

Closing the Gap of the Educational Needs of Homeless Youth

By
Tiffany G. Edwards

Edited by
Dr. Ismail Sahin
Dr. Mack Shelley



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Table of Contents

CHAPTER 1: THE CONTEXT OF EDUCATIONAL NEEDS OF HOMELESS YOUTH....	1
Background Information.....	2
Statement of the Problem	3
Purpose of the Study.....	6
Research Questions.....	6
Significance of the Study.....	7
Field of Education	7
Homeless Studies	7
Conceptual Framework.....	7
Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs.....	8
Homelessness and Trauma Theory	9
Research Design and Methodology.....	9
Case Study Design	10
Methods of Data Collection.....	10
Site and Participant Selection.....	11
Data Analysis	12
Limitations.....	12
Delimitations	13
Criteria of Trustworthiness.....	14
Credibility.....	14
Transferability	15
Dependability	15
Definition of Terms	16
Organization of the Study.....	18

CHAPTER 2: EDUCATING HOMELESS CHILDREN: THE LITERATURE	19
A History of Homelessness in the United States	19
Homelessness in the Colonial Period through the Civil War (1725–1864)	20
Homelessness in the Post–Civil War Period (1864–1900)	21
Homelessness in the Progressive Era (1900–1929)	23
Homelessness in the Depression Era and World War II (1929–1945)	24
Homelessness in the Postwar Era (1945–1980)	25
The Modern Homeless Era Part I (1980–2007)	27
The Modern Homeless Era Part II (2007–present)	28
Conceptual Framework.....	29
Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs.....	29
Homelessness and Trauma Theory	32
Impact of Homelessness on Children and Youth	35
Living Conditions Create Increased Risk	36
States of Risk.....	37
Shelter Culture.....	42
Physical, Emotional, Social, and Educational Well-Being of Homeless Children and Youth	44
Educational Needs of Homeless Students	53
Teacher Perceptions	57
Education Laws for Homeless Children.....	59
Homelessness in California and Los Angeles	69
State of Emergency	71
Schools for the Homeless.....	73
Mobile Schools.....	74
The Griffon Learning Center.....	77
Chapter Summary	77

CHAPTER 3: MEASURING THE NEED FOR EDUCATING HOMELESS YOUTH.....	79
Research Questions.....	79
Research Design	80
Qualitative Methodology.....	80
Research Setting	82
Participants and Sampling Criteria.....	82
Access and Entry	83
Methods of Data Collection.....	83
Observations.....	84
Interviews	84
Documents and Media.....	87
Methods of Data Analysis	88
Limitations.....	90
Delimitations	91
Criteria of Trustworthiness	91
Credibility.....	91
Transferability	94
Dependability	95
Positionality and Reflexivity	95
Positionality.....	95
Reflexivity.....	96
Chapter Summary	97
CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH FINDINGS FOR THE EDUCATION OF HOMELESS YOUTH	
.....	99
Restatement of the Purpose of the Study.....	99
Research Questions.....	100
The Context for this Study.....	100

Setting.....	101
Summary of Key Findings.....	104
The Research Process	105
Participants	107
Themes Emerging in the Data	124
Theme 1: Hopelessness and Oppression: “Hopelessness and oppression are palpable.”	125
Theme 2: Culture of Invisibility and Despair: “Nobody cares about me, about us.”.....	139
Theme 3: Safety: “It’s a really dangerous place.”.....	142
Theme 4: Emerging Hope: “I have hope because of the people here.”	147
Theme 5: Political Climate for Change: “Make ending homelessness and poverty in America a priority.”.....	152
Chapter Summary	158
CHAPTER 5: IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATING HOMELESS YOUTHS	159
Summary of the Study	159
Discussion of the Findings	161
Research Question One: Perceptions of the Staff and Volunteers	161
Research Question Two: Perceptions of the Youth	173
Relationships and Social Support Services	176
A Socio-Psychological Lens.....	181
Homelessness and Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs.....	181
Homelessness and Trauma Theory.....	183
Implications and Recommendations of the Study	184
For the Griffon Learning Center.....	185
For the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD)	187
For Politicians.....	190
For the Participants	191
Future Research	192

My Final Reflection.....	193
Conclusion.....	194
Chapter Summary	195
REFERENCES	197

CHAPTER 1: THE CONTEXT OF EDUCATIONAL NEEDS OF HOMELESS YOUTH

Colleen's mother was only 16 when Colleen was born, and her father was in his mid-thirties. Colleen's parents were forced to marry literally 12 hours before Colleen was born. Their marriage did not last long. By the time Colleen was three, her mother had to raise Colleen on her own. Colleen's mother had no job and no education. They ended up living in their car and driving across the country to various relatives. It took more than a year to reach the East Coast from California, because their progress was based upon having the financial means for food and gas to get there. When they arrived in Virginia, they stayed with Colleen's great aunt and uncle. Eventually Colleen's mother left her behind with them. Within a year, Colleen's great uncle died, and her great aunt could not keep Colleen due to financial constraints and other responsibilities. That is when Colleen ended up in the foster care system. She spent the next several years in and out of homes, institutions, and various temporary families. Toward the end of elementary school, Colleen's maternal grandparents took her into their care. Her life was relatively stable until graduate school.

Again, Colleen had to face homelessness. In her first year as a graduate student, she literally had to live on her college campus. She would sleep on the lawn, in chairs, and even in the basement of a building on campus. She learned how to sneak into the dormitories to take a shower and get into the dining halls. These experiences reinforced many of her early childhood experiences. After nine months of surviving as a homeless graduate student, she was successful at gaining housing and finding greater stability in her life circumstances; however, Colleen was forever changed because of her experiences of being homeless to various degrees as a child and again as a young adult. The reasons why she behaves and reacts to certain situations go directly back to her experiences of being homeless, especially as a child. I am Colleen, and unfortunately my story is one of millions who experience homelessness as a child and young adult.

Background Information

The early part of the 21st century has seen extensive and prolonged economic upheaval. The Great Recession was the largest economic downturn since the Great Depression of the 1930s. Although the effects of the Great Recession have been felt throughout the world for nearly a decade, the Great Recession is said to have ended in the Summer of 2009 in the United States. The federal government recognized the sustained effects and slow economic growth of the Great Recession and, at the time of this study, had only started to raise interest rates from their historic lows. During the Great Recession, the United States saw a nationwide 10% unemployment rate (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014). However, that number includes only individuals who qualified for unemployment benefits and not those who were underemployed or who were still seeking work but whose unemployment benefits had run out (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014). It is believed that the real unemployment rate in the months following the Great Recession exceeded 30% of able-bodied adults in the United States (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014). In certain areas of the country and within specific populations, the unemployment number is significantly higher (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014). According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, in 2014 it took the typical worker who was seeking full-time employment an average of 36 weeks to find full-time employment. If they were seeking part-time employment, it took the typical worker an average of 33.7 weeks. In the years following the Great Recession, opportunities for employment improved, and the unemployment rate continued to decline; however, wages did not match the increased cost of living and many people have not been able to recover since the Great Recession.

With the economic decline across the globe and a significant increase in poverty, the homeless population has burgeoned. In the United States, the largest increase in the homeless population is among children (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2009; U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2016). According to the United States Census Bureau, there were over 1.35 million homeless children in 2000 and over 1.75 million in 2010. Many organizations believe that this number is severely underestimated due to several factors including, but not limited to, under self-reporting, legal status, not all areas that contain homeless populations being analyzed, and changes in definitions of homelessness (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2009; U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2016). In 2008, the National Coalition for the Homeless reported numbers as high as 2.3

million children, and the National Center for Family Homelessness stated that the number of homeless children in the United States exceeded 2.5 million in 2014. There is not an exact count of homeless children and youth in the United States because no government or philanthropic entity has invested in national research. The most accurate data that exist regarding the number of homeless youth are of school-aged children who attend public school and are identified as being homeless. This does not give a complete picture of homelessness among children. Given the conditions surrounding homelessness, and the complex nature of collecting data, it is difficult to get an exact count; nevertheless, homelessness among children and youth is a significant problem in the United States. Of those who self-reported being homeless, the number of homeless children increased by 34% from January 2007 to December 2010, with the majority of those children living in the largest cities in the United States (Bowman, Dukes, & Moore, 2012). Half of all homeless children are under the age of five and make up at least 40% of the homeless population living in shelters (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2009). The education and wellbeing of these children should be a paramount responsibility of American society. The way in which our children are treated is a direct reflection of the conscience of society (Freire, 2011).

Statement of the Problem

School is a place where children and youth can feel at home. They see the same faces, sit in the same seat, and can put their attention to the pursuits that ease their daily troubles outside of school. In school, students gain both academic and social knowledge, as well as the skills necessary to avoid poverty and homelessness as adults (National Center for Homeless Education, 2017). Education is essential to preventing homelessness for today's youth, and they need educational opportunities that are equivalent to their housed peers. As stated previously, there are over two million homeless children in the United States. A great majority of these children can be found in the nation's largest cities, such as Los Angeles (Smith & Grad, 2017). Despite efforts such as additional legislation and updates to the laws to protect and serve homeless people, ballot measures and tax increases to provide more housing and services for the homeless, the number continues to increase as is evidenced in the Greater Los Angeles Homeless Count (Smith & Grad, 2017). The Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority conducted a study in May 2015 and found that the number of homeless people in the county had increased since the 2013 homeless count; of significant note was the 12% increase in the City of Los Angeles. The City of Los Angeles is home to 62% of the

homeless in the county (The Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority, 2015). About 70% of the people included in the 2015 homeless count were unsheltered, meaning that they were sleeping on the streets or in cars (The Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority, 2015). The number of children counted in the study, depending upon the area of Los Angeles County, averaged 25% (The Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority, May 2015). These figures alarmed officials to the point that the Los Angeles City Council made a pledge to call a state of emergency on homelessness in the Summer of 2015. Despite the media attention around the world of the bold move to make such a pledge, Mayor Garcetti did not follow through with the council's recommendation and make the state of emergency official. Even more recently, in the 2017 Greater Los Angeles Homeless Count, there was a 23% increase from 2016 in the number of homeless people in Los Angeles County, with 57,794 people considered homeless on any given night (The Los Angeles Service Authority, 2017). The largest concentrations of homeless are within the City of Los Angeles, with 34,189 people living in a state of homelessness (The Los Angeles Service Authority, 2017). Even more alarming is the rapid increase in the number of homeless minors, both accompanied and unaccompanied. There was a 41% increase in homeless minors in Los Angeles County between the homeless count of 2016 and 2017 (The Los Angeles Service Authority, 2017). It is estimated that at least 3% of all public school students are homeless in the United States; this is double the student homeless population prior to the great recession of 2008 (Layton & Brown, 2015; U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

Any person who has experienced homelessness is deeply affected; however, the impact upon children is significant. Homelessness has a profound and accumulative negative effect on the socio-emotional, intellectual, and physical development of children; additionally, homelessness has long-term and potentially irreversible consequences (Hart-Shegos & Associates, 1999; Jahiel, 1992a; Solarz, 1992). The younger a child is when he/she experiences homelessness, the greater the impact upon cognitive development, which leads to a decreased school readiness (Institute for Children, Poverty, & Homelessness, 2013). President Regan and the First Lady were extremely concerned about the growing population of homeless children in America. They encouraged Congress to write legislation to provide services for homeless children and families, which were to include provisions for education. The educational provisions became part of the McKinney-Vento Act of 1987. Later, this legislation became part of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 and the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015.

According to the McKinney-Vento Act of 1987, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, and the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015, homeless children and youth include any minor who does not have a consistent and adequate nighttime residence (United States Department of Education, 2016). The law gets even more specific as to who may be included (See definition of homelessness below). One of the protected rights under the McKinney-Vento Act is for children to stay at their school of origin; however, there are consequences to such a decision. Shelters and foster care are often outside of the district, causing transportation issues, which lead to high absenteeism, tardiness, exhaustion, and other costs for the child. One of the main purposes of the McKinney-Vento Act's was to protect the educational rights of homeless children at school; however, homeless children need greater access to resources beyond school (Murphy & Tobin, 2011). Traditional resources are overburdened and are especially unequipped to cope with the growth in the number of homeless children (Santos & Ingrassia, 2002; United States Conference of Mayors, 2010). The public school system in Los Angeles continues to face budget crises; additionally, regardless of the financial constraints and lack of needed resources, many schools and individual administrators do not have an awareness of the mandated services they are to provide.

More than 23% of the nation's 1.36 million registered homeless students reside in California, where more than 310,000 homeless students attended public schools in the 2013–2014 school year (Hyatt, Walzer, & Julianelle, 2014; Layton & Brown, 2015). This makes California the homeless student capital of the United States. Nearly one in 20 students in the state of California was homeless in the 2013–2014 school year. Even though California has more than a fifth of the nation's homeless students, it receives only about \$5 million of the \$65 million federal McKinney-Vento funds available each year (Hyatt et al., 2014; Layton & Brown, 2015). That equates to about \$16.13 per registered homeless student in the State of California meant to be used for additional resources and services. The Los Angeles Unified School District has the most homeless students in the state, with 14,323 students identified as homeless in the 2012–2013 school year (Hyatt et al., 2014). That accounts for 3.6% of the students in the district (Hyatt et al., 2014).

How can educators, legislators, and society at large close the gap of and meet the educational needs of homeless students? The Griffon Learning Center, a mobile school and youth learning center for homeless children, is one of the organizations that has risen up in recent years to meet the challenges and is an organization that deserves further research.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is multifaceted. This study sought to examine the experiences of homeless children who are in the public education system in Los Angeles. It also investigated the extent to which the McKinney-Vento Act, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) accomplished their intended purpose for homeless children through the public education system in Los Angeles. Further, this study examined how a private agency, The Griffon Learning Center, a mobile school and youth learning center, is closing the gap and providing the additional educational services for homeless children that are not being met by their local public school. Although the intent of this study and its findings will not end the cycle of homelessness, it sought to provide some insight into the problem, hoping to lead to some relief for homeless children and their families.

Research Questions

As the United States continues to face an increase in the homeless population, especially in the number of homeless youth, it behooves educational researchers to examine how to meet the unique educational needs of homeless children better. This qualitative case study sought to expand upon the current knowledge and focus on one case of a mobile school and youth learning center in Los Angeles County. The researcher is interested in understanding how the staff and volunteers at the mobile school and youth learning center interpret their experiences with homeless youth; how they believe they are meeting the educational needs of the homeless children with whom they interact; and what meaning they attribute to their experiences. To this end, this study sought to answer the following questions:

1. According to the perceptions of the staff and volunteers, how does the mobile school and youth learning center organization meet the educational and social needs of the homeless children and their families whom they serve?
2. According to the perceptions of the children whom they serve, how does the mobile school and youth learning center organization meet their educational and social needs?

These questions were answered through conducting a qualitative case study on a mobile school and youth learning center in Los Angeles County. The case study included several observations at various times and different days of the week and multiple interviews of the staff members and volunteers of the mobile school and youth learning center, as well as with the children who utilized the site. Informal interactions were noted in the researcher's

observation journal. This study was further informed by examining the current knowledge and literature of homeless youth in the United States as well as studying the federal McKinney-Vento, the No Child Left Behind, and the Every Student Succeeds Acts. Documents from the case study site were also examined to inform the study.

Significance of the Study

Field of Education

It is salient to distinguish homeless children from other “at-risk” populations. The needs of homeless youth not only include the traditional needs of at-risk children but also encompass many needs beyond the scope of the definition of at-risk youth. With the continued increase in the homeless student population, this research hopefully shed light on the unique needs and challenges that homeless children face. With a greater understanding of the challenges that homeless students face, new areas of curriculum and resources could be developed and implemented. This research may provide information necessary for teacher and administrative training about this unique population.

Homeless Studies

Homeless studies are an emerging area within educational research. This study suggests educational resources that could be developed to address directly a changing homeless population outside of the public school system. It also clarifies that homeless youth are not a homogenous group and educational supports need to be designed recognizing the diversity of their needs. This study addresses issues of poverty, empowerment, and social connections and attempts to clear up misperceptions of who is homeless and the causes of homelessness.

Conceptual Framework

Two theories from social psychology were utilized to understand better the responses and information collected with regard to the perceptions of the needs of homeless youth in this case study: Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs (1970) and Goodman, Saxe, and Harvey’s Trauma Theory (1991).

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Maslow's (1970) Hierarchy of Needs, as discussed in *Motivation and Personality* (1954), became the basis for many other psychological developmental and sociological theories. In its most basic form, the theory of the Hierarchy of Needs states that lower biological needs must be met before higher order and psychological needs can be considered by the individual. Maslow theorized that there are five primary levels of human motivation and development. The first level, physiological needs, includes those things that are necessary for human survival; they are biological in nature: food, water, air, sleep, shelter, clothing, and so forth. With these needs met, an individual can move on to the next level, which is safety.

There are many forms of safety. The first is personal security or physical safety. Maslow (1970) talked about this in terms of wars and natural disasters, but for the purposes of this study a more fundamental understanding was used: physical shelter, family unity, family violence, child abuse, and assault. The next level of safety is financial security or economic safety. Given the population that the researcher studied, this aspect of safety is also salient. Homeless people often have experienced an economic crisis spurred, for example, by a lack of job opportunities or job security, a grievance procedure gone wrong, or not having substantial bank accounts or insurance policies to protect themselves from an unforeseen emergency or disability. This second level of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs also includes the idea of health and well-being as well as safety against accidents or illness and their negative impacts. The final level of needs includes love and belonging, self-esteem, and self-actualization. The third level, love and belonging, is an especially powerful need for children and youth, and it can override the other needs (Maslow, 1970). Although homeless parents may try to provide a sense of love and belonging for their children, the lack of housing and the absence of extended family support can equate to a loss of traditions or a sense of being rooted in culture or a group (Kozol, 1988). In the fourth level, people attempt to gain self-esteem and hold the esteem of others; however, this is difficult in situations of homelessness. In general, parents, no matter their socio-economic-status, want to meet the needs of their children. When this is impossible, the loss of self-esteem and the accompanying stress result in perceptions of failure and helplessness (Kozol, 1988). With the conditions surrounding homelessness it is no wonder that few, if any, homeless people reach Maslow's highest level, self-actualization.

Homelessness and Trauma Theory

Just the fact that someone is homeless is, in and of itself, a major risk factor for emotional and/or psychological trauma (Goodman et al., 1991). In examining how homelessness impacts children, it is useful to look through a psychological lens and use the construct of psychological trauma. Psychological trauma is the way in which a person responds to an uncontrollable life event in which he/she has extraordinarily overwhelming emotional reactions (Goodman et al., 1991). It is constructive to use trauma theory to examine and understand homelessness for three major reasons. The first is that when people become homeless, they not only lose their home, a significant factor in and of itself, they also lose their connections—neighbors, friends, routines, social roles, and possibly even their family members and job. These losses may produce symptoms of psychological trauma (Goodman et al., 1991). The second is that those who did not initially suffer psychological trauma from becoming homeless may develop psychological trauma as a result of the conditions of homelessness (Goodman et al., 1991); these include such things as living in shelters (see Chapter 2 Shelter Culture), instability, safety concerns, and a loss of control to name a few (see Chapter 2 Physical, Emotional, Social, and Educational Well-being of Homeless Children and Youth) (Goodman et al., 1991). Third, if an individual has not experienced psychological trauma as a direct result of losing one’s home or the conditions of homelessness, then the experiences of homelessness may make those with previous “histories of victimization” more susceptible to further psychological trauma responses (Goodman et al., 1991). For those in this third group, homelessness may prevent the individual from recovering from his/her original trauma. The impact of homelessness on children must be examined before one can begin to determine how to meet the social and educational needs of homeless students in Los Angeles. By using Maslow’s theory of the Hierarchy of Needs (1970) and Goodman et al.’s Trauma Theory (1991) to create the conceptual framework for this study, the researcher investigated the experiences of homeless children and youth.

Research Design and Methodology

This case study is a qualitative analysis of a mobile school and youth learning center located in in Downtown Los Angeles. It is primarily a descriptive case study, in which the researcher tried to understand the behaviors and experiences of the participants from their own perspective and frame of reference (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Utilizing a qualitative research

methodology allows the researcher to study participants firsthand and gain reliable results based upon the experiences of the participants and the opportunity to collaborate with the participants (Maxwell, 1996). Given the sensitivity of the population of this study and the uniqueness of the topic, a case study is the most appropriate method to capture the experiences of the homeless children and youth who utilize the mobile school and youth learning center as well as the experiences of those who serve them.

Case Study Design

This study employed a qualitative case study design. One type of case study examines in detail one setting (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). A case study is a single unit of study that is bound and defined to uncover how significant factors interact with one another (Merriam, 1998). This particular study examined a mobile school and youth learning center organization located in Downtown Los Angeles. This case study provided insights that could be used to design further research to advance the knowledge base of homeless studies and the field of education. As stated above, a case study is the most appropriate method to capture the experiences of the homeless children and youth who utilize the mobile school and youth learning center as well as the experiences of those who serve them. In examining the literature, there was limited information on mobile schools in the context in which this study utilized the term. Because substantial research on this population within the context of a mobile school and youth learning center does not exist, the case study design is useful in connecting the experiences of these homeless students to other marginalized student populations. This case study serves to connect mobile schools and youth learning centers to the broader world of educating homeless students. It employs the voices of homeless students and the staff and volunteers at a mobile school and youth learning center. It describes how this organization came about, the current challenges, the perceived social and educational needs of homeless students, and what the mobile school and youth learning center was doing to meet these needs.

Methods of Data Collection

In this qualitative case study, the data are mediated through the researcher who is the facilitator collecting and analyzing the data (Merriam, 1998). Since the researcher is interacting with the participants of the study directly when using qualitative methodologies,

he or she can respond to the data in real time and change with the various circumstances as the need arises. In this qualitative case study design, the following methods of data collection were utilized: interviews, ethnographic field notes, which include direct observations and informal interactions, and analysis of documents and policies. To inform the case study, interviews were conducted with staff members and volunteers at a mobile school and youth learning center. The researcher became a participant observer providing tutoring or other volunteer services at the site. Children who utilize the mobile school and youth learning center were also asked to participate in brief interviews. The researcher made direct observations at the site. The researcher's personal experiences and observations were documented in a journal in real time. A variety of available public documents and media related to the mobile school was also analyzed. Other artifacts were considered as they became available, such as notices, curriculum, computer programs, and orientation materials. Data collection occurred during the Fall of 2016. Data collection also ensued during different times of the day. The site had extended hours into the evening to serve better the homeless students who were able to attend the local public school but needed additional one-on-one tutoring or other services and resources not provided by the public school. They also offered programs and services for the parents and/or guardians of homeless children and youth in the evening to accommodate the working homeless.

Site and Participant Selection

To protect the identity of the homeless children, volunteers, and staff members of the study, the research site is referred to as the Griffon Learning Center throughout the study. This organization was a nonprofit mobile school established in the early 1990s. At the time of the study, the organization supported more than 50 locations throughout Southern California and was in the process of expanding its partnerships with local school districts. Some of the locations of the Griffon Learning Center were mobile sites. These mobile sites drove into neighborhoods of high need and provided tutoring and other services to homeless youth. Some locations were temporary sites found inside of libraries, malls, community centers, schools, and other public gathering places. There were only a few permanent locations, where the population of homeless youth was proportionally higher than in other areas, such as in Downtown Los Angeles. According to internal records, the Griffon Learning Center served over 3,100 homeless students in 2016 and over 3,500 homeless students in 2017. The people of the organization believe that they offer homeless students a place of stability and support

to help students achieve academic success during one of the most tumultuous times in a child's life. In addition to one-on-one tutoring, the Griffon Learning Center provides homeless students with school supplies, assistance with gaining access to public school and gathering records, and financial assistance and scholarships. The parents of the children who utilize the services of the Griffon Learning Center also have access to informational sessions and support services. The mission of the Griffon Learning Center is to reduce the gaps in a child's education while he/she is homeless and to provide a support system for the child. Although the organization serves kindergarten through 12th grade, the average age of the children they serve is eight years old. This case study employed convenience and purposive sampling to ensure that staff and volunteers who had the most knowledge about the Griffon Learning Center were part of the sample. Convenience sampling was used to access the perspectives of the children and youth who utilized the services of the Griffon Learning Center. Participation in the study was voluntary. Staff and volunteers of the Griffon Learning Center received an open invitation to play a part in the study. They were asked if they were willing to participate in interviews regarding their perceptions of the educational and social needs of the homeless students the Griffon Learning Center serves, and what the staff and volunteers believe they and the organization as a whole is doing to meet homeless students' needs. Parents and/or guardian of the homeless students were asked if they were willing to allow their children to participate in brief interviews.

Data Analysis

After collecting data from interviews, inductive analysis was used to extract the themes present in the data (Hatch, 2002). Inductive analysis is a process that examines specific elements and identifies patterns and connections so that general statements can be made about the phenomena being investigated (Hatch, 2002). With this type of analysis, the theories and concepts come directly from the context of the study (Hatch, 2002). The data were analyzed together and coded by hand to identify themes and patterns, allowing for a bounded case study (Merriam, 1998).

Limitations

One of the greatest limitations of this study is the transient characteristic of homeless people. The mobile school and youth learning center, by its very nature, works with different children

nearly every day. Some children do utilize the services for longer periods of time. The constantly changing living situation of a homeless child means that the staff and volunteers at the mobile school and youth learning center may only have a child in their care for a single day. In addition, the mobile school and youth learning center may move locations depending upon the needs of the area. Given the short amount of time the staff and volunteers can work with a child, the long-term impacts such a resource has upon this population could not be measured. Also, due to the limited amount of time and uncertainty that the children faced, the staff and volunteers may have been emotionally impacted by the experience. Many of the findings may be characterized as anecdotal evidence from the perspective of staff members and volunteers of the mobile school and youth learning center. Additionally, the children who participated in the interviews may have limited exposure to the site.

Due to the sensitive nature of the population involved, brief interviews were conducted with some of the homeless children who participate in the services provided by the mobile school and youth learning center. Focus groups were not conducted with homeless children and/or their families. Informal interactions recorded in the researcher's journal include, but were not limited to, exchanges with those who used the Griffon Learning Center while the researcher was volunteering and/or observing in the academic counseling center or front desk.

Personal bias of the researcher may also be a limiting factor. The researcher experienced times of being homeless, both as a child and as a young adult, as defined by the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. The researcher's experiences also may have informed the study with regard to local knowledge and may have helped the researcher to be accepted by the community studied.

Delimitations

One criticism of this study could be the impact of generalizability. This study examined one mobile school and youth learning center in Downtown Los Angeles. Although the characteristics and needs of homeless children as described in Chapter 2 are similar, every individual's situation is unique and therefore the needs being met by the mobile school and youth learning center examined are unique to the individuals it encounters. The resources and access to resources also vary depending upon geography, which in turn can play a role in what is and is not needed by the population the mobile school and youth learning center seeks

to serve. This research also does not address the influence of gender—of the children, of the staff and volunteers working with the children at the mobile school, of the parent(s) and/or guardian(s) with whom the child is living, or of the researcher. Similarly, ethnicity is not included as a factor. The researcher does not deny the influence of these factors, but they were not in the focus of this study.

Criteria of Trustworthiness

To reduce the possibility of further research limitations, it is relevant to ensure that the study meets the criteria of trustworthiness. Qualitative studies are not designed to be experiments. The validity and reliability of a qualitative study are determined in different ways. Lincoln and Guba (1986) discussed specific criteria, including discovering the truth (internal validity), exploring the applicability of the study (external validity), finding the consistency (reliability or replicability), and ensuring its neutrality (objectivity). To deem a qualitative case study as trustworthy, the criteria employed by the study need to be examined.

Credibility

The internal validity of this qualitative case study is determined by its credibility. A research study should match reality to ensure its credibility (Merriam, 2009). In this study, the researcher was able to build credibility by studying an environment in which she was a community member and had experienced homelessness as a child and again as a young adult. It must be noted that the construction of reality is a multifaceted system in which the researcher interprets the reality of the participants through observations and interviews (Merriam, 2009). Although this may appear to be a challenge or even a flaw of research, it is actually a strength; the researcher is closer to the data as opposed to some detached instrument being used (Merriam, 2009).

The literature on qualitative research suggests criteria that increase the credibility of a study (Hatch, 2002; Lincoln & Guba, 1986; Merriam, 2009). The criteria include: prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation, peer debriefing, negative case analysis, and member checks (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). To improve the credibility of this study, interviews, observations, and document analysis were utilized. These processes allowed for a triangulation of the data and time needed to create a period of prolonged engagement with the

participants of the study. In addition, the researcher participated in member checks with the adult participants by providing them with copies of their interview transcripts and asking clarifying questions through email and in person. Finally, in the findings section of this study, data that contradict the general themes are discussed. By meeting these criteria, the credibility of this study was established.

Transferability

The external validity of a study refers to the relevance of the study to other situations. Lincoln and Guba (1986) described these criteria as transferability or generalizability. As Merriam (2009) suggested, to increase the possibility of generalizability in qualitative case studies, the researcher can provide rich and thick descriptions, describe the typicality of the case study, and use multiple sites to conduct the study. Various factors may affect the generalizability of this study. First, the study was of one mobile school and youth learning center organization; additionally, the study was conducted in only one of the organization's 12 regions. Second, transferability may be impacted because every school has personnel with varying levels of knowledge of the law regarding homeless students, and different amounts of funding provided for their support as well as diverse populations of homeless students. Finally, the adult participants themselves may represent different mindsets than those who work with homeless children and youth in different contexts as well as the mindsets of the homeless student participants who may have different perspectives being in Los Angeles as compared to another location. Although this case study explored the unique environment of the staff, volunteers, and students at one location of a mobile school and youth learning center organization, the literature suggests that many homeless children and youth in different parts of the country face similar challenges in regard to their educational and social needs. It is relevant to keep these issues in mind when considering the generalizability of the findings to other homeless students, school districts, and mobile school and youth learning centers.

Dependability

Reliability is predicated on the assumption that there is “a single reality and that studying it repeatedly will yield the same results” (Merriam, 1998, p. 205). Because the term reliability in the traditional sense does not apply to qualitative research, Lincoln and Guba (1986) used the word dependability, positing that researchers can use several criteria to ensure

dependability in their research. The first is the positionality of the researcher. The second is triangulation of the data of the study. The third is an audit trail (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). For researchers to audit their process, they must describe the steps and processes of their data collection, data analysis, and the decision making that goes into it (Merriam, 2009). The detailed description in Chapter 3 serves as an audit trail for a future replication of this study.

Definition of Terms

Throughout the study many key terms are used repeatedly. To inform the reader, these terms are defined below:

Doubled-up—refers to a residential situation in which multiple families are living in the same single-family dwelling; an adolescent without parental support living with other adolescents in an abandoned structure; and individuals living in a shelter (Low, Hallet, & Mo, 2011). However, a distinction needs to be made by those who choose to live doubled-up due to cultural reasons, domestic partnerships, and other situations unrelated to economic necessity. For the purposes of this study, the term doubled-up refers to those who do so out of necessity, not choice.

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)—the 2015 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), the federal education law. It builds upon key areas of educational progress to commit to equal access and opportunities for all students, and upholds the protections for disadvantaged and high-need students. It maintains the area of accountability called for in NCLB. ESSA requires that all students be held to high academic standards that prepare them to be successful in college and/or the work place. It ensures that salient information is provided to all stakeholders through annual assessments that show students' progress toward the expected high academic standards. It calls for increased access to preschool and allows for growth in local initiatives.

Homeless(ness)—As is discussed at length in Chapter 2, when the term is applied to children, it is ambiguous. Legally, children are either in the custody of their parents, guardians, or the state in which they reside (Russell, 1998). According to the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (Title X, Part C, of the No Child Left Behind Act), homelessness for children and youths:

A. means individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate night-time residence (within the meaning of section 103(a)(1)); and

B. includes-

i. children and youths who are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason; are living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to the lack of alternative adequate accommodations; are living in emergency or transitional shelters; are abandoned in hospitals; or are awaiting foster care placement;

ii. children and youths who have a primary night-time residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings (within the meaning of section 103(a)(2)(C));

iii. children and youths who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings;

iv. and migratory children (as such term is defined in section 1309 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965) who qualify as homeless for the purposes of this subtitle because the children are living in circumstances described in clauses (i) through (iii).

McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (MVA)—the federal mandate that frames how public schools identify and serve homeless students (Low et al., 2011).

Mobile School—a year-round educational service program specifically designed for homeless children. It has both fixed and nonfixed sites. The nonfixed sites are literally schools on wheels that drive up to a shelter to provide services for the homeless children in the area on a day-by-day basis. Many mobile schools provide educational services for all minors. Some mobile schools specialize in services specifically for younger children (kindergarten through middle school), while others focus on older children (high school). A few fixed sites were built by some organizations and are located near homeless shelters or in urban areas where many homeless people can be found. The fixed sites of the organization tend to service more long-term students (more than one month). The fixed sites are often referred to as youth learning centers.

No Child Left Behind (NCLB)—the 2001 federal mandate whose purpose was to close the achievement gap by utilizing standards-based educational reform. Its premise was that by

setting high standards and establishing measurable goals, the individual student outcomes can be improved. The NCLB required that individual states develop assessments in basic skills; and that the states must give these assessments to all students at specific grade levels to receive federal funding for schools.

Organization of the Study

Chapter 2 examines the history and demographics of homelessness in America. It chronicles the impact of homelessness upon children and youth and addresses the societal problem of homelessness. Chapter 2 also discusses the federal and local mandates in place for homeless children and the role of the government in providing services for this population. Previous homeless studies are examined.

Chapter 3 describes the methodology of this study and clarifies the research questions. A thorough discussion of the case study site, the design and procedures, and the conceptual framework are included. The findings of the study are presented and thoroughly analyzed in Chapter 4. This book concludes with Chapter 5, which provides the researcher's recommendations for the mobile school and youth learning center examined. The recommendations may potentially be applied to other mobile school and youth learning centers as well as to programs and organizations working with homeless youth. Additionally, it discusses the study's relevance to the field of education and homeless studies. Finally, it concludes with recommendations for future studies in for homeless youth and education and the researcher's reflection on the study.

Citation

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CHAPTER 2: EDUCATING HOMELESS CHILDREN: THE LITERATURE

For the most part, homelessness is not a choice. It is estimated that 7% of the total population of the United States has been homeless at some point in their life, requiring them to sleep on the street, in a shelter, an abandoned building, a car, or at a bus or train depot (Link, Susser, Stueve, Phelan, Moore, & Struening, 1994). Homelessness is a situation that individuals and families find themselves in due to a series of events. For some, homelessness is the result of losing a job and other compounding economic circumstances; for others, homelessness can be the result of having to flee from a dangerous, or even deadly, situation. No matter the cause or circumstances surrounding why a person is homeless, homelessness is a societal problem with a long history in the United States that goes back to the nation's founding.

A History of Homelessness in the United States

Homelessness is not a new phenomenon in the history of the United States—neither is a youth running away from home. However, how homelessness is examined and defined has changed over time. In “each historical period, the definition, recognition, incidence, and severity of homelessness within society [has] varied” (Murphy & Tobin, 2011, p. 30) greatly depending upon what is culturally acceptable. For example, common comical images have pervaded pop culture such as a “hobo” who is walking along train tracks and holding all of his belongings in a kerchief over his shoulder. There are darker images as well, such as those with mental illness, or of a drunkard or addict who appears to be homeless, or even of victims who have had homelessness forced upon them for a variety of reasons such as natural disasters. A similar phenomenon in pop culture relates to homeless youth. Many classical images of homeless children bring to mind Charles Dickens's *Oliver Twist*, with “street urchins” surviving through nefarious means, primarily as thieves and beggars. By the 1950s, homeless youth were perceived as psychologically disturbed (Karabanow, 2004). In the 1970s, homeless youth were called “*enfants perdus*,” or our lost children (Karabanow, 2004).

The general perspective of homeless youth has evolved in more recent times to reflect a perspective that homeless youth are often victims—sexually or physically abused runaways or escaping a turbulent home environment—rather than threats to society (Glassman, Karno, & Erdem 2010; Karabanow, 2004). To understand this change in perspective, it is imperative to look at the history of homelessness in the United States.

Homelessness in the Colonial Period through the Civil War (1725–1864)

During the Colonial Period through the Civil War in the United States (1725–1864), an entire class of homelessness was created by England’s policy of forcibly deporting the homeless (Wallace, 1965) regardless of the reason for an individual’s homelessness. Many of those who were brought to the Americas were homeless children (Wallace, 1965). Despite England’s policies, the issue of homelessness in the Colonies was rather inconsequential before 1730; but the population continued to increase throughout the 1700s (Kusmer, 2002). A steady rise in the homeless population among children is noted in the 1820s as well (Kusmer, 2002). Although reliable census records were not kept during this period in America (Murphy & Tobin, 2011), “in 1854 an estimated 10,000 orphans or homeless children lived on the streets, in back alleys, and abandoned buildings in New York City” (Shane, 1996, p. 9). By 1860, the State of New York had an estimated 30,000 homeless children (Karabanow, 2004). Given the continued rise in the homeless youth population in the nineteenth century, one solution was to place children in private homes (Johnson, 1988), and in return the families received a small stipend from the city’s council (Hoch, 1987). This was the start of the foster care system in the United States.

In this same period, the first charities for the homeless emerge in America (Kusmer, 2002). This was due to vast economic changes starting in the 1820s (Murphy & Tobin, 2011). A series of economic depressions enlarged the ranks of the homeless (Snow & Anderson, 1993). People who had once been secure found themselves among the mendicants of society (Kusmer, 2002). In the time leading up to the American Civil War, towns designed their jailhouses with rooms dedicated to housing vagrants for the night (Kusmer, 2002). This eventually led to institutions for homeless (Johnson, 1988). The Orphan Train Movement began in 1853 with the Children’s Aid Society of New York. Children from the ages of six to 18 were put on trains and dispersed throughout the United States, Canada, and Mexico, but were mostly placed with families or on farms in the Midwest (Children’s Aid Society, 2014).

The Orphan Train Movement was able to place more than 120,000 homeless children by its end in the early 1900s (Children’s Aid Society, 2014). However, many of these children were placed into situations where they became free domestic or farm laborers.

Homelessness in the Post–Civil War Period (1864–1900)

After the American Civil War, the problem of homelessness became a national issue (Murphy & Tobin, 2011) with the dramatic increase of homeless (Snow & Anderson, 1993) through postwar veterans, displaced families, orphaned children, and others suffering from both economic losses and physical housing. Experts discuss four main factors that caused the increase in homelessness in the postwar years. To begin with, the war itself created a massive homeless population (Johnson, 1988). Many different types of people were displaced and uprooted including but not limited to the orphaned or widowed, the poor, and discharged soldiers returning home to find that it was no longer there or that their property had changed hands (Bahr, 1973). The Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children was founded in New York in 1875 due to the rising numbers of orphaned and homeless children throughout the country (Institute for Children, Poverty, and Homelessness, 2013). The organization not only helped orphaned and homeless children, but also any child who appeared to be neglected or improperly cared for (Institute for Children, Poverty, and Homelessness, 2013). The Civil War influenced the movement of populations, and many displaced people were drawn to large city centers (Bahr, 1973). At the conclusion of the war, soldiers had to find their own way back home (Ropers, 1988). The general soldier did not necessarily have the financial means to return home immediately and instead had to find work to earn enough money to do so. Many war veterans were unable to find sufficient work in a postwar economy and were forced to continue their nomadic existence, essentially as homeless (Ropers, 1988). This new population of homeless soldiers trying to make their way home through any means possible sparked the term “hobo,” which is “homeward bound” for short (Ropers, 1988). These hobos were trained soldiers who knew how to forage off the land and survive in the most inhospitable environments. One of their greatest abilities was their knowledge and comfort with the railway system (Bruns, 1980). These hobos primarily used the railroads to wander throughout the country, begged for meals when they could not procure food for themselves, and slept outdoors (Bruns, 1980).

Another group of homeless was created by the changes in the American economy (Murphy &

Tobin, 2011). The industrial and agricultural state of the country created a need for a growing mobile work force (Hoch, 1987; Snow & Anderson, 1993). These migrant and seasonal workers needed to go where the work was and did not have a place to call home. They were also among the poorest of the poor and their livelihoods were essentially at the whim of their temporary employers (Murphy & Tobin, 2011). The country needed “battalions of workers [who would march] to the pulse of an on-again, off-again [call for] employment” (Bruns, 1980, p. 14). Connected to the shift in industry and agriculture was the desire to conquer new territory and expand west. This created additional groups of wandering homeless men looking for new adventures and employment far from home and family (Bruns, 1980). All sorts of new jobs came about from railroad construction, mining, logging, herding, and farming. Employment was irregular and often in isolated or undeveloped areas. Hundreds of thousands of people entered this new class of worker and lived in make-shift camp sites. This is where the term “tramp” comes from, “transient camp” worker (Hoch, 1987). These tramps help to forge the west and contributed greatly to the overall development and economic growth of the country (Hoch, 1987).

Up to the turn of the twentieth century, there continued to be economic crashes that produced severe unemployment and homelessness (Bruns, 1980; Kusmer, 2002; Murphy & Tobin, 2011; Ropers, 1988). The two depressions that had the greatest impact upon expanding the homeless population occurred in 1873 and 1893 (Johnson, 1988). The depression of 1873 was given the name “Black September.” It was nationwide and instigated one of the worst periods of unemployment this nation has seen (Wallace, 1965). Nearly 40% of males were unemployed and looking for work (Wallace, 1965). Charities and the government created bread lines, soup kitchens, shelters, and other emergency relief efforts; homelessness turned into a perceived way of life for the nation (Wallace, 1965).

It is also believed that immigration was a contributing factor to the rise of homelessness in America during this era (Murphy & Tobin, 2011). Hundreds of thousands of people came to the United States looking for the “American dream,” a belief that all things are possible with hard work. These immigrants left Europe due to economic and political disruptions (Murphy & Tobin, 2011). Upon arriving in America, many were unable to find stable work and were forced to also become mobile workers (Ropers, 1988). “As each successive wave of [immigrants] added its share to the numbers of those made homeless by the Civil War, vagrancy in the United States reached heights previously unknown” (Wallace, 1965, pp. 14–

15). In 1890, the recorded homeless population exceeded 5.2 million people (Ropers, 1988).

There were essentially two categories of homeless people with regard to residency at this time: those who tramped throughout the country and those who gravitated toward large cities (Kusmer, 2002). This is also when “skid rows” began forming in city centers (Wallace, 1965) and reached their permanence (Bahr, 1973). A “skid row” is an area of a city in which there is a high concentration of substandard hotels and inexpensive rooming houses that cater primarily to men with low incomes (Bogue, 1963). These hotels are intermingled with bars, employment agencies, pawnshops and secondhand stores, low-end restaurants, and churches that serve the poor (Bogue, 1963). Additionally, these areas are very close to the business centers, factories, transportation hub, or trucking and storage facilities (Bogue, 1963).

The term “skid row” has its origins in downtown Seattle, Washington (Ropers, 1988). In the second half of the 1800s, loggers would use specific streets to transport their logs down to the waterfront. To help facilitate the movement of the logs down the streets, the loggers would freeze the streets in the winter and grease the streets in warmer weather. The loggers then could gently “skid” or push the logs down the streets. The streets chosen for this practice were where the homeless and poor lived, not the wealthy (Murphy & Tobin). The term “skid row” over time continued to be used in reference to this type of transportation of logs, and also to the place where the inhabitants are primarily poor skilled labor and sometimes homeless (Bahr, 1973; Bogue 1963; Miller, 1982; Ropers, 1988).

It was also during the 1800s that earlier societal perceptions of homeless people being seen as casualties of larger economic and social forces began to change (Murphy & Tobin, 2011). Homelessness was beginning to be perceived as a personal deficiency and a fault of moral character (Hoch, 1987). In other words, it was believed that the individual was responsible for being homeless and there was something wrong with him or her. The homeless became marginalized and were seen as untrustworthy (Murphy & Tobin, 2011). The treatment of homeless people became increasingly harsh (Hoch, 1987).

Homelessness in the Progressive Era (1900–1929)

The first decades of the 1900s saw a decrease in the number of homeless (Stronge, 1992a) due to the economic shifts creating a greater demand for a stable labor force (Hoch, 1987).

Jobs became more localized, and the number of mobile people needed for seasonal work diminished, leading to the end of the hobo era (Snow & Anderson, 1993). Part of the reason seasonal agricultural work was limited was that mechanization, as well as the economy, was on the rise and provided large numbers of stable jobs (Snow & Anderson, 1993). Another factor that contributed to the decrease in transient workers was the invention of the automobile (Snow & Anderson, 1993). Trains were not needed as much as a means for transportation of people and this led to some of the rail stops and lines being reduced and even eliminated; the railroad lines that remained switched from steam engines to diesel fuel, making it more difficult for people to hop on and off the trains due to the increased speed (Snow & Anderson, 1993).

Once the country entered World War I, the need for male manpower dramatically increased (Hoch, 1987) and the majority of the skilled labor population of America's skid rows left for the war effort, leaving behind the poorest of the poor and the homeless (Wallace, 1965). The end of the war did help to reestablish many skid rows (Wallace, 1965); however, they did not return to their previous level of importance due to the large population of skilled labor (Murphy & Tobin, 2011).

In 1911, a study of homelessness was conducted in Chicago. The study describes the average homeless person as a White male, under 40, single, physically "defective," and U.S. born (Johnson, 1988). The "defects" mentioned to describe the men included blindness (approximately 5%), mental illness (5%), senility (4%), and nonspecified physical disability (33%) (Johnson, 1988). Homelessness began to be viewed again as a product of unemployment (Hoch, 1987) and a by-product of an industrial economy (Johnson, 1988). Social workers emerged and began tying homelessness to greater social issues rather than moral character flaws as at the end of the previous era (Hoch, 1987). City councils began establishing shelters, and charities built rescue missions, especially in the skid row areas, for the first time (Hoch, 1987).

Homelessness in the Depression Era and World War II (1929–1945)

All previous statistical records of homelessness in the United States were broken by the decade that followed the stock market crash of 1929 (Stronge, 1992a; Wallace, 1965). It is difficult to get a precise number of people who experienced homelessness in the United

States; however, Nels Anderson, a leading scholar on homeless of this era, suggested that at least 1.5 million people were homeless at any given time during the Depression era (Wallace, 1965). Others cite counts as high as 5 million (Murphy & Tobin, 2011). The government conducted surveys in 1933 and estimated that the homeless population in America made up only 1% of the population (or 1.2 million people in 1933) (Burt, 2001). Estimates of the number of homeless children ranged from 100,000 (Johnson, 1988) to 200,000 in a government census in 1932 (Snow & Anderson, 1993). Unlike the previous era, when the country entered World War I, in this era, the military directly recruited from the country's skid rows to serve in the armed forces or in the military's industrial efforts (Snow & Anderson, 1993). This led to a dramatic decrease in the number of homeless people in the United States (Snow & Anderson, 1993).

