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**CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE RESILIENCE OF
FOSTER CARE GRADUATES**

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Bachelor of Arts, State University of New York, Binghamton, 1962
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THESIS

Submitted to the Faculty of Social Work

In partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Social Work
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1994

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation reports on a study undertaken to learn, from young adults doing well in the community after being graduated from lengthy periods of out-of-home-care, what these veterans named as contributions of the system to their resilience.

In-depth interviews with nineteen successful long-term child welfare graduates have produced over five hundred pages of transcribed interview data, which has been coded, analyzed and the findings from which are presented in this report. The findings are necessarily based on a specific definition of "successful" employed in conceptualizing the project and gathering the sample which, although it attempts to minimize class bias nonetheless is necessarily reflected in the study's findings.

Findings of significance include the following: 1) participants exhibited high levels of social responsiveness and cooperation, 2) they reported strong feelings of being different from "normal" children raised in their biological families and they experienced stigmatization, 3) referrals came disproportionately from the PARC program (an independence preparation center) as compared with all other geographic and functional areas of the two major child welfare agencies involved in the study, and 4) positive interventions in young graduates' lives happened throughout childhood and early adulthood, suggesting that there is never a time to say "it's too late" to make contact with the young adult client.

Contributions to resilience named by participants fall into five general categories. They are: (1) pathfinders and role models, (2) experiences that raise and maintain self-esteem and self-efficacy, (3) exposure to opportunities, (4) patterns of protective thinking, and (5) community memberships.

Implications derived from these findings include the need to systematically and planfully include these aids to resilience with all youngsters in out-of-home care. Practice with youngsters in care needs to be steadily and consistently informed by the experience of young adults who have graduated from care, as well as those still living in foster or group settings. Young people who do not have families to whom they will return are entitled to have continued parental support in the same way young adults living in their families receive some instrumental and affective support from their parents despite chronological age.

It is suggested that stigmatization of youngsters who have lived in out-of-home care should be acknowledged and studied along with the meaning behind society's social construction of the role of "foster child" and the reverence afforded the biological family.

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Health and Welfare Canada, through their award of a National Welfare Fellowship, helped me, financially, to pursue my doctoral studies in general, and this research project as a portion of those studies. J. Evariste Theriault, Consultant with the National Welfare Fellowships, was supportive of the project and effective in linking me with others interested in my area of study.

I cannot sufficiently express my gratitude to the foster care veterans who took part in this study including the nineteen participants, other young adult graduates who responded to the findings, and old friends who have always been generous enough to share their experiences and insights about out-of-home care. Their willing participation in this project has been central to the work, and also to my personal growth and development as a researcher and practitioner.

Administrators at the Children's Aid Society and Catholic Children's Aid Society of Metropolitan Toronto were kind enough to allow me entrance into their organizations for the purpose of inviting referrals for participation in the study. I hope the colleagues who made the actual referrals from their caseloads, and also those who did so from the Pape Avenue Resource Center, will accept my warmest greetings and acknowledgment. They are practitioners who focus on the strengths in young people and believe in the importance of the interaction between practice and research for informing both. I hope they will find aspects of this report useful to them in their very significant and challenging work.

To my Advisor, Professor Bob Basso, for guiding me through the research and dissertation process, Professor Anne Westhues, for being an affirming and enabling colleague, Professor Mark Pancer, for so willingly and enthusiastically reading and responding to the work from a point of view outside of social work, and to Professor Amy Rossiter, whose keen reading and intellectual challenge made me really stretch, go my congratulations to a fine dissertation committee! Their contributions will be remembered fondly.

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INTRODUCTION

When I began this project, I was primarily interested in the topic of building resilience in children and young adults. Specifically, I hoped to gain some insight into the experiences and relationships that helped build resilience in youngsters who had experienced potentially destructive life circumstances. Perhaps because of my professional history in the child welfare field, where I observed that the experience of severe adversity is clearly established in the lives of youngsters raised in out-of-home-care, the potential of a study based on resiliency among child welfare graduates was evident. The study was designed to learn from well functioning young adults, at the end of their tenure in out-of-home-care, what they recollected and understood to be the factors that helped them become who they were.

As the research interviews ensued, however, I became increasingly impressed with the enormity of the challenge that had been successfully accepted by most of the study's participants and anticipated by others, that is, to become independent adults without the help and support of family ties. The roles filled and supports offered by family are crucial to all of us, although the definition of family is changing to reflect the many configurations of human relationship that meet the variety of our needs. Several of the most inclusive definitions of the family offered to date include this 1992 approach from the Vanier Institute of the Family, a definition which emphasizes the functions performed by the family:

Any combination of two or more persons who are bound together by ties of mutual consent, birth and/or adoption/placement and who, together, assume responsibilities for variant combinations of some of the following: 1) physical maintenance and care of group members; 2) addition of new members through procreation or adoption; 3) socialization of children; 4) social control of members; 5) production, consumption and distribution of goods and services; and 6) affective nurturance (Vanier Institute, 1992, p.8).

The definition of family included in the Ontario Ministry of Education's 1987 outline for the teaching of family life studies in the secondary schools focuses on the communal, psychological and economic contributions families make to the individual:

The family is a social unit of interacting persons who make commitments, assume responsibilities, nurture each other, become socialized, transmit cultural and religious values, and share resources over time (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1987, p.4).

These very comprehensive definitions of family and its functions help emphasize the relative abyss facing young out-of-home-care graduates, whether or not they are able to realize the enormity of their challenge, as they face independence without family to provide the affective and instrumental supports potentially emanating from the family constellation.

There were 10,008 children in care of children's aid societies in Ontario on June 1, 1993. Fifty-three percent of these youngsters were thirteen years of age and over. This figure can be compared with the thirty percent of youngsters in care in 1969 who were thirteen years and over, suggesting the increasing emphasis in child welfare practice on keeping family units together. Also, there is a desperate need for appropriate foster, group home and residential treatment settings that would enable the system to provide alternatives for some youngsters who require specialized and residential caring at an early age, but who are unable, in the present resource configuration, to obtain that caring. Of course, other factors also contribute to the increasing proportion of older children and youth in out-of-home-care. Older children cost more to raise, and the majority of child welfare clients are poor, although "...the present system does not address their poverty or the reasons for it." (Callahan, 1993, p.185) These beleaguered, largely woman-led, family units may be unable to withstand the force and stress created by the growing needs of older children, both for material goods and for a parental presence and supervision when there is a necessity to leave the home to make even a meager living. Older children who are victimized by adults in their environment, moreover, may make their plight known to others as they get older and find some reason to trust adults in the school or the community. Children and youths who are sent to Canada by their families in impoverished or war-torn countries are also represented in the statistic representing older youngsters in out-of-home-care, when extended kinship or ethnic associations fall short of providing for the young person's growing needs.

Each year, in Ontario, hundreds of youths and young adults are discharged from child welfare care having reached the age at which the province is no longer charged with the responsibility for looking after them. This may occur when the child is sixteen, but care is often extended to the age of eighteen and, under the extended care and maintenance contracts offered by some agencies, care may be extended to age twenty-one where the young person is enrolled in a college or university program for which the security of child welfare support will help ensure successful completion. When these young people leave child welfare care, they are said to be graduated or discharged from care, having reached independence or emancipation.

For many of these young people, the familial and societal problems that made it impossible for their biological parents to raise them still exist at the time of discharge and are therefore considered to be permanent impediments to going home. In some instances, the conditions that contributed to the child's need for care have been somewhat ameliorated, but other developments in the lives of child and adult, coupled with the distancing inherent in a child's placement in out-of-home-care, have made it impossible for the young person to go home again. For some, even visiting with family members is a painful and avoided experience. For others, some visiting takes place, but family members do not provide the kinds of material or emotional support that come to mind when we think of family. The challenges these young adults face are enormous because they are often ill-equipped, educationally and emotionally, to accomplish the tasks that loom large even for much better prepared young adults, that is, to establish and maintain an adult life without the instrumental and affective support provided by family.

This consideration of one set of hurdles facing young graduates of out-of-home-care leads to a question increasingly posed by those in the child welfare area. What are the outcomes from out-of-home-care for these young people, and what do we expect to see in the young people who are discharged from care? Some analysts believe the child welfare system is a reflection of our class system, deriving its clients from the poorest and least powerful among us, and reinforcing their under class position through the experience of substitute care.

Prevailing Child Welfare policies and services are not tools toward social transformation, and, verbalized goals to the contrary, they have little to do with facilitating the free and full development of children in their care (Gil, 1985, p.31).

Others who take a more benign, non-critical approach to the system that provides child welfare services seem to calibrate a good outcome with a combination of financial independence and psychological well-being.

The most important objective for children who will reach emancipation in the foster care system is the development of the child into a mature and independent adult who is not supported by the welfare system. The failure of this objective is the root issue in the findings of unusually high percentages of former foster children among the homeless.... These children who will reach emancipation in foster care have an importance in the system that is larger than their relative numbers. ... Current policy-making has concentrated on the return of foster children to their parents, but many of this agency's children are in circumstances in which this is impossible or undesirable. They are scarred and troubled children who present great challenges to their caregivers. About one third of them develop into troubled or criminal adults. The resources required to minister to their needs are substantial, because they may be in care for long periods of times, including care during adulthood for those who become homeless or jailed criminals (Finch, S., Fanshel, D. & Grundy, J., 1991, p.29).

Whether the point of view about child welfare provision of care is benign or critical, those who have "walked the walk" have serious concerns about the outcomes emerging for a good many young adults, from the services provided in the past and up to today. Brian Raychaba, himself a ex-ward of the Catholic Children's Aid Society of Metropolitan Toronto, has written persuasively about the outcomes for young adults he has observed, met, known, and for whom he has spoken and written:

The general transience and residential instability of many youth out of care is (*sic*) the end result of various threads which, when amassed together, can be said to constitute the social and psychological tapestry of the after-care experience. Their generally poor economic situation, isolation from positive social support networks, and their lingering and unaddressed psychological and emotional difficulties are all facets of this reality. Many likely come to work in unskilled and inadequately paying forms of employment due to their lack of schooling and

occupational training as well as their deficiencies of work related social skills. Frequent residence change is also likely associated with a lack of money management skills needed to balance budgets and pay bills. Besides mental health problems which many of these youth carry with them from care, the negative aspects of emancipation — feelings of abandonment, loneliness and isolation — also make for a situation in which simply coping is difficult enough (Raychaba, 1988, pp. 65- 67).

The condition underlying the poor outcomes for foster care graduates described by Raychaba, as well as our failure to meet so many of the needs affecting children; has been identified as the absence of a "political constituency for child welfare." (Cailahan, 1985, p.23)

Along with child welfare care outcomes, another unanticipated issue of great importance in the accounts offered by study participants emerged from the data. This issue was the stigmatization of the foster child, as perceived by the young people themselves. For many of the participants, being separate and different from others with "normal" background was seen to be a life-long plague. Some questioned their own capacities to have and raise children because of their biological parents' histories. Others felt that being raised in care made it impossible for them to know who they were; living in someone else's family precluded contact with the culture and history of their own backgrounds. This "identity deep freeze," as I've named it, evokes visions of young people being fed, clothed, educated and otherwise cared for while their identities wait to be fed by life experiences that are more personally related to the young people themselves. Still others named a kind of shame associated with having been a foster child, a perceived prejudice against them which they've discovered in others and, probably much worse, a prejudice they've accepted about themselves and others. The degree of stigmatization experienced by different participants was moderated by the circumstances necessitating care, the presence or absence of a lasting, positive, identification with biological family members, and the culture in which the child was raised prior to care, its teachings concerning substitute parenting and its degree of acceptance of alternative child rearing arrangements.

How do we explain, when we consider the limited resources available to reach our most favoured outcomes for young people in care, the lack of political constituency evidenced in society, the degree of stigmatization at large in the culture, and the constantly eroding series of programs and

services available to people in need, that some young people emerge from child welfare care as well functioning, dynamic and self-actualizing young adults? In effect, the data show that what Michael Rutter suggested, in his work (Rutter, 1987) about the "protective processes" that buffer the individual against the poor outcomes connected with adversity, seems to obtain in the lives of successful foster care graduates. Experiences and relationships that raise and maintain self-esteem and provide opportunities to go off in new and interesting directions are essential. In addition, the centrality and variety of the use of path-finders and role models, both positive and negative, are underlined in these data.

Not predicted by Rutter, but noticeable in the study data, are reports of young people belonging to a great number of communities, all of which approximate, in some ways, the functions usually seen as belonging to family constellations. In addition to all these, there were habits of thought, ways of seeing the world and ideological constructs which seemed to yield positive results for the young people named by others as successful. Among these ways of thinking that I've called "protective thinking" are self reliance, positive explanatory style, feminist ideology and analysis, proving others wrong (in their negative assessments of one's self), self-assertiveness and the assertion of one's authentic self.

It would seem, both from the data and from additional evidence garnered when the same study participants were approached (two years after the initial interviewing, for the purpose of getting their comments concerning the study's findings) that concerning the protective processes which are essential for those emerging from the foster care experience specifically, the stigmatization/shame issue needs to be addressed by each young person. The child welfare system, even when it systematically plans and provides for each young person in care to be exposed to the protective processes mentioned above, falls short when it misses this very important socialization tool, that is, the ability of the young person to reframe, in a positive light, the career of the foster child. It is probably true, as well, that the very experience of emancipation that is, when we think about it, a very final rejection by the system that has undertaken to raise this small number of young people, requires re-thinking in light of the problems raised by out-of-home-care to the identity formation of each of them. The following story illustrates these points very well.

Running into Grace the other day, two years after I first interviewed her for my study of successfully launched foster care graduates, I was at first confused, then surprised, to see her at the Pape Area Resource Center. She had been one of the study participants who was not associated with PARC, the child welfare resource established to help child welfare graduates preparing for independence. PARC does business in a modest home, at the end of a block on Toronto's east side. One would never guess it was different from any other residence on the block, except for the front porch and steps usually inhabited by young people, ages sixteen to early twenties, in an ever-changing series of arrangements and faces. Sometimes all young women, sometimes young men, younger youths laughing, having fun and enjoying life in a carefree way, older young adults, looking and dressing more somberly, perhaps more business-like, and arguing about political issues and social change. Every size, shape, skin colour and point on the globe is reflected here; it is a pleasant and stimulating place to be.

PARC is a resource established and maintained by both the Children's Aid Society of Metropolitan Toronto and the Catholic Children's Aid Society, for the purposes of preparing young people in out-of-home-care for independence, and to serve as an on-going resource for already independent young adults for whom PARC is "family." About two hundred young adults obtained some kind of service from this resource center in 1993. The instrumental supports offered by PARC include job searches, employment preparation, opportunities to try out new skills, help with filling in OSAP applications and other applications and forms, as well as resumés and other papers necessary for getting on in financial, educational and employment opportunities. PARC housing, with rents geared to income, is an essential service for many of the young people who will congregate on its steps. Young people also meet in groups at PARC, to discuss important issues often related to life in care, life after care, and other areas of social and emotional importance. There has been a group devoted to feminism, its discourse and its relationship to the young women attending. One regular group is composed of older young adults who meet regularly to plan advocacy for youngsters in care, to promote the well being of themselves and others, and to develop an effective methodology for intervening in social policy effecting youth in care and after graduation from care.

Grace, one of my research participants, had been a very successful secondary school student when we first met after she was referred for my study. The accomplished and charming young woman had been planning a university career, a future in the areas of law or teaching, continuing with her musical and athletic interests, and developing more trusting and perhaps more intimate ways of relating to relevant others. When she was interviewed, Grace had never heard of PARC, and like ten of the participants (around half) of my study, she seemed to have arrived in a good space without the need for services offered by an organization like PARC. She was raised in one foster home in the suburbs and had a group of long-standing friends, most of whom had been friends of hers from elementary school years, in the gifted stream for youngsters identified as talented students. Very few of her friends and acquaintances knew about her history, her mentally ill and disappeared mother, the early years of unhappiness at home, and that Grace lived in a foster home with foster parents. These were aspects of her life she did not share easily, not trusting others to process the information in ways that would be favourable to her.

At this chance meeting Grace was pleased to see me, remembered who I was with a minimum of reminding, told me proudly that her first year at one of Ontario's highly rated universities had been a great success and that she was enjoying university life immensely. But most important, she said, was the fact that her whole life had changed for the better since she'd become associated with PARC, the setting where I was so surprised to find her. Serendipitously, Grace had found PARC when she was advised to go there in search of a summer job after her first year at university. She took the job, helping out at PARC, and was invited to join the Senior Network Group, a group of graduated young adults who were living independently in Toronto, either attending university or college, or working, caring for their families, or some combination of the three. She didn't feel, at first, that a group like this one seemed to hold any promise or meaning for her. When she started attending, however, her view changed completely. "It was the first time I was ever with a group of people where I didn't have to explain."

This was a very powerful experience for Grace, one that seems to have helped her integrate the various parts of herself, including the foster child and the successful student and popular, charming, young woman. For the first time, she feels truly comfortable about herself. When asked, by me, to

comment on the difference in her own perceptions two years ago and today, she replied, "When you interviewed me, I didn't know what I was missing." I looked over her original transcript to see if Grace had mentioned anything that would communicate the topic of unfinished business, the tremendous need she had to reframe her experience as a foster child. She hadn't; but she had mentioned that the other side of her strong sense of being self-reliant was her distance from others. This was disturbing to her, and perhaps her experience with people who have had the same experiences, who know what it means to grow up in foster care, who can support one another and advocate for the younger ones coming up, will increase Grace's ability to get close to others and allow them to know her.

It would seem, from this story and from the findings described later on, that young people become more resilient because of a variety of planned and chance experiences and relationships that heighten self-esteem, increase mastery, support the person and provide enough confidence to ensure that opportunities that are offered can be taken advantage of. Specifically, for young people in out-of-home-care, however, it seems essential that the child welfare system provide each one with the ammunition necessary to reframe his or her perception of what it means to be a foster child.

This dissertation, describing the study of experiences and relationships which have strengthened foster care graduates and contributed to their well-being, is divided into four substantive chapters. The first chapter presents the theoretical background for the study, with emphasis on concepts and research done in the areas of resilience in children and youth, resilience in children and youth who come from disadvantaged circumstances, the considerations related to successful outcomes in out-of-home-care, and the work which has been accomplished in outlining the needs of foster children as they near and pass through emancipation. The second chapter introduces the original and the emergent approaches, the conceptualization and design, and the methodology employed in the study. The study's findings are conveyed in the third chapter, which contains quite a lot of transcribed material from the interviews, material which is included to provide examples establishing the strength and depth of each of the findings. The fourth chapter takes the reader through a summary of the study's findings, a discussion of those findings in light of what is already established in the field with respect to

each finding, and an exploration of the relevance of these findings for practice, policy and research in the area.

All the language used in the study is commonly employed and understood; the specific meanings attached to phrases frequently used in the text are explained here. The phrases **“successfully launched”** young adult and **“successful graduate”** are used to refer to young adults who moved from foster care into independent life who work, attend school or training, or both. An alternative to these activities within the definition is parenting a child or children in a loving and caring way, at home. The successful graduate has a permanent home, at least one other person with whom to share life's problems and joys, and friends or acquaintances with whom to socialize. He or she develops interests, hobbies or activities that animate, feels basically positive about her/his self and in some control of her/his future. Finally, the successfully launched young adult or successful graduate exhibits some self-reflectiveness and self knowledge.

The phrase **out-of-home-care** refers here to all the forms of governmentally initiated and maintained parenting required for children and youth whose original biological family unit is unable to provide care. Extended family care financially supported by the government, foster family care, group home care, residential treatment home care and “independent living” situations (where youths approaching independence but still in the care of the child welfare authorities live together with an older role model who guides and advises) all come under the heading of out-of-home-care. The phrase is used by some writers in the field today, and is preferred usage by the Child Welfare League of America in its publications.

As an alternative to the term “substitute care,” out-of-home-care offers several conceptual benefits. The phrase, which is value free and implies only a difference in the premise of the setting in which the child receives care and takes part in every day home life, also does not claim that this care is a substitute for growing up in one's biological family. Out of home care is often an improvement in some important ways and usually it is a source of some loss and it requires major adjustments in the child's life and ability to function, but it can't be considered a “substitute” because it is a distinctly different experience.

The young adults involved in this study are called “respondents” and “participants.” These terms were chosen in preference to several others that might have been used, for example, “subjects” or “informants.” The choice of one term over another is not executed randomly, but with acknowledgment of the association of each term with a particular kind of study being contemplated or undertaken. The term “subjects” is usually employed in research where a hypothesis brought to the study by the researcher is to be confirmed or nullified on the basis of the subject’s responses to the researcher’s questions, framed in the researcher’s words. “Informants” are, on the other hand, usually cognizant with, being part of, a culture about which the researcher is essentially naive. The researcher, therefore, expects to work with the informant, in the informant’s culture, using the language or dialect the informant knows, to learn about the informant’s life and culture from the ground up, and with few preconceived ideas. The respondent is generally a person who answers questions formulated by, and in the language and conceptual framework of the researcher, although the questions may allow for a wide range of responses and, indeed, the scope and direction of the research may emerge from the respondent’s contributions (Spradley, 1979). The use of the phrase “participants” was undertaken both to vary the usage in the text and because this phrase also relates to the tenor of the study interview itself, which was based on mutual respect, equality between the participants, and the sensed desire of both researcher and participant to contribute to the experience.

THEORETICAL AND EMPIRICAL BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to review relevant sources in the professional literature on the factors affecting life outcomes for children and youth. I will introduce the terms used in the study, along with an account of the research associated with the use of these terms. The small but diverse body of work that sets the stage for the study has been produced by researchers and analysts from a variety of disciplines, including psychology, psychiatry, child development, sociology and social work.

Protective factors, protective mechanisms, protective processes, invulnerability and resilience are signified as the positive factors in this literature, each having to do with averting the potential damage to the young person from the negative factors, signified by terms such as risk factors, vulnerability, stressful life events and adversity.

The following pages outline a literature which reflects the concerns of those interested in maximization of positive outcomes for children who have been exposed to conditions associated with trauma or deficit. The literature reflects a beginning interest in the risks inherent in some adverse experiences of children, a consideration of the multiplicity of outcomes possible from exposure to the same adversities, and the suggestion that although we may be able to predict outcomes from what we know about exposure to risk in statistical terms, there is a great deal to be learned from an intensive study of the biographies of individuals. There are differences among cases, and for some children who are exposed to high risk experiences there is evidence of good coping, competency and well-being.

In the first part of the review, the youngsters bearing the signs of positive adaptation and strength are described as exceptional with respect to their native strength and invulnerability. Later, the literature reflects an interest in more than an inborn imperviousness to life's stresses, and moves to an examination of the ways in which the environment, the family and the community can help the child develop strength against the ill-effects of high risk experiences encountered earlier. Conceptualizations of the factors inherent in these positive, remedial situations are discussed, followed by

theories of a catalytic nature, in which the high risk events are seen to be worked upon or ameliorated by protective mechanisms or processes.

Examples of high risk experiences or factors which have, nonetheless, produced competent and caring youngsters and young adults follow, with an examination of studies on black youngsters born and raised in disadvantaged inner-city neighbourhoods in the United States, on children of divorced parents, on a large sample of Hawaiian children born into poverty and with other high risk familial and personal factors as well, and on youngsters exposed to maltreatment in their biological families. Some ideas about what configuration of relationships, experiences and supports has helped these children and youth are synthesized from the research findings.

The small and varied literature concerned with young people who have experienced severe difficulties in their biological families, followed by out-of-home-care in institutional, group and foster home settings, is reported on next in order to learn what is known about the experience of out-of-home-care and how its graduates have fared.

And finally, having suggested that there is an association between how well young people cope at the time they are emancipated from out-of-home-care and their subsequent coping and levels of well-being in early adulthood, the chapter regards a cross section of the literature related to preparation of youth for independence. An exploration follows, of what those involved with designing independence programs and those who have experienced them have to say about what is required in the strengthening of young people for the world following out-of-home-care.

We will have delved into this content in order to learn what is known about how young people come out of adversity, and what seems to help them develop resilience. This knowledge will set the stage for the central focus of this research, what competent and successful young adults who have graduated from out-of-home-care can tell us about the contributions to their strength from experiences and relationships in the caring arena and in the community. Can we detect an interplay between the child's pre-care experiences and specified aspects of the in-care experience which have led to positive outcomes? In what ways are the child's sex, age, minority or ethnic community affiliation, immigration history, or class background related to the kind of care experienced, and the eventual condition of the young adult at the time of emancipation? What contributions to these young adults' well-

being did foster parents make? And what can we learn about how social workers and child care workers, teachers, and volunteers can be helpful and how they can detract from a youngster's well-being?

