up. But um, you know, I think we, we need to kinda maybe focus in on that, how can we help at the school level, um, with, with some of the needs that the child themselves may have.

One policy maker identified the loopholes in the laws and policies. According to the policy maker, there are some resources available in the community but they are outdated. They do not meet the needs of the youth in today's society. According to this policy maker, reorganization of these resources is an important step in helping youth.

(F3) I don't necessarily think it's totally about new resources but I think we've gone long enough without reorganizing what we have in a way that fits the new population because there's so many things like Huck House, um, Runaway Children Youth Act, all these funding source s and all these laws that were created in the seventies, they just don't match the population.

Dissemination of information about the resources was another major concern in helping the youth. One policy maker reported that there is a lack of funding for dissemination of information to homeless youth. Oftentimes, when the resource or the funding is available, the information is not available to the youth. Under those circumstances, youth are not able to take advantage of the resources that are available in the community. Here is an excerpt from the policy maker:

(F3) When we do make laws and policies and funding pops up, just like all the stimulus monies, like target at youth, target at youth, then we have like one month to push it out and one month to get programs and prioritize; there's not enough time for us to get on board with what's happening and what's going on and how we can be impactful a lot of times, and we have to like, be more diligent about how to roll out that information, like hey, we got the FAFSA forms changed so homeless youth can just get a pass on getting their financial aid, but how do we roll out that information, and when there's no funding, it's really hard...

In addition, policy makers reported that trust is a major issue while providing the services to the youth. Many youth had trust issues because of their past experiences and many youth did not trust the services because of being apprehensive of the consequences. Hence, the policy maker suggested that along with the dissemination of information it is also important to provide the information in a way that helps the youth to trust the services.

(F2) If you're gonna convey a message, if you're going to provide resources when you're working with young adults, especially those have been dealing with these burdens and struggles, it's about trust. And you have to be able to come to provide services in a manner where, that they will trust, because they have been placed in situations where that has been broken down in every avenue, whether it's been in the home, or whatnot, you know...

The issue of judgment was also mentioned during the focus group interview. One youth advocacy policy maker reported that the youth are not treated with respect by those who are supposed to help the youth. Instead of hearing their voices, these youth are judged based upon their clothes, shoes and basically based upon their situation. Many of the policy makers concluded that the youth need to be treated with respect and dignity and they need to be provided with positive experiences so that they can trust the system.

(F3) get told this by even our peers at, you know, advocacy events that we did this spring, wanted to pick apart what they were wearing and it just, the message got lost, and then there, and then they have these strong voices, and one young lady had a job at Kroger's and was wearing her Kroger's uniform, like it shows she has a job! And he was like, oh well, well yea, they should just be wearing like suits if they should be talking to the state senators.

One policy maker reported that the current policy environment is exclusive and does not include the people for whom the policies are made. According to him, instead of

judging the youth, the policy makers need to include this population in the policy making process. He reported that the video helped him to realize that for effective policy implementation, it is quintessential to have an inclusive model of policy making where people for whom the policies are made need to be included in the decision making process.

(M1) well for me and just what I saw there, the young lady that talked about how the policies have to start here as opposed to starting there. That inclusion model of policymaking is something that I think we've probably moved away from, uh, some folks have moved away from and in order for us to have effective, uh, policies, and effective policy implementation, we've got to engage the public, no matter who they are, no matter what they look like, no matter what their situation is, these type of young people need to be included, uh, in the discussions that we are having, um, and that was, you know, that was real distinct there, the, the way she put it was, was, was really clear. You know, you've gotta start down here with the policies and not just continue to work, uh, at that level. I think that stood out for me.

Motivation for action. The policy makers were moved by the video. The video motivated them to take action to help homeless youth. Different policy makers commented about different aspects of the video that moved them. For one policy maker, viewing the video strengthened the commitment to help the youth. She identified that housing is a critical need for the young people and reported that they will find solutions for the youth. Here is an excerpt from the policy maker.

(F1) Yea we, we gotta find results for these young people, you know, and if we can help them with some aspect, and housing's critical, you know, if you don't have the stability, that one young man, that really hurt my heart to hear him talk about, you know, moving from place to place to place.

Towards the end of the focus group, the policy makers made a concrete plan to help the youth. They decided to help the youth by taking one step at a time and the first

step was housing. Here is a dialogue among the policy makers where they were deciding about supportive housing for youth which could help them build a housing history and could help them acquire housing in the future. Since the discussion was very long, I am providing here only a part of the discussion. In the discussion, it was also decided that the housing units would be provided at a place that is located on the bus line and that is surrounded by other services.

(F1) Right, right. We're building on the strengths of the young people, building on what we can do one step at a time. Have we ever thought, and, and maybe this goes to you, M2, have we ever thought about, you know how we do the master leases, um, for specialized populations at apartment complexes, have we ever thought about doing similar to what used to be Homeshare, where it was a program for seniors who needed somebody to live with them, to help them with little chores. Have we ever thought about doing, like a Homeshare with our young adults, uh, in a master lease situation, so that, you know, I saw the two young women, they might have made decent roommates, at least they'd have an opportunity to try it, because most of these young people can't even sign a lease.

(M1) Right.

(F1) You know, um they don't have a history, they don't have somebody that's gonna sign on the dotted line and be responsible, so how would they get, if they're not in an independent living program through, you know, either Huck House or, or Children's Services or something.

(M2) That may be something to, to consider. We've never thought...

(F1) 'Cause I, you know, as I-

(M2) Or there, or there's always been the, the caveat about their age and, being ability to be on their own.

(F1) Right, so, but if, if we had an agency sign the master lease, and then the agencies would be responsible for pairing up or identifying the young people, you know, who were a match so to speak, um, or if it's a single person, um, and then they'd be responsible for, you know, like our prevention, first month, last month or deposit or whatever. But, but some way, to then give them a history so then when they're ready to go on their own to get their own apartment, they have a history. 'Cause that helps, 'cause if you don't have a history, you can forget it.

(F2) I think we already have models in Columbus as far as then adding a supportive services component to that, whether it's, like the CHN, you know, type scenarios where you could link it with a supportive service provider, you would have an appointed person, you'd have certain tasks that you would have to stay (unclear) with your mental health provider, whatever, whatever that supportive service would be, could be a component of that housing program.

(F1) Continuing with your education or whatever the case may be.

(F2) Yea...yea.

(M2) In one of our, um, I think at South Point Place, we had worked with Franklin County Children's Services trying to set aside some units for them.

(F1) Mm hm. Mm hm.

(M2) And um, just couldn't work out the funding for that.

(F1) Mm hm.

(M2) For some reason. Um, but we were willing, or they were willing to uh, set aside eight to ten units, uh...for youth.

(F1) That, that would be something we could try. We'd certainly want it to be on a bus line, you know, to make it as easy as possible...