Before the Second World War and war-related industries reversed the degree of homelessness, there was a different portrait of homeless. There were more homeless families than in any previous era (Johnson, 1988). There were also more homeless children than in any previous time period, both as part of a family and as unaccompanied minors (Snow & Anderson, 1993). Homeless men in the 1930s were also unlike the homeless men from previous eras (Murphy & Tobin, 2011). In an analysis of the people who used Chicago's transient shelters from 1931 to 1934 less than half fit the profile of mainstream homeless (Hoch, 1987). Of the 16,720 men studied, 5% were classified as bums, 20% were casual workers, 20% were migrant workers, 33% were unskilled workers, 15% were skilled workers, and 7% were white-collar workers (Hoch, 1987). The reason behind people's homelessness could be directly correlated to the economic shifts not only in the United States, but also in the world (Hoch, 1987). The response to homelessness was more in a nature of helping people than in blaming people for being homeless (Murphy & Tobin, 2011). President Roosevelt introduced the New Deal and an emerging framework of entitlement began to take root (Hoch, 1987).

Homelessness in the Postwar Era (1945–1980)

After World War II through the end of the 1970s was a relatively quiet time in the history of homelessness in America. The homeless population decreased until the onset of the modern homeless period (Bahr, 1973; Hoch, 1987). One estimate is that the homeless population decreased to less than 100,000 people in 1950 (Bogue, 1963). They became more centralized

in the decaying and shrinking skid row areas (Shlay & Rossi, 1992), becoming more of an urban problem (Kusmer, 2002). They were less visible than at any other time in history and, in fact, seemed to nearly disappear (Stronge, 1992). Essentially, the problem of homelessness was forgotten until the end of the 1970s (Kusmer, 2002).

There are two main reasons for the dramatic decline in the homeless population in the postwar era. For one, the postwar economy was stronger than ever, allowing for anyone who wanted a job to get one (Johnson, 1988). In the postwar era, the median household income nearly doubled, even when controlling for inflation (Hoch, 1987). Also, the postwar spike in homelessness that happened after the Civil War and World War I never occurred (Murphy & Tobin, 2011). The government was better prepared for the veterans returning home and had a variety of federal programs in place to help with the transition back into normal civilian life (Bahr, 1973). The GI Bill, the Veterans Administration, and a series of social welfare benefits, such as education and psychiatric services, enabled World War II veterans to avoid the sentence of homelessness that their previous counterparts experienced (Wallace, 1965).

Given all of the above, the face of homelessness changed to older, single males surviving on pensions and/or welfare, or menial low-pay employment (Hoch, 1987). Many of these men were disabled, retired, and elderly (Ropers, 1988). A new stereotype of homelessness emerged as someone who is an alcoholic and a menace to society (Johnson, 1988).

At the beginning of the 1970s, most homeless people in the United States were White males (Bahr, 1973). At the same time, homeless Black males ranged from 3% to 40% of the homeless population depending up what part of the United States they were located (Bahr, 1973). About half of the men studied during the postwar era had never been married, while another 30% to 40% were divorced or separated, and approximately 10% were widowers (Bahr, 1973). Most were born in the United States and were homeless in the cities in which they lived (Murphy & Tobin, 2011). In other words, they were not mobile workers. This is a significant change in the population of homeless. The transiency of earlier generations of the homeless changed into a fixed or rooted population in the skid rows of America (Bahr, 1973). Some of this homeless population were gainfully employed, but in low-wage and low-status positions (Bahr, 1973). In fact, it is estimated that one-third to one-half of the population of skid rows throughout the country had some type of consistent employment (Bahr, 1973).

The Modern Homeless Era Part I (1980–2007)

In the 1980s the issue of homelessness became an important recognized social problem (Murphy & Tobin, 2011). The worst economic depression since the 1930s hit the United States, and with it came a significant increase and re-emergence in the homeless population (Karabanow, 2004). Before the onset of the economic depression, President Regan initiated widespread cutbacks in federally funded public assistance programs (Hoch, 1987). After seeing the results of the cuts in combination with the dramatic increase in the homeless population, he wrote new legislation to protect the rights of homeless children.

Homelessness was much more visible than it was in the 1950s through the 1970s. Skid row areas not only survived from the early Post–Civil War era but also were overflowing (Ropers, 1988). Homeless people could be seen in all areas of America’s cities, not just in these self-designated areas but also in business and residential neighborhoods (Ropers, 1988). Not only did the population of homeless people increase and spread throughout the country, it included a growing population of women and children (Johnson, 1988; Shlay & Rossi, 1992). The population was also much younger than that of the previous era (Kusmer, 2002). A larger proportion of the homeless population included minorities (Kusmer, 2002). More and more of the homeless population also included the working poor (Murphy & Tobin, 2011). In general, the new homeless population was much more diverse than in any previous era (Shlay & Rossi, 1992).

Where homeless lived shifted dramatically. In the past homeless people were essentially a sheltered population because of government services and rescue missions (Ropers, 1988). However, in the modern homeless era more and more people were literally living on the streets (Kusmer, 2002). Many did not have any means of basic shelter (Ropers, 1988). An increasing number of people lived doubled-up with friends and relatives (Murphy & Tobin, 2011). Homelessness in the post-Depression and postwar era was mostly associated with urban centers and primarily confined to skid rows. That was no longer the case in the Modern Homeless Era. Homeless people were found throughout the country. They were no longer confined to big cities and became a suburban problem as well (Kusmer, 2002). The story of homelessness was rewritten as being more sporadic and episodic, and homeless people constituted a larger portion of the population (Murphy & Tobin, 2011).

Equally important, the causes of homelessness are shifting in this modern era. Homelessness in the recent skid row era was attributed to moral character flaws such as alcohol abuse. Personal characteristics and moral failings remain the main perception for causes of homelessness, but the role of societal failings such as the economic environment, housing trends, and government policies are a greater part of the discussion (Kusmer, 2002).

The Modern Homeless Era Part II (2007–present)

There are essentially two main categories of homeless people: those who are seen and those who are not. It is those who are seen that seem to create the perception of the homeless population today. Even though the population of homeless people includes a significant number of families with children and unaccompanied youth, the visible homeless on the street asking for money, holding up cardboard signs, passed out on a sidewalk, sleeping under freeway bridges, and so forth. It is because of the visible homeless that many in society believe that all homeless people are con artists, addicts, and a drain on society in general (Medcalf, 2008). The majority of homeless people are not seen by the public on a regular basis (Medcalf, 2008). Many homeless are hardworking people wanting to get their lives back on track and to accumulate enough resources to find a place to live and be part of the main stream society again (Medcalf, 2008). Many homeless adults have full-time employment. In a study on homelessness in 27 major cities in the United States conducted by the United States Conference of Mayors, it was found that one in four homeless people are fully employed (Medcalf, 2008).

Until recently, homelessness has not been a priority for funds or personnel because of the disparity of the social perception and the invisible reality (Medcalf, 2008). It is essential that more attention, funding, and resources be given to the homeless problem; especially for the homeless children and youth who have no control over their circumstances and must cope with all that comes from being homeless. In the 2013–2014 school year, 1,360,747 homeless children were enrolled in public schools in the United States (National Center for Homeless Education, 2014). In California there were 270,000 homeless students enrolled in public school, of those 13,794 were enrolled in the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD Homeless Statistics, 2013). Today in the United States, two-thirds of homeless adults do not have a high school diploma or GED (National Center for Homeless Education, 2014).

Conceptual Framework

Examining the historical literature available on the homeless population in the United States logically leads to a study of societal constructs such as education. This research study focuses on the perceptions of teachers and students of one mobile education provider to provide a better understanding of the responses and information collected with regard to the perceptions of the needs of homeless youth and how staff members of a mobile school meet those needs. In this case study, the data are examined through a socio-psychological lens. This lens is created by using the work of Maslow (1970) and Goodman, Saxe, and Harvey's Trauma Theory (1991). The following section explains each theory and their components chosen for merger into the guiding lens.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Maslow's (1970) Hierarchy of Needs, as discussed in his book, *Motivation and Personality*, is the basis for many other psychological developmental and sociological theories. In its most basic form, the theory of the Hierarchy of Needs says that lower psychological needs must be met before higher-order needs can even be considered by the individual, including academic matters (Medcalf, 2008). Maslow theorized that there are five primary levels of human motivation and development (see Figure 1). The first level focuses on physiological needs, including the things that are necessary for human survival: food, water, air, sleep, shelter, and clothing. The typical homeless family today will find it difficult to meet the lowest level of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. In addition, a homeless family will find it equally as difficult to achieve the next level, safety.

There are many forms of safety. The first is personal security or physical safety. Maslow talks about this in terms of wars, natural disasters, but for the purposes of this research a more fundamental understanding is used: physical shelter, family unity, family violence, child abuse, and assault. Living in a car, on the streets, or even in a shelter, is rarely safe (Kozol, 1988). This lack of safety creates situations in which a person's ideals of trust, hope, and achievement are turned into mistrust, apathy, and despair (Eddowes & Hranitz, 1989). The next level of safety is financial security or economic safety. For the homeless population this aspect of safety is also salient. Homeless people often experience an economic crisis spurred by a lack of job opportunities or job security, a grievance procedure gone wrong, not having

substantial bank accounts or insurance policies to protect them from an unforeseen emergency, or disability. This second level of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs also includes health and well-being as well as safety against accidents or illness and their negative impacts.

The third level of needs involves feelings of love and belonging. For children, this need can outweigh physiological and safety needs (Maslow, 1970). Moving is a way of life for most homeless families. There are many reasons why a homeless family moves. Sometimes it may be because of a shelter's rules such as most shelters do not allow people to stay longer than 30 days. Other shelters may provide services only at night, forcing people to leave during the day. Although homeless families try to give their children a sense of being loved and belonging, the lack of stable housing and the lack of support from their extended family because of homelessness can mean that there is a loss of tradition or a sense of not belonging to a culture or group for the child (Kozol, 1988). This level in the Hierarchy of Needs must be met for people to be able to form and maintain emotionally healthy relationships with others. Those who are unable to have their need for love and belonging fulfilled are susceptible to loneliness, anxiety, and depression (Maslow, 1970).

The fourth level of needs is self-esteem. Humans desire to be accepted and valued by others. We also have a desire for self-respect. These two desires make up self-esteem. Parents, no matter their socio-economic-status in life, want to meet all of their child's needs. When parents are unable to meet their child's needs due to the conditions of homelessness, the loss of self-esteem and the stress that accompanies the inability to meet their child's needs may result in perceptions of failure and helplessness (Eddowes & Hranitz, 1989).

The final need is that of self-actualization. It is the desire to live up to one's full potential and to understand what that potential actually is for the individual. One can easily comprehend that few homeless people are able to reach the highest level of Maslow's hierarchy. Again, Maslow emphasized that lower basic needs must be met before higher needs can be considered, and homelessness often results in a lack of one or more of these basic needs being met.

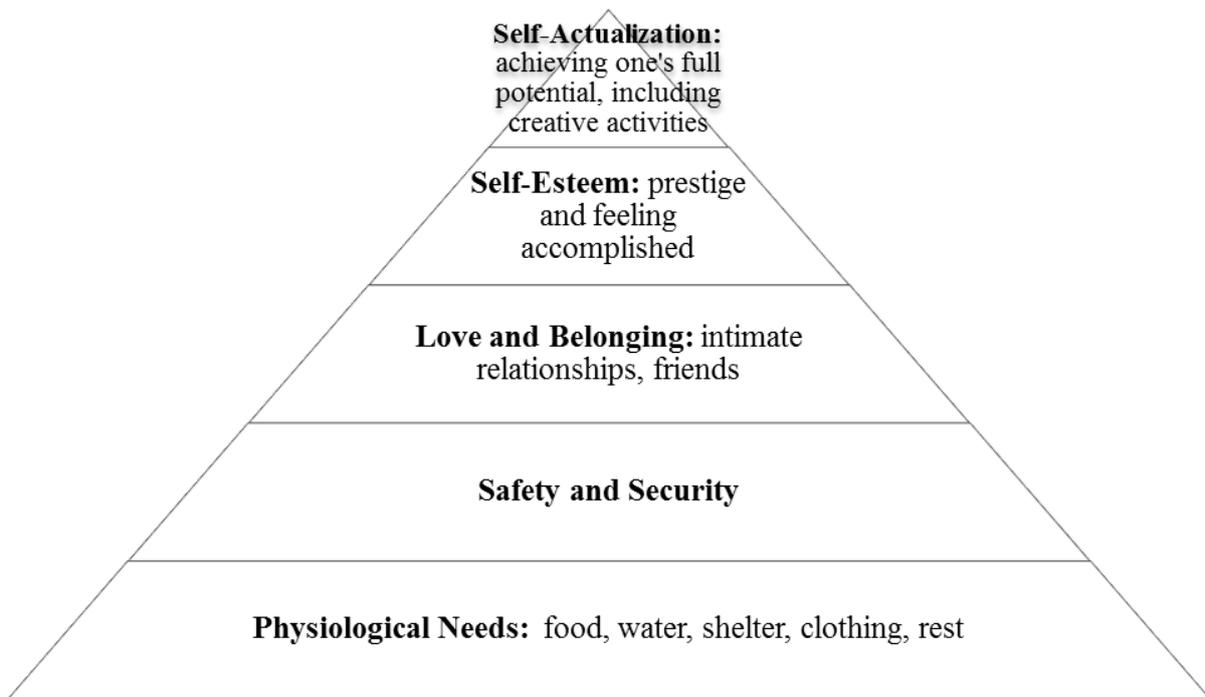


Figure 1. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1970)

One major criticism of Maslow's theory is that the needs of all people are not uniform (Tay & Diener, 2011). Considering basic factors such as age, gender, and marital status can alter an individual's needs (Tay & Diener, 2011). A related point is that Maslow did not take into account societal needs (Cianci & Gambrel, 2003). During times of war and unrest, the needs of an entire society change and influence the individual's needs (Cianci & Gambrel, 2003). Hofstede (1984) criticized Maslow's hierarchy as not allowing for cultural norms and that the structures of various societies differ across the globe. When Maslow conducted his research, and formed the theory of the Hierarchy of Needs, he focused on high-achieving college students who were primarily male and Caucasian. This makes his research not generalizable. Early on, Wahba and Bridwell (1976) carried out an in-depth review of Maslow's work and found little evidence to support the theory.

Other critics take Maslow's theory and rework it. One psychologist, Pamela Rutledge, moved Maslow's third level to the center with all other needs related to it. She expressed that belonging and connections are the driving force behind human behavior. According to Rutledge (2011), Maslow missed the role of societal connections. As society becomes more complex, interconnected, and specialized, human beings depend upon one another more (Rutledge, 2011). Regardless of the criticism of Maslow's theory, the needs of people influence their behavior (Maslow, 1970).

Homelessness and Trauma Theory

Just the fact that someone is homeless is in and of itself a major risk factor for emotional and/or psychological trauma (Goodman et al., 1991). In examining how homelessness impacts children, it is salient to look through a psychological lens and use the construct of psychological trauma (see Figure 2). Psychological trauma is the way in which a person responds to an uncontrollable life event in which he/she has extraordinarily overwhelming emotional reactions (Goodman et al., 1991).

It is also useful to use trauma theory for examining and understanding homelessness for three major reasons. The first is that when someone becomes homeless, he or she not only loses their home, a significant factor in and of itself, he or she also loses connections-neighbors, friends, routines, social roles, and possibly even their family members and job. These losses may produce symptoms of psychological trauma (Goodman et al., 1991). The second is that those who did not initially suffer psychological trauma from becoming homeless may develop psychological trauma because of the conditions of homelessness (Goodman et al., 1991). These include such things as living in shelters (see Chapter Two Shelter Culture), instability, safety concerns, and a loss of control to name a few (see Chapter Two Physical, Emotional, Social, and Educational Well-being of Homeless Children and Youth) (Goodman et al., 1991). Third, if an individual has not experienced psychological trauma as a direct result of losing one's home or the conditions of homelessness, then the experiences of homelessness may make those with previous "histories of victimization" more susceptible to further psychological trauma responses (Goodman et al., 1991). For those who are in this third group, homelessness may prevent the individual from recovering from his or her original trauma.

When discussing homelessness as a psychological trauma, it is salient to ensure that one understands what is being meant by psychological trauma as the term is applied to many types of symptoms and conditions, especially those involving excessive levels of stress, such as homelessness. In studies of homeless women, more than half suffer from posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Goodman et al., 1991). PTSD has many possible symptoms such as reliving traumatic events whether through dreams, dissociative states, or intrusive thoughts; reduction in affect or interest in significant activities; increased irritability and anger, hypervigilance, and bad dreams; drug and/or alcohol abuse; self-mutilation; lowered sex

drive and intimacy; a sense of helplessness; and a sense of isolation (Figley, 1985; Goodman et al., 1991; Harvey, 1991). In addition to PTSD, the two most commonly found symptoms of psychological trauma found among homeless people and families are social disaffiliation and learned helplessness.

Social disaffiliation. One of the main aspects of a psychological trauma is social disaffiliation. As many psychological and social theorists have conjectured, humans need intimate and long-lasting attachments to other human beings (Anderson, John, & Keltner, 2003; Bowlby 1969, 1973; Goodman et al., 1991; Maslow, 1970). It is a biological imperative (Goodman et al., 1991). In other words, for children to be able to develop self-reliance, self-esteem, autonomy, and emotional security, they need to feel safe and connected to others (Goodman et al, 1991; Maslow, 1970). As one grows to adulthood, those same evolutionary and biological mechanisms are necessary for one to find meaning and self-worth (Goodman et al., 1991; Maslow, 1970).

Trauma occurs when a person believes that his/her secure affiliative bonds have been severed, which then diminishes one's sense of safety, security, and trust in others (Van der Kolk, 1987). These feelings are often compounded by the very real failures of social support systems and the continued lack of connection with the people the trauma victim was once strongly affiliated with (Goodman et al., 1991). Society in general often rejects people who have suffered a psychological trauma such as homelessness (Goodman et al., 1991). Some people are unable to sympathize with victims of homelessness because they see the homeless as responsible for their circumstances (Goodman et al.; Lerner, 1970; Ryan, 1971). Other people stay away from people who have suffered a psychological trauma because they are perceived as deficient (Bard & Sangrey, 1979; Coates, Wortman, & Abbey, 1979; Goodman et al., 1991). Responses such as these can exacerbate what victims of trauma feel and even confirm in their own minds that they are worthless and do not deserve to be around others creating additional obstacles to recovering from a psychological trauma (Goodman et al., 1991).

Homelessness may produce a sense of distrust and isolation as one's affiliative bonds are broken (Goodman et al., 1991). There are accounts throughout the literature of homelessness stripping away a person's identity and role in society (Goodman et al, 1991; Hirsch, 1989; Kozol, 1988). Once a person becomes homeless, they are often unable to continue to

maintain and fulfill their obligations to others (i.e., work, neighbors, friends, family etc.) (Goodman et al., 1991). As discussed in Chapter Two, many homeless shelters and transitional housing facilities, which often separate family members from each other (i.e., husbands go to men's shelters and wives go to women's shelters, older male children go to men's shelters and mothers go to a women's shelter etc.) (Molnar, 1989). By separating family members from one another, their ability to maintain certain societal roles is diminished as is their affiliative bonds with one another (Goodman et al., 1991).

Many empirical studies show that social disaffiliation is a key symptom of psychological trauma experienced by many homeless people (Goodman et al., 1991). One study found that many homeless adults have experienced homelessness before were in an out-of-home placement as a child, and likely lived alone as an adult, all of which contributed to their greater sense of social disaffiliation (Sosin, Colson, & Grossman, 1988). Other studies suggest that family homelessness exacerbates feelings of distrust and social isolation (Goodman et al., 1991). Homeless mothers in particular have less trust of others and feel more isolated than other homeless adults because they believe that their relatives, friends, and social service providers did not protect them and their children from becoming homeless and/or getting out of the state of homelessness (Goodman et al., 1991). The longer people are homeless, the more their social networks diminish (Goodman et al., 1991).

Learned helplessness. Researchers have stressed the sense of helplessness people feel that often ensues from traumatic events (Goodman et al., 1991). Helplessness was viewed as a core component of psychological trauma and used the construct of learned helplessness to understand the weakened sense of efficacy and self-worth that is predominantly found among trauma victims (Figley & MuCubbin, 1983; Walker, 1978). People experience learned helplessness when they are unable to find proof that their own actions can influence the course of their lives (Seligman, 1975). Learned helplessness occurs often when people believe they are responsible for their situation, or they perceive the situation may be permanent, or they believe that the situation is caused by comprehensive rather than specific factors (Garber & Seligman, 1980). At the same time, some behaviors that appear to be learned helplessness are actually adaptive responses to a situation that may not have alternatives to sustained victimization (Flannery & Harvey, 1991).

Behaviors symptomatic of learned helplessness may be some of the costs of homelessness

because, like other traumas, becoming homeless frequently reduces a person’s ability to control their daily lives (Goodman et al., 1991). No matter where they live, homeless people experience daily attacks on their sense of personal control. They may depend on help from others to fulfill their most basic needs. Depending upon others for basic needs can exacerbate a person’s sense of helplessness and as such increase the risk of depression, a common symptom of learned helplessness (Goodman et al., 1991). By experiencing a continued sense of loss of control, homeless people can become passive and stop fighting for the services available to help them survive or get out of the state of homelessness (Goodman et al., 1991).

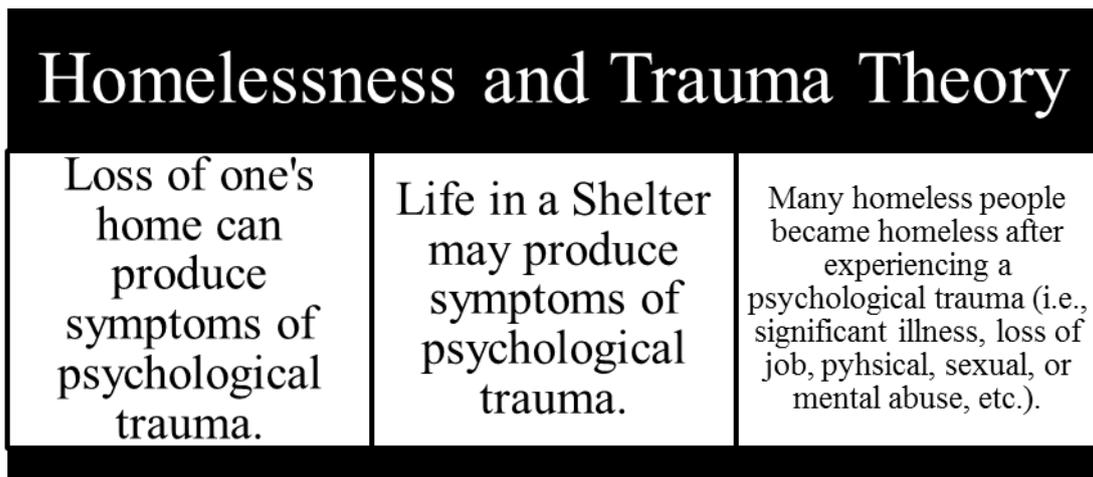


Figure 2. Homelessness and Trauma Theory

Impact of Homelessness on Children and Youth

There is a well-established body of research regarding the impact of homelessness on children and youth. The research reveals that homelessness has a profound, long-term, and cumulative negative impact on the whole development of a child (Hart-Shegos et al., 1999; Solarz, 1992). As the research shows, homelessness has potentially irreparable effects upon children (Jahiel, 1992a). Homeless toddlers are at significant risk for permanent damage. They may encounter environmental hazards, which can lead to environmentally induced illnesses as well as developmental delays and decreased cognitive development, language, socialization, and emotional health (Biggar, 2001). Homeless children are not simply at risk; most suffer specific physical, psychological, and emotional damage due to the circumstances that accompany episodes of homelessness (Hart-Shegos et al., 1999). In other words, children who experience homelessness are impacted socially, emotionally, physically, and mentally (Shane, 1996).

There are high costs to homelessness, especially for children, and there are few events in a person's life that potentially have the power to impact a person in negative directions more than homelessness. As Ropers (1988) noted, "Of all the possible events that could happen to an individual as a result of social disruption, short of death, homelessness is perhaps the most devastating for personal and social disorganization" (pp. 88–89). That is, while there is a variety of non-residency-based risk factors (e.g., poverty) that exercise a negative gravitational pull and undermine educational success, few are more robust than homelessness: "Poor children are at a greater risk than children who are not poor, and homeless children are at greater risk than other poor children" (Shinn & Weitzman, 1996, p. 119). Homelessness is a complex social problem with economic, social, and psychological implications (Woronoff, Estrada, & Sommer, 2006) for individuals and for society more generally.

Living Conditions Create Increased Risk

As one might anticipate, the life of homeless youth is wrought with great risks, many of which come directly from the living conditions they must face: "Unstable living [conditions] increase the likelihood of experiencing physical and emotional health problems as well as learning difficulties" (National Center for Homeless Education, 2006, p. 1); and "The instability and chaotic nature of homelessness can have profound effects on a child's physical health, psychological development, and academic achievement (Moore, 2005a, p. 5). The risk is increased for younger children experiencing homelessness: "Unstable living conditions contribute enormously to the developmental delays and psychological problems often noted among homeless children" (United Way of New York City, 2002, p. 17).

As expressed in many basic social-psychology theories including those explained above, housing is essential to a person's well-being and to their sense of self (Leavitt, 1992; Maslow, 1970). Without a clear sense of self, other aspects of their lives are impacted such as their health, nutrition, education, and employment options (Crowley, 2003; Jahiel, 1992b). Housing provides a certain level of safety and protection that homeless youth do not experience (Jahiel, 1992a). Those who experience homelessness are often in environments of violence and unhygienic living conditions (Jahiel, 1992b). Furthermore, homeless youth are in an exceptionally high-risk situation in which they "have few stable social supports, experience non-normative life events, and face multiple problems" (Kurtz, Lindsey, Jarvis, &

Nackerud, 2000, p. 383). This leads to stress (Bassuk, Weinreb, et al., 1997; Nicholas & Gault, 2003; Reganick, 1997; Rotheram-Borus, Parra, Cantwell, Gwadz, & Murphy, 1996), instability (Aviles & Helfrich, 1991; Lumsden & Coffey, 2001; Shinn & Weitzman, 1996), and uncertainty (Better Homes Fund, 1999; Bowman & Barksdale, 2004; Kling, Dunn, & Oakley, 1996), and environments that lead to the development of physical, emotional, and educational attainment difficulties (Hope & Yong, 1986; Rotheram-Borus, 1991). The instability of homelessness makes children susceptible “to many forms of stress that can impair their mental and emotional health” (United Way of New York City, 2002, p. 16). Although serious, the loss of housing goes much deeper than the physical loss of shelter. This loss includes the stresses of risk.

States of Risk

Unhealthy conditions. The choices afforded homeless youth are limited. One of the most significant conditions of being homeless is the unhealthy living situations that youth may find themselves in, which often result in a variety of health concerns. Homeless children and their parents are compromised by poor physical environments (Mihaly, 1991). It is difficult for homeless families to live in a sanitary situation (Gargiulo, 2006; Shinn & Weitzman, 1996) and maintain a healthy lifestyle (Hagan & McCarthy, 1997). Homeless people experience a number of complications as a result of unstable housing. To begin with, homeless people must cope with exposure to the elements (Jahiel, 1992a; Shinn & Weitzman, 1996)—extreme heat and cold temperatures (Brickner, 1985; Jahiel, 1987). They must navigate environmental allergens and pollution (Better Homes Fund, 1999). Among the environmental and pollutants are dangerous opportunities to be exposed to lead and other toxins (Jackson, 2004) as well as rodents and other vermin that carry diseases (Biggar, 2001). Being exposed to environmental extremities and unsanitary conditions lead to an increased risk of diseases (Hersch, 1988; Solarz, 1992). Due to these factors, homeless children have a greater frequency of various illnesses as compared to the general population (Jahiel, 1987). The younger the child is, and especially infants, the more prone to illnesses they are, and the various environmental factors that homeless children encounter may contribute to more illnesses (Hart-Shegos & Associates, 1999). Given that many families are homeless due to financial constraints, if individuals become ill, their lack of finances and housing further contribute to the inability to treat illness (Solarz, 1992). Not having a consistent place to sleep uninterrupted and laying down increases the difficulty of maintaining a healthy lifestyle (Jahiel, 1987; Johnson, 1992).

Inadequate medical care. Another noticeable risk factor for homeless youth, and especially children, is inadequate medical care. Homeless people struggle with gaining access to medical care because of their living situation (Hart-Shegos & Associates, 1999; Molnar, 1990; Nunez, 1994b; Shane, 1996). Inadequate health care contributes to an already difficult situation as many young people suffer from increased health concerns (Reed-Victor, Popp, & Myers, 2003); this is especially true for families with young children (Jahiel, 1992a). The most serious problem facing homeless children is the lack of adequate healthcare (Hightower, Nathanson, & Wimberly, 1997). Children are the most vulnerable among the population and that risk is increased dramatically for homeless children with inadequate healthcare (Shane, 1996). According to the Better Homes Fund (1999), “almost one-quarter of homeless mothers can’t get timely medical care for their children because no services are available or because they are unable to take advantage of services that are available” (p. 7). Likewise, adolescent homeless youth do not fare any better. Essentially, access to healthcare is nonexistent for homeless adolescents the moment they are on the street (Whitbeck & Hoyt, 1999). However, it is important to note that children who are in the foster care system do have access to medical care, although they are still considered to be among the homeless population (Ensign & Bell, 2004; Whitbeck & Hoyt, 1999).

Klein, Woods, Wilson, Prospero, Greene, and Ringwalt (2000) found that half of street youth and 36% of sheltered youth reported not having access to a regular source of healthcare. Additionally, one-fourth of street youth and 18% of sheltered youth reported having a serious illness in the past year of the study (Klein et al., 2000). Few homeless youths believe that adequate healthcare is available to them (Klein et al., 2000). One factor in limiting access to healthcare is the lack of medical insurance (Murphy & Tobin, 2011). Unaccompanied homeless youth do not have medical insurance and accompanied children are unlikely to have medical insurance because of the financial constraints a homeless family experiences (Ensign & Bell, 2004; Ropers, 1988). In addition to the medical insurance problem, unaccompanied adolescents cannot legally be treated or receive other services in some states. According to the National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth, youth cannot consent for their own healthcare except in life threatening situations and in cases related to pregnancy without restrictions. Exceptions to this include decisions related to treatment of STDs, alcohol and drug treatments, and mental health when the minor is 15 years old (14 in some states) and only in certain states. In 2015, 30 states had laws governing unaccompanied

minors that allow for children to consent to healthcare services; however, many healthcare providers may not be aware of the change in the law which can lead to homeless youth being turned away from needed care (National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth, 2016). All unaccompanied minors are supposed to be given over to the authorities; this puts those who run homeless shelters and provide health care services for homeless in a quandary. Homeless children and youth often have not completed their immunizations for communicable diseases (Jahiel, 1992a). Children who have been displaced not only have problems getting access to medical care, but also access to their medical records. If a child's records are not updated properly, many needed immunizations may be missed (Shane, 1996). Inadequate healthcare also means that many homeless youths struggle with more physical and psychological difficulties than those who are not homeless (Murphy & Tobin, 2011; Rew, 1996; Rotheram-Borus, 1991). Increased physical and psychological difficulties for these children often lead to greater complications in school (Murphy & Tobin, 2011). It must be noted that "lack of essential health care may hamper students' ability to attend school" (Medcalf, 2008, p. 27). A student's ability to do well in school is greatly impacted when they have unresolved health problems (Medcalf, 2008). When homeless children go to school, they are focused "on survival and fulfilling their basic needs" (Medcalf, 2008, p. 27).

Hunger. Hunger and homelessness go together, and indeed "are inextricably interwoven" (National Center on Family Homelessness, 2009, p. 17). In the United States, it is estimated that 48.1 million Americans (32.8 million adults and 15.3 million children) lived in food-insecure households in 2014 (Feeding America, 2015). That equates to approximately 14% of all households in the United States. A further 6% of households (6.9 million) experienced very low food insecurity (Feeding America, 2015). Those households with children reported food insecurity at a higher rate than homes without children (19% versus 12%). In 2014, 61% of food-insecure households took part in a federal food assistance program such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, the National School Lunch Program, or the Special Supplemental Nutritional Program for woman, Infants, and Children (Feeding America, 2015). For a child to develop physically and emotionally healthily, nutritious food is critical. Children who face hunger regularly may perform lower in school and struggle with social and behavioral problems that impact their ability to learn (Hart-Shegos & Associates, 1999). In 2013, it was estimated that 20% or more (1:4) children in the United States live in food-insecure households (Feeding America, 2015). In the same year, 21.5 million low-

income children received free or reduced-price meals daily through the National School Lunch Program (Feeding America, 2015).

When looking at shelters and other areas in which homeless people may temporarily occupy, such as motels, food may be unavailable, or they may not have access to kitchens/cooking facilities (Hightower et al., 1997). Some families turn to cooking on hot plates, eating in fast food restaurants, or eating junk food from convenience stores or vending machines (Molnar, Rath, & Klein, 1990). Those shelters which do serve food only serve food at particular times (Better Homes Fund, 1999) and have a limited number of meals each day (Johnson, 1992). Given this, it is not difficult to assume that homeless children's dietary needs are not being met regularly. A homeless child's lack of food does not just impact his or her ability to concentrate and performance at school (Jahiel, 1987), but eventually leads to malnutrition (Bassuk, Ruben, & Lauriat, 1986; MacLean, Embry, & Cauce, 1999; National Center on Family Homelessness, 2009; Tower & White, 1989). Before a school can even consider helping homeless children with academic matters, school personnel must first address how to help these children "meet the basic necessities for survival and well-being" (Medcalf, 2008, p. 27).

Social isolation. One of the many complications homeless youth face is social isolation, a particularly damaging aspect of being homeless (Anooshian, 2005). Homeless children must endure the same social isolation that their parents encounter (Murphy & Tobin, 2011). When a child becomes homeless, they often lose their friends, neighbors, and community, as well as "their sense of security and belonging" (Rafferty, 1995, p. 55). They have lost their social support system. These children find themselves in the midst of a confusing situation in which their "needs for belonging and affiliation are not addressed" (Johnson, 1992, p. 164). The absence of a social support system leads to homeless children viewing "social situations as potentially dangerous-to be avoided" (Anooshian, 2005, p. 134). This can become especially true for unaccompanied youth (Murphy & Tobin, 2011). The lack of a stable social support system also leads homeless children to lose trust in others, especially adults (Powers & Jaklitsch, 1992). This lack of trust of adults also lends itself to homeless youth avoiding initiating contact with any type of social service agencies (Moore, 2005b). For unaccompanied homeless youth the lack of trust might be more prevalent:

This distrust is often based upon either prior experiences with their families or with social service agencies that placed them in foster homes, state hospitals, or detention

centers based upon the available resources instead of a desire to meet their needs. Many have spent years bouncing from one placement to another and have learned that they must look out for themselves. (Moore, 2005b, p. 15)

Once children have experienced homelessness whether accompanied or unaccompanied, they avoid forming friendships and other relationships for fear that they are going to have to leave or move on (Murphy & Tobin, 2011; Reganick, 1997). These children may have once been close to a teacher or friend only to be taken away from that person. They become reluctant to form new relationships because they believe they will lose that person as well. As this form of mental and emotional protection continues, they can enter a cycle of deepening isolation (Fleisher, 1995; Hagan & McCarthy, 1997).

As a child continues to develop, social isolation, whether created by the self or the circumstances surrounding the child, leads to further damage (Murphy & Tobin, 2011). Socially isolated homeless children and youth are at an increased vulnerability or disadvantage (Shane, 1999). Homeless minors who are socially isolated struggle academically, have difficulty in developing supportive relationships, and often are emotionally and behaviorally delayed (Schmitz, Wagner, & Menke, 2001). Homeless children also exhibit more behavioral problems further isolating themselves from other children (Anooshian, 2005; Hicks-Coolick, Burnside-Eaton, & Peters, 2003). Furthermore, socially isolated homeless youth are more likely not to develop the “cognitive and social skills necessary for adult independence in American society” (Fleisher, 1995, p. 105).

Proximity to victimization. Related to being socially isolated, homeless children are at a greater risk for being violated and victimized (Hagan & McCarthy, 1997; Moore, 2005b). Although they provide temporary shelter, food, clothing, and other services, homeless shelters are often squalid and dangerous, especially for children (Merves, 1992; Solarz, 1992). Social scientists have established that crowded and chaotic environments, like homeless shelters, create conditions for potential conflict, violence, and hostility (Hart-Shegos & Associates, 1999; Molnar et al., 1990). The streets, especially those in Downtown Los Angeles, can be even more threatening to homeless youth (Hagan & McCarthy, 1997). Regardless if one is living in a shelter, a car, or on the streets, homelessness “is a demanding existence” (Eddoweds & Hrantiz, 1989; Morse, 1992, p. 13).

It is no surprise that homeless children and youth do not feel safe (Johnson, 1992). Unaccompanied youth are at an especially high risk of being victimized (Murphy & Tobin, 2011). Part of this is due to where unaccompanied minors congregate. Often homeless youth gravitate to places where they are tolerated such as areas where there is a high percentage of crime and delinquent life styles (Hersch, 1988; Moore, 2005b; Rotheram-Borus, 1991). Homeless shelters and low-income housing are generally situated in high crime areas (Kozol, 1988; Merves, 1992; Van Ry, 1992). In many large cities, welfare hotels are found in the worst parts of the city exposing children to prostitutes, drug dealers, and gang members (Mihaly, 1991; Solarz 1992). To survive, homeless adolescents turn to deviant behaviors and violence (Baron, 2003; Janus, McCormack, Burgess, & Hartman, 1987; Karabanow, 2004; Rew, 1996). It is not surprising that many homeless youths become victims of repeated sexual abuse as well as physical and sexual assaults (Klien et al., 2000; Terrell, 1997).

Shelter Culture

One major contributor to people becoming homeless is domestic violence. According to the U.S. Conference of Mayors, in their report on hunger and homelessness, 16% of all homeless people are victims of domestic violence (U.S. Conference of Mayors, 2013). Going a bit deeper, nearly half of homeless women self-report that one of the reasons why they are homeless is because of domestic violence (National Center on Family Homelessness, 2013). Having experienced traumatic events, people are less willing to trust and accept help from others. As the number of homeless youth increases it has become an increasingly hostile environment for homeless youth. Basic street survival strategies (e.g., sleeping in doors and bus shelters, keeping belongings on public lands, etc.) are criminalized and public spaces “purified” of those whose “spoiled” identities threaten to “taint” fellow members of the public, city authorities seem to have turned from a position of “malign neglect” to more obviously punitive measures designed to contain and control homeless youth (Johnsen, Cloke, & May, 2005). Some ways in which homeless people in general are being controlled has to do with what many believe to be benign measures such as making bus and park benches for individual guests with dividers between seats rather than one solid bench so that no one may lay down on the benches. At the same time there is a rise in number of night shelters, hostels and day centers emerging in recent years to provide shelter and sustenance to homeless people (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2007). Although there is an increase in the number of shelters and facilities for homeless people it is coupled with a dramatic

increase in the sheer number of homeless in the United States (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2007). Additionally, just because there is a place to go does not necessarily mean that those places are safe or provide all the necessary services. Researchers in the field warn against the romantic tendencies implicit in the notion of “spaces of care,” emphasizing that what may operate as a “space of care” for one person might, for another, be experienced as a space of fear (Johnsen et al., 2005).

Many homeless stay out of shelters for several reasons. Many people misperceive the reasons and may believe that it is because of drugs, but the truth is that for many it is because of the rules and regulations, primarily those related to checking-in and out of the shelters. The issue is complex. Contrary to popular belief, many homeless people have jobs. Because check-in hours for shelters are often rigid and the process of waiting in line and checking-in usually takes hours, most working homeless people cannot use them. Other homeless people work evening or night hours that do not allow them to get into a shelter before curfew. People who work from nine to five usually cannot use homeless shelters, either; by the time they get off work, it is usually too late for them to get in line to check into a shelter. Another reason some homeless shelters are incompatible with having a job is that they require the shelter users to attend classes, which are often held during normal work hours, every day they use the shelter, regardless of whether those people have a drug or alcohol problem or not. Related to this is that the check-in process itself can be humiliating and dehumanizing. Many times, people are asked deeply personal questions that they are embarrassed to answer.

People are also turned away from shelters because of a physical disability. Many homeless shelters are in old buildings re-purposed to fit a bunch of beds. Sometimes their beds are located above the first floor and they have no elevators. Some shelters do not have railings in the restrooms or ramps into the rooms or buildings either. Some shelters turn away people in wheelchairs or with other mobility limitations such as the need to use a walker or crutches to get around. While sometimes they will offer a hotel voucher to the disabled person that does not always happen.

There is also a belief that homeless shelters and the areas around them are often hunting grounds for human predators (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2006). Some of the craftier ones get jobs at homeless shelters while others just watch for individuals departing the shelters. It is not just rapists, either. Predators in search of “excitement” will track a

person leaving a shelter so they can beat him/her or harass him/her for fun. Also, although there are usually attendants of some kind on watch few of whom are trained to deal with violent behavior making homeless shelter users vulnerable to other shelter users who are predators (Johnsen et al., 2005).

No matter how clean a homeless shelter is kept, the danger of getting parasites by using it is still very high (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2006). Homeless people carry parasites, likely because they tend to share bedding. So, if a person sleeps every night in a different bed that a long string of other homeless people have slept in, eventually they are bound to suffer from lice, scabies, or bedbugs. Related to parasites is illness. Many people in homeless shelters have chronic illnesses and transmissible diseases. Tuberculosis is frighteningly common among homeless people (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2008). Even the flu can be a dangerous disease to contract.

Most homeless shelters separate families. Women can bring their pre-teen children into most women's shelters but teenage male children (as young as 13) may be required to go to a men's shelter which they may not even get into (Johnsen et al., 2005). Men and women usually cannot be in the same homeless shelter, so husbands and wives are separated, knowing their spouse might not get a bed in a different shelter. These people are often elderly or disabled and depend on each other for safety and care. Also, children cannot stay in the vast majority of men's homeless shelters. This leaves homeless single fathers in a very difficult spot. Most people in these circumstances will forgo the use of homeless shelters so they can take care of each other.

Physical, Emotional, Social, and Educational Well-Being of Homeless Children and Youth

As one might speculate, homelessness can have a significant impact upon a child's physical, emotional, social, and educational well-being (Mihaly, 1991; Solarz, 1992; Tierney et al., 2008). It is not just about not having a literal home; "the further implications of being homeless can affect every aspect of a child's life" (Tower, 1992, p. 42).

Physical well-being. In first examining the physical health of homeless youth, one can find that homeless children suffer from higher rates of acute and chronic illnesses than poor

housed children (Burt, Aron, Lee, & Valente, 2001; Jahiel, 1992a; Johnson, 1992; MacLean et al., 1999; Moore, 2005b; National Center on Family Homelessness, 2009). In fact, “homelessness can be considered an agent of disease” (Jahiel, 1992a, p. 150). Many homeless children experience the same types of common illnesses that housed children experience (i.e., the common cold, ear infections, the flu, lice, scabies, etc.). However, homeless children and youth experience four times more incidences of these common illnesses and for greater periods of time (Better Homes Fund, 1999; Hart-Shegos & Associates, 1999; Karabanow, 2004; Molnar et al., 1990; Moore, 2005a; Rescorla, Parker, & Stolley, 1991; Shane, 1996). Tuberculosis and whooping cough are also found at higher rates among homeless youth (Medcalf, 2008; Toro, 1998). When it comes to more serious illnesses, homeless youth are more likely to contract such conditions as cardiac disease, peripheral vascular disease, endocrine dysfunction, and/or neurological disorders than their housed peers (16% versus 9%) (Duffield & Lovell, 2008; Hart-Shegos, & Associates, 1999).

Homeless children are more likely to test positive for lead poisoning along with more severe side effects (Hart-Shegos & Associates, 1999; Kozol, 1988; Rescorla et al., 1991; Shinn & Weitzman, 1996; Solarz, 1992). Homeless children and youth are seven times more likely to have an iron deficiency and anemia; and when anemic, homeless children are 50% more iron deficient than their housed anemic peers (Hart-Shegos & Associates, 1999). The younger the child, the higher the risk of iron deficiency and anemia (Molnar, 1990). Homeless children have higher rates of tooth decay and dental problems (Duffield, 2000); it is estimated that homeless children have ten times the rate of tooth decay than the general population of children in the United States (Jahiel, 1992a; National Center on Family Homelessness, 2009).

Homeless youth are more sensitive to the elements of the weather and exposure such as heat stroke, heat exhaustion, hyperthermia, and frostbite (Jahiel, 1987; Jahiel, 1992a; National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, 2004a; Ropers, 1988; Shane, 1996). Related, homeless children and youth are more likely to experience rodent bites and insect and rodent-borne illnesses (Shane, 1996) leading to symptoms such as diarrhea and respiratory infections (Hart-Shegos & Associates, 1999). As one might expect, homeless youth have an increased rate of injuries and trauma, including self-inflicted injuries (Jahiel, 1992a; Pears & Noller, 1995; Shane, 1996). It is estimated that one in nine homeless children have asthma, which is two to three times the rate of housed poor children and four times more than all housed children in the United States (Barry, Ensign, & Lippek, 2002; Karabanow, 2004; Mihaly,

1991; National Center on Family Homelessness, 2009; Williams, 2003). Homeless children are three times as likely as housed children to be hospitalized for asthma (Hart-Shegos & Associates, 1999). It is estimated that homeless children and youth have two times more dermatological problems than housed low-income children (Karabanow, 2004; Nunez, 1994b; Shane, 1996).

Homeless youth have higher rates of infectious disease than their housed peers (Jaheil, 1987; Ringwalt, Greene, & Robertson, 1998). One of the most terrifying is HIV. Homeless youth are especially vulnerable to becoming infected with HIV (Larkin Street Youth Services, 2010). In an attempt to address their basic needs, homeless youth are often dependent upon survival skills that put them at risk; they might employ substance abuse or even exchange sex for food, clothing, shelter, and other resources (Bernstein, & Foster, 2008; Shannon, 2008; Stricof, Kennedy, Natell, Weisfuse, & Novick, 1991). Homeless youth engage in more sexual activity than their housed peers and that sexual activity is more likely to be high-risk and unprotected (Walzer, May, Gonzales, & Lin, 2014). Because of their lack of housing, homeless youth are more likely to be coerced into prostitution, pornography, or stripping (Hyatt, Spurr, & Sciupac, 2014). This type of sexual exploitation is often a continuation of what may have led to the youth becoming homeless in the first place. In other words, homeless youth may run away trying to escape from a situation in which they were being physically and/or sexually abused only to find themselves in a similar situation once again (Hyatt, Spurr, & Sciupac, 2014). These homeless youths may contract HIV and are often unaware that they have the disease; moreover, if they are aware of being infected they may find it difficult to follow the drug regimen necessary to suppress the disease (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2012).

These numbers can change drastically depending upon the type of homelessness (Murphy & Tobin, 2011). For example, youth living in doubled-up situations fare better than those in shelters (Murphy & Tobin, 2011). Youth living on the street as compared to a shelter are far worse off when it comes to their health (Klein et al., 2000). Physical health influences many other aspects of one's life. When looking at homeless children and youth, these impacts can be detrimental and lead to "missed school days, reduced classroom attention spans, and delayed language development" (Hightower et al., 1997, p. 4), not to mention delayed or impaired cognitive development (Backer & Howard, 2007; Kozol, 1988; National Center on Family Homelessness, 2008).