Risk, Vulnerability, and Adversity

The notion of **risk** in human experience connotes the hazard associated with an individual factor or experience or set of factors or experiences. Risk has been experienced uniquely by every research study participant, client, and individual. A factor or experience which places one person at high risk for damaging repercussions may "roll off the back" of someone else, based on differences among individuals with respect to 1) how they perceive the experience or factor, 2) their genetic predisposition, and 3) the psychosocial environment in which they grow and live (Anthony, 1987, p.4). Risk research with respect to children has focused primarily on those at risk of experiencing the schizophrenic and affective disorders of their parents and the socio-behavioural maladaptions connected with community disadvantage, family psychopathology and family and community criminality,

Vulnerability as a concept came to prominence in both animal and human studies, and relates to the tendency of an individual or group, because of biological, perceptual and environmental elements, to react to factors or events. This concept was demonstrated metaphorically by Anthony in the example of three dolls, one made of glass, one of plastic and one of steel. When the three were subjected to the blows of a hammer, the glass doll, the most vulnerable, smashed to bits. The plastic doll, while not being destroyed, carried scars from the experience; but the third doll made of steel was not vulnerable to the assault, being made of exceedingly strong stuff. After covering each doll with protective material, analogous to the protection provided by good environmental circumstances associated with effective preventive programs, the dolls struck subsequently by the same hammer showed far fewer ill effects (Anthony, 1974).

The association of risk for emotional ills with difficult life experiences, or **adversities**, was made by Pinel, approximately two centuries ago, when he asked his psychiatric patients, as the very first question in taking the clinical history, "Have you suffered vexation, grief or reverse of fortune?" (Rutter, 1985, p.598) That experiences in early life have effects on the child's

later well-being has been universally accepted in the children's mental health field. Adversity in early life has long been associated with psychological and social difficulties in later life, and can be seen to be a risk factor. John Bowlby's 1951 World Health Organization report on Medical Care and Mental Health made the connections between deprivation of love and care in the early years and anti-social behaviour in adolescence and adulthood (Bowlby, 1965).

The field of children's mental health has long focused on the topic of children's vulnerability to psychopathology. Bleuler's work, early in the twentieth century, on the incidence and manifestations of schizophrenia in adolescents suggested a variability of outcome for the youngsters, leading to the position that each case should be studied individually for the purpose of learning what factors, genetic and social, had a bearing on the development of the disease (Garnezy, 1987). Research in this area has been on-going and rich in its complexity and variety throughout this century. The contributions of data and questions from the areas of genetics, family interaction, child development, childhood coping and competency, ego development and others have told us a great deal about children at risk for the development of schizophrenia, as well as the more general areas of children's vulnerability to stress and levels of competence. Extensive studies undertaken at the University of Minnesota have shown that exposure to stressful life events, intellectual functioning, general competency, ability to engage with others and activities, and tendencies towards disruptiveness were all related to the socio-economic status of the child's family, and familial stability, cohesiveness and organization (Garnezy, 1987).

Other risk factors in the family and home environment have been identified as the result of epidemiological studies (Rutter, Cox, Tuping, Berger & Yule, 1975, Rutter, Yule, Quinton, Rowlands, Yule & Berger, 1975, Rutter, 1986) and have been linked with childhood social and psychological dysfunction. These conditions include marital discord, father's low-skilled or non-skilled employment, familial overcrowding, paternal criminal behaviour, maternal mental illness, and the child's admission to out-of-home-care. The child exposed to two or more of these adversities is said to be at four times the risk of suffering childhood psychological distress, and as the number of risk factors reaches four, and the four have the opportunity to interact with

one another, the likelihood of distress can be ten times that of the child exposed to only one or none of the identified risk factors (Rutter, 1979).

Underlining Rutter's findings with respect to the numbers and interplay of risk factors and their potential thereby to magnify the hazards in the lives of children, Schorr (1988) pointed to the work of Escalona (1982), who clinically followed premature babies born in New York City for three years. Included in her studies were the infants who were both premature and born to families of low socio-economic circumstances, and those who were premature and born to families of more secure circumstances. She found a strong association between middle-class status and buffering against the vulnerabilities associated with prematurity.

Researchers who study individuals exposed to biological risk factors and stressful life events have gone through several stages in their approach to understanding vulnerability and resiliency. First, they gave emphasis to the negative developmental outcomes associated with a single risk factor such as low birth weight, or with a stressful life events, such as the prolonged absence of a parent. They then shifted from this "main effect" model of risk research to one that considered interactional effects among multiple stressors, such as the co-occurrence of parental psychopathology (e.g. alcoholism or mental illness) and poverty. The most recent phase has been marked by a lessened emphasis on negative developmental outcomes and a greater focus on successful adaptation in spite of childhood adversity. For in contrast to retrospective studies, prospective longitudinal studies have fairly consistently shown that even among children exposed to potent risk factors it is unusual for more than half to develop serious disabilities or persistent problems (Werner & Smith, 1992, p.4).

A longitudinal study undertaken in 1955 by Werner and Smith followed almost 700 Hawaiians from pre-birth into adulthood, and the data accumulated from that study support the idea that risk factors do not have effects in a vacuum, but rather their manifestation in the life of the child or youth is determined largely by the other influences at play in the youngster's family and larger environment. A good example of this association is demonstrated by the group of children in the Werner and Smith study who were seen to have neurological problems during their first year of life. Those whose families met the indices for social disadvantage suffered more trouble

in their school years than those whose families were advantaged. The same held true where early physical problems were detected (Werner & Smith, 1982).

Schorr, in her powerful argument calling for the implementation of childhood prevention programs that have been shown to buffer against the risk factors in disadvantaged children's lives, explained that although the knowledge of risk factors at work does not allow us to predict outcome in any specific situation or individual, knowledge about the "risk factors" does make it possible for us to accurately assess probabilities. Explaining why these already proven preventive programs work, she stated:

...it takes more than a single risk factor to produce damaging outcomes. Lasting damage occurs when a child's constitutional vulnerabilities interact with an unsupportive environment. Lasting damage occurs when the elements of a child's environment—at home, at school, in the neighborhood—multiply each other's destructive effects. The implication is clear: The prevention of rotten outcomes is not a matter of all or nothing. It will make a difference if we can reduce the incidence of low birthweight or of vision defects, if the isolated mother is helped to respond to her difficult infant, if more children come to school better prepared, succeed in mastering fundamental academic skills, and have reason to look forward to a better future. It will be of value if we can eliminate one risk factor or two, even if others remain (Schorr, 1988, pp. 28-29).

In a recent review of research undertaken to understand the associations among family relationships, stressful life events and vulnerability to childhood psychopathology, Goodyer (1990) examined a multitude of studies in the broad category of familial social experiences which impact on the vulnerability to psychopathology in children. Examples of these social experiences which may effect youngsters negatively are adversities in parental histories, damaged relationships between parents and children, as well as social adversities affecting the whole family such as crowded and disadvantaged housing, and poverty. Specific life events and their effects on the vulnerability of children, for example, separations, birth of a sibling, divorce, bereavement, and a child's physical handicap have been studied, and the studies reviewed by Goodyer. Focusing on the work done with respect to separation in early childhood, Goodyer underlines the several

analytic distinctions found in the literature. Separations of short duration, undertaken in the context of a solid relationship between child and care taker and spanning a short period of time may result in transient manifestations of discomfort and anxiety, but these effects are short lived. Where the relationship between caretaker and child is troubled, however, the negative impact of separation seems to be magnified, indicating that a solid relationship creates a protection against the ill effects of separation. Where the relationship is troubled and, as an example, hospitalization of the child is necessary, professional intervention before and during the separation may avoid some of the pain and anxiety for parent and child while also facilitating both the necessary medical intervention and healing. Where repeated periods of separation form a chronic pattern for the child, the exposure to the adverse conditions connected with, for example, repeated periods of out-of-home-care seem to be associated with impairment of development. It is not indicated, however, that all instances of repeated parent-child separation or long-term separation are related to poor outcomes (Goodyer, pp.173-75).

Stressing the dearth of our understanding of the relationships among everyday difficulties, life events and family composition Goodyer wonders how family composition (for example, age of parents and disparity in ages between parents and among the children) influences the quantity and quality of events and difficulties at separate points in the family life cycle. In addition to life history studies, both prospective and retrospective, it is suggested that other research modes such as the use of observational techniques will tell us more about the relational and personal aspects of experiencing adverse life events. In summary, Goodyer states that

...stressful effects of both everyday difficulties and life events require better understanding in order to 1) promote and facilitate normal child development; 2) develop a better understanding of the causes of psychiatric disorder in young persons; and 3) to formulate social policy about family life and treatment strategies for disturbed children and their families (Goodyer, 1990, p. 187).

Invulnerability and resilience

While examining the potential threat posed by risk factors, researchers have been diverted and excited by the finding, generally observed in the field, that not all individuals, children and adults alike, are similarly influenced by adversity, whether constitutional, environmental or social. In 1970, in his address to the annual meeting of the American Orthopsychiatric Association in San Francisco, Norman Garmezy, whose University of Minnesota Child Competency research program had been studying children at risk for mental illness, stated:

In the study of high-risk and vulnerable children, we have come across another group of children whose prognosis could be viewed as unfavorable on the basis of familial or ecological factors but who upset our prediction tables and in childhood bear the visible indices that are hallmarks of competence: good peer relations, academic achievement, commitment to education and to purposive life goals, early and successful work histories... To these children I have assigned the name "invulnerables". School principals not only believe they can identify such children but they resonate to the hopefulness suggested by the concept of an "invulnerable" child... With our nation torn by strife between races and between social classes these "invulnerable" children remain the "keepers of the dream". Were we to study the forces that move such children to survival and to adaptation, the long-range benefits to our society might be far more significant than our many efforts to construct models of primary prevention designed to curtail the incidence of vulnerability (Garmezy: 1971, p. 114).

The dream of the constitutionally "**invulnerable child**", represented so evocatively by Anthony's three dolls, provoked a great deal of interest when they were presented at conferences and in print. Naturally, researchers and practitioners in the field of children's mental health were fascinated by the image of "invulnerable" children, those who were not negatively affected by even the most damaging of life's adversities. Bleuler (1978) noted that invulnerability took several different forms among the children of mentally ill parents. A group of superadjusted children of schizophrenics were very competent in their life's challenges, and tended to be emotionally withdrawn, introspective and distanced with other people. The children of manic depressives who were similarly competent were emotive

and charismatic in their adaptations, they were enjoyed by those around them, who learned to accept their excesses with grace. Anthony (1987) remarked, about the “invulnerables” noted by Bleuler, that they seemed to pay a price in the distant and isolated quality of their relationships, for their immunity from psychiatric illness.

Rutter took exception to the image of childhood “invulnerability” on three grounds: 1) stress-resistance is not absolute; it exists, in varying degree, in everyone, 2) elements of stress-resistance are both hereditary and acquired through experience, and 3) stress-resistance changes, in any one person, over time with respect to its quantity and its qualities (Rutter, 1985, p. 599). On these grounds the “invulnerable” child has been replaced in the literature, over time, by the more reality-based and dynamic concept of the “resilient child” (Masten & Garmezy, 1985; Luthar & Zigler, 1991; Rhodes and Hoey, 1994). The resilient child is the one whose coping and integrating capacity, strengthened by supportive and buffering factors and experiences, enables her or him to experience potentially damaging life events and circumstances and emerge from these adversities still able, and in some instances even strengthened, to meet the future. As well, the concept of resilience is a relative concept, with an implication in its usage that the quality and quantity of the attribute will change over time and has its foundation in both genetic and environmental sources (Mrazek & Mrazek, 1987).

Resiliency and Infancy

Each vulnerable infant is protected from the myriad stimuli in the environment by a number of buffering mechanisms. Buffering mechanisms or factors are those which mediate between the child and “high risk” factors, thereby ameliorating, to some degree, the potential for a harmful outcome. Anthony characterized the essential moderating of the environment and meeting of the infant’s needs for comfort, food, safety and affection as “good enough mothering” (Anthony, 1987). Bergman and Escalona developed a theory of compensation among the buffering systems at work to explain the infants they studied, who seemed to be born with special, and sometimes excruciating sensitivities to sensory stimuli. Noting the precocious development of musical appreciation, talking and walking in these infants, they considered some children may prematurely develop ego functioning as

an adaptation to gaps among the other natural protective systems (Bergman & Escalona: 1949).

Fascinated by the interaction between infants and mothers, and the very idiosyncratic reaction patterns each infant presents, Anneliese Korner (1971) studied many "normal" mothers and reviewed the literature in the field of neo-natal differences. She concluded that infants differ markedly from one another, that these differences should color the infant's earliest experiences, and that the differences, if responded to sensitively by mothers, will individualize the way each mother relates to her infant. The concept of "fit" between mother and infant is considered in several studies with respect to inherent temperaments (Thomas, Birch, Chess Hertzog, & Korn, 1963) and "preadaptedness" (Hartmann, 1951). The concept of "fit" between infant or child and the environment is also examined with respect to the concept of "coping", with findings suggesting that the child's successful coping with stressful situations depends, to some degree, on the goodness of the fit between the child and parents or other care-takers (Lerner & Lerner, 1983). The excellent mothering, the ease of exchange, the mutually satisfying and stimulating interaction inherent in the "good fit" is seen to provide early resilience in infants. These studies seemed to see the elements of "fit" as constants or givens in both infant and mother. Today we view both constitutional and environmental factors as malleable, and we further assume that a "fit" that starts out poor can become poorer and place the child at risk or, through some interventions, better.

Not only do the babies show differences from the beginning, but their mothers may behave differently with different babies and differently at different times, depending on how they are feeling toward the babies or on how the babies are feelings toward them (Anthony, 1987, p.31).

The topic of "fit" between mother and infant based on the sex of the infant was explored by one researcher studying the connection between mother's attitudes and infant development, depending on the infant's sex in West Bengal (Graves, 1978). She observed that when young mothers took personal care of their infants (servants and extended family did a lot of the child caring) the infant receiving mother's personal care was male. Following Bowlby's conceptualization of secure versus insecure attachment (Bowlby,

1969) the male infant recipients of affectionate mothering exhibited, at one year of age, the exploratory and assertive behavior pattern illustrative of the mutually accommodating development pattern associated with secure attachment. Girls, however, clung to their mothers and showed much discomfort at leaving the maternal lap, functioning indicative of "insecure attachment". Graves suggests that perhaps because daughters leave their families of origin upon marriage in the studied society, they are considered by their mother to be "on loan" and therefore mothers protect themselves from their eventual loss through a distancing pattern unnecessary in the raising of their sons.

Murphy and Moriarity (1976) also wrote about the fit between mothers and infants based on elements of infant adaptation seen, generally, to differentiate the boys from the girls. In this American, mid-western sample however, the constitutionally more irritable, sensitive and frustrated babies who presented greater difficulty at the breast tended to be male, while the healthy, placid more easily satisfied babies at the breast tended to be female, leading to maternal behaviour that was better tuned to the robust girls than to the more difficult boys. Perhaps the difference in good fit with respect to gender of infant in these two contexts has less to do with the constitutional differences between male and female infants on the two continents than it does with the positive value placed on giving birth and raising male children in most parts of the developing world.

Good Coping as a Factor in Resilience

A generative theorist in the area of children's coping, Lois Murphy wrote "The concept of coping seemed right for describing children's ways of dealing with challenges." Murphy's interest in coping came from her own life, her work in child development and her curiosity about "copers" of heroic proportions.

Finally, as I observed active infants, I was impressed by the multiple serendipities—chance discoveries of successful devices for coping with infantile tasks, challenges, obstacles and frustrations. All of this helped me to pull together and see in the context of basic human processes the coping efforts of a baby; of a severely handicapped person like our polio child... or Franklin Roosevelt; of blind or deaf children I had observed in numerous special schools, and Helen Keller; of people who were more frail

or vulnerable than others or had been weakened by illness. The writings of Bernfield... Hartmann... as well as those of Sigmund and Anna Freud, helped to strengthen my emphasis, along with biographies of vulnerable geniuses such as Michelangelo and Beethoven, and the ingenious and heroic coping strategies of my mother who was severely crippled by rheumatoid arthritis... Coping came to include all those efforts to deal with environmental pressures that could not be handled by reflexes or organized skills, but involved struggles, trials, persistent focused energy directed towards a goal (Murphy, 1974, p.71).

Murphy and her colleague, Moriarity, studied the coping behaviours of infants through adolescence from a homogeneous population in Topeka, Kansas, beginning in 1952. What the two gleaned from the Topeka study has come to be a part of what we commonly understand as the basis for good, sound, child-rearing. Infants attempt to cope from birth, and this coping effort can be supported, ignored or even thwarted from the start. Strong connections were found between the infant's coping pattern before the age of six months and her or his characteristic coping patterns years later. Children prosper from autonomy and mastery; good parenting is supporting the child's mastery. Parents can and should often respect the child's own perceptions of need and preference. Childhood fears are best managed when parents support and accompany the child's foray to meet the fearful situation.

Part of the cultural tradition was the maxim that God helps those who help themselves. We saw too how children watched resourceful coping by parents. And we saw parents' encouragement of children's independent coping efforts from early infancy. Here we have ecologically conditioned, general cultural and individual parental reinforcement of children's spontaneous efforts and expressions of determination. And so the answer to the question 'Where does coping capacity come from?' is not simple. It involves drive within the child, supported by the need and the freedom to cope with real challenges, with multiple supports from the environment (Murphy & Moriarity, 1976, p. 347).

In accounting for the resilience seen in so many children, that is, the ability to get up after a set-back and try again, these researchers suggest that the flexibility they found to be so highly correlated with resilience allowed children to break free from failures, avoid self-defeating patterns and try

many different problem-solving techniques in their efforts to cope with life (Murphy & Moriarity, 1976).

More Factors Associated with Resilience in Children

In his summary and analysis of what was known about resilience in children Garmezy predicted an upsurge in the research pertaining to "protective factors" which are:

those attributes of persons, environments, situations, and events that appear to temper predictions of psychopathology based upon an individual's at-risk status. Protective factors provide resistance to risk and foster outcomes marked by patterns of adaptation and competence. (Garmezy, 1983, 73)

Garmezy summarizes five different approaches to the study of resilience in children, which take place under very different conditions, in different parts of the world and using different research methodologies and perspectives. Remarkably, he notes, the findings are significantly alike. The wide variety of studies he cites include the following:

1) Rutter and his colleagues' epidemiological studies on the Isle of Wight and in an inner London Borough (Rutter, M., Cox, A., Tuping, D., Berger, M. & Yule, W., 1975a, and Rutter, M., Yule, B., Quinton, D., Rowlands, O., Yule, W., & Berger, M., 1975b),

2) a literature survey focussed on competent black urban children exposed to poverty and prejudice (Neuchterlein, 1970; Garmezy & Neuchterlein, 1972),

3) Werner and her colleagues' longitudinal, (then) two decade study of youngsters born on the island of Kauai in the Hawaiian Islands (Werner, Bierman & French, 1971; Werner & Smith, 1977; 1982),

4) a longitudinal-developmental study of ego resilience in infants and young children (Block & Block, 1980),

5) studies of children raised in war, most notably the work studying adaptations of children and youth in Israel and in Northern Ireland and finding a variety of adaptations, even among those who have suffered most. (Zuckerman-Bareli, 1982; Fraser, 1974; Heskin, 1980)

These studies identify characteristics of the children seen to be resilient, their families and their environments, which are different

characteristics from those of other children who, subjected to similar stresses, do not cope as competently.

In his analysis of all this material Garmezy found that resilient children shared three categories of factors, or characteristics, in almost all their experiences. First, the **children themselves** were easy to relate to, felt good about themselves, believed they were somewhat in control of their lives and were self-reliant. Second, **in most families**, there was the presence of a supportive environment, including warmth, closeness and organization. Third, in the neighborhood or elsewhere **in the community**, there was a support system available to help the child move towards self-defined goals, and there were role models with whom the youngster could identify (Garmezy, 1983, pp. 73-78).

Protective Processes or Mechanisms:

Both Rutter and Garmezy, in their later work, (Rutter, 1985; 1987; Garmezy, 1987) questioned whether, instead of protective factors which were in many cases simply the converse of the high risk factors earlier identified by researchers and theorists, there might be **processes** or **mechanisms** which took place in the lives of children and young people to make them more resilient.

Positing the existence of these processes or mechanisms, and considering how they might work in a catalytic way to change the trajectory of young people's lives, Rutter (1987; 1989) suggested four basic categories into which most of these resiliency-building experiences could be placed:

The limited evidence available so far suggests that protective processes include those that **reduce the risk impact** by virtue of effects on the riskiness itself or through alteration of exposure to or involvement in the risk, those that **reduce the likelihood of chain reactions** stemming from the risk encounter, those that **promote self-esteem** and self-efficacy through the availability of secure and supportive personal relationships or successful task accomplishment, and those that **open up opportunities** (Rutter, 1987, p.329).

Those processes which protect children by **reducing the risk impact** do so either by altering the risk itself or by altering the child's exposure to the risk. Examples of the former are scheduling an infant or child for necessary

but not emergency surgery at a point in the child's development (for example, under six months or not until school-age) when separation from parents takes a smaller toll on the developing child's emotions. Another example of this process is the provision of good paternal support to a mother whose damaging childhood experiences might put her at risk for poor parenting under stress. An example of the latter, or altering the child's exposure to risk, can be seen when we look at two children growing up with the same depressed parent or parents embroiled in marital discord. The child with an easy-going, malleable, temperament is less likely to become the focus of family discord and adult frustration. Some children find ways to alter their own exposure to family troubles by spending more time at school, at work, at play or at other people's homes. (Rutter, 1985). Parents in families situated in high-risk for delinquency neighborhoods who supervise the whereabouts and activities of their children can reduce the risk for delinquency in their offspring (Wilson, 1974; 1980).

Reducing the likelihood of chain reactions stemming from the risk encounter, Rutter points out, can be exemplified in the changes in the child's life when a parent dies. The negative chain reaction which ordinarily follows from loss of one parent, for example, less sensitive child care, perhaps institutional care and diminution of security, both emotional and financial, may be interrupted or modified by interventions which support the efforts of the remaining parent. Researchers have found, for example, that children at risk for behavioural problems at school because of separations and divorce at home, respond well to an orderly and authoritative teacher and classroom environment, thus stopping or slowing down a negative chain of events in the classroom (Hetherington, 1989).

That risks can have a differing consequent chain of events depending on the age, sex and maturational level of the child is suggested by Elder and his colleagues (Elder, Nguyen, & Caspi, 1985) in a study linking family hardships with children's lives. These researchers suggest that since pre-school boys and young adolescent girls are most negatively affected by the separation of a father from the household, preventive intervention of a therapeutic or quasi-educational nature might help parents minimize the negative chain of events coming out of father's leave-taking at those developmental junctures in their children's lives.

In a study of the emerging mental health profiles and social adaptation of children raised by single mothers in a poor, black, urban, U.S. community, it was found that the negative chain of events statistically associated with the disadvantaged single parent household, that is, lack of time, attention, supervision and parental energy to devote to the offspring, were substantially minimized in households where grandparents also resided (Kellam, 1977).

Rutter asks how the self-concepts of **self-esteem and self-efficacy** develop, and wonders which experiences can strengthen them for individuals in high-risk situations. He notes that:

A growing body of literature attests to the importance of people's concepts of both self-esteem and self-efficacy, taken very widely to include people's concepts and feelings about themselves, their social environment, and their ability to deal with life's challenges and to control what happens to them (Rutter, 1987, p. 327).

Two types of experiences seem influential to Rutter in the development of the child's self-concept. One is the experience of warm and positive love relationships, and the other is mastery or accomplishment in an area identified as significant and meaningful to the child.

In Elder's work on children growing up in the Great Depression, the suggestion is made that the tasks taken on by youngsters must be at their developmental level of coping in order to facilitate resilience. In the economically hard pressed families of the Depression, older children who took on domestic duties or part-time jobs in order to help their families seemed to gain from the experiences, while younger children pressed into work or service before they were ready seemed to be stressed by the attempt (Elder, 1974; 1979). Along similar lines, Manfred Bleuler, in his longitudinal study of the offspring born to 208 schizophrenic patients, pointed to a kind of strength which emerged in many of these children. Bleuler used the example of 14 year old Vreni, who raised her four younger siblings in a household where parental absence, illness, and brutality prevailed, and accomplished her tasks with strength and devotion. About these children, he said:

It is surprising to note that their spirit is not broken, even of children who have suffered severe adversities for years... pain and suffering has a steeling, hardening effect on some children, making them capable of mastering their lives with all its obstacles, in defiance of all their disadvantages (Bleuler, 1978, p. 400).

And on the same topic, Werner and Smith (1982) in their large-scale longitudinal Hawaiian study, found that youngsters who were resilient were very helpful to their parents and provided real and needed work in the family context. The help of caring for siblings is particularly recognized as a factor in the growth of self-esteem and self-efficacy .

And, finally, when Rutter explores the mechanisms of **opening opportunities**, he makes the point that there are the generally apprehended turning points in young people's lives, such as when they leave school for employment or specific job training, when the offer of training or apprenticeship certainly offers a constructive alternative and may significantly change a life trajectory. There are other times and other opportunities, he suggests. For example, postponing pregnancy in young women or girls increases their chances of eventually forming a bond or marriage with a man who may share the parenting and be supportive as a partner, thereby helping establish good mothering (Quinton & Rutter, 1984). Just moving away may create more opportunities, as it did for disadvantaged youths whose tendencies towards delinquency dropped when they left London's inner city (Elder, 1986).