CHAPTER 4: DISCUSSION

Almost two decades ago, Toro, Trickett, Wall, and Salem (1991) urged researchers to assess the lives of homeless youth at multiple levels of the ecological system. These authors suggested that in order to understand homelessness, researchers need to view homelessness as a result of contextual factors ranging from the individual and family vulnerabilities to the social context in which the individuals are situated. Further, Toro et al. (1991) asserted that homelessness needs to be understood through the constructions of those who are experiencing it. Since then, the ecological systems framework has been used by some researchers to intervene in the lives of homeless youth (Slesnick, Prestopnik, Meyers, & Glassman, 2007). Particularly, these studies have intervened at the micro- and meso- levels of the ecological system and have shown the effectiveness of ecologically based interventions in homeless youths' lives (Slesnick, Prestopnik, Meyers, & Glassman, 2007). However, in general, the empirical literature on youth homelessness suffers from a lack of comprehensive understanding of homeless youths' lives from an ecological perspective particularly at the exo- and macro-levels of ecological system.

This study utilized the ecological systems framework (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) to understand homelessness among youth who are between 18-24 years of age and are living in the Midwestern United States. In interpreting the stories of youth and the interview with policy makers, my analyses demonstrated that different contexts of the ecological environment profoundly influenced the *onset* and *maintenance* of homelessness among youth. The perspectives of the youth generated information about the influence of various layers of the ecological systems on their lives. Further, the perspectives of the policy makers provided information about the macro-system (the settings in which youth hardly participate directly but influence the life trajectory of the youth).

According to Bronfenbrenner (1979), the *experiences* of a developing individual are of primary importance in understanding the development of that individual and the social context in which one is situated. The significance of the experience is reflected in the following excerpt.

Very few of the external influences significantly affecting human behavior and development can be described solely in terms of objective physical conditions and events; the aspects of the environment that are most powerful in shaping the course of psychological growth are overwhelmingly those that have meaning to the person in a given situation (p. 22).

Therefore, this study utilized the experiences of homeless youth in order to understand their ecological environment. The sections that follow will describe the various systems in the homeless youths' ecological environment and will discuss how these systems create and maintain homelessness among youth. First, this chapter provides a summary of the findings that were presented in Chapter 3. Second, the findings are discussed using

the theoretical framework of ecological systems (described in chapter 1) and the existing literature on homeless youth. Next, the limitations of this research are identified followed by suggestions for future research. Finally, the implications of the findings are discussed.

Summary of Findings

The findings of this study suggest that homeless youth are not a homogenous group. This group consists of single mothers, those who stay with ‘friends’ or relatives, those in shelters, those on the streets, and those who had been imprisoned. These categories are fluid and overlapping; one individual may occupy multiple positions at multiple points in his or her life. For example, a mother who is couch-surfing at relatives’ houses might take abode in a shelter because she lost the support from her relatives. Similarly, this group might consist of runaways, “push-outs” or throwaways, or those who are “situationally” homeless. The experience of the situationally homeless was defined by Ziefert and Brown (1991) as becoming homeless due to situational factors such as loss of job or eviction.

The narratives of the participants revealed that a number of factors interacted with each other to contribute to the incidence of homelessness among youth. These factors were categorized into four major themes, (a) vulnerable families, (b) association with delinquent peers and dropping out of school, (c) an ineffective social service system, (d) unprepared youth, limited job opportunities, and unaffordable housing costs.

Family vulnerability was evident in both the structure and processes of the family. A majority of the youth in the current study reported growing up in a single-mother household or “blended” (i.e. stepparent) family. A significant number of youth either

never met their biological father or had an inconsistent presence of the father in their lives. A majority of the youth reported coming from poor or low-income households. Some youth reported being raised in rough or “ghetto” neighborhoods where crime, violence and drug use were commonplace. Several youth had at least one parent who was working long hours to make ends meet. A small number of youth reported having parents who were on the welfare or disability payments. Many youth reported having at least one parent who was using alcohol or drugs.

Further, findings suggest that the family life of these youth was dysfunctional and chaotic. Their family life was permeated with conflict, disagreement, abuse, and lack of effective communication. Abuse was further categorized into physical, sexual, or psychological abuse. Not only the biological parents, but also the extended family members and siblings participated in the abusive behavior toward youth. The physical and psychological abuse was mostly inflicted by the biological parents and in some instances by extended family members such as aunts. The sexual abuse was often perpetrated by the extended family members such as uncles, cousins or acquaintances of the family. The dysfunctional family processes resulted in feelings of disconnection, alienation and abandonment among several youth and was one of the primary factors in youth leaving home.

The experiences in the school environment varied for youth. Some youth reported feeling alienated and marginalized by their peers whereas others reported being popular among their peers in school. Youth who felt a sense of belonging to school reported having better academic achievement than those who felt marginalized in school.

Regardless of their school experience, a majority of the youth dropped out of school. Often, issues related to life outside of the school such as caring for younger siblings, struggling with home and child care responsibilities, drug use, association with a negative peer group were reported as reasons for dropping out of the school. The association with peers or romantic partners who were engaged in deviant activities such as gangs was common among the youth. Several youth gave priority to peers and partners over their family. After leaving home, a majority of the youth reported seeking shelter at peers' or partner's place. Peers provided them comfort and a place to stay. For female youth, running away from the family and staying with romantic partners resulted in teen pregnancy which further severed connections with school.

The abuse and conflict at home, and the runaway episodes led many youth to foster care and group homes. In addition, the involvement with deviant peers and deviant activities led some youth to go through the criminal system such as juvenile detention, jail, or prison. Several youth reported further negative experiences in these systems of care such as in foster care or group home. While going through the various transitions in their life, youth remained unprepared for the responsibilities of adult life. Several youth could not continue education and many could not find a job or affordable housing. The economic crisis in the United States further limited the job opportunities of the youth. Although a majority of the youth went through various transitions that resulted in homelessness; some youth had different experiences. These youth were not abused (although they suffered from disagreements or high conflict in the family), did not runaway, and were not placed in the system's care. However, due to the absence of

adequate support, training, and limited opportunities, these youth also struggled to cope with the responsibilities of emerging adulthood such as finding a job or a place to stay and ended up being homeless.

Once youth became homeless, they faced further obstacles in their life. Due to the lack of resources or inadequate resources, these youth struggled with finding a safe place to stay, food, clothing, transportation, and employment. In addition to meeting basic survival needs, these youth also struggled with the oppression of society including the law enforcement officers and the individuals who were in the position to help them. The situation of homelessness not only resulted in struggles with meeting survival needs, it also resulted in suffering. Youth suffered due to loss of dignity, freedom, security, social support, and hope while being homeless. In order to persevere under difficult situations and to cope with these struggles, youth employed different strategies. The strategies included finding meaning in one's life (either in their relationships or in their experiences); valuing oneself or finding strength in oneself; finding support from external sources such as from belief systems or from friends and relatives. A significant number of youth also engaged in self-destructive behaviors such as drug use in order to cope with their life situation.

In addition to understanding the experiences of homeless youth, this study also aimed at creating a participatory video with homeless youth and to use this video as a tool to bridge the gap between policy and research. As a result of participation in this study and creating the video of youth, several youth reported that they felt better about themselves, gained new insights and confidence as well as information about resources in

the community. The policy makers reported that the video served as a tool to inform them about the realities of youth. The video influenced the perspectives of the policy makers and helped them initiate a dialogue about the shortcomings of the current policy environment. Finally, the video strengthened the commitment of policy makers in helping youth and motivated them to take action for the well-being of the youth. The following section discusses these findings using the ecological systems framework.