Psychological and emotional impairments. Children and youth experiencing homelessness are not just physically impacted by their environment; they are affected deeply emotionally and psychologically as well (Bassuk et al., 1997; Biggar, 2001; Murphy & Tobin, 2011; Rew, 1996; Shane, 1996). Homelessness is a “stressful and traumatic experience [that] has profound effects on the emotional development of homeless children” (Better Homes Fund, 1999, p. 12). Homeless children and youth are susceptible to a plethora of mental health and psychosocial problems (Fraenkel, Hameline, & Shannon, 2009; Rew, Taylor-Seehafer, Thomas, & Yockey, 2001). There is clear research that shows that homeless children and youth are at a greater risk for emotional and psychological problems, and that these problems take a severe toll on them (Fischer, 1992; Hagan & McCarthy, 1997; Hart-Shegos & Associates, 1999; Hersch, 1988; Hicks-Coolick et al., 2003; Julianelle, 2007; Kidd & Scrimenti, 2004; Mallett, Rosenthal, Myers, Milburn, & Rotheram-Borus, 2004; McCaskill, Toro, & Wolfe, 1998; Moore, 2005b; Murphy & Tobin, 2001; Rafferty, 1995; Schmitz et al, 2001; Whitbeck & Hoyt, 1999).

It is estimated that homeless children and youth ages six to seventeen are three to four times more likely to have a mental illness as compared to their housed peers (Better Homes Fund, 1999; National Center on Family Homelessness, 2008; Rew, 1996; Rotheram-Borus, 1991; Shane, 1996). Half of “homeless students demonstrate emotional difficulties” (Wilder, Obiaker, & Algozzine, 2003, p. 9) as well as “have problems with anxiety and depression” (National Center on Family Homelessness, 2009, p. 2). In a study done by Hart-Shegos and Associates, it was found that one in three “homeless children have at least one major mental disorder that interferes with daily activit[ies]” (1999, p. 13). Depending upon the study, and when and where data were collected, there is a wide range of estimates with regard to how many homeless children and youth suffer from specific disorders; however, it is clear that homelessness highlights emotional and psychological stress (Murphy & Tobin, 2011). Older youth find ways to deal with their homeless situation.

In a study conducted in 2007, many homeless youths reported that they use alcohol and other drugs to self-medicate to be able to cope with hunger, and with physical and emotional pain, as well as to escape the reality of being homeless (Burt, 2007). In the same study, nearly 40% of homeless youth reported that they had difficulty not using alcohol while 50% regularly used some type of drugs (Burt, 2007). Some homeless youth believed that drug abuse was necessary to their survival as certain drugs stimulate a person long enough to stay awake

through the night, preventing them from becoming a victim (California Homeless Youth Project, 2009). In a study conducted in 1998, homeless youth reported being five times more likely to be heavy drinkers compared to their housed peers (Russell, 1998). The longer people are homeless, the more likely they are to have a lifetime of substance abuse (Russell, 1998).

Developmental delays. When looking for specific concerns for homeless children, developmental delays are often found (Nunez, 1994b). According to Hart-Shegos and Associates, most homeless children under the age of five (75%) who participated in the study were found to have had at least one major developmental delay (1999). In the same study, 44% of children had two or more major developmental delays (Hart-Shegos, 1999). It has been estimated that homeless children can experience developmental delays at a rate of four times that of housed children (Medcalf, 2008). These developmental delays are on par with children who come from abusive situations (Douglass, 1996). The types of developmental delays are seen in three primary categories: language (including listening, speech, vocabulary, reading, and writing), fine motor skills (spatial relationships and movement), and cognitive development (sequencing and organization) (Eddowes, 1992; Kidd & Scrimenti, 2004; Shinn & Weitzman, 1996; Woods, 1997). Others would add emotional, social, and psychological development to the list (Hart-Shegos & Associates, 1999; Nunez, 1994b).

Disorientation. Homeless children may experience feelings of confusion and a sense of being out of control over their own lives (Powers & Jaklitsch, 1992). Related many young people who experience homelessness have a sense of being lost (Pears & Noller, 1995; Reganick, 1997). This sense of not having control over their own lives and feeling lost can create “a type of psychological disorientation for homeless youths” (Murray & Tobin, 2011, p. 109) that may lead to additional emotional problems (National Center for Homeless Education, 2006; Reganick, 1997; Rotheram-Borus, 1991), including “the inability to trust and commit to any social relationships” (Anooshian, 2000, p. 83) as well as anxiety and depression (National Center for Homeless Education, 2006).

Low self-esteem. A common, yet serious problem for homeless children and youth is low self-esteem (Moore, 2005b). In studies that focus on the psychological health of homeless adolescents, it is fairly standard to find that homeless youth have a deteriorated sense of self and lower self-esteem than their housed peers (Powers & Jaklitsch, 1992; Rotheram-Borus, 1991; Rothman, 1991). When people have low self-esteem combined with a state of

homelessness, additional emotional and psychological problems are soon to follow (Baron, 2003; Biggar, 2001; Shane, 1996; Snow & Anderson, 1993). It is not just that homeless children and youth feel bad about themselves, it is a cumulative effect that worsens as each situation arises surrounding their state of homelessness, leading to feelings of guilt, shame, hopelessness, loneliness, distrust, anxiety, and possibly even to depression and suicide (Murphy & Tobin, 2011; Powers & Jaklitsch, 1992; Tower & White, 1989).

Guilt and shame. Homeless children and youth find themselves in a world in which they have little to no control. These feelings of a loss of control often lead to guilt and shame over being homeless (Anooshian, 2005; Feitel, Margretson, Chamas, & Lipman, 1992; Murphy & Tobin, 2011; Powers & Jaklitsch, 1992; Russell, 1998; Shane, 1996; Tower, 1992). The same can be said of the mothers of homeless children (Fraenkel et al., 2009; Powers & Jaklitsch, 1992). This sense of shame makes children feel as if they are different from other children and possibly even inferior to others (Murphy & Tobin, 2011). Homeless children will stay away from making friends and may not participate in class activities and/or discussions, to avoid drawing any type of attention to themselves or their homeless circumstances (Medcalf, 2008). Homeless children and teens believe that they are unable to “fit-in” with others who are not homeless (Murphy & Tobin, 2011). Homeless students are often made fun of by their housed peers with “disparaging remarks about clothing, personal hygiene, or living conditions” (Medcalf, 2008, p. 27). Over time, homeless adolescents become embarrassed and attempt to hide their circumstance for fear of others looking down upon them and treating them differently from other children (Shane, 1996). Students may also feel embarrassed when they receive their free or reduced cost meals as the meal tickets look different than the regular meal tickets (Medcalf, 2008). Schools also may mark special material and supply packets for economically disadvantaged children differently than other children’s packets, compounding unwanted attention and possibly leading to further embarrassment (Hidayah & Marhaeni P.A, 2016; Medcalf, 2008). The shame that children feel as a result of being homeless can lead to blame. In other words, homeless children often blame themselves for their family’s homelessness believing that they have done something to cause the situation (Murphy & Tobin, 2011; Powers & Jaklitsch, 1992). Shame, guilt, and eventually blame, all cycle back around to lowering one’s self-esteem (Powers & Jaklitsch, 1992).

Loneliness. Given the sense of shame, guilt, blame, and low self-esteem, it is no wonder that homeless children will isolate themselves from others at school to avoid being “found out”

(Anooshian, 2000; Baron, 2003; Helge, 1992; Murphy & Tobin, 2011). Isolation leads to a sense of loneliness, and homeless youth have been found to have significantly higher rates of reported loneliness than other children (Rew, Taylor-Seehafer, Thomas, & Yockey 2001). Isolation and loneliness can further contribute to mental health problems (Karabanow, 2004). These homeless children become more and more withdrawn and insecure (Anooshian, 2005; Kling et al., 1996; Molnar et al., 1990; Rabideau & Toro, 1997; Tower, 1992; Van Ry, 1992). They seem to no longer care about anything in particular and often lack energy, both of which are unusual traits for children (Jahiel, 1987; Korinek, Walther-Thomas, & Laycock, 1992; Penuel & Davey, 1998). Some homeless children will become unusually shy (Bassuk et al., 1986; Mihaly, 1991; Van Ry, 1992). Homeless adolescents may look for means of escape by entering a world of fantasy (Tower, 1992) or even exhibiting a regression in their behaviors (Eddowes, 1992; Solarz, 1992). Some children internalize their stress and develop fears that they did not have before becoming homeless (Shane, 1996; Tower, 1992).

Distrust. As homeless children's fear deepens and their isolation from others increases, their distrust of others is heightened (Murphy & Tobin, 2011). The longer one is homeless, the less trust they have of others regardless of whether or not homeless youths see the other person as a family member, friend, stranger, or authority figure (Taylor, Lyndon, Bougie, & Johannsen, 2004). Homeless children and teens may feel betrayed by adults because of their newfound homelessness, which in turn leads them to become suspicious of adults (Tower, 1992). Children are supposed to be loved, nurtured, and protected by their parents. For homeless children, they may believe that their family has not done one or all of these things and as such adults are not to be trusted (Tower, 1992). When the family structure breaks down and children do not feel safe and loved, then their world is turned upside down and they lose faith, and consequently trust, in adults (Tower, 1992). They may also lose confidence in their own perceptions of the world around them (Tower, 1992). When looking at older homeless children, especially unaccompanied minors, they have a sense that they need to take care of themselves because there is no one else (Pearce, 1995). Street youth are extremely suspicious of others because of either their own bad experiences or because of stories they have heard from other homeless youth (Taylor et al., 2004).

Anxiety, depression, and suicide. The psychological and physical stress that one is under while being homeless is alarming, and more often than not "results in a heightened sense of anxiety" (Whitbeck & Hoyt, 1999, p. 107). Among all of the emotional and psychological

difficulties that homeless children and youth experience, anxiety is one of the most common (Bassuk et al., 1986; Caton, 1986; National Center on Family Homelessness, 2009; Penuel & Davey, 1998; Tower & White, 1989). As one might hypothesize, anxiety is significantly higher among homeless children compared to their housed peers (Baggerly & Borkowski, 2004; Hart-Shegos & Associates, 1999; Menke & Wagner, 1997; Taylor et al., 2004). When looking at homeless teens, anxiety rates continue to climb (McCaskill, Toro, & Wolfe, 1998).

Depression is another of the most commonly found psychological problems among homeless youth (Eddowes, 1992; Powers & Jaklitsch, 1992). All of the various elements of being homeless build upon one another and eventually lead to depression in both children and adults (National Center on Family Homelessness, 2008; Pears & Noller, 1995; Shane, 1996; Zieseimer & Marcoux, 1992). Numerous studies in the past 30 years have recorded depression in homeless children and youth with vastly different statistics (Murphy & Tobin, 2011). Some studies report that approximately 20% (Russell, 1998) are depressed and still others state that depression rates are as high as 85% (Farrow, Deisher, Brown, Kulig, & Kipke, 1992) among homeless youth. One thing is for certain, researchers agree that depression and depressive-like behaviors are higher among homeless children and youth than among their housed peers (Murphy & Tobin, 2001). The symptoms of depression also appear to be worse for homeless children and youth (Murphy & Tobin, 2011; Taylor et al., 2004).

Along with depression for homeless youth come feelings of hopelessness (Rew, 1996). Feelings of hopelessness and depression can lead to a desire to give up on life. Unaccompanied youth are highly susceptible to suicidal thoughts and behaviors (Farrow et al., 1992; Karabanow, 2004; Powers & Jaklitsch, 1992; Rotheram-Borus, 1991; Rothman, 1991). Like depression, suicide is an uncomfortable topic to discuss or admit having thought about, yet in some studies researchers found that nearly two-thirds (Russell, 1998) to almost all (Bassuk, 1992) of homeless youth admitted to having thought about committing suicide. Nearly half of homeless youth attempted suicide at some point during their state of homelessness (Cauce, Paradise, Ginzler, Embry, Morgan, Lohr, & Theofelis, 2000; Rotheram-Borus, Mahler, Koopman, & Langabeer, 1996; Russell, 1998).

A subculture of violence. As previously discussed, being homeless exposes youth to criminal activity and puts them in situations in which they may have to perform criminal acts to survive. Homeless youth may have no choice but to submit to criminal acts because of the

lack of resources available to them (Murphy & Tobin, 2011). It is extremely difficult for homeless people to obtain gainful employment, let alone a homeless teenager (Whitbeck & Hoyt, 1999). Without access to resources and finances, survival is almost impossible for a homeless teenager on his or her own (Rothman, 1991). The situation of homelessness creates the need for criminal behavior in order to survive (Whitbeck, Hoyt, & Ackley, 1997).

Part of the reason that homeless youth are exposed to violence is that they congregate where it is more acceptable to be an unaccompanied minor. In general, these are areas where violence is more likely to occur and where other people are socially deviant and dangerous (Baron, 2003; Hagan & McCarthy, 1997; Moore, 2005b). With the lack of resources, finances, and a supportive parent or adult, homeless teens begin to exhibit some adult behaviors such as sex and alcohol use (Whitbeck & Hoyt, 1999). They also begin to develop relationships where adults are outsiders and their fellow homeless peers who act like adults become the dominant focus (Whitbeck & Hoyt, 1999). Their new peer group replaces the family, and the acceptable behaviors of the group, including, but not limited to, antisocial behaviors, exploitation, aggression, and violence become their new norm (Bao, Whitbeck, & Hoyt, 2000; Baron, 2003; Baron & Hartnagel, 1998; Terrell, 1997). Therefore, homeless youth get pushed into crime because of their circumstances and the fact that the other homeless youth are doing the same thing (Baron & Hartnagel, 1998; Ennet, Bailey, & Federman, 1999; Hagan & McCarthy, 1997).

It is important to note, however, that not all homeless youth participate in negative peer-dominated groups (Murphy & Tobin, 2011). Some groups provide healthy personal support (Whitbeck & Hoyt, 1999). Homeless youth often teach others how to survive life on the streets (Bao et al., 2000; Karabanow, 2004). These groups can provide homeless teens with protection and social support (Whitbeck & Hoyt, 1999). However, these supportive and healthy social networks are not the norm (Murphy & Tobin, 2011).

More often than not, the peer groups homeless youth become part of put the youth in jeopardy (Baron et al., 2001). These subgroups create a culture of violence (Baron & Hartnagel, 1998). The structure of such groups supports antisocial and criminal behaviors (Hagan & McCarthy, 1997; Whitbeck & Hoyt, 1999). They often reject mainstream cultural norms (Auerswald & Eyre, 2002). Being associated with such groups puts homeless youth in constant danger (Bao et al., 2000). At the same time, these groups work toward maintaining

the status quo in keeping homeless youth homeless (Snow & Anderson, 1993). The more time a teen spends in such a group, the less likely he or she is to utilize opportunities for education and career training (Hagan & McCarthy, 1997). This type of lifestyle is reinforcing and ensures that the cycle continues, making it more and more difficult to leave (Murphy & Tobin, 2011). Victims often turn around and victimize others, creating an almost never-ending cycle of crime and homelessness (Murphy & Tobin, 2011).

Educational Needs of Homeless Students

Homeless children are their own at-risk population with unique educational needs. Due to the transitory nature of homelessness, it is difficult for schools to assess and meet the needs of individual homeless children and youth. Many homeless children have special education needs or educational deficits. Because of trouble with consistently getting to and attending school, administrators and counselors may have difficulty placing homeless students in the appropriate grade level. Attendance policies can dictate whether a student is promoted to the next grade level or retained, regardless of a student's ability to perform academically. When students transfer schools, their records do not always follow them, which can impact a student's grades and credits earned. The ins-and-outs of the educational system can become overwhelming and lead students to dropping out.

Transportation. Getting to school daily and on time is a barrier for many homeless children and youth. Homeless children may not receive the services and programs they are entitled to because of a lack of transportation (Medcalf, 2008). It can be problematic for homeless children to get to school. Oftentimes, homeless people live in unsafe areas, and a child walking through those neighborhoods is not ideal. Parents may not permit their children to walk to school in dangerous vicinities. The McKinney-Vento Act provides for the transportation of homeless children and youth to and from school; however, the child's parent or guardian has to make a request to the school district for the student to receive the services (Medcalf, 2008). Most homeless people are unaware of their rights, including those that pertain to education (Powers-Costello & Swick, 2008). As a result, most homeless children are not able to go to the school they had been attending before they became homeless—even though it is their right to do so under the McKinney-Vento Act. Despite the law, very few districts provide transportation to homeless students (Medcalf, 2008).

Educational deficits. After examining the many ways homelessness impacts children and youth in terms of their physical, emotional, psychological, and social well-being, it is no surprise that the effects of homelessness “on children’s education [are] equally damaging” (National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, 1995, p. 1). The type, duration, and frequency of homelessness also influence the degree to which homelessness impacts a child’s education. If a youth is experiencing street homelessness, the affect is at its greatest in negatively impacting his or her schooling, whereas a child living in a doubled-up or invisible homeless situation the negative impact is at its least (Shinn & Weitzman, 1996). The movement and instability that homelessness creates further lends itself to increasing barriers for educational success (Medcalf, 2008; National Center on Family Homelessness, 2009; Nunez & Collingnon, 1997; Penuel & Davey, 1998). If a homeless child or youth is able to attend school, the transition from one school to another brings with it several challenges. There is often a great deal of missed school days, if not weeks or months, during states of homelessness (Duffield & Lovell, 1998; James & Lopez, 2003). In some instances of childhood homelessness, years of schooling are lost (Tierney, Gupton, & Hallett, 2008). Not only is there the actual loss of time, but there is also the loss of learning. It is believed that each time a child changes schools, he or she loses four to six months of educational gains (National Center for Homeless Education, 2006). Adding in factors such as developmental delays, health concerns, emotional, and psychological problems, and unstable support system, it is no wonder that homeless children make less academic progress than their housed peers (Dworsky, 2008; Tower, 1992). Schools themselves often create barriers to homeless children’s academic success, further reducing the likelihood of a homeless youth completing and obtaining a high school diploma (Better Homes Fund, 1999).

Homelessness creates conditions under which children will have physical and psychological concerns that need to be addressed through special education services (Murphy & Tobin, 2011). In Los Angeles, it is estimated that 45% of the homeless student population needs being evaluated for special education services (Jackson, 2004). One reason why so many students are yet to be evaluated is that the situation of homelessness itself may make it difficult for the child to stay in the same school long enough for the evaluation process and educational plan to be completed (Emerson & Lovitt, 2003; Jackson, 2004). Therefore, a significant portion of the homeless student population is unable to receive the services it desperately needs, further reducing their chance at completing a high school diploma.

Grade level. Considering the challenges homeless students face as outlined above, it is no surprise that homeless students perform below grade level in numerous assessments (Murphy & Tobin, 2011; Pawlas, 1994; Popp, 2004). According to Rafferty and Rollins (1989), homeless children are less likely to score at or above their grade level in reading and mathematics. Homeless children are more likely to perform below grade level than their housed peers in basic standardized assessments of reading, spelling, and mathematics (Duffield & Lovell, 2008). Homeless students on average are two to three grade levels behind their housed peers (National Center on Family Homelessness, 2008). Even more alarming is that the national high school graduation rate for homeless youth is below 25% (National Center on Family Homelessness, 2014). Nearly 80% of homeless students performed below their grade level on some measure (Hart-Shegos & Associates, 1999). Hart-Shegos found that approximately 75% of homeless children performed below their grade level in reading; 72% performed below their grade level in spelling; and 54% performed below their grade level in mathematics. Furthermore, these same children are four times more likely to score at or below the tenth percentile in reading and vocabulary than their housed peers (Hart-Shegos & Associates, 1999). A little more than a decade later, the numbers have not improved, and in some areas have gotten worse. For the three school-years 2013–2014 to 2015–2016 the National Center for Homeless Education collected and analyzed the assessment data of homeless students. It found that 31% of homeless students achieved grade level proficiency in reading (language arts) and 25% achieved grade level proficiency in mathematics (National Center for Homeless Education, 2017).

Grades. Due to the lack of consistent attendance, difficulty in homework completion, and general unpreparedness, homeless children have poor-to-average grades (Nunez, 1994a; Van Ry, 1992). Some researchers maintained that the grades of homeless students are no less than alarming (Dworsky, 2008). In an analysis of grades of homeless students conducted in 1992 by Bassuk and Rubin, more than half of homeless students were failing at least one subject and had below average grades (Murphy & Tobin, 2011). In fact, “homeless youth are at high risk for school failure” (Shane, 1996, p. 3).

Retention. If students are not meeting the minimum standards of achievement tests and have failing grades, one logical conclusion is that they should be held back. For homeless students, not being promoted to the next grade at the end of the school year is not uncommon. Studies show a quarter to 57% of all homeless students being held back, with a quarter of homeless

students not being promoted more than once (Dworsky, 2008; National Center on Family Homelessness, 2008; Rafferty, 1995). Homeless students are retained, on average, twice as much as their housed peers (Better Homes Fund, 1999).

Achievement scores. Given all that has been discussed above, when it comes to standardized tests and achievement scores it is not surprising that homeless children do not do as well as their housed peers. In achievement data for the last 25 years of the 20th century, homeless children scored poorly on standardized mathematics and reading tests (Rafferty, 1995). Not much has improved in the past 15 years, either. In fact, only a small minority of homeless children score in the national average or national above average ranges in either reading or mathematics (Dworsky, 2008; National Center for Homeless Education, 2017). Overall, academic achievement, as reported in standardized tests, is significantly lower for homeless children (Williams, 2003). Looking at state assessments of achievement of students in the third through 12th grades, 48% of homeless students were proficient in reading and 43% of homeless students were proficient in mathematics (National Center on Family Homelessness, 2008). In comparisons of homeless students and their housed peers, homeless elementary school students were nearly 10% behind in reading achievement scores than their housed peers (National Center on Family Homelessness, 2009). Homeless elementary students were approximately 18% behind in mathematics achievement scores compared to their housed peers (National Center on Family Homelessness, 2009). In high school the gaps were larger, with homeless students falling more than 16% behind their housed peers in reading achievement scores and more than 20% behind in mathematics achievement scores (National Center on Family Homelessness, 2009).

Dropout rates. Connected to the decreased achievement scores and lower grades are higher dropout rates among homeless youth. In 2009, less than 25% of homeless youth completed high school either with a GED or high school diploma (National Center on Family Homelessness, 2009). In 2016, that number grew to 30% nationwide; but it is still far below the national average (National Center for Homeless Education, 2017). Homeless youth are 87% more likely to drop out of school (National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth, 2016). In a national survey of formerly homeless youth, more than 40% reported having dropped out of school because of circumstances related to being homeless (U. S. Department of Education, 2016). In the same study, two-thirds of formerly homeless youth reported that being homeless had a significant impact upon their education, making it

difficult for them to stay in school and achieve academically (U. S. Department of Education, 2017). Students who drop out of school will face very difficult economic struggles. People who do not earn a minimum of a high school diploma or GED are less likely to find a job that will provide them with a living wage, thus continuing the cycle of poverty and homelessness (Rumberger, 2011). High school dropouts are also more likely to engage in criminal activity, rely on public assistance, and create other societal costs (Belfield & Levin, 2007).

Teacher Perceptions

Teachers are directly on the frontline of education and perhaps embody the most power within the system because they are the ones who interact with children and youth on a daily basis. The McKinney-Vento Act of 1987, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, and the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 make provisions for professional development of teachers who specifically serve homeless children and youth. Despite the requirements set out by these laws, however, states, local districts, and specific school sites have done little in providing support for teachers to meet the needs of homeless children and youth. Teachers have a hand in developing perceptions of children and families that are empowering in the teaching and learning process (Powers-Costello & Swick, 2008). Therefore, teachers must also be learners who are continually attempting to enrich their own perceptions of children and families (Ayers, 1995). This is imperative for teachers working with poor and/or homeless children and families. Teachers can try to increase their sense of social justice as they develop compassionate perspectives and relationships with these populations (Stronge, 1992b).

Teacher perceptions of children and families who are homeless are especially difficult because Western culture tends to see homelessness as a reflection of individual weakness and defect rather than symbolic of social injustice (Freire, 2011; Kozol, 1988). There is evidence suggesting that some teachers act out a belief that homeless students are more difficult to handle with regard to behavior in the classroom than nonhomeless students, especially boys (Bell, 1997; Greene, 1998). Western ideology transmits that homeless persons are in some way deficient (Harris & Fiske, 2009). Therefore, homeless children and families tend to be seen differently than the rest of a school's populations unless people purposely reconstruct their perceptions (Nunez, 1996). If homeless people are seen as deficient then it is no surprise that teachers may perceive homeless students in a deficient manner (Nunez, 1996).

Subconscious patterns of thinking or actions on the part of educators can create a source of injustice that many homeless children and families experience (Powers-Costello & Swick, 2008).

Teachers need training to use multiple opportunities to engage students in challenging their understanding of justice and equality (Greene, 1998) as well as to reflect upon the complexities of the lives of homeless families and children, especially in the formative years (Swick, 2004). Teachers need to be role models of understanding, caring, and responsiveness in relation to supporting and engaging homeless families in empowering experiences (Powers-Costello & Swick, 2008). Children observe caring people as having a positive impact upon their lives as well as the lives of their parents; this is especially true in homeless children and youths (Herth, 1998). Herth's work on teacher perception shows that how teachers view students who are homeless impacts their teaching style with these children. Teachers who are compassionate in their inherent behaviors respond in a more supportive manner in their connections with children and families (Morgan, Goddard, & Givens, 1997).

Early childhood professionals should examine the barriers to developing a more authentic and just view of the realities of homelessness among families with very young children (Stronge, 2000). Teachers of young children can self-assess their status in relation to their understanding and responding to the needs of children and families who are homeless. In 1996, Swick used a variety of methods to engage teachers of homeless students in a process of self-assessment. He had them use journals, conducted case studies, and examined teachers' involvement with community services. His intent was to empower teachers to reconstruct their deficit frameworks of understanding homeless people. In the process and related studies, teachers noted that the school culture creates many of the barriers that homeless families and children face, and that teachers have been indoctrinated in the culture to perpetuate the ideology of deficiency (Powers-Costello & Swick, 2008). When teachers do try to engage the system and assist homeless families and children, they are often met with disapproval and bureaucratic red-tape; this leaves many teachers confused and unwilling to continue engaging such issues head-on (Stronge, 2000).

School culture needs to be addressed on a fundamental level to change perceptions of, and be able to engage, homeless students and families. In most cases schools attempt to look at the greater good of the school culture rather than the individual needs of students (Ayers, 1995).

Students who are in high-risk situations such as homelessness often get lost in the shuffle (Swick, 2000). As a result, they become even more isolated and are viewed negatively by their teachers (Powers-Costello & Swick, 2008). Homeless children and families experience a social disconnect with the school community (Stronge & Reed-Victor, 2000). Looking more closely at teacher perceptions of homeless students, teachers will negatively view a homeless child because of other factors such as poor hygiene or clothing, a lack of participation by parents, low homework completion rates, and poor school attendance (Powers-Costello & Swick, 2008). Homeless and poor children and families do not have the same resources and may not have access to some of the basics such as bathing facilities, laundry facilities, computers, basic office supplies, and a place to study. Parents may not be able to part of school functions due to a lack of transportation or embarrassment about their appearance, not because of a lack of interest in their child's progress.

When examining the academic progress of homeless children and youth, the single most powerful factor is the teacher and the negative attitudes that teachers hold toward those who are homeless (Swick, 2000). Educators' perceptions reflect the culture of the school and their own personal culture (Swick, 1996). Because teachers are on the front lines and have the most direct interactions with children and their families, they are the best place to start. Teachers should be encouraged to reconstruct their teaching practices by engaging in dialogues of social justice frameworks.

Education Laws for Homeless Children

President Regan and his wife, Nancy, were concerned about the growing population of homeless children in America and encouraged Congress to enact legislation to provide services for homeless children and families, including provisions for education. Although many the aspects of creating a society free of homelessness were not addressed, The McKinney-Vento Act of 1987 was born. Al Gore stated the following in his introduction of the McKinney-Vento Act to the Senate floor:

[McKinney] is an essential first step towards establishing a national agenda for action to eradicate homelessness in America. No one in this body should believe that the legislation we begin considering today is anything more than the first step towards reversing the record increase in homelessness. (Congressional Record, p. S3683, March 23, 1987)

The act allowed for the authorization of four major programs to assist those in states of homelessness: the Adult Education for the Homeless Program, the Education of Homeless Children and Youth Program, the Job Training for the Homeless Demonstration Program, and the Emergency Community Services Homeless Grant Program (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2006). Since its inception, the act has been amended five times. Each time the amendments have attempted to expand the scope of the law and to strengthen its provisions. Within the first decade, HUD determined that the law's programs allowed for the assistance of "significant numbers of homeless persons to regain independence and permanent housing at a reasonable cost" (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 1995). However, HUD does not account for the education of homeless children, but rather focuses on the housing of homeless adults who benefited from the act's measures. The act and its subsequent revisions specifically address and target education for homeless children as well as housing programs for all. Two programs specifically aimed at children and youth are the Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program and the Consolidated Runaway and Homeless Youth Program. The Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program offer tutoring and nutrition programs in cities with high populations of homeless people. Oftentimes, they do not have their own facility and go directly to shelters and/or schools. The Consolidated Runaway and Homeless Youth Program has center-based programs where there are high numbers of homeless teens. The centers offer assistance in helping teenagers, depending upon their age, be placed into transitional housing programs or foster care. Some centers offer educational services, job training, as well as health and counseling services. These programs are necessary to lessen the negative outcomes of homelessness upon children (American Psychological Association, 2014).

The McKinney-Vento Act of 1987 became part of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 and is now part of the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015. According to these acts, the term "homeless children and youth" includes individuals "who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence" (U. S. Department of Education, 2016). The law gets even more specific as to who may be included. Children and youth who are living with people outside of their immediate family due to a loss of their own permanent housing, an economic hardship, or similar reason are included in the definition despite not literally living on the street. The definition also includes children and youth who are living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or on camping grounds. The definition continues with children and youth who are living in emergency or transitional shelters, those who have been abandoned at hospitals, fire stations,

or police stations, or those who are awaiting foster care. The law goes further to include minors who stay in a place that is not ordinarily designed or used as an accommodation for people (e.g., cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings). The final category addressed in the legislation is migratory children who are considered homeless because they are living in one of the situations mentioned above.

The McKinney-Vento Act has changed since 1987 but at its core was the right for homeless students to receive a free education equal to that of their housed peers regardless of their living situation. In the past, schools were allowed to keep homeless children separate from the rest of the student body. Many schools segregated homeless students out of fear and misinformation. It is also important to note that homeless students are more likely to be in an ethnic minority, classified as having special needs, or are second language learners (National Coalition of Homeless, 2008). Homeless children are placed in special needs programs at higher rates than those of other children just because they are homeless and not because of a particular diagnosed need or deficit (Stronge, 2000). In the 2015–2016 school 20% of identified homeless students in public schools were placed in special education programs, while the average student placement in special education remained around 13% nationwide (National Center for Homeless Education, 2017). Under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, the law made provisions against the segregation of homeless students. The statute expressly prohibits “a school or state from segregating a homeless child or youth in a separate school, or in a separate program within a school, based on the child or youth’s status as homeless” (Article A, p. 3). Homelessness in and of itself is not a sufficient reason to separate a student from the rest of the student body. States, school districts, and individual schools are called to create and enact policies and practices to make sure that students are not separated from the rest of the school’s population just because they are homeless. Additionally, the No Child Left Behind Act (2001) clearly states that funds provided by the federal government under the McKinney-Vento Act cannot be used to replace the regular academic program in a school (Article C). The money must be used to expand upon or improve the services provided as part of the school’s regular academic program (Article C). These provisions were carried forward in the Every Student Succeeds Act (2015) as well. An additional \$85 million was added to support homeless students in public schools (National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth, 2016). Connected to the idea of funding and segregation, any state that receives funds under the statute must ensure that

there is no segregation of homeless children or youth in any of their schools (Article A & C). If a state violates this aspect of the law, it will lose its supplemental funding under the law (Article C) and possibly its accreditation (American Bar Association Commission on Homelessness and Poverty, 2017). The only general exception to this law to this is when a homeless student is temporarily separated from the rest of the school's population due to health precautions, safety emergencies, or special and supplementary services that are necessary to meet the unique needs of the specific child (Article C).

The McKinney-Vento Act also provides a limited exception to the prohibition against segregation of homeless students in separate schools or in separate settings within a school (Article C). It specifically applies to only four counties in the entire United States, three of which are in California: Orange County, San Diego County, and San Joaquin County. The fourth, Maricopa County, is in Arizona. These four counties have other specific regulations to fulfill. They are exempt from segregating homeless students from the rest of the general student population because of historical factors. These four counties have a high transitory population due to seasonal farm workers, high levels of illegal and legal immigrants, and high poverty rates of specific populations (Institute for Children and Poverty, 2003). Prior to 1987, when the McKinney-Vento Act was instituted, these counties had already established schools and programs designed for homeless children and families as well as for the transitional population (Institute for Children and Poverty, 2003). These counties already received federal funding to support the services offered. Under the McKinney-Vento and No Child Left Behind Acts, these counties receive additional funding to continue service for their populations.

In addition to seeking education services, many times homeless students have difficulties with transportation to and from school. When the McKinney-Vento Act was included under the No Child Left Behind Act, states and their local agencies became responsible for providing transportation to and from school for all students within their districts, which includes homeless children and youths (Article F). This provision continues under the Every Student Succeeds Act and has become more specific to include greater guidelines. Districts must provide transportation to and from a child's school of origin until the end of the school year even if the student acquires permanent housing, if it is requested by the parent, guardian, or the liaison for an unaccompanied minor (National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth, 2016). If a student has changed districts because of a move to

permanent housing but continues to attend the school of origin, the school districts have to work out how to share the cost of transportation equally (National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth, 2016). Under the Every Student Succeeds Act, transportation for homeless students has to be arranged at the time of enrollment and cannot “create a barrier to attendance, retention, or success” (National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth, 2016).

One of the greatest changes to the law has to do with enrollment requirements. Unaccompanied minors may now enroll themselves in school (National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth, 2016). This is a departure from the past, in which a parent, guardian, or a representative from the state had to enroll a child in school. Immunization, health, and previous academic records are a general requirement for students to enroll in school. Under the Every Student Succeeds Act, schools must enroll homeless children and allow them to attend classes even if no records are available at the time of enrollment. The liaison assigned to the homeless student’s case is responsible for assisting students and their families obtain all immunization, health, and academic records (National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth, 2016).

Similarly, many schools in the past disallowed homeless students from enrolling due to lack of an address as proof of residence in a particular district (Burt & Cohen, 2005). Regardless of a permanent address, schools are required to enroll a student, even when there is no immediate proof of residence within a particular district (Article B). The school must enroll a child in the regular academic program at the request of a parent, guardian, or the state while proof of residence within a district is being determined (Article B). It is the responsibility of the government to attempt to maintain a consistent and stable school environment for each child (American Bar Association Commission on Homelessness and Poverty, 2017). Homeless children and youth frequently move. Maintaining a stable school environment is critical to all children because changing schools significantly impedes a student’s academic and social growth (McCormick & Holden, 1992). The literature on highly mobile students indicates that it can take some students four to six months to recover academically after changing schools (National Coalition of Homeless, 2008). Highly mobile students have also been found to have lower test scores and overall academic performance than peers who do not change schools (National Coalition of Homeless, 2008). Once a local liaison from the school or district is assigned to a homeless child, they must make school placement

determinations on the basis what is in the best interest for the child (Report to Congress Fiscal Year 2006, 2006). In most circumstances, it is best to continue a student's education in their school of origin (McCormick & Holden, 1992), or the community with which the child is most familiar. The McKinney-Vento Act (1987) states that children and youths should remain in their school of origin "for the duration of homelessness when a family becomes homeless between academic years or during an academic year; or for the remainder of the academic year if the child or youth becomes permanently housed during an academic year" (Report to Congress Fiscal Year 2006, 2006, p. 7).

Under these acts, each school district must have a local liaison for homeless children and youth regardless of whether the district receives federal funding from the McKinney-Vento Act (Article G). All large school districts throughout the country receive funding. The local liaison is responsible for serving as the primary contact between homeless families and school staff, district personnel, shelter workers, and other service providers. They are supposed to coordinate various services to assist families with enrolling their children in school. In the process, the local liaison should make sure that homeless children are identified by school personnel to be able to receive services from government agencies. In connection with enrolling students in school, the liaison is to ensure that the children and their families receive all the appropriate educational services for which they qualify, such as Head Start, Even Start, and preschool programs as well as referrals to health, mental health, dental, and other appropriate services (Article G). Many homeless families have complications with maintaining records. It is also the responsibility of the local liaisons to assist homeless families in obtaining immunizations and/or the necessary medical records (Article G). The liaisons are to assist families with transportation services or any enrollment disputes (Article F). Under the provisions of the law, public notices of the educational rights of homeless children and youth are supposed to be publicly posted where they can receive services under the law (National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth, 2016).

Policy in practice. In 2003, The National Coalition for the Homeless examined a series of laws that emerged around the country aimed at improving the "quality of life." However, the laws had the opposite effect for homeless people as they seemed to criminalize being homeless (Medcalf, 2008). In the study of 147 cities in 42 states, as well as Washington, DC, and Puerto Rico, the "quality of life" laws abused basic civil rights to remove homeless people from public sight (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2003). San Antonio, Texas, is

an example of the practice. Their “quality of life” laws banned public camping (which includes storing belongings such as in a shopping cart, cooking and using utensils, pitching a tent, building a fire, setting out furniture, collecting trash including recycling, and displaying luggage), sleeping overnight in public view (including in one’s own car, camper, or other vehicle), defecating or urinating in potential public view regardless of whether or not someone is present, asking for money or food in a public place, and unlawful loitering. Camping was allowed with a permit or other lawful permission. While San Antonio established its “quality of life” laws, it did not increase support services for the poor and homeless or provide for housing or public toilets (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2003). In San Antonio, people who violate the “quality of life” laws are issued a ticket with a \$500 fine (Medcalf, 2008). Unpaid fines result in jail time. It costs at least 25% more per day to keep a person incarcerated than to provide a homeless person with support in the form of food, clothing, shelter, transportation, and other services to homeless people (Grisham, 1999).

San Antonio is a good case to look at when examining policy in practice as Texas has one of the largest homeless populations in the United States and one of the highest numbers of people, especially children, living in poverty and extreme poverty. According to the U.S. Bureau of the Census, in 2014, 46.7 million people lived in poverty or 14.8% of the total recorded population of the United States. This number has remained relatively stable since 2010 but is an overall increase of 2.3% since 2007, the year before the last recession (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2014). The poverty rate for children and youth was 21.1 % in 2014 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2014). When the National Coalition for the Homeless conducted its examination of the “quality of life” laws, 39% of people living in poverty had earned less than half of the poverty guideline established by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2003). When looking at Texas, 17.7% of the population lived in poverty (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2014). As one can see, the number of people living in poverty in Texas is significantly higher than the national poverty rate. Some of the poorest communities in the nation are in Texas, especially along the Texas-Mexico border (Medcalf, 2008). One in 11 children in the United States lives in Texas, accounting for seven million children (Lee & Shea, 2015). In 2013, the poverty rate for children in Texas was 25%, or 1.7 million children (Lee & Shea, 2015). At the same time, 60.1%, or 3.1 million, students in the Texas public education system came from economically disadvantaged homes (Lee & Shea, 2015).

Since the early 1980s, San Francisco has passed more antihomeless laws than anywhere else in California (Herring & Yarbrough, 2015), and Los Angeles is a close second (Boden & Selbin, 2015). By the end of 2015, both cities had 23 different ordinances aimed at criminalizing acts of the homeless (Boden & Selbin, 2015). The laws include ordinances that criminalize sleeping in public, sitting in one place for more than an hour in public, and panhandling. In a study of the laws of San Francisco, and data collected from 351 surveys and 43 interviews of homeless people and other sources, Herring and Yarbrough found that the systematic criminalization of homelessness through the antihomeless and quality of life laws have not only failed at reducing the homeless population, but was also found to perpetuate poverty and homelessness, as well as racial and gender inequality. Of the 351 respondents, 74% reported having been approached by police within the past year (2014), with 69% of respondents being given a quality of life citation, and 22% receiving more than five citations in the same year (Herring & Yarbrough, 2015). Furthermore, only 10% were able to pay the fine for their last citation (Herring & Yarbrough, 2015). When someone is unable to pay their fine on time, the City of San Francisco adds another \$300 to the fine. Additionally, an arrest warrant is issued, and the person's driver's license, if one exists, is suspended. These measures only create more barriers to someone who is attempting to get a job, secure housing, and exit homelessness (Herring & Yarbrough, 2015). In California, more than 7,000 people were arrested for vagrancy in 2013 (Boden & Selbin, 2015). From 2000 to 2012, arrests for vagrancy rose 77% in California while arrests for public intoxication and disorderly conduct declined significantly (Boden & Selbin, 2015). It appears as if the vagrancy law is being used to punish homeless people merely for being homeless and not for people's actual behavior.

In Los Angeles the relationship between the police and the homeless has been a tenuous situation for decades. One such example is the 1999 shooting of a homeless grandmother:

Margaret Mitchell, a homeless 54-year-old Black woman, was pulling a shopping cart along the street in Los Angeles when two officers on bicycles approached and began harassing her. Under a California law, police can ticket people and confiscate their carts for supposedly not having a store's permission to take the carts onto the street. Margaret walked away from the police. Her shopping cart held all her possessions, including a red blanket that had become her trademark with the people in the area. As she walked down the street, someone driving by recognized her, pulled over and tried to talk the cops out of hassling her. But the officers continued. One witness saw her

running and pulling the cart behind her as the cops ran after her. “My first thought was, ‘Oh man. When they catch this person, they’re going to beat her.’ That was my first thought. I didn’t see the guns. I just saw the cops running. And I saw her in front of them running. And then I heard the bam! It was so sudden that I didn’t even realize she was shot until moments later when I processed it and I saw her laying on the ground.” (Revolutionary Worker, 1999)

In the weeks and months that followed, several civil rights protests occurred throughout Los Angeles. In the Police Commission’s investigation of the case, it was decided that the officer shot Mitchell without cause and violated the department’s policy of using deadly force. The city paid nearly a million dollars to Mitchell’s family.

Over the past 30 years, in urban areas, there has been a systematic effort to diminish and remove evidence of visible poverty and homelessness (Stuart, 2013). Much of this effort of the gentrification of lower income areas has been attributed to attempts at boosting the overall economy of major cities (Stuart, 2013). The police have been tasked with relocating the homeless to other less desirable places (Stuart, 2013). Nowhere is this more evident than in the Downtown Los Angeles Skid Row district. The homeless have been systematically shepherded closer to the Los Angeles River and the overall space that Skid Row once occupied is slowly decreasing while the homeless population has been continuing to rise. Just looking at news articles focused on Downtown Los Angeles, one can see that tension has continued to increase between the police and the homeless. Police have been pressured by city officials in recent years to make sure that during the day the streets are clear of as many homeless people as possible over concerns that the visible homeless deter business. As a result, an underground city has formed where the homeless literally go underground using the Los Angeles Sewer System to stay off the streets during the day. Officers drive up and down the most heavily populated streets before dawn and use their loud speakers to wake up the homeless and remind them that their encampments need to be removed before 6 A.M. each morning (Dellinger, 2015). Those who remain above ground are encouraged to go and attend a daytime recovery program, church service, job and career placement program, adult education class, or other service, ensuring that the streets remain as clear as possible. Just after sunset the homeless people come back up from the sewers and begin setting up tents again. The police are within their rights to have the encampments removed if it is before 9 P.M., but most officers will not disturb the homeless unless there is some cause (Dellinger,

2015). A new law went into effect in July 2015 that allows the city to confiscate homeless peoples' possessions (Dellinger, 2015). Once someone has been given a citation for having their possessions on public property, the person is not allowed to have those same possessions anywhere within the County of Los Angeles again (Dellinger, 2015). In other words, it is now being made illegal for a homeless person to have more possessions than they can physically carry. Police can now have someone move who has occupied the same public space for 24 hours, whereas in the past it was three days (Dellinger, 2015). These new ordinances seem like a clear attempt at banishing homelessness from Los Angeles.

A growing concern. Children in families without adequate financial resources often go without basic human needs such as food, shelter, and medical care. As previously stated, such deficiencies negatively impact children in terms of their academics, social and emotional well-being, and lifelong economic outcomes (Center for Public Policy Priorities, 2005). As the homeless population continues to grow in the United States, the education of children has become an increasing concern. A 2005 study by Filkelstein estimated that approximately 10% of school-aged children were homeless by the federal definition. According to Miller (2009), less than half of homeless students attend school on a regular basis. Given the seriousness of this issue, Miller attempted to determine the responsibilities of the school versus the greater community as well as examine the perceptions, leadership styles, and collaborative efforts of school administrators and supervisors of city homeless shelters with regard to providing educational and various services for homeless students. The findings of his study imply that the organizational structures of schools and shelters differ greatly, creating distinct cultures that do not necessarily complement one another and therefore do not promote a positive climate for student achievement. Miller made several recommendations to increase the effectiveness of leadership practices in both school sites and homeless shelters. One recommendation was to create open channels of communication among all school and community shelter leaders (e.g., case workers, teachers, child development specialists, residents at the shelters, administrators, social workers etc.). It is imperative that all stakeholders have a clear understanding of what the provisions are for homeless children with the reauthorization of the McKinney-Vento Act under the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015. Another recommendation consisted of examining the tools and routines of the institutions involved in order to foster relationships and become more humanizing organizations. The final call to action challenged shelters and neighborhood schools to acquire advocates for each homeless family with school-aged children (Miller, 2009).

Using transformative leadership models in which the focus is on the relationships among the physical, experiential, and skill-level differences students bring into the classroom, Shields and Warke (2010) examined the roles of school and community leaders with respect to providing equitable services to homeless families. Shields and Warke challenged the status quo and brought to light issues of social justice, and community and individual accountability. They examined a specific suburban elementary school's program, where it is believed that 7% of its population was homeless. Three families' lives were examined in detail. The study concluded with a series of recommendations for community and school leaders. To begin with Shields and Warke believed that it must be understood that homelessness is not the same for all who experience it. It is imperative for individual teachers to know and understand the law with regard to homeless students as set forth in the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (Shields & Warke, 2010). Additionally, those on the front lines, primarily teachers, need to resolve these issues to cultivate positive relationships to address the unique needs of each child beyond the concerns of accountability with regard to benchmarks and test scores (Shields & Warke, 2010).

Homelessness in California and Los Angeles

The State of California has continued to see an increase in poverty and homelessness despite indicators of strong economic growth and a decreasing national unemployment rate. The national poverty rate stood at 12.7% in 2016 while the State of California's official poverty rate was 14.3%, a statistically significant difference (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2016). However, the cost of living in California is much higher than most other states. One factor to consider is the high housing costs in California are not factored into the poverty rate. The U.S. poverty line for a family of four is a household income of \$24,000 per year, while the median rent for a two-bedroom apartment statewide is \$1,341 per month (Huffington Post, 2013; Public Policy Institute of California, 2015; U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2016). If a family were just to use 30% of their monthly income on rent and utilities, they would have to earn a household income of \$53,627 statewide (Huffington Post, 2013). The median income for the United States was \$51,939, meaning that the average household in the United States could not afford the rent and utilities of a two-bedroom apartment in California if they only used the standard 30% rule (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2014). These are the averages for the whole state. When one considers an area such as Los Angeles, the cost of living increases; the median rent for a two-bedroom apartment is \$2,443 per month and the minimum wage is \$11

an hour or \$21,120 a year in 2018, it is clear to see why poverty rates continue to climb and why Los Angeles has become the homeless capital of the United States (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2014; Huffington Post, 2013; Public Policy Institute of California, 2015).