Black youngsters felt they had benefitted from the opportunity to exhibit courageous behaviour during civil rights demonstrations in the U.S. south (Coles, 1964). Rachman (1978) and Antonovsky (1979), both writing about resilience acquired by adults in conditions of great environmental stress and turmoil, emphasize the importance, respectively, of the opportunities to serve or save others and the benefits of having a strong sense of identification with an ideology and a community. The children of depressed parents have exhibited altruism and precocious helpfulness arising from the opportunity for them to care for their ill parents (Radke-Yarrow, 1984). Although, on balance, we may not believe the depressed parents' offspring fare so well in their overall development, we note that having this opportunity to help an ill parent does add to the growth of several significant

aspects of character. The most resilient youngsters were a real and needed help to their parents and to the family, especially in caring for siblings, in Werner and Smith's findings (1982). The "caring-competent" children, found by Hetherington (1989) to be the best adjusted young people she studied six years after parental divorce, all had found the opportunity to care for others at an early age, be they younger siblings, aged and infirm grandparents or the distressed (perhaps substance abusing) custodial parent.

Examining another aspect of exposure to opportunity, Bandura, a life-span theorist and researcher, emphasized the potentially advantageous impact chance encounters may offer, depending on the individual's openness to experience, and the alternatives available within the individual's social milieu. Gaps in the individual's early development may hinder him or her from reaching life's goals because of the diversion or even seeming satisfactions inherent in chance encounters. For those who have never, for example, mastered the conceptualization and accomplishment of time management or simple scheduling, it is impossible to take advantage of an opportunity at 10 A.M. on Tuesday next. Those without self-confidence or high self-esteem, for another example, will find it hard to enter a competition or optimistically take a chance when a good opportunity appears. As Bandura states it:

Mastering the tools of personal agency does not necessarily assure desired futures. But with such skills people are better able to capitalize on planned or fortuitous opportunities, to resist social traps that lead down detrimental paths, and to disengage themselves from such predicaments should they become enmeshed in them (Bandura, 1982, p. 754).

And the seeking or eliciting of opportunities has been linked with temperamental characteristics intrinsic to the individual (Scarr and McCartney, 1983). The role played by opportunity, chance happenings and life events should not be undervalued. The path of each of us is determined, at least in part, by opportunities which emerge from serendipitous, fortuitous and sometimes tragic circumstances. However, life events which are age related and happen to most people can be planned for, rehearsed, properly timed and maximized, for example, first pregnancies in women, school entrance, and beginning to work for pay (Brim, 1980).

Pathways from Childhood to Adult Life and Mediating Factors or Processes

Extending the themes which have occupied so much of his work on developmental issues in children and adults, Rutter (1989) next wrote about human development with a life-span perspective, incorporating the ideas related to protective processes, but also illuminating the continuities and discontinuities, transitions and turning points in the course of development. That children and adults both change and, in some regards, stay the same is known, he asserted, but longitudinal studies have not been able to come up with a great deal of causal material. In short, what are the factors or mechanisms which mediate the effects of social or biological experience upon the individual?

The mediating factors suggested by Rutter (1989) include the following. First, both continuities and change may be mediated genetically. Second, mediation may be in aspects of the biological substrate that are not genetically determined. Third, mediation may lie in the ways in which a person's behaviour or experience in childhood serve to shape the environment experienced in adult life. Fourth, there probably is a mediating influence in the enhancement or reduction of cognitive and social skills. Five, childhood adversities may create vulnerability to later psychological disorder because they lead to diminished self-esteem and sense of self-efficacy. Alternatively, successful coping and/or positive experiences may mediate against early adverse conditions, leading to resilience. There is longitudinal evidence of this pattern, for example, in the follow-up study of institution-reared girls in whom it was found that positive school experiences were associated with solid, competent, planning around marriage and career (Quinton & Rutter, 1988), and with the Depression-reared older children who benefitted from coping adequately with increased and successfully managed family responsibilities (Elder, 1974, 1979). Six, the categories of established habits, mind set and coping skills may stabilize either a positive or negative pattern, or lead to a similar order of change. Seven, the linkage between and among experiences may be a mediating factor or process. This concept, similar to the negative and positive chain reactions explicated in Rutter's earlier work,

speaks to the suggestion that one life experience leads, if there is no planned or serentipitous intervention, to another with similar characteristics.

An example of linkage between and among experiences commonly seen in the child welfare field, starts with the serious mental disorder of a parent. Spousal discord, where the parent lives with a spouse, soon follows, with parenting breakdown resulting in the admission of the child to out-of-home-care and that child's eventual discharge from care to no functioning family unit; a young person alone and vulnerable. Framed another way, Rutter has asserted that the linkage between experiences works so that one set of advantages leads to another and one set of disadvantages leads to another (Rutter, 1989).

Transitions and Turning-points, Continuity and Change

Behaviour is shaped by biology, genetics, psycho-social influences, and by both past and present; these last two are not independent of one another. Chain effects are common, and each link in the chain needs to be examined to see how each effects the next, and how changes in life trajectory come about. Transitions are both end products of the past processes and instigators of future ones. Life transitions, then, require examination both as independent and dependent variables (Rutter, 1989).

In their exhaustive study of the research findings in order to synthesize a theory which charts and explains human development from infancy to old age, Michael and Marjorie Rutter (1992) combined their respective research and clinical knowledge about development in childhood and adulthood. Discussing the research efforts which have been undertaken to prove causal hypotheses (as contrasted with the association usually suggested) with respect to developmental phenomena, the authors state that a wide array of experimental approaches have been employed. Among these approaches are longitudinal studies, reversal of the key experience studies and those that employ interventions and measure functioning before and after the specific intervention. Speaking of reversals of the key experience, the authors state that:

Critics of the view that adverse early life experiences are usually followed by long-lasting psychological sequelae pointed out that most early adversities were followed by later adversities and that the ill-effects were just as likely to stem from the later

adversities as from the early ones. Accordingly it has been important to examine what happens when a seriously adverse early environment is followed by an ordinary, or better than average environment (Rutter & Rutter, 1992, p.354).

To understand the Rutter's developmental paradigm, one must first acknowledge that although biology and genetics play powerful roles in human development, social experience is central to our psychological development and selfhood. Asserting that development is neither anchored to specific ages nor completed when one reaches adulthood, development throughout life can be viewed as a meandering path whose destinations hinge on transitions and turning points, continuities and discontinuities. Regarding the transitions and turning points in life, four major considerations of these very important junctures along the path are considered. First, very few of life's major transitions, are experienced similarly by the majority of people; the specific qualities attached to the person and the transition have an important part to play. For example, marriage is a major life transition but those who marry do not necessarily experience the transition similarly, nor can we predict any probable future outcomes from the fact of marriage.

On the other hand, it is equally clear that the experience of marriage can and does have a major effect in some circumstances. The effects stem from **when** a person marries, **whom** a person marries, the **quality** of the relationship formed and whether or not **changes** in social group and life patterns are involved (Rutter & Rutter, 1992, p.356).

Second, individuals experience life's transitions differently because of genetic makeup and previous social experiences. With respect to potentially damaging, negative experiences, the more vulnerable the person is entering the experience, the more damage can be expected. On the other hand, with respect to potentially beneficial experiences, the benefits are greatest where there is the largest potential for change. For the child coming from a secure and supportive background, we would expect a positive school experience to make less difference than it would make for a child lacking the support and security at home.

Third, the effects of major life experiences differ from person to person. Stress generally brings forth our customary responses, many of which may not be particularly useful. When this happens, we are said to suffer from

distress or emotional disorder, but because our reactions are characteristic of our adaptation pattern, this is not considered to be a turning point. Positive turning points do occur, however, when a life experience causes us to find new mechanisms and may see us emerging from the experience in a better adapted configuration; negative turning points occur where severe stressors are sufficiently damaging to the person's adaptation.

The fourth consideration regarding transitions and turning points is related to why and how some of us are more likely to experience risky and or beneficial environments. For the authors, we create or are drawn, in an active way, through our interactions with others and our behaviours in general, to specific environments and situations. Also central here is the idea that the lack of planning is terribly important contributory factor to risk, and planful competence is essential for the protection of the individual

Continuities and discontinuities in life trajectory are exemplified in some striking findings from follow up studies of young women (Quinton & Rutter, 1988) and young men (Rutter, Quinton & Hill, 1990) who had, as children, been admitted to institutions or group homes because of some form of family breakdown. The methods and measures employed in both studies were the same, with one additional interviewer's presence added for the second, male, study. With respect to continuities, the pattern most impressively shown to exist relates to the idea that disadvantaged experiences tend to beget more of the same.

The children who were admitted to institutions in infancy because of a breakdown in parenting usually experience further hazards in the late teens, either because they return to the same severely discordant families from which they were 'rescued' a dozen years previously, or because they lack any home to which they can go leaving the Group Homes. In other words, in many cases the continuing psychiatric risk derives not from any irreversible effect in infancy, but rather from a continuity in disadvantageous environmental circumstances that continue to impinge in ways that prolong and intensify the risks (Rutter, Quinton & Hill, 1990, p.152).

Discontinuities in pattern were also evident, in which connection early adult marriage to a non-deviant spouse had a protective effect on both male and female care veterans. Positive school experiences, in the young women, seemed related to increased planning with respect to both marriage timing

and partner and career selection. Although the planning aspect played a great part in this linkage of mastery, there is an indication that this isn't the total picture with respect to this mediating factor. Individual qualities inherent in the marital partners seem to hold some importance which has yet to be measured, but which indicates, nevertheless, that "...to some extent people select and shape their own environments" (Rutter, Quinton & Hill, 1990, pp.151-152).

Interesting differences between the men and the women studied included findings that 1) there was a greater tendency for childhood deviance to emerge in adulthood among the males than among the females, and 2) the ex-care males were more likely than the ex-care females to marry a non-deviant spouse. Both these findings are suggestive of the important gender-related role ascriptions, role performances and patterns that need to be explored with respect to these questions of continuity and discontinuity in the life paths of young people who have experienced adversity in early years.

Finally, regarding the effects of life experiences and how these effects are carried forward in individuals from childhood to adulthood, Rutter and Rutter suggest:

We are all familiar with the effects of exposure to pathogens in building up immunity to infections and of exposure to allergens in creating sensitization to their ill-effects... The question is what are the psychological equivalents of these 'steeling' and 'sensitizing' effects, and what are the mechanisms by which they operate? This is the issue on which we know least, and clearly it warrants research investment because such knowledge is needed for the planning of effective policies of prevention and intervention (Rutter & Rutter, 1992, pp.358-359).

A Warning About the Study of Resilience

There are political uses made of research findings, and the concept of "resilience" lends itself to use by those who wish to minimize the handicaps of social and economic disadvantage. Pointing to the many people who, despite being born and raised in difficult or even dangerous conditions have led successful and secure lives, some say "if they can do it; anybody can do it", thereby negating our need, as a collectivity, to address the problems created by poverty and disadvantage. "These advocates use the evidence of individual differences to generalize to a collective, clearly a false assumption" (Garmezy, 1987, p.171).

In fact, although important work has been, and will be, undertaken to learn more about what factors and interaction among them lead to resiliency in children and adults, it is imperative that we concentrate on alleviating the risk factors which have been proven to lead to disastrous outcomes. The role of poverty in the realm of risk factors for children is offered here:

First, risk factors leading to later damage occur more frequently among children in families that are poor and still more frequently among families that are persistently poor and live in areas of concentrated poverty. Second, the plight of the children bearing these risks is not just individual and personal; it requires a societal response. Third, the knowledge to help is available; there is a reasonably good match between known risk factors and the interventions to reduce them. The close association between poverty and risk holds for every component of risk—from premature birth to poor health and nutrition, from failure to develop warm, secure, trusting relationships early in life to child abuse, from family stress and chaos to failure to master school skills. Persistent and concentrated poverty virtually guarantee the presence of a vast collection of risk factors and their continuing destructive impact over time. The converse is also true. Middle-class status is an effective buffer against a wide variety of risk factors (Schorr, 1988, pp. 29-30).

Summarizing the concepts

In summarizing the concepts of risk factors, vulnerability, resilience, and protective factors or processes we can visualize a model which was originally used to conceptualize the relationship between the resilience and susceptibility of a biological organism to bacterial infection. The model was adapted by Horowitz (1989), a developmental psychologist, as a starting point in the inquiry into the effects of biological and other risk factors on the development of the child. Adequate development with respect to a specific behaviour or group of behaviours is the result of the individual child's proclivities interacting with aspects of the family or the community in ways which can help or hinder development at any point in the life cycle.

Resiliency, in this model, is an individual characteristic, different in each child, which may be genetic or non-genetic in its inception. Stressful life events, negative changes in circumstance and other adversities which could constitute risk factors in vulnerable youngsters will not seriously affect the

development of a child who is resilient. The child's environment, including the family, the school, neighbourhood, community, state, province, country and world, for that matter, can span the wide range of influences between supportive on the one hand and dangerous on the other, and they can offer specific opportunities to learn and grow, as well as the more general socialization and acculturation available to each young person. The environment can be supportive for one developmental task at the same time that it presents enormous challenges for another task. And at different points in the child or young person's life, he or she is more open to change, both because of increased vulnerability and because of increased resilience.

Resilience may be seen to be a quality of the individual which may be strengthened or, indeed, weakened by the sum of life experiences. Protective factors or mechanisms can be viewed as less a part of the person and more related to specified happenings, events, relationships, or contexts. Protective factors or mechanisms alter, moderate or ameliorate a person's reaction to a situation that in ordinary circumstances leads to poor outcomes. We can appreciate a protective effect only when it is seen in a risk related context. That is to say, we have no reason to note the protective potential of, for example, two parents' cohesive and cooperative marital relationship until a child of the marriage faces chronic illness and assessment of the child's potential psychological vulnerability becomes an issue. Perhaps the protective factor or mechanism has less effect or, indeed, importance in a low risk population than it comes to have in a context where risk is high. Rutter (1989) suggests that the effects are catalytic: they may reduce the impact of the risk factor and or the negative chain reactions associated with the risk situation, they may increase self-esteem and efficacy, and they may lead to increased opportunities.

Indeed, the individual's future may very much depend on what he or she brings to life in the way of biological and genetic pre-disposition, temperament, previous experiences and the effects of all these. Pathways through life and the mediating factors or processes which may ameliorate the negative effects of adversity have been discussed, as have the importance of transitions and turning points and an introduction to the concepts of continuity and discontinuity of life experience. We have been exposed to the concepts generally associated with the topics of vulnerability and resilience. The literature concerning research which has followed children and youth

from adverse conditions to outcomes is small, but in several instances it is very instructive.

RELATED RESEARCH

There are very few studies focusing on adults, and attempting to determine what effects protective factors or processes had on their childhood development through experiences marked by adversity. Those studies which have been done vary widely in their gaze (between retrospective and prospective), their samples (clients versus non-identified community members), definitions of coping, mastery, success, and the timing of the assessment in the subject's life (Werner & Smith, 1992). The risks studied vary most significantly with respect to the level at which they are found, that is, in the individual, the family, or the community (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Resilient High Risk Youngsters in a Prospective Longitudinal Study

Poverty was one of the four or more risk factors experienced by the age of two years by the 72 resilient individuals whose lives were chronicled by Werner and Smith in their book *Vulnerable but Invincible* (1982). These high risk youngsters' adult adaptations exhibited resiliency and competency, when contrasted with a matched sample of people exposed to similar risks, but exhibiting difficulties in youth and adulthood. Other risk factors experienced by these 42 girls and 30 boys born and raised to poor families in Hawaii included parental alcoholism and mental illness and the children's own vulnerabilities including severe perinatal stress, low birth weight and physical handicaps.

Werner and Smith's resilient youngsters exhibited temperamental characteristics that evoked positive attention from family members and school personnel, including alertness and autonomy, good communication, locomotion and self-help skills, and many interests (not narrowly sex-typed). There were many activities and reasons to feel proud. At High School graduation, the resilient youngsters, when compared with the matched sample of high risk youngsters who fared poorly, exhibited a positive self-concept, and an internal locus of control (*i.e.* they felt they had reasonable amounts of control over their lives and futures), they were nurturant,

achievement oriented, and the girls, especially, were more assertive and independent than the other girls in their cohort.

Most of the resilient youngsters were raised in relatively small families, with three or fewer siblings. All had established a close bond with a significant adult in infancy. Substitute parents provided role modelling where parents were employed or otherwise involved outside the home. Structure, rules and assigned chores played a part in daily life, and the youngsters seemed to benefit from having responsibilities they could accomplish and for which they received praise and recognition.

The resilient boys and girls had friends in school, some had a favorite teacher, and extracurricular activities were important to many of them, especially cooperative activities such as 4H, YMCA and YWCA. Emotional support came from a variety of youth leaders, ministers or church groups (Werner & Smith, 1982; 1992).

Constitutional factors (health, temperamental characteristics) discriminated most between the resilient children and their high risk peers in infancy and early childhood. The support of alternate caregivers, such as grandparents or siblings, and the child's verbal and reasoning skills gained in importance in middle childhood. By late adolescence, personality characteristics, such as self-esteem and an internal locus of control, and the presence of external support systems differentiated most between positive and negative developmental outcomes among the high risk children. As the number of risk factors or stressful life events increased, more protective factors were needed to counterbalance the negative aspects in the lives of these vulnerable children and to ensure a positive developmental outcome (Werner & Smith, 1992, p. 57).

Resilience in Disadvantaged Black Children

Despite the expectation that they will be particularly vulnerable in society because they are members of an oppressed group and they disproportionately lack the security, financial and emotional, of being raised in a two-parent family, many black children from disadvantaged circumstances fulfill their potential and report high levels of satisfaction with their lives and careers. Much of the research related to children living in single parent families is confusing with respect to black children, because it is focused on families of divorce, and many of the mother-led families in the

African or Caribbean- American communities have not experienced divorce. The limitations of the divorce-based research include the fact that it was conducted on samples made up of largely white, middle-class and voluntary subjects, and therefore it may have relatively little to say about poor, black, families (Fine & Schwebel, 1992). Additionally, we are reminded by Ogbu (1987) that it is a mistake to evaluate the parenting, the family life and adaptations of poor, minority children and their families using white, middle-class norms and expectations, and by the same logic the study of protective mechanisms and resilience in these populations undoubtedly calls for sensitivities to the differences inherent in varying definitions of what resilience entails.

A review of the literature on resilience in black children from single parent families indicates that some black children benefit from protective factors or processes which are common in the black community, which emphasize the importance of the tribe and the oneness of being, and which have their roots in the African experience (Fine & Schwebel, 1991). Sometimes, it is asserted, child welfare authorities are unaware of the resources available for black children in their own communities, for example non-related and extended family adults who are strongly bonded with the child and who could take over responsibility for them (Halpern, R. 1990). Black families may be comprised of more than one household, they are focused on the child, they are comfortable with temporary and permanent consensual transfers of parenting responsibility in the best interests of the child, they may be closely related familial unit (although not related by blood but rather by friendship and history), and they have changing and flexible role expectations and performances (Nobles, 1978).

Research on educationally competent black children from both single and two-parent families in the urban ghettos, who had been exposed to poverty and prejudice, produced a group of factors which seemed to appear in most of the studies and which seem to represent protective factors in the lives of these competent children (Neuchterlein, 1970, Garmezy & Neuchterlein, 1972, described in Garmezy, 1981; Garmezy, 1983). Teachers and clinicians rated these children as highly sociable, non-defensive, non-aggressive, cooperative, participating and emotionally stable. The children had a positive sense of self and they experienced the feeling of personal power. Some studies showed the youngsters to have an internal locus of control and consequently,

to think they had some control over their lives and futures. Reflectiveness and impulse control characterized the youngsters' cognitive skills. Households where the competent children lived exhibited exceptional levels of organization, space, neatness and they were marked by the presence of books. Parents were involved in their children's educations, they promoted well-defined parental and children's roles in the family, and they afforded their children more self-direction and respect for their individual goals and interests. The children had at least one important adult role model who was a part of their lives, and they exhibited comparatively positive attitudes towards adults in general and, more specifically, those in authority.

Children of Divorce and Resilience

Questioning the assumption that living in a single-parent family is invariably a risk factor, some analysts suggest that living amidst marital discord is more of an adversity for children than is living with a well adjusted single parent (Despert, 1962; Rutter, 1971; Emery, 1982; Demo and Acock, 1988). This finding was discussed by Wallerstein (1983) however, in the light of her finding that in fully a third of the divorced families in her study, open parental discord continues to be experienced by the children in the family even five years following divorce. Children in divorced families, moreover, suffered from more negative changes in their lives than did children from intact families (Hetherington, Cox & Cox, 1985). And many youngsters from divorced families, even ten years after the divorce, saw themselves as disadvantaged, longing for the financial and emotional security enjoyed by youngsters in families without divorce (Wallerstein, 1984).

Wallerstein, who viewed divorce as a major life stress calling for coping behaviours and patterns, offered her observations of 131 children from 60 white, middle-class, divorced families in Northern California. She named six adaptational tasks which challenge the children of divorce, including: 1) acknowledging the marital disruption, 2) regaining a sense of direction and freedom to pursue customary activities, 3) dealing with loss and feelings of rejection, 4) forgiving the parents, 5) accepting the permanence of the divorce and relinquishing longings for the restoration of the predivorce family, and 6) resolving issues of relationship. The children who accomplish these tasks, each in turn and ending at the end of adolescence, have called upon their own

coping mechanisms, support from the family and from the larger community, and are seemingly able to move into adulthood without evidence of psychological damage or behavioural problems emanating from the divorce experience. This resilient pattern can be contrasted with the outcome accompanying failure to cope with the children's tasks in divorce, which can lead to the young person's becoming arrested at the stage of development they experienced at the time of marital separation. Poor reality testing, low self-esteem, sustained sadness, feelings of rejection and seeking reconciliation with the estranged parent can form an unhappy adult adaptation in these instances (Tessman, 1978; Wallerstein, 1983).

Hetherington, in a six year follow-up of her longitudinal study of 144 white, middle-class, highly educated adults and their children, half divorced and mother-led, and half intact (Hetherington, Cox & Cox, 1982), discussed the protective factors which helped the resilient, coping youngsters. The two clusters of children who did the best six years after divorce were called the opportunistic-competent, and caring-competent children. Children in both competent clusters had a variety of interests, and good interpersonal relationship skills. The children were flexible and tenacious when dealing with stressful situations. Traits and behaviours observed among the opportunistic youngsters included playing parents off against one another, orientation towards adults in power and peers with high status, friendships of short duration, and the girls in this group had working mothers who taught them to be self-reliant and independent. Almost all the youngsters in the caring competent cluster were female, and over half of them were daughters of divorced, non-remarried mothers with whom they related very well. Those youngsters in this group had at least one caring adult in their lives, a trait they had in common with the competent-opportunistic youngsters. The competent caring youngsters were most significantly differentiated from the opportunistic competent group by their own care and nurturance of either younger siblings, a physically or psychologically dependent parent, or a grandparent. This early required helpfulness seems to have a positive effect on girls (Hetherington, 1989; Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989).

Ten years following divorce, young women in particular hesitated to involve themselves in marriages which might conceivably end in divorce and thereby have negative repercussions on their own children. Many felt that

they were more mature and independent than other young women their ages, both as the result of their divorce experiences and of having had to take on more responsibilities at an earlier age. And, finally, siblings were seen to be a strong support to the young adults who saw themselves as resilient through divorce experiences. Siblings had provided social support, role models and opportunities for development of intimate relationships, loyalty and loving feelings (Sandler, 1980; Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989; Wallerstein, 1985).

Children Raised by Severely Limited Caretakers and Resilience

Analysts have examined resilient adaptations to child abuse and neglect. Other studies have examined the adult adaptation of children exposed to specific parental psychopathology such as schizophrenia or depression, while several others have focused on adult adaptations to parental separation on the one hand, and inability to parent in the other, leading to institutional care for the young people studied.

The fact is that many children around the world continue to be abused, despite our growing focus, knowledge and exposure to the many ramifications of this problem. Secondary prevention may lie in the study and development of survival traits which young people can strengthen and employ to overcome the damage of this abuse. Two pediatric psychiatrists, Mrazek and Mrazek, have identified characteristics and skills that may foster resilience in maltreated children. Among the personal characteristics suggested are rapid responsiveness to danger, precocious maturity, dissociation of affect, information seeking, rapid formation and utilization of relationships with potentially supportive adults, positive anticipation of a better future, the ability to take risks, the conviction of being loved by someone, recognition of the aggressor's competencies and identification with these, recognizing the enhancing, good and positive aspects of generally poor situations, enjoying being altruistic, and an optimistic orientation to life (Mrazek & Mrazek, 1987).

The life circumstances usually thought to be protective for children (e.g. sufficient family income and security, supportive family milieu, access to good health, education and social welfare services., etc.) are supplemented by several additional life circumstances which are thought to be resilience promoting in abused and neglected youngsters. First, foster parents, if they

can provide an environment where they and the children can express feelings, and if they provide experiences markedly different from the biological parent, can foster resilience. And second, adults who act as "polestars", showing the way to healing through a relationship with the child and the expression of optimism, may be transformational influences in the lives of abused children (Sheehy, 1986; Mrazek & Mrazek, 1987).