The Ecologically Grounded Theory of Youth Homelessness

According to Bronfenbrenner (1979), the ecological environment of an individual consists of “a nested arrangement of concentric structures, each contained within the next” (p. 22). These structures are categorized into four systems: micro-, meso-, exo-, and macrosystem. The microsystem consists of the relationships and interactions with the immediate or face-to-face settings in an individual’s environment. Examples of these settings are family, school, peer group, and neighborhood. The mesosystem comprises of the linkages between two or more settings of the microsystem such as the linkages between home and school. The exosystem comprises one or more settings in which the individual does not actively participate, however, the activities or events taking place in those settings affect the individual for example, the parent’s workplace. The macrosystem can be thought of as a societal blueprint for a particular culture or subculture that is determined by the ideologies and the social institutions common to that particular culture.

Family environment. At the innermost level of the ecological system is the microsystem. The first setting of the microsystem is the family where the individual comes into face-to-face interaction with the family members. To be effective, the

interactions need to be enduring, which means that they need to occur on a fairly regular basis over a period of time (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). An examination of the family setting of the microsystem suggests that youth who became homeless did not have positive and enduring experiences with their primary caretakers. Consistent with the existing literature on homeless youth (Whitbeck et al., 2002; Robertson & Toro, 1999), this study's findings suggest that family conflict and disagreements were prevalent among the lives of the youth. In addition, many youth reported receiving maltreatment in their families in the form of physical, sexual, or psychological abuse. A significant number of studies corroborate the finding that abuse is prevalent among homeless youth and is one of the primary reasons for runaway behavior among youth (Bao, Whitbeck, & Hoyt, 2000; Rotheram-Borus et al., 1996, Tyler et al., 2001).

The role of third parties. Further, the family environment of homeless youth indicates a significant role of third parties in the lives of the youth. According to Bronfenbrenner (1979), "the capacity of a dyad to serve as an effective context for human development is crucially dependent on the presence and participation of third parties, such as spouses, relatives, friends, and neighbors. If such third parties are absent, or if they play a disruptive rather than a supportive role, the developmental process, considered as a system, breaks down" (p. 5). For a majority of the youth, the role played by third parties was disruptive. For example, the extended family members perpetrated physical, sexual, and psychological abuse among youth. Several youth also reported having a conflicted relationship with siblings. The role of the third party became particularly salient when an outsider entered the family, such as the mother's boyfriend.

Youth reported feeling alienated because of the newly developed relationship between the mother and her boyfriend. The period was particularly stressful because mothers did not take the time to introduce these “outsiders” to her children or the outsider sexually abused the child. This finding corroborates that of Tyler and Cauce (2002) who reported that in addition to the biological parent, abuse is often perpetrated by step parents, siblings, relatives, or non-family members such as the mother’s boyfriend.

School environment and the linkages between home and school environment.

Another important setting in the microsystem of a growing individual is the school environment where he or she spends the majority of time. Despite the importance of this setting, the literature suffers from a lack of information about homeless youths’ school experiences. The available literature on school experiences suggests that several homeless youth drop-out from school at a young age and report academic difficulties (Toro, Dworsky, & Fowler, 2007). The reasons for dropping out of the school or the nature of the academic difficulties have not been examined in the literature.

This study provides information about the school experiences of homeless youth. Youth reported mixed reactions toward school. Several youth reported feeling alienated in the school environment because of a lack of sense of belonging. Bronfenbrenner (1979) once stated that the school has become “one of the potent breeding grounds of alienation in American society” (p. 234). This statement is still relevant for homeless youth in today’s society. It is noteworthy here that some youth who reported a sense of belonging to the school fared better academically than those who felt marginalized. A review of the literature on students’ sense of belonging to school corroborates this finding

and suggests that feelings of belonging affect academic achievement and motivation (Osterman, 2000).

Although some youth fared better than others in terms of academic achievement or peer relationships in the school, these youth were not able to continue their education. Regarding academic achievement, Bronfenbrenner (1979) cited a study by Hayes and Grether (1969) which concluded that “the substantial difference in academic achievement across social class and race found by the end of the sixth grade is not “attributable to what goes *in* school, most of it comes from what goes on *out* of school” (p. 226). Clearly, the youth participating in this study were facing several issues outside of school such as experiencing the loss of a biological parent, enduring abuse, and/or taking care of younger siblings or children. Although the youth were facing various issues, they were not able to receive help with those issues. One of the reasons for the lack of help lies in the mesosystem that consists of linkages between the home and school. The narratives of the participants suggest that the linkages between home and school life were very weak or almost nonexistent. One youth reported that no one could help her in the school because no one knew what she was doing (using drugs). The flow of information and the interconnections which are vital for the effectiveness of the school system were missing in this youth’s life and this affected her development.

In the focus group interview with policy makers, one policy maker remarked that many of the issues that youth suffer from could be identified and resolved in the school system. However, he stated that the lack of funding provided by the policy environment restricts schools to hire professional counselors who can help the youth with their

personal issues. Based upon a review of literature, Toro, Dworsky, and Fowler (2007) also suggested that school based programs can prevent homelessness by “providing prosocial niches outside the home where they may be less vulnerable to influences of deviant peers” (p. 15). The lack of connections between the home and school setting and the lack of funding for qualified counselors suggests that these youth are not valued or cared for by the larger system in which the youth are situated i.e. the macrosystem.

Emergence of destructive social networks. When social network with primary and influential settings (i.e. school and home) break down, at least two things happen. First, destructive social networks figure more prominently into youths’ lives such as peers or romantic partners who are involved in deviant activities. Second, youth with limited life experiences or who have no other positive network support available are easily engaged in those destructive networks. Studies of homeless youth have widely documented that youth who are homeless have a higher likelihood of associating with deviant peers (Haber & Toro, 2007; Toro & Goldstein, 2000). Although this setting of peer networks provides a much needed sense of belonging and attachment for the youth, these networks create additional challenges for positive development and future prospects for the youth. These challenges include but are not limited to drug addiction, gang involvement, or delinquent activities. The engagement in destructive social networks further alienate youths from the home and school settings.

The social service system. The examination of various settings in the youths’ microsystem suggests that homeless youth are deprived of close positive connections and a sense of belonging in their environment. The lack of connection is visible in youths’

severed ties with their home and school settings. In the absence of close affectionate connections, youth look for these connections in other places and find a sense of belonging with other youth, some of whom may themselves be (or have been) homeless (Kipke et al., 1995). Instead of attempting to build positive connections in youths' lives, these youth were placed in state's care such as in foster or group homes where they suffered further alienation. Although this system might be adept at meeting the basic needs of minors through housing via foster or group homes, it does not appear to be adept at meeting the multi-dimensional needs of these youth. A significant number of studies found that a majority of the youth who had a history of out-of-home placement become homeless (Roman & Wolfe, 1995; Toro & Goldstein, 2000). In addition, a longitudinal study found that some youth who were in out-of-home placements reported feeling lonely and having "no roots" (Courtney, Piliavin, Grogan-Kaylor, & Nesmith, 2001). Further, in a recent article, Atkinson (2008, p. 183) stated, "No one expects adulthood to occur overnight, but that is exactly what happens to youths exiting the foster care system." Consistent with the findings of other studies (Roman & Wolfe, 1995), this study found that youth who were in systems' care remained unprepared for the increasing responsibilities of fast approaching adulthood.