The poverty rate for children is 22.4% for the State of California (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2014). Again, this number is based upon the national poverty line and does not include the higher cost of living in California. More than 23% of the nation's 1.36 million homeless student population resides in California, where more than 310,000 homeless students attended public schools in the 2013–2014 school year (Hyatt, Walzer, & Julianelle, 2014; Layton & Brown, 2015). This makes California the homeless student capital of the United States at a rate twice that of any other state: 4% of California students were homeless during the 2012–2013 school year as opposed to 2% nationwide (Hyatt et al., 2014; Layton & Brown, 2015). Another factor to note is that there were 20,000 more homeless students in the 2012–2013 school year in California than in the previous school year (Hyatt et al., 2014) and an additional 40,000 homeless students in the 2013–2014 school year in California (Layton & Brown, 2015). Nearly one in 20 students in the State of California was homeless in the 2013–2014 school year. At the same time, California is ranked the 48th worst state in the country in regard to issues related to homeless students such as academic performance (National Center on Family Homelessness, 2014). Even though California has 23% of the nation's homeless students, it receives only 11% of the \$65 million federal McKinney-Vento funds available each year (Hyatt et al., 2014; Layton & Brown, 2015).

The Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) has the most homeless students in the state, with 14,323 identified as homeless in the 2012–2013 school year (Hyatt et al., 2014). That accounts for 3.6% of the students in LAUSD (Hyatt et al., 2014). Approximately 86% of the reported homeless students in LAUSD lived in some type of doubled-up situation (Hyatt et al., 2014). The majority (50.3%) of homeless students in LAUSD was enrolled in prekindergarten through the fifth grade, with nearly an even split between middle school (23.2%) and high school (26.5%) (Hyatt et al., 2014).

A large limitation to all of the data reported above with regard to the numbers and percentages of homeless students is that they do not include children and youth who are not enrolled in a standard public school setting. Students who are being educated by private organizations, such as mobile schools and learning centers, or by other means are excluded.

Students who are enrolled in a non-LEA prekindergarten or preschool are not included either. There are also homeless students who attend public institutions who have not been identified as homeless. Sometimes parents/guardians and/or the students themselves may not self-identify as homeless; this is especially true for older children who may fear being in trouble with the authorities or even of being reunited with their parents (Hyatt et al., 2014). Schools may not correctly identify all homeless students due to a lack of knowledge, awareness, and/or even training about the McKinney-Vento requirements and services (Hyatt et al., 2014).

Sometimes older students stay in school even though they are homeless and separated from their families and/or guardians because they believe that a high school diploma will help them obtain better employment opportunities and housing with a higher salary. The Alliance for Excellent Education (2011) estimated that in 2009 a high school diploma allowed a person to earn nearly \$8,000 more per year than someone who had dropped out of high school (\$27,380 versus \$19,540). In other words, a high school diploma can mean the difference between being above or below the poverty line. It is also estimated that the loss in lifetime earnings for the State of California will negatively impact the economy by \$3.2 billion because of homeless students dropping out of school (Hyatt et al., 2014); therefore, it is not only the individual who benefits from staying in school and graduating with a high school diploma but the entire state as well.

State of Emergency

Throughout this chapter, various statistics have been brought to light regarding those living in states of poverty and homelessness. Recently, homelessness in the city of Los Angeles has finally gotten some much needed attention by the mayor and city council. After 2 years of significant increases in homelessness (12%), on September 22, 2015, the Los Angeles City Council pledged to declare a state of emergency on homelessness, calling for \$100 million to be set aside specifically to address homelessness in Los Angeles (Ford, 2015). On the same day, Mayor Garcetti announced his plan to move the homeless off the streets of Los Angeles. Some of the immediate changes included in the council's proposal would make it easier for the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority to use defunct public buildings to run services for the homeless out of as well as reduce the "red tape" for nonprofit and religious organizations to set up and operate shelters (Ford, 2015). There is an immediate need of at

least 19,000 additional shelter beds in Los Angeles as there are only approximately 6,000 beds currently available and there are at least 25,000 people in need of a shelter bed on any given night in Los Angeles (Los Angeles City Council, 2015). As of 2015, housing permits for new construction that specifically will be built for low-income residents, transitional housing units, homeless shelters, and parking lots to house homeless whether in vehicles or temporary shelters were to be fast-tracked (Los Angeles City Council, 2015). In addition to the \$100 million set aside by the council, the mayor called for an additional \$100 million to be used specifically for permanent housing projects to get homeless people off the streets. By declaring a state of emergency on homelessness, the city can also suspend money that is meant to be allocated to nonessential programs and divert it to homeless programs and initiatives (Wogan, 2015). Additional staff can be hired to help provide services for the homeless regardless of a hiring freeze for city workers (Wogan, 2015). Citywide quality of life laws can be suspended temporarily, reducing the number of citations issued to homeless people. Instead, police can focus on getting people off the street and into shelters. By declaring a state of emergency, public awareness about homelessness gets raised, hopefully with the increased awareness that perhaps citizens will assist more in efforts to help the homeless (Wogan, 2015). All of this could significantly help with the crisis of homelessness in California, but ultimately it was a pledge and not an actual declaration. The city council cannot declare a state of emergency; only the mayor can, and Mayor Garcetti decided not to follow through with the pledge made in September 2015.

Instead, the mayor and the council looked at short-term measures. In 2015, about \$12.4 million was made available for homeless programs, including emergency housing during inclement weather, should El Niño actually hit Los Angeles (Wattenhoffer, 2015). An additional \$10.1 million was set aside for rapid rehousing efforts, and \$5.1 million was being used to assist homeless veterans (Wattenhoffer, 2015). Other monies have been set aside for specific programs, but all-in-all the efforts are turning out to be a far cry from what was promised to Angelenos. There is also a great concern over whether or not Los Angeles might lose a significant portion of its federal funding from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to support programs for the poor and the homeless because of failing to comply with the federal requirements to reduce the homeless population (Wattenhoffer, 2015). As stated previously, homeless numbers in Los Angeles have continued to rise by double digits, putting the city at risk for losing \$28 million (Wattenhoffer, 2015). The mayor and the city council revisited the encampment laws that went into effect in July of 2015 and

how they could be strengthened to remove more homeless from the streets of Los Angeles to meet the federal guidelines better.

Schools for the Homeless

A great deal of attention has been drawn to homelessness and the lifelong impacts it has upon children. Many efforts have been made through legislation, federal funding, and public services to address the crisis. However, these efforts are falling short. To address the problem better as it relates to the education of children and youth, nonprofit organizations have been created to take school directly to children who otherwise, due to circumstances surrounding their homelessness, would not have access to an education. Some of these organizations literally drive up to a homeless shelter or motel known to have homeless families and set up shop on a converted bus, others will temporarily pop up in a space inside of a strip mall, store front, parking lot, or other space in low-income areas, while still others will establish a permanent location in the heart of a densely homeless populated area.

Although the focus of this study is a nonprofit mobile school and learning center organization, it is relevant to look at a specialized public school. In San Diego, California, there is a public kindergarten through 12th-grade school, the Monarch School, specifically designed for homeless students where “93 percent of students have no form of permanent housing” (Zimmerman, 2015, p. 1). It is the largest school of its kind in the country and has the only public high school for homeless students. Monarch started off as a drop-in center with one teacher in 1987 and, as of 2015, served nearly 300 homeless students from all across San Diego County’s 42 school districts (Zimmerman, 2015). Because, in 2015, Monarch only served homeless students, the barriers that many children and youth faced going to school were eliminated. Monarch provided food, clothing, health care, special education services, extracurricular activities, counseling services, transportation, connection to housing services, and other services related to the McKinney-Vento Act. Students felt safe at Monarch: “they all share the same story . . . there’s no reason to be embarrassed . . . everyday they come to a safe place and focus on learning” (Zimmerman, 2015, p. 3).

Monarch was able to graduate six seniors in 2015 and had its first graduate go off to a 4-year university (Zimmerman, 2015). Many students are failing their classes though due to many lost years of learning due to frequent bouts of homelessness. At Monarch, the teachers and

counselors worked with each student to create an individualized education plan regardless of whether or not they needed special education services. The mere fact that they were homeless meant that they need some type of extra support services (Zimmerman, 2015). The school spent a great deal of time not just educating students but also connecting them and their families to public services such as housing and medical care. Unfortunately, given the transitory nature of homelessness, many students are not able to complete enough credits for high school graduation. Nevertheless, the school ensures that each student receives the best education they can while they are at Monarch.

It is important to note that the Monarch School is technically in violation of the McKinney-Vento Act in that it is a public institution that specifically separates homeless students from non-homeless students. However, Monarch was able to get a special exemption as long as it provided the same services as other public schools in the county and that homeless students attend Monarch voluntarily (Zimmerman, 2015). The Monarch School almost lost its exemption in 2013 when Congress was re-evaluating the four public schools with exemptions. In Monarch's case, the exemption was upheld due in great part to Senator Diane Feinstein's support, stating that the Monarch School was able to provide more services than neighboring schools for homeless students. It was also noted that there are not enough programs in the United States to help homeless teens and young adults transition from adolescents to adulthood (Zimmerman, 2015). In 2014, only about 3,300 of the 40,000 unaccompanied youth ages 16 to 22 were in transitional housing (Zimmerman, 2015). Monarch heard this and added a life skills and internship program to its curriculum for high school students in hopes of better preparing their students for their life ahead. In the coming years, Monarch and the other three public schools for homeless students may disappear if Congress decides to pull their exemptions.

Mobile Schools

This is where the private nonprofit sector comes into the landscape. The concept of mobile schools is not a new one, and it is being used throughout the world to bring education to the marginalized. UNICEF has mobile schools in Kenya and other parts of Africa to reach children and youth in areas where there is no formal education system within a reasonable distance of large populations of children (Slavin, 2011). Brilliant Earth funds mobile schools in rural diamond mining communities where there is no formal education system in place

(Brilliant Earth, 2018). There are other, smaller organizations reaching out to the children of refugees fleeing the unrest in the Middle East and Africa (Intersos, 2017).

One of the largest and well-known mobile school organizations is a Belgian firm called Mobile School. It is dedicated to empowering organizations working with homeless youth and enables them to provide mobile schools. Mobile School designs expandable chalkboards and interactive boards on mobile carts. The carts come with educational materials and games. Mobile School also provides training for teachers. Their partner company is Streetwize, which provides leadership training based upon the inspiration, insights, and skills of homeless children and youth. Streetwize's change-maker leadership training is comprised of four competencies: (a) positive focus, (b) agility and resilience, (c) proactive creativity, and (d) cooperative completion (Streetwize, 2018). The money raised from the leadership training funds the Mobile School company, allowing it to offer free materials, supplies, teacher training, and carts to teachers and organizations assisting homeless children (Mobile School, 2018). Mobile School has assisted organizations working with homeless children and youth in more than 20 countries in South America, Asia, Africa, and Europe.

In the United States, the public school system has to be careful how it carries out alternative programs to ensure that all students are getting the same free and appropriate education. As discussed above, under the McKinney-Vento Act, "State educational agencies (SEAs) must ensure that each homeless child and youth has equal access to the same free, appropriate public education" (National Foundation Advisory Group for Ending Homelessness, 2000). Additionally, "homeless students may not be separated from the mainstream school environment" (National Foundation Advisory Group for Ending Homelessness, 2000).

One such example in how the public school system violated the law is when the San Antonio Independent School District established a temporary, or mobile, elementary school at a homeless shelter in San Antonio where it had a high population of young children. It was set up as an old-fashioned one-room schoolhouse to serve homeless children in kindergarten through fifth grade. The school was designed to be easily moved, as needed. The site had very little in the way of materials and supplies and only the most basic textbooks. It did not have the same items as a traditional classroom and was far from equal to the main school campus (Medcalf, 2008). The mobile school was supposed to be overseen by the local elementary school's principal and staff, but they did not connect with the teaching assistant

who ran the daily activities after the first part of the school year (Medcalf, 2008). Throughout the mobile school's existence, there were several substitute teachers; the principal even sent a teacher who had only a high school diploma. A curriculum specialist who had never been to the site designed the lesson plans (Medcalf, 2008). This created some problems in that the lessons did not match the cultural contexts of the students at the shelter school. For example, the curriculum specialist sent lessons on ballet with complex vocabulary during the week in which the students were going to go to Sea World (Medcalf, 2008). In the beginning, the homeless children would go to the local elementary school for physical education and music lessons.

However, the other students were teasing the homeless children, so the principal stopped having the shelter school children come over to the regular school. The principal sent the vice principal and counselor over once to check in on the classroom, but no other support was offered (Medcalf, 2008). The school received federal funds for the children and was supposed to provide services such as Head Start, free breakfasts and lunches, reading remediation, and other enrichment funds; however, there is no evidence that the school ever used these funds for the students they were meant for (Medcalf, 2008). Situations like this push the burden of meeting the education needs of homeless youth into the private sector.

In the United States, one form of the mobile school that people may be familiar with is a school or library on wheels, in which an old school bus or trailer is converted into a small learning center (American Library Association, 2014). The vehicle drives up to an area where there are children in need, such as in front of a homeless shelter, low-income motel, or park, and offers tutoring or other educational services for the day. In some countries, a school on wheels may be the only educational resource available in rural areas. One example is in India, where the Children's Hope India organization assembled a team of educators, social workers, and other staff to provide easy access to school for street children and those on the outskirts of Delhi (Children's Hope India, 2015). Another form of the mobile school is a temporary pop-up sight. Sometimes mobile schools get enough support from donors and the local community that they can establish permanent sights for their learning centers (Ram, 2013). The range of services at these mobile schools depends on resources and includes, but is not limited to, tutoring, day care, nutrition services, full-service educational programs, and access to other services such as health care and hygiene.

The Griffon Learning Center

This study focuses on one nonprofit mobile school and learning center organization in Los Angeles. To protect the identities of the participants of the study, the site is referred to as the Griffon Learning Center throughout the study. It was established in the early 1990s and at the time of data collection they had over 50 locations throughout Southern California. The organization was still utilizing trailers and converted buses to house mobile schools and learning centers. Some sites could be found inside of libraries, malls, community centers, public schools, and other public gathering places. There were also permanent locations where there is a dense population of homeless children such as in Downtown Los Angeles. According to internal documents, in 2016, the Griffon Learning Center served over 3,100 homeless students and, in 2017, nearly 3,500 were served. The staff and volunteers of the organization believe that they offer homeless students a place of stability and support to help students achieve academic success during one of the most tumultuous times in a child's life.

In addition to one-on-one tutoring, the Griffon Learning Center provided homeless students with school supplies, assistance with gaining access to public school and gathering records, financial assistance, and scholarships. There were also informational sessions for the parents and guardians of the children who utilized the services of the Griffon Learning Center. The mission of the Griffon Learning Center is to reduce the gaps in a child's education while they are homeless and to provide a support system for the child. Although the Griffon Learning Center served kindergarten through 12th graders, the average age of the children they served was eight years old. There were other mobile school organizations in Southern California, and particularly in Los Angeles, which offered more programs and services for older students such as access to high school course credits or GED test preparation, career and college counseling services, and life skills training. Although smaller organizations, they are attempting to do their part in meeting the needs of homeless students who are unable to regularly attend the local public school, or who need additional resources not available otherwise.

Chapter Summary

Chapter Two continued to introduce the study and focused on the pertinent literature to build context for the study. It began with a history of homelessness in the United States and

reviewed the major eras as they related to changes of perceptions of the homeless, services, and contributing factors to states of homelessness. The conceptual framework for the study followed the history of homelessness. A socio-psychological lens comprised of aspects of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1970) and Goodman et al.'s Trauma Theory (1991) was used for this case study. The literature as it related to the impact of homelessness upon children was then examined. The chapter continued with a discussion of teacher perceptions and the laws governing education for homeless children and youth. The chapter concluded with a focus on California and, more specifically, Los Angeles. It analyzed the situation of homelessness in Southern California, talked about schools for the homeless and mobile schools, and described the organization being studied.

Citation

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CHAPTER 3: MEASURING THE NEED FOR EDUCATING HOMELESS YOUTH

The case study format was a natural way of exploring the perceptions and experiences of homeless youth who utilized the services of a mobile school and youth learning center, and the perceptions and experiences of the staff and volunteers who served them. According to Merriam (1998), “Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meanings people have constructed, that is, how they make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world” (p. 6). This book sought greater understanding of how organizations such as the Griffon Learning Center were closing the educational gaps for homeless youth in Los Angeles. The process of investigating the perceptions and experiences of those surrounding the Griffon Learning Center was best accomplished as an interpretive task utilizing case study methodology and its related techniques as the research framework. Additionally, attention was given to the rigor and trustworthiness of the research design, how it was implemented, and the processes of the data collection and analysis. The following chapter details the methods and process of the study discussing design and conceptual framework, research methodology, data collection and analysis, context of the study, the participants (including researcher positionality), and limitations of the study.

Research Questions

This qualitative case study sought to expand upon the current knowledge and focus on one case of a mobile school and youth learning center in Los Angeles County. The researcher was interested in understanding how the staff and volunteers at the mobile school and youth learning center interpreted their experiences with homeless youth, how they believed they were meeting the educational needs of the homeless children they interacted with, and what meaning they attributed to their experiences. Additionally, this study wanted to explore how homeless students who utilized the services of a mobile school and youth learning center perceived their own social and educational needs, the extent to which those needs were being

met by the staff and/or volunteers, and what meaning the homeless students attributed to their experiences. To explore their perceptions, this study sought to answer the following questions:

1. According to the perceptions of the staff and volunteers, how does the mobile school and youth learning center organization meet the educational and social needs of the homeless children and their families whom they serve?
2. According to the perceptions of the children whom they serve, how does the mobile school and youth learning center organization meet their educational and social needs?

Research Design

Qualitative Methodology

To answer the questions this study sought to investigate, qualitative methods were utilized. This was accomplished by conducting a case study on a mobile school and youth learning center for homeless children in Downtown Los Angeles. This research attempted to understand the behaviors and experiences of the participants from their own perspective and frame of reference (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). This approach allowed the researcher to study participants firsthand and gain reliable results based upon the experiences of the participants and the opportunity to collaborate with the participants (Maxwell, 1996). Given the sensitivity of the population of this study and the uniqueness of the topic, a case study was the most appropriate method to capture the experiences of the homeless children and youth who utilized the services and programs of the mobile school and youth learning center as well as the experiences of those who served them.

Merriam (2009) said that each writer makes sense of their observations in their own way and that they have their own philosophies. In other words, “stories are how we make sense of our experiences, how we communicate with others, and through which we understand the world around us” (Merriam, 2009, p. 32). Merriam (2009) further stated that “reality is socially constructed, that is, there is no single, observable reality” (p. 8) and that “there is no single truth” (p. 10). This study is the reality and truth as expressed by a researcher who had experienced in part what some of the subjects of the study had experienced homelessness. This case study includes analysis of observations, interviews, and documents.

Case study design. This study employed a qualitative case study design. One type of case study examines in detail one setting (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). A case study is a single unit of study that is supposed to be bounded and defined to uncover how significant factors interact with one another (Merriam, 1998, 2009). This study examined a mobile school and youth learning center organization located in Downtown Los Angeles. This case study documented the experiences of a unique phenomenon and provides insights that could be used to design further research in order to advance the knowledge base of homeless studies and the field of education.

Merriam (1998) characterized qualitative case studies as using three inclusive features. First, qualitative case studies are particularistic. This means that a case study focuses on one event, and it creates a model for resolving small, practical problems (Merriam, 1998). Second, qualitative case studies are descriptive. Being descriptive allows the case study to be infused with rich, thick descriptions, like those found in anthropological research (Merriam, 1998). Lastly, qualitative case studies are heuristic. By being heuristic, the case study might provide new meanings and expand the researcher's perspective or confirm what is already known (Merriam, 1998).

As stated above, a case study was the most appropriate method to capture the experiences of the homeless children and youth who were utilizing the mobile school and youth learning center as well as the experiences of those who serve them. In examining the literature, there was limited information on mobile schools, especially in the context in which this study is utilizing the term. Because substantial research on this population within the context of a mobile school and youth learning center does not exist, the case study design was useful in connecting the experiences of these homeless students to other marginalized student populations.

This case study served to connect mobile schools and youth learning centers to the broader world of educating homeless students. It employs the voices of homeless students and the staff and volunteers at a mobile school and youth learning center. It describes how this organization came about, the current challenges, the perceived social and educational needs of homeless students, and what the mobile school and youth learning center was doing to meet these needs.

Research Setting

To protect the identity of this sensitive population and those who work with them, this study calls the research site and its parent organization the Griffon Learning Center. Some details about the site are not included to protect the study's participants further. The Griffon Learning Center was established in the early 1990s. At the time of data collection, the organization had grown to over 50 locations throughout Southern California. Some of the sites were small learning centers inside of converted buses and trailers. They went into neighborhoods where there was a suspected high population of homeless children. Some of the organization's sites were located inside of libraries, malls, community centers, public schools, and other public gathering places. The Griffon Learning Center established a few permanent locations where the population of homeless children was consistent or had grown. One such site was in Downtown Los Angeles. In 2016, The Griffon Learning Center served over 3,100 homeless youth. More than 1,800 volunteers provided nearly 90,000 hours of tutoring. The volunteers and staff of the Griffon Learning Center believe that they offer homeless students a place of stability and support to help students achieve academic success during one of the most tumultuous times in a child's life.

In addition to one-on-one tutoring, the Griffon Learning Center provided homeless students with school supplies, assistance with gaining access to public school and gathering records, financial assistance and scholarships. There were also informational sessions for the parents and guardians of the youth who utilized the services of the organization. The mission of the Griffon Learning Center was to reduce the gaps in a child's education while he/she is homeless and to provide a support system for the child. Although the Griffon Learning Center served kindergarten through 12th graders, the average age of the children they served was 8 years old.

Participants and Sampling Criteria

This case study used convenience and purposive sampling to ensure that staff and volunteers who had the most knowledge about the Griffon Learning Center were part of the sample. Convenience sampling was used to access the perspectives of the children and youth who utilized the services of the Griffon Learning Center. Participation in the study was voluntary. Staff and volunteers of the Griffon Learning Center received an open invitation to play a part

in the study. They were asked if they were willing to participate in interviews regarding their perceptions of the educational and social needs of the homeless students the Griffon Learning Center served, and what the staff and volunteers believed they and the organization was doing to meet homeless students' needs. Parents and/or guardians of the homeless students were asked if they were willing to allow their children to participate in brief interviews. Flyers were posted in private staff and volunteer areas and a sign-up sheet was left with the site coordinator for the adult interviews. Flyers with times, dates, and locations were posted in the local shelters and the information board at the research site. The flyers also contained a contact email and phone number for more information. The staff and volunteers were also asked to refer potential student subjects to the researcher. Once a participant agreed to be interviewed, whether an adult or youth, they were asked if they knew of anyone else who might have been interested in the study.

Access and Entry

Gaining access and entry to the research sites is of vital importance. Without access to those who worked and volunteered at the mobile school and youth learning center as well as to those who utilized their services, the crux of this study could not have been accomplished. To begin the process of gaining access and permission, site coordinators were contacted before the study was formally proposed. It was emphasized to the site coordinators that all participation in the study was voluntary and that anonymity would be maintained throughout the study and after it was concluded. As part of building a relationship with the site coordinators, staff, volunteers, and homeless students, the researcher also volunteered at the site. The researcher had already volunteered with other organizations in the area that assisted the homeless for more than 3 years prior to this study.

Methods of Data Collection

Merriam (2009) suggested that the concept of collecting data may be misunderstood as the data are not in limbo waiting for a researcher to come along and collect and analyze them; rather, the researcher selects data and uses it for a specific purpose for his/her study. To provide a clear picture of the educational and social needs of homeless students and how the mobile school and youth learning center was attempting to meet those needs, the following methods of data collection were utilized: observations, interviews, and document analysis.

Observations

Qualitative researchers look for firsthand accounts of the phenomenon the researcher is studying, and data from direct observations are one means to accomplish this (Merriam, 2009). This case study employed observations at a mobile school and learning center in Los Angeles using an ethnographic approach. Ethnographic field notes are clear “accounts describing experiences and observations the researcher has made while participating in an intense and involved manner” (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995, p. 5). The field notes are actual representations of what happened at the site and provide a lens into the perceptions and practices of those being observed.

After having been a volunteer as an academic counselor with the Griffon Learning Center for more than a year, the researcher became a participant observer. The observations took place on different days of the week and at various times of the day. This was to ensure a broader scope of the understanding of the activities of the mobile school and youth learning center as well as the community that it served. The observations took place in the summer and fall of 2016. The organization was open year-round to the homeless community. When the researcher was on-site and conducting direct observation, the researcher kept a journal in real-time. Given the nature of the situation, observing children in crisis, videotaping was not permitted on the premises. The journals and observations were coded after each visit to the site before the next visit. The intent of the observations was to build rapport with the staff, volunteers, and community, gain an understanding of the culture of the organization, and inform the questions asked in the interviews.

Interviews

Interviews were an integral component of this study. Interviews are purposeful conversations between two people with the intent to gather information (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Interviews provide information on the past and are one of the best ways to collect information directly from a source (Merriam, 1998). In this case study, interviews were an essential component of the data collection process because the researcher was not able to observe all the experiences of the participants at the mobile school and youth learning center. Interviews allowed for data collection in a subject’s “own words so that the researcher can develop insights on how subjects interpret some piece of the world” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 103).

Therefore, interviews provided salient insights into the experiences of staff, volunteers, and homeless students.

Qualitative researchers should consider asking open-ended questions and looking for cues that may expose how the participants of their studies understand their own experiences (Hatch, 2002). Therefore, an interview protocol was used. The interview questions were semistructured and malleable enough to allow for additional questions to be asked based upon developing themes from the participants (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Merriam, 2009). It is salient for an interview to be guided by a protocol (shown in Tables 1 and 2), but it cannot be too inflexible that it may limit the stories of the interviewees (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Merriam, 2009).

The researcher conducted one interview with each adult participant. Each interview was supposed to last approximately 45 to 60 minutes. The interviews were conducted in the Fall of 2016. The adult participants included two staff members of the organization to build the historical context of the organization as well as four volunteers. The intent originally was to interview three staff members and three volunteers to measure their perceptions of the social and educational needs of homeless children and how those needs were being met.

However, more Griffon Learning Center volunteers agreed to participate in the study than staff members. The researcher conducted five of the adult interviews in a semiprivate space off-site at a coffee house. The participants received a gift card for office supplies or the coffee shop after the interview was completed. The subjects did not know that they were going to receive a gift card.

The participants were asked to sign a consent form and were asked if the researcher could tape-record the interview. The participants also received The Human Subjects Bill of Rights and a list of counseling service providers. The researcher took scrupulous notes during the interviews in addition to making the recordings.

The researcher also wrote a reflection within 48 hours of each interview detailing additional information and personal reflections. When possible, transcribing and coding of each interview took place before each subsequent interview. The staff and volunteer interview protocol was as follows:

1. Are you a staff member or volunteer at the Griffon Learning Center? What is your specific position?
2. How long have you been a part of this organization?
3. What do you do for the Griffon Learning Center as part of your position?
4. As you understand it, what is the purpose of the Griffon Learning Center?
5. What services does the organization offer and to whom?
6. As you understand it, what is the history of the Griffon Learning Center?
7. Why have you chosen to be a part of the Griffon Learning Center?
8. How has working/volunteering for this organization impacted you?
9. What do you believe are the educational needs of the students whom you serve? Why?
10. What has the Griffon Learning Center done to meet these educational needs?
11. What have you personally done to meet these educational needs?
12. What do you believe the local public school is doing to meet these aforementioned educational needs?
13. What do you believe are the social needs of the students whom you serve? Why?
14. What has the Griffon Learning Center done to meet these social needs?
15. What have you personally done to meet these social needs?
16. What do you believe the local public school is doing to meet these aforementioned social needs?
17. What do you believe all educators should know about homeless students and how to serve them?
18. What do you believe policy makers should know about homeless students and how to serve them?

The researcher conducted one semistructured interview with each minor participant. The interviews were scheduled to last approximately 20 minutes. It was anticipated that younger children would have shorter answers and thus their interview took less time. Interviews were conducted during the late Fall of 2016. It was the intent of the study to interview at least six minor participants. Ideally, at least three children under the age of 12 and at least three youths 12 or older were to be interviewed to measure their perceptions of what their social and educational needs were and how those needs were being met by the staff and volunteers at the mobile school and youth learning center.

In the end, 12 homeless children and youth were interviewed. The child and youth interviews were conducted in a semiprivate area so as not to be overheard by other homeless students, but still public enough to be seen by others. The participants received a school supply kit after the interview.

The minor subjects were told before their interviews while going over the Child Assent form that they would receive a school supply kit. Each participant's parent or guardian was asked to sign a consent form and were asked prior to the interviews if the researcher could tape-record the interview. The minor participant also needed to agree to be tape-recorded and was asked to sign a Child Assent form.

The participant's parent or guardian also received the Human Subjects Bill of Rights and a list of counseling service providers. Minor participants were informed that they did not have to answer any question they did not wish to answer and that they could stop the interview at any time. The researcher took scrupulous notes during the interviews and wrote a reflection within 48 hours of the interview to record additional information. The Homeless Student protocol was as follows:

1. What grade are you in? How old are you?
2. Do you like school? Why or why not?
3. Why do you come to the Griffon Learning Center?
4. What do you do at the Griffon Learning Center?
5. What have you learned while the Griffon Learning Center?
6. What has the Griffon Learning Center done to help you?
7. What do you believe all educators should know about students like you and how to help them?
8. What do you believe policy makers (the people who make laws) should know about students like you and how to help them?

Documents and Media

Documents are ready-made data sources or artifacts (Merriam, 1998, 2009). Documents need to be authentic and accurate representations, and public documents and media were the primary focus of data analysis (Merriam, 1998, 2009). Some of the documents analyzed included items that were posted in public areas in local shelters, at the mobile school and

youth learning center (e.g., rules and procedures, life-values, daily schedules, computer lab rules, visitor policies, etc.), or in the offices of the administrative assistant, house manager, and director (e.g., hotline numbers and other contacts, daily checklists, the U.S. Constitution, labor laws, IGETCI, and other college and vocational certificate enrollment information, etc.). The organization's website, quarterly newsletters, public reports and publications, historical documents, board reports, and founding documents were analyzed. The organization had produced a few short films during its existence, and those too were reviewed.

Methods of Data Analysis

In this qualitative case study, the data were mediated through the researcher, who was the facilitator collecting and analyzing the data (Merriam, 1998). Since the researcher interacted with the participants of the study directly when using qualitative methodologies, she could respond to the data in real time and change with the various circumstances as the need arose. Due to the researcher's role as a volunteer and a researcher, it was important to outline the different processes used to analyze the study data. In this qualitative case study design, the following methods of data collection were utilized: interviews, ethnographic field notes that included direct observations and informal interactions, and analysis of documents and policies.

Inductive analysis is a process that examines specific elements and identifies patterns and connections so that general statements can be made about the phenomena being investigated (Hatch, 2002). With this type of inductive analysis, theories and concepts come directly from the context of the study (Hatch, 2002). Hatch outlined the steps. They are comprehensive but also allow the researcher the flexibility necessary to create domains and codes as they emerge from the data. Hatch also suggested that these steps be completed while collecting the data to allow the researcher to observe how each part of the process influences the final analysis of the data.

Inductive analysis is not suitable for all types of qualitative work, but its strength lies in "its power to get meaning from complex data that have been gathered with a broad focus in mind" (Hatch, 2002, p. 179). The inductive analysis approach provides researchers the opportunity to process large amounts of data while ensuring confidence that the data are

representative of the situation being examined. Hatch's (2000) Steps in Inductive Analysis are:

1. Read the data and identify frames of analysis.
2. Create domains based on semantic relationships discovered within frames of analysis.
3. Identify salient domains, assign them a code, and put others aside.
4. Reread data, refining salient domains and keeping a record of where relationships are found in the data.
5. Decide if your domains are supported by the data and search data for examples that do not fit with or run counter to the relationships in your domains.
6. Complete an analysis within domains.
7. Search for themes across domains.
8. Create a master outline expressing relationships within and among domains.
9. Select data excerpts to support the elements of your outline.

After collecting the data from interviews, observation field notes, and documents, the researcher analyzed the material utilizing inductive analysis. Each interview was transcribed soon after it was conducted and received an initial review to inform future interviews. However, after all the interviews were completed for each subgroup, there was an in-depth reading of the interview transcripts. After reading them twice, they were coded with key words written in the margins.

After a few rounds of coding, the codes were organized into an index of codes. The data were reread to find the salient domains as well as data that countered the domains. After exhausting the transcription data, the documents and the observation field notes were read to select data that could be added to the index of codes.

Merriam (1998, 2009) suggested following the process of other qualitative studies and being concerned with holistic and bounded case study analysis while analyzing the collected data. When the case study is a bounded unit, the researcher can focus on managing the data as one piece to find patterns and interpretations (Merriam, 1998, 2009). Therefore, as data were collected, they were examined to see what themes emerged. This process continued until all of the data together presented a story of the experiences of the participants of this study.

Limitations

Unfortunately, there are millions of homeless people in the United States, many of whom are children and teenagers. Los Angeles County is the homeless capital of the United States, with nearly 60,000 identified homeless people (Los Angeles Service Authority, 2017; Smith & Grad, 2017). As such, several public and private organizations in Southern California lend themselves to assisting the homeless. Despite these agencies' assistance, the problem is growing. The area that this study focused on was the educational and social supports for homeless youth, provided by one site of one organization, the Griffon Learning Center, so that the researcher could conduct as many personal interviews with participants in their chosen spaces as possible. Purposive sampling and referrals were utilized to identify homeless youth as well as staff and volunteers at the Griffon Learning Center.

Due to limited time and resources, the participant sample size was a limitation of this study. Due to the transient nature of homelessness, the long-term impacts of the services provided at the research site could not be measured. Another limitation was that the staff may have been emotionally impacted by the nature of their work. Some of the findings may be characterized as anecdotal evidence from the perspective of staff members. One researcher conducted all the interviews.

The extensive amount of time spent volunteering and interviewing the participants of this study contributed to the presentation of the data and influenced the researcher's perception of homeless youth, the staff, and volunteers of the Griffon Learning Center, the Griffon Learning Center itself, politicians, and the researcher's own experiences. Prior to the study, the researcher volunteered at the Griffon Learning Center as well as at other organizations that support the homeless throughout Los Angeles. It is also important to note that the researcher experienced states of homelessness throughout her childhood and as a young adult. Those experiences of being homeless may have impacted the way in which the research was conducted as well as the collection and analysis of data, and the overall presentation of the study. The researcher had also been an educator for more than 20 years, working with primarily low-income youth. Due to the limitations of this study, the findings are not generalizable to the greater population of homeless youth and organizations that provide services such as the research site.

Delimitations

A delimitation of this study was the influence of gender. The gender of the children, the gender of the staff working with the children at the mobile school, the gender of the parent with whom the child was living, and the gender of the researcher were not addressed in this study. Similarly, ethnicity and primary language were not included as factors. The researcher does not deny the influence of these factors, but they were not in the scope of the researcher's study.

Criteria of Trustworthiness

Qualitative studies are not designed to be experiments. The way in which one determines the validity and reliability of a qualitative study is different. Lincoln and Guba (1986) examined means to establish specific criteria including discovering the truth (internal validity), exploring the applicability of the study (external validity), finding the consistency (reliability or replicability), and ensuring its neutrality (objectivity). To deem a qualitative case study as trustworthy, the criteria that the study employs need to be examined.

Creditability

The internal validity of this qualitative case study was determined by making it a credible study. A research study should match the reality to ensure its credibility (Merriam, 2009). It must be noted that the construction of reality is a multifaceted system in which the researcher interprets the reality of the participants through observations and interviews (Merriam, 2009). Although this may appear to be a challenge or even a flaw of research, it is actually a strength; the researcher is closer to the data as opposed to some detached instrument being used (Merriam, 2009).

The literature on qualitative research suggests criteria that increase the credibility of a study (Hatch, 2002; Lincoln & Guba, 1986; Merriam, 2009). The criteria include: prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation, peer debriefing, negative case analysis, and member checks (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). By meeting these criteria, the credibility of this study was established.

Prolonged engagement. Prolonged engagement refers to consistent, intensive, and lengthy contact with the participants in the field (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). Data collection included observations, interviews, and document analysis over a period of several months. During that time, the data were revisited, more questions were asked, coding occurred, and then the process was repeated. It is salient to this study that considerable time was used to find any misrepresentations of the reality that was being documented. Throughout the duration of engagement, possible themes were identified from interviews that also emerged from the observations and document analysis. Therefore, prolonged engagement allowed for confirmation of findings through different data. The researcher volunteered with the Griffon Learning Center for more than a year prior to becoming a participant observer.

Triangulation. Triangulation is a process of using multiple sources of data, multiple investigators, or multiple methods to confirm the finding of a study (Merriam, 2009). In this study, multiple sources of qualitative data were used (Figure 2). The multiple sources allowed for triangulation, and additional triangulation occurred within the data with the different participants in the study. Various data were used to create a case study, bounded by the reality of the participants, providing a holistic understanding of the reality experienced by the homeless students and youth, staff, and volunteers at the Griffon Learning Center who participated in this study.

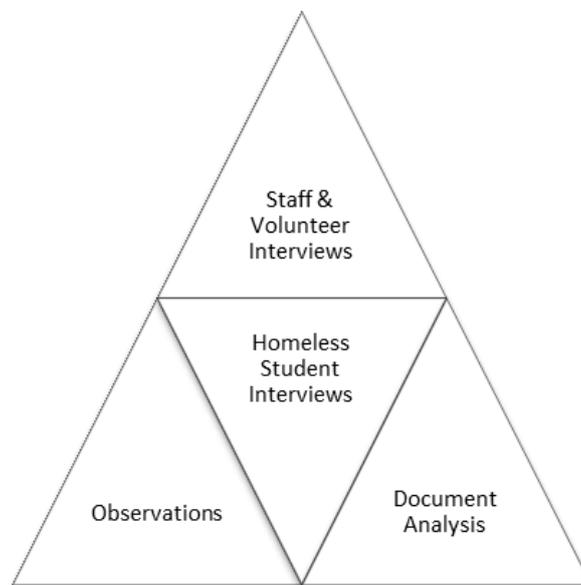


Figure 2. Triangulation of Data

Peer debriefing. To ensure the credibility of this study, it is salient to include professional peers in the process of inquiry to expose the data and keep the researcher honest (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). Throughout the data collection and analysis process, colleagues who were going through the research process themselves and those who had recently completed their doctorates were engaged. Because of the researcher's professional background, including over 20 years of teaching and administrative experience, many colleagues had pursued or were pursuing a doctoral degree in the fields of education, leadership, psychology, or anthropology during the study, and assisted in debriefing.

The index of codes was shared in situations, which allowed for feedback and other assistance in helping to finalize the themes and domains. Professional peers questioned the findings and analysis of the data as they emerged into themes that made up this study. Additional debriefing took place with the researcher's research chair.

Negative case analysis. The use of negative case analysis was an essential component in keeping this study credible. This process allowed for data to be discussed that contradicted the themes or patterns that emerged (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). Creswell (2009) suggested that because reality includes different viewpoints that do not always come together, the researcher should present all the information that contradicts the general perceptions emerging in the data. By presenting data that counter the general themes that emerge, the case study becomes more realistic and credible.

Member checks. An important step in maintaining the credibility of a study is the use of member checks. Member checks consist of giving the staff and volunteers at the mobile school and youth learning center who participate in this study an opportunity to see the data before they are presented in final form (Hatch, 2002; Lincoln & Guba, 1986; Merriam, 2009). After conducting interviews of individual staff members and volunteers at the Griffon Learning Center, the researcher gave participants a copy of their transcript (either email or hard copy).

Adult participants had the chance to clarify anything presented in their interview transcript and were asked to clarify any responses that were unclear. Through the process, adult participants could affirm themes that were true for them and counter ideas that were not true for them. The use of member checks assisted in triangulating the data to improve the

credibility of the study. Additionally, the use of member checks allowed for verification of the themes that emerged from the homeless student participants' interviews.

Transferability

The external validity of a study refers to the relevance of the study to other situations. Lincoln and Guba (1986) described these criteria as transferability or generalizability. As Merriam (2009) suggested, to increase the possibility for generalizability in qualitative case studies, the researcher can provide rich and thick descriptions, describe the typicality of the case study, and use multiple sites to conduct the study. Qualitative case studies can be generalizable to a wider theory when they replicate their finding to new cases (Merriam, 2009). Although some of the literature might suggest that the nature of this study did not lend itself to generalizability, the thick descriptions of the experiences of the homeless children and youth as well as the staff and volunteers at the mobile school and youth learning center organization may have made this case study generalizable.

Various factors may affect the generalizability of this study. First, the study was of one mobile school and youth learning center organization. It was conducted in only one of the organization's regions. Each region had several sites, some of which were mobile schools and others were temporary brick and mortar locations as well as fixed sites. Second, transferability may have been impacted because every school district within each state had personnel with varying levels of knowledge of the federal, state, and local laws, different amounts of funding provided for the education of homeless children and support services, as well as diverse populations of homeless students.

Finally, the adult participants themselves may represent different mindsets than those who worked with homeless children and youth in different contexts. The homeless student participants also may have had different perspectives being in Los Angeles as compared to another location. Although this case study explored the unique environment of the staff, volunteers, and students at one location of a mobile school and youth learning center organization, the literature suggests that many homeless children and youth in different parts of the country face similar challenges regarding their educational and social needs. Acknowledging the limitations to the transferability of this study and addressing the areas that do make it generalizable enhance the trustworthiness of this study.

Dependability

Reliability assumes that there is “a single reality and that studying it repeatedly will yield the same results” (Merriam, 1998, p. 205). Because the term “reliability,” in the traditional sense, does not apply to qualitative research, Lincoln and Guba (1986) used the word dependability instead. Lincoln and Guba posited that researchers use several criteria to ensure dependability in their research. The first is the positionality of the researcher. The second is triangulation of the data of the study. The third is described as an audit trail (Lincoln & Guba, 1986).

For researchers to audit their process, they must describe the steps and processes of their data collection, data analysis, and decision making that goes into it (Merriam, 2009). The detailed description in this chapter serves as an audit trail for a future replication of this study. Although the audit trail provides dependability, there is also an advantage in the use of a case study in that it is a bounded and naturalistic event (Merriam, 2009).

Positionality and Reflexivity

The researcher has an inherent influence when conducting a study (Maxwell, 1996). Hatch (2002) stated that, “while it may improve chances for access and ease the sometimes-cumbersome task of building rapport, studying settings with which you are familiar is generally a bad idea” (p. 47). It should therefore be noted that the researcher had experienced periods of homelessness both as a child and as a young adult. However, having experienced homelessness adds credibility to the researcher while interacting with the homeless students and adult participants of this study. The researcher’s previous experiences may have allowed the participants of the study to feel more comfortable with the researcher and lent an increased openness. The researcher’s experiences allowed for co-constructed knowledge with the participants rather than serving as a limitation. The ability to respond and reflect on the data in order to limit the amount of bias was undertaken by using research journals and bracketing in field notes.

Positionality

This study chronicled the experiences of homeless children and youth as well as the staff and volunteers who supported them at a mobile school and youth learning center in Downtown

Los Angeles. The positionality within this study included the researcher's role as a volunteer in the community, as a former homeless student, a current educator in Southern California, and a researcher. First, the researcher was a community member through volunteering with various churches and organizations that work with the homeless. Additionally, the researcher had lived in Los Angeles most of her life and, at times, lived in the very same neighborhood where the research site was located. She had attended multiple schools throughout Los Angeles as a homeless student.

In addition to being part of the community, the researcher had been a teacher and administrator for over 20 years in Los Angeles. She became a teacher for the promise that education could bring about social change. The researcher had worked primarily in private Christian schools that focused on preparing students for college and career readiness. Most of the schools served racially and ethnically diverse and lower-income to lower-middle-income families. There are pockets of homeless students even within these private institutions.

As a researcher, it is acknowledged that the observations that were made and the discussions conducted with the participants of this study may have been affected by the researcher's previous experiences as a homeless student and current role as an educator. The researcher tried to ensure that the interviews reflected the experiences of the homeless students, staff, and volunteers, in their own words, as opposed to the researcher's experiences. In this study, utterances of experiences that the researcher did not experience or agree with are included. Connections were made through the researcher's field notes. The intersection of her identity and her beliefs gave life to her role as a researcher and how the study was approached. Therefore, the researcher's positionality is not defined by one aspect of who she is, but rather by the connections that were made through the multiple facets of what she contributed to this study.

Reflexivity

Reflexivity is the process of self-reflection that a qualitative researcher undergoes because he/she is not an objective scientist (Hatch, 2002). Researchers become part of the world in which they study and, as such, they need to keep close account of their influence on the setting (Hatch, 2002). As previously mentioned, the researcher had experienced periods of homelessness.

Additionally, the researcher had been very involved with church cultures and organizations that work with the homeless. Considering these two factors, the researcher may have expressed, as others term it, some bias points of view. The researcher attempted to refrain as much as possible from expressing personal opinions and recorded and presented information as observed. The researcher attempted to track biases through bracketing and monitoring emotional responses within field notes, both of which are suggested by Hatch (2002) as well as Bodgan and Biklen (2007). Merriam (2009) stated that the reader of a qualitative study also filters the information through their own lenses of life experiences and creates their own interpretations. Because the researcher was a participant in the community studied, a strict set of field notes that included observer comments in brackets was employed and maintained. Another important aspect of the researcher's reflexivity was the researcher journals as an ongoing, informal data analysis. For example, following an afternoon at the Griffon Learning Center, where the researcher was a participant observer, the researcher went home and created a researcher journal and included brackets of biases and questions. The researcher's positionality as a former homeless student, a volunteer in the community, and a current active director of academics (superintendent) of a private Christian school system could have interfered with the researcher's ability to create a trustworthy study; however, practices were in place that allowed for reflections on her role as a researcher and did not interfere with the data analysis.

Chapter Summary

This study is a necessary piece of research due to the significant increase in the number of homeless children. At the same time the sheer numbers of homeless youth increase, public funding and support services decrease. This research sought to make recommendations to educators and policy makers on how to better serve the homeless student population and better meet their unique educational and social needs. This chapter outlined the proposed design for the study that was conducted to answer the research questions:

1. According to the perceptions of the staff and volunteers, how does the mobile school and youth learning center organization meet the educational and social needs of the homeless children and their families whom they serve?
2. According to the perceptions of the children whom they serve, how does the mobile school and youth learning center organization meet their educational and social needs?

The primary qualitative methodology employed in this study was a case study. This study took place at a mobile school and youth learning center in Los Angeles and focused on perceptions of the staff and volunteers of the educational and social needs of the homeless students they served as well as the perceptions of the homeless students. Data collected included observations, interviews, documents, and media. The data yielded information that highlights the educational and social needs of homeless children, and recommendations were made for how educators can better serve homeless children.