What one makes of the adverse experiences and how one integrates the potentially damaging events into a world or life view, may be an important element in the building of resilience in children exposed to seriously limited caretaking. In one study of adult incest survivors, making sense of the incestuous victimization was positively correlated with effective adult coping, including less psychological distress, better social adjustments, higher levels of self-esteem, than those women who were not able to make any sense out of their experiences (Silver, Boon & Stones, 1983). Another group of researchers examining evidence of resilience in adolescents from maltreating homes found that:

The protective process in resilient children may operate by supporting the development of a positive self-image and an internal sense of control, which are expressed in goal setting and planning behaviour, and in a determination to be different from disappointing parental models (Herrenkohl, Herrenkohl & Egolf, 1994, p.308).

In another study, this one of adolescent children of parents with affective disorder, resilience was positively correlated with youngsters' self-understanding and understanding of their parents' illness, their ability to empathize with parents' difficulties while not being overwhelmed by them, and their appreciation of the fact that they, themselves, did not exacerbate or cause parental illness (Beardslee, 1989).

Youngsters exposed to the adversity of being raised by mentally ill parents are not similarly or equally affected, and each life story is different. Manfred Bleuler (1978) wrote about the strength he found in many of the children he studied, youngsters whose parents were schizophrenic patients.

It is surprising to note that their spirit is not broken, even of children who have suffered severe adversities for years... pain and suffering has a steeling hardening effect on some children, making them capable of mastering their lives with all its obstacles, in defiance of all their disadvantages (Bleuler, 1978, p 400).

Bleuler's longitudinal study of 184 children of schizophrenic patients showed healthy adult adaptations in nearly three-fourths of the offspring. Bleuler detected several strong aids to the establishment and maintenance of resilience in his sample. The ill parent had, at one time, been able to provide some good parenting, there was a relationship of warmth and closeness with either a parent substitute or the other, and healthy, parent, and the youngsters themselves were able to master the care of either a younger sibling or the ill parent, thus experiencing a sense of self-efficacy at an early age (Bleuler, 1978, 1984).

In a follow-up study of adults who were children of manic-depressive and schizophrenic parents, Anthony (1987) reported that the progeny, in adulthood, were overwhelmingly competent and healthy. However, he suggests, their need to distance themselves from their parents' illness and the earlier experiences, employing the mechanisms of intellectualization and rationalization, made it difficult to form intimate relationships with others. Some sought and found relationships and work in which they were in the position of "helper", and some others found a kind of intimacy or emotional support, although not of a one to one nature, in their religious and social group experiences.

We have looked at the research related to resilience as it has been found in a range of populations of youngsters who have faced adversity. Now we shall look specifically at the small but significant body of research on foster care graduates. This review will help us to place in context our research question, "what do successful foster care graduates say has strengthened their resilience?"

Follow -up Studies of Children Graduated From Out-Of-Home-Care

There have always been children whose own families have not been able to raise them; Moses has been suggested as the first known foster child (Fein & Maluccio, 1991). The history of out-of-home-care has been well

documented, and it reflects what our societies, particularly in Great Britain, the United States and Canada, have thought about families, property, poverty, child labour, gender roles and the rightful place of the State in the shoes of parents (Frost & Stein, 1989; Melichercik, 1987; Wiltse, 1985; Kadushin & Martin, 1988; Donzelot, 1979; Costin, 1985; Gil, 1985; Hart, 1993).

The need for out-of-home-care is connected with a variety of familial circumstances, all of which can be viewed as adversities. These circumstances include physical, emotional and sexual abuse, neglect, lack of supervision, abandonment, violence in the home, parents' inabilities to provide the necessities of life including education and medical intervention, parental death, mental illness, physical illness, or drug or alcohol addiction, and sometimes the child's mental illness or behavioural maladaptation leading to dangerous or self-destructive behaviours requiring residential treatment and remedial socialization. In all of these circumstances, the court and its officers, and the child welfare authorities (in jurisdictions where they are not officers of the court) will attempt to specify the conditions under which the child can be returned home.

When termination of parental rights takes place, the grounds for this permanent severing of legal rights of parents and their responsibilities toward the child is usually an acknowledgment that the child cannot be safely returned home. Indicators pointing to termination of parental rights include the following: 1) parental demonstration of an extreme lack of interest or commitment toward the child, 2) parental inability to make adjustments in preparation for the child's return, 3) severity or repetition of abuse or neglect, 4) parental incapacity, despite the help of a child welfare agency to supplement parenting, to care for the child, and 5) the child's determined unwillingness to return home. (Hardin, 1985; Turner & Shields, 1985). However, although parents may be unable to relate positively to their youngsters at one point, a future visiting relationship or even a sustaining relationship is possible when children are older and, perhaps, better able to appreciate the circumstances of the past and the change they may detect in their parents (Aldgate, Stein & Carey, 1989; Kluger, Maluccio & Fein, 1989; Davis, 1989).

Most adolescents in foster care still have a living parent who is likely to be suffering from severe difficulties such as substance abuse and mental

illness. The families of youngsters in care are plagued by poverty and have major problems in the basic areas of daily life, such as health, housing, education and employment (Packman, 1986; Quinton & Rutter, 1984; Kluger, Maluccio & Fein, 1989).

Perhaps because of the seriousness of the adversity we associate with the conditions calling for substitute care, or because so little is known about the adults among us who were raised in out-of-home-care, it is generally assumed that youngsters who have been in foster care will tend to be troubled adults.

In areas where knowledge is limited, beliefs spring up to fill the void. And so deep inside many people there is a lurking suspicion—a thought that can change into a belief—that those who were reared in foster care must have ended up as damaged people. Such notions have even gained the unwitting support of some clinicians who cannot help but see, and may insist on seeing, the world through problem-colored glasses. Such ideas surface in social gatherings where one can be confronted by the 'we know they are all emotionally damaged' or 'it is clear they are overpopulating the jails' remark (Festinger, 1983, p.11).

Stressing the structural location in the lower and under classes of the families perceived as having the problems and requiring the solutions, some analysts assert that child welfare practice is a band-aid solution if it is any solution at all, and that youngsters touched by the system of services we call child welfare are systematically kept in their original social location.

Prevailing Child Welfare policies and services are not tools toward social transformation, and, verbalized goals to the contrary, they have little to do with facilitating the free and full development of children in their care (Gil, 1985, p.31).

The findings from some of the research into the post-care lives of young adults point in the direction of loneliness, lack of preparation in education or job training, serious difficulties finding and keeping employment and a high level of transitory living accommodation or actual homelessness (Stein & Carey, 1986; Susser, Struening, & Conover, 1987; Raychaba, 1988; Bass, 1992). A summary of the challenges facing large numbers of young people with histories of out-of-home-care is provided by Raychaba, himself an ex-ward of the Catholic Children's Aid Society of Metropolitan Toronto:

The general transience and residential instability of many youth out of care is (*sic*) the end result of various threads which, when amassed together, can be said to constitute the social and psychological tapestry of the after-care experience. Their generally poor economic situation, isolation from positive social support networks, and their lingering and unaddressed psychological and emotional difficulties are all facets of this reality. Many likely come to work in unskilled and inadequately paying forms of employment due to their lack of schooling and occupational training as well as their deficiencies of work related social skills. Frequent residence change is also likely associated with a lack of money management skills needed to balance budgets and pay bills. Besides mental health problems which many of these youth carry with them from care, the negative aspects of emancipation—feelings of abandonment, loneliness and isolation—also make for a situation in which simply coping is difficult enough (Raychaba, 1988, pp. 65-67).

On the other hand, although the literature on out-of-home-care outcomes is not, on balance, positive, there are young people whose lives are transformed while they are in out-of-home-care and who, at emancipation and in adulthood, seem to be reaching for self-actualization despite the serious disadvantage and dysfunction of childhood.

Few studies have focused on systematically studying adults who were in and out of out-of-home-care, in an effort to assess what has helped and what has not. Triseliotis (1980) in an account of his own systematic follow-up study of forty young people born in 1956-57 and spending between seven and fifteen years each in a single foster home, refers to the findings of Ferguson (1966), Meier (1970) and Salo (1962), which were gathered in Great Britain, the U.S. and Finland, respectively. Ferguson's inquiry into the welfare of 205 young men two to three years after they left foster care led to the conclusion that in areas such as employment, scholastic achievements and intellectual ability, the young men with in-care histories fared more poorly than a comparison group of working class young men with no in-care histories. However, Meier's assessments of former foster children proved to be more positive; the large majority of these subjects had found satisfactory places in their communities. And Salo's findings, in Finland, supported those of Meier. Salo compared the adult adjustment of individuals who as children had been removed from neglectful surroundings with that of persons who, as children, remained in those same circumstances. Consistently, the adults who had

been removed from the poor circumstances in youth, and placed in both institutions and foster homes, showed less maladjustment than those who remained (Triseliotis, 1980).

Triseliotis, in his follow-up study of forty young adults who lived in long-term foster homes found that the majority of them valued their foster home placements, identified with the values and characteristics of their foster families, and wished they had been adopted by their foster parents. The uncertainty of the foster placement versus an adoptive placement created some anxiety for the youngsters, when they became aware of their exact status. The long-term fostering seen in Triseliotis' sample was seen to be a *de facto* form of adoption, and he concludes this status should be seen far less frequently today, when drift in the system is more systematically addressed.

On the topic of the youngsters' identification with their foster families and their characteristics, Triseliotis found that although the young people were more like their foster families than they were like their families of origin in terms of career plans, world view and ideas about their futures, the foster parents and social workers did not use the youngsters' growing identification with the life style and values of the foster family as well as they might to support and encourage their ambitions and aspirations. Instead, everyone involved tended to have low expectations for the scholastic and career achievements of the foster children, especially in contrast with the expectations for adopted children. Emphasis is placed, by the author, on the need for social workers to continue on with individual children in care, to get to know them, to make visits definite and planned, and to play a larger role in planning, in general, for the future (Triseliotis, 1980).

Festinger's large and comprehensive, interview-based, study of New York City adults who had been in foster and group care in the 1960's and 1970's tells a great deal about the experience of foster and group care at that time and in that place, as well as what the care meant to the adults who lived through it and were part of it (Festinger, 1983). The 277 young adults, all of whom had been discharged in 1975 from the care of thirty child caring agencies at the ages of between eighteen and twenty-one, had spent at least the five years preceding discharge in foster or group care. Two thirds were discharged from foster homes; the remaining one third were from group settings such as group homes, group residences and institutions. Festinger's account of the investigatory work required to obtain the sample of young

adults from the original number of over 394 possible participants sheds light on the generally recognized assertion that follow-up studies are logistically difficult to arrange.

Among the conclusions and future directions suggested by the Festinger study findings are the five following areas of concern. First, the generally accepted assumption that foster care graduates tend to have dysfunctional adult lives does not turn out to be valid. Festinger's foster care graduates, in fact, are not significantly different from young adults without in-care histories taken from the general population, at the same ages and from similar neighborhoods, with respect to reliance on public aid, records of arrest, their world views and their expectations for the future. One significant difference seems to obtain between the satisfaction levels of young people raised in foster family homes and those having been placed for years in group home settings, with substantive evidence that the group home graduates were doing less well, and raising questions as to the reasons, other than resource gaps and planning difficulties, giving rise to the placement of so many teenagers in group facilities when the foster family seems, in the light of these findings, to offer so much more in the way of positive and supportive experience.

Second, a theme consistently found in the remarks and suggestions offered by the graduates concerns the degree to which children and youth need to be consulted about decisions affecting their lives today and planning for their future.

Whether it was a decision about a foster home, about changes in placement, about visiting arrangements with kin, or about their goals in life, they felt they should have been heard... The process cannot begin when young people are in their late teens; it must begin earlier (Festinger, pp. 296-297).

Third, one area where these graduates lagged behind the non-care sample was with respect to educational achievement. Once in care, many youngsters fell behind in school, and these deficits were either not detected early enough or agencies emphasized the youngsters' emotional needs to the detriment of their educational needs.

The assumption has been that psychological problems lead to problems in school, and the reverse process has largely been disregarded (Festinger, p.297).

Festinger suggests a five part program to better address the educational needs of youngsters in care, including 1) accurate and updated assessments of the academic potential of youngsters in care, 2) expectations about daily school performance should be communicated to children, foster parents and group home staff, 3) academic problems need to be detected early and addressed with the help of tutoring, when needed, 4) the use of educational psychologists and other specialists must be sought, and 5) standards for foster care practice need to include the young person's educational needs as one of the staples of good care, because without this element no child can reach his or her potential.

Fourth, many graduates expressed the opinion they were insufficiently prepared for their emancipation between the ages of eighteen and twenty-one, and they experienced, as a result, some very difficult times in the community, and this was especially true for those young adults who had few ties in the world outside care. The conclusion reached by researchers was that preparation for independence needs to begin many years before the actual date arrives, the components of this preparation must be itemized and clarified, and the responsibility and accountability for seeing that the preparation takes place should be vested in those delivering child welfare services.

Finally, the adults consulted had many good suggestions about post-graduation services that might have been offered them, and that would have saved them a great deal of pain in the years immediately following discharge from care. A concept akin to alumni offices was suggested, where graduates could find consultation and referral services, community information, and where, as well, the needs of graduates could be filtered back to those providing services in care, thereby informing the practice (Festinger, 1983).

It is important to mention here that with respect to both the Triseliotis and the Festinger studies, the samples were idiosyncratic with respect, specifically, to the very low number of placements each young person experienced, raising the question, as both authors did, of the degree to which the samples reflected the average youngster's out-of-home-care experience

with number of placements and consequent continuity of care (Triseliotis, 1980; Festinger, 1983).

That success at school is both an ingredient of future well-being and predictor of the same is supported by Rutter and colleagues' research on the outcomes for 94 English girls who were raised in out-of-home-care and a control group of 51 women from the general population. The young women, who were interviewed between the ages of 21 and 27, showed several distinct patterns. Of those who had become parents, some found help and support for their parenting from communicative and supportive relationships with husbands or partners who were chosen with some care and with whom they had sustained a lengthy relationships before becoming committed. These women were observed to be developing positive coping skills and relationships with their own youngsters. These also were the women who, as students, found some success in school and experienced a sense of self-efficacy from their school successes. The elements of planning which went into both school performance and choice of a marital partner seemed to be protective to these young women.

There were, on the other hand, young women who seemed, as parents, to be repeating some of the negative and damaging patterns they themselves had experienced as children. These women had married or committed without much knowledge or planning, sometimes for the wrong reasons (*e.g.* to get away from home), lacked support from their mates, and had a history of poor school experiences. For the young women who were raised in their own families, the presence of a supportive and communicative partner was not so significantly associated with positive or negative parenting patterns (Rutter, 1987, 1989).

In a retrospective, longitudinal study, using information from closed case records as well as follow-up direct contact data from subjects themselves, Fanshel, Finch and Grundy (1990) report on the effects of pre-placement experiences. They also looked at the events and relationships developed through a multiplicity of placements ending with foster family care provided by the privately funded Casey Family Program in Seattle, Washington. This program was specifically devised to provide "quality planned long-term foster care for children and youth when this is the best permanent plan" (Fanshel, Finch & Grundy, 1990, p.5). Although similar in many ways to the kinds of foster family care provided throughout the United States and Canada, the

Casey Family Program was specifically designed to be a system of foster home care which could stabilize and maintain to the point of emancipation many youngsters with troubled behavioural and multiple placement histories.

Findings from the case recording and follow-up contacts with 585 young adults emphasize the importance of the program's commitment to trying again with many of the young people, even after a number of required foster placement changes. As one young graduate put it when asked for suggestions as to how to improve foster care services in the Casey Family Program,

That ALWAYS, no matter whether a child looks like they will stay in one home or not, consider them anyway for placement. When one isn't ready to attach emotionally what becomes healing is to be able to attach to a less threatening entity, such as a program, a program that really cares. Kids need time to heal and I think Casey may rule out some kids because they look too difficult, that may really want to change but need time. They deserve to have the opportunity. Pain is a very strong emotion and kids need the time to heal, even if meanwhile, their behavior isn't great. I doubt by Casey's current standards I would have been accepted today, and yet, it changed my life. Who could ask for more (Fanshel *et. al.*, p.202)?

In the post-discharge follow up study the team discovered that in becoming independent young adults the former foster children often achieved a level of comfort and well-being which could not have been predicted from the adversity of their past experiences.

The follow-up study showed that those who had emancipated at eighteen years of age in relatively good condition were able to go on to adult lives in which they were able to adequately address their income and housing needs, build families, enjoy relative well-being and good health, and obtain satisfaction out of their lives even when their earlier history would have pointed to more negative outcomes. Not all such children were hostage to their troubled life histories (Fanshel *et al* , p.204).

A summary of the conclusions related to which elements of care tended to strengthen children involved in the Casey Family Program includes the assertions that minimizing not only physical abuse but all forms of corporal punishment in care has a positive effect on outcomes. Minimizing the

numbers of placements also has a positive association with the condition of the young person at emancipation, which in turn has a positive association with important adult measures, years later, of well-being.

Both the Festinger and the Fanshel studies included interview material with foster care graduates, and both found the interviews served an important function for the graduates who, whether expressing positives or negatives about their experiences in care, needed and benefited from the opportunity to remember and say what they knew. And, perhaps of most importance for service deliverers and policy formulators "...they were able to share the child's perspective about the world created for them by social service systems." (Fanshel *et al*, p.217). A study based on information from alumni of the Boise Division of the Casey Family Foster Care Program indicates great general satisfaction of the graduates with the care they participated in while growing up. They highlighted, in addition, the need for concentrated vocational counselling during the transition period between foster care and independence, and their responses emphasized for the research team involved that transition to independence is a time of great crisis for young people, which calls for increasingly sensitive and goal oriented programs and counselling efforts (Wedeven, Pecora, Hurwitz, Howell, & Newell, 1994).

In their discussion of the success enjoyed by some youngsters who grow up in foster care, Fein and Maluccio (1991) attribute the positive outcomes to essentially four considerations. First, they call for the resolution of uncertainty with respect to the length and meaning of foster family placement and the implications of legal status on the child's on-going, sporadic, terminal or eventually reuniting relationship with biological parents. A great deal of intensive, therapeutic work is necessary to bring about the resolution, the authors suggest, but to the extent that it is accomplished, the young person will be able to form lasting attachments to foster parents or other parental substitutes (Maluccio & Whittaker, 1989; Fein & Maluccio, 1991). Second, Fein and Maluccio call for heightened levels of explicitness with respect to the expectations for all members of the working team including foster parents and the child, emphasizing the importance of clarity in helping the youngster achieve her or his potential. The importance of professional tenacity in monitoring the work of the team is emphasized. Third, foster parents must be included, trained, recognized and rewarded for

their significant role in helping youngsters find success and well-being. And fourth, preparation for independence which, as it is envisioned by Fein and Maluccio, is a process requiring years of work, is an essential element in the plan.

...children growing up in foster care need extensive help to prepare for life after foster care, for independent living. In particular, such preparation should incorporate the development of satisfying, potentially life-long relationships that can help compensate for the loss of the biological family; the building of a variety of supportive social networks; the availability of a family with which the young person can identify and return to-as he or she faces life crises; and training in a variety of skill areas essential for independent living (Fein & Malluccio, 1991, p 63).

Fein and Malluccio believe, in conclusion, that although the effects of separation and placement are potentially devastating, young people may still be helped in foster care especially if placements are kept to a minimum, continuity of care is the guiding principle, and the child, foster parents and biological parents are well served with supportive, educational and therapeutic resources. Foster family care may be a sound alternative for children and youth requiring out-of-home-care, but only if everyone involved in the care, and perhaps most significantly, if the system of foster care itself receives the social and economic support it deserves from all of us.

Resilience and Preparation for Independence:

One of the conclusions reached by the research team that completed the Casey Family Program study (Fanshel et al, 1990) was that the children, youth and adults who participated in the study showed a pattern of continuity through the years. That is, children whose lives had established a particular pattern or direction before coming into Casey Family care were likely to continue in that trajectory through care and after, unless a concerted intervention to change that pattern were undertaken. After a change in trajectory, however, the new path would prevail, so that although past difficulties tended to repeat themselves in the present, interventions bringing about positive change in the youngster's behaviours or relationships became the pattern for future behaviours and relationships. It is to be expected, therefore, that these researchers also learned that as a group, the youths who

were well adjusted and in good condition at the time of their emancipation from Casey care, when interviewed in a follow up study as adults,

...reported having better well-being, having more satisfactory adult employment, having gained a better education, having better finances, having a smaller size family and having a warmer regard for the social worker. A subject who adapted better to Casey care had a better measure of housing as an adult and less drug usage. In general, these associations had very small p-values suggesting that these are clear findings (Fanshel et al p.106).

Because the condition of the young adult at the time of emancipation from care is a sound, and perhaps the best understood predictor of adult well being, and also because the goal of out-of-home-care, like the goal of most parents, is the well-adjusted independent life of the young adult, special preparation is undertaken, wherever possible, to implement a program of training for independence. The older foster child is younger than the average adolescent preparing to leave home, he or she is funded by a social system instead of a family and, depending on the place and the youngster's economic background, economic support may be similar to that of peers or it may be very different. One major difference is that the young adult gaining independence from a foster family or group home "...may lack the support system of a family to assist her or him in the process of becoming an independent adult." (McFadden, 1985, p. 614).

The contents of the programs which have come to be known as "independence" training or preparation tends to be pretty specific, and should be differentiated here from other kinds of preparation for adulthood. The goal of independent living or emancipation preparation programs, however they are titled, has seemed to be the practical and instrumental training of the young person for managing his or her own care, after out-of-home-care is terminated either by agency design and policy, or by the young person's own decision to become independent. For these youngsters, for whom there is no family member or group to live with, visit regularly or fall back on for affective or instrumental support in the present and the future, these programs with specific goals attached to mastery of a series of skills, must be a small part only of the larger and vastly more complex goal of discharging from care a young adult who is prepared to live an independent life.

Independent living plans are implemented after assessment of the teen's survival skills (financial management, food preparation, etc.) and environmental supports (extended family school and employment, friends, etc.). It represents a short-term plan within the long-term goal of attainment of independent adult status. It is appropriate when used as a planful step toward maturation, and inappropriate when used as a stopgap when family or small group resources are not available (McFadden, 1985, p. 614).

Independent living preparation is complicated for young people who have previously had to leave home and, in the worst scenarios, have had to leave multiple homes and families and have not yet resolved the multiplicity of losses incurred.

The young person in placement experiences a double loss. There is the real loss of security, home, relationships, neighborhood and roles. Additionally the youth reexperiences, consciously or unconsciously, the loss of the biological family. For most children this may be experienced also as a loss of self. As the youth is poised for launching into the world, he or she relives the sum total of all prior losses including those engendered in prior placements (McFadden, Rice, Ryan & Warren, 1989, p.135).

Indeed, although some researchers have suggested that graduates from foster care do not fare more poorly as adults than others in the general population, (Maluccio & Fein, 1985; Festinger, 1983) there remain unanswered questions about the long-range effects of both the losses (Gries, 1986; Molin, 1988) and the tenuous status (Kenmore & Petterson, 1987; Molin, 1990) involved in long-term foster care, which are restated here by researchers whose comprehensive longitudinal study of foster care did not find a negative effect, but who remained questioning never the less.

We are not completely sure that continued tenure in foster care over extended periods of time is not in itself harmful to children. On the level at which we are able to measure the adjustment of the children we could find no such negative effect. However, we feel that our measures of adjustment are not without problems, and we are not sure that our procedures have captured the potential feelings of pain and impaired self-image that can be created by impermanent status in foster care (Fanshel & Shinn, 1978, p 479).

In their work, *Leaving Home Again: Emancipation From Foster Family Care*, McFadden and her colleagues have pointed to several important areas the team members working with the emancipating youth need to keep in mind. The preparation for emancipation is likely, they assert, to reactivate earlier losses in the youth's life and, in so doing, to stimulate maladaptive responses to separation and rejection. Also, this preparation can rejuvenate reunion fantasies having to do with the possibility of finding love and security with the parent or parents with whom family life once proved to be impossible. And, despite the particular vulnerabilities of the young person at the time of emancipation, the phase of life holds opportunity or promise as well, to add to the youth's store of what could be called resiliency, but which is referred to here as emotional scar tissue. As one young woman in a group experience put it:

It's kind of like learning to ride a bicycle. When you're getting ready to go on your own, you need to get everything coordinated and to keep your balance even if you wobble a little. If you look back at where you've been you may fall off. You need to look at where you're going. Of course, it might not hurt, once you really got rolling, to peek in your rear view mirror to see if anything is sneaking up on you (McFadden, Rice, Ryan & Warren, 1989 p. 143).

The great majority of Ontario youth in care, like youth in care in most parts of Canada, the United States and Great Britain, are emancipated or on their own at age eighteen. Some Crown Wards, those who remain in school, continue to take part in child welfare services and receive a sustenance allowance called Extended Care and Maintenance until they reach the age of 21. To those who work with these young people, the idea of pushing them out of the nest at age eighteen is destructive. One social worker intimately involved with many youngsters preparing for independence says of the usual termination age of foster care, group care and wardship:

It's asking those who are the least likely to be able to live on their own to do it earlier and more completely than the average kid... Those in foster care are at a disadvantage academically because the disruption of being shunted from home to home while in the system, and the trauma of abuse that brought them into it, interfere with learning (*The Toronto Star*, Oct. 10, 1991).