Macrosystem and the onset of youth homelessness. Once the youth found himself or herself in an adult role, it became extremely difficult for them to receive assistance from external sources. Many youth tried to succeed in creating a better life for oneself. Despite their efforts, many youth failed to succeed in their endeavors and became homeless. Consistent with the findings of several other studies (Morrell-Bellai et

al., 2001; Toro, Dworsky, & Fowler, 2007), this study found that macro-level factors such as lack of employment opportunities and affordable housing contributed to the onset of homelessness among youth. In fact, lack of affordable housing has been considered the primary or immediate cause of homelessness (Burt et al. 2001). The role of macro-level factors in the pathways of homelessness is further strengthened by the finding that even those youth who were not abused or did not run away from home became homeless because they could not find affordable housing and employment opportunities. In fact, in order to pay his rent, one youth (who had received an educational fellowship) succumbed to the drug business and eventually to his own drug addiction.

Macrosystem Ideologies and Public Policy. The macrosystem of the ecological environment became more prominent in youths' lives once they became homeless. The macrosystem consists of the overarching patterns of ideologies and organization of the social institutions of a particular culture. According to Bronfenbrenner (1979), the structure of the services and the availability of the resources are dependent upon legislation and public policy of the macrosystem, which are largely determined by the ideologies and the belief system of a particular culture or subculture. In general, the ideology of the American culture places high value on individualism, self-reliance, and responsibility for one's own actions. The opposite of these values, such as dependence, is reflected in the 'welfare' or assistance from government programs is highly stigmatized in US society (Woodhouse, 2008). Further, the ideology of individual accountability stigmatizes the homeless person since it blames the individual for his or her own situation.

The stigmatization and marginalization was vividly portrayed by both youth and policy makers in the current study. The marginalization and stigmatization of youth was visible in the way that society treated them, including law enforcement officers or the staff at social service agencies. The marginalization of youth was also visible in the way that the policies were created, the shelters were structured, the quality of food and services that were provided to the youth by the larger society. While struggling for shelter, food, clothing and other needs, the youth found that there was no support available to them or that there was nobody who cared for them. Living in a society where adequate resources and support are not available, these youth turned to illegal activities to support themselves such as prostitution, drug dealing, and robbing which further stigmatized their status in society.

In the focus group meeting, the policy makers reported that the lack of willingness or motivation in the policy environment to assist homeless youth presents a greater obstacle than the lack of funding or lack of resources in improving the situation of homeless youth. One policy maker remarked that the allocation of funding also reflects the value that society places on homeless youth. The policy makers also reported a lack of respect in society towards these youth. The social stigma faced by homeless youth has been a topic of interest in recent research (Kidd, 2003, 2004). This study adds to this body of literature by providing the perspectives from both the policy makers and the youth.

While living in an environment that is marginalizing or stigmatizing, the youth devise interpretations for their homelessness which often re-inscribe societal norms. The

values and beliefs that are held by the larger culture are internalized by the youth. For example, the youth think of themselves 'not worthy' or call themselves a 'bum.' The feelings of embarrassment and guilt emerging from the stigma were often reported in the narratives of the youth. According to Hagan and McCarthy (2005), contact with law enforcement officers combined with the dysfunctional family histories can cultivate feelings of shame and humiliation among homeless youth. These feelings of shame, along with police harassment, can provoke youth to criminal behavior which, in turn, can impede their ability to secure and sustain legal employment. The findings of the current study and prior literature suggest that, contrary to popular belief, these youth are not inherently criminals and instead it is society that turns them into criminals.

Suffering among homeless youth. Further, the findings of this study suggest that homelessness is not only a threat to the material existence of the youth; it is a threat to the very existence of the self. Youth not only struggle to meet the needs of their physical survival and safety, they struggle with the challenges of overcoming dehumanizing oppression by society. The struggles with material needs and physical safety have often been portrayed in the existing literature (Dachner & Tarasuk, 2002; Kelly & Caputo, 2007). Although the struggles of youth are commonplace in the current literature, understanding the suffering of homeless youth is virtually nonexistent in the literature. The experience of suffering is documented among other marginalized populations. According to Charmaz (2008), any form of marginalization results in suffering. Further, Charmaz (2008) stated that "suffering poses existential problems of identity and continuity."

Strengths of homeless youth. Although homelessness is an oppressive and dehumanizing situation, it is not entirely bleak and hopeless. Hope lies in the efforts and strengths of the youth. Youth in this study reported trying hard to swim against the tide. Many were striving to acquire employment and many were trying to give their children a better future. In order to regain their lost freedom, lost dignity, and lost sense of self, several youth turned inside to find strength while others found support from external sources. The findings of this study show that youth who “succeeded” in meeting their goals, traced the roots of their success to the positive connections that were available to them in their environment. Similar to several other youth, these youth also had many dreams and hopes. In addition, these youth found supportive connections in their environment that motivated them, gave them good advice and helped them connect with positive opportunities and resources. This finding corroborates the findings of other studies (Slesnick, Bartle-Haring, Dashora, Kang, & Aukward, 2008) that suggest the importance of caring and positive social connections in bringing transformation to homeless youths’ lives.

The Fogo Process. According to Bronfenbrenner (1979), the blueprint of a culture or subculture can be changed as a result of transformation in the settings of a society, which can further transform the behavior and development of an individual. Further, he stated that “A transforming experiment involves the systematic alteration and restructuring of existing ecological systems in ways that challenge the form of social organization, the belief systems, and lifestyles prevailing in a particular culture or subculture” (p. 41).

This study was an attempt to create a transformation through the Fogo process. As discussed in Chapter 1, the Fogo process is a participatory video methodology that has its roots in Paulo Freire's (1970) "Pedagogy of the Oppressed." Within Frierian research, the inquiry process itself empowers the participants and enables them to change themselves by encouraging self-reflection and a deeper understanding of their situation (Lather, 1986). Or, in other words, what Freire (1970) referred to as *conscientization* "developing consciousness, but consciousness that is understood to have the power to transform reality" (Taylor, 1993, p. 52). Based upon youths' reports during the follow-up interview, it was found that participation in the Fogo process not only helped them to feel more comfortable with themselves, it also helped them to gain better insights about their situation and find ways to bring transformation in their lives. The transformation was visible in youths' attempts to seek help with relationship abuse and/or to enroll in school or college. In addition, several youth noted that the study was liberating or therapeutic for them. Consistent with the findings of the Fogo process (Snowden, 1984), youth in this study were able to voice their concerns, ideas and vision and were able to recognize that they shared common problems.