Citation

Edwards, T.G. (2020). Measuring the need for educating homeless youth. In I. Sahin & M. Shelley (Eds.), *Closing the gap of the educational needs of homeless youth* (pp. 79-98). Monument, CO, USA: ISTES Organization.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH FINDINGS FOR THE EDUCATION OF HOMELESS YOUTH

Restatement of the Purpose of the Study

This case study sought to examine what is happening to homeless youth in Los Angeles and how they are being educated. It also sought to investigate the extent to which the McKinney-Vento Act, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) accomplished their intended purposes for homeless children through the public education system in Los Angeles. A qualitative case study methodology was used to uncover the richness in studying the beliefs and experiences of some homeless children who utilized the services of a mobile school and youth learning center organization as well as those of the staff and volunteers who work there. In conducting a qualitative case study, the unique experiences and beliefs of homeless youth, staff, and volunteers were highlighted rather than determining correlations or comparisons. Through this qualitative study, the researcher sought to understand behaviors, experiences, and ideologies from the participants' own frame of reference (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). One of the greatest benefits of conducting a qualitative study resides in the reliable results and theories based on experiences, and the ability to collaborate with the participants instead of just study them (Maxwell, 1996). This study investigated how one private agency, the Griffon Learning Center, was closing the gap and providing additional educational services for homeless students. Since limited research studies the experiences of homeless children, staff, and volunteers within a mobile school and youth learning center organization, the case study provided an in-depth examination of that unique experience and a critical insight into the environment. This investigation captured some of the voices of homeless students in Los Angeles as well as staff and volunteers from a mobile school and youth learning center program and documented their beliefs and experiences.

Among the thematic findings from the study were the following: (a) hopelessness and

oppression, (b) culture of invisibility and despair, (c) safety, (d) emerging hope, and (e) political climate for change. This study shed light on the experiences of homeless students within Los Angeles as well as the experiences of the staff and volunteers at the Griffon Learning Center. Due to the complex and conflicted history of homelessness in the United States, and to the seemingly continual increase in homeless people in large cities like Los Angeles, including that of homeless women and children, it was relevant and timely to understand the experiences of homeless students who chose to attend a place such as the Griffon Learning Center and the experiences of those who have tried to help them. Although the intent of this study and its findings will not end the cycle of homelessness, it sought to provide some insight on the problem, hoping to lead to some relief for homeless youth and their families.

Research Questions

As the United States continues to face an increase in the homeless population, especially in the number of homeless youth, it behooves educational researchers to examine how to meet the unique educational needs of homeless children better. This qualitative case study sought to expand upon the current knowledge and focused on one case of a mobile school and youth learning center in Los Angeles, the Griffon Learning Center. The researcher sought to understand how the staff and volunteers at the Griffon Learning Center interpreted their experiences with homeless youth; how they believed they were meeting the educational needs of the homeless children they interacted with; and what meaning they attributed to their experiences. This study sought to answer the following questions:

1. According to the perceptions of the staff and volunteers, how does the mobile school and youth learning center organization meet the educational and social needs of the homeless children and their families whom they serve?
2. According to the perceptions of the children whom they serve, how does the mobile school and youth learning center organization meet their educational and social needs?

The Context for this Study

In the 30 years since the passing of the McKinney Vento Act of 1987, and the subsequent No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 and Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015, there is a paucity of studies conducted on the impact of mobile schools for homeless students in the United States.

This study documented the beliefs and experiences of some homeless students in Los Angeles who utilized the services of the Griffon Learning Center, a mobile school and youth learning center as well as the beliefs and experiences of the staff and volunteers who worked with these children.

Setting

The Griffon Learning Center. According to interviews with staff and volunteers, the founder of the organization was a retired teacher who recognized a need in her community to provide additional educational services for homeless children that appeared not to be met by the public-school system. After retiring in the early 1990s, she started tutoring homeless children in a park near the beach in Southern California. Quickly, more teens joined in, and she needed more people to help her. Some of her friends who were also retired educators assisted her in the afternoons. The police began enforcing loitering laws and prevented her and her colleagues from tutoring teens in the park. According to internal records of the Griffon Learning Center, she then decided to create a nonprofit organization and began by designing a program that could be run out of a converted van, school bus, or trailer. Its intention was to ensure that learning did not stop for homeless children regardless of whether they could make it to their local public school. They would drive to homeless shelters or into neighborhoods where there were high concentrations of homeless youth, and the volunteers provided reading, writing, and math lessons for the children as well as help for the parents of homeless children. According to the interviews of the staff and volunteers, the various helpers assisted parents with navigating social services and public-school system requirements for homeless children. In the first year, they worked with just a handful of homeless shelters in the beach communities of Southern California. Within 3 years, they had more than 20 locations between local parks, low-income motels and hotels as well as homeless shelters. As is stated in their donation brochure, in 2001, they established their first permanent learning center in downtown Los Angeles. Early on, the founder and volunteers connected with other organizations to provide vaccination and health clinics for homeless youth, clothing and school supplies, food, and motel housing vouchers.

As documented on the organization's website, this once-small venture established more than 25 years ago, by 2017, was serving homeless students in more than 150 locations throughout Southern California. Some of the sites were still run out of trailers that drove up to shelters,

targeted neighborhoods, and parks; some were temporary sites inside of libraries, malls, community centers, and other public gathering places, while still other sites were now permanent. According to internal reports, in 2015, the Griffon Learning Center worked with nearly 3,500 homeless youth. That same year, more than 2,200 volunteers provided approximately 90,000 hours of tutoring in 154 locations across Southern California. The website stated that the average age of the child they assisted was 8 years old. The Griffon Learning Center did not collect demographic information beyond a child's age and grade in school.

The Griffon Learning Center believes that they offer homeless students a place of stability and support to help students achieve academic success during one of the most tumultuous times in a child's life. In addition to one-on-one tutoring, the organization continued to provide homeless students with school supplies, assistance in gaining access to public school and gathering records, financial assistance and scholarships as well as parenting classes and support services. According to the interviews with staff members, in recent years, the Griffon Learning Center added GED classes, online courses, online assessment tools, and were sponsored by a number of digital learning portals (educational websites designed to reinforce a student's knowledge and skills). These digital learning portals included, but were not limited to, PowerMyLearning (a platform that uses games and videos to practice applications and knowledge in all subject areas for kindergarten through 12th grade, and is based upon the Common Core State Standards), ck-12 (a website that has downloadable books in math and science for additional student practice), Manga High (a game-based approach to math test prep), Khan Academy (a comprehensive video and interactive resource in primarily math and science topics as well as in standardized test prep), and LearnZillion (a wide-ranging collection of resources in math and English for grades two through 12 based upon the Common Core State Standards). As presented in organizational documents, the mission of this organization was to reduce the gaps in children's education while they are homeless and to provide a support system for the child. These services aim to meet the organization's mission. As the organization grew, it was able to connect with a number of county services in each of the counties in which it operated. For example, according to interviews with staff members, the Griffon Learning Center site assisted families and individuals with navigating through the Department of Public Services, the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services, and the local public-school system. A representative from each of these agencies worked with the Griffon Learning Center.

As the organization continued to expand, so did its need for greater funding. As can be found in internal memos and public reports, in 2014 the expenses totaled a little more than 1.4 million dollars. A year later, the expenses jumped to 1.8 million dollars, and in 2016 the expenses exceeded 2.2 million dollars. There had been a significant increase in individual donations in the past few years. In 2014, individuals donated less than 15% of the annual budget, and by 2016 individual donations made up more than 25% of the revenue. According to the annual giving report, the largest increase was from 2014 to 2015 because of a large donation made by the estate of a man who grew up in poverty and gained an unexpected fortune later in life. His estate gave more than 3.3 million dollars to many Skid Row organizations. In 2016, the Griffon Learning Center began making more direct asks for donations and increased the number of smaller and more mainstream events, leading to more donations from individuals. Donations from corporations and foundations still made up the clear majority of the annual budget, although in recent years corporate funding had gone down from over 70% of the annual budget in 2014 to approximately 40% in 2016. The Griffon Learning Center received several material donations every year from a variety of individuals, foundations, churches, organizations, and corporations. These material donations ranged from art and school supplies to food, clothes, and hygiene kits. It was common for a box of materials to arrive at the case study site daily. All donated items were sorted, cataloged, and stored until they could be reviewed and a decision made as to how and where they should be distributed. A staff member noted that some of the donated items go to local shelters or other organizations where they can be more effective. The donation report outlined that material items make up nearly 20% of the annual revenue of the Griffon Learning Center. One of the largest material donations made annually outside of basic school supplies is curriculum. A few different companies and publishers worked with the Griffon Learning Center to provide pieces of or whole curriculums. Much of the curriculum donated to the organization was Common Core-based.

As the organization grew, so did its need for staff members and to establish a board. Each permanent, semipermanent, and temporary location had its own staff; however, each site's staff went through the same orientation and onboarding process. There were differences in each population of children and youth that utilized the various sites. According to the staff, adjustments between staff and volunteers were made in terms of how to reach the community better around each site. Like the staff, all volunteers were vetted extensively, had to complete background checks, and completed a volunteer orientation before ever entering a location.

The board of the Griffon Learning Center was made up of 15 executives and professionals from the world of business and education. Some board members were also part of the executive staff of the organization. Those who came from outside of the Griffon Learning Center executive staff included professors from universities in Southern California, retired public school K–12 educators and consultants, real estate developers, financial brokers, entertainment executives, and other business people. The companies, corporations, and universities that each represented were also large donors to the Griffon Learning Center.

Summary of Key Findings

Five themes emerged from this study regarding the experiences and beliefs of homeless students whom the Griffon Learning Center and the volunteer and staff members assisted: (a) hopelessness and oppression, (b) culture of invisibility and despair, (c) safety, (d) emerging hope, and (e) political climate for change. These five themes were divided into domains that also serve to tell the story of homeless children and those who chose to serve them through the mobile school and youth learning center organization. The domains are explored further later in the chapter.

The key findings in this study are framed by the themes and domains and are verified by the different data collected over a 5-month period. They were:

1. *Hopelessness and oppression:* Staff and volunteers commented on their observations of the youth they worked with living in states of hopelessness and despair. The children talked about being afraid and not knowing what to expect next. Some used the word “hopeless” to describe their life’s experience. Incidents of bullying were described.
2. *Culture of invisibility and despair:* Homeless students characterized themselves as being nothing, worthless, and invisible to others. The staff and volunteers echoed the children’s perception of the homeless being the “invisible problem.”
3. *Safety:* The children expressed varying levels of concern and fear over safety and well-being. During the time in which the data were being collected, there was a great deal of police activity surrounding the research site, gang activity, drug distribution and use, prostitution, and other crime. The staff and volunteers described many of the children as being in dangerous situations.
4. *Emerging hope:* The developing relationships and experiences the homeless students had with the staff and volunteers at the mobile school and youth learning center

allowed the children to believe that there was a possibility they could have a better life. They looked forward to going there because they felt better about themselves and their future. The staff and volunteers worked at the mobile school and youth learning center organization to provide the youth with hope for a better tomorrow.

5. *Political climate for change:* Homelessness has gotten a great deal of attention in the past few years, especially in Los Angeles, where there were talks of declaring a state of emergency, plans for new housing projects for homeless veterans, ballot measures to increase city taxes to raise money for affordable housing units, and other attempts by politicians and citizens alike to reduce homelessness. The staff and volunteers characterize the people as finally being willing to listen and take action to end homelessness in Los Angeles.

The Research Process

Gaining access and entry to the research site was of vital importance. Without access to those who worked and volunteered at the Griffon Learning Center as well as to those who utilized their services, the crux of this study could not have been accomplished. Before data collection could begin for this study, the researcher reached out to the executive staff of the Griffon Learning Center to be granted permission. The researcher was told that the Griffon Learning Center does not typically allow research to be conducted on their organization or at their sites. However, they were intrigued by her proposed study and told her that she would have to become a volunteer before her request would be considered. The researcher went through the same volunteer vetting process as other volunteers including an application, an interview, a background check, and volunteer orientation. She was assigned to assist with academic counseling and as a tutor. The researcher volunteered at the case study site for eight months before the executive staff of the Griffon Learning Center agreed to allow her to conduct the study. It took another five months, during which the researcher continued volunteering, before the study was fully approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB), at the beginning of August in 2016. During this time, the researcher became a known entity and familiar face to the staff, volunteers, and families using the center's services. After 13 months of volunteering, the researcher switched from being solely a volunteer to become a participant observer.

The researcher gathered both internal and external publications from the Griffon Learning

Center including but not limited to items such as brochures, pamphlets, flyers, annual reports, articles posted on the Griffon Learning Center’s public website, and documents posted on the internal network for volunteers. In addition to accumulating documents from The Griffon Learning Center, the researcher conducted 60 hours of observations in August and September of 2016, as a participant observer. After completing observations, the researcher conducted interviews of both minors and adults. The adult interviews were of staff members and volunteers, while the minor interviews were of children and youth who utilized the mobile school and youth learning center. To get adult participants, the researcher announced the study at daily staff and volunteer meetings throughout September and October in 2016. During the presentations, the researcher asked for those interested in participating in anonymous interviews to speak with her after the meetings. Of those who expressed an interest, six adults were interviewed: four volunteers and two staff members. The adult interviews took place during October and November of 2016.

There were challenges with gaining student participants for this study. The most difficult hurdle was getting parents and guardians to speak with the researcher. During the parent information sessions in September of 2016, the researcher introduced her study and the opportunity for children and teens to participate in an anonymous interview. Additionally, the site coordinator assisted the researcher by asking the volunteers and staff members to nominate homeless students’ parents who might be receptive about their child possibly participating in the study. When the nominated parents and guardians arrived to pick up their children, the researcher approached them and asked if they would allow their child to participate in the study. Although several parents and guardians agreed to allow their children to participate, the researcher was still concerned that the parents and potential student participants might not be able to complete the interview process due to the transient nature of homelessness. This led the researcher to try to get more potential interested subjects. The researcher began greeting parents outside of the Griffon Learning Center as they came to pick up their children. The researcher spoke with several parents and guardians one-on-one about her research. After several days of approaching parents in October 2016, the researcher believed she had enough parents and guardians interested in the study. Twelve student participants completed the interview process. In addition to the work of getting parents and student subjects to agree to participate in the study, it was a challenge to schedule interviews. Some of the participants were not capable of committing to a specific time or day to complete an interview. To attempt to accommodate the student participants’ schedules there were

several open drop-in appointments in which the participants could select to participate in October through December 2016.

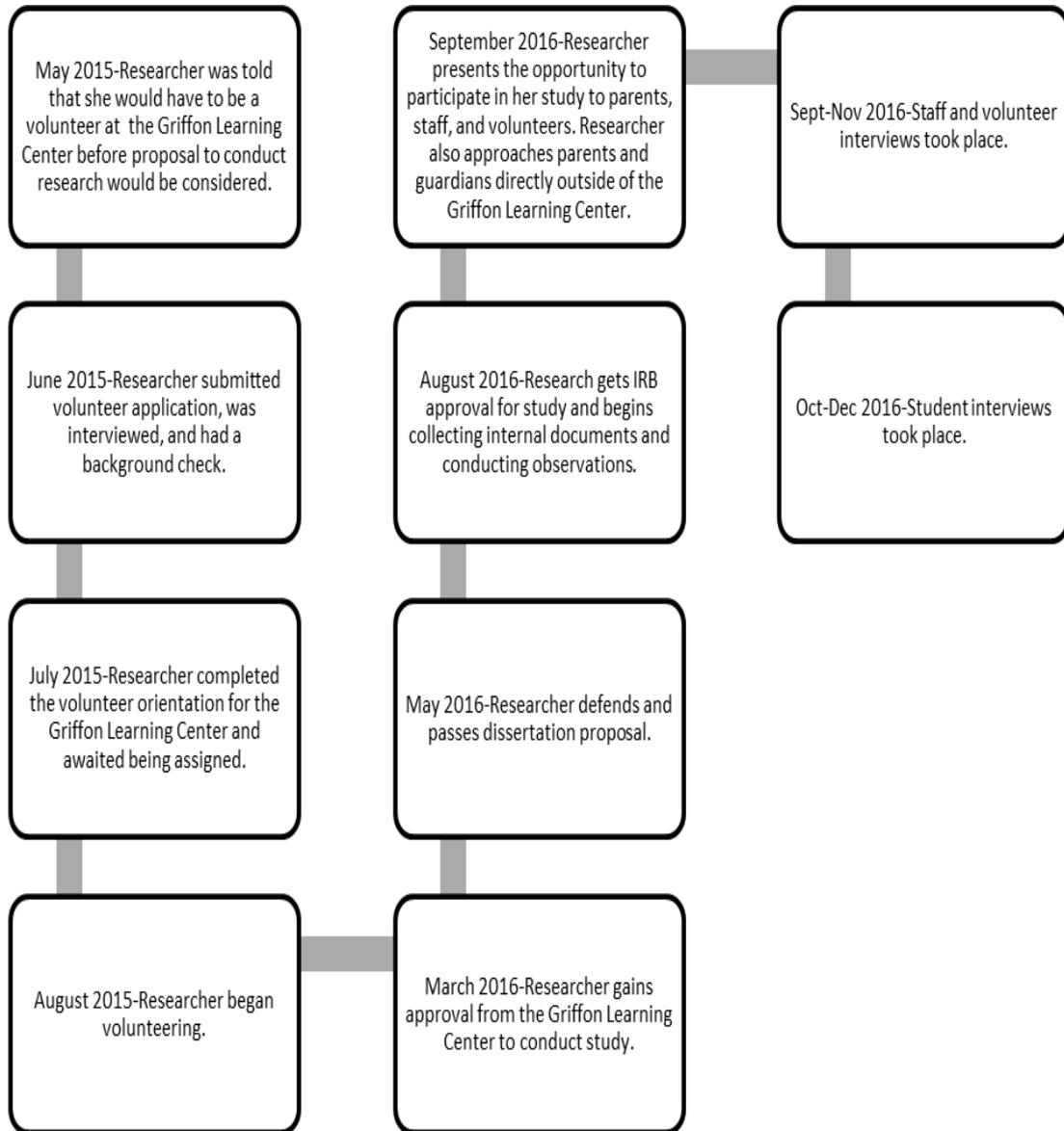


Figure 4. Research Data Collection Process

Participants

The staff and volunteer participants. This case study employed convenience and nomination sampling methods to ensure that staff and volunteers could speak about the issues. Six adults took part in the individual interviews about their beliefs and experiences with working with homeless youth. Two of the six adults were staff members; the other four adults were volunteers at the research site. These adults were selected to participate based upon their

availability and on their experience working with homeless children. They each had at least one full year’s experience at the site. All six adult subjects participated in member checks. The adult participants were given pseudonyms to protect and keep their identity anonymous. The descriptions of the adult participants were compiled from the formal interviews, observations, and informal communications.

Table 1. Staff and Volunteer Participants in the Study

<u>Pseudonym</u>	<u>Role</u>	<u>Experience</u>	<u>Ethnicity</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Gender</u>
Alice	Staff-Administration	5½ years	Caucasian	Approximately-30 years old	Female
Brandon	Volunteer-Tutor	1½ years	Caucasian	Approximately-25 years old	Male
Cassey	Volunteer-Tutor	4 years	Latina	Approximately-25 years old	Female
Daryle	Volunteer-Tutor	1 year	African American	Approximately-20 years old	Female
Eddie	Volunteer-Tutor	8 years	Latino	Approximately-35 years old	Male
Francis	Staff-Senior Administration	3½ years	Caucasian	Approximately-40 years old	Female

Francis. Of the two staff members who participated in the study, Francis was a senior administrator and had been working with the organization for approximately three and a half years at the time of her interview. When she first joined the organization, she worked out of the central office. There she received her training and assisted in planning the summer education programs. After a few months in the central office, she had the opportunity to become a senior administrator at one of the permanent sites for the Griffon Learning Center. Prior to working for the research site, Francis was an administrator in a public school for twenty-years. She decided that she could make more of an impact on the world by leaving her well-paying public-school job and going to work for a nonprofit that assisted youth. Although she had a great sense of fulfillment in her job, she had struggled emotionally with being so close to the homeless population. Francis vacillated throughout her tenure as to whether or not she could continue to work directly with homeless youth and their families on the frontlines. Instead of transferring to a different facility within the organization, Francis decided to leave the Griffon Learning Center and return to working in a public-school district

office in the Spring of 2017. At the time of her interview, she appeared to be in her 40s and Caucasian. She grew up in Pasadena, California, and attended public schools. She still lives in the same house she grew up in with her mother. She had never been married and did not have any children of her own. For college, Francis went to a women's liberal arts school in Pennsylvania, where she earned a bachelor's degree in comparative literature and classical studies. When she returned to California after college, Francis got an administrative position at a public school. Along the way, she returned to school and earned an administrative credential. She talked about returning to school to get a master's degree in social services or business administration.

Alice. The other staff member interviewed was Alice. She had been working for the Griffon Learning Center for little more than five and half years at the time of her interview. She appeared to be approximately 30 years old and Caucasian. This was Alice's first full-time job after completing her master's degree in public health. Alice was being trained to take over Francis's position for when Francis moved to another location within the organization. From the time Alice took on her position, she had been preparing for the day to run this location of the Griffon Learning Center.

Alice grew up in the suburbs of Chicago, Illinois, where she lived, by all appearances to outsiders, the typical middle class suburban life. She attended good schools, participated in after-school theater arts programs, and played soccer. As a young girl, she even did her obligatory 2 years of ballet and then moved on to piano lessons. However, Alice struggled with depression and became addicted to opioids. Her parents sent her to a recovery center for six months during her senior year of high school. When she returned, Alice contemplated returning to high school or taking the GED and starting college. Concerned that she might slip into the same crowd at school that enabled her addiction, Alice chose to take her GED and moved across the country to California to complete her bachelor's degree in English and theater arts. While in college, she became involved with a local church that had homeless and youth ministry opportunities throughout Los Angeles. This contributed to her decision to pursue a master's degree in public health versus working on a graduate degree in screen writing. Alice spoke about her past in the present and was mindful that she could easily become overwhelmed by the work she did with homeless youth. As a result, she stated that she would continue to attend Narcotics Anonymous meetings weekly and check in with a therapist from time to time.

Daryle. As one of the four adult volunteers, Daryle was in her final year of her bachelor's degree program in elementary education at a local Christian university at the time of her interview. As a young child, Daryle lived in a devotedly Christian home in the south. Her parents were active in their local Baptist church. The family would attend midweek services, participate in Saturday events, and spend most of the day on Sunday at the church. Daryle said that the church was where all of her friends, whom she saw as family, were. She talked extensively about her Christian faith and her parents being contributing factors as to why she wants to pursue a career in education. Both of her parents were educators; her father was a professor at a university in New Orleans, and her mother was an elementary school teacher before Hurricane Katrina. Her family moved to California to be closer to relatives after the death of her father and the loss of their home from Katrina.

Daryle talked about the culture shock of moving to California as a child and the overwhelming grief of losing her father. There were constant reminders in the news any time another potentially big storm was in the forecast or the anniversary of Hurricane Katrina. These led to a deep struggle throughout Daryle's teen years. She said that it was her involvement in church that brought stability to her life. She could not recall a time in which a major celebration for her or her family did not involve the church. Now, her family was active in an African Methodist Episcopal church where she participated in the choir and music ministry. She appeared to be approximately 20 years old and African American. She hoped to go on to earn a multiple subject teaching credential and work in a local public school. She found her way to the Griffon Learning Center because of required coursework for her bachelor's degree.

Brandon. At the time of his interview, Brandon was in his first term of dental school at a prestigious public institution. He appeared to be approximately 25-years old and Caucasian. When Brandon was unable to find a job, he started volunteering with the Griffon Learning Center organization during his gap year between his bachelor's degree and graduate school. Because of his flexibility, Brandon was able to volunteer at multiple sites in the beginning of his tenure at the Griffon Learning Center. Once he started graduate school, he had to reduce the number of hours he volunteered weekly, but at the time of his interview, he was still a consistent face at the Griffon Learning Center for the kids. Brandon primarily tutored high school students in upper division mathematics and science. When Brandon first starting volunteering, he bought a teen whom he was tutoring a graphing calculator, which is against

the rules of the organization. After a stern warning by a supervisor, Brandon shifted his focus to real-world applications and teaching his students how to work around not having a graphing calculator, which Brandon realized was much more beneficial to the kids than providing them with a calculator. His goal was to make science and math fun and accessible for all of the youth at the Griffon Learning Center.

He came from a relatively wealthy family and did not have to work. He spoke about traveling the world as a child and getting a car for his sixteenth birthday. At the same time, Brandon recognizes that he has had advantages that others did not. He was well grounded and came from a family where giving back to the community was part of their expectations. As his family travelled the world, they also served in missions and churches, giving Brandon and his brother a different perspective of the world. Brandon's brother completed law school and went on to work in the public defender's office. Like his brother, Brandon hoped to serve people. Brandon wanted to open his own dental office in a low-income neighborhood when he finished school and eventually work with Doctors Without Borders.

Cassey. After high school, Cassey did not know what she wanted to do with her life. Her family wanted her to start working and find a husband, but Cassey saw education as a way to improve her chances of success in life and to be able to help her family. She grew up in a big family where there was always a doubt as to whether or not they would be able to eat. Cassey's family bought most of their belongings from Good Will and other thrift stores. She remembered spending Saturday mornings at a food bank and going to Toys for Tots parties as a child.

Cassey was the first in her family to graduate high school and they believed that was enough. None of Cassey's four siblings finished high school. They were surprised when she went on to college. Cassey said that her family was frustrated with her because she spent 4 years at a community college instead of working full-time. It took Cassey a while to decide that she wanted to be a social worker and to complete the required course work for transferring to a 4-year school while working 25 hours a week. After she transferred, she took a course that required volunteering at a youth organization to complete a project. That is how she ended up at the Griffon Learning Center. At the time of her interview, Cassey had been volunteering at the center for 4 years. She worked with the youngest of the children at the center and tutored kindergarteners. She was proud of her work at the center and hoped to continue to volunteer

at the Griffon Learning Center as long as possible. Her family was now supportive of her choices and pleased that she had completed a bachelor's degree. Cassey went on to work on a master's degree in social work education. At the time of her interview, she appeared to be approximately 25 years old and a Latina. Cassey met her husband while volunteering at the Griffon Learning Center, and they were married in the Summer of 2017.

Eddie. The last volunteer interviewed was Eddie. He appeared to be approximately 35 years old and a Latino. Of the volunteers interviewed, he had been volunteering at the Griffon Learning Center for the longest amount of time, 8 years. Because Eddie had been at the center for so long, he was looked upon as if he a staff member. He often opened the center and took shifts that most volunteers could not. He specialized in preparing teens for the GED, but he also ran the study sessions for the Advanced Placement exams in English (both exams) and United States History. When he was not tutoring, he assisted by answering phones, supervising the media center, picking up supplies, and even cleaned the bathrooms. Eddie was a humble man who had the character to do what is necessary to help the center run efficiently.

As a teenager, Eddie's parents had difficulty staying employed and making ends meet. Eddie and his family were regularly in danger of becoming homeless. Eddie was good in school but started to lose his way. He thought that he should drop out and work to help support his family. Some of his teachers saw that Eddie was changing and was in danger of dropping out. They got together and started mentoring him. Eddie found solace in school again. He felt supported and could work on taking advanced courses. His teachers helped him with his college and financial aid applications. When he was hungry, they fed him, whether it was literal food, knowledge, or self-esteem. Because of their dedication and support, Eddie was able to graduate from high school and attend an Ivy League school tuition free. He stayed at the university during all of the holidays and summer breaks to save money and work on campus at the law library. This enabled him to send money back home and cover his additional costs while in college. Working in the law library also fueled his interest in the law.

After college, Eddie returned home and started working at his old high school. He moved back in with his parents and brother and continued to help support his family. One day at work, he was introduced to a worker from the Griffon Learning Center organization. Once he

found out that the Griffon Learning Center existed, he knew he had to help them. Eddie started volunteering a few weeks later. Between working and volunteering, his love of the law grew stronger. Eddie decided to apply to law school nearby the center. He was accepted and given a handsome scholarship that enabled him to quit his job at the high school. He continued to volunteer at the center throughout law school. He finished his course work in the Spring of 2016 and was studying to take the bar exam when he was interviewed. He took the bar exam in early 2017 and passed the first time. He was, at the time of the interview, working for a nonprofit law firm. Eddie could no longer volunteer on a consistent basis, but he came out and supported the organization for major events. He also had made himself available to the Griffon Learning Center for legal questions.

Homeless student participants. As stated above, this case study employed convenience and nomination sampling methods to ensure that participants could speak about the issues surrounding this study. Twelve children took part in the individual interviews about their beliefs and experiences at the Griffon Learning Center. The children ranged in age from 8 years old to 17 years old, with the average being 12 years old. This was above the average age of all students who utilized the Griffon Learning Center. The average age of children who used the services of the organization was 8 years old. Five of the homeless students were in elementary school (grades K–5), four were in middle school (grades 6–8), two were in high school (grades 9–12), and one had dropped out from school and was working on taking her high school equivalency test, or GED. Five of the students interviewed were male, and seven were female. All of the homeless student participants spoke fluent English and a translator was not needed. English language ability was not a prerequisite for participation in this study. Although students were not asked about their race or ethnicity, it could be ascertained that seven of the students were Latino/Latina, three were African/African-American, and two were Caucasian. Based upon the researcher’s 60 hours of observations and 13 months of volunteer experience at the Griffon Learning Center prior to collecting data, the race and ethnicity of the student population of the study was reflective of the race and ethnicity of the students who utilized the Griffon Learning Center. All of the student participants, with the exception of Jennifer, were enrolled in a public school, but did not necessarily attend regularly. All of the children and youth interviewed and discussed in this study were given a pseudonym. The descriptions of each child were compiled from the formal interviews and informal observations.

Table 2. Homeless Student Participants in the Study

Pseudonym	Role	Grade	Ethnicity	Age	Gender
George	Student	8	Latino	15	Male
Hailey	Student	5	Latina	10	Female
Ian	Student	3	African American	9	Male
Jennifer	Student	Preparing for GED	Caucasian	17	Female
Kyle	Student	3	Latino	8	Male
Lori	Student	10	Latina	16	Female
Mary	Student	9	Latina	14	Female
Nikki	Student	5	African American	10	Female
Oscar	Student	6	Latino	12	Male
Penny	Student	5	Caucasian	11	Female
Quinton	Student	8	African American	14	Male
Rosie	Student	6	Latina	13	Female

Kyle. The youngest homeless student interviewed was Kyle. At the time of being interviewed, he was 8 years old and in the third grade. The average age of children who utilized services at the Griffon Learning Center was eight. He appeared to be of Latino descent. He enjoyed school, and he wanted to do well in school and make his family proud. Kyle liked learning new things and especially enjoyed science and English as he felt they allowed him to use his imagination the most. At Griffon Learning Center, he participated in the reading club and the science explorers. Kyle was especially excited to talk about how cooking is chemistry. He loved sharing what he had learned with others and would like to be a scientist or teacher when he grows up.

The social aspect of school had become increasingly difficult for Kyle. He got a school-issued backpack and supplies, a nondescript gray backpack. Some of Kyle’s friends received the same backpack and supplies. Kyle was proud of his backpack as it was his first ever backpack, but it also made him a target for bullies. Only students who are “poor” received

these backpacks from the school. They looked different from what most of the other students would carry, as comic book and cartoon character themed backpacks are popular in elementary school. Kyle's backpack makes him stand out in the sea of brightly colored plastic backpacks. Kyle started being teased and bullied because of the backpack. It went from name calling to having his backpack taken and hidden to being spit on, hit, and eventually Kyle was stuffed into a trashcan. He stopped going out to play at recess because of the bullying. Although he and his mother complained multiple times to the teacher and administration, little was done to protect Kyle. Despite this, Kyle still liked school. Kyle's living situation was unclear other than that he had three siblings, two of whom were living with his grandmother in another city. He said that he gets to see his older sister and brother during the holidays, but that his baby brother lived with him. Kyle suddenly stopped going to the Griffon Learning Center in the early Spring of 2017.

Ian. The second-youngest homeless student interviewed was Ian. At the time of the interview, he was 9 years old and in the third grade. He appeared to be of African or African American descent. He did not particularly like or dislike school but understood that it was where he was supposed to be. He enjoyed history and science the most and participated in activities at the Griffon Learning Center that included science or history. Ian loved football and one day he would like to play in the National Football League (NFL). He stopped playing Pop Warner football when his family had to move unexpectedly out of their house. They left everything behind including their car. Ian talked about not being able to visit friends, play sports, and go places anymore because his family no longer had a car.

Like Kyle, Ian has experienced bullying during recess. In fact, they shared one of their bullies. Ian just wanted to be a kid and have the opportunity to play without worrying about other kids trying to bother him. Ian talked about staying in the classroom during most recesses with Kyle. He would only leave if he had to use the restroom, his bully was not at school, if the bully had detention during recess, or the teacher made him go outside to recess. When Ian did go outside for recess, he was constantly watching for where his bully was on the playground and tried to avoid him. This caused a great deal of stress for Ian. Unlike Kyle, Ian would fight back if his bully hit or kicked him, which got Ian into trouble. Ian did not mind being in trouble too much as it meant that he got to stay inside for recess to serve detention and avoid his bully.

Ian grew up in a family touched by gang violence, and he carried the emotional scar of it with him. Both his father and uncle were killed by gang violence. His “step-father” was allegedly involved in a gang as well. He talked about how the Griffon Learning Center had kept him off the streets, but he was not referring to his state of homelessness, but rather gangs and crews. In an informal conversation between the researcher and his mother, it was revealed that Ian’s mother fled from a domestic violence situation with Ian and his little brother, and that to save herself and her children she had to leave everything behind to start over. At the time of the conversation, they were living in temporary housing and she was working and trying to save enough to get a car and a one-bedroom or studio apartment in a different state. Ian did not return to the Griffon Learning Center following the Christmas party a couple of weeks after his interview.

Hailey. Two 10-year-old homeless students were interviewed, both in the fifth grade. The first was Hailey. She appeared to be a Latina and was observed speaking Spanish with other children and some staff members while at the Griffon Learning Center. Hailey loved reading and art. Hailey had a creative imagination and was able to construct the world she read about in her mind and recreate them in art. The reading club and library at the Griffon Learning Center were among Hailey’s favorite things in her world. She talked about how she was able to read books at the Griffon Learning Center that she had never seen before anywhere else. She was especially happy to see books about people like her. She would like to be an illustrator or cartoonist when she grows up. She already had some ideas of characters she would like to create a cartoon series or book series for but did not believe that she had the ability to write the stories for them. Hailey lacked confidence in her ability to write.

School was difficulty for Hailey before coming to the Griffon Learning Center because she was unable to finish her homework while living at the shelter. According to Hailey, her teacher would yell at her for not having her work finished or the needed school supplies. This made Hailey begin to dislike school. When her grades dropped because of missing or incomplete assignments, her mother would get upset at Hailey as well. The Griffon Learning Center provided Hailey with a safe place to go after school and to be able to have a place to complete her homework. She received tutoring for the subjects she found especially challenging—math and science. Some of her assignments required access to a computer and printer, which were unavailable at the shelter. Hailey was able to make significant progress in her schoolwork while at the Griffon Learning Center and was even on the honor roll for the

third and fourth quarters of the school year. Hailey continued to go to the Griffon Learning Center for the remainder of the school year and gained confidence in her abilities. She partook in the Griffon Learning Center summer program before her family moved away.

Nikki. The second 10-year-old in the fifth grade was Nikki, and she appeared to be of African or African American descent. Nikki enjoyed history and English. Her favorite era of history was the Medieval Era, but she also liked early U.S. History. She participated in the Griffon Learning Center's reading and adventure clubs. She was interested in American folk heroes at the time of her interview and had just finished reading about Johnny Appleseed and Daniel Boone. Next on her list was John Henry. She had seen a Disney cartoon about American folk heroes and wanted to read about all of the figures that were presented in the film. Nikki described herself as precocious and not afraid to present in front of the class or share her thoughts with others. She enjoyed writing poetry and stories and then sharing them with others.

Nikki did not know why she went to the Griffon Learning Center, only that her mother told her that she had to go. She did not believe that she needed any extra help and did not know that her mother was looking for a safe place for Nikki to go after school until she could come and get her. Once Nikki got involved with the clubs and formed a relationship with her tutor, Nikki accepted coming to the center. She started looking forward to going to the center to see her friends and read new books. At the time of her interview, Nikki was keenly aware of the politics and the national presidential election. Much of her poetry centered on the elections and being a homeless child. Her poetry asked powerful "why" questions that were being left unanswered by those seeking office. This led her to a desire to study political science in college and possibly become a politician one day.

Nikki's time at the Griffon Learning Center ended just a few weeks after she was interviewed, when her mother was able to move in with her parents out of state. Nikki came to the center one last time to say "good bye" to her friends and the staff at the Griffon Learning Center and to tell them the good news that they were going to live with her grandparents. She wrote a poem to commemorate the event and gave it to some of the staff and volunteers Nikki knew.

Penny. At the time of her interview, Penny was in the fifth grade and 11 years old. She lived

in a local shelter with her mother and did not talk much about being homeless, only to say that her mother does not have any money for Penny to play soccer anymore. She appeared to be Caucasian. Penny had a beautiful smile and an infectious giggle. She was very caring toward other children who do not “fit in” with the group and tried to follow the expectations of those around her. It is important to note that Penny had both developmental and psychological delays, which affected many aspects of her life, including, but not limited to, her educational needs and her social interactions. Penny had a stutter, which got worse when she was upset or stressed. She would mumble or choose not to speak at all when she met someone new. If she got flustered or stressed, Penny would turn to acts of violence because she was having difficulty communicating what she wants.

Penny’s favorite sport was soccer. She used to be on a local soccer team but was asked not to return after she got in a fight with other soccer girls at school. Over the course of weeks, the girls teased and tormented Penny, including spiting on her while at school. They would gang up on her and call her names, making fun of her disabilities and her living situation. One day Penny could not take it anymore and started kicking the ringleader until a security officer pulled Penny off the other girl. Because of the fight, Penny was expelled from the school. She expressed that she was happier at her new school, that she did not have friends, and was not able to play soccer. Her mother sent Penny to the center after school instead of to soccer practice. Penny’s time at the Griffon Learning Center led her to discover a new hobby, reading. When Penny was not in a tutoring session, she could be found in the library or in the reading club at the center. A couple of months after her interview, Penny stopped coming to the center.

Oscar. Of the two sixth graders interviewed, Oscar was 12 years old and was close to turning 13. He appeared to be of Latino decent. He was tall and large, and was made fun of because of it. Additionally, Oscar had difficulty communicating. It took him a while to complete a sentence. Others would try to finish what he was trying to say, and this got him flustered. If others did not finish his sentences, they may stop listening to him, which led to frustration and anger. He wanted to be able to communicate what he was thinking and feeling by himself and be heard. He had contemplated suicide on many occasions and was seeing a counselor to cope with his feelings and thoughts. He mentioned during his interview that he also was learning how to manage his anger and not hit others when he got frustrated with them, at the same time not to shut down.

At school, Oscar enjoyed physical education (P.E.) because it was one of the classes in which he excelled. He did not have to talk very much and was able to let out some of his aggression. Because Oscar was the biggest student in his class, when students could pick their teammates, he was chosen first to participate on a team. The P.E. class was where Oscar felt as if he was not an outsider. He was also quite good at most sports. Because he was good at P.E., he hoped that in the future he will be able to participate in afterschool sports. In addition to P.E. and sports, Oscar enjoyed science and one day would like to be a scientist. He was especially interested in the mechanics of how things work. In Fall of 2016, if one were to look for Oscar in the afternoon, he could be found working with the robotics kits, playing with Legos, or watching YouTube videos of science experiments at the Griffon Learning Center. By the Spring of 2017, Oscar spent less time in the media center and more time in group activities and clubs interacting with other children. He seemed happier and smiled more than when he was interviewed months before.

Rosie. The other sixth grader interviewed was Rosie. When she was interviewed she was 13 years old. Rosie was behind in school due to high absenteeism as her family moved a lot for work. Rosie struggled with accepting that she had been retained a grade due to absenteeism. She was bored with school because she had studied all of the same material the previous year, but once she got past accepting her situation, she tried to focus on the subjects she enjoyed most, history and art. Her favorite days at school were when lessons on art and history were combined. Rosie talked about her Latina heritage with pride when discussing a recent lesson and art project on the Day of the Dead at school. Rosie said that she missed her family back in Mexico and hoped that one day she could go to college and get a good job so that she can help bring her siblings to the United States.

In addition to art and history, Rosie had a strong interest in dance. Rosie wished that she could continue in afterschool dance class, but she told her mother that she did not want to dance anymore. Rosie was keenly aware of how much money the dance classes cost her mother and that they were struggling to have enough money to eat and pay the weekly rent at the motel. For the same reason, Rosie said “no” to a lot of other opportunities. She was invited to birthday parties, dinners at friends’ houses, and even a trip to Disneyland. Rosie did not accept invitations because she knew that her mother could not afford to buy Rosie a new dress and presents. She rejected offers for dinner and sleepovers because Rosie did not want to invite anyone over to the motel. Even though her friend’s family was going to pay for the

trip to Disneyland, Rosie did not accept because she knew that her mother would not be able to reciprocate. To avoid hurting her mother's feelings, Rosie stopped telling her mother about these opportunities. Rosie tried to have a positive attitude about her life situation, and instead of focusing on the have-nots she focused on what she did have. When she finished her homework at the Griffon Learning Center, she took advantage of the art room and art supplies to make Christmas gifts for her sister and mother, as well as for her family in Mexico.

Quinton. When Quinton was interviewed, he was 14 and in the eighth grade. He appeared to be of African or African American decent. Quinton was the quintessential big brother looking after his younger siblings, especially his little brother. He was extremely mature for his age and expressed his appreciation for what he had in life. Although he was homeless, and his immediate family was divided between two different emergency shelters, Quinton saw this as a season of his life. Both of his parents were working and had almost enough saved to rent a two-bedroom apartment or house in a safer neighborhood. A few weeks after Quinton's interview, he came into the center with his family and said good-bye to the staff and his tutors; they were able to get a place to live together.

School was a means to an end for Quinton. He objected to how his teachers treated him once they found out he was homeless. He felt as if they were too inquisitive, and at the same time not compassionate or understanding enough. He wished that they could be more flexible with deadlines and requirements. For example, Quinton did not object to writing an essay for school and would have gladly written it out by hand. He did not have access to a computer and the Internet to submit the paper online, as required. He tried to finish it at the center, but when the media center was full children could only use a computer for 30 minutes at a time. He just did not have enough time to finish typing the paper in 30 minutes. He tried turning in the paper more than half typed and the rest handwritten, but the teacher would not accept it. Quinton said that this was not a unique experience.

One activity that was important to Quinton was football. He hoped that by playing football in high school he would be recruited for college football and, someday, professional football. If he was not recruited for football, Quinton would graduate from high school and join the U.S. Marine Corps. While Quinton was living in the shelter, he was not able to play football because the shelter required those seeking a bed for the night to line up and register by five in

the afternoon, which was right in the middle of football practice. Quinton told the researcher that he was going to start playing football again once his family found moved into their new place.

Mary. When Mary was interviewed, she was nearing the end of the first semester of high school. Mary was 14 years old and appeared to be of Latina descent. She was observed speaking Spanish to her younger sister at the center. Mary would walk her sister to the Griffon Learning Center from school every day and made sure that her sister had a safe place to be. Once Mary's sister was settled, Mary would go to work illegally at a nearby restaurant to help pay for necessities for her family. Mary and her sister went to school near the center because their schools were near where Mary worked. She had been working at the restaurant since she was 11 years old when her mother lost her job. Mary reluctantly talked about her job at the restaurant, saying only that she worked where the customers could not see her washing dishes. Before the restaurant opened, Mary helped set up the tables and folded napkins in the front. She worked every day except Wednesdays, when she had a tutoring session at the center, and on Sundays, because the restaurant was closed.

When Mary was interviewed, she lived in a converted garage with her younger sister and mother. Her mother had been unemployed for more than 3 years. At the beginning of the school year, her mother had an opportunity for a job near San Diego. The family made the trip, and they were there over two weeks. During their stay, Mary's mother interviewed for the job and began training. Unfortunately, Mary's mother did not finish the training, and consequently, did not get the job. The family then returned to living in the garage. When Mary went back to school, not all of her teachers allowed her to make up her missed schoolwork and tests. This is similar to when Mary and her sister missed school because of transportation issues. The girl's schools were too far away for them to walk to and the schools did not have buses pick students up near where they live. This meant that if Mary's mother's friend was unable to take the girls to school, they had to take the public bus. The girls could only take the bus if their mother had enough money for the bus fare for them. Some days it was a decision between taking the bus to school and not eating lunch or staying home. When Mary and her sister were absent because they had no way to get to school, their absences were not excused. These experiences contributed to Mary's dislike of school. Despite her dislike of school, Mary said she would like to go to college and study art. She wanted to be an artist or work for a museum one day. Shortly after the interview, Mary's

mother started working at the same restaurant as her daughter and the family moved into a residential motel closer to where the girls went to school.

George. At 15 and soon to be 16, George was an older eighth grader at the time of his interview. George's family came to the United States from Mexico. His parents crossed the border in the late 1980s for work and had George and his little sister in the United States. George's mother died after a long illness when George was 12 years old. This pushed him into taking on the role of caregiver for his little sister. He was the one who did the cooking, cleaning, and making sure that his sister got up and went to school. George walked his sister to school from the motel they lived in and made sure she got safely back to the motel after time at the Griffon Learning Center. His sister was part of the group that was walked to the center after school by staff at the Griffon Learning Center. George naturally looked out for those around him. As he was older than the rest of the students in his middle school, he was a bit of a father figure and very popular now. He used to be teased because of his age, being the new kid, or wearing clothes that were old or too big for him. Now, he did not respond to others' remarks and focused on being kind to others.

George's father was a migrant farm worker; when he was not able to get seasonal work he picked up odd jobs. Because of this, neither George nor his sister had ever completed a full year of school at the same school. At the time of his interview, George's father was working on a construction site near the Griffon Learning Center. George was excited that the job might last until after the summer and he and his sister might get to complete a year of school at the same place. George wanted to complete high school and go on to trade school to become a skilled and licensed electrician or plumber. His father wanted George to continue in his education as well. However, George stated that he would probably need to drop out of school before being able to graduate high school and start working alongside his father. Despite what happens to him, George wanted to make sure that his sister could go on to college. A few weeks after the interview, George and his sister stopped coming to the center. There was no word of what happened to them.

Lori. At the time of her interview, Lori was 16 years old and in the tenth grade. She was about a year older than the typical tenth grader and would be 19 years old when she graduates from high school. She appeared to be of Latina descent, and the interviewer heard her conversing with other children and some staff members at the Griffon Learning Center in

Spanish. Less than a year before the interview, Lori and her mother's lives dramatically changed. Her father, who was the sole income earner for their little family, died. They were left without any savings, no life insurance policy, and a great deal of debt. Her mother had no idea about the financial situation that they were in because her father had hidden it from them. In the months following his death, Lori and her mother were out on the streets and living in shelters. On top of her life at home changing dramatically, Lori had to change high schools to be closer to the shelter.

Lori was an advanced student who qualified for honors and Advanced Placement (AP) courses but did not have access to them at her new high school. As a freshman, she completed Advanced Algebra II and was supposed to take honors pre-calculus as a sophomore. Her new school's highest mathematics course was regular pre-calculus. This meant that Lori would not have access to AP Calculus let alone regular calculus if she stayed at the high school. According to Lori, the school did not have any honors or Advanced Placement courses. She wanted to go to a good college but was concerned that she would not be able to complete the needed coursework to be a competitive college applicant.