The high percentage of street youth estimated at between 50% and 60% who have been involved with the child welfare system in Canada, according to a 1986 survey by Street Outreach Services, a support program run by the Anglican Houses, is in part due to the early age at which youngsters are cut loose from care. Suggestions have been made by ex-wards and others that a whole range of counselling, referral and skill-specific training should be offered young child welfare graduates who are between care and total independence.

Raychaba, comparing in 1987 what was known about the status and well being of young adults who had been discharged from out-of-home-care with what was known about homeless people, paints a picture that emphasizes the vulnerability of both groups to drug and alcohol abuse, transiency, emotional troubles, lack of success in school, poor social and school skills and very few social supports. For Raychaba, the gaps in the system which leave so many young adult in-care graduates unprepared, poor, lonely and unable to relate are all capable of being addressed. He stresses the very important point that the young people themselves, individually and as a group, must be part of the planning and implementation process around preparing each person for emancipation from care (Raychaba, 1987).

Aftercare services suggested by Raychaba and members of Canada's Youth In Care Network include:

The appointment of a designated aftercare worker, some form of financial assistance and/or a set system of leaving care grants 'to ease the initial financial burden of moving and establishing a home' and further government endorsement and support for the mutual assistance/consumer, advocacy/outreach program concept are also recommended. Young people also suggest very strongly that counseling/treatment for emotional/psychological difficulties and/or drug/alcohol abuse should continue for as long as is necessary after care is terminated (Raychaba 1987b, p.23).

Pasztor (1988) and Kroner (1991), both of whom have designed independence preparation programs and written extensively on the topic, have stated that preparation for independent living does not fit the needs of young people. Rather, what they really need is what they would get if they were at home, that is, family support. Kroner, whose observations derive from analysis of what young people leaving foster care can achieve with

respect to their growth from living in scattered-site independence-oriented apartments, says that youngsters leaving the child welfare system in Ohio are expected to be able to do things for themselves that ninety-five percent of "normal" American teens could not do! The benefits of living in independence-oriented apartments during the latter stages of care include, according to Kroner, the elements of empowerment, the development of stronger internal controls, and the possibility of looking realistically to the future. Best of all, when the youth leaves care, he or she does not have to leave home because their places in these facilities continue to be reserved.

A state-wide project in Arizona was designed to provide counselling, referral and instrumental support for youth discharged from out-of-home-care going to live on their own is seen to meet a very significant set of needs for the young adults who must build an independent life in their communities. Postplacement or aftercare services should, according to the author, be available to the emerging graduates for as long as needed, as it is the responsibility of the State to provide for the needs of young people for whom it is accountable (Irvine, 1988). John Meston of the Canadian Child Welfare Association has made the same argument about the State's responsibility to see young people through to adulthood. As he expresses it:

Where the state has intervened to rescue a youth from inadequate parenting, the obligation exists for the state to properly complete the undertaking (Meston, 1988, p.633).

A recent study of transition into employment, education and independent living programs serving youth and young adults with emotional and behavioural disorders across the United States (Clark & Stewart, 1992) emphasizes the importance of making these programs individualized to meet the needs of each young person.

The philosophy that underlies the individualized system of care is that of an unconditional commitment by the team to serve its children with no eject, adjusting services and supports to the changing needs of the children and their families (Clark & Stewart, 1992, p.197).

This concept of individualized, wrap-around services seems eminently applicable to young people being discharged from out-of-home-care, in that no

program will suit every young person, but every young person is in need of preparation for the future with respect to one or more of the areas of housing, education, job training, life skills including domestic skills and safety, social skills, work preparation skills, self-knowledge, communication, sexuality, family life preparation, and learning about money.

Much more needs to be learned about adolescents leaving foster care in order to contribute to the development and operation of programs preparing youngsters for self-sufficiency. In particular, information is required regarding age, gender, race and ethnicity, educational achievements, health and mental health of youth moving toward discharge from care; experience with prior foster, adoption or guardianship arrangements; and relationships with birth parents. In addition, knowledge is needed about the extent to which new materials on preparing adolescents for interdependent living are used and their influence on the performance of foster parents. We also need information about the effectiveness of methods used to teach required skills; and the support that should be provided when adolescents attempt to use those skills to meet new challenges in their post-discharge environments (Aldgate, Maluccio & Reeves, 1989, p.123).

Conclusions and directions

From what has been written about resilience in children, we can see that youngsters who are resilient have personal characteristics that add up to social responsiveness, familial characteristics which include a warm relationship with at least one significant adult, and environmental supports which contribute to the attainment of their goals. These protective factors are significant, but the theory is supplemented by the suggestion of protective processes, which are experiences or relationships which work with one another and upon the risk factors at particular times in a catalytic way in order to change the trajectory of a child or youth's life.

Black children from disadvantaged backgrounds in the United States showed high levels of competency when they came from households which were organized, where there were books, where they had a warm relationships with at least one adult and in families bearing the mark of family structure akin to the structures developed in African life, including

extended familial and extra-familial family relationships and community interest and ownership of every child and every child's future.

Children from families with marital divorce showed better adjustment and increased competency years after divorce when their personal, familial and community factors contributed to their resilience as well. Competent youngsters, both those who were very caring and those who were more opportunistic, had interests of their own and good relationship skills. The caring youngsters took the opportunity to care for others, including siblings, parents and grandparents, in ways that gave them pleasure and increased their mastery. Siblings of the youngsters helped a great deal, both in their support and where they served as positive role models.

Maltreated youngsters who showed evidence of resilience exhibited precocious maturity and tenacity, the ability to take risks, enjoyment of opportunities to be altruistic, and saw the positive aspects of generally poor situations while retaining a positive anticipation of the future. Foster parents were very important to the resilient youngsters when they provided a healing environment which was quite different from the youngsters' own homes. Polestars were role models for the maltreated youngsters; adults who retained an optimistic vision of life and were able to show the way for the youngsters who followed. In the lives of incest survivors and otherwise maltreated youngsters, self-understanding, parental understanding and the ability to form a cogent picture of the past and its events all seemed to work together with the lack of self-blaming and an internal sense of control in those whose adaptations were at a good level of functioning and feeling.

In the limited number of follow-up studies to foster care, a difference of opinion emerged about the outcomes of foster care, ranging from seeing graduates as generally damaged, malfunctioning adults through seeing them just at level with others of their age and from their class and background.

Among the potential contributions to the resilience of youngsters in out-of-home-care, according to graduates who have been asked for their opinions, are improved support for the individual's educational experiences, the inclusion of children and youth in planning for their lives and their futures, improved preparation for independent life after care and increased and improved services available to young people after their emancipation and until they become self-sufficient.

From looking at the careers of youngsters in care in a life perspective, it seems that the condition of young adults at emancipation is a good predictor of their adjustment and well-being later in life. Although long-term care in out-of-home-situations is potentially devastating because of the powerlessness, separations and losses, identity threats and possibilities for bad experiences, those who survey the system and its outcomes believe out-of-home-care can work if placements are kept at a minimum and continuity of care is the most important concept governing practice. Children, foster parents and biological parents need to be adequately served and resourced in order to have long-term care which can help young people grow with strength and realization of their interests and potential.

A great deal of preparation for graduation from care is necessary. Those who know and write about this preparation also emphasize the tremendous need for post-graduation services and support networks for the young adults coming out of care who are not returning to a family unit or close association with a family member. The concepts are commonly understood and held; the resources are lacking in every situation. The State's commitment to the children it raises is questioned and observed critically by those who advocate for the children and youth.

This summary of what is known leads to the question posed by the research study. On the question of whether or not successful outcomes are the norm in out-of-home-care, opinion is certainly divided between those, like Festinger (1983) whose findings place foster care graduates on par with similarly lower socio-economic class young adults raised in their own families and like Raychaba (1988) who points to the very large proportion of homeless and mentally ill young adults with out-of-home-care backgrounds and claims an association between the two. What is not available in the literature is an account of the out-of-home-care system, its strengths and its weaknesses from young adults judged, by practitioners in the system, to substantially embody the characteristics associated with good outcomes. Once we have identified young adults who have been through the out-of-home-care system, and who are found to be successful graduates, that is, young adults who give evidence of being prepared and eager to reach for their goals and their potential in adult life, what can we learn from them about the helping, protective and ameliorative aspects of their life in out-of-home-care and in the community? This study, it is hoped, should give us some more insight into what has

worked, what has the potential of being useful, and also what insurmountable hurdles remain in the way of young adults who have lived the life.

DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I will examine my approach to the research question and to the research. The method and research techniques employed in the study will then be recounted. Finally, an account of the study's limitations and strengths, will be included.

The emergent approach to research

Georgi's (1970) assertion of the importance of the researcher's approach lies in the centrality of the researcher's relevant experiences, prejudice and perspective to the design and evolution of the research enterprise. This concept of approach is mirrored in Denzin's reference to the "researcher's personal, historical relationship to the interpretive process" (Denzin, 1989, p.29), and in Heidegger's discussion of the "hermeneutical circle or situation" (1962).

By approach is meant the fundamental viewpoint toward man and the world that the scientist brings, or adopts, with respect to his work as a scientist, whether this viewpoint is made explicit or remains implicit. We also recognize that in a very real sense this task is inexhaustible. That is, no person could ever make completely explicit all of the characteristics of his approach. However, we would also maintain that it is worthwhile to make explicit whatever one can (Georgi, p.126).

The viewpoint one brings to the research enterprise determines more than the question and the design of the project; the viewpoint also determines what sections of the data are included or excluded, and how that data are interpreted.

Strictly speaking, there are no such things as pure facts. All facts are selected from a universal context by the activity of our consciousness, and hence they are always interpreted facts. This does not mean that we cannot grasp the reality of the world; it simply means that we merely grasp certain aspects of it depending upon the point of view that we adopt. Once again the importance of the viewpoint of the person can be seen (Georgi, p.135).

The approach of the researcher, then, can be considered to be of equal importance to the research question, design and methodology, and there is a

requirement to establish this approach in so far as it is possible to identify and communicate one's own perspectives and prejudices.

A related but different concept also has ramifications for the idea of the approach to research. In a naturalistic, qualitative research undertaking such as this one the design of the research and the methodologies employed are said to be of an emergent nature. That is to say, it would have been impossible to specify the design, the methodology or the end product of this project in advance; all of these unfold with the accumulation of data and understandings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 1990). Throughout the doing of this research, then, the design and the methodology were informed and shaped by the obstacles and new understandings that emerged.

I have come to understand, through doing this research, that my perspective and pre-suppositions were altered by the very first few minutes of the first interview, and therefore my approach can be said to have been transformed almost immediately, creating an emergent approach to the remainder of that first interview and all the data collection to follow. "Getting to know any person in depth is a major experience because we have to admit that another way of structuring the world truly exists" (Langness and Frank, 1981, p.1). I will attempt to describe my initial approach and the emergent nature of its alteration through the doing of this research.

What follows is an excerpt from the Research Proposal submitted to my Doctoral Thesis Committee in January of 1992. This excerpt contains what I presented as my approach to the research at that time.

As a professional social worker employed for many years by the Child Welfare System to prevent family breakdown, protect children from maltreatment and plan for children, I often wondered how youngsters could be expected to survive the years of family troubles, the trauma of loss, the scars of neglect and abuse, followed by having to find comfort with strangers, and (sometimes repeatedly) having to adapt to and trust new substitute families.

My approach to the question probably began when my interest was kindled by marriage into a family where my spouse and his siblings were raised in foster care during the 1940s and 50s in New York City and surrounding areas. The influences on these lives which were so important to me, were at the center of my developing interest. Because of my long association with at least one ex-ward, and my knowledge of one case history in depth, I probably approach the question with many pre-dispositions. One of them is certainly the idea that for each child

who lives with great adversity and survives there has been an identifiable "life-line" thrown by another human being. I am hoping to examine some "life-lines" if they emerge from the data in this study.

My approach to this question comes, in part, from being a mother and a step-mother in the sixties, seventies, eighties and nineties, and knowing on a personal level how much hard work and how many mistakes and lapses go into raising children to adulthood in families. The trauma of divorce and the challenges of the blended family, both increasingly common experiences in children's lives, present major difficulties for the children in these families which, if surmounted, may be no barrier to healthy development. I know about these problems, having experienced them myself, along with many other parents of children, many of whom struggle to place the welfare of children first.

My approach to this question comes also from having lost my own parents and, consequently, contact with most of my extended family as a youth and young adult, and romanticizing the security and charm of having an older generation on whom to lean well into adulthood. This loss is suffered by most ex-wards who have lived in long-term foster and group placements, not once, but twice, as they leave first their natural families and later the foster parents or group home parents who are contractually no longer there for them, and informally no longer there for them in many cases

My approach is also embedded in my professional life as a social worker with families and children since 1965. I have worked with many children who have suffered from the results of family dysfunction, parental inadequacies, lapses and abandonment. In many cases my colleagues and I have predicted that because of a child's vulnerability due to a multiplicity of risk factors, not to mention the inadequate state of our knowledge and practice, the outcome in adulthood for some children would be poor. Often, we have been correct in predicting negative outcomes for these children; sometimes we have not.

My approach to doing the research itself can best be described as anticipatory, participating, exchanging and sharing. Social work is about people's lives. Their problems and successes are complicated and messy. Interaction with other people, whether as therapist or researcher, never has clean lines of demarcation. I look forward to research relationships that will increase my understanding as well as adding something to the understandings of the participants.

If we examine each of the paragraphs above and attempt to choose one phrase to encapsulate what is being communicated about my approach in

each, the following list emerges: social work professional, personally related to the problem, parental, empathic, an expert, a receptive person who is open to change and to sharing. Within ten minutes into the first interview with the first research participant, however, I became aware that several aspects of the approach I had brought with me into the interview room were being challenged, specifically, my relatedness to the issue and my role as an expert. With respect to the relatedness of my approach, I wondered, at that moment and later, how it had been possible to practice for so many years in the child welfare field without having been regularly informed through the perceptions and perspective of youth and adults who had lived the life.

I first became aware that Craig and I were coming at the material being examined from two different perspectives when he told a story, with some pain in his telling, but also from a somewhat objectified plane upon which he'd arrived after ten or more years of trying to make sense of his years in care. The story was about the events that followed his foster parents' discovery that he, at the age of fifteen, was sexually involved with a young girl also placed in the foster home. Being a "young fifteen", he did not see himself as more mature, experienced, or powerful than the very mature twelve year old girl who was a new addition to the foster home, and with whom he was totally in love. This foster home had been his dream home for several years; he felt wanted and respected by the adults and by the other youngsters there; life couldn't have gotten much better.

I thought it was the best place I had before or after I was at the Children's Aid. That was the placement. It was the best. You couldn't top that.

When the knowledge of the children's sexual relationship became known, following a series of meetings and scenes employing people unknown to him but having agency titles and investigatory responsibilities, the girl was moved to another group home and Craig was to remain in his foster home, but things were markedly different.

What they did, they took her out and put her in a different group home...and just isolated me within the same group home, left me in there, right? Nobody spoke to me, everybody treated me as if they lost all respect for me, as if I had no dignity or whatever the

hell, right...so they just shut things off. Y'know, like a light switch.

So I can see why they're angry at me and I can see their disappointment and stuff like that, right, but it would've been nice if they would've just asked me, just talked to me instead of saying 'well, y'know you're this kind of a guy...you're work like that...you're from Toronto, and your history is like this right, so you are like that. I had no idea of where the hell I was coming from or where I was going to ...or what I wanted to be. They just didn't want to have anything to do with me, they just didn't listen. They shut off their minds as well as their ears...but y'know the way that I felt about the way things were looking for me, I said 'there's no way', I was out of there.

Well, a couple years later I went back to the town...I phoned them to ask them if they knew what time the bus came to the town that was nearby right, to go back to Toronto, and they said basically 'don't phone here, don't phone this house'. I used to send them mail; they didn't open it..just dumped it into the garbage right away.

As I listened to Craig's story, I was filled with a variety of contradictory thoughts and emotions. My fourteen years as a social worker and social work supervisor with the agency in whose context these events had taken place provided a rich backdrop for the events as they were recounted. I could very easily imagine the meetings that had taken place, the compulsion to meet all the requirements of the protocol surrounding sexual abuse and sexual interference taking place in foster and group homes, the foster parents' and social workers' strong desire and intention to protect the younger child involved. Would I have focused on the fifteen year old boy's needs to be heard and understood? Would I have been sensitive to the foster parents' quandary; on the one hand knowing and liking the boy involved, on the other hand seeing him as a threat to other youngsters in the home, a predator, and possibly someone who could behave in ways that would make their foster home unsafe for other placements? In short, as a person working within the system, was it possible that this damaging outcome for Craig might have happened under my nose and within the realm of my responsibility? I knew it was.

In the research context, removed from our respective roles within the institution, Craig could inform me and I could hear him concerning his experiences as a consumer of the services for which I, and many of my colleagues, had been responsible within the institution. This interview, like

the eighteen that followed, exposed the experience of childhood and youth from at least two new vantage points. First, the participants in my study were speaking from young adulthood, with all the distance, filtering and structure they had applied to their life stories. Second, the participants spoke from inside the experience, a position only other children and youth in care or graduated from care can share. These were the vantage points I sought when I designed the study. The content I was after, coming as it did from the participants' own experiences and their assessments of those experiences, would best be explored through a naturalistic, qualitative study in which participants would be encouraged to communicate about their experiences and their opinions about services they'd consumed.

Throughout this research, then, my approach was challenged, confronted, and subtly changed. Even after hearing Craig's first story, and before going on to the next section of that first interview, I was aware that my personal relationship with the material and my role as an expert, *vis à vis* the experience of youngsters having gone through the out-of-home-care system I thought I knew so well, were going to continue to be severely challenged. The expert became a student, and my feeling of humility towards the respondents and their material was born and continued to grow through the process.

Narrative material and the assessment of factuality

Perhaps Mishler (1986) would suggest that since every narrative, or story, we tell is a form of self-presentation and an assertion of our identity, Craig told me this story for a purpose. Because he is a very powerful young man, he may have been attempting to balance the unequal power differential normally associated with the interviewer-interviewee relationship by showing through his story that many adults in the system (as I had been) make poor judgments and consequently harm children and youth.

There is also the question of whether the events recounted by Craig, and the events recounted by all the research participants, actually happened the way they were remembered and spoken. The answer to this question must lie in our understanding of what constitutes "the facts" attached to past events. For some there are facts which exist only in the past; they are incontrovertible and, perhaps, only retrievable through examination of a

written record which was undertaken by a certifiably able and objective observer at the time. For others (for example Wyatt, 1963; DeConcini, 1990) our individual and collective reconstruction of the past are a living and creative endeavor, in the sense that our accounts of the past probably adapt to changes in the way we view the world and ourselves in it.

The factual veracity of Craig's story and all the other stories found in the data is asserted here to be less important than the way it is remembered and the meaning it has for the identity and the world view of the teller. Increasingly, narrative accounts, biographic material, autobiography; in short, the life-history approach pioneered in the 1920's, are regaining prominence, representing

...a particularly important means for portraying the intertwined impact of social and historical circumstances and particular life experiences in determining well-being (Cohler, 1994, p.17).

Participants' accounts that seemed to be totally incredible and the product of a disturbed thought process would have been exposed as such when compared with the accounts given by the other participants, and analyzed by the researcher who, herself, had worked in the context studied for fourteen years. Where research is undertaken to learn about the experiences of a group of people, one can best accomplish this by enabling research participants to speak freely about their experiences in an area on which focus is established (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) and subsequently attempting to understand the meaning of the material thus obtained.

OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH DESIGN

In the remainder of this chapter I will describe the actions I undertook to do the research. The research design included an in depth interview employing a questionnaire composed of largely focused but open-ended questions.

A summary of the findings derived from the research as well as some of the recommendations related to practice and policy (see Appendix for the summary), were sent to participants with a note encouraging them to write or call with their responses to what they read. Also, the findings were shared, at a National Research Symposium focused on child welfare issues, with additional successfully launched young adults who were not participants in

the study, but who were, nonetheless, able to formulate a response to the findings because of their own experiences with having been youngsters in the system of out-of-home-care.

In addition, the findings were shared with students in a Sociology class from the Transitional Year Program at the University of Toronto. All the members of this class shared the experience of having dropped out of school in their teens, for a variety of social and economic reasons, and re-engaging with formal education in their twenties and beyond. The research findings and implications for practice and policy were also shared with a group of child welfare policy analysts and developers from Canada, the United States and several European countries, as well as with individual managers and practitioners who are responsible for service design and delivery in the agencies where the research was undertaken. Having those who were studied review the findings, those with characteristics similar to those studied, and potential users of the findings all review the findings are methods suggested to support the credibility of the findings derived from the research undertaken. Known as analytical triangulation (Patton, 1990) this method of sharing the analysis of the findings with individuals at various important but separate locations with respect to the analysis makes it possible to confront and attempt to justify or explain any serious discrepancies between the research analysis and the reactions thus gathered.

Underlying assumptions and values:

There is adversity in the conditions that give rise to the need for a child to have substitute care, as well as in the adjustment to substitute care itself. This assumes that young people who have been in care and who are successfully graduated must have been resilient in order to have managed so well despite the potential risk effects inherent in their earlier experiences. The conclusion that the study participants are, in fact, resilient individuals is negated if we reject the quality of adversity associated with the need for out-of-home-care.

All children in a democratic society are equally entitled to develop their potential. This bias against classism, racism and sexism and in favour of the ideals of equal access inherent in a democratic society leads to conclusions

and implications for policy and practice which mitigate against the oppression of the group to which the study participants belong.

The promise shown in young adulthood does not always become manifested in self-actualization in later years, nor does a troubled young-adulthood invariably result in a lifetime of troubles. The assumption made here is that successful launching into independence is often, but not invariably, related to future self-actualization. Clearly, if this assumption were proven false, we would not necessarily be able to assign lasting or significant value to the strengthening factors discussed in the data.

Conceptualizing the study sample.

The sample I used has been called a "theoretical" sample (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) and a "purposeful" sample (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The purpose of collecting the data was not to generalize about all youth, to generalize about youth in care or even to generalize concerning all successful graduates of out-of-home-care. Rather, the inquiry attempted to elicit as much material as possible about the individual sources of strength and the coping patterns reported by young people. "The object of the game is not to focus on the similarities that can be developed into generalizations, but to detail the many specifics that give the context its unique flavor" (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p.201). With respect to sampling therefore, I chose a group that would be informative to a study building generalization to theory, rather than generalization to population (Yin, 1989).

Goetz & LeCompte (1984) list a variety of sample selections that lend themselves to research designs that focus on generalizations to theory. They include convenience selection, comprehensive selection, quota selection, extreme-case selection, typical-case selection, unique-case selection and reputational-case selection. This list is roughly equivalent to Michael Quinn Patton's (1990) six delineated types of sampling that "serve purposes other than facilitating generalization." Patton suggests that the researcher may want to sample extreme or deviant cases to obtain information about unusual cases that may be particularly troublesome or enlightening. Sampling typical cases avoids rejection of information because it is known to arise from special or deviant cases. Maximum variation sampling documents unique variations that have emerged in adaptation to different

conditions, while **critical case** sampling permits maximum application of information to other cases because, if the information be valid for critical cases, it is also likely to be true of all other cases. One might, it is suggested, sample **politically important** or sensitive cases to attract attention to the study or to deflect attention from it. Finally, **convenience sampling** is employed to save time, money or effort (Patton, 1990, pp.81-97).

The sample I sought and found for this research can be seen, in contrast with most young people who have left care for independence, as a group of extreme or deviant cases in that the characteristics sought in members of the sample are seemingly found in a minority of young people of the general category, including all recent graduates. I do not assert that "successfully launched" out-of-home-care graduates are extreme or deviant based on the literature, which is decidedly limited and mixed with respect to its findings, but rather with respect to the numbers of "successfully launched" graduates referred for this study, when compared with the number of graduates estimated by the agencies involved. The two agencies discharge an average of eighty young adults each year into the community., with no clear prospect of returning to their biological families. Because my sample was sought from graduates for the previous five years, there were possibly four hundred young adults who might be identified as "successfully launched". Among the successfully launched young people, however, I found seventeen young people who were, to the referral sources responding to my request, typical (to them) of cases of successfully launched young adults. The inference which seems to come from these numbers is either that this sample is a group of extreme or deviant cases or that the social workers, child care workers, supervisors and foster parents who made referrals for the study are an extreme or deviant sample among their colleagues because of their willingness to make referrals for this study.

Actually, however, aside from the qualifications for referral described above, no two young people were alike with respect to important demographic and psycho-social background material. Because the seventeen represented maximum variation sampling but there remained a gap in the category of male and female Native Canadian and male, Afro-Canadian or Afro-Caribbean-Canadian, a request for participants from these groups was employed at a later stage. Specific referrals were requested from workers and supervisors who either were known to me professionally, known to me

through previous referral in the study, or rumoured to have worked with a young person who fell into the race and gender category sought. Two additional respondents, both Native Canadians, were identified, contacted, and agreed to be involved in the study through this second, convenience, sampling. Employing Patton's categories, then, my sample was, at the first level, a maximum variation sampling, after which it was typical within the category of successfully launched graduates, followed by convenience sampling of the "snowball" or "relevant others" (referral sources nominating other referral sources) type to address the gaps I found following my first request for sample nominees.