A unique aspect of the Fogo process in this study was the development of trust with the participants. The findings of this study and the existing literature (Kurtz, Lindsey, Jarvis, & Nackerud, 2000; Moore, 2005) suggest that trust is a major issue for homeless youth. Due to their past experiences, homeless youth distrust adults which present a difficulty in engaging them in interventions (Moore, 2005). However, in the current study, the Fogo process led to a collaborative effort of video making where trust

was developed between the researcher and the participants. This trust was visible in the explicit remarks by some participants that they would trust me, the researcher, to confide in. Trust was also noticed when the participants provided intimate details about their lives and reported their engagement in illegal activities on the video. Trust was established in the current study by creating a safe and non-judgmental space where youth could share their stories and experiences. Further, trust was built by connecting with youth, honoring their voices and engaging them in the video making process. These findings parallel those of Kurtz, Lindsey, Jarvis, and Nackerud (2000) who found that caring relationships and providing a safe space were the context for homeless youth to develop trust.

In this study, the Fogo process also attempted to bring transformation in a macrosystem which is the policy environment. The Fogo process attempts to bridge the gap between the participants and policy makers by utilizing the video as a tool to share the participants' voices and to bring transformation at the policy level. According to Bronfenbrenner (1979, p. 8), "basic science needs public policy even more than public policy needs basic science." The inclusion of policy makers in the research process influenced the perspectives of the policy makers and resulted in a plan of action for the well-being of the youth. The finding of this study suggests that the Fogo process can be influential in bringing transformation at the local level of the policy making environment. Although several researchers have used the participatory video which has its roots in the Fogo process, very few studies have built upon the Fogo process itself (Ferreira, 2007). This study is based upon the Fogo process and shows that this process can be used with

the marginalized population of homeless youth and can bring transformation at the individual and policy levels of the environment.

Limitations

Limitations of this study should be noted. First, the findings were based on youth self-report. Only youths' experiences with different systems in their ecology were utilized to understand their ecological system. Data were not collected from family members, teachers, or other systems to gain other perspectives. Given that the ecological theoretical framework considers all the interactions and relationships as bi-directional, this study is limited to an understanding of how homeless youth influenced and were influenced by their environment. In future research endeavors, data collected from different levels of youths' ecological environment will provide a broader understanding of the multiple perspectives associated with youth homelessness.

Second, the study included a convenience sample of fifteen youth and five policy makers. The findings cannot be generalized to all homeless youth and policy makers. For example, the findings may not represent homeless youth living in other ecological contexts, in other states or communities. It is of note here that generalization of the findings is not the aim of qualitative research. The aim of the qualitative research is to achieve transferability. Transferability parallels the concept of external validity. It requires the researcher to provide detailed accounts of the context, participants and methodology so that the reader can decide whether the findings of the study can be applied to other similar contexts or settings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To achieve

transferability, this study attempted to provide an in-depth understanding of homeless youths' lives and to detail the research methodology.

Another limitation is the pre- and post- intervention design, which can threaten internal validity. As noted in Chapter 1, the lack of a control group limits conclusions regarding the impact of the intervention. For example, change may have occurred due to time or attention and not to the specific procedure used. However, it is noteworthy here that one of the important aims of the qualitative research is to achieve catalytic validity. Lather (1986) defines catalytic validity as “the degree to which research process re-orientes, focuses, and energizes participants in what Freire (1970) terms “conscientization,” knowing reality in order to better transform it” (p. 67). Catalytic validity is achieved when the participants gain self-understanding and insights and self-determination through research participation. The feedback of the youth regarding the research process suggests that catalytic validity was achieved in this study.

Future research should include a more collaborative approach to video making. In this study, the participants were videotaped during individual interviews and group sessions. The participants made decisions about the script of the video and shared their stories with other youth during the group sessions. However, due to time constraints, limited resources, and physical limitations, it was not possible to train the youth in developing and editing the video. In future research, the participants can be more actively involved in creating and editing the video. This collaborative process can be empowering to the participants (Ferreira, 2007). Further, the policy makers suggested that their messages be conveyed to the youth but due to time limitations this was not possible.

Future studies should seek to establish bi-directional communication among policy makers and the youth.

Implications

This research highlights the interconnectedness of various levels in the ecology of homeless youth and identified the structural, institutional, and familial influences that create and maintain homelessness among youth. The findings of this study show that a variety of factors contribute to homelessness among youth including family issues, alienation in school, association with deviant peers, lack of opportunities, ineffective social services, public policy, and ideologies. These factors indicate that in order to prevent homelessness among youth, an ecological approach is needed that targets change at multiple levels of an individual's environment.

First, the findings of this study suggest that family conflict and abuse are the primary factors leading to the trajectory of homelessness among youth. Hence, interventions that target family processes can serve as primary approaches in preventing youth homelessness. Literature on prevention research suggests that family focused prevention programs have the potential to reduce youth homelessness. For example, findings from project SAFE, a program that provided phone consultation, groups or workshops, and a resource library to parents who were concerned about youths' behavior, showed that parents' reported increased ability to cope with youth and this lowered the likelihood of youth leaving home (Gagliano, 2006). In addition, ecologically based family therapy (EBFT), a family-focused intervention conducted with runaway adolescents and their primary caretaker has shown effectiveness in reducing adolescents'

substance use and improving many other areas such as family (conflict and cohesion) and individual functioning (Slesnick & Prestopnik, 2005, 2009). Findings of these studies suggest that family focused interventions such as EBFT has the potential to prevent youth homelessness.

Further, the findings of this study show that several youth dropped out of school before becoming homeless. These youth were facing issues in their personal lives that affected their academic learning; however, the school system was unaware of these issues. This finding suggests that schools need to take a comprehensive approach towards the developing individual in order to prevent youth homelessness. In other words, schools need to consider the overall well-being of the students instead of merely focusing on their educational achievement. The comprehensive approach has also been espoused by Haber and Toro (2004) and Chamberlain and MacKenzie (1998). According to Chamberlain and MacKenzie (1998), schools need to be proactive as well as reactive instead of waiting for the young person to come and seek help. Specifically, these authors suggest that schools need to identify those who are in need and approach them sensitively without labeling them. The current study suggests that before dropping out of school, many youth started skipping school and falling behind in their homework and grades. These youth need to be identified, and services need to be provided to them by well-trained counselors.

Additionally, this study found that the linkages between home and school life were missing for several youth. Schools need to be more proactive in building linkages with families and involving them in the educational development and overall well-being

of the youth. In addition, Chamberlain and MacKenzie (1998) suggest that schools need to collaborate with community agencies so that youth can receive support for the complex issues that they face such as family relationships, drug and alcohol problems. However, the collaboration would be facilitated if there is governmental policy and funding available to encourage linkages between schools and community agencies.

Findings of this study suggest that a majority of the youth went through children's services such as foster care and group homes. A vast body of literature has documented that these systems are not adept at meeting the multifaceted needs of these youth (Cauce et al., 1998; Toro & Goldstein, 2000). The effects of these services need to be evaluated carefully and alternative approaches need to be developed to meet the needs of the developing person. For example, the Homebuilders family preservation services, which provide intensive services to a family in crisis over a brief time period, have shown reduction in foster-care placement and improvement in family and child functioning (Feldman, 1991; Nelson & Landsman, 1992). These kinds of services can serve as an alternative to foster care or group home placement.