She also used to be highly involved in cheer and student council at her previous school. Her new high school did not have a formal ASB or student council; there were only a few organized clubs. This disappointed Lori, but what was worse for her was that she could no longer participate in cheer. She had been in varsity competitive cheer at her previous school. Lori was unaware of the cost of cheer and, when she tried out for the team, Lori's mother had to tell her daughter that they could not afford for Lori to be part of the squad. The uniform cost nearly a thousand dollars, and the cheerleaders were expected to attend most sporting events throughout the year, requiring transportation, meals, and sometimes even housing. The extra costs were just out of their reach.

Between not being able to participate in cheer and student council as well as the lack of course offerings, Lori's opinion of school had changed. She used to enjoy it, but now she saw it as something she just had to survive. By going to the Griffon Learning Center, Lori found that she gained access to free study sessions for the AP exams. She also discovered the Khan Academy and free online high school courses. Lori spent every day after school either in the media center working on extra courses to prepare for her college applications or studying for AP exams. This gave her something to focus on outside of her current living situation,

mourning the loss of her father, and dealing with her dissatisfaction of her current high school.

Jennifer. The only youth participant who was not enrolled in school at the time of her interview was Jennifer. She dropped out of high school due to time constraints and lack of support. At 17, Jennifer was responsible for providing an income for her family. Throughout her life, Jennifer was in and out of the foster care system. Jennifer was able to return to her family just before Christmas during her sophomore year of high school. While in foster care, Jennifer attended five different high schools and went to a sixth when she went back to her family. She made the typical adjustments to a new school and was doing well. Jennifer felt as if things were finally going in the right direction, but her family lost their apartment and Jennifer started missing school or would be late to school because of transportation issues. She started working at a fast-food restaurant to help out the family. It became increasingly difficult for Jennifer to keep up in her schoolwork. Jennifer had a hard time explaining why she was missing so much school to her teachers and did not believe they cared about her situation. She received several zeroes and fails because she was unable to turn in her assignments late for credit or make up missed tests. Between the lack of support, stability, and the unexpected state of homelessness, Jennifer felt like she had no choice but to drop out of high school and work full-time. However, Jennifer was determined that would not be the end of her education.

It was important to Jennifer to get an education that would lead to a career that would make her financially independent from her family and still be able to help support them from time to time. She started attending the GED classes and tutoring sessions at the Griffon Learning Center to prepare to take the GED exam in the spring of 2017. She took and passed the exam. After she passed the exam, she no longer could use the resources of the Griffon Learning Center, but she would still stop by and visit. Jennifer went on to enroll in a medical vocational program at a community college.

Themes Emerging in the Data

Through inductive analysis (Hatch, 2002), five themes emerged to create the story of the homeless youth who utilized the services of the mobile school and youth learning center and the staff and volunteers who worked there. They are:

1. Hopelessness and oppression characterized by the domains of (a) school avoidance, (b) absenteeism, (c) bullied by adults and other children, (d) homeless children withdrawing from friends and activities, (e) what the staff and volunteers see—hopelessness and oppression.
2. Culture of invisibility and despair characterized by domains of (a) homeless children’s expressed feelings of invisibility and despair, and (b) the role of the Griffon Learning Center.
3. Safety characterized by domains of (a) criminal activity, (b) safety of the staff and volunteerism (c) safety of homeless children, and (d) the Griffon Learning Center—a safe place to be.
4. Emerging hope as characterized by domains of (a) developing relationships, (b) the Griffon Learning Center—a place to call home, and (c) developing hopes and dreams for the future.
5. Political climate for change as characterized by domains of (a) ballot measures and other legislation, and (b) increased awareness and a call to action.

Theme 1: Hopelessness and Oppression: “Hopelessness and oppression are palpable.”

School avoidance. In the interviews of the adults and the youth at the Griffon Learning Center, one emerging theme was that of school avoidance. Some of the children and teens interviewed talked about being afraid of someone at school. Their fears ranged from being teased or bullied by their peers and/or adults to being taken away from their families. To cope, they avoided attending their public school. These students felt as if there was not an adult who cared about them in school. When speaking with Alice, an administrator with the organization, she explained that every day in the morning there was small groups of homeless children outside of the Griffon Learning Center waiting for it to open.

Similarly, there were children standing outside of the shelter where one of the organization’s main mobile school stops was located. They would go to the center during the day instead of going to school. Alice stated, “Even though they are enrolled in [school], they come to us because they know we care about them.” She continued by saying that the homeless students do not believe that their teachers and other adults at the school care about them. Alice continued, “They are afraid to tell anyone at the school about being homeless because of what might happen to them.” Depending upon each child’s situation, they might be taken away

from their parents, or if they were runaways they might be placed in foster care or in a facility. “There is a huge fear of being taken away from what they know,” said Alice. Eddie, a long-time volunteer, was asked to start coming to the Griffon Learning Center in the morning 3 years ago instead of the afternoon because of the increasing need for supervision and tutoring during the day. Eddie talked about the homeless students preferring to come to the Griffon Learning Center over going to school “because here they know that we don’t judge them; we listen, we encourage, we have fun, and we learn.”

According to Alice, an administrator, the highest number of children were observed at the center when the “daily snack in the afternoon” is handed out. For many kids, this is what gets them to come into the center, and then they discover that “while here, they are able to get access to our various programs.” Most of the children met weekly one-on-one with a tutor and then the rest of the week would work in groups. Alice said that the teens primarily went to the Griffon Learning Center to use the computer lab where they could access the Internet and work on homework. Those in high school, especially seniors, would meet with the academic and career counselor. Alice believed, “If we weren’t here, most of these children would not have a place to do their homework and be able to make progress in school.”

As expressed by the homeless students interviewed and by Alice, the homeless children avoided going to school when they had not been able to finish their homework. It was not that the students did not want to complete their assignments and projects, or study for tests and quizzes, it is that they did not have a place to do their work and prepare for assessments, and they did not have the necessary supplies to complete what was required. From Alice’s perspective, the Griffon Learning Center tried to be that space for the children and give access to resources they needed to continue to progress in their studies.

Absenteeism. Some homeless students commented on their high absenteeism and inability to make up work. Mary, a 14-year-old ninth grader, claimed that when she missed school her teachers would only let her make up missed assignments and assessments when she had an excused absence. Not being able to get to school because she missed the bus was not considered an excused absence. Mary said that she has to take two busses to get to school if she missed the public school bus. Mary, her sister, and her mother were living in a garage of a friend and they had limited resources: “My mom doesn’t always have enough money to give me so I can take the bus to school and I usually dunna eat lunch.” Mary missed two

weeks of school in September because her mother had the possibility of a job in San Diego. Mary, her sister, and mother went to San Diego together while Mary's mother was going through job training. Unfortunately, Mary's mother did not get offered a job after completing the job training and Mary's family returned to Los Angeles. The school would not issue an excused absence and most of Mary's teachers would not let her make up the missed work. Mary recalled, "Only my, you know, Spanish and English teachers let me complete the homework, you know, I missed while we were in San Diego." She used to enjoy school, but it had become increasingly challenging for Mary as time went on and she experienced more and more absences. In addition to Mary's absenteeism, she struggled to complete assignments that required access to computers, the Internet, and printers. Mary's only opportunity outside of school to complete much of her work was at the Griffon Learning Center: "I don't have anywhere, you know, I can do work outside of school but here." Mary spent a lot of her emotional energy trying not to upset her mother or make her mother feel guilty. When Mary was unable to complete her work at the Griffon Learning Center, she "pretend[s] like [she's] sick" and avoids going to school. However, Mary said that, "The teachers are mean though when you miss class, you know. Well not all of 'em, but most." Mary's difficulty in school led her to contemplate dropping out of high school. Mary said, "I'm not sure about any of it anymore, you know. I'm only fourteen though and really dunna know what else I can do besides school for now."

Both George and Rosie were approximately a year behind in school because of the amount of school they had missed. Rosie said that she was held back because she missed nearly three months of the school year in the fifth grade and was not allowed to make up the work. She claimed, "They wouldn't even let me take a test to show I knew what I was supposed to learn when I was gone; my mom did teached me. It not fair; I had to do it all over again." When George was asked what grade he was in and how old he was, he said, "I, uh, should be, uh, in the ninth, uh, or maybe even, uh, the tenth grade, uh, cuz I'm almost sixteen, uh." Due to George's high absenteeism, he had not been able to progress as far in school as his peers. He believed "it's just stupid that they won't, uh, just let [him], uh, be with other kids, uh, [his] age." George was frustrated that the school system was punishing him for his circumstances: "My dad can't help, uh, it if we can't stay in one place very long, uh."

George's father had worked several temporary jobs. He took anything he could that would help him provide for his family. Over the years, George's father had worked various types of

construction jobs, on farms, helped people move, done gardening, and many other manual labor tasks. As a result, their family moved constantly, and the children missed a lot of school. George said that he “can’t ‘member, uh, when [his] sister and, uh, [h]e, uh, were in a school for a whole year.” Because of the frequency of moving, sometimes they were not even registered for school and just stayed where they were sleeping for the interim. Other times they were registered for school but they “have, uh, no way to get to school.” Since George’s mother died, George had taken on additional responsibilities. He took care of his sister. He was the one who stayed home with her when she got sick. He prepared the meals, cleaned up their living space and made sure that everything was prepared for the next day. This is a lot of extra pressure to put on a 16-year-old. Compounded with an unstable living situation and changing schools frequently, it was no wonder that George felt the way he did about education:

So, what, uh, if I, uh, don’t understand Shakespeare and shit! When is, uh, Shakespeare, uh, gonna help me get a job? I, uh, think I might, uh, just try to get, uh, a GED. A teacher, uh, even told me, uh, I should just drop out.

George believed that he would end up “working odd jobs” like his father. He would like to be able to go to trade school and become a plumber or electrician, so he could earn good money and not have to move around like his father, but George was concerned that he “might not finish” trade school either.

Jennifer, the homeless student who dropped out of high school and was studying to take the GED exam, recalled, “I left school ‘cuz I couldn’t take it anymore.” As she remembered, Jennifer had previously attended six different high schools in a little over a year when she was originally placed in foster care and was moved around from home to home. She was able to get back to her family, but they soon became homeless and Jennifer was expected to start working. At first, Jennifer could balance working and going to school. She would miss a few classes, especially first period, because she was tired from working late at night. Jennifer said that her first period teacher “was really cool and, uh, let [her] come in at lunch and, uh, take quizzes if [she] missed one.” According to Jennifer, “lot of, uh, kids, uh, come to school late,” and her first period teacher was “used to it” and “trie[d] to help [students] out” by allowing students “turn in stuff late for credit.” Jennifer started to miss more school as her work hours began to bleed into her school hours. If she stayed at school through the end of last period, she would end up being late for work. Her manager threatened to fire her if she was

late to work again. Jennifer found herself in a quandary: “My mom, uh, and sister and I need to be able to eat. It’s my responsibility now, uh. I couldn’t get fired.” She started ditching classes, especially after lunch, to make it on time to work. Between trying to make money for her family and going to school, she was frequently absent and could not keep up with the work. Jennifer said that when she tried to explain her situation to her teachers “they’d got mad and, uh, wouldn’t let [her] make up stuff.” She was even told that she “was gonna fail out.” She decided to make “it easy on ‘em,” and she “just didn’t go back again.” Jennifer wanted to complete high school and earn a diploma by traditional means; however, her circumstances led her to make a decision to drop out and work on getting a GED at the Griffon Learning Center.

Alice, one of the administrators interviewed, talked about homeless students needing a place to complete their homework and study. She stated that many homeless children fall behind in their education and “miss knowledge and skills due to their high absenteeism.” To her, the Griffon Learning Center organization provided not only a physical space for these children to be able to do their work, but also a way to “gain access to resources they need” from teachers, counselors, tutors, health care and social workers, to technology, school supplies, food, and clothing. According to Alice, many children and teens go to the Griffon Learning Center from the moment they finish school until the center closes primarily because “they don’t have anywhere else to go that is safe in this neighborhood.” For some, they had to wait until their parents got off from work and were able to pick them up. Others just left on their own right before the center closed.

Bullied by adults and other children. Another prevalent reason why the homeless students avoided school was the degree to which they got into fights or were being excessively teased or even bullied by other children as well as by teachers. George mentioned when he was younger he would experience moments of being teased or “made fun of” when he “didn’t have lunch, uh, or wore the same clothes every day.” Now that George is older, the comments were less frequent, and he felt that he was able to brush them off to some degree. Besides comments being made by other kids, George had teachers tell him he “should just drop out” of school. On some of the tougher days, George agreed with these teachers. It was when he goes to The Griffon Learning Center and interacted with the volunteers and staff that George “feel[s] like [he] can finish middle school . . . and go on to high school.” He says this is “cuz they make you, uh, believe”. George was one example of how powerful adults can be in a

child's life.

Kyle, a third-grade student, talked about how the other kids in his class teased him. Kyle said that he and his friends have been harassed “because of [their] backpacks.” Kyle carried one of the school-issued backpacks and school supply kits. Unfortunately, all of the bags looked alike, and he was easily identifiable as someone who is poor. Kyle said the teasing did not stop with name-calling and that he had been pushed as well: “Albert started calling me names. He pushed me at recess.” Kyle had a fading black eye on the day of the interview. When asked about it before the interview by a staff member, Kyle said that it had happened at school and would not give any other details. Given Kyle's circumstances, it was also not unusual for him to have to wear the same clothing for several days in a row. Kyle cited this as one of the reasons why he was teased: “Albert and the other kids in my class sometimes made fun of me and call me names cuz I wear the same shirt all week. They tell me I smells bad even when I don't.” He said, “the teacher don't do nothing 'bout it.” Toward the end of the interview, when Kyle was asked what he wished his teacher knew about him and other children like him, he talked about how teachers should treat students and how they should respond to those who do. Kyle believes that “if something happens then the bad guy should be punished.” In many instances Kyle had been on the receiving side of being punished for someone else's transgressions—from not being able to play outside at recess and eat at the lunch tables for fear of being bullied to not trying to stand out in anyway in his class for fear of the teacher commenting on Kyle's behavior. Kyle said that “teachers shouldn't make fun of their students” and that “teachers shouldn't let kids make fun of other kids.” Kyle adamantly believed that “teachers should show us how to be good to each other.” Although Kyle did not expressly say that his teacher has made fun of him, he implied as such in his comments. Kyle gently asked, “Why is people mean?” It was difficult to give this child an answer.

Like Kyle, Nikki experienced a lot of bullying from her classmates as well as from her teacher. The bullying ranged from name-calling, other inappropriate comments, and having items stolen, to being thrown into a trashcan and told she was trash. She said that other students teased her about her worn clothes, holey shoes, or even having an orange lunch ticket instead of a blue one. According to Nikki, her teacher would make daily comments about Nikki. The teacher would note if Nikki's homework paper was dirty or wrinkled. Nikki said that her teacher would go as far as “tell[ing] me that I needed to tell my mom I needed a

bath in front of the other students.” Nikki believed that this led to the students continuing to bully her, from subtle incidents such as being picked last for the team to more obvious gestures of having her backpack hidden from her. The worst incident Nikki spoke about was when a group of girls chased her around the school. It ended with Nikki being “thrown into a trashcan.” She said they told Nikki she “was trash” and that she “should stay where [she] belonged.” Nikki reported the attack to her teacher. She said, “When I would tell the teacher about these things, she would tell me that she didn’t see it or hear it, so she couldn’t help me.” Nikki was harassed continually because of her poverty. She eventually told her mother about what was happening at school. Nikki and her mother decided that it would be better for Nikki to change schools than attempt to work things out through the school as the bullying was not isolated to a couple of kids but included adults at the school. This prompted Nikki’s family to move but in the process of moving they lost the ability to have their own apartment and were living with two other families in a two-bedroom apartment near the river. Nikki said, “things are much better now” that she has changed schools but that she no longer has her own space at home. She felt guilty for her family having to move, but at the same time, she said she “no longer feel[s] as if [she] is a nobody.”

Ian was a little boy who enjoyed learning but had started not to like school because of recess and free time. Ian said that recess can be fun, but that “it depends ‘n who is at school.” Ian had one person in particular who bullied him: “If Thomas is there, recess [is] not good. He’s mean to me. He pushes me. He’s a bully.” Ian would often stay in the classroom at recess and lunch to avoid encounters with Thomas unless the teacher forced Ian to go outside or if he needed to use the restroom. Like Kyle, Ian had had encounters with Albert; however, Albert focused on Kyle rather than Ian. Ian and Kyle were now friends and came to the center together after school.

Penny, a fifth grader, said that she cried a lot because of the bullying she experienced at school and that she no longer wanted to go to school. During her interview, Penny recounted an experience that happened to her in summer school. She used to play soccer with another girl named Sarah. Penny believed that Sarah was her friend. According to Penny, one day, Sarah approached Penny with a group of other girls and started making fun of Penny. The girls laughed at Penny as she started to cry. Penny said, “Sarah started calling me names, waa, like, waa, ‘sped’, waa, and a, waa, ‘Ruthie girl’ (a reference to a battered women’s shelter).” Penny was confused by Sarah’s behavior as they were, as Penny referred to them,

“soccer buddies.” Sarah started spitting on Penny and then the other girls joined in and started spitting on her, too. Penny became confused and she “didn’t know what to do.” She became angry and pushed Sarah down. Penny recalls “kickin’ her” and that “there was a lot of yelling.” One of the girls pushed Penny over and “then a security guard and . . . a teacher pulled us apart.” Penny was not too sure what happened to Sarah, but Penny was dismissed from school. She said, “I’m at a different school, waa, now. I don’t, waa, have any friends at school, waa, but it’s better than the last school.” Like many of the children at the Griffon Learning Center, Penny desired to be like everyone else, having friends, doing fun activities, and feeling safe.

Alice, a staff member at the Griffon Learning Center, saw this in her work frequently. In her interview, she talked about the homeless children’s fear of others finding out about them being homeless. They were fearful that “they will get made fun of by other children, or worse yet, an adult.” Like the examples above, Alice had heard many stories about the children and youth who came into the center being teased or bullied both by other adolescents as well as by adults. Alice believed that sometimes the comments and actions by others were unintentional and “unfortunately the teachers say things or, uh, do something that they don’t realize makes the kid feel worse.” This is especially true when the child “might be treated differently” by the teacher and the other children see this and then “their friends might stop playing with them.”

Homeless children withdrawing from friends and activities. In addition to avoiding school for a variety of reasons, many homeless children had withdrawn from their friends and activities. Mary used to like school and spending time with her friends, but this school year things changed for her. She lost belief in her dream to be an artist and had lost connections with friends. Mary recalled that “the kids who used to be [her] friends stopped hangin’ out with [her] at lunch.” She said that in some ways she felt “betta” about the separation because she no longer has to “deal with ‘em.” When she was asked about what she liked about school or what her favorite subject was, Mary replied, “I guess English class, and I really like the library. I like to read, you know, and then draw pictures of what I’ve read.” She went on to say, “I think I’d like to be an artist, you know, but that probably won’t happen.” Mary did not believe that she would be able to complete school: “I’ll probably not finish, you know, and go and work at the mall or something.” When asked about what she has drawn lately, Mary said that she had not drawn any pictures, “not even doodled” for about a year. When asked why,

she replied, “I just don’t.”

Some of the children expressed or implied that they were embarrassed because of the lack of new things or clothes, the lack or type of school supplies they had, or of feeling shame or guilt. These feelings of embarrassment, shame, and guilt had led them to avoid others. As Mary stated above, some of her friends have stopped “hangin’ out” with her. As a defense, Mary reframed the situation as not having “to deal with ‘em.” Some of the children were more specific as to why they did not spend time with their friends. Kyle talked about how he was excited to get his new backpack and school supplies from his school. Kyle said, “It’s cool lookin’ see. And it has pencils, paper, and a folder.” Kyle smiled and picked up his backpack to show the researcher his new bag when he spoke about it during the interview. He was happy that he would have everything he needed to do his schoolwork—until the other students made fun of him. Kyle stopped smiling as he continued, “then Albert (a pseudonym) started calling me names. He pushes me at recess.” All of the school-distributed backpacks and supplies looked alike and were easily identifiable by other students. If a student was carrying a school-distributed backpack, it implied that the child’s family was poor. Kyle asked, “Why is people mean?” Kyle now only played with the other children who have the “cool” backpacks: “My friends are here with me. We go to school together. We sit together. We play together. We eat lunch together. We come here together. We are together.”

George also talked about being made fun of for wearing the same clothes repeatedly and not having money for lunch. On many occasions, George would only have enough food to make his sister a lunch and he would go without. He rarely had any money to spend on lunch. Because of George’s frequent changes in schools, he was rarely at one place long enough for his peers to realize his situation. George had learned to use his transitory situation to his advantage. Sometimes he made friends and was able to share their lunch: “I just brush it off, uh, like I forgot my lunch, uh, or left my wallet somewhere, uh.” However, when he was younger, other kids would make fun of George when he did not have a lunch. He discovered, “in, uh, middle school, uh, nobody seems to care if you eat or not, uh.” Nevertheless, there was one holdover from his elementary days, clothes: he was teased throughout elementary school for wearing the same clothes every day. In middle school, it got worse. George stated, “I get called an ‘old man’, uh, and ‘day laborer’, uh, and other things, uh, cuz I wear my dad’s clothes.” Some of his pants were stained with paint and/or grease and had obvious signs of being patched up. Regardless, George wanted to make his father proud: “My dad bought

me a new shirt for my birthday last year, uh. It's my favorite, uh, shirt, uh, and I wear it a lot, uh. So what? It, uh, makes my dad proud." Even though he was still a teenager, George responded to his situation with a great deal of maturity.

Like George, Rosie had had a difficult time not being able to participate in seemingly normal activities for a teenager. She felt bad when she was invited to do something at another schoolmate's house. When Rosie was invited to a friend's house for dinner, she would often not go because she could not invite her friend over in kind. She felt as if she had missed out on a lot of "normal teenage things" because of her living situation. Rosie had to say "no thank you" to birthday party invitations because her mother did not have enough money to buy Rosie's friend a present or Rosie a new dress to wear to the party. Rosie had never had a birthday party either. Rosie talked about a specific incident when she was being interviewed involving a trip to Disneyland. Rosie had never been before and had been invited to go with her friend Elena. Elena could take one of her friends as part of her birthday present. Elena's parents were going to pay for the ticket to Disneyland. Rosie said, "I know my mom, em, won't, like, let me go, em, not because she doesn't want me to, em, but because she doesn't, like, em, have the money I would need, em, like for food and stuff." As a result, Rosie "just, em, don't tell her about stuff anymore" including the trip to Disneyland. Rosie recognized that she was not having the same experience as other teenagers and would like to be, as she puts it, "like a normal kid for once." At the same time, she felt guilty if she expressed these feelings to her mother. Rosie did not want her mother "to feel, like, bad because she can't give me, em, what I want."

Shelter hours, transportation difficulties as well as the lack of the ability to pay for sports and other activities, led some homeless students to dropout or stop participating in the activities that they love. Quinton, a fourteen-year-old eighth grader, could not stay after school for football practice or games. Quinton had to give up something that he really enjoyed because of his living situation. He had to be with his father when they checked in at the shelter or Quinton could not stay at the same shelter as his father. As it was, Quinton and his father had been separated while being in the same facility but checking in at the same time reduced the chances of being separated. Quinton was afraid to be by himself in the shelter or to be separated from his father in there. He would not elaborate any further than that but reiterated that he had "to meet him at the line by five to get a room together." Quinton went to the Griffon Learning Center right after school, met his brother there, and completed his

homework. Quinton's little brother was walked to the center by the staff of the Griffon Learning Center from school. Quinton left just in time to take his little brother to meet his mother in line at the women's shelter and then he went to meet his father in line at the men's shelter. As a result, Quinton was not able to play football until his family's living situation becomes more permanent. Quinton recognized, "it's not forever. Dad's gotta job . . . and Mom she's working too. Dad said we'll have enough for a place soon." Quinton's little brother was only five, and as such, could stay with his mother in the women's shelter that was around the corner from where Quinton and his father stayed. The shelters were single sex except for the women's shelter, which allowed young children of any gender to accompany their mothers.

Ian, a 9-year-old third-grade student, struggled with being able to participate in afterschool activities because his family did not have a car and could not take him to and from activities. Ian recalled, "I can't play at my friend's house, or at Pop Warner (a youth football league) because I can't get home. We [have] no car to get me." The only reason he could go to the youth learning center was that staff members walked a group of students from the local elementary school to the center every day after school. Alice, one of the staff members, said, "Many of the parents have no means for afterschool childcare and we meet that need by going directly to the schools and bringing the children here." Ian was not alone; transportation is an issue for many homeless students. Even though the Griffon Learning Center was close to the area's schools, some homeless children missed their scheduled one-on-one tutoring sessions because of a lack of transportation. Alice said that "many of our families have no means of transportation . . . they either take the bus or walk here to get their children." She continued, "Many of our kids miss their tutoring or counseling sessions merely because they have no way of getting home if they come here after school." The Griffon Learning Center recognized that transportation was a real issue of concern. According to Alice, "close to a third of our scheduled tutoring sessions are missed because of transportation related causes." Despite students missing scheduled one-on-one tutoring sessions, the volunteers and staff had plenty of work to do as unscheduled walk-ins come in at all hours. Students could also be pulled from the group sessions if a tutor was available for them.

Lori, a 16-year-old tenth grader, used to be a cheerleader, but the uniform and related costs were too much for her family to afford for Lori to be able to participate at her new school. Lori said, "I was so excited when I made the varsity squad this year but . . . my mom never

told me before how much she paid for the uniform, spirit wear, and stuff. It's like more than a thousand dollars." Like Lori, Penny did not participate in soccer anymore because of the cost and the inability to travel for tournaments, and because of a fight she had with one of the other players while at school. Penny said, "I can't play soccer no more because no money. Mom said we can't go to soccer anymore."

To varying degrees, the homeless students interviewed talked about not having enough money or other resources to participate in sports and other activities they enjoy. For some, they expressed disappointment. Others accepted that this is a temporary situation for them. Still others did not want to upset or make their parents feel bad, so they keep their thoughts and feelings to themselves.

What the staff and volunteers see—hopelessness and oppression. In the interviews with the staff and volunteers, a major theme that reappeared was that of the homeless children living in states of fear and hopelessness. In an interview with Francis, a senior administrator, she talked about the daily reality that the children face and the impact it had upon them: "When you walk around the neighborhood you can see it. You can feel it. The hopelessness and oppression are palpable." Francis expressed her concerns for the children who came to the Griffon Learning Center and what they saw on a day-to-day basis. She was afraid for these children; that they might become what they saw throughout the neighborhood. Francis was apprehensive about her ability to continue working in this environment as it was impacting her emotionally and as she stated, "I don't know if I can keep coming here and see the look of hopelessness on their faces. It makes me feel hopeless."

Daryle, a volunteer, too, talked about the hopelessness of the children she worked with. According to Daryle, the children were happy when they arrived at their tutoring session, but they began to show signs of anxiety and fear as the session ended. She said, "Sometimes they even will cry when we are done, and I remind them that we will meet again next week." Daryle believed that they were not necessarily crying because their tutoring time for the sake of tutoring had ended, but rather it was "the end of one-on-one time with a caring adult." When she looked at the children's faces Daryle said, "It's as if their light has gone out. They have lost their hope. It breaks my heart when I see that look."

Cassey, one of the veteran volunteers, discussed that she observed stages of difficult

emotions that most of the homeless students she worked with go through. Where they are in the stages of beliefs depends upon how long they have been homeless, or near homeless. According to Cassey, “In the beginning most act like scared birds” and their age “doesn’t matter” because “in a manner of speaking, they’re in a state of shock, and that quickly lapses into panic and fear.” They end up being afraid of almost everything. This was especially true for those who were not from the area. Cassey spent a great deal of time with those who were new to homelessness. She tried “to bring them a sense of routine and normalcy.” In her observations, “overtime fear is no longer the primary emotion,” as it eventually “gives way to guilt, shame, and blame.” Unfortunately, many children and teens end up blaming “themselves for their family’s situation” while “others can slip into states of denial.” Cassey was very clear on the Griffon Learning Center’s policy not to “ask the children about their living situation,” but she acknowledged that the kids “often bring it up” because it “is a safe place for them.” Cassey had the greatest concern “for those who are, what [she] call[s], ‘lifers’ (long term homeless), they stop fighting.” She saw them going “through each day and stop thinking about the possibilities beyond their current situation.” She had seen them “give up on their dreams” and “drop out of school.” Cassey’s worry was not unfounded. In the 4 years she had been volunteering, Cassey had worked with five “lifers” who stopped coming to the Griffon Learning Center, and she later found out had dropped out of school. One was only in the seventh grade. Given the population that Cassey and the others worked with, it was not unusual to have children come to the center for very short periods. Cassey was specifically referring to teens whom she had worked with for nearly an entire school year.

Alice, a staff member, focused more on the fear that these children faced. She talked about how children had told her about a whole litany of fears. One of the most common fears among homeless children and youth is someone at school finding out about them being homeless. Alice said outright, “Some of our kids are afraid to go to school.” They were afraid of someone finding out that they were homeless and as a result, being made fun of by other children, or worse yet, an adult. Of course, children do not want to be teased or bullied, but “unfortunately, the teachers say things or do something that they don’t realize makes the kid feel worse.” Alice had seen situations in which “all of a sudden they might be treated differently, and their friends might stop playing with them.” However, according to Alice, the number one fear homeless children had was “if someone at school finds out about their situation that they’re gonna get taken away from their family.”

Children had either experienced being teased themselves about being poor or homeless, or they had witnessed others being teased. This made others finding out about their circumstances a very real and new fear for them. When they become homeless, children are already in an unfamiliar and fearful situation, the anxiety of being taken away from their family is heightened under those conditions. Eddie, a longtime volunteer, too, talked about the fear children have of being taken away from their parents. He stated, “Unfortunately, many children have seen movies, shows, or news programs that dramatize children being taken away from their parents. It creates a very real fear for them.” Eddie had encountered children and teens at the Griffon Learning Center who “have at one point been taken away from their family.” He also acknowledged that they worked with “runaways and unaccompanied minors” at the center. However, they practiced a “don’t ask, don’t tell policy” and provided services to all children and adolescents who entered the facility. The kids also “talk to each other and hear stories from other children and teens who have experienced foster care,” and as Eddie said, “it scares them even more.”

Although one of good things about the Griffon Learning Center was that it provided a place for homeless and low-income children to be. It was a gathering space, as Eddie noted, where they shared their collective fears with one another. Sometimes this could lead to heightened fears. Brandon, another volunteer, talked about this phenomenon, and said that teenagers “are their own worst enemy. They make themselves afraid of being afraid.” He compared them to “those people who hate horror films but still go and sit with their hands in front of their face the whole time.” They talk about a story they heard from someone else and there is no proof as to whether or not the story is true. Brandon said that the kids “begin to think it could happen to them,” and that ultimately “it will happen to them.” Their belief system changes from the situation being akin to a fairytale to their destiny. At the same time, Brandon saw the benefit of the youth talking about their fears with each other: “Talking about their fears can also help them feel like they aren’t alone and not the only one who’s experiencing what they are going through.”

Alice addressed the children’s fear of where they were staying. She went on to talk about how she has kids who have said pointblank that “they don’t like where they live.” Alice said that the children and teens were not complaining to her about not liking the way their room looks or smells, or even its size. The kids were not complaining about sharing a bed or even not having a bed. She said, “they are usually referring to more serious matters,” and that the

kids are “usually are afraid of the people that are there.” Many of the children and teenagers that Alice worked with lived in the local shelters, the weekly rental motels, and some literally lived on the street. The youth had very little control over their living conditions, and many did not know where they were going to be from one day to the next. The area around the Griffon Learning Center was not particularly safe, especially for unaccompanied minors. As Alice said, most of the older students had to walk through the neighborhood to get to the center. Along the way, “they see horrible things and are in real danger.” Alice continued, “They usually come into the center together in groups. That alone tells me they are afraid.” Alice and the other staff of the organization had been looking for ways to reduce the dangers for the students who walked through the neighborhood to the center.

Theme 2: Culture of Invisibility and Despair: “Nobody cares about me, about us.”

Homeless children’s expressed feelings of invisibility and despair. Being a teenager in the United States is difficult enough, and when coupled with poverty and homelessness it becomes seemingly insurmountable. Both the adults and students interviewed commented on the culture of invisibility as it pertains to homelessness. The children expressed both their frustration and desperation in how they were being treated as well as viewed by others. In essence, they felt invisible, and they articulated that point very clearly. Their comments on the topic ranged from declarations of being human and deserving of respect to accepting their present circumstances and picking themselves up by the bootstraps to survive.

Each of the children and youth interviewed were in a different place when it came to their perceptions regarding how they were seen and in how they viewed themselves. In Penny’s words: “Nobody cares about me; about us.” This sentiment was repeated by the other children and teens interviewed as well as overheard on several occasions during the researcher’s observations at the Griffon Learning Center. Oscar expressed his similar feelings and went on to say, “I might as well just go and disappear.” Nikki stated that she “used to feel and think every day that [she] was a nobody.” She went on to comment, “I was invisible, or at least I might as well be.” Jennifer used a bit more colorful language when talking about how others had made her feel because of her situation. Jennifer said that people tried to make her feel like “a worthless piece of shit,” but went on to say that she is “a human being and [she] deserves to be, uh, respected.” Lori echoed Jennifer when she said, “Sometimes I think, why don’t they see me? I AM a human being!” Lori went on to keenly express her frustration

at her own situation and for other homeless: “If we are the riches’ country in the world, then why do people have to live like this?” She asked a poignant question that many people have asked and will continue to ask. Lori continued to elaborate her point, “Walk around this neighborhood, nobody really wants to be here or at least they didn’t before they got here. They didn’t grow up dreamin’ that they would end up smokin’, drinkin’, and selling themselves.” She concluded with, “They didn’t grow up wanting to be forgotten.” Although the homeless children feared having their homelessness being revealed, they certainly did not want to be forgotten either. When asked about what Ian would like his teachers to know about him and others like him, he poignantly said, “I’m just a kid. I’m just a kid.” Ian summed up many of the interviewed youths’ sentiments in that simple statement.

Some students were quite candid in their interviews. Quinton spoke freely about his living situation throughout the interview and saw his current situation as a temporary season of his life. As such, Quinton questioned why people were treated differently, because as he saw the world, “Everybody is really the same. It dunna matter if you Black, White, Brown, or whateva.” George pointed out that “Everybody here is the same.” The “here” George was referring to is the Griffon Learning Center. His comment highlights how outside of the Griffon Learning Center there was a perceived inequality or difference, and others had no problem treating George and his sister as such: “Not everybody is so nice to me and my sister.” In his interview, George also spoke about how he was told by a teacher to drop out of school: “A teacher, uh, even told me, uh, I should just drop out.” Like any young man, George had dreams to complete high school and continue his education to get a good job; however, George did not believe that his dreams were achievable: “Imma gonna probably, uh, end up like my dad, uh, working odd jobs.”

Lori believed that politicians and educators need to work together to and come up with a solution because “everyone should have a place to live and food to eat.” Whatever the solution was, as Lori stated, “it shouldn’t be for free.” Lori believed that “people need to work hard and give back to the community.” At the same time, Lori did not necessarily believe that a solution would come quickly and that she needed to take care of herself: “You have to look out for yourself and find ways to get what you want.” Likewise, Jennifer echoed Lori’s American ethos or “pull yourself up by the bootstraps” mentality, and said, “You have to make your own way, cuz nobody gonna help.” Amid the American ethos that some of the teenagers had taken on was a level of acceptance and defeatism. Rosie articulated that she

had “learned to accept what’s happening to us.” Although Rosie wished she could be “like everyone else,” she no longer told her mother about what was happening at school or about her wants and hopes, because Rosie did not want to make her mother feel bad. Rosie, like many other children observed at the Griffon Learning Center, was just living day-to-day and hoping that one day that they can be seen like “a normal kid for once.” These children in many ways had become adults and were trying to protect their parents.

The role of the Griffon Learning Center. The staff and volunteers at the Griffon Learning Center tried to make the children and teens feel as normal as possible and to have a place to forget the outside world, even if it is just for a short period of time. The services they provided not only assisted youth in their academics, but also gave them a place to feel cared for by adults and to be seen by others, where they were “no longer the invisible problem” (Brandon). Staff, and volunteers like Brandon, hoped that they could “help [the youth] feel like they aren’t alone and not the only one who’s experiencing what they are going through.” To put it another way, “Make them feel real” (Brandon). Although the people of the Griffon Learning Center had little control over the world outside of the center, they strove to meet each child where they were at and let the kids be kids. As Cassey, a longtime volunteer, put it, “We are all here to help the children in any way we can . . . For the hour I get to spend with each I child, I try to make them forget about everything but learning something new and being creative.” During her observations, the researcher encountered many adults whose focus was on making the children and teens who came to the Griffon Learning Center feel like other children. The staff and volunteers tried to create stable spaces and celebrate the youths’ accomplishments. For example, the children and teens had their birthdays and other holidays acknowledged, and children who had seen improvement in their grades were congratulated.

Some of those interviewed were more specific about how the children and teens were often overlooked outside of the center, merely because they were homeless; in essence, how those who are homeless are invisible to others. The idea of homeless people being invisible to others sparked the “Make Them Visible” campaign. It primarily focused on services for the homeless in New York City, but their work brought about awareness of the issue across the country in hopes of making homeless people visible to others. Alice, a staff member, spoke about the one of the social experiments of the “Make Them Visible” campaign. Volunteers dressed up as if they were homeless people wearing worn and dirty clothes, some holding

signs asking for donations. These volunteers would sit or lay on sidewalks where members of their family worked and would walk by daily. The volunteers' family members walk right by them without acknowledging them. During filming of the experiment, not a single person stopped and recognized his or her own wife, uncle, sister, or child. The family members were approached by the researchers and brought into an office where they were shown the video of their encounter, or lack thereof, with their wife, uncle, sister, or child, and subsequently interviewed. According to Alice, all the people who participated in the follow-up interviews and/or volunteered their perspective of homeless was changed. Alice continued, "Like the, uh, volunteers from the experiment, people walk right on by our kids every day, and don't give 'em a second thought."

Like Alice, Brandon said, "When you walk around this neighborhood and watch the people who work in the area, you can see them walk right by a person writhing in pain on the ground and not even look at them." At the same time during orientation, volunteers and staff members were told not to engage all of the homeless they met outside of the center for safety reasons. Staff members or volunteers who had concerns for a specific homeless person outside of the center were to notify the proper authorities and senior staff. Throughout their interviews, the adults expressed their ire at how homeless children, and homeless people in general, are invisible to others. Brandon stated that "there's something wrong with the world when we ignore each other."

Theme 3: Safety: "It's a really dangerous place."

Criminal activity. Throughout her time at the Griffon Learning Center, the researcher observed police activity within a two-block radius an average of once in every three visits, and on several occasions the police activity was on the same block as the center. It is important to note that the researcher spent time at the Griffon Learning Center on different days of the week and at various times of the day. The police were observed talking with people on the street, detaining and handcuffing individuals, searching through belongings, clearing people and their belongings off the street, assisting people who appeared to be in distress, and in one incident running after an alleged perpetrator, hitting them with a stun-gun, and then tackling them to the ground. Although the Griffon Learning Center did not employ security because they did not wish to deter anyone from coming into the center, it was common practice for staff members to stand near the entrance outside and greet the

children as they entered after school. The homeless and others who had been part of the neighborhood for a long time tended not to loiter in front of the center and would often give a clear path for the children to enter. Despite this, several of the children and teens had reported to the staff and volunteers being offered drugs and/or alcohol, propositioned, harassed, robbed, jumped and/or beaten, molested, and other acts of violence while in the neighborhood. Incidents like these led to the Griffon Learning Center to have staff and volunteers walk with the young children from the local elementary school to the center after school and a van pick-up service at the local middle and high schools. They were looking at other ways they could increase the safety of students.

Safety of the staff and volunteers. Safety of the staff and volunteers was also a concern for the Griffon Learning Center. It was difficult for the organization to manage the safety of the staff and volunteers when they were in the neighborhood, especially those who took public transportation and needed to walk through the neighborhood to get to the center. As outlined in the initial safety protocols, when volunteers and staff are onboarded, people who do take public transportation are encouraged not to have headphones on or any electronics visible while walking. They are asked to dress modestly and not to wear expensive name brand clothing or shoes. It is highly recommended that people do not wear anything more than costume jewelry, if any at all. Once at the center, there are additional safety precautions everyone is encouraged to follow. These safety protocols are posted on the bulletin board in the break room. No fewer than three people (staff and/or volunteers) are encouraged to be at the center alone. When the center is closed for the evening, the employees and volunteers who are still there are supposed to walk together to their cars. Anyone is taking the public transportation system is cautioned not to go alone. There are protocols in place for all types of scenarios from mild incidents of dealing with loitering outside of the center to a violent act taking place in the center and the need for a lockdown. These protocols were part of the staff and volunteer orientation materials.

Before the data collection process began and the researcher was only a volunteer at the Griffon Learning Center, her car was broken in to several items and money were stolen. The car was in a parking garage with security. Both before and during the data collection process, the researcher was also harassed, propositioned, and asked if she would like to “party” while walking to and from the parking garage and the Griffon Learning Center. In speaking with volunteers and staff members outside of interviews, the researcher’s experience was not

unusual. Several people stated that they had been accosted on numerous occasions while in the neighborhood. Some of the volunteers and staff had reported being robbed and/or assaulted. These were the very incidents that the safety protocols were developed for to protect the people who worked at the Griffon Learning Center. Although part of the orientation materials and posted throughout the Griffon Learning Center's locations, safety measures were something that needed to be repeatedly reinforced and examined.

Safety of homeless children. The children and teens who visited the Griffon Learning Center had to contend not only with the expected obstacles of other homeless, prostitution, drug dealers, and gang activity, but also with other criminal elements. In recent years, crime in the Downtown District of Los Angeles, or the Los Angeles Police Department's Central Division, had continued to increase. In 2015, violent crime saw an increase of 67%, and property offenses saw a jump of 26% in the district surrounding the Griffon Learning Center (Poston & Mather, 2015). Two years later, the district saw violent crime increase by more than 13%; property offenses saw a slight jump of 4.5%, and homicide increased by 14%, according to the Los Angeles Police Department's Compstat City Profile (Los Angeles Police Department, 2017). With the continued gentrification of Downtown Los Angeles and attempts to push the homeless and others closer to the Los Angeles River, tensions between various groups had risen. The homeless, near-homeless, and their advocates had continued to butt heads with developers and business and property owners. The new downtown dwellers moving into the lofts and high-rise apartments and the hipsters visiting the new bars and eateries in the area had become easy targets for organized crews and traditional "smash and grab" crimes. These increases in criminal activity were adding to the dangerous environment with which these children had to cope.

One of the older students, Lori, spoke about how she had to wait until the shelter opened before she and her mother could go there. After school Lori did not feel as if she had "anywhere else that is safe around here," so she took one of the shuttles—the center had a few volunteers drive to the local middle school and high school and pick up a small group of students in vans—to the Griffon Learning Center from her high school. George and his sister went to the Griffon Learning Center after school to wait for their father to pick them up because, "this is, uh, the safest place to be around here." Staff members of the Griffon Learning Center escorted Ian from his elementary school to the center. Ian went because he "dunna have anywhere else to go" that was safe. Ian appreciated the center because he

“dunna have to worry about the world outside” as much anymore. He continued by talking about how the people at the Griffon Learning Center had not only provided a safe place to be, but they had given Ian the ability to be Ian: “They’ve kept me safe. They’ve kept me off o’ the streets. They’ve let me be me.” Mary took her sister to the center “every day after school, you know, so that she has a safe place to be, you know, until [her] mother comes . . . and picks her up.” Mary no longer worried about her sister because “she is taken care of here.” Several of the children repeated this theme of being in a safe place while at the Griffon Learning Center.

The Griffon Learning Center—A safe place to be. During the interviews of the volunteers and staff members, the topic of safety arose within the conversation about what the purpose of the Griffon Learning Center was as well as at other points of the exchanges. When speaking about the mission of the organization, nearly all the adults, like Brandon, mentioned that one aspect of the mission was “to provide a safe place for them to be. And to allow them to be kids.” Brandon also later mentioned the safe environment of the Griffon Learning Center when he talked about how the students were able to articulate how they feel: “They are allowed to express themselves in a safe environment.” Before reading the mission statement out loud during her interview Alice put it another way: “We are here, uh, to provide a safe and loving environment, uh, where homeless and low-income children can receive free tutoring and other education related services.” She further summarized it by saying, “to make them feel safe and, uh, cared for, while giving them the support they need to achieve in school.”

The adults in general were very well aware of the dangers of the neighborhood. Safety, especially the safety of the students coming to the center, was a frequent point of conversation between the staff and volunteers. The children regularly mentioned to their tutors or others about having had a “bad experience” in the neighborhood. These stories were discussed at the daily staff and volunteer meetings and how they might be able to combat some of the issues that arose. However, the threats and hazards of the neighborhood were frequently beyond the scope of the Griffon Learning Center. The center did have a child safety program in which they invited outside organizations to make special presentations to the homeless students as well as at the parent information sessions. The researcher observed presentations on personal safety as it related to child abduction and stranger danger, injury prevention, and a session on drugs and alcohol. In analyzing documents, there were other

safety presentations mentioned on the topics of fire safety, health and safety for preschoolers, and general personal safety. According to Francis, an administrator, it was the hope of the Griffon Learning Center that the information presented would reduce some of the vulnerability of the homeless who came to the center.

As Alice described the neighborhood, it is “a really dangerous place.” In her interview, Alice also discussed the awareness that the homeless children had about the danger in the area as “they usually come into the center together in groups.” More than one adult talked about how the kids “see horrible things and, uh, are in real danger” (Alice). During her interview, Francis gave a detailed account of the neighborhood and expressed her fear for these children’s daily lives. She said there were people lying on the sidewalks, shooting up heroin, and getting into fights. Francis went on to say, “There are prostitutes not just on every street corner, but all up and down the street.” It upset her that, “our kids are exposed to this . . . every single day. . . . there’s no hiding it from these children.” She found it difficult to address with the children, families, and staff when questions about their future came up because she was afraid of what their futures might be. Francis started, “It’s no wonder that they can’t imagine a future beyond the Nickle (a nickname for the local district). We try to help. We try to give them hope.” But then she continued, “I am afraid that one day I will walk around the corner and see some of our kids from this very center lying on the sidewalk or smokin’ crack.”

Eddie, a longtime volunteer, believed that “one of the biggest needs these kids face outside of educational component of school is dealing with their fear.” Cassey, another longtime volunteer, was grateful that the Griffon Learning Center existed for the youth because, as she put it, “the children here need safe places to be when they’re not in school.” Cassey went on to make a further observation about the police: “Heck, the police don’t even come around very much because they’re afraid.” She continued by asking, “So how can the kids be safe?” The volunteers and staff members also did not believe that “the public schools are doing anything directly, uh, to protect the kids from the dangers of this neighborhood” (Alice). As previously mentioned, The Griffon Learning Center was looking at additional ways to improve safety for children, such as increasing the number of vans and frequency of shuttles to the center from the area schools, working more closely with and doing more on-site tutoring at the neighborhood shelters as well as continuing the safety presentations. However, their time at the center was only a part of the students’ day.