There are several limitations inherent in this sample. First, those studied only represent those judged, by the standards devised by me and listed above, to be successfully launched. This definition excludes some very important information which could have been contributed by young people exhibiting severe problems at the time of graduation from care, or by young people who do not stand out, or have not formed relationships in the out-of-home-care system sufficiently to cause their nomination as respondents.

My criteria of success are not universal, although the criteria employed in this study approximate what I believe social workers and child care workers in the Child Welfare field define as success. When the study was underway and after the analysis was completed, respondents and other ex-foster children made suggestions about their definitions of success. The definition employed in this study could have included the ideas and contributions of foster care graduates.

Social workers identified youngsters based, in part, on the working relationship established between them. Other workers would, perhaps, have established successful working relationships with youngsters not identified. To some extent, the skills of each professional determine both who becomes a success story, and who is defined that way. I have attempted to make my definition wide enough to avoid some of the most obvious class and culture bound biases concerning success, but it is impossible to capture the potential lost in those situations where a youngster was not reached by the professional person involved.

As I did not interview more than nineteen youngsters, and those youngsters were seen in an urban (Toronto) context (although several were raised in rural areas), the data do not represent the experience of youngsters

in a rural Ontario context. The data are not purported to represent the experiences of youngsters around the country coming, as it does, from a small sample of Ontario young adults. On the other hand, several young adult foster care graduates from Ottawa and Edmonton have, in fact, stated that their experiences were similar and that they could identify with many of the attitudes and experiences recounted in the research findings (these were conversations with the Executive Director of the Association for Youth in Care of Edmonton, and the National Development Officer of the National Youth in Care Network, located in Ottawa).

With respect to the strength of the sample, the respondents interviewed were both equal and amenable to the in depth interview, and seemed to welcome the opportunity to put some of their experiences into a structure that had meaning for them. For some, experience had already been considered in its relationship to today's behaviours and attitudes. For others, this was said to be the first time consideration of the meaning and contribution of the past was attempted. The proposition has been supported by research that indicates "...resilient individuals have a total organizing conceptualization of who they are and how they came to be (Beardslee, 1989, p.275). This proposition gains additional support from this study, in which participants reported the pleasure and benefit of having recounted or begun to conceptualize, for the first time, such a total organizing narrative.

Because participants were given a great deal of freedom, in the interview situation, to express their views and to convey what they thought was important about their life stories, the themes which emerge from the data have meaning for them and for their cultural experience, and may well form the hypotheses in future research investigations.

Setting up the interviews

The Children's Aid Society of Metropolitan Toronto and the Catholic Children's Aid Society of Metropolitan Toronto were invited to take part in the study through initial phone contacts with the Executive Directors of each, followed by a note accompanying a copy of my research proposal. Each Executive Director expressed an interest in participating and set up a contact between someone in the organization responsible for research projects done with agency cooperation, and me. I met with groups of social workers, child

care workers and foster mothers in both agencies and PARC (the independence preparation program founded and maintained by both agencies). Personnel were asked to identify young people (16-25 years) who had recently (within five years) left the care of the agency, and who were, in the opinion of the practitioner, successfully launched. A letter was sent, additionally, to all departments in the two agencies introducing the project and inviting referrals (see Appendix).

Practitioners called me, sharing the essential information regarding the person being referred. In situations where the referral seemed appropriate, they were asked to locate the person, ask if she or he was interested in being a participant, and ask permission to give the person's phone number to me. This initial contact and inquiry by the agency personnel known to the young adult were designed to protect potential participants from unwanted intrusions and sharing of their confidential information with a stranger.

Twenty-six young adults were referred for the study during the time I set aside for interviewing. Of these, nineteen were willing and able to be interviewed, either at an office to which I had access on the campus of the University of Toronto, at PARC (the near east side of Toronto), or at their home or University campus, in other cities, in several instances. The remaining seven proved difficult to schedule for a variety of reasons including work and class schedules, child care responsibilities, impending birth in one situation, an imminent move from Ontario in another, and my perception of lack of interest in one instance. In several situations I reimbursed participants for their TTC expenses, when I knew their resources were severely limited, and with one young woman, I paid for her young child to have child care at home, while she met me at PARC for the interview.

The interview

Each respondent was given a consent form to peruse and sign after our introductions and before the interview began (See Appendix). Permission was requested to allow the use of an audio-tape recorder, which was placed between us on a low table.

It has been suggested that the interview technique of data collection comes second only to participant observation as a method which provides

detailed observation of events and experiences (Bogdan & Taylor, 1984; Patton, 1990). The interview does, however, take first place when the perspective of another is the object of study.

We cannot observe how people have organized the world and the meanings they attach to what goes on in the world. We have to ask people questions about those things. The purpose of interviewing, then, is to allow us to enter into the other person's perspective. Qualitative interviewing begins with the assumption that the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit (Patton, 1990, p.278).

The choice of interviewing techniques employed was a combination of three variations delineated by Patton (1990) and named "the informal conversational interview, "the general interview guide approach," and "the standardized open-ended interview." Using the same series of interview questions in each interview (the questions are listed in the Appendix), I was able to minimize the bias which would have been inherent in allowing each interview to take a totally different shape and focus. Taking all the respondents through the same questions is usually associated with the standardized, open-ended interview, the purpose for which is to "...obtain data that are systematic and thorough for each respondent" (Patton, p.281). However, often the sequence of the questions changed for each interview, depending on how the participant answered the first question, and where the initial response took us. Sometimes, because I introduced each interview with a bit of information to fill the participant in on what I was looking for, she or he would start right in, attempting to get started on answering the questions posed with a theory or a story. In this way, called the general interview guide by Patton, all the standardized questions in the same words were posed, but in a variety of sequences depending on the emphasis and direction given by each participant. Also, similar to the approach named the informal conversational interview by Patton, a spontaneous generation of different and quite spontaneous questions did flow from material generated by the respondent in many instances.

Interview times varied between two and a half hours and one that approached four hours. Perhaps one factor which made it enjoyable and even satisfying for participants to take part was the element of having been named, by someone who knew them in their growing up years, as

"successful". My impression, underlined by one bear hug, one young man's seeming lack of interest in ever leaving the interview room, several invitations generously proffered to me for attendance at events in participants' lives, and more than a few remarks about the salutary effects of the interview experience, was that participants very much welcomed and enjoyed the chance to survey their past experiences and to make a cogent story of them. The questionnaire initially brought to the first interview and used in each ensuing interview appears below. I developed each question based on the area of data obviously connected with the question itself.

- 1) You have been identified as a young adult who is doing well. Do you recall ever deciding to be successful at achieving your goals? If so, when did you first begin to see yourself this way? What goals did you first set for yourself?
- 2) Was any person especially helpful to you in setting or achieving your goals?
- 3) Was any idea or philosophy particularly important to you in life?
- 4) You lived in foster care for some years. How did your experiences in care contribute to your development as a young adult?
- 5) In what ways do you think your development was helped or harmed in care?
- 6) What were the circumstances surrounding your going into care?
- 7) Since you've left your foster placement, what have you missed the most?
- 8) Think about your life as if it were a book. Divide it into chapters, any way you see fit. Try to think about the major events in your life as "turning points" leading you from one chapter to the next. Name the book and describe it.
- 9) As you view your life at this point, what would you say is the single factor that has had the greatest effect on determining who you are today?
- 10) If you have begun to choose a particular career path, describe how you came to this particular decision on an occupation. When did you first decide on this occupation? Who or what influenced you? What were the alternatives you considered?
- 11) Although your ideas are not expected to be complete or clear, and you may not have thought about this before, please tell me what you would like to accomplish in your adult years.

12) What do you expect in the future with respect to work, family, friendships, relationships, and your own , individual, development?

Some of these questions very quickly were found to be phrased in such a way as to miss the evocation of material I was attempting to get at. The first question, for example, about whether or not participants remembered having set goals for themselves sometimes brought forth specific information about a career goal or a set of work related goals, but what I came to understand was my real question had less to do with goal setting and more to do with the organizing principle behind these young adults' lives, if there was one. A good example of this comes from the Vietnamese-Canadian Mai-Lin's interview material. When asked, early on in the interview, about her goals in life she spoke about originally having wanted to be a doctor, but moving away from that goal because of difficulties with math. Then she repeated her older, care-taking, brother's admonitions against settling for easy goals, exhorting his little sister to achieve something important and to strive to be someone special. However, much later in the interview, when we spoke about how Mai-Lin envisioned her future life, she spoke about wanting to be someone admired and respected in the community so that her parents, left back in Viet Nam so many years ago, would feel, and she would be able to feel, that their collective sorrow over their traumatic separation was all worthwhile. As she said it: "...we paid a big price to get to Canada and I think this would make my parents proud". I soon learned that although participants were able to talk about early goal setting to some degree, this wasn't the important question. I began to trust the evocative environment established by the interview setting and ambiance to eventually get at the organizing principle where one existed.

One additional question which each participant answered, but with great difficulty and a lack of correspondence with anything that would be meaningful to him or her was the one where participants were asked to view their lives as a book and to divide the whole into chapters which signified turning points. This question was intended to reach participants' changes in inner or behavioural direction and to help them focus on times of transition or of significant growth or mastery. After several interviews, however, I became aware that even the most creative and imaginative respondents had difficulty conceptualizing their lives in this way. I used the question in every

interview, however, and with very little variation among the answers, participants divided their lives by physical moves from biological family to the next home, placement after placement. While this response makes a great deal of sense, and underlines the psychological significance to young people of where and with whom they live, it wasn't getting at their individual development or, in most cases, how these divisions of years related to their own changes in behaviour, philosophy or feelings.

Several questions which occurred to me or were suggested to me by participants were added to the interviews shortly after the first few because they emerged from either the participant's suggestion or my own recognition of their possible importance. The two questions which were added shortly after the first few interviews were: "What should I have asked you, that might have given me some more information about what has been a help to you?" and "How do you see yourself?" These questions actually emerged from my understanding, early on in the process, that I could learn a great deal more from participants by stating what I wanted to know and asking them to look into themselves for the material than by posing questions which I intended to use, much like a fisherperson baits a hook, to get at the material. Therefore, although the informal conversational interview generally takes place during ongoing participant observation fieldwork, and the participant may be unaware that an interview is taking place this certainly was not the case in these interviews. However, it felt comfortable to be responsive to the participant, and to go where she or he wished in a conversational way, within the context of the interview purpose, which had been stated.

A good example of the interview technique encompassing elements of all three types of interview follows, with the standard interview question in bold print.

S- Okay, so let's go to the first question, all right? And that is that the people at PARC thought of you right away as somebody who is doing very well, and I wonder if you ever thought consciously about the fact that you wanted to achieve certain goals in life.

C-No

S-You didn't?

C-No. What happens, how I treat my goal is just that Iwork towards whatever has worked to better myself or to advance or to go forward or whatever, right, and when I'm in a certain position or situation I look around and see what options are

available and then I work towards a new option, right? I just work towards the next step, whatever that might be, I don't really have a set goal anywhere. I have ideas, I may want to be a teacher, I may want to be a social activist, or maybe I might want ...to work with aboriginal people on reservations, ...I don't really know.

S-Uh hmmm. Yeah.

C-You know, I just want to be in a position where I'm contributing to something in this world that makes me feel good.

S- Uh hmmm.

C-So I don't care about what I do, what type of impact I have on how many people I just want to feel good about what I do, right?

S-Uh mnnn.

C-And I've experienced going nowhere and I don't want to go nowhere.

S-You say you've experienced going nowhere. What period of time was that?

C-What period of time was that?

S-Yeah.

C-That was, well, early teens and late in my teens. So early teens are bad, mid teens are good, late teens are bad. I guess late childhood is bad.

S-Uh hmmm. And then in mid-teens there was a good period where you felt you were doing something that you enjoyed?

C-Yeah, that's when I guess I was uh, I don't know the reason why I was...except around socially functioning well, around friends and things like that and I guess I felt accepted. I felt wanted. I don't know if that's the right word, "wanted", I felt like a lot of people were interested in me.

S- Uh hmmm. In those middle years?

C-Yeah.

S-High School years?

C-Umm no, you can't classify them as high school years, it's just basically maybe two years of my teen age years.

S-Uh hmmm. Can you remember what it was, because this is a bit interesting to me, what made you feel good about who you were for those two years? It was being accepted, you were getting some attention for...

C-It was not being accepted by social workers or authority figures or anything like that, it was just being accepted by my peers, right. For being who I was, right. And being actually more than accepted, I was more respected and sometimes looked up towards, right?

S-Yeah.

C-Which was a big switch, right?

Five pages later, after a significant narrative account that communicated, very strongly, the ways out-of-home-care had both been

supportive and damaging to this participant, I asked the next question from the question list, which concerned the people who were helpful in setting or achieving goals.

Coding the data

The success of the coding and the analysis depended on the amount of theoretical sensitivity I was able to bring to the data.

Theoretical sensitivity refers to the attribute of having insight, the ability to give meaning to data, the capacity to understand, and the capability to separate the pertinent from that which isn't (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p.44).

Sources of theoretical sensitivity, for me, included my initial reading of the literature related to protective processes and resiliency, my professional experience in the child welfare field, my personal experience with separation in adolescence as well as with family members who were graduates of the child welfare system and later, with my own children and step-children as they've approached separation, individuation and increasing independence from the family. Finally, the analytic process itself contributed to my theoretical sensitivity; that is, the more I became immersed in the data and aware of themes already identified, the more sensitivity I was able to bring to the reading of new material (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

When the interviews had been transcribed, I read each one from beginning to end. For many of the interviews, I made notes to remind myself of themes or experiences which stood out or moved my thinking in a new direction. Often, material that struck me as important or surprising on reading had also occurred to me during the interviews when they were first spoken. Sometimes, however, especially when I searched the transcripts for comparative data in a specific category, I found material that had gone past me during the interview and even during the first reading. On the second reading, starting with the first interview and going through them as they had occurred, codes were developed in the interview material until all the material ceased to evoke a need or desire to create a new code. Called "open coding" by Strauss and Corbin, this process entails the "breaking down,

examining, comparing, conceptualizing and categorizing of data”(Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p.61). Also referred to, in grounded theory, as “the constant comparative method of analysis” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, pp.101-116), this process of reading through the transcript and assigning previously established codes, coming to relevant data expressing an idea not met or distinguished previously, assigning a new code (name, colour and symbol) and examining the rest of the data to see where and how the category is expressed in other cases, continued until, at forty-eight colour and symbol codes, relevant categories stopped presenting themselves.

The coding process, although undertaken and completed by me, required some independent and outside assessment of my ability to detect significant data and assign appropriate coding categories to it. My dissertation advisor was enlisted to go over a sample of my coding process and to offer objective and professional insight and advice evaluating my coding process and suggesting ways the process might be improved or expanded to include additional material.

Another way to describe the act of reading the data and reducing it to a large group of categories is to call this the second step in phenomenological reduction (Patton, 1990) or bracketing (Denzin, 1989a). In bracketing, the following steps, which I took in the course of the data analysis, are involved:

- 1) Locate within the personal experience, or self-story, key phrases and statements that speak directly to the phenomenon in question.
- 2) Interpret the meanings of these phrases, as an informed reader.
- 3) Obtain the subject’s interpretations of these phrases, if possible.
- 4) Inspect these meanings for what they reveal about the essential, recurring features of the phenomenon being studied.
- 5) Offer a tentative statement or definition of the phenomenon in terms of the essential recurring features identified in step 4 (Denzin, 1989a, pp.55-56).

Following this work, the coding categories were examined with an eye to collapsing several or many into one theme, eliminating some from the

analysis where the relevance was questionable, and listing a group of concepts which summarized the important relevant material in the data.

In the next phase of the analysis, I attempted to put into words, what I thought was happening from the descriptions afforded by the data. Called variously the "story line" (Strauss & Corbin 1990) and the "structural synthesis" or "bones of the experience" (Patton, 1990, p.409), a leap was taken into an assertion of what the data said.

The methodology as seen from the interpretive viewpoint

The steps I followed in accomplishing this research are described variously by several proponents of the interpretive heritage, including Clifford Geertz (Anthropology), Erving Goffman and Norman Denzin (Sociology), Edmund Sullivan (Psychology) and others. The interpretive heritage includes many paths within the disciplines.

There are as many differing interpretive perspectives in the social sciences as there are practitioners who utilize the critical, qualitative, naturalistic methodology that defines the approach" (Denzin, 1989a, p.14).

Each of these researchers and schools of research is slightly different with respect to emphasis, but the goal shared by them all is **to make the experiences of some people accessible and understandable to the reader.** The unequal power relationship inherent in the "detached-researcher" vis a vis the subject dyad is eschewed in favour of an exploratory partnership of researcher with participant.

The interpreter enters into a dynamic relationship with the interpreted. To be systematic, psychological interpretation must be disciplined by a certain distance, but this distance is premised on the assumption that in order to understand something one must relate to it with some degree of affinity or sympathy.... The bottom line of this is that the psychological interpreter must seriously take into account the world as it is seen from the agent's sense of his or her intentions (Sullivan, 1984, p.116).

Closest to the methodology I used is that outlined by Norman Denzin in his work delineating the processes of **interpretive interactionism**

(Denzin,1989a) and **interpretive biography** (Denzin, 1989b). The main steps to be included in gathering and analyzing participants' information include the following:

1. Utilize multiple, case study, biographical methods.
2. Find the crises and Epiphanies in the subject's life.
3. Connect these experiences, as personal troubles, to public issues and institutional formations.
4. Employ sophisticated rigor.
5. Present the phenomenon to be evaluated in the language, feelings, emotions, and actions of those being studied.
6. Follow the five steps of interpretation, including deconstruction, capture, bracketing, construction, and contextualization.
7. Clearly state the researcher's value position on the phenomenon being evaluated (Denzin, 1989a, p.27).

I attempted to get at the crises, and epiphanies in participants' lives through use of a question which related to "turning points." Crises and epiphanies were sought because they may represent realizations and conceptual hubs around which the participant has constructed her or his understanding of personal history (Denzin, 1989b; Strauss, 1959). Crises are those experiences or conditions in which the person is sorely tested by "slings and arrows", those circumstances or traumatic happenings which challenge the person to gather all available strengths, both internal and external, in order to prevail. Epiphanies are those experiences which

...have the potential for creating transformational experiences for the person. They are often interpreted, both by the person and by others, as turning point experiences. Having had this experience, the person is never again quite the same (Denzin, 1989a, p.15).

The five steps of interpretation , including deconstruction, capture, bracketing, construction and contextualization, require some finer description because they comprise the intellectual mechanics of what I did with the emerging data. What Denzin calls "deconstruction", I have called "wearing

new lenses”, to differentiate what I will do from the meanings usually associated with “deconstruction” in critical analysis.

1-Wearing New Lenses, or deconstruction: I attempted to look at the young adults in my sample, their narrative material and their answers to the questions, from a vantage point totally removed from my pre-research stance. I think my critical analysis uncovered several biases, paradoxes and contradictions in the field. My review of the literature, much of it accomplished after the research was completed, and thereby responsive to the issues which emerged from the data, emphasized several critical issues in the field about which I was reasonably innocent before my exposure to the data.

2- Peering Intently, or capture: The conditions leading to (and several detracting from) resilience, and the quality of that resilience in the lives of the participants themselves, were held up for serious inspection.

3-Examining the data out of context or bracketing: Here, the phenomenon is

...taken apart and dissected. Its elements and essential structures are uncovered, defined, and analyzed.... In bracketing the subject matter is confronted, as much as possible, on its own terms (Denzin, 1989, p.55).

4- Following threads, or construction: This process is also known as finding themes in the data. “The goal is to find the same recurring forms of conduct, experience, and meanings in all of them” (Denzin, 1989, p. 60).

5- Personalizing , or contextualization: This process is defined by Denzin as locating the phenomenon under study in the personal biographies and social environments of the study participants, isolating meanings for them, presenting the phenomenon in their terms, in their language, and in their emotions.

Contextualization reveals how the phenomenon is experienced by ordinary people. It does this by thickly describing its occurrences in their world of interaction” (Denzin, 1989, p.60. Also see Geertz, 1973, for a discussion of “thick description”).

Interpretation of the data in interpretive interactionism

As Patton reminds us:

It is important to understand that the interpretive explanation of qualitative analysis does not yield knowledge in the same sense as quantitative explanation. The emphasis is on illumination, understanding, and extrapolation rather than causal determination, prediction and generalization (Patton, p.424).

The interpretation of the findings from this research should, for the interpretive interactionist, illuminate the phenomenon, be based on thickly contextualized material, be historically and relationally grounded, be processual and interactional, engulf what is known about the phenomenon, incorporate prior understandings of the phenomenon, cohere and produce understanding and be open to further, and better understandings in the future, because interpretation is never finished (Denzin, 1989, p.63).

Establishing Trustworthiness

In a qualitative, naturalistic, study the work must meet requirements for trustworthiness. It has been asserted and ably established that the qualities of "credibility," "transferability," "dependability" and "confirmability" are justifiably substituted for the expectations asked of quantitative studies, *i.e.* internal validity, external validity, reliability and objectivity (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p.301).

What is meant by these terms? **Credibility** substitutes for the traditional research paradigm's internal validity, and was established in my study through (1) designing the study in such a way that my findings are seen as credible to the reader, and (2) demonstrating the credibility of the findings by having a summary of the significant findings approved by the participants in the study themselves. Often, these two goals are accomplished through the employment of three tools: prolonged engagement, persistent observation and triangulation (Lincoln and Guba p.301).

My fourteen years as a front-line social worker and manager in one of the two agencies being studied helped me to meet the goals of both

prolonged engagement and persistent observation. With respect to prolonged engagement, I have been around the field site long enough to be familiar with its dynamics and its players. I was able to establish trust with agency personnel either because they knew me, they were predisposed to share my interest in the research question, or they had an already established interest in the research process and a belief in the usefulness of agency situated research. With those who were asked to contribute through referral by a superior in the hierarchy and felt the need to comply, however, there is no claim to any significant trust having been established.

With the participants themselves, however, I believe not knowing any of them was a positive feature of my role as investigator. Being a stranger enabled several of them to speak without the constraint they might well have employed with people identified with the agencies who had raised them. Many of the participants were actively working on expression of their real feelings and thoughts and other avenues of self-assertion.

If the purpose of prolonged engagement is to render the inquirer open to the multiple influences- the mutual shapers and contextual factors- that impinge upon the phenomenon being studied, the purpose of persistent observation is to identify those characteristics and elements in the situation that are most relevant to the problem or issue being pursued and focusing on them in detail. If prolonged engagement provides scope, persistent observation provides depth (Lincoln and Guba p. 304).

Persistent observation was also aided by my long history with the agencies involved. The establishment of what really counts in the environment of the study (*i.e.* pervasive qualities) was made less difficult because of my history (Lincoln and Guba, p.304).

Triangulation is one more way suggested by naturalistic inquirers to enhance the credibility of data and interpretations. (Denzin, 1978, Denzin, 1989, and Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Triangulation is a concept which refers, in conventional research, to contextual validation. That is, triangulation encompasses all those methods the researcher uses to verify the meaning of the data. Sources, methods, investigators and theories have all been multiplied or varied in order to check, validate or prove that with some certainty the data stands on its merit.

In this study, however, whose findings are, essentially, my interpretation of the participants' experiences of childhood, youth and young adulthood, there is neither the compulsion nor the ability to enhance the credibility of the data and the interpretations by enlisting the data and the interpretations of others. I was interested, however, in learning how the young adults taking part in the study would react to reading about the findings and my analysis of them. I felt a desire to let them know how I had reacted to and understood their material, and to hear how they reacted to what I understood.

The study's participants were sent a letter accompanying a precis of the study's findings. Perhaps, from one point of view, the sharing of a precis rather than the complete transcript with each participant may be seen to limit participants' abilities to corroborate the meaning of individual remarks. Another point of view which can be offered here is that the findings from this study come from the interviews as they took place, and were analyzed by myself as researcher. The findings do not purport to represent other than situated and partial knowledge, therefore, in exactly the same way that all research findings are partial and situated. In this view of research methodology and findings, there is not an objective reality, but only the truth as players in the process experience and enunciate it. My place in the system and my biases have been spelled out here, as fully as possible. It is for the consumer of the research, therefore, to decide how valid and helpful these findings are or are not.

Each participant was enjoined to call or write to me with any response at all which might inform me of their reaction to the findings. The findings and recommendations for practice were also shared with several other groups; previously disadvantaged students at the University level, professional social workers concerned with child welfare issues, and researchers, policy formulators, out-of-home-care graduates, and agency personnel from Canada and several additional countries. In each context there were opportunities to share feed-back with people at a variety of levels concerning the formulation which emerged from the data. Finally, I have met and will continue meeting with the agency personnel, PARC personnel, and with young adults who stand in the same relationship to out-of-home-care as the participants in the study. The goals of this interaction are two: 1) to continue to get reactions and hear exceptions to and modifications of the

research findings I report, and 2) to disseminate some of the ideas which emerged from the research and which have implications for practice and policy in the field.

Because **transferability**, in the sense that traditional researchers use the term when they discuss external validity, is not expressed

... in the form of statistical confidence limits, the naturalist can only set out working hypotheses together with a description of the time and context in which they were found to hold.... Thus the naturalist cannot specify the external validity of an inquiry; he or she can provide only the thick description necessary to enable someone interested in making a transfer to reach a conclusion about whether transfer can be contemplated as a possibility (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p.316).