In addition, this study found that several youth who were in out of home placements remained unprepared for the responsibilities of adult life. Youth who are at risk of homelessness such as those with histories of out of home placements or who lack a support network should be the target of intervention efforts. The availability of supportive housing can prevent these youth from becoming homeless (Burt, 1997). In addition, providing educational programs, vocational or employment training, and job placement can lead youth to the path of self-sufficiency and reduce their likelihood of

becoming homeless. One comprehensive vocational and educational program, Job Corps, has the potential to stabilize youth but it has not been evaluated for homeless youths (Burghardt et al., 2001).

Further, the findings of this study suggest that youth who are homeless not only are deprived of material needs but are also deprived of a sense of self. Although housing, food, clothing and other material needs are primary for the survival of youth, attempts should also be made to provide these services in a way that helps the youth to regain one's sense of self. In other words, the services need to be provided in a respectful way and with the aim of building trusting relationships with youth. Rew (2008) asserted that "social policy for homeless adolescents should be implemented by communities guided by a philosophy, ethic, and theory of caring and connectedness" (p. S42).

One of the unique findings of this study is that the youth longed for connection and support in their environment. Either they were rejected and alienated by the society or were accepted by peers who were involved in deviant activities. Youth who found positive connections in their environment, such as helping case manager or encouraging cousin, were able to "succeed" in meeting their goals. This finding is similar to the findings of other youth that suggest that social connectedness is a primary protective factor in the lives of youth (Patel & Greydanus, 2002) and should be targeted in the intervention efforts with this population. For example, Ecologically based family therapy, that targets connectedness not only with family members but also with other community services such as medical care, job training, or self-help programs has shown improved

family and individual functioning among runaway youths (Slesnick & Prestopnik, 2005, 2009).

Further, findings of the current study show that the Fogo process, using the video to bridge the gap between youth and the policy makers, was an effective intervention strategy. The video helped shift the understanding of the policy makers about the homeless youth and initiated a dialogue about bringing change in youths' lives. This finding suggests that homeless youth are the "experts" about their lives and they must be actively involved in identifying their needs, developing solutions, and impacting policy. Oftentimes, the people who make the policies are disconnected from the realities of those for whom the policies are made. This research supports a "bottom-up" approach rather than a "top-down" approach to policy making.

Finally, the findings of this study suggest that although homeless youth have multifaceted issues, these youth have immense strengths to survive under adverse situations. Interventions and programs need to build upon the strengths of the youth. Also, the existing literature suggests that adolescence is a critical period in development where an investment of resources, highly tailored to meet individual needs, may have a significant individual and social effect. An investment in the youth may have long lasting influence on the well-being of the youth. According to Bronfenbrenner (1979, p. 53), "No society can long sustain itself unless its members have learned the sensitivities, motivations, and skills involved in assisting and caring for other human beings."

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APPENDIX A
QUESTIONNAIRES

Locator Form

Your full legal name: _____

Any available contact information:

Address: _____
Street Address

City State Zip

P.O. Box _____

Phone No.: (H) _____ (W) _____ (C) _____

Have you ever had another name? If so, what was it? _____

We would also like to have the names of two people who might be able to help us locate you if we were to lose touch with you. These should be:

1. People with whom you are likely to keep in touch and who would know how to contact you.
2. People who are likely to have the same address and telephone number for the next few years.

These people need not be told anything about the nature of the research program in which you are participating. We would contact them only if we are unable to locate you. In each case, you can indicate whether or not it is OK for the person to know about the research project in which you are participating.

1. Name: _____

Address: _____
Street Address

City State Zip Phone No.: _____

Relationship to you: _____ Okay for this person to know about the research? ____ Yes ____ No

Permission Date: _____ Initial:

2. Name: _____

Address: _____
Street Address

City State Zip Phone No.: _____

Relationship to you: _____ Okay for this person to know about the research? ____ Yes ____ No

Permission Date: _____ Initial:

Statement of Permission

I hereby grant my permission for the people I have named to be contacted in the event that I cannot be found. I understand that the only purpose of such a contract would be to locate me, and that these individuals need not be given any information about the nature of the research in which I am participating, unless I grant permission. I may at any time change these names or withdraw my permission for one or more of them to be contacted.

Signature: _____ Date:

Witness: _____ Date:

Demographic Interview

DEMOGRAPHICS:

1. Gender: M / F
2. Age: _____
3. Ethnic Group:
____ (1) American Indian or Alaskan Native
____ (2) Asian, Asian-American, or Pacific Islander
____ (3) Black or African-American
____ (4) Hispanic, Cuban
____ (5) Hispanic, Mexican
____ (6) Hispanic, New Mexican (or Spanish-American)
____ (7) Hispanic, Puerto-Rican
____ (8) Hispanic, Other Latin American
____ (9) White, not of Hispanic origin
____ (10) Other: Please specify: _____
4. In the last year, what was your primary living arrangement? (Check one):
____ (1) Alone in own house or apartment
____ (2) With spouse or children in own house or apartment
____ (3) In a house or apartment with a friend or friends
____ (4) With parent(s) or guardian(s) in their house or apartment
____ (5) Homeless or living in temporary shelter
____ (6) With other relatives (specify) _____
5. For the most part, how many persons, including yourself were living in your home *when you were growing up*? _____ Persons
6. Have **you** ever been:
a. Placed in a foster home? Yes / No
b. Placed in a group home? Yes / No
c. A ward of the state? Yes / No
d. Kept in juvenile detention? Yes / No
e. Kept in jail overnight? Yes / No
f. Been in prison Yes / No
7. When you were under the age of 18 did you ever run away from home? Yes / No
If yes, how many times? _____
8. What is your religious preference?
Please check only one: _____ Catholic _____ Protestant Christian _____ Jewish
_____ Muslim _____ Buddhist _____ Hindu
_____ Other: _____

9. Up to age 18, how many years were you raised by:

Years

1. _____ Both of your birth parents
2. _____ Birth mother only
3. _____ Birth mother plus partner (not birth father)
4. _____ Birth father only
5. _____ Birth father plus partner (not birth mother)
6. _____ Other relatives (grandparents, aunt or uncle, etc.)
7. _____ Adoptive parents
8. _____ Foster parents
9. _____ Institutions (group home, hospital, detention, shelter)
10. _____ Other (Specify)

10. How many children do you have?

_____ Biological sons _____ Adoptive sons _____ Foster sons
_____ Biological daughters _____ Adoptive daughters _____ Foster daughters

11. How many times have you been married? _____ time(s).

12. **Current** Marital Status (Check one for each):

Youth (You)

Youth's Birth Parents

- ____ (1) Single, never been married
____ (2) Legally married (for how many years? ____)
____ (3) Cohabiting with partner
____ (4) Separated but still married
____ (5) Divorced
____ (6) Widowed

- ____ (1) Single, never married
____ (2) Legally married (for how many years? ____)
____ (3) Cohabiting with partner
____ (4) Separated but still married
____ (5) Divorced
____ (6) Widowed

13. Employment Status

- (1) Work 40+ hours a week _____
(2) Work fewer than 40 hours a week _____
(3) Homemaker _____
(4) Retired _____
(5) Unemployed _____

14. What is your primary occupation (**whether or not you are currently employed**)? That is, what is your major occupational skill?