Theme 4: Emerging Hope: “I have hope because of the people here.”

Developing relationships. The youth who went to the Griffon Learning Center built relationships with each other and the adults who worked and volunteered there. During the researcher’s time at the Griffon Learning Center as a participant observer, she formed relationships with several young people. Week after week, specific children would request to see her for academic counseling or tutoring or would ask her to participate in activities at the center such as reading aloud for the reading and adventure clubs or assisting with the craft tables. She was a consistent face to them. When the researcher was not at the center on a particular day, some of the children would come up to her and ask her where she had been or when she was coming back to the center again. The researcher believed that the children she worked with looked forward to their time with her and some had said as much to her. The researcher was thanked on several occasions for explicit actions by the youth she worked with; she was thanked for helping her students find a road to high school completion, assisting senior high school students apply for college and financial aid, and helping young people find belief in their own capabilities. Although the researcher did not recall any of her interactions with the children and teens including the word “hope,” the researcher felt that her relationship and work with them helped to provide these young people with hope for a future.

One of the newer volunteers interviewed, Daryle, spoke about the consistency that the center provided for the children. This consistency led to a sense of normalcy. She discussed how the relationships with the people of the center made the children feel cared for and that their relationships might bring them hope. She said at “The Griffon Learning Center these children . . . are cared for and . . . are given, er, opportunities to learn and grow. Their relationships with their tutors, the staff, and with each other provide some sense of normalcy, and possibly even hope.” When Daryle first started volunteering for the organization, she had a difficult time because, as she put it, “These kid’s stories are so sad.” After the first few times she volunteered, she would go home and cry. Daryle said, “You can look into their faces and see how much they are hurting.” She then realized that she can “make their day better” and she “can encourage them to see beyond where they are at.” Once she got past her own personal difficulties with the realities that homeless children face on a day-to-day basis, she was able to make a full commitment to volunteering at the center and “from there [she] just fell in love with the kids” and had “been volunteering eva’ since.” She believed that the relationships she had formed with the children she tutored were key to “their success and belief in themselves.”

After Francis, one of the senior administrators interviewed, initially introduced the youth to the center and interviewed them for placement purposes, she rarely interacted with the young people again as she was primarily the support person for the staff and volunteers at the center. Francis did not necessarily build personal relationships with those who used the Griffon Learning Center, but she recognized the importance of those relationships and believed that the relationships that the adults built with the youth was one of the most salient ways they assisted those who came to the center. The staff and volunteers tried to focus on being positive and helping the kids just be kids. Francis believed that “the relationships that the children build with their tutors is one of the most important ways we are helping these kids. They know that there is someone outside of their family that cares about them as a person.” The staff and volunteers of the Griffon Learning Center “try to make each child’s experience here as positive as possible. Here they can try and forget about being homeless and just be” (Francis). The researcher observed many ways that the staff and volunteers of the Griffon Learning Center strived to make the time the children spent at the center positive and allowed for opportunities for children to play and learn. From the relationships built during the afterschool learning clubs and tutoring sessions, the positive words and phrases the adults used when speaking to or about the youth, and the affirmative statements posted on the walls, to the special events and celebrations for the children and the scholarship programs, the young people seemed to find a new hope.

Although the children interviewed did not explicitly say they had hope because of their relationship with the volunteers and staff members at the Griffon Learning Center, they did comment on how they had been treated by the people there. George said, “They’re nice to us.” At another point in his interview, George recalled, “There are, uh, people who care about others. I mean really care.” Similarly, Oscar said, “My counselor is nice.” Kyle likes “Everything. Everyone. They are nice here. They are good.” The students mostly expressed variations on the people at the center being nice to them or caring about them as a person. This was in opposition to how they had been treated at school and in other situations, as discussed in other sections of this chapter.

The Griffon Learning Center—A Place to Call Home. The children and teenagers who went to the Griffon Learning Center had a strong desire to be there. At first, some may have struggled with the going to the center, but after a while, they began to see the place as their

safe haven. Some children blatantly said that they had hope because of the staff and volunteers: “I have hope because of the people here” (Mary). Rosie did not like going to the center in the beginning, but now, she said, “I try to make, em, the best of it.” She spent time in “the computer lab a lot and, em, I work on my homework.” However, Rosie’s favorite part of being at the Griffon Learning Center was the art room. When she finished her homework, she went “to the art room and work on a present for [her] mom.” Rosie was excited about having access to the art materials and a place “to make something, em, special for Christmas” for her mother.

For Quinton, it was not just about him. He had to look out for his little brother as well, and the Griffon Learning Center relieved some of his anxiety. He said, “The tutors and others make you feel like it’s gonna be alright.” In his experience, “for two hours we’re happy and safe.” At this point in his life, their time at the Griffon Learning Center was the only time Quinton got to see his little brother smile anymore. Quinton felt “we can be kids here. Out there, I havta’ be a man.” Quinton recognized what the staff and volunteers were doing for him and his little brother. In Quinton’s words, “They set me straight.” For some of the youth, it was about being somewhere where all the other people their own age were going through similar circumstances. They did not have to hide the fact that they were homeless from one another. It enabled the children to be themselves and make friends. Mary felt as if the other youth at the center were her equals. She did not “hide what’s going on” from her “tutoring buddies.” Mary believed she had “real friends here.” Mary noted that everyone at the Griffon Learning Center was “all going through similar things,” making relationships more connected. She was also happy that her “sister has friends here too.” Both Kyle and Hailey spoke about their friends at the Griffon Learning Center. Kyle was particularly happy that his “friends are here” and Hailey enjoyed having the opportunity to “play with [her] friends.”

Other youth went to the Griffon Learning Center for the opportunity to get academic support, whether it was from one-on-one tutoring, group sessions, specialized learning clubs, GED classes, or utilizing the media lab. Lori desired to be an honors and Advanced Placement student so that she could someday go on to a “good college”; however, as she stated: “That’s only goin’ to happen if I take the right courses, participate in activities, and have high test scores. Right now, I don’t have access to the classes and activities I want at school.” The high school she attended did not offer advanced coursework and she could not afford to participate in the extracurricular activities that the school did offer. She came to the center every day

after school to complete her homework and then spent time in the media lab. Lori had a renewed sense of possibility though, as she was “taking advantage of the Griffon Learning Center’s media lab and preparing for the SAT and APs through Khan Academy.” She was hoping that she “will have good enough test scores,” because of studying using the free online test prep through Khan Academy. At the time of her interview Lori had “also just found out that [she] can take classes through a virtual school for free” while using the media center. Lori intended on starting to take Advanced Placement courses online in the afternoons at the Griffon Learning Center. Lori believed that regardless of her circumstances outside of the center, the Griffon Learning Center was giving her the opportunity to improve her chances of getting into a good college. When she reflected on her time at the center, Lori said that, “The people that work here are very kind and helpful. They want the best for us. Unlike at school, here, I feel as if I am somebody.” Rosie also wished to go to college one day and appreciated the opportunity she had at the Griffon Learning Center. She said, “I like coming here now, em, because they helped me to want to work hard, em, and do well in school so I can go to college one day.” She also believed they were helping her “to be a better student.”

Many of the younger children did not talk about high school or college in their interviews and were simply happy to be learning new things while at the Griffon Learning Center. One of the most acknowledged aspects of the center by the younger children were the learning clubs. Kyle especially enjoyed the science and reading clubs because he got to “do experiments and make up new things.” His favorites were experiments he could eat at the end. He adored adventure stories and being able to pretend being the hero. Kyle spoke about the new book the group was reading, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. He was excited about making a straw hat out of construction paper, so he could act out the part of Tom Sawyer. Nikki was part of the reading club as well and liked making “things based upon the stories.” She was happy when the students got to “write our own stories and poems.” She liked “sharing [her] stories with others.” When Nikki was interviewed, they had just read a story about Caesar Chavez and were working on “I am” poems to describe themselves. Oscar belonged to the adventure club. As he put it, “We do alotta cool stuff, em, like make Lego robots, em, and slime.” Activities like these kept many of the children engaged and wanting to come back week after week.

Developing hopes and dreams for the future. When the children walk through the doors of The Griffon Learning Center they are often living in a state of survival, and, for some, to

survive their situation. However, as the youth continued to come back, they began to change from just surviving to living, and from living to creating hopes and dreams again. The volunteers and staff members of the Griffon Learning Center strove to, as longtime volunteer Eddie said, “offer love, encouragement, self-esteem, self-awareness, courage, and above all hope.” Francis, an administrator, agreed, “We try to give them hope.” Brandon, a volunteer, said he was raised to believe, “My brother and I weren’t supposed to keep our blessings to ourselves. That we were to use our talents and blessings to help others.” Brandon wanted to bless young people “with providing them hope for the future.”

The young people who utilized the services of the mobile school and learning center organization stated that they had found hope and believed in their abilities to achieve their dreams. Before George came to the center, he thought that he “should just go ahead and drop out of school.” After going to the center, he felt as if he “can finish middle school this year and go on to high school.” George changed his mind because the people at the Griffon Learning Center “make you, uh believe. “At first Lori “was annoyed” about having to go to the center. According to Lori, she and her mother became homeless suddenly. They had been fortunate enough to stay with friends for a few weeks at a time, but it had turned Lori’s whole world upside down. Lori talked about being “annoyed” by the uncertainty of her life and not being able to do the things she once enjoyed. However, at the Griffon Learning Center, she found stability, safety, and hope for her future: “Now this place is my safe haven. I have hope for my future because of the people here.” Similarly, Rosie talked about wanting to be able to do “normal kid stuff,” and how she did not want to hurt her mother’s feelings for wanting to be like everyone else. When Rosie was at the center she “forget[s] about not being able to do stuff.” Like Lori, Rosie had found a sense of normalcy at the Griffon Learning Center: “Here, I’m like a normal kid for once. That’s what they, em, do, make you feel normal.”

Jennifer was the only teen interviewed who had chosen to drop out of school. She did so because she needed to work to help support her family and she was not able to keep up with her schoolwork and regularly attend school while working. However, her time at the Griffon Learning Center led her to pursue her GED and go on to a postsecondary education. Jennifer said that the people of the center “have been really, really great, uh, to” her. She believed that she “probably wouldn’t have continued to try and get [her], uh, GED if it hadn’t been for the help [t]here.” The people of the center made her feel as if she had value and worth. Jennifer took her GED examination and passed about six weeks after she was interviewed. Her

intention after completing her GED was to “work as many hours as” she could until Jennifer’s mother was able to “work full-time.” It was Jennifer’s hope that “after [her family] saved up some money,” she would “go to city college and get a certificate in something like, uh, dental hygienist, uh, nursing assistant, or maybe even cosmetology.” Her desire was to be able “to have something that will help [her] get a better job,” so that she can avoid being homeless as an adult. As she put it, “I may not end up making lots of money, or changing the world in, uh, a significant way, but I . . . deserve to be, uh, respected.” The people of the Griffon Learning Center built up the young people’s faith in their own abilities and self-worth. As Jennifer put it: “This place helps kids find themselves. . . like know that they have value and worth.” Jennifer and some of the other children interviewed said, “We can all be just kids here.” She went on to say, “We can leave our, uh, worries at the door and find a space to laugh or cry. I can care about something other than just survivin’ here.” Again, this is a sentiment repeated by others during the interviews.

According to the interviews of the children and teens who utilized the services of the Griffon Learning Center, their lives had been transformed irrevocably for the better because of their interactions with the staff, volunteers, and other students who went to the center. Many of the children interviewed talked about how they now had hope in their future or how their perspective on their lives had changed because of their time at the center.

Theme 5: Political Climate for Change: “Make ending homelessness and poverty in America a priority.”

Ballot measures and other legislation. In the Fall of 2016, there was a great deal of focus on one proposition that was being framed as a resolution to the low-income and no-income housing crisis in Los Angeles, Proposition HHH, or the Homeless Reduction and Prevention, Housing and Facilities Bond. The measure allows for an increase in property taxes of approximately 10 dollars for every one hundred thousand dollars in property value. It was expected that the bond measure would raise approximately 1.2 billion dollars. The money was to be combined with other funds from federal and state agencies as well as from private donors and philanthropic organizations. The bond money, along with the other sources, was estimated to generate close to four billion dollars to spend on housing. The bond measure was meant to serve the homeless population of the City of Los Angeles and not the greater county. The goal was to create ten thousand housing units and, with it, house at least thirteen

thousand people. According to the City of Los Angeles, each housing unit would cost about \$350,000, of which the city would pay for a third. Once an individual or family has been approved to move into the unit, the city would provide vouchers to cover the cost of the rent and utilities. The tenants are expected to pay 20% to 30% of their gross monthly income toward rent and utilities. The measure did not specify the amount of time that the City of Los Angeles would give an individual or a family vouchers for housing. Before the November 2016 election, 12 tracks of land were identified throughout Los Angeles County for potential new housing units for the homeless, none of which were in Downtown Los Angeles, where the greatest concentration of homeless is in the county. When the identified tracks of land were announced, some of the area residents already began to object to the possibility of a homeless community moving into their neighborhood. The city put the onus on the developers to work with the local communities to accept the new housing units in their neighborhoods.

The HHH ballot measure was not well received by the adults interviewed at the Griffon Learning Center. One of the volunteers, Cassey, admitted to not knowing all the details of Proposition HHH, but she was quite passionate about not voting for the measure and asked, “How can building 100 units in the valley help the people living” here on the street? Although Cassey did not state the correct number of housing units, her point of building housing for the homeless 15 miles or more away from where the homeless people were and worked did not make much sense to her. This was a common perspective among volunteers and staff members at the center. Eddie, a longtime volunteer, was quite vocal about his opinion of Proposition HHH. He did not believe it is “going to work either.” Eddie’s concern had to do with where the units are expected to be built: “Has anyone really looked around here? Are they going to move homeless people into the \$700,000 condos they just built?” The new buildings throughout the densely populated area are high-end housing or businesses. As Eddie pointed out, “There aren’t any new micro-units or low-income motels being built.” In addition to a lack of existing affordable housing, new affordable housing is not being built due to the concerns over where to put them if they were as the area is being transformed into an arts and entertainment space. In other words, the neighborhood was being gentrified. At the time of data collection, there had not been any announcement for plans of building low-income housing units within the downtown district.

Although another volunteer, Brandon, believed that there could be some good from the

measure in the long term, he was concerned about the total cost for Angelenos, where the housing was going to be built as well as how long it would take to get the units built. Brandon said that the project is “going to cost more than two billion dollars.” He stated that the critics of the measure “are saying that it will be nearly five years before the first units are finished.” However, more disconcerting was that “they aren’t going to be built . . . where the greatest need is.” Brandon also believed that taxing items other than housing, such as marijuana, would be more profitable to help homeless; “We all know that marijuana will be legalized in California with this election, at least let it do some good for the greater community.” Brandon continued to suggest that if marijuana is legalized and taxed, but if the money raised does not go toward housing and services for the homeless, then it should be directed to education, because, as Brandon put it, “education always needs more funding.” Once Brandon shifted his focus to education and taxes, he commented on how the public education system should make helping homeless students a priority and simplify the process for homeless children to graduate from high school. Brandon asked, “Why can’t students earn partial units for a class if they have to move in the middle of a semester?” This is something that some schools had begun to consider, including private schools. He continued his thought, “Why should a kid be penalized for not having a place to live?” This is precisely why some schools were developing plans in areas with high populations of homeless and transitory students.

Proposition HHH was not the only legislation and potential legal action discussed in the interviews. The LA City Council and Mayor Garcetti had talked about declaring a state of emergency multiple times in 2016 because of homelessness. After talking about it for months, they decided not to declare a citywide state of emergency and instead went to the governor’s office asking for a statewide declaration of a state of emergency. Governor Jerry Brown refused to declare a statewide state of emergency on homelessness and he would not sign into law the new proposed tax on people earning more than one million dollars to fund homeless programs throughout the state. This led the LA City Council and the mayor scrambling to find another way to address the problem. They authorized an emergency \$12.4 million plan to give to the homeless for short-term housing. To some this announcement brought approval, and to others jeers. Eddie, a longtime volunteer at the Griffon Learning Center, was quite upset by this plan. He believed “they knew it would never be spent the way they wrote out the emergency legislation.” Eddie was referring to the LA City Council and Mayor Garcetti. By Eddie’s estimation, “It only equates to about ten nights per homeless

person to have a room,” and worse than the length of time a homeless person can receive emergency housing, “there is no supply of housing for the homeless to go to.” In other words, Eddie, like others, believed that “the voucher system won’t work” as a reasonable solution. Former Los Angeles Mayor Rick Riordan was upset by the voucher announcement because, as Eddie put it, “he knew it wouldn’t work.” Mayor Riordan purchased over a thousand tarps and ponchos toward the end of the summer in 2016 and personally walked through Skid Row and passed out the tarps and ponchos to the homeless people. Riordan did so because a poncho or a tarp can potentially do more to help the homeless than an unfunded and not well-planned-out voucher system can. Riordan is seen as bit of a folk hero in Los Angeles, and by the people at the Griffon Learning Center, because he is a politician who has had a tremendous impact upon the community in a positive way and especially on low-income children.

Like former Los Angeles Mayor Riordan, Cassey thought that, “Every politician should walk around and spend a day in a neighborhood like this before they make assumptions.” Cassey, a longtime volunteer, was concerned that “much of what they decide to do isn’t practical for the people who actually live here.” She offered several ideas during her interview that she felt were more concrete and could have a real impact for positive changes. She talked “about having mobile showers and bathrooms” sponsored by the city. Although from time-to-time philanthropic organizations sent mobile showers and bathrooms, and even laundry facilities, into the community, it does not happen consistently enough to have a lasting impact. By having more shower and bathroom facilities available for the homeless, there would be less public urination and defecation and potentially could improve the health of many in the area. Cassey suggested that the city build more public recreation centers for the children and teens. Although the Griffon Learning Center tried to fill in many gaps, the case study site was not a recreation center for the children. Cassey also suggested putting “up temporary housing or tents in the empty lots instead of fencing them off.” Several lots had remained empty for months and even years in the district that were not even being used for parking. As Cassey continued, “At least this way, some homeless people wouldn’t be lying on sidewalks or setting up tents there.” Like many of the others interviewed, Cassey was frustrated at politicians because she felt, “They just don’t listen. . . . [she’s] got a lot of ideas, you know, we all do, but the politicians don’t listen to us.” Eddie admitted to some days wanting “to beat the hell out of some of these politicians” because they were more concerned about money than people: “The only way that this is going to get fixed is if people stop thinking

about the buck and start thinking about the people.”

Increased awareness and a call to action. According to the United States Department of Labor (2015), the rate of volunteerism across the country had continued to decline for more than a decade. However, some individual organizations had seen increases in volunteerism, especially in the realm of education. “From news reports, city council meetings, speeches by the mayor, impending states of emergency that never come, marches, and, uh, now Proposition HHH,” in Los Angeles, there had been an increasing awareness on the homeless problem, especially in 2015 and 2016 (Alice). Although Alice had been disappointed by the lack of action beyond words in the city “with the increased attention on homelessness,” she was glad to report that she had “seen change for the good” with regard to “the number of people applying to be a volunteer” at the Griffon Learning Center. Even though Alice said it was “the only tangible thing” she had seen change, Alice was confident that improvements could be made but that “the government needs to follow the laws, uh, that already exist, and, uh, provide the proper funding and manpower for the programs that are supposed to be implemented.” Alice provided an example of such a program with the Local Homeless Educational Liaisons through the Local Education Agency (LEA). The liaisons were part of the provision of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act reauthorized by Title X, Part C, of the No Child Left Behind Act and the Every Student Succeeds Act to ensure educational rights and protections for homeless minors. Alice asked, “How can one LEA handle the ten thousand plus homeless children in Los Angeles, uh, on a budget of about fifteen dollars per child? Really?” The LEA was the school district itself, and they appointed the liaison. Alice was referring to there being only one liaison appointed to the entirety of the homeless student population of LAUSD.

Alice questioned the intentions of the gentrification of Los Angeles. She believed that Downtown Los Angeles was in need of “affordable housing in the area, uh, instead of these executive lofts and, uh, mega complexes going up all around us.” Similarly, Francis stated, “If they want to really change the system then they have to stop building fancy apartments and shift to housing for low-income renters.” Francis talked about the need for more housing as the most important solution to homelessness and one of the easily fixable solutions: “Once a person is no longer homeless, the other problems they have are much more manageable.” She gave an example of how fast housing could be constricted with a motivated company: “When that new five hundred unit complex next to the 110 freeway and L.A. Live burnt

down last year, it only took them eight months to rebuild it.” She went on to say that the same space could have been broken into “smaller apartments and created two to three times as many units for the homeless.” Francis spoke about fast-tracking permits and regulations like they did for rebuilding the complex next to the 110 freeway. She believed that the same could be done for new units for homeless: “This city could fast track permits and regulations and build thousands of units in this area in less than a year.”

Alice was deeply concerned about “more and more people . . . getting pushed . . . closer to the river,” as well as “the number of low rate motels . . . disappearing as the properties” were being converted into “new high-rise luxury apartments.” As Alice put it, “many families, uh, are homeless merely because, uh, they couldn’t find an affordable place to live, uh, not because of some defect in their nature.” She found the gentrification to be “socially disgusting.” Like many of those interviewed, Alice believed that people need to take action and, instead of gentrifying the area, build new micro-units for the homeless. Francis used stronger language when she called for politicians to take action: “They need to get off of their asses and out of their ivy towers and do something instead of talk!” She believed that politicians made promises “continually, and very rarely do we see anything really happen for the better for homeless people.” For Francis, she only saw that homelessness is “a concern when it’s time for budgets, elections, or building a new high rise” in the area.

Daryle, a volunteer, was interviewed shortly after the November 2016 election. When asked about what policy makers should know about homeless students and how to better serve them, Daryle started by expressing concerns over who won the presidential election and the potential future impact: “Well, the Cheeto Puff and his minions were just elected a few days ago. So, it’s anybody’s guess as to what’s gonna happen.” Daryle said that her fellow college students “were actually crying over Hillary’s loss and think that we are all goin’ to plunge into some, er, age of darkness.” Daryle believed that her peers were “a bit overly dramatic,” but at the same time, she was “worried as to what changes might be made that will impact these kids.” At the forefront of Daryle’s mind was the unknown with regard to how the new administration would deal with undocumented immigration. Daryle knew that “some of these kids or their parents aren’t legal citizens.” She did not “care about legal status,” but Daryle knew that their legal status might put them at greater risk and make them less likely to seek out needed assistance. This greatly worried her. She “only care[s] that these children are children, and they’re homeless.” Her parting words in the interview were for the new

president and the new Congress: “make ending homelessness and poverty in America a priority. See past whether or not someone is a citizen, and just see them as human beings.”

Chapter Summary

Chapter 4 detailed the beliefs and experiences of homeless children who utilized the services of a mobile school and youth learning center organization in Los Angeles as well as those of the staff and volunteers. By using a multistep inductive analysis (Hatch, 2002), five themes emerged from the data collected: (a) culture of fear and hopelessness, (b) culture of invisibility, (c) safety, (d) emerging hope, and (e) political climate for change. The beliefs and experiences of those interviewed provided an insight into the culture of homeless children in Los Angeles and the culture of a mobile school and youth learning center organization. Chapter 5 provides a summary of the findings, answers to the research questions, an analysis of the findings, implications of the findings, and recommendations for future studies.

Citation

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CHAPTER 5: IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATING HOMELESS YOUTHS

Chapter 5 is organized into five parts: summary of the study, discussion of the findings, implications and recommendations of the study, direction of future research, and the conclusion. The summary of the study includes a restatement of the purpose of the problem, the study's purpose, and the research questions explored. The discussion of the findings provides answers to the study's research questions and highlights the findings through a socio-psychological lens and the pertinent literature on the topic. The implications and recommendations section describes how this case study informs those who work with homeless youth, such as those at the Griffon Learning Center and LAUSD, politicians, the participants themselves, and educational researchers. The chapter concludes with recommendations for future research, the researcher's final reflection, and a review of the study.

Summary of the Study

The United States is in the midst of a homeless crisis. The largest cities and urban areas have the highest concentrations of homeless people, with Los Angeles County having more homeless than any other area of the country (Smith & Grad, 2017). Despite efforts such as additional legislation and updates to the laws to protect and serve homeless people, ballot measures, and tax increases to provide more housing and services for the homeless, the number continues to increase, as evidenced in the Greater Los Angeles Homeless Count (Smith & Grad, 2017). As Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti said, "There's no way to sugarcoat the bad news" that the situation is getting worse (Smith & Grad, 2017). In 2017, there was a 23% increase from 2016 in the number of homeless people in Los Angeles County, with 57,794 people considered homeless on any given night (The Los Angeles Service Authority, 2017). The largest concentration of homeless is within the City of Los Angeles with 34,189 people living in a state of homelessness (The Los Angeles Service

Authority, 2017). Even more alarming is the rapid increase in the number of homeless minors, both accompanied and unaccompanied. The number of homeless minors in Los Angeles County increased 41% between the homeless counts of 2016 and 2017 (The Los Angeles Service Authority, 2017). It is estimated that at least 3% of all public-school students are homeless in the United States; this is double the student homeless population since before the great recession of 2008 (Layton & Brown, 2015; U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Homelessness has a lasting negative impact upon people, and the effect is even more profound upon children (Hart-Shegos & Associates, 1999). States of homelessness substantially influence the socio-emotional, cognitive, and physical development of children and often lead to irreparable consequences (Hart-Shegos & Associates, 1999; Jahiel, 1992a; Solarz, 1992). As has been shown throughout this study, more attention needs to be given to childhood homelessness and how to reduce or even minimize the impact of homelessness upon children. Educational researchers need to examine how to meet the unique educational needs of homeless children. This crisis must be resolved before another generation of homeless children grows up.

Several private agencies are attempting to tackle the issue of homelessness, and more specifically the education of homeless children. This study examined how one such private agency, a mobile school and youth learning center organization, the Griffon Learning Center (a fictitious name to protect the participants of the study), is closing the perceived educational gaps and providing additional educational services for homeless children. The researcher sought to understand how the staff and volunteers at the Griffon Learning Center interpreted their experiences with homeless youth, how they believed they were meeting the educational and social needs of the homeless children they interacted with, and what meaning they attributed to their experiences. Additionally, the researcher sought to understand how homeless youth saw their own experiences with the staff and volunteers, and how they believed their educational and social needs were being met. Although this study and its findings will not end the cycle of homelessness, the hope is that it provides some insight on the problem and may lead to some relief for homeless children and their families.

This study sought answers for the following questions:

1. According to the perceptions of the staff and volunteers, how does the mobile school and youth learning center organization meet the educational and social needs of the homeless children and their families whom they serve?

2. According to the perceptions of the children whom they serve, how does the mobile school and youth learning center organization meet their educational and social needs?

Discussion of the Findings

This qualitative case study focused on one site of one private agency, a mobile school and youth learning center, the Griffon Learning Center. This research aimed to understand the experiences and perceptions of some of the homeless children and teens who utilize the Griffon Learning Center in addition to the experiences and perceptions of some of those who serve the homeless youth. The following is a discussion of the findings in relation to the research questions this study sought to address from the perspective of a socio-psychological lens, more specifically Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1970) and Goodman et al.'s Trauma Theory (1991).

Research Question One: Perceptions of the Staff and Volunteers

The first question focused on the perceptions of the staff and volunteers who work at the Griffon Learning Center and how the organization meets the needs of homeless youth:

According to the perceptions of the staff and volunteers, how does the mobile school and youth learning center organization meet the educational and social needs of the homeless children and their families whom they serve?

Data were collected over a five-month period through ethnographic field notes, interviews, and document analysis. To answer the first research question, six adults—two staff members and four volunteers—who worked at the case study site, were interviewed in September and November 2016. The findings indicate that the Griffon Learning Center provides a variety of educational services for homeless children and adults as well as experiences and amenities that can be deemed social support services.

Educational services. The most basic needs for most homeless children are not being met, which puts all other aspects of their lives in disarray (Maslow, 1970). Although only some of the children interviewed discussed their living situation, it was clear that all aspects of their lives were impacted by being homeless. For those living in a shelter, they were separated from family members and had rules to adhere to that made other aspects of their lives, such as

participating in sports, unmanageable. Children living doubled-up mentioned feeling guilty and responsible for their situation. Still others cited transportation difficulties, not eating, wearing the same clothes day-to-day, not being able to participate in “normal” teenage activities, and other aspects of their lives that had changed because of being homeless. Homelessness has a profound, long-term, and cumulative impact upon the whole development of a child (Hart-Shegos et al., 1999; Solarz, 1992). With the seriousness of childhood homelessness, it may be overwhelming to know where to start to help.

One way the Griffon Learning Center attempts to assist homeless children is with their educational attainment and by providing a sense of normalcy. As every adult discussed in their interviews, the primary educational service that the Griffon Learning Center provides at all of its locations is one-on-one weekly tutoring sessions. Although, as stated in their mission, this service is meant to reach primarily homeless and near-homeless children across Southern California, according to Alice, a staff member, any minor who visits one of the locations of the Griffon Learning Center may receive free one-on-one tutoring. The staff and volunteers “don’t ask the children about their living situation, but they often bring it up” themselves (Cassey, a longtime volunteer). Each child is matched with a tutor and a preliminary schedule is set up. At the study site, Francis, an administrator, is responsible for connecting the youth to the “right tutor.” She said, “I try my best to match them with the right tutor and hope for the best.” Although the center did its best to match kids to an appropriate tutor, it did not always work out. According to Francis, “sometimes the kids don’t get along [with their tutor] or their tutor reminds them of someone they don’t like . . . and I have to assign ‘em to someone else.” However, “most of the time it does work out” (Francis). As one longtime volunteer stated, “Our students are cared for and are important. In other words, we’re all here to make this part of their lives bearable” (Eddie). He went on to say, the purpose of the tutors is “To love them and help them be more successful in school.”

Daryle, a volunteer, spoke about how the children who come to the center were often far behind in basic skills: “I have two kids that I work with who are about ten or eleven years old; they barely read at a first grade level, yet they’re in the fifth grade.” According to Duffield and Lovell, homeless children are more likely to perform below grade level than their housed peers (Duffield & Lovell, 2008). Daryle, a volunteer, went on to say that the children that the Griffon Learning Center worked “with are so far behind in basic math and language skills, that unless those are addressed first, they will never be able to achieve in

science, history, and the other subjects.” As the literature shows, this is all too common among homeless children. Homeless children can experience developmental delays at a rate four times that of housed children (Medcalf, 2008). These developmental delays occur in language, fine motor skills, and overall cognitive development (Eddowes, 1992; Kidd & Scrimanti, 2004; Shinn & Weitzman, 1996; Woods, 1997). However, many times, the tutors at the center were not able to make long-term investments in individual children because they may only see a child for just a few sessions. According to Alice, an administrator at the Griffon Learning Center, “The very nature of being homeless, uh, these children aren’t at one . . . site long enough to be thoroughly, uh, or formally evaluated . . . because of their transient nature.” Despite the limited amount of time the tutors may have had with an individual child, they tried to help them to the best of their ability. Daryle, a volunteer, will “spend an entire hour on just helping them organize their binder, notes, and backpack.” She wanted to teach them skills beyond just helping them complete their daily homework. She liked teaching “them how to create a homework journal and try to just keep track of their own things.” Daryle had “even taught children how to tie their own shoe laces.” She feels “it’s important to meet kids where they are at.”

Alice also discussed children missing their tutoring appointments due to circumstances out of their control: “Many of our kids miss their tutoring, uh, or counseling sessions, uh, merely because they have no way of getting home if they come here after school.” If a child misses their assigned tutoring session, then the tutor assists one of the drop-ins. If a youth needs additional tutoring beyond the once a week one-on-one session, they can attempt to get a drop-in appointment. If they are not able to get a drop-in appointment, they can join the daily general group tutoring and study sessions. According to Francis, an administrator, the organization tries to “accommodate as many children as possible” at each location. This has led to the development of other educational services such as after school clubs, focused study sessions by subject, online tutorials, and online assessments.

In addition to the general group tutoring and study sessions, are specialized group tutoring and study sessions. The specialized sessions are for the older teens. Some subjects require the tutors to have an expert’s level of knowledge, such as upper division mathematics (i.e., statistics, pre-calculus, calculus, etc.) and science (i.e., chemistry, biotechnology, physics, etc.) as well as Advanced Placement (AP) subjects. These specialized sessions are not available at all of the Griffon Learning Center’s locations. The AP study sessions meet from

October through April, whereas the upper division math and science study groups meet starting in late August and go through the end of May. GED prep classes also fall into this category of specialized sessions. GED prep classes meet once a week year-round. Eddie, a longtime volunteer, believed that these specialized sessions are an important part of the Griffon Learning Center's services to meet their intended mission: Without the specialized sessions, "many teens might not be able to finish high school" or complete their GED. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2016), homeless students face significant gaps in high school graduation rates compared to their housed peers. A survey of formerly homeless youth conducted by the U.S. Department of Education found that 40% of respondents had dropped out of either middle school or high school while they were homeless. The Griffon Learning Center tries to help these kids. Eddie, a longtime volunteer, worked mostly with the "teens trying to get their GEDs." He said that the kids "got frustrated with the school system." He pointed to some teens feeling "like teachers or administrators were being unfair or unhelpful." For others, Eddie believed "they want to hurry up and move on." Eddie was "just happy they didn't drop out of school completely." He also worked with homeless students trying to prepare for Advanced Placement exams. Eddie believed that "they're smart kids, but they haven't learned how to study," and "they also miss a lot of school" because of circumstances surrounding their homelessness. According to the research, the movement and instability that homelessness causes for young people, such as high rates of absenteeism, lends itself to additional barriers for educational success (Medcalf, 2008; National Center on Family Homelessness, 2009; Nunez & Collingnon, 1997). At the Griffon Learning Center, volunteers such as Eddie focused on study skills and working through practice tests with the homeless students to improve their chances of academic success.

Alice, a staff member, said that the Griffon Learning Center "provides support programs in many subject areas, uh, for all ages, uh, but we call them clubs, like the reading or math club." Alice says they are called clubs rather than programs "to help the children, uh, feel like they belong, uh, or are part of something." She believed this "comforts the children," and that they felt a sense "of stability or normalcy" belonging to a club. This is consistent with the research in that humans need intimate and long-lasting attachments to others (Anderson et al., 2011; Bowlby, 1969, 1973; Goodman et al., 1991; Maslow, 1970). The afterschool clubs at the Griffon Learning Center help to establish some new connections with others for the homeless children. According to the staff and volunteers interviewed, the afterschool clubs are one of the most popular and highly attended educational services at the case study site.

Each of the clubs is themed or has a subject focus as well as a hands-on learning experience. For example, the adventure club has a science and anthropological focus. One week, the students can learn the basics of robotics and then put together a simplistic robot kit. The next week, they could find out about the history and purpose of Kwanzaa and make coffee can drums. The following week, they could study polymers and make slime. The afterschool clubs primarily target the younger children who go to the Griffon Learning Center.

Although all of the youth who go to the case study site use the media lab, also known as the digital learning center, the older children gravitate toward the media lab versus the afterschool clubs. Many school projects, essays, and other assignments that older students get require access to computers, the Internet, and printers. As Alice, a staff member, said, “Homeless children may not have access to computers elsewhere.” As such, sometimes, homeless children will avoid going to school when they have not been able to complete their work, which is one reason why the digital learning center is a salient aspect of the Griffon Learning Center. As has been found in homeless studies, schools can create barriers to homeless children’s academic success by the requirements they place upon the children such as the materials needed to complete homework and projects (Better Homes Fund, 1999). Alice, an administrator of the Griffon Learning Center, believed that educators “need to know, uh, that some homeless children will not go to school when they haven’t finished their homework.” She continued, “It’s not that the students don’t want to complete their [work], it is that they do not have a place to do their work . . . and they do not have the necessary supplies, uh, to complete what is required.” The Griffon Learning Center tries to meet the needs of students by making sure each computer station also has a headphone and microphone headset for those who need access to audio or language programs. When the teens are not completing assignments for school, they can enjoy playing games and participating in the relatively new technology programs.

In 2015, the media lab had a major upgrade at the case study site location, and a new digital learning center was created. There are now specialized programs for students in coding, animation, virtual reality, virtual fieldtrips, and 3D printing. The Griffon Learning Center established three more digital learning centers—similar to the one located at the case study site—throughout Los Angeles County. In addition to these media labs, the Griffon Learning Center was able to form partnerships with some public schools both Los Angeles County and Orange County to establish afterschool digital learning programs for homeless students.

These schools have high populations of identified homeless students. The technology programs are similar to and based upon the programs at the Griffon Learning Center's media centers. The hope is that the digital learning centers "will provide students with the opportunity to learn twenty-first century skills" and be able to get "jobs that will take them out of homelessness" (Francis, an administrator).

Another educational service that the Griffon Learning Center provides is academic and career counseling. These services are a relevant aspect of the organization. This is salient as the research shows that some homeless youth fall into peer groups that can put them at jeopardy (Baron, Kennedy, & Forde, 2001). These peer groups may reject societal norms (Auerswald & Eyre, 2002) and can pull kids away from educational opportunities and career training (Hagan & McCarthy, 1997) to maintain the status quo in keeping homeless youth homeless (Snow & Anderson, 1993). The staff and volunteers at the Griffon Learning Center work hard at reassuring teens to see beyond their current circumstances and encouraging them to utilize the career and academic center. Middle school and high school students use this service. Most of the academic counseling sessions focus on how to complete high school graduation requirements on time and/or possibilities for remediation and/or advancement. Some students ask about college and trade school. Of those, many do not know where to start and are seeking assistance with applying. Financial aid is also a common topic for those pursuing further education. The McKinney-Vento Act makes financial provisions for college-bound homeless youth to provide financial assistance for housing, post-secondary education tuition, and education-related costs. Alice, a staff member, discussed that although their middle and high schools provide academic counseling services, teens may not want to go to their "public school's counselor for fear that their status of being homeless" may be discovered and concern over what would happen if people found out. Volunteers operate the academic counseling office at the case study site. Academic counseling is not consistently available at all of the organizations locations. However, academic and career counseling, as well as mentoring, is part of the summer program for all students in grades eight through 12 who come to any of the Griffon Learning Center's open sites during the summer break. The volunteer and staff receive specific training, materials, and lessons for the summer program. The counseling services are just one of the many ways the Griffon Learning Center tries to develop youth's sense of autonomy and control over their future to avoid perpetual homelessness (Goodman et al., 1991; Maslow, 1970).

The Griffon Learning Center is open year-round and has summer programs for homeless children that are different from the services offered throughout the traditional school-year. To begin with, parents are encouraged to have their child continue the one-on-one tutoring throughout the summer in order to prevent learning losses and to keep up a consistent routine. Social-psychologists and educators have posited that children who have regular routines can develop bonds with others and begin to establish a sense of stability, safety, and security, which may reduce the psychological trauma experienced by homelessness children (Goodman et al., 1991; Maslow, 1970; Van der Kolk, 1987). As it is, homeless children and youth often miss school. Many times, they have to change schools despite the federal protections in place through the McKinney-Vento Act to keep students at their schools of origin. It is common for homeless children to miss several days, weeks, months, or even years of school while homeless (Duffield & Lovell, 1998; James & Lopez, 2003). It is believed that each time a child changes schools, he or she loses four to six months of educational gains (National Center for Homeless Education, 2006).

At the Griffon Learning Center, the eight-week summer programs are designed to help students stay on track, close any learning gaps, and be more prepared for the next school year. For kindergarten through seventh graders, the summer programs are a mix of the traditional academic programs and services with special growth mindset lessons intended to encourage the development of resilience and persistence. According to Francis, an administrator, the Griffon Learning Center believes that cultivating the academic development of homeless students is equal to promoting resilience and persistence. They try to pass along the philosophy that learning is a continuum with value and to focus on what can be gained in all circumstances. The summer program focuses on “meaningful tasks based upon the individual student’s interests and environment” (Francis). Students in the kindergarten through seventh-grade summer program must complete a series of assessments before starting the summer program.

Older students, those in eighth through 12th grade, can partake in a different summer program that is meant to increase a student’s chance of success in high school and beyond. The tutors take on more of mentoring role during the summer. They guide students through the California high school graduation requirements and introduce them to various postsecondary options. The general purpose of the summer program is to provide teens with more specialized education and career services than are available throughout the regular

school-year; the goal is to strengthen the youth's education, encourage teens to earn a high school diploma or GED, and inspire them to achieve productive and stable futures (Francis, an administrator). The staff and volunteers do this by reviewing school transcripts and graduation requirements, presenting the students with what the options after high school are (i.e., college, trade school, AmeriCorps, military, etc.), arranging college and vocational school campus tours, and helping students gain access to college and career fairs. In addition to the focus on the teen's future, one-on-one academic tutoring continues throughout the summer, just like for the younger children.

In 2016, the Griffon Learning Center launched online assessment tools for parents to gauge what knowledge their children have mastered and what educational gaps their children might have. The results of the assessments then suggest what the parent can do to help their child to learn the missed material. The assessments are designed in a platform that is compatible with most computers, tablets, and smartphones. If a parent is unable to gain access to the Internet or work with a compatible device and give their child the assessments, the child's tutor will assist and proctor the online assessments and give a report to the parents. The online assessments are based upon the Common Core standards. At the time of this study, online assessments for grades kindergarten through seven were available. The Griffon Learning Center is working on expanding the online assessments to include more subject areas and more grade levels.

As the Griffon Learning Center looks for ways to expand its organization's reach and meet the needs of more homeless youth, an online tutorial program was launched at the end of 2015. It uses a mix of digital learning platforms and live remote one-on-one tutoring. Again, many homeless students do not have a way to get to devices that can access the Internet and these forums, but for those who do these services allow more homeless children to receive the help they need. The digital learning platforms are run through other organizations and therefore do not need to be staffed and maintained by the Griffon Learning Center. The online tutoring sessions are still provided by trained tutors of the Griffon Learning Center.

The Griffon Learning Center provides educational services that should be offered by the local public school or the school district according to the McKinney-Vento Act. Instead, the students and their families are going to the Griffon Learning Center and other organizations for these services. Some schools may not offer or have the resources necessary to carry out

these same services. Some parents and students may not be aware of what services their local public school or school district has available. Still others may be afraid to utilize the services of the public school or school district due to concerns over what might happen once the school is aware of the student being homeless.

Social support services. In addition to the educational services provided by the Griffon Learning Center, the auxiliary services and the environment of the Griffon Learning Center itself may be considered social support services. Some of the auxiliary services include offering parent informational sessions, providing children with backpacks and school supplies, connecting the youth to health care services, and presenting scholarships and other awards, to name a few. The staff and volunteers of the Griffon Learning Center strive to make each location a place where homeless youth feel cared for, encouraged and celebrated, and safe. Studies show homeless children are impacted deeply and emotionally by their circumstance of being homeless (Bassuk, Weinreb, Dawson, Perloff, & Buckner, 1997; Biggar, 2001; Murphy & Tobin, 2011; Rew; 1996; Shane, 1996). The care shown at the Griffon Learning Center for these children may lessen the long-term effects of homelessness (Murphy & Tobin, 2011) and the psychological trauma they experience (Goodman et al., 1991).

One service that the Griffon Learning Center provides for parents and guardians are information sessions. According to Daryle, a volunteer, each night information sessions are held on various topics important to parents and guardians, such as “housing relief, enrolling children in public school, accessing social services, resume building, career planning, accessing health care, safety, and other topics.” They make it a point to explain what a person’s rights are under the law such as with the McKinney-Vento Act, and subsequently NCLB and ESSA. Alice said the informational sessions are “well attended,” and are “led by community liaisons, representatives from various organizations,” and the staff and volunteers of the Griffon Learning Center. The sessions are about 45 minutes to an hour in length. Most of the organization’s sites do not offer parent information sessions but do have informational pamphlets and contact information for different agencies. These information sessions can potentially help an individual out of a state of learned helplessness—the belief that their own actions cannot influence the course of their life—or prevent it altogether giving them a sense of control over their daily life (Goodman et al., 1991; Seligman, 1975).

The Griffon Learning Center provides any child requests it a backpack and school supplies. The school supplies usually include a binder with dividers, a pencil case, pens, pencils, an eraser, a highlighter, a ruler, safety scissors, correction tape, and a mini stapler with staples. Sometimes additional notebooks, notebook paper, crayons, markers, index cards, and other materials are added to the backpacks when supplies have been donated. The backpack and school supplies are necessary for most youth to be able to complete their assignments (Alice, a staff member). Homeless families often do not have the resources necessary to purchase a backpack and school supplies for their children (Alice). Although homeless people may experience attacks on their personal sense of control over their circumstances by heavily relying on others for their most basic needs, exacerbating their sense of helplessness, by providing school supplies, the Griffon Learning Center is trying to give homeless youth the ability to complete assignments and progress academically (Goodman et al., 1991).

The Griffon Learning Center offers several scholarships. They range in value and number offered each year. For example, each site has monthly awards for students who demonstrate exceptional growth. These awards come with a small financial scholarship or gift card. There are special scholarships specifically designed to help homeless or former homeless youth continue their education. The scholarship money can be used for educational summer programs, college or trade school, enrichment courses, or apprenticeships. The recipients had to have received services from the Griffon Learning Center for at least three full months within the past 3 years. The scholarships are renewable for students pursuing a college degree or vocational certificate. There are also scholarships for homeless youth under the age of 18 and who have not yet graduated from high school who want to attend a specialized summer camp or participate in extra-curricular activities such as dance classes, music lessons, sports, or another activity.

Francis, an administrator, believed the “lack of health care and frequent illness” are “concern[s] for homeless” families. Likewise, studies show that homeless people struggle with access to healthcare because of their living situation and a lack of financial resources (Hart-Shegos & Associates, 1999; Nunez, 1994b; Shane, 1996). The Griffon Learning Center attempts to provide some minor services. One way they do this is through partnerships with other organizations, agencies, and businesses. Some local businesses, such as Rite Aid and CVS as well as hospitals such as Kaiser Permanente, the Keck Medical Center of USC, Good Samaritan, and other medical centers will donate first aid supplies, set up immunization

clinics, and even offer free or low-cost health care to the Griffon Learning Center community. Inside the facility studied, there is a part-time volunteer nurse who cares for minor illnesses and injuries. When the nurse is not able to take care of the youth's needs, she connects them and their families to the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority for additional assistance with gaining the appropriate medical care.

According to Alice, a staff member, the children and teens who attended school often had difficulty getting to the Griffon Learning Center. They must go through dangerous neighborhoods to get to the center. To alleviate the trouble of students walking through the neighborhood alone, the Griffon Learning Center assists them with getting to the center. Afterschool, a small team of staff and volunteers go to the area schools and walk groups of elementary and middle school students to the center. In addition, a vanpool picks up students from the local high schools. For students to get a ride to the center in the van, they need to have submitted a permission slip to the Griffon Learning Center signed by their parent or guardian. The same is true for the children who walk to the center with the staff and volunteers. Unfortunately, those who do not have a permission slip on file cannot officially walk with the staff and volunteers to the center. However, they may follow the group closely and are encouraged to submit the paperwork as soon as possible. Those who do not have transportation with the staff and volunteers of the Griffon Learning Center are on their own to get to the site. Many teens will walk in small groups through the densely homeless populated neighborhood to get to the center.