The **dependability** and **confirmability** of my findings, interpretations and inferences should be based partly on the credibility safeguards established above, and should, further, be able to be established with ease through my keeping of necessary records throughout the investigation. **Dependability** is the assertion that my study has been undertaken and accomplished in the manner, or through the processes I described. **Confirmability** is the expectation that my "...product- the data, findings, interpretations, and recommendations ...are supported by data and is internally coherent so that the 'bottom line' may be accepted" (Lincoln and Guba, p.318).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) have suggested a concept of auditing which would enable an examiner outside the research project to establish that the process and product meet criteria for quality asserted by the researcher. The auditor would examine up to six categories of research data and form an opinion based on these. While it would be impossible to engage an auditor for this purpose with respect to my doctoral thesis, I have kept the audio tapes, copies of them transcribed and coded, notebooks with conceptual, thematic and biographical notes concerning the data and participants. The Appendix section of the thesis contains copies of the letters and forms used in the project. Therefore, a clear audit trail could be made available to readers with questions about the process or the product of my study. The audit trail suggested by Lincoln and Guba was an idea borrowed from a doctoral

dissertation by Edward S. Halpern who established the concept in 1983 as part of his doctoral dissertation based on a naturalistic inquiry (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

Strengths and Limitations of the Study

The first limitation of the study follows from my initial definition of "success" contained in letters asking colleagues for referrals of potential research participants. Clearly, although my definition of "success" attempts to reflect what I and my colleagues who continue to practice in the child welfare field might consider to be attributes associated with well being and positive outcomes in young adulthood, every criterion for inclusion is also a criterion for exclusion. The findings, therefore, are substantially determined by who these participants are. Other young adults, those who do not meet these criteria in part or in whole, might have other things to say about what has helped or hindered their progress in out-of-home care. It is also true, however, that the data in this study contains many examples of negative experiences and relationships in out of home care, and it would be difficult to construe the inference that because the young people participating are "success" stories by a definition determined by professional social workers, the study is therefore in any way an apology for the care experienced by participants.

Also on the "limitation" side of the ledger, there were several ways the data could have been organized and presented. There was always the lingering thought that in choosing one way I had rejected another, perhaps better, way. In writing the findings for the use of presentation in several forums, I was aware that the more participants' own words were included in the presentation, the more immediate and intense the communication. Instead of organizing the presentation of the material around ideas, it might have been preferable to organize around the participants and to emphasize the many narrative accounts of life paths they offered, and the meanings of both the form and content of these narrative accounts. I was intrigued and stimulated by reading on the topic of narrative analysis, especially the work of Mishler (1986) which I came to after writing the analysis of the findings. Although a great deal of narrative material is included in the findings section of this dissertation, the data could be even more strenuously mined for

narrative material, and I believe this emphasis would have been fruitful. As Mishler expresses the challenge of narrative analysis:

It is important to recognize that determining the point of a story is an investigative problem. It is not simply stated by the narrator, who may not say explicitly: "This is the point." In this sense, it is not an observable piece of behavior and requires inference and interpretation on the analyst's part. Nor can it always be expressed in the narrator's own words, as it is here. My interpretation depends on a reading and assessment of the full response from which the core narrative was extracted.... This interpretive problem is not peculiar to the narrative analytic approach, but is integral to interviewing as a method. A mainstream researcher, reading the above paragraph, might be tempted to assert that this approach is unscientific and that it shows why standardization is necessary. But this is illusory. Standardization involves an analogous process of deletion-selection-interpretation from the complex discourse of the interview. Further, these steps tend to be hidden by the methods used so that we can never retrieve the actual discourse and therefore cannot evaluate the adequacy of any particular investigator's mode of standardization. Here, with the data available for any investigator, an assessment can be made as to whether the interpretation offered is plausible, not a definitive criterion, but certainly not inconsequential (Mishler, 1986, p.238).


On another topic related to the study's limitations, it should be mentioned that although a sample was sought which would represent young men and women in care from both the majority culture and from the visible minority groups as well, and although this was almost achieved, the absence of any referral of an Afro-Canadian or Afro-Caribbean-Canadian male participant should be counted among the study's limitations but also, perhaps, it should be counted among the limitations of our public institutions serving children and youth.

One further limitation of the study concerns the extent to which participants were involved in the project; this involvement could have been multiplied at least threefold with salutary results for the quality of the research. Unfortunately, I hadn't anticipated the willingness and enthusiasm many of the participants bring to the prospect of making life in out-of-home-care better for future generations of children and youth. Instead,

I tried to minimize the amount of time and effort respondents would have to contribute, assuming they would feel put upon to be consulted repeatedly.

Paradoxically, on the same topic, the biggest strength of the study is that it carries some truths about the careers of children and youth in care from pre-conscious, or tacit, awareness into the light of day where examination and, perhaps, some transformation of action, can take place. The research undertaken has gotten to these truths by asking for the stories and the opinions of people who represent the positive and successful outcomes achieved by the child welfare system. In inviting the participation of these young people, who have given evidence that they belong to what is commonly considered an oppressed group, this project has, in a very small way, both empowered the participants and enriched the potential of these service delivery organizations to improve their practice. There is revolutionary research being undertaken today which has the salutary effect of empowering oppressed groups both by their participation in the research itself, and through the transformation of social relations which eventuate because of the social movements which give rise to the research.

People have begun to challenge the way language, research and knowledge are used as instruments of power that impose form and order for the purpose of control. Whether it be calls from the governments of third world countries demanding what they have called a New World Information Order, progressive literacy workers and popular educators using the context of learning as a means of transforming social relations, or feminists challenging the way knowledge is produced and whose view of the world it represents, they are all questioning the monopoly that certain powerful groups hold over information (Kirby & McKenna, 1989, p.15).



In conclusion, I would suggest that this research is strong to the extent that it has taken its place with that body of work which challenges, questions and empowers. Having completed this project, I have gained a great deal of knowledge about the necessity for consumers of child welfare services to inform policy and practice through the regular provision of consumer feedback and evaluation.



FINDINGS

I INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

The findings in this study fall into two major categories: how the researcher perceived the respondents and the special qualities they bring to social interaction, and what the participants named as the experiences, people and thinking that strengthened them.

All the respondents exhibited strong social responsiveness. They were willing or eager to communicate, interested in helping with the project, and reacted with some trust and a good deal of graciousness to the inquiries of a stranger from a different generation. Social responsiveness is a package of attributes and skills which make it pleasurable and rewarding to be the responsive individual's child care worker, social worker, volunteer, foster parent and teacher. These skills undoubtedly have played a large part in helping these participants to use opportunities and to become as self-actualized as they are. And these are skills that can be taught.

"Devalued" is the word I've used to describe how these successfully launched foster care graduates feel about their status as youngsters raised in out-of-home-care. They identify their stigmatization not so much with the circumstances surrounding their need for care or the adversity requiring the care, as with the lack of normality associated with **not living in a family of their own**. For them, and projected to the world around them, they are or have been lesser youngsters. The stigmatizing aspects of care, and the refusal of some participants to accept the stigma, transforming, in fact, their experience with care into a position of expertise, are all discussed and explored.

But for these young people who are all active, growing, working or studying, and caring individuals, some of their experiences, largely in out-of-home-care, have **added value** to others' estimations of them, and, more importantly, to their estimations of themselves. They are thereby steeled against some measure of the psychological damage possible with exposure to serious adversity.

The preponderance of value adding experiences, relationships and thinking reported by study participants fall into five major categories, which are herein designated as: 1) **Pathfinders and role models**, 2) **Seeking**

community, 3) Establishment and maintenance of self-esteem, 4) Exposure to opportunities, and 5) Protective thinking.

Quotations from the transcribed interview data fill the following pages in order to bring this section devoted to findings to life, and to communicate, as directly as possible, the personal experiences and thoughts of the participants. Most often, only two or three examples of a phenomenon are included to elucidate several different aspects of the same phenomenon. Usually, the pseudonym of the participant quoted is included to help contextualize the words. Sometimes, however, a phenomenon may evoke a great many different and compelling variations on the same theme, and in these instances a large sampling will be included without attributing each statement to one person.

The data show that there is an enormity of range and depth to the opportunity, both early and late, both time limited and continuous, for adding value in a youngster's life, both where early familial input has been protective, and where there is no evidence of any familial sustenance. The potential to protect against the effects of adversity, to remediate following adversity, and to begin building strengths in youngsters is actualized in many of these life stories, but sadly, the potential is not realized with many others. These findings suggest interventions that have worked, and may well continue to work towards the goal of helping youngsters realize their potential.

II. ABOUT THE PARTICIPANTS

A Social Responsiveness

One quality all the participants shared, some quite enthusiastically and naturally and others requiring a bit of working at it because of shyness or, in one instance, depressed affect, was the willingness to engage in the research interview with a stranger, someone of another generation, and to talk about themselves, sometimes exposing very personal material. Agreeing to engage, putting one's self at the disposal of others, trusting enough to enter into a relationship, however minimal, all of these characteristics are indicative of a personality structure which is basically desirous of social intercourse, or socially responsive.

Every person in the sample made an effort to answer my questions and to dig deeply into the inner experience in order to give me what I asked in the way of information, memories, perceptions and ideas. Some were interested in my research, my reasons for undertaking it, my own career pattern, even my professional experience in the Child Welfare field. Some were hesitant to tell me about experiences where social workers, like myself, acted wrongly or were hurtful, for fear of, perhaps, insulting or alienating me or causing me to question their motivations or contributions.

Several participants expressed pleasure at the opportunity to discuss and consider their lives and to bring their thoughts together in the way my interview required. One young man said all the talking had cured his headache. Another asked for his tapes, stating the interview could help him with his own development. A young mother said the occasion to be interviewed had started her on her own path to putting her past together, so she will be able to better answer her own children's questions about their biological roots, in the future. One young woman was amazed to hear herself professing feminist ideology; she was particularly shocked to observe how her own views about herself, her life and the world had changed because of her exposure to, and investment in, feminism. She, too, wanted her interview tapes when I finished with them. A particularly affable young man gave me a big, bear hug when he got up to go, indicating with his outstretched arms that we made a connection. Another young man made no move to go, even three hours after we met and as the sun went down in the quiet office where the interview took place.

These are young people who gravitate towards experiences which give them occasion to reflect, to relate to others and to help. It may be conjectured that youngsters who will be identified as successful young adults will need to have formed a relationship with at least the one adult who identifies him or her that way. Socially responsive youngsters provide pleasure and rewards to the people who work with them. It is an easy leap from my experience of pleasure in spending a morning or afternoon with the participant to imagining how a teacher, foster parent, child care worker or social worker would respond to having the youngster in her home, her classroom or on her caseload.

B Brief Profiles

A brief introduction to the nineteen young adults who were part of this study should help the reader absorb each participant's interview material and to associate each respondent more easily with her or his remarks. Participants are described in the order in which they were interviewed. (Please see the Appendix for a chart summarizing some of the important data related to participants).

Wherever possible — including several interviews where participants expressly mentioned their desire **not to** remain anonymous — information which could identify specific persons is withheld or obscured. This practice sometimes detracts from the possibility of bringing participants to life in detailed fashion; on the other hand, it was necessary to ensure the confidentiality of participants' interview data and the anonymity of the others in their lives, both inside and outside the Child Welfare establishment.

(1) **Craig's** interview foreshadowed the high quality of analysis and verbal acuity which characterized many other participants' responses. This first respondent exhibited both involvement in and highly developed thinking about topics related to youngsters in care, gaps in the system, services to families and especially the impediments to identity development in care. His responses were very far from the very personal and off the cuff views on these topics I had expected to hear from participants. Craig's very rich responses to my questions, as well as his willingness and ability to interact around the issues did, however, reinforce one of the original expectations for the study, that is, that successful young adults who had been through the system could provide a great deal of information and feedback which might be incorporated in policy and practice to benefit future youngsters in out-of-home-care. In addition, Craig and every participant except one who followed were eager and comfortable to share and exchange ideas with someone who was interested in them. In fact, these young people were exceptional in this regard; they were youngsters with sufficiently developed communication and social skills to discuss their lives and experiences with a stranger openly and with some ease.

Craig, at 22, is the single father of one small child whom he is raising by himself. At the time of our interview he was preparing to leave for his first year at University, where he planned to study Native-Canadian thought and life, with an eye to becoming an educator and curriculum developer in this

field. He grew up in a community well known for its deprived and disadvantaged circumstances, in an English/Canadian family with several siblings, ties with whom are tenuous now. His early childhood was characterized by neglect and chaos at home, but peppered with some interventions of a positive nature by a long-term adult male volunteer and by the occasional teacher who appreciated Craig's gifts. He entered out-of-home care at the age of twelve, after several years of increasingly troubled delinquent activities.

(2) **Louise** is 25 and has completed two years of Community College, but she plans to return to school for different training in a more financially secure field as soon as she has enough money to do so. Security — emotional as well as financial — is very important to her in planning her life. She is very attractive and composed. Louise came into care several years after she immigrated from Jamaica, at the age of nine. Her biological mother, with whom Louise was reunited after nine years, was unable to be a parent to her without excessive and abusive punishment.

(3) **Connie**, 23, is in her final year at university. Professional school or graduate school are choices she considers today; she wants to work with the public in a helping capacity. She is well-spoken, has a great deal of charm, and possesses excellent communication skills. She clearly had considered previously many of the questions I asked during the years before our discussion took place. Connie is an African-Canadian who was raised, for almost her entire life, in one English/Canadian family in a rural area. Her biological mother was a young University student when Connie was born, and she wasn't able to support her child. Connie very much considers this family to be her own family, and she and they act accordingly with respect to continuing ties and support.

(4) **John**, 21, attended Community College for two years and is about to start a University career. He comes from a mixed East Asian/English Canadian marriage. He came into out-of-home care after extended family members were unsuccessful at caring for John and his sibling in another country. The biological parents did not parent effectively; the domestic situation was characterized by mental illness, alcoholism, and abuse. John wants, more

than anything, an emotionally and materially secure life and to live as other "normal" people live. He is a sensitive, warm and caring person.

(5) Carly, 24, is on a long road to being graduated and licensed as a professional child care worker. At the age of 18, largely through the intervention of an inter-agency program designed to prepare youngsters in care for independence (PARC), Carly began to feel she could accomplish some things that were previously out of the question for her. Before then she had no confidence and believes she was considered to be different and inferior as a student and as a human being. In care from the age of six, Carly was emotionally and sexually abused both in care and out. One parent was mentally ill, the other sexually abusive. She sees both parents as rejecting, and her early memories are bereft of warm relationships. Ten foster placements and some young adulthood and independence under her belt, Carly is an exceptional young woman. She relates shyly and tentatively, but with great openness and heart! One imagines her career with children will be truly successful, because she understands so much and yet she remains eager to learn and grow.

(6) Patrina, 22, came to Canada from the Caribbean at the age of nine. In her country of origin she had been largely responsible for herself and five younger siblings. Upon arrival, she was re-introduced to her father and she met a new step-mother. Life with these parents led to rejection and abuse, emotionally, physically and sexually, and resulted in Patrina's placement in out-of-home-care at the age of twelve. Patrina is a dynamo. She is a community college graduate who has taken a series of responsible positions and keeps looking for more and better. Above all, she is determined, and a survivor. One is immediately impressed with her towering strength of character and personality.

(7) Amy, 24, is a university graduate about to enter a Social Work program and become a professional social worker. She's already a social worker, in that she's interested in motivations, strengths, weaknesses, needs and wants; she seeks to understand others. After being separated from her biological mother at the age of two, Amy was raised in the Caribbean by a family friend. She was reunited with her mother in Canada at age eight. The following four

years were marked with misunderstandings, insecurity and escalating abuse as the family in Canada broke down. Amy's religious life and community have been central to her.

(8) **Promilla**, 23, is a married woman of South-Asian/Caribbean background with one small child. She is graduated from high school despite the fact that she had come to Canada from the Caribbean at the age of 10, but had been unable to attend school until she became "legal" at fourteen. Her social and relationship skills enabled her to graduate from Grade 12 with awards, although today she says her reading, writing and numeracy skills are severely limited. She aspires to higher education and a secure career. Promilla came into care when the parenting of her biological father and step-mother became physically abusive. A perceptive and interested teacher rejected her attempts to give excuses for the bruises that were detected. Promilla is extremely warm, assertive and talkative; she becomes an old friend after a few minutes.

(9) **Kim** is 26, married, and the mother of two school-aged children. She comes from an English-Canadian family. Kim is one of a large number of siblings, many of whom were raised in care because their biological mother was not able to provide for them. Entering foster care at age three, she grew up in several out-of-home placements. Kim has a responsible job in a large financial institution, and she hopes for even more responsible positions. A bit reticent to explore memories of the past, Kim is firmly rooted in "today" and "tomorrow"; she worries that opening too many boxes and looking into the past may be upsetting, while at the same time she wishes to understand all she can about her own background in order to benefit her own children's development. She is a competent, soft-spoken, direct and intelligent person with a great deal to impart in her own logical, down to earth, way.

(10) **Laurie**, 23, has just completed a year at Community College, following five years of full-time employment after graduation from Grade 12. She wants to complete her training in a field which is always marketable, and recognized everywhere in the world. When meeting Laurie, one is impressed with her determination to care for herself, a skill she has worked very hard to develop. Attractive and fit, this English-Canadian young woman required

out-of-home-care from the age of five, when her adoptive mother died, leaving an adoptive father who was unable to carry on. Recently, Laurie sought and achieved a meeting with her birth mother and a half-sister.

(11) **Paul**, a 19 year old youth of South-Asian/Canadian background, is finishing Grade 12, and about to enter a two-year course in Community College. He hopes, desperately and passionately, to be a law enforcement officer. Paul has been in and out of foster care since he was four years old, when his mentally ill mother began to leave home and her son for extended periods of time. There was a good deal of chaos and violence in those early years, with Paul's mother being unable to form a stable relationship with other caring adults. This young man is very empathic, caring and sensitive. He wants a life in which his ability to be strong and to assert himself are developed and employed.

(12) **Ramon**, 21, has finished his second year at university. Originally arriving in Canada from Iran as an unaccompanied minor at the age of 14, he remained in care for four years. He plans to be a medical doctor, modeling himself and his life style after a favorite Uncle in Iran. Ramon is very charming and verbally adroit. He gives the impression of being instrumental and guards his feelings carefully. The private and guarded Ramon has been through a great deal of trauma as the result of separation from his parents, friends, and his homeland.

(13) **Grace**, 19, finishes her OAC year and will begin university next year. Of Chinese/Canadian descent, Grace was born in Asia, but moved as an infant, with her single mother, to Canada. At the age of eleven, she chose to seek an out-of-home-placement because her mother was unable to raise her without abusive behaviour, and could not change the troubling patterns in their relationship. Grace had one foster placement and one school placement, having been placed in the gifted stream early on and moving with a small group of youngsters into middle school and then through secondary school. Law and teaching are on her career goal list, and one feels after meeting her, that Grace can accomplish anything. She is highly articulate, intelligent, composed and self-possessed while expressing humility and appreciation of others.

(14) **June** is a Native/Canadian woman of 22 who suffered greatly in her early years of neglect and abuse, and whose pain is apparent today. Her experiences in out-of-home care, especially one group home placement which continues to be family for her, have had a largely healing effect on June's life. She actively constructs her present work life, social life and future plans and is very much in contact on a daily basis with the unhappiness inside her. She hopes to be happy. June has a responsible position, lives on her own, is involved in athletics and is searching for a more secure identity through some knowledge and contact with Native history, culture and spiritualism.

(15) **Steve**, 21 also Native/Canadian, dropped out of high school in Grade Eleven, spent some years on the city streets, and is now on a healing path, working in the treatment facility which helped him with his addictions, and to find himself and his strength. Steve's life in and out of care has been characterized by abuse and lack of caring adults; unfortunately the few experiences with adults who reached out to him occurred when Steve acknowledges he wasn't available. As he puts it "a lot of wounds have been inflicted." He is a very personable, warm, communicating human being who immediately turns a stranger into a friend.

Hoping to find a career, Steve is working through his questions of identity in contact with the Native community, especially some of the adults who can put him in contact with his culture and history as a Native man. He believes this path is essential to follow first, before he can turn to the direction of his future.

(16) **Claire**, at 20, is a real power house. Halfway through a university honours degree, she isn't sure whether her career will be in genetic research or medicine. Her grades are high, her friendships, interests, relationships and work experiences are many and varied. She has a tough, instrumental side and is at the same time open, friendly, caring and warm. One is impressed immediately with the certainty that Claire will continue to achieve at high levels in all areas of her life.

Awareness of the hurdles which exist for a Black woman in Canadian society permeates Claire's understanding of her life history. She came into out-of-home care when the circumstances of life in Canada with a father with

whom she had been newly reconciled, and with her resentful step-mother, deteriorated into abuse. Experiences in care were positive and supportive and the one foster mother who cared for Claire is a "second mother" to her. Claire's relationship with her own mother in Jamaica continues to fill her with warmth and self-confidence as it did before the move to Canada seven years ago.

(17) **Brad**, very intelligent and eighteen, is entering his OAC year in high school; he looks forward to going out of town to university a year from now. Although he is uncertain about a career choice, he is thinking seriously about science as a general area in which he has some interest and talent. A likable youngster, Brad looks to older adolescents and to the adults in his life for guidance and models for his own path and behaviours. He is young and uncertain in many areas and he gives the impression of being open to others' intervention and malleable.

Brad has suffered many losses of loved adults. His father, with whom he was reconciled after six years in care, died soon after the reconciliation. His mother has been lost to mental illness as far back as Brad can remember. A much loved foster mother died suddenly, and another foster mother with whom he had a long-standing loving relationship was lost to him when conflict between Brad and his foster-father led to the boy's rejection. More than anything, Brad wants to be typical and normal, and to be acceptable to others as he moves into adulthood.

(18) **Mai-Lin**, 20 years old, is a university student from Vietnam, from where she escaped with her older brother at the age of eleven. She is instrumental, self-conscious and in control of interaction, and she reports that becoming intimate with others is difficult for her. Mai-Lin chose to come into care because she hungered for the help and support of an adult woman in her life; she felt she was raising herself. A lively intelligence and the need to be worthy and respected are actively embodied in this very attractive and verbally adroit young woman, who wants her future to make her childhood loss of everyone and everything she knew, at age eleven, worth it.

(19) **Moustafa**, 21, was sent to Canada as an unaccompanied minor from his war torn country in the Middle East in the family's quest for more and better

educational opportunities and to avoid the possibility of the boy's being used by the government as "cannon fodder" in war. He was fourteen when he left his homeland and came here expecting to be cared for by his older brother who, as it turned out, was not ready for the responsibility for an additional six years. Moustafa does not think his experiences in Canada make up for the loss of his friendships and family life in the Middle East, although he has acquitted himself well in school and in living up to his parents' expectations. He is an emotional, introspective and brooding young man who expresses his feelings of inadequacy with respect to intimate relationships and meeting his own expectations. He has a very deep, abiding, and warm relationship with the group home mother who raised him from the age of fifteen, and in whom he has invested a great deal of trust and confidence

C Sources of Referral

The young adults interviewed for this study are not much different from any other nineteen young adults with respect to their activities and pursuits. In addition to the few minimal requirements for study inclusion, however, (including the specifications that they either work or study, live at a permanent address, enjoy friendships and a confidant, cultivate some interests and exhibit the rudiments of self-knowledge) these participants also had at least one adult in their world who identified them as successful out-of-home-care graduates. That is to say that for each participant there was one adult within the child welfare system who regarded her or him highly, who was pleased and impressed with her or his achievements, who was focused, I would posit, in what we have come to understand as a quasi-parental way, in the evolving production of the adult from the raw material of the child. Perhaps, as the demographic data depicted on the accompanying chart suggest, youth who are referred to a program like PARC and are most likely to use it come from a less, rather than more, stable history of out-of-home-care, and that the parental role can be, in some aspects, provided by a program like this one, in which focus on the emerging young adult is concentrated.

It is perhaps instructive to note that referrals for the study came from two basic sources, those being the PARC (Pape Area Resource Center, developed and sustained by funding from the two largest Child Welfare

agencies in the Metropolitan Toronto area) readiness for independence program and from individual social workers from geographic areas all over the city. Social workers in the second category are responsible for the progress of individual young people in care, sometimes also for the youngsters' welfare before and after out-of-home-care, and often for the monitoring, resourcing and support of the foster home or group home as well.

Although this is not a large sample study and no generalizations can be reached from exploration of the sample, it is interesting to note that many more referrals of successful young adults came from the PARC program than from any other source in the two large, metropolitan child welfare agencies from which my sample was taken. In fact, some very large segments of the out-of-home care populations of both agencies are either not referred to a program like PARC prior to their emancipation from care, or are referred and do not attend. And from the population of PARC non-attenders, although a sizable group of social workers with youngsters in foster homes and group homes did name successful youth, the number of this group was very small compared with referrals from PARC, when one considers the very large number of potential referrals possible from across the city.

One large department in particular, which places and monitors the placements of youth in outside paid institutions, children's mental health centres and some agency-run group home settings had no young person they considered to be successfully launched during the past five years. It may well be suggested that the young people placed in these "outside institutions" have already, prior to these placements, been sufficiently damaged by their experiences to make them inappropriate, even years later, for a study about "successful graduates". It may also be conjectured that referral for a study depends, to a large degree, on the formal and informal associations established by the researcher with people in the various sectors of the institutions being studied.

In reality, one-site, on-site, preparation for independence programs are not available in every community, and the young adults who were not referred by the PARC program had not, in fact, heard about the program. As well, although programs like PARC seem to be effective for a large number of young people, one might wonder what earlier preparation might make it possible for more of them to use the concrete and emotionally supportive

services offered during the year or years immediately preceding independence.

The question which can be raised from the pattern of referral which followed our inquiries with these large, Child Welfare institutions, relates to the degree to which they are focused, throughout, on their "finished product". Do these institutions perform enough of a parental role with respect to preparation of youngsters for independence and adulthood? Or are the many adults who work with children in out-of-home-care focused most often on the immediate and pressing problems involved in finding and sustaining protected environments for youngsters, problems which often take precedence over the activities and planning associated with the eventual "successful launching" of the youngsters in their care?

III DEVALUED CHILDREN

A Devaluation emerging from out-of-home-care

Children who have lived in out-of-home care are potentially doubly devalued, first by the circumstances which brought them into care, and then by the stigmatization attached to their "foster" status. Of course, when youngsters experience poor out-of-home-care because of insufficiencies in the out-of-home-care system or its linkages with the communities in which the families live, they become further devalued as the result of these experiences. The premise here is, however, that even when the out-of-home-care is good and sufficient, youngsters often report feeling devalued because of the stigmatization connected with living in families other than their own.

Clearly, when children are taken from their families in order to protect them, the circumstances surrounding their daily lives are of such menace as to constitute an imminent threat to their lives, emotional health or physical well being. The legislation existing with respect to children at risk in each Province reflects our ill ease with removing children from their families, in part because of the added risk inherent in depriving the child of that which is his or her right, the right to belong to a family. Therefore, even in circumstances of familial stress, conflict, physical and sexual abuse, neglect, periodic abandonment and established mental illness of one or more parents, child welfare authorities must prove, in a court of law, that the risk of these

circumstances clearly outweighs the risks inherent in depriving the child of his or her family.

The pervasive devaluation perceived by participants in association with their having been in out-of-home-care is the strongest and most surprising finding that emerges from my interviews with research participants. I expected to find devalued self-judgments and assessments of personal social worth because of the experiences (for example chronic neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse) which led to the need for out-of-home-care. I was not looking for data that so strongly indicated youngsters' devalued self-judgments and assessments of personal social worth **because they were raised in out-of-home-care.** Negative feelings about having been raised in out-of-home-care were at least as prominent, in some respondents' accounts of themselves, as their feelings about most other adversity experienced in their young lives. Most of these young people have experienced real, major and often painful crises with respect to **who they are and what others think of them** in the light of their growing up in out-of-home care, eclipsing the significance to them today of the difficult circumstances which resulted in their out-of-home-placements. And all participants have, to lesser and greater extents, grappled with this double dose of de-valuing.

The young adults interviewed in this study, like young adults in general, are in the process of developing a solid and highly valued set of characteristics and behaviours by which they are known, that is, identity. The process centers, for many participants, not so much on the troubles and trauma leading to the need for out-of-home-care, but rather on the fact of **having been foster children.** There seem to be many gradations to these data based on considerations including time spent in foster care, the circumstances leading to the need for care, constancy of care, quality of care, and the young person's age and maturity level when entering care, gender, race and place of birth (Canada or elsewhere in the world).

Connie is an excellent example of the young out-of-home-care graduate who reports having experienced no devaluation associated with having been raised in out-of-home care. In some respects, including the longevity, security and transcendence of her foster placement, Connie's out-of-home placement represents the best possible aspects of care. On the other hand, as an African/Canadian woman raised with three biological sons of the foster parents in a rural community, Connie found herself the only person of colour

in her extended family, in the neighborhood, in school and in her local community. Her identity problems and struggles, therefore, revolved around being Black and being female, but did not extend to the "foster" versus "normal" child role and its meaning. She very strongly identifies as a part of her family, and attributes some of her success at recognizing and addressing her oppression as a Black young woman to the support and love of her foster family. Perhaps the circumstances of knowing no other family from infancy, having always been a part of one foster family, learning nothing negative about the character, life-style or capabilities of her biological parents and maintaining a visiting, communicating, supportive relationship with her foster family all take her life-long placement out of the realm of out-of-home care in this participant's frame of reference and that of her foster family and the community.

Connie's concerns with respect to identity more closely resemble the usual experience of a youngster adopted in infancy, who has always experienced her family as hers, but who has unanswered questions about her biological and historical roots. I would like to note, however, that the only real concern I sensed in Connie's reflections on her foster family emerged when I asked her if she knew why adoption, rather than foster placement, had not been considered or perhaps chosen in her situation. Although she had no information about her legal status, she also indicated, through her body language and reluctance to consider the topic, that the fact of her foster placement gave her some difficulty.

Most respondents report that they have experienced feelings of shame and embarrassment about having been raised in an alternative arrangement to a biological, natural, or "normal" family. However, aside from one or two exceptions, respondents did not make negative self-judgments despite their devalued status. Craig's look backward to his years between seven and ten is one of these exceptions.

My mother was not very attentive to our hygienic needs. So I was ah, a dirty kid with a lot of disgusting habits, right? And when I developed, ah bad habits, they weren't corrected, right. I was a strange kid, I guess. Like I was a loner, you know. Damn strong. Fucking strong kid, but I was strange. I was different. I could still pick out kids that are like me today when I see them, right.

And Laurie suspects that she wasn't popular in elementary school because of her own behaviours which were off-putting.

All the kids didn't like me because I was disgusting. I had this disgusting habit of picking my nose and eating it in front of people and I didn't care.

The overwhelming majority of self-devaluation is not, however, related to personal characteristics or behaviours. Rather, the negative and uncomfortable self-judgments relate to participants' social identification as 1) people from dysfunctional backgrounds and 2) people raised in out-of-home-care. Almost all these young people have, to a degree, accepted what they identify as a social stigma surrounding their life circumstances. Some have dealt with these feelings and have achieved a sense of well-being as a result; they have had experiences, formed relationships or used interventions which added value to their self-evaluations.

Many attribute negative assessments of them, or their social roles, to others in the community. This includes a generalized "people think" allusion, or an anticipated negative assessment or snub as in "I don't tell everyone about my background, only a few good friends. Most people don't understand."

Devaluation associated with out-of-home-care is clustered in three main categories. First, participants report and display shame, embarrassment, self-doubt and hurt with respect to the **perceived failings and insufficiencies of their natural parents**. Almost all participants express shame about being raised, in whole or in part, in out-of-home-care. Second, just the fact of **being a foster child** is associated with shame and the anticipated rejection by others, at both the personal and the institutional level.

Third, some participants believe and state that living in a stranger's home is not sufficiently related to their identity or history to help in identity development. The youngster's sheer inability to make contact with or gain information about his or her background or roots can be a further complicating factor. Out-of-home care graduates point to both areas, the inability to identify with characteristics of substitute caretakers and their families, and the non-accessibility of personal and family history, when they relate difficulties in developing a strong and solid conception of who they are.

This problem of identity building while in out-of-home care can be seen as identity deep freeze.

(i) Failings of Natural Parents

It hurts to have parents who did not have success in the world, or were judged as unfit parents. It hurts to think your parents were alcoholics or crazy people, or the kinds of people who are pointed at and made fun of. If your father or step-father beat up your mother, or your mother left you alone at home to go out and have a good time, that hurts too. And the hurt seems to come from three main sources: empathy with the sick or insufficient parent, self-pity because the parent abused or neglected you, and shame/worry because whatever the problems in one's biological family, participants are implicated by them, they identify with them, and they feel that they too are potentially lacking.

Some young people broke down and cried during our conversations together. For the most part, they did so when discussing an ill biological parent, a helpless parent, their difficulties today in relating to a troubled parent, or a remembered injury suffered at the hands of a biological parent. When discussing other aspects of their lives, these competent, attractive and well-spoken young people were in control of their emotions. When they spoke about their biological parents, they were less so. The impression given is one of buried feelings existing under a foundation of mastery, accomplishment and strength, feelings which will continue to be addressed further, both actively and unconsciously, as time goes on in order for the individual to put limitations on the evocative power attached to them.

The following excerpts of interview material relates to natural parents and how much perceived parental inadequacy affects participants with respect to their feelings about themselves.

When Paul looks into his future he visualizes a career in law enforcement, having a warm and comfortable home, maybe marriage, and enough money to take care of his chronically mentally ill mother. He doesn't know who his biological father was, but has troubled memories and angry feelings towards a step-father who was abusive towards his mother. When he considers the possibility of being a parent himself, he worries.

I've thought about it but I take it as it comes.... My mother is not that stable which you know. That's the easy way out kind of,

you know, crazy, not as in 'psychotic'. I don't know what her diagnosis is either. And even if I did know, other people don't even understand that so I usually wait for a reaction.... People want the details of how she, you know, she has all these problems. I don't know how you become a good father.... I grew up without a father.... I worry too much that I don't think I'll be a good father. I don't think I can offer all the right qualities to someone. Yeah, it's a question mark.

He doesn't visit his mother very often because the visits have the effect of making him feel bad, guilty and unable to do things for himself.

Well, I used to feel real, real, bad but I'm trying not to now, go into it so much cause I start feeling sorry for myself. ...I can't always support her and I gotta take care of myself too which I learned from the Children's Aid. ...I always blame myself for the things that happened to her. I couldn't help her when, you know, when she was being abused or anything like that.

John, a well-dressed, well-spoken and interpersonally adept university student feels he ought to visit his mentally ill mother and the sister with whom he shared so many traumatic experiences in the past, but being with them or even talking about them makes him feel uncomfortable and, perhaps, out of control.

I want to step in and start talking to them but I sort of crawl into that place where I start arguing with her and being unreasonable and stuff like that which I'm normally not like with the people I live with. And ...I tried to deal with it before but just, like I understand it but I just can't deal with the emotions.

Kim's mother gave birth to a large family of children but was unable to raise any of them; the youngsters all came into care because their minimal needs for food, shelter and supervision were not met at home. Kim, an attractive young working mother and wife, always worried about whether her mother's problems had major implications for her own ability to be a mother. Sometimes, as well, her foster parents made dire predictions about her future, when they were exasperated.

Like sometimes, as people do, when they got angry they said things like "you're going to be just like your mother, you're just

like your mother," so that gave you a negative impression. I always had this kind of image of myself, because of my mother, that I would follow in her footsteps, and I didn't want to. I always said "No, I don't think so," right? So I always wanted to make sure I didn't.

Sam's alcoholic mother weaves in and out of his life in reality and as the symbol of a Native Canadian who has, at times, followed a self-destructive path. At his worst time as a teen-ager, following a dangerous period with drugs, alcohol and prostitution, Sam looked to the child welfare system to get out of his rut.

I didn't like living low. And worst of all I saw myself becoming like my mother, becoming like my sister, you know. I want to be better than them. I feel my parents, my mother's disgraced us, disgraced my name. My people, like the Ojibwa. That means far reaching light. Like what I felt is there's the only one that held our name, real important. Like we had a lot of honour back then, eh. And before my great grand father had died, he signed a treaty, 1873, he signed our name, and the way he signed it was like this... that was his signature. (We didn't have writing back then.) ...And I had set my mind I'm not going to be like her.

(ii) Being a Foster Child

Most participants allude to the devaluation attached to being a foster child. Some stress a special circumstance of history which distinguishes them from other foster children, that is, the degree to which they were raised by extended family members instead of strangers, or the degree to which a placement was close to being life-long, and therefore like a natural family versus a series of unrelated and unsuccessful placements.

For example, Amy was fostered by a paternal aunt she hardly knew after her mother sent to Jamaica for two young daughters and found her attempts to mother the girls deteriorating into physical abuse. Amy reports that she and her foster parent-aunt received more support and higher status from the schools she attended and from the community in general than was the case for others in foster arrangements with strangers.

I had no understanding, no stigma, there was nothing. I think because the school recognized an aunt as extended care, it wasn't weird. There was nothing weird about it and I had

family, I mean I knew them, and I had cousins, so it was very normalizing and I realize how fortunate I was now when I look at other youth who say they went to foster homes with strangers. I think the hardest part for me being in foster care was my own feelings that I had to... the obligation to be good for my aunt who, she didn't have to do it but she did. So, it was really never feeling that this was mine, I didn't have it, it wasn't mine, it didn't belong to me.

Connie, as mentioned above, doesn't have the others' problems with devaluation because her foster placement began in her infancy and she very strongly identifies her life-long foster parents as her own mom and dad.

I don't represent all of the children who've been in care. I guess you'd say that my experience has been somewhat different from other kids, especially when other kids have been moved from home to home and they don't have quite such a good relationships with their parents.

Study participants think of the usual foster child career as one coming from a dysfunctional family necessitating out-of-home care, which may unfortunately involve a series of placements, including several unsuccessful ones, with strangers. Those participants who haven't had the usual out-of-home care histories, as well as the immigrant and unaccompanied minor participants whose situations are also not the usual profile share the impression that being a foster child in the usual configuration means existence in a stigmatized and less-than-normal position in the community.

Here are comments made about the foster child role by study participants.

From Laurie:

"Well, when I was a child I was a foster kid and other kids were normal kids. Normal kids, foster kids. That was the only... that's how I separated the two categories, you know. I didn't want to be around foster... everything foster. I wanted to be normal like everyone else.

And being more specific about what the difference was between being a foster child or a normal child, Laurie said:

Somehow I wasn't as good as everybody else cause I'm a foster child. That is exactly what I thought. Everyone else is better than me.

When asked whether the difference, when she was a child, was based on anything specific she could remember, the answer was definite and categorical:

No, no. Just that title, 'I'm a foster child.' The title.

Laurie differentiated fostering from adoption at an early age. Living with her first foster parents for eleven years, she longed to be adopted by them.

I loved them so much, like I really did and I wanted to be part of the family. I didn't just want to be a foster child. I wanted to be adopted and be committed to. That's what I wanted. To be part of a family, be in the family.

And about the stigma of being a foster child, Laurie despairs of coming up with interventions which could help youngsters in care to feel differently about their status.

Oh gosh, that's really tough because there's nothing you really can do. You know you're a foster child, you know what you are and it's just nothing can make you feel good about it. I don't know.

From Paul:

Obviously to me when you're in there, so obviously something's wrong with you, you know. You're going to go to the schools with foster parents. You can't say they're your parents... something must be wrong with you cause if you're living in a foster home then there's something wrong either with your family or something. It's not normal, normal as in everyone has a happy life, happy family, everyone has a mother and father, kind of thing.

From Steve:

The foster kids are lesser than the real kids, you know.

From Brad:

Well, often in my early years I was almost, I was ashamed... And I would say that my foster parents were my real parents... And I didn't really invite people to my house that often and when I did I always had to make up stories of my past saying that they were parents and I kept the same line so that it was consistent, right? I guess I became like a liar... When I was in elementary school and had foster parents I was afraid people would treat me different because I was not as good as them, like I didn't have parents and I was afraid of losing friends... that rumours would go like 'did you know that Brad has foster kids in the family?'

From Kim:

You look around you... you look at how other people are living and know that one day you'll live like that, and that you'll be normal. That word normal it was always in my vocabulary, like I always wanted to be normal, because I always felt un-normal. You always were given the impression you're not like everybody else so you're abnormal. So I always wanted to be like everybody else, I wanted to have a normal life and I just wanted to get over any obstacles.

John, after talking very positively and enthusiastically about his Independent Living setting and how much the experience helped him, went on to describe its place and status in the community, and in his own perceptions:

And everyone had their own little family and house and everything and then this Independent Living Program sitting in the middle of the street always causing trouble and stuff like that. So you have a bad perception of what Children's Aid is about.... Like I wouldn't want to live next to, like if I had a house I wouldn't want them to move in next to me.

And later:

I always see people who either have their own families or they have nice houses and stuff like that. Like they, there's always something I'm lacking that I consider normal, normal's, you

know, two point five kids in the house and dad and mom and a nice car.

From Moustafa, an unaccompanied refugee sent by his parents from Iran to avoid his possible involvement in war and to have the opportunity for higher education talked about his group home and the other youngsters placed there:

The kids that come there are all sexually molested by their parents or they're abused, drugs, they were getting hit by their parents and I didn't even know these things cause I wasn't able to speak well so I didn't even, I thought they were all happy there... [I thought it had] to do with parents were divorced and stuff like that so it wasn't a serious case. But some of them were really actually serious cases. So I just said, I was just going on with my life, you know. Learn English and go to school. So I didn't ask personal questions about their lives.

Grace is pleased with her own excellent progress through school, sports, music and friendships. She has had one stable placement in care, and is moving to a new community with her very supportive foster family. When asked *what* about being in care has helped or hampered her development into young adulthood, she said:

Well okay... I guess the biggest thing for me... it's not so much financial or emotional cause really it was better for me emotionally to be in care and probably financially too. But it was kind of psychologically I guess... The whole stigma, the whole negative thing attached to being a foster child, being in care with Children's Aid like so, I guess, something I'm still a bit ashamed of. Though I mean I shouldn't be. I know on one level I shouldn't be but on the other level I really am and so it's things like I wouldn't tell, I've only told my closest friends that I'm in care, things like that and I don't know ...it was just, there's always a bit of paranoia around, you know, what if my teachers know, will they treat me different, blah, blah, blah. Or will they... So it was a whole psychological thing I guess.

The **devaluation** inherent in being a youngster in out-of-home-care is felt least by four participants from two cultural/ethnic groups, the African Caribbean and Native Canadian groups. These four and other participants

from the same cultural/ethnic groups do report, however, those difficulties in the realm of identity formation and development which arise from separation from their families and larger cultural/ethnic communities.

Although one cannot generalize with confidence from these few respondents, there are some reasons why young people from these particular groups may report less discomfort with the role of "foster child." The first hypothesis is that because both cultures have traditional views of family which extend beyond nuclear, extended, and even blood-line definitions, being raised in out-of-home care may not constitute a threat to the young person's status. Informal caring for, and adoption of, children when this is necessary is often acceptable and practical and one parent may ask or assume it is acceptable for another adult to nurture and supervise the child.

Patrina, for example, moved easily from one household to another in Jamaica. The concept of changing homes in a fluid manner, based on one's own interests and the preferences and capabilities of others came very easily to her in her growing-up years.

Like in between my great-grandmother and my grandmother, yeah. I stayed with my great-grandmother a few times and my mother, she used to beat the crap out of me sometimes just from me being there. So I used to always take off and go to my grandmother's house and then you know my great-grandmother would see the way my mother treat me too and she always tells me to go to my grandmother's house because we live so close, you know, a couple of minutes from each other's house... Yeah, back and forth. So I was always used to the moving up and down so.

For Patrina, whose immigration from the Caribbean was supposed to result in better opportunities and a secure family life (on the paternal side) in Toronto, but who became a victim of physical and sexual abuse after her arrival, her self-image as a foster child started out being positive. It was only after she learned, in concrete ways, that she was supposed to be devalued that she began to explore the negative implications of the foster child role.

But you know at school it was kind of hard so that's why I didn't want to go anywhere else and meet anybody cause in Grade 8 at first was really hard. Cause people really didn't talk to me. The kids weren't very friendly. They found out that I was in a foster

home which I thought at the time was a good thing. I didn't really know it was a bad thing to some people. To me it was always a good thing because it was like it was better than my real house. It was better than my real family so it didn't really matter to me but the kids were calling me 'foster home hippie' and all sort of names for what reason I don't really know and the teachers always pinpointed me out as 'oh don't bother Patrina, Patrina has a problem'. It's like he was saying I was retarded in a way. So a lot of people started, you know, just seeing me as a different person.

And June, a Native Canadian woman whose biological family was severely dysfunctional, exposing her to chronic neglect and abuse, says nothing about the negative status inherent in out-of-home-care reported by many others. Today, she longs for the happy times she remembers in one particular group home where she felt...and still feels...loved.

I miss being with them. I always, when I'm there I, I think back and think 'I wish I was younger then so I can like be here with this family' you know. And I think it's a healthy environment and it's like I can be myself and I can just let go or I can say whatever I want to say without getting hit or, you know, stuff like that. I just like it over there. It's fun.

In both Native Canadian and Afro-Caribbean cultures, there is a tradition for it to feel comfortable, under the best conditions, for parenting to be undertaken out of the home of the biological parents, for practical reasons, by extended family or other community members, and for short periods of time or, in some instances, for the greater part of a childhood. Of course, for parents from both these cultures, the mandatory giving up of parental rights to strangers from a governmental agency, and under the mantle of protective custody, diminishes parental self-esteem and causes great and long-lasting trauma.

One additional factor which may partially account for the absence of status threat or devaluation reported by these members of minority groups is that youngsters from Caribbean -African backgrounds and those who are Native Canadian may not expect to experience the conferring of either value or high status by the majority of white Canadians because of the racism inherent in our society. This hypothesis could, of course, best be explored

through a larger study which would compare larger numbers of young people from different ethnic and racial groups with respect to their experiences in out-of-home-care and their perceptions of their own social value resulting from these experiences.

(iii) Identity Deep Freeze

Craig was the first to raise problems inherent in *developing* identity in substitute (or out-of-home) care when he said:

Children's Aid is just a place to take care of your physical needs, right, while you are getting from childhood to adolescence to adulthood. Children's Aid is not a place where people develop culture, develop history... It's not a developing place, right? And I think a lot of people who get into the Children's Aid too young don't know who they are, where they're coming from or just, you know, basically that, right? They have no contents. They have no ideas of themselves, right? They're void, they're empty.

Out-of-home care as a deep freeze in which youngsters await discharge from care into adulthood is a haunting image. This is how Craig characterizes his time in substitute care, and yet Craig is the last person to whom I'd attribute gaps in the content areas of ideas or sense of self. Perhaps his understanding of that discrepancy is attached to the advanced age (12) at which he entered foster placement, and his relationship with a Big Brother which developed for him in latency and transcended his placements in out-of-home care.

Perhaps because he is highly analytical, and perhaps because he has the soul of a poet, he paints a very frightening panorama of the potential for social death which threatens our attempts to provide out-of-home-care.

Care is not a culture. Like... there's so many tangibles that you learn that give you an identity when you're growing up as a child, right? You know, it's things like, you know, certain types of prayer you know. Things to read or... ways to behave... or is it a loving, close family, you know. But when you're at home, right, all these type of things help to give a self-identity. It helps to understand like who you are and what you are, right. It's the big, huge, great big, fantastic number one step that determines how a person is going to be who they are. I don't know how you

can explain it in like, ten minutes, right. It's such a damn big topic you know, it's incredible how large this is, right. But the basic idea is that we need some type of reference to reflect ourself against, right, but develop towards, right. To be a part of like.

Addressing the need for content and past, Brad offered that his foster mother really took the place of his dysfunctional mother with respect to providing him with a past, among many other functions she filled with respect to his growing up. And this remains true for him even though the identified foster placement ended very unhappily because of the conflict between Brad and his foster father.

Like she was basically my mother, the mother I never had because my mother couldn't take care of me, my real mother. She would say, you know, 'fold your clothes'. She would make me do chores, earn my allowance, pretty well live the way a teenager or a child is supposed to live.... And a past. They always took, they always kept my pictures, my photos I still have them. I always got my report cards. Things like that.

When Steve, a Native Canadian young man, was asked for his opinion about the practice of placing children with foster parents of their own ethnic and racial background, his reply was: "I think it's great." He was asked whether more familiarity with his roots earlier on in his life would have added to his strengths. His answer was:

Oh definitely. Oh yeah. I had a big problem with identity. I didn't know who I was, you know. But going through treatment [drug and alcohol addiction treatment delivered in a native philosophy/healing treatment model] and all that, *coming up who I am*, you know. No problem. Helped a lot.

I inquired whether it would have helped Steve to learn about his roots from an earlier age. He answered:

Oh yeah, I'd have my base right there. I'd know what to turn to you know. But I never did feel comfortable with Catholic stuff, right.... Didn't click.

Laurie, whose adoptive mother's death led to her placement, as a small child, in out-of-home-care, has recently re-connected with her birth mother. Now she'd like to have just one meeting with her birth father. Her ideas about identity and out-of-home care come through in these statements:

I'm just so greedy for knowledge. I want to find my dad too like I really want to see what he looks like. I want to know about his family and after that, like I don't really care if I have contact with him or not.... I'm just curious.

Asked what this knowledge about her roots, her history, might do for her, she replied:

It just gives me a more complete picture of my life. Instead of having pieces missing 'cause I don't even have pictures of myself when I was a baby. And that really hurts 'cause I don't know what I looked like when I was a baby. Whereas most normal people, not that I'm not normal, but that's a kind of a term we use when we're a foster child. Normal kids, you know, regular kids, they have pictures of themselves when they're babies. Like I don't know what I look like. I don't know how much hair I had when I was like four months old. You know I don't know how many teeth I had when I was a year old. I have no idea, you know, and that really bugs me. **There's a part of my life that's just missing.**

B The Special Case of