15. What is your total **annual** family income? Total annual income \$ _____

_____ 0-\$5,000 _____ \$5,001- \$15,000 _____ \$15,001- \$30,000
_____ \$30,001- \$45,000 _____ \$45,001- \$60,000 _____ \$60,001- \$75,000
_____ \$75,001 or above

16. What is your **highest** level of education?

- | | | |
|-------|---|---------------------------------------|
| _____ | 01) First grade | |
| _____ | 02) Second grade | |
| _____ | 03) Third grade | |
| _____ | 04) Fourth grade | |
| _____ | 05) Fifth grade | |
| _____ | 06) Sixth grade | For GED recipients , check the |
| _____ | 07) Seventh grade | number of years of formal |
| _____ | 08) Eighth grade | education actually completed |
| _____ | 09) Ninth grade | (do not check 12) |
| _____ | 10) Tenth grade | |
| _____ | 11) Eleventh grade | |
| _____ | 12) High school graduate (not GED) | |
| _____ | 13) One year full-time post-secondary | |
| _____ | 14) Two years full-time post-secondary | |
| _____ | 15) Three years full-time post-secondary | |
| _____ | 16) Four years full-time post secondary: college graduate | |
| _____ | 17) One year full-time post-graduate | |
| _____ | 18) Two year full-time post-graduate | |
| _____ | 19) Three years full-time post-graduate | |
| _____ | 20) Four years full-time post-graduate | |
| _____ | 21) Five years full-time post-graduate | |
| _____ | 22) Six years full-time post-graduate | |
| _____ | 23) Seven years full-time post-graduate | |
| _____ | 24) Eight years full-time post-graduate | |
| _____ | 25) Nine years full-time post-graduate | |
| _____ | 26) Ten years or more full-time post-graduate | |

17. What is the highest degree that family members have?

- | Primary
Caretaker | Other Adult
Family Member | |
|----------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| _____ | _____ | 0) No degree |
| _____ | _____ | 1) Graduate Equivalent Degree (GED) |
| _____ | _____ | 2) High School Diploma |
| _____ | _____ | 3) Trade School Certificate |
| _____ | _____ | 4) Associate Degree |
| _____ | _____ | 5) Bachelors Degree |
| _____ | _____ | 6) Masters Degree |
| _____ | _____ | 7) Doctoral Degree |

LEGAL:

18. Have you ever been ARRESTED? Yes / No How many times? _____

List incidents (from most recent); include charges, date, status (conviction, probation), and whether alcohol or other drugs were involved (if more than four, list on a separate piece of paper):

<u>Charge</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Current Status</u>	<u>Alcohol or Drugs involved?</u>
A.			Yes / No
B.			Yes / No
C.			Yes / No
D.			Yes / No

19. Do you have a Parole Officer/Case Worker/Case manager? Yes / No Which? _____

20. Have you ever been involved in a GANG? Yes / No
 Are you currently involved in a GANG? Yes / No
 Have you ever been ranked in? Yes / No
 Have you ever been ranked out? Yes / No
 Which gang were you, or are you, a member of? _____
 How often were you, or are you, involved in fights?

MENTAL HEALTH TREATMENT:

21. Have you ever been hospitalized, INPATIENT, for SUBSTANCE abuse treatment?
 Yes / No
 Describe: How many times? _____
 Where, when, duration of stay:

22. Have you ever been hospitalized, INPATIENT, for EMOTIONAL difficulties?
 Yes / No
 Describe: How many times? _____
 Where, when, duration of stay:

23. Have you ever received OUTPATIENT treatment for ALCOHOL/DRUG issues?
 Yes / No

Describe where, when, duration of treatment:

24. Have you ever received OUTPATIENT treatment for other EMOTIONAL problems?

Yes / No

Describe where, when, duration of treatment:

ASSESSMENT OF DANGER:

25. Have you ever tried to harm yourself, commit SUICIDE, or placed yourself in dangerous or life-threatening situations?

Yes / No

If yes, how many times? _____

A) Please describe when, what happened, reasons:

Were you hospitalized (or taken to the hospital)? Yes / No

- B) Have you had thoughts of harming yourself recently (in the last few weeks)? Yes / No
Do you have a plan? Y / N Describe:

Do you have access to what you need to do that? Y / N Describe:

What are your reasons for wanting to die?

What stops you from killing yourself?

26. HOMICIDAL IDEATION: Is there anyone you seriously want to harm? Yes / No
Do you have a plan? Y / N Describe:

Do you have access to what you need to do that? Y / N Describe:

Who is this person?

Do you know how to find this person? Y / N Describe (address/phone):

What stops you from harming this person?

27. Has anyone ever touched you SEXUALLY in a way that made you feel uncomfortable OR that hurt you OR that was against your will? Yes / No

28. Has anyone ever hurt you PHYSICALLY (enough to leave marks or bruises or burns)? Yes / No
Describe the circumstances (when/dates, what, who, duration of abuse):

29. During the past 15 days how many days have you used the following:
Number of Days

a. Any alcohol	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
b1. Alcohol to intoxication (5+ drinks in one sitting)	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
b2. Alcohol to intoxication (4 or fewer drinks and felt high)	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
c. Illegal drugs	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

30. During the past 15 days, how many days have you used any of the following:
Number of Days

a. Cocaine/Crack	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
------------------	----------------------	----------------------

b. Marijuana/Hashish (Pot, Joints, Blunts, Chronic, Weed, Mary Jane)	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
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c. Heroin (Smack, H, Junk, Skag), or other opiates:	
1. Heroin (Smack, H, Junk, Skag)	<input type="text"/>
2. Morphine	<input type="text"/>
3. Diluadid	<input type="text"/>
4. Demerol	<input type="text"/>
5. Percocet	<input type="text"/>
6. Darvon	<input type="text"/>
7. Codeine	<input type="text"/>
8. Tylenol 2, 3, 4	<input type="text"/>

d. Non-prescription methadone	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
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e. Hallucinogens/psychedelics, PCP (Angel Dust, Ozone, Wack, Rocket Fuel), MDMA (Ecstasy, XTC, X, Adam), LSD (Acid Boomers, Yellow Sunshine), Mushrooms or Mescaline	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
--	----------------------	----------------------

f. Methamphetamine or other amphetamines (Meth, Uppers, Speed, Ice, Chalk, Crystal, Glass, Fire, Crank)	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
---	----------------------	----------------------

g. 1. Benzodiazepines: Diazepam (Valium); Alpeazolam (Xanax); Triazolam (Halcion); and Estazolam (Prosom and Rohypnol-also Known as Roofies, Roche, and Cope)	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
2. Barbiturates: Mephobarbital (Mebacut); and pentobarbital sodium		

- (Nembutal) ☐ ☐
3. Non-prescription GHB (known as Grievous Bodily Harm; Liquid Ecstasy; and Georgia Home Boy) ☐ ☐
4. Ketamine (known as Special K, or Vitamin K) ☐ ☐
5. Other tranquilizers, downers, sedatives or hypnotics ☐ ☐

h. Inhalants (poppers, snappers, rush, whippets) ☐ ☐

i. Other Illegal Drugs (specify) ☐ ☐

31. In the past 15 days have you injected drugs? ☐ Yes ☐ No

EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES:

32. Have you ever been told that you had a learning problem, such as reading, math, language, or attention problems? Yes / No

33. Have you ever had an individualized education program (IEP) for a learning problem? Yes / No

34. Were you ever in a special education classroom? Yes / No

35. Is it hard for you to sound out words or understand the words you have read? Yes / No

Self Efficacy Scale

This questionnaire is a series of statements about your personal attitudes and traits. Each statement represents a commonly held belief. Read each statement and decide to what extent it describes you. There are no right or wrong answers. You will probably agree with some of the statements and disagree with others. Please indicate your own personal feelings about each statement below by marking the letter that best describes your attitude or feeling. Please be very trustful and describe yourself as your really are, not as you like to be.

- 1 = Disagree strongly
- 2 = Disagree moderately
- 3 = Neither agree nor disagree
- 4 = Agree moderately
- 5 = Agree strongly

- ___ 1. When I make plans, I am certain I can make them work.
- ___ 2. One of my problems is that I cannot get down to work when I should.
- ___ 3. If I can't do a job the first time, I keep trying until I can.
- ___ 4. When I set important goals for myself, I rarely achieve them.
- ___ 5. I give up on things before completing them.
- ___ 6. I avoid facing difficulties.
- ___ 7. If something looks too complicated, I will not even bother to try it.
- ___ 8. When I have something unpleasant to do, I stick to it until I finish it.
- ___ 9. When I decide to do something, I go right to work on it.
- ___ 10. When trying to learn something new, I soon give up if I am not initially successful.
- ___ 11. When unexpected problems occur, I don't handle them well.
- ___ 12. I avoid trying to learn new things when they look too difficult for me.
- ___ 13. Failure just makes me try harder.
- ___ 14. I feel insecure about my ability to do things.
- ___ 15. I am a self-reliant person.
- ___ 16. I give up easily.
- ___ 17. I do not seem capable of dealing with most problems that come up in life.
- ___ 18. It is difficult for me to make new friends.
- ___ 19. If I see someone I would like to meet, I go to that person instead of waiting for him or her to come to me.
- ___ 20. If I meet someone interesting who is very hard to make friends with, I'll soon stop trying to make friends with that person.
- ___ 21. When I'm trying to become friends with someone who seems uninterested at first, I don't give up very easily.
- ___ 22. I do not handle myself well in social gatherings.
- ___ 23. I have acquired my friends through my personal abilities at making friends.

National Youth Survey Delinquency Scale

Instructions: On the following pages are a list of behaviors. You will ask the interviewee about each one of them. If the interviewee admits to any of the behaviors, follow up with the appropriate probes.

Read the following sentence: I would like to ask you some confidential questions about your past behavior. How many times in the past 2 months have you:		Number of Times	If 10 or more times, also ask: How often?						If 1 or more , ask how old were you when you first did this?
			Once a month	Once every 2-3 weeks	Once a week	2-3 times a week	Once a day	2-3 times a day	
1.	Stolen (or tried to steal) a motor vehicle, such as a car or motorcycle								
2.	Stolen (or tried to steal) something worth more than \$50								
3.	Knowingly bought, sold, or held stolen goods (or tried to do any of these things)								
4.	Carried a hidden weapon other than a plain pocket knife								
5.	Stolen (or tried to steal) things worth \$5 or less								
6.	Attacked someone with the idea of seriously hurting or killing him or her								

Read the following sentence: I would like to ask you some confidential questions about your past behavior. How many times in the past 2 months have you:		Number of Times	If 10 or more times, also ask: How often?						If 1 or more , ask how old were you when you first did this?
			Once a month	Once every 2-3 weeks	Once a week	2-3 times a week	Once a day	2-3 times a day	
7.	Been paid for having sexual relations with someone								
8.	Been involved in gang fights								
9.	Sold marijuana or hashish ("pot", "grass", "hash")								
10.	Hit (or threatened to hit) a teacher or other adult at school								
11.	Hit (or threatened to hit) one of your parents								
12.	Hit (or threatened to hit) other students								
13.	Been loud, rowdy, or unruly in a public place (disorderly conduct)								
14.	Sold cocaine or crack								
15.	Sold other hard drugs such as heroin or LSD								
16.	Taken a vehicle for a ride (driven) without the owner's permission								

Read the following sentence: I would like to ask you some confidential questions about your past behavior. How many times in the past 2 months have you:		Number of Times	If 10 or more times, also ask: How often?						If 1 or more , ask how old were you when you first did this?
			Once a month	Once every 2-3 weeks	Once a week	2-3 times a week	Once a day	2-3 times a day	
17.	Had (or tried to have) sexual relations with someone against their will								
18.	Used force (strong-arm methods) to get money or things from other students								
19.	Used force (strong-arm methods) to get money or things from a teacher or other adult at school								
20.	Used force (strong-arm methods) to get money or things from other people (not students or teachers)								
21.	Stolen (or tried to steal) things worth between \$5 and \$50								
22.	Broken into a building or vehicle (or tried to break in) to steal something or just to look around								
23.	Begged for money or things from strangers								

APPENDIX B

CODEBOOK

A sample page from the codebook after the second round of coding

1.00	Psychological abuse
1.01	Humiliation
1.02	Scapegoating
1.03	Family alienation
1.04	Terrorizing
1.05	Abuse by siblings
1.06	Abuse by third parties
2.00	Physical Abuse
2.01	Hitting
2.02	Choking
2.03	Punching
2.04	Intensity of abuse
3.00	Sexual Abuse
3.01	Perpetrators
3.02	Age at abuse
3.03	Disclosure of abuse
3.04	Family's reaction
3.05	Consequences of abuse

APPENDIX C
PARTICIPANT'S POEMS

WHO WILL CRY

Who will cry.....

For a girl who has no mother no father, no place, she can call home.....

Who will cry

For a girl who feels like she is lost and alone

Who will cry

For a girl who has been broken from people throwing sticks and stones.....

Who will cry

For a girl who has been taking advantage of all her life.....

Who will cry

For a girl who's always wanted to lay down and die.....

Who will cry

For a girl who has been a victim since she was 4 years old.....

Who will cry

For a girl who felt as if her family gave up on her when she was only 15 years old.....

Who will cry

For a girl who's been searching for someone to love her but always seem to find hurt and pain

Who will cry

For a girl who turns to her friends for comfort and support but all they do is turn their backs and laugh.....

Who will cry.....

I will

I cried for her for 15 years.....

Written by: Sandy (real name was changed)

INNOCENT VICTIMS

We can't live in this world.....

All this black on black crime.....

We can't turn on the TV and watch the news without someone taking someone's life.....

When will it end.....

When will we be free.....

People are tired of looking over their shoulders and wondering who will it be

An innocent victim.....

Who never really seen life.....

Never saw it coming

Or the person who ended their life.....

So before you pick up a gun

And take someone's life.....

Please think of this advice and just think twice because you will be the one behind bars ..

On trial facing life.....

Written by: Sandy (real name was changed)