One of the overlooked services of the Griffon Learning Center is the afterschool snack. The homeless youth are given a small snack as they enter the center. The snacks usually include granola bars or pretzels, a piece of fruit, and a juice box or water. The type of snack offered is dependent upon donations and available supplies. Sadly, for some children, it is the first time they have eaten all day (Francis, an administrator). As studies on homelessness state, hunger and homelessness go together (National Center on Family Homelessness, 2009). Eddie, a longtime volunteer at the Griffon Learning Center, said some children initially went to the Griffon Learning Center because of snack time. The general philosophy among the staff is that the students will be better ready to learn and more willing to trust the people of the organization if they are not hungry. The research also shows that children who face hunger regularly perform at lower rates and often have social and behavioral difficulties, which influences a child's ability to learn (Hart-Shegos & Associates, 1999). Meeting this basic

need for the youth who visit the Griffon Learning Center enables them to focus on other aspects of their lives (Maslow, 1970).

The circumstances surrounding homelessness often mean that one has to move away family, friends, neighbors, and community, which can lead to a loss of tradition, culture, and support, which is especially damaging to children (Diaz & Bussert-Webb; Kozol, 1988). For people to maintain emotionally healthy relationships with others, they must have a sense of being loved and belonging, otherwise they become susceptible to loneliness, anxiety, and depression (Maslow, 1970). The staff and volunteers at the Griffon Learning Center strive to create a stable and positive environment, foster positive relationships with the youth who use the center, create a space for children to belong with one another, and develop new traditions. One way they do this is through celebrations. Holidays are celebrated in a variety of ways. Some, like Christmas and Thanksgiving, include parties and gifts for the children or community meals. Others, like Martin Luther King Jr. Day and Cesar Chavez Day, are marked by history lessons and poignant crafts. Meaningful moments in individual student's lives are also celebrated at the Griffon Learning Center. Children's birthdays and milestones are celebrated. Students are congratulated when they have accomplished a task, project, or mastered a skill. Sometimes these celebrations and congratulations include a small token such as a bookmark, pencil, or other useful supply. The Griffon Learning Center also holds high school graduation festivities for teens who finish high school or pass the GED. Celebrations and traditions help people, especially children, build their identity (Goodman et al., 1991).

One of the most important aspects of the organization's mission is that the homeless students know that the staff and volunteers at all the sites care for them. According to Anooshian (2005), for many homeless children, one of the most damaging aspects of homelessness is social isolation. Rafferty (1995) found that when children become homeless, like their parents, they lose their friends, neighbors, community and sense of security and belonging. Additionally, when children lose their support system, social situations become dangerous and lead to a distrust of adults (Anooshain, 2005; Powers & Jaklitsch, 1992) and can also lead to apathy and despair (Eddowes & Hranitz, 1989). The lack of trust in others can lead homeless youth to avoid interacting with social service agencies (Moore, 2005b). This, along with the fear children have of possibly leaving or losing new social affiliations (Murphy & Tobin, 2011; Reganick, 1997), can make this task even more difficult for the staff and volunteers and the Griffon Learning Center. The services themselves bridge some of the

gaps; but it is through the relationships established with the children that they can see and know some adult cares for them. The Griffon Learning Center works hard at matching homeless students to the appropriate tutor not only for their academic needs but also for their personality. As such, many of the kids develop strong positive relationships with their tutors over time. Throughout the organization, each youth is seen and treated as an individual person and equal to all of the other children who utilize the services of the Griffon Learning Center. As Maslow (1970) theorized, human beings want to be valued and accepted by others as well as to have self-respect. This equality, as well as individuality, allows the children to form strong relationships with the adults of the Griffon Learning Center as well as with each other. According to Eddie, a longtime volunteer, “In the midst of all these services, we offer love, encouragement, self-esteem, self-awareness, courage, and above all hope.”

Research Question Two: Perceptions of the Youth

The second question focused on the perceptions of the homeless youth who used the services of the Griffon Learning Center and how the organization met their needs:

According to the perceptions of the children whom they serve, how does the mobile school and youth learning center organization meet their educational and social needs?

As mentioned above, the data for this study were collected over a five-month period. The data are comprised of ethnographic field notes, interviews, and document analysis. To answer the second research question, 12 homeless children, aged eight to 17 years old, who utilized the services of the case study site, were interviewed in October through December of 2016. The findings indicate that the homeless youth who go to the Griffon Learning Center participate in a variety of educational services as well as find emotional support by building relationships. Beyond the services provided by the Griffon Learning Center, the homeless children find it a safe place to be, as well as a place where they can be themselves without prejudice.

Educational services. The homeless students who participated in the study mentioned nearly the same educational services as the staff and volunteers; however, their perspective on the services differed. To begin with, most of the students stated that they had “nowhere else to go” after school besides the Griffon Learning Center (George). This was for a variety of reasons—from needing a safe place to be while waiting to be able to get into the shelter

(Quinton) or other living situation (Mary) or waiting for their parents to get them after work (Rosie) to not being able to participate in afterschool activities due to financial constraints (Lori), and several other reasons in between. If these children did not go to the Griffon Learning Center, they may have no other choice but to spend more time on the street. The streets, especially those in Downtown Los Angeles, can be even more threatening to homeless youth (Hagan & McCarthy, 1997). It is no surprise that homeless children and youth do not feel safe (Johnson, 1992). A couple of the children did not want to go to the Griffon Learning Center in the beginning and even resented it; however, over time their attitude toward the situation changed: “At first, I was annoyed. But, I was annoyed by my whole life. Now this place is my safe haven. I have hope for my future because of the people here” (Lori).

Many of the younger children did not talk about high school or college in their interviews and were simply happy to be learning new things while at the Griffon Learning Center. Most of the youth went to the center for the opportunity to get academic support for completing homework, essays, and projects. Some of homeless children spoke about the one-on-one tutoring services, but they did not necessarily point to it as the primary service they used. When speaking about one-on-one tutoring, they focused on their relationships with their tutors and how their tutors made them feel, as opposed to improving in school. Researchers have found that the environment does not just physically influence homeless children and youth, it deeply affects them emotionally and psychologically as well, and they are in need of positive and supportive relationships with adults (Bassuk et al., 1997; Biggar, 2001; Murphy & Tobin, 2011; Rew, 1996; Shane, 1996). The youth interviewed for this study cited establishing strong bonds with their tutors and others at the Griffon Learning Center making them feel as if someone cared about them. The ability to form relationships with their tutors and others at the center allowed the homeless youth to feel safe and connected to others. According to social psychologists, for children to develop self-reliance, self-esteem, and emotional security, they need to feel safe and connected to others (Goodman et al, 1991; Maslow, 1970).

According to the U.S. Department of Education (2016), two-thirds of former homeless youth surveyed reported that homelessness had a significant impact upon their education, making it difficult to stay in school. One teenager interviewed, Jennifer, spoke in detail about her decision to drop out of high school and pursue a GED. She dropped out of school because of

the continued time conflicts she had between work and school. When she was working and going to school, it was difficult for her to be at school on time and stay all day. Jennifer struggled with finding understanding and support from most of her teachers. She was not able to complete all of her homework on time, which eventually led to failing grades. As the primary financial contributor of her family, Jennifer had to continue to work. She attended the weekly GED study sessions at the center for the entire fall semester before taking the GED test and passing. With the support of the staff and volunteers at the Griffon Learning Center, Jennifer was able to beat these odds, unlike the two-thirds of homeless adults who do not have a high school diploma or GED (National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth, 2017). Other students interviewed, such as Lori, spoke about the specialized sessions for Advanced Placement and upper division math and science as being the most useful resource for them.

The younger children interviewed primarily attended the after school academic clubs, especially the math club, reading club, and adventure club. The academic clubs provide students with the opportunity for hands-on learning in conjunction with traditional methodologies. For example, in the reading club students read a short story, poem, or novel together and then complete a related art or writing project. At the conclusion of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, the children made construction paper straw hats; they wrote “I am” poems to describe themselves after reading autobiographical poems and made sugar skull masks after reading *Rosita y Conchita*. This was one aspect of the Griffon Learning Center that the younger children were excited to talk about and invited the researcher to attend and participate with them multiple times throughout their interviews. They described feeling as if they were learning about others like themselves and felt valued, connected to a community, and were beginning to develop self-respect, all of which are important experiences to contribute to the fourth level in the Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1970).

Many of the homeless students spoke about the media lab and the ability to access computers and the Internet. The older youth discussed using the digital learning center to complete homework, essays, and school projects as well as to play games. The kids felt as if there is an expectation by their teachers that they be able to access the Internet and a computer with a printer because many assignments require these tools. The homeless students mentioned that they have avoided going to school when they did not complete their homework. Mary said that she will “pretend like [she’s] sick sometimes when I wuz’t able to finish [her] work” so

she does not have to go to school when her work is incomplete. Some said that they save specific assignment types, such as essays, until they can get the Griffon Learning Center where they have access to the media lab and a tutor. The students interviewed did not mention the new specialized technology programs that the media lab offered. However, the researcher observed many of these same children participating in these programs. The youth may see the special technology sessions more as games rather than as a set of specialized programs. Lori spoke about using the Griffon Learning Center's media lab to watch Khan Academy tutorial videos to prepare for the SAT and her AP tests. She also spoke about taking classes through a free virtual school over the summer. Overall, the digital learning center was one of the most used and talked about resources by the homeless students.

Relationships and Social Support Services

The homeless children and teens who go to the Griffon Learning Center often do not have anywhere else to go, whether it is during the school day or after school. After the case study site was established for a short time homeless youth began gathering in front of the center during the school day waiting for the doors to be open. For a variety of reasons, the minors would wait patiently outside instead of going to school. The staff of the organization believed that it was safer and more conducive for the kids to be inside the center than outside. A majority of the participants interviewed expressed concerns over safety. According to Maslow (1970), when a person is physically unsafe, his or her psychological safety can also waiver. In order to accommodate the need, the Griffon Learning Center changed the schedules and added services for the homeless youth that find themselves coming into the center during the school day. Many of the youth that end up in the Griffon Learning Center during the day are unaccompanied minors and coming into the center is their first step at accessing any type of assistance. Other children who come to the center during the day include, but are not limited to, those who are newly homeless and are not registered in school, students who are avoiding school for various reasons, and minors who must work but are participating in the GED or other programs. The mere fact that the center is open during the school day is a service in and of itself.

Rafferty (1995) said that when youth become homeless they lose “their sense of security and belonging” (p. 55). Anooshian (2005) continued by saying homeless youth have lost their social support system which leads them to seeing “social situations as potentially dangerous”

and to “be avoided” (p. 134). The lack of stable social support system can lead homeless children to lose trust in others, especially adults (Eddowes & Hranitz, 1989; Powers & Jaklitsch, 1992). This lack of trust lends itself to homeless youth avoiding social services and agencies (Moore, 2005b).

After school, some youth end up at the Griffon Learning Center because they are unable to participate in other afterschool activities. Sports teams, cheerleading, performing arts activities, and others often require those involved to pay for participating, for uniforms, activities, entry fees, transportation, meals, and other auxiliary costs. A few of the teens interviewed talked about no longer being able to participate in football and cheer because of the financial burden these activities placed upon their families as well as transportation issues and concerns about not being able to get in line for the shelter on time. They talked about feeling guilty. According to several studies, homeless children and youth often experience a loss of control, which can often lead to guilt and shame over being homeless (Anooshian, 2005; Feitel et al., 1992; Murphy & Tobin, 2011; Powers & Jaklitsch, 1992; Russell, 1998; Shane, 1996; Tower, 1992). Some of the homeless students interviewed mentioned not being allowed to stay on their school campus unless they were a member of a team or participated in an activity. Quinton talked about not being able to participate in football because he needed to be in line on time at the local men’s shelter to get a room with his father. He said, “I have to be with my dad when we’s check in at the shelter or I can’t stay with him and I dunna wanna be by myself in there So, no football for me right now.” Most homeless shelters separate families. Male children as young as 13 may be required to go to a men’s shelter and may still not be able to get into unless they are in line hours before the shelter opens (Johnsen et al., 2005; Molnar, 1989). One student interviewed, Lori, could no longer participate in varsity cheerleading because of the cost: “My mom never told me before how much she paid for the uniform, spirit wear, and stuff. It’s like more than a thousand dollars.” Ian said that due to transportation issues afterschool sports were not possible anymore. Money and limited resources were a common refrain.

The children and teens who visit the Griffon Learning Center not only have to contend with the expected obstacles of other homeless, prostitution, drug dealers, and gang activity, but also other criminal elements. Homeless shelters and low-income housing are usually found in high crime areas (Kozol, 1988; Merves, 1992; Van Ry, 1992). As described in the previous chapter, the Griffon Learning Center is located in a high crime area. The children have to

cope with this dangerous environment on a daily basis. For many of those interviewed, safety was one reason why they go to the Griffon Learning Center. For a space of a couple of hours, they do not have to worry about the outside world. They can just be kids, have fun, learn, and build friendships with other youth who are experiencing similar circumstances. Ian even mentioned that coming to the center had prevented him from becoming involved with street crime. Some of the youth interviewed stated that the Griffon Learning Center has protected them from becoming a victim, at least inside their facility. According to the research, homeless children are at a greater risk for being violated and victimized than housed children (Hagan & McCarthy, 1997; Moore, 2005b). At school, many are teased, harassed, and bullied. George, one of the homeless students interviewed, talked about how at the Griffon Learning Center, youth find that “Everybody is the same here” and they “don’t feel judged here.” Whereas at school Nikki said that, she “used to feel and think every day that [she] was a ‘nobody,’ that [she] was invisible.” The volunteers and staff try for the children to feel as if they are seen and recognized as individuals.

One of the most powerful aspects of the Griffon Learning Center is the relationships that the homeless youth build with each other and the adults who work and volunteer there. According to Herth (1998), children see caring people as having a positive impact upon their lives as well as the lives of their parents; this is especially true for homeless children and youth. During the researcher’s time at the Griffon Learning Center as a participant observer, she formed relationships with several young people. Week after week, specific children would request to see her for academic counseling or tutoring or would ask her to participate in activities at the center such as reading aloud for the reading and adventure clubs or assisting with the craft tables. She was a consistent face to them. When the researcher was not at the center on a particular day, some of the children would come up to her and ask her where she had been or when she was coming back to the center again. The researcher believes that the children she worked with looked forward to their time with her and some had said as much to her. The researcher was thanked on several occasions for explicit actions by the youth she worked with; she was thanked for helping her students find a road to high school completion, assisting senior high school students apply for college and financial aid, and helping young people find belief in their own capabilities. Only one student interviewed mentioned the word “hope” directly. Outside of that one instance, the researcher does not recall any of her interactions with the children and teens outside of the interviews including the word “hope.” However, the researcher feels that her relationship and work with the

children and youth helped to provide these young people with hope for a future. With the staff and volunteers pouring effort into helping the homeless youth, many can see beyond their current circumstance and develop new hopes, dreams, and desires for a future, which are all essential aspects to building opportunities for self-actualization (Maslow, 1970).

Of all the possible experiences a person can face throughout his or her lifetime, homelessness is perhaps the most devastating and disorganizing (Ropers, 1988). The chaotic nature of homelessness can have a profound impact upon a child (Moore, 2005b). The Griffon Learning Center tries to remove some of the chaos that homeless youth experience by providing consistency. This consistency leads to a sense of normalcy. The youth form strong relationships with the people of the center that make the children feel cared for. The staff and volunteers strive to make the kids' days better and encourage them to see beyond where they are for the moment. The staff and volunteers try to focus on being positive and helping the kids just be kids and give them a space to forget about being homeless, which for some of the children in the study is the opposite of their experience while at school. From the relationships built during the afterschool learning clubs and tutoring sessions, the positive words and phrases the adults used when speaking to or about the youth, and the affirmative statements posted on the walls, to the special events and celebrations for the children and the scholarship programs, the young people seemed to find a new hope.

The youth who go to the Griffon Learning Center have a strong desire to be there. At first, some struggled with the idea of going to the center, but after a while they began to see the place as their safe haven and tried to make the best of their circumstances. Some children said that they have hope and motivation because of the staff and volunteers. They talked about the volunteers and staff being good people who are nice to them and listen to them. They stated that they felt cared for by their tutors and others at the center. The youth did not say such positive things about how they have been treated at school. They felt ashamed. This sense of shame makes young people feel as if they are different from others (Murphy & Tobin, 2011).

Homeless children and teens believe that they are not able to be part of the larger group of youth who are not homeless (Murphy & Tobin, 2011). This can lead homeless children to avoid making friends with other children, participating in class activities and discussions, and drawing attention to themselves or their living situation (Medcalf, 2008). The youth at the Griffon Learning Center are grateful to have a place to go where they can be kids and be

around others like themselves. Those who have younger siblings are especially appreciative to have a safe place for their little brother or sister. For some of the homeless youth, it is about being somewhere where all of the other people their own age are going through similar circumstances. They do not have to hide the fact that they are homeless from one another. It enables the children to be themselves and be able to make friends. At the Griffon Learning Center, the homeless youth regain facets of their identity and become part of a community reducing the chances of social disaffiliation (Goodman et al., 1991).

When the homeless youth walk through the doors of The Griffon Learning Center, they are often living in a state of survival; and, for some, to survive their situation, they come to the center. However, as the youth continue to go back to the Griffon Learning Center, they begin to change from just surviving to living, and from living to creating hopes and dreams again. The children experience care, encouragement, stability, and safety at the Griffon Learning Center, which leads to growth in their self-esteem, self-awareness, and hope (Maslow, 1970). To say that the Griffon Learning Center has been an important part of the youth's lives who were interviewed would be an understatement. The young people who utilize the services of this mobile school and learning center organization have found hope and believe in their abilities to achieve their dreams. Before coming to the Griffon Learning Center some of the youth interviewed thought that they should drop out of school due to the experiences they had had while at school—from being told to drop out by teachers, being teased and bullied, not being able to complete work, and other pressures from the school. After going to the center, they believe they can finish middle school, or high school, and one day go on to college, trade school, or the military.

Some interviewees stated that regardless of their circumstances outside of the center, the Griffon Learning Center has given them the opportunity to improve their chances of getting into a good college. Their lives have been irrevocably transformed for the better because of their interactions with the staff, volunteers, and other students who go to the center. Many of the children interviewed talked about how they now have a potential future or how their perspective on their lives had changed because of their time at the center. They have hopes for future careers—from skilled laborers like plumbers and electricians to being professionals such as teachers and doctors. They spoke about being reunited with family members and living in their own home. Moreover, for now, they enjoy being a normal kid.

A Socio-Psychological Lens

The data were examined through a socio-psychological lens. This lens was created using the sometimes-disputed Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1970) and Trauma Theory (1991). Below is a brief summary of the theories, accompanied by a discussion of how the conceptual framework related to homelessness and the data collected.

Homelessness and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Malsow's (1970) Hierarchy of Needs is the basis for many other psychological and sociological theories. In its most basic form, the theory says that lower psychological and physiological needs must be met before higher-order needs including academic matters can be considered by the individual (Medcalf, 2008). The five levels from lowest to highest are comprised of (a) physiological needs, (b) safety and security (c) love and belonging, (d) self-esteem, and (e) self-actualization. The research concurred that Maslow's theory should not be used as a pyramid with each "need" being met before the next level can be considered, and that it is more of a continuum to be thought through.

Considering a homeless person, the most basic physiological needs are not being met. Because this most basic level is in a state of flux for a homeless person, all of the other levels of Maslow's Hierarchy are at risk. Although only some of the children and youth interviewed discussed their living situation, it was clear that all aspects of their lives were impacted by being homeless. Those living in a shelter were separated from family members and had rules to adhere to that made other aspects of their lives, such as participating in sports, unmanageable. Children living doubled-up mentioned feeling guilty and responsible for their situation. Still others cited transportation difficulties, not eating, wearing the same clothing day-to-day, not being able to participate in "normal" teenage activities, and other aspects of their lives that had changed as a result of being homeless.

The second level of Maslow's theory cites a sense of well-being or security and safety. Homeless people rarely have a sense of safety and security. Living in a car, on the streets, or even in a shelter, is rarely safe (Kozol, 1988). With a person's physical safety at risk, their psychological safety can also waiver. Ideals of trust, hope, and achievement can be easily turned into mistrust, apathy, and despair (Eddowes & Hranitz, 1989). Most homeless people

do not have financial security, which is one of the main reasons they have become homeless in the first place. Most of the people interviewed discussed concerns over safety. Some of their concerns over safety brought the youth to the Griffon Learning Center as it is seen as a safe place to be within the neighborhood.

When examining the desire for love and belonging, this need can outweigh both previous needs for children (Maslow, 1970). The circumstances surrounding homelessness often mean that one must move away from family, friends, neighbors, and community, leading to a loss of tradition, culture, and support, which is especially damaging to children (Kozol, 1988). For people to maintain emotionally healthy relationships with others, they must have a sense of being loved and belonging; otherwise they become susceptible to loneliness, anxiety, and depression (Maslow, 1970). The staff and volunteers at the Griffon Learning Center strive to create a stable and positive environment, foster positive relationships with the youth who use the center, create a space for the children to belong with one another, and develop new traditions. Almost every child and adult interviewed talked about this facet of the Griffon Learning Center's community.

Human beings have a desire to be valued and accepted by others, as well as to have self-respect. These lead to self-esteem, Maslow's fourth level in the Hierarchy of Needs. As has been seen throughout the discussion of the interviews, many of the children faced a lack of acceptance by others outside of the Griffon Learning Center to the point of being bullied and intimidated by their peers, and even adults. Some of the children had to change schools to get away from their bullies, others contemplated dropping out of school completely as a result, and one did drop out of high school and pursued her GED. The children and youth interviewed felt valued and accepted by others at the Griffon Learning Center and were beginning to develop self-respect as a result of their time there.

The final level of Maslow's (1970) hierarchy is self-actualization. Many people in the best of circumstances do not achieve self-actualization, as Maslow defined it—living up to one's full potential, including creative endeavors. When examining the lives of homeless children, it is unreasonable to consider evaluating whether or not they have achieved self-actualization. However, some of the youth interviewed discussed their hopes, dreams, and desires for the future. They mostly included educational and career attainments, but also opportunities to be a "normal kid."

Homelessness and Trauma Theory

In its simplest form, psychological trauma is the way in which a person responds to an uncontrollable life event in which he or she has extraordinarily overwhelming emotional reactions (Goodman et al., 1991). Homelessness is in and of itself a major risk factor for psychological trauma (Goodman et al., 1991). People who become homeless lose not only their physical home, but also often their connections to neighbors, family, friends, routines, job, social roles, and community. These losses may produce psychological trauma (Goodman et al., 1991). Once a person has become homeless, he or she may experience symptoms of psychological trauma as a result of the conditions surrounding homelessness (Goodman et al., 1991). If an individual did not experience psychological trauma as a direct result of becoming homeless or the conditions surrounding homelessness, then the experiences of homelessness may make those with previous histories of victimization more susceptible to further psychological trauma and becoming homeless may prevent the individual from recovering from his or her original trauma (Goodman et al., 1991).

Three major forms of psychological trauma are found among homeless people: (a) Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), (b) social disaffiliation, and (c) learned helplessness.

PTSD. Homeless people are under excessive stress and as such are susceptible to PTSD, and according to Goodman (1991) more than half of all homeless women suffer from PTSD. PTSD has many symptoms, including, but not limited to, reliving traumatic events, dissociative states, intrusive thoughts, reduced affect or interest in activities, increased irritability or anger, hypervigilance, bad dreams, substance abuse, self-mutilation, lowered sex drive and intimacy, a sense of helplessness, and a sense of isolation (Goodman et al., 1991; Figley, 1985a; Harvey, 1991). Some of the children and youth interviewed talked about feeling isolated, helpless, and experiencing episodes of anger or irritability. The researcher acknowledges that she is not a trained psychologist and cannot diagnose any condition, and thus only recorded the responses of the interviewees. Any child who appeared to be in distress was referred immediately to the administration of the Griffon Learning Center, where the organization's policies and procedures were followed regarding youth in distress.

Social disaffiliation. For children to be able to develop self-reliance, self-esteem, autonomy, and emotional security, they need to feel safe and connected to others (Goodman et al, 1991;

Maslow, 1970). Psychological trauma occurs when a person believes his or her bonds have been cut off, which then diminishes one's sense of safety, security, and trust in others (Van der Kolk, 1987). The individual's belief is then affirmed by the very real lack of connection between people he or she was once affiliated with (Goodman et al., 1991). The responses of others toward homeless people can exasperate what victims of trauma feel and even confirm in their own minds that they are worthless and do not deserve to be around others, creating additional obstacles to recovering from psychological trauma. Homelessness can often strip away a person's identity and role in society, further leading to social disaffiliation (Goodman et al., 1991; Hirsch, 1989; Kozol, 1988). Social disaffiliation is a key symptom of psychological trauma experienced by many homeless people (Goodman et al., 1991). Some of the youth interviewed talked about losing their identity and no longer being a part of the world they once knew, especially with regard to team sports, academics, and friend circles. At the same time, they mentioned that they were beginning to feel a sense of belonging and developing new friendships at the Griffon Learning Center.

Learned helplessness. People experience learned helplessness when they are unable to find proof in the belief that their own actions can influence the course of their lives (Seligman, 1975). Being homeless lends itself to a situation of learned helplessness because homeless people often do not have a sense of control over their own daily lives (Goodman et al., 1991). Homeless people may experience daily attacks on their sense of personal control when they heavily rely on others to meet their most basic needs, further exacerbating a sense of helplessness (Goodman et al., 1991). The youth interviewed were not only at the mercy of their circumstance of being homeless, they as minors also were dependent upon adults to provide for their basic needs. At least two of the youth interviewed had jobs to support their families, and one dropped out of school as a result. Others took on the responsibility of caring for younger siblings. Still others talked about what they used to be able to do and how they could no longer participate in the activities they loved. All the children discussed directly or indirectly that they did not feel as if they had control over their lives.

Implications and Recommendations of the Study

This investigation meant to provide a critical examination of how private agencies, such as the Griffon Learning Center, are helping to close the educational gaps of homeless youth from the perspective of homeless students and the staff and volunteers who serve them. The

participants in this study wanted their voices to be heard by those who could influence the lives of other homeless children. All youth interviewed were just beginning their journey. Although they do not know where they will end up, each had their own hopes, dreams, and desires for a brighter future.

This study has many implications and recommendations that could affect the Griffon Learning Center, school districts such as the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), and politicians. Additionally, this study could influence the participants and the researcher. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1970) and Trauma Theory (Goodman et al., 1991) shaped this discussion with their socio-psychological constructs. When homelessness is looked at through Trauma theory, there are three major components: (a) the loss of one's home can produce symptoms of psychological trauma, (b) life in a shelter or other institution may produce symptoms of psychological trauma, and (c) many homeless people became homeless after having experienced psychological trauma. These experiences can lead to social disaffiliation and learned helplessness. This case study, a window into the world of a mobile school and youth learning center organization researched by a participant observer, provides a clearer picture of the perceptions and feelings of the study's participants.

For the Griffon Learning Center

For the most part, the Griffon Learning Center is meeting the additional educational needs of many homeless children throughout Southern California. They are continuing to fulfill the mission and the dream its founder had nearly 25 years ago. Eddie, a longtime volunteer, restated the mission: "To enhance educational opportunities for homeless children from K through twelve. Our goal is to reduce the gaps in homeless children's education and provide them with the highest level of educational attainment possible." In addition to assisting homeless youth in attaining the highest possible education and closing learning gaps, the Griffon Learning Center attempts to ensure homeless children and teens that they are cared for and loved. This study helped to identify some areas that can be examined and expanded, to continue fulfilling the Griffon Learning Center's mission.

The Griffon Learning Center may want to consider adding training modules for volunteers to complete during the course of their service. Throughout the study, it was revealed that once a person had completed the initial orientation and onboarding, there are no more required

trainings except for summer program volunteers. The volunteers interviewed mentioned not remembering the mission, the services, and other key components to the Griffon Learning Center, as they had not needed to review the information since their orientation. Although there are daily staff meetings which the volunteers are welcome to attend, for the most part, the volunteers come and go on tight schedules and do not stay for the open staff meetings. As a result, the volunteers miss updates and reminders, new services, changes in protocols, and other pertinent information. The Griffon Learning Center does make an effort to email staff and volunteers information updates, but because this is a passive action, there is no guarantee that volunteers are up-to-date on needed information.

Throughout the interviews, observations, and training modules, there was a focus on safety—the safety of the youth inside the center, in the neighborhood, at school, and in their living situation as well as the safety of the staff and volunteers at the center and in the neighborhood. Although the Griffon Learning Center cannot control the circumstances outside of their facilities, they have made great strides in examining their safety protocols at their sites and in expanding their safety practices. There are occasional safety presentations for the youth and families so that they can be more aware of their surroundings and, it is hoped, better protect themselves. Potentially, the Griffon Learning Center can look at more ways to improve the safety of their staff, volunteers, and those who receive services from them.

The Griffon Learning Center offers students the opportunity to meet with an academic counselor outside of their school. These counseling services are a salient part of helping students complete their high school education and find information about postsecondary opportunities, which is an implicit part of their mission. However, this service is not always available, as the office is staffed with volunteers. Additionally, this service is not available at all of their locations. One way they combat this is through their summer programs. Although many children are fortunate enough to be able to attend one of the summer programs, several others cannot. The Griffon Learning Center may want to consider expanding its academic counseling services to include a full-time academic counselor at their permanent and semi-permanent sites or secure more volunteers to provide services every day. They may also consider an online academic counseling program.

The Griffon Learning Center works with other organizations in the communities surrounding

their sites to offer some health services. The Griffon Learning Center may want to look into ways to expand its health services by holding health and immunization clinics more frequently or by providing further information on the health and immunization clinics being held in the community elsewhere. Another consideration is to have more medical personal available on site at their permanent locations, as these are where they have the greatest need.

Throughout the researcher's time at the Griffon Learning Center before, during, and after the data collection process, she observed and discussed with staff the planned expansion of its curriculum offerings in terms of subjects, grade levels, and delivery methods. Coupled with this, they were working on the development of online assessments for middle school and high school subjects. This potentially will assist the tutors, and the students themselves, to see what skill and knowledge gaps students have in particular subjects to better tailor tutoring and group sessions. Specific publishers of Common Core curriculums have created the current online grade-level assessments for the lower grades. The Griffon Learning Center may want to consider utilizing nationally recognized assessments such as the SAT 10 or NAEP or create their own based upon the standards, rather than using textbook publishers' assessments. Relatedly, they may want to diversify the curriculum publishers to be more reflective of the resources being used at each site's local area schools.

The Griffon Learning Center does a lot of work at assisting homeless youth in gaining access to extra-curricular activities and postsecondary educational opportunities. In addition to their summer programs, counseling services, and afterschool programs, the Griffon Learning Center offers scholarships for postsecondary education and afterschool enrichment activities. However, there are two primary challenges: (a) the scholarships are dependent upon donations, and (b) the lack of knowledge about these scholarships. Although the scholarships are publicized on the organization's website, the youth who go to the Griffon Learning Center as well as many of the staff and volunteers are unaware of these scholarship opportunities. It is highly recommended that the organization's leadership examine how to better promote these scholarship programs.

For the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD)

The Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) has been criticized for many reasons. It has seen changes in leadership, large budget cuts and deficiencies, scandals, closed schools,

and increasing numbers of students dropping out. Being the second-largest school district in the country is a heavy burden. However, they are responsible for providing a free and equal education for all students. Throughout this study, several implications for practice were identified for LAUSD, and may be appropriate for other school districts to consider.

To begin with, LAUSD, as a government agency, must follow the law and provide all of the protected educational services outlined in the McKinney-Vento Act and subsequent No Child Left Behind and Every Student Succeeds Acts. They may need to begin increasing the number of staff and LEAs. Unfortunately, the number of homeless students is growing, and LAUSD needs to have the necessary staff to improve services. Next, better educating administrators and teachers needs to be considered. The administrators and teachers need to know and understand the law, as well as the services that the district is obligated to provide. Additionally, LAUSD should look at ways to increase and ease access to those services. Further, making the information more readily available to all stakeholders and speeding up the process of identifying at-risk populations may increase the number of homeless youth who can benefit from the services. It is not just about providing the mandated services and protections but making the processes simpler for all of those involved, especially with regard to accessing school records and enrolling a homeless student.

The LAUSD may want to consider more training of teachers and administrators working with at-risk populations, especially homeless students. Some best practices may include having alternative assessments for students who do not have access to the Internet, computers, and printers outside of school; this issue affects a majority of the homeless youth interviewed for this study, and many of the teens who go to the Griffon Learning Center. Nonetheless, perhaps a more serious issue is the school environment. In the interviews with the homeless students, comments about how teachers made them feel in addition to their actions and words, or lack thereof, created some uncomfortable situations for the children. From teacher's comments urging students to drop out of school to outright ignoring behaviors of students, some of the actions by educators allowed for excessive teasing and bullying to occur. The district may want to consider expanding its efforts at reducing bullying and training teachers in how to better respond to situations both in and out of the classroom, and what is appropriate and inappropriate for teachers to say to struggling students.

One area that the district has control over and can easily change is school lunches. LAUSD

may want to consider serving the same school lunches to all students, and not to identify or discriminate based upon a student's financial ability to pay for school lunches. Depending upon the school district, students are identified as being a different status (e.g., free lunch, reduced lunch, full pay, etc.) through various colored lunch tickets, cards, notations on school IDs, wristbands, or even the lunches themselves. To access free or reduced lunch services, families need to complete paperwork. In some school districts, the free lunch consists of white bread and a slice of cheese, which technically meets the federal requirements for school lunches. According to the New York Times, more than half of school districts used lunch shaming tactics to encourage families to pay for school lunch bills, and more than 75% of districts have significant unpaid lunch bills (Siegel, 2017). Lunch shaming is the practice of "holding children publicly accountable for unpaid lunch bills" by throwing away their food, giving them an alternative and less desirable lunch, or branding them. News outlets ran several articles of incidents with children having their hand stamped with "I need lunch money" or "overdue lunch bill." More attention is being given to eliminating shaming practices for children who cannot afford school lunches, but there is still much work that can be done in this area. The U.S. Agriculture Department oversees the school lunch program and "does not prohibit lunch shaming practices," but it does recommend a list of "preferred alternatives" to compel parents to pay (Siegel, 2017).

Notifying families about their rights when a student becomes homeless is an area that should be relatively easy to do. If the school is unaware of who might need the mandated services under the McKinney-Vento Act, and is unable to provide those services to an individual student directly, then the school and district should have ease of access to the information in multiple languages and in multiple forms. The district and school websites could be more user-friendly. Bulletins, pamphlets, and other publications can be readily available at school sites in public areas. Schools can hold specialized information sessions during special events and public meetings when parents attend.

Another area that the LAUSD may want to consider examining is its pay-to-play practices. A few of the children interviewed talked about how they could no longer participate in the activities they loved. Their families could not afford to pay the fees associated with participating in school activities such as sports and cheer. Costs of activities that used to be covered by public schools in the past are now passed along to the families in the form of participation fees. The Griffon Learning Center organization became concerned about pay-to-

play practices and created scholarships to assist homeless youth with the cost of such activities. Pay-to-play practices are becoming more of a problem to low-income families, further widening the gap of those who can participate in extracurricular activities and those who cannot. For individuals who desire to go on to postsecondary education, extracurricular activities are an important part of their application portfolio; by reducing access to extracurricular activities through pay-to-play practices, some students may continue to face an even more difficult road to college.

Homeless students are supposed to be able to continue attending their home school of origin, but due to their circumstances surrounding homelessness it may be difficult to attend the school of origin without significant support from the school. Under the McKinney-Vento Act, schools and school districts, such as LAUSD, are supposed to provide those supports. One support not specifically mentioned as a requirement of the law is giving partial credit for completed coursework. In most high schools, students must complete a full semester, including a final exam, to earn the units for the course. However, if a high school student has to transfer out from one school and go to another school due to situations related to homelessness, the school could give the student some units proportional to the amount of the coursework completed. Having partial credit may encourage students to continue with their studies and increase the number of homeless students completing their high school coursework. Perhaps also offering competency tests in specific subject areas and giving student credit accordingly when they have missed school due to homelessness. The current system in LAUSD does not have these options available, which can create challenges for students. Similar considerations of partial credit could be made for younger students, preventing retention and increasing promotion rates if they are able to show academic competency.

For Politicians

Homelessness and poverty affect not only those who are experiencing homelessness firsthand, but entire communities. Politicians should consider making ending homelessness and poverty a priority. There are laws in place to protect homeless children and ensure they get a free and equal education. Yet these statutes and laws are not being carried out as they were intended. Politicians should promote the enforcement and maintenance and provide the resources for the laws and programs that are already established and examine their

effectiveness. If something is not working, then the legislature needs to find a way to change it so that more people are taken out of states of homelessness, and, eventually, poverty. In other words, politicians, regardless of where they serve, should examine how to provide more resources to end homelessness in the United States.

One way that politicians can become more aware is by spending time in their electorates and visiting the people that they represent, including the homeless. Once politicians have spent time in their district, they may see firsthand what the people's experiences are, which may lead to better decision making. For example, politicians may see how certain laws actually harass the homeless and poor instead of providing a safer community. Politicians may see that providing free public amenities such as toilets, showers, and laundry facilities in areas with high homeless populations can improve a community rather than attempting to hide its members or pushing them into other districts. After seeing where they homeless live, politicians may want to provide housing in those areas, both temporary and long-term.

For the Participants

Both the adults and the youth interviewed spoke about their experiences and perceptions surrounding the Griffon Learning Center. In doing so, they reflected and commented upon the microcosm of being homeless in Los Angeles and the challenges surrounding their situations exposing some of their traumas. They addressed how the Griffon Learning Center is attempting to meet the educational and social needs of the homeless children they serve. They also accepted the responsibility of representing others, whether staff members, volunteers, or homeless youth, as they presented their ideas and experiences.

In the end, the staff and volunteers seemed to become more aware of the mission and purpose of the organization as well as the services it offers to homeless youth. They reflected upon why they are part of the organization, what they have done while at the Griffon Learning Center, what they have provided the homeless children they work with, and their hopes for the children's futures. However, one staff member spoke of her own difficulty in coping with the realities of working with homeless children. Instead of transferring positions within the organization, she ended up leaving the organization in early 2017. It is not clear whether this study contributed to her decision to leave.

The students looked back at their experiences and why they went to the Griffon Learning Center. They discussed the benefits they had received while there, both academic and social-emotional. For many of the students, it seemed as if talking about their experiences at the Griffon Learning Center made them conscience of how much they appreciated the Griffon Learning Center, its people, and that they were part of a community. One teenager interviewed told the researcher at the Christmas party that she was more motivated to take the GED in December 2016 rather than wait until March 2017 because she had declared it as a goal in the interview. All the participants seemed to be happy to have participated in the study and to be at the Griffon Learning Center.

Future Research

This qualitative study explored how one organization that assists homeless youth attempts to meet the perceived educational and social needs of homeless children and teens in Southern California. The needs of homeless youth encompass many other needs beyond the scope of the definition of at-risk youth. The Griffon Learning Center's purpose has attracted thousands of volunteers and staff members each year to take up the task and create a variety of programs and services that seek to not only support homeless children in their learning, but also support them emotionally, and prepare them for their future endeavors. Because this study was limited in scope and time, and due to the continued increase in the population of homeless youth, more research about this organization and other such institutions could benefit mobile schools, learning centers, long-distance or online learning programs, schools, and any entity attempting to meet the educational and social needs of homeless youth. Research should focus on what makes homeless youth similar and different from other at-risk youth regarding their educational needs.

This research could contribute to the formation and utilization of curriculum, best practices, training, and additional resources. Homeless studies that concentrate of the difference between the needs of accompanied homeless youth versus unaccompanied homeless youth would also be relevant as the population of both types of homeless minors continues to increase. Additionally, studies that look closer at what aspects of the McKinney-Vento Act and the subsequent No Child Left Behind and Every Student Succeeds Act are meeting the intended needs of the legislation and what pieces need to be reorganized to fulfil the law's intent.

My Final Reflection

This has been a personally salient experience for me, the researcher. Throughout the process of preparing for this study and volunteering, I encountered many obstacles that could have deterred me from moving forward. Initially, I had to fight my own demons of being back in a place where I was reminded of such pain, loneliness, fear, hunger, depression, and uncertainty as a child. During my time at the case study site, I was accosted numerous times. I was asked if I was looking for “company” or if I wanted to “party.” I was offered drugs and asked for money. At one point, I was followed by two nefarious-looking individuals and dodged them by going into a bodega. My car was broken into, and money and other items were stolen. Walking around the neighborhood, I felt threatened. It got to the point where my husband would drop me off in front of the Griffon Learning Center, watch me go inside, and then later pick me up, to avoid some of my earlier experiences. Even though I was a familiar face, I was still an outsider to those who were not part of the Griffon Learning Center. Over time, I was accepted by the children and teens I worked with.

Some of the things I noticed that have changed since my childhood are the increased number of homeless families and the overall increase in homeless people in such a concentrated area over the past 30 years. Drugs are much more prevalent, easier to obtain, and cheaper than in the 1980s. People are more open about using drugs on the streets in front of others. Although many people go down into the sewers or make their way into libraries and other public spaces, the sheer number of homeless people out on the streets during the day is devastating. There are ordinances in place restricting tents from being erected during the day, but many stay pitched as there are limited law enforcement officials who can be dedicated to homeless ordinances in the area. Unless walking in one of the gentrified areas of the district, one needs to be careful where he/she steps as the sidewalks have human waste, trash, and people literally lying down on the cement.

Once I started volunteering at the Griffon Learning Center, I was confronted by the heavy emotional burden of working with children and youth in crisis. I would cry in the car on my way home nearly every time I volunteered in the beginning. It got to the point where I need to start attending psychological counseling as the experiences of working with homeless youth became overwhelming. Once I switched from being a volunteer to a participant observer, I had to shift my focus to be a researcher. For a while, the researcher’s mindset helped to

provide a bit of an emotional divide, but once the interview process began, I was once again emotionally unprepared for the narratives of the children and youth I interviewed. Sometimes their stories would remind me of things that had happened to me; in other instances, I was overwhelmed by the depravity of humanity. After listening to stories of young people suffering through experiences of being bullied by adults and peers, I had a myriad of emotions. Those who are supposed to care for and educate children are telling them that they are worthless, if not literally then by their actions or lack thereof. The challenges that many of the homeless children face on a day-to-day basis just to get to and from school are enough to discourage them from wanting to go to school, yet they do. I had a genuine fear for the safety of these children. I became angry at teachers who had bullied their students or stood by and let others taunt their students. I became disappointed in an educational system that would allow these youth to fall through the cracks and not provide the support they needed. I was livid at politicians and bureaucrats for focusing on the wrong things and being more concerned with the next election than with the needs of the people in their district. I was grateful that a place like the Griffon Learning Center exists and that there are numerous people who do care and are trying to do something to better the lives of those in their community.

Despite my own emotional and logistical challenges, this study needed to be completed to give a voice to this unique population. Just because someone is homeless does not mean that they are “no bodies.” These are children and youth worthy of being treated just like every other child. They deserve to have the same opportunities for a free and equal education as their housed peers. They are worthy of love, compassion, understanding, and human decency. Homeless children and youths rarely have any control over their circumstances. It is the entire community’s responsibility to assist all children and youths. If I could say anything to the President of the United States, the members of the United States House of Representatives, and the United States Senate, and to members of the United States Supreme Court, it would be to make ending homelessness and poverty in the United States a priority, and to care for all the children of the country whether they are documented or not.

Conclusion

Chapters 1 and 2 introduced the study. They discussed the purpose and significance of such a study. They examined the history of homelessness in the United States and its impact upon

children. Chapter 2 went more in depth, addressing the societal problem of homelessness. Local and federal mandates were analyzed and the role of the government as it pertains to protecting homeless youth was discussed. Previous homeless studies were discussed.

Chapter 3 outlined the qualitative case study design for the study that was conducted to answer the research questions:

1. According to the perceptions of the staff and volunteers, how does the mobile school and youth learning center organization meet the educational and social needs of the homeless children and their families whom they serve?
2. According to the perceptions of the children whom they serve, how does the mobile school and youth learning center organization meet their educational and social needs?

The study took place at one site in Downtown Los Angeles of a mobile school and youth learning center organization, the Griffon Learning Center. It focused on the perceived educational and social needs of homeless youth from the perspective of the staff, volunteers, and homeless students at the Griffon Learning Center. The data collected included observations, interviews, documents, and media.

Chapter 4 detailed the beliefs and experiences of homeless children who utilized the services of a mobile school and youth learning center organization in Downtown Los Angeles as well as those of the staff and volunteers. By using a multistep inductive analysis (Hatch, 2002), five themes emerged from the data collected: (a) hopelessness and oppression, (b) culture of invisibility and despair, (c) safety, (d) emerging hope, and (e) political climate for change. The beliefs and experiences of those interviewed provided an insight into the culture of homeless children in Los Angeles and the culture of a mobile school and youth learning center organization.

Chapter Summary

In conclusion, Chapter 5 provided a summary of the findings and answered the research questions. It analyzed the findings and provided implications of the findings and recommendations for the future. This study provided the researcher with the opportunity to gain a more intimate knowledge of a mobile school and learning center organization. Even though the data focused on one site within the organization, it enabled the researcher to see

the inner workings of such an entity and its impact from the perspective of those who work and volunteer for the organization as well as those it is supposed to serve. With this knowledge, the researcher hopes to build upon other research and work to connect like organizations with each other to become a more powerful force at providing a holistic experience for homeless youth and their families. The researcher has a renewed motivation to establish or extend a nonprofit organization specifically designed to assist homeless youth with completing their secondary education and obtaining a postsecondary education to break the cycle of homelessness for themselves and their families.

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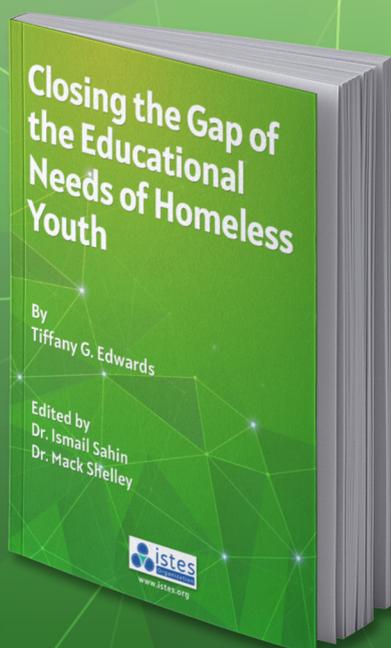
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The number of homeless children and youth in the United States is on the rise (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2016). Between 2016 and 2017 in the Los Angeles County Homeless Count, there was a 41% increase in the number of homeless minors (The Los Angeles Service Authority, 2017). Education is key to bringing people out of poverty and ending the cycle of homelessness.

Using a socio-psychological lens, this book presents a case study that examined the perceptions of six of the staff and volunteers at one site of the Griffon Learning Center, an organization trying to close the educational gaps of homeless children and youth. It also includes the perspectives of 12 children and youth who utilized their services. The data of this study include interviews, observations of a participant observer, ethnographic field notes, journal reflections, and document analysis. An examination of the relevant literature is included.

Although this study cannot end the cycle of homelessness, it hopes to shed light on the issue and makes recommendations to organizations, school districts, politicians and legislatures, and educational researchers.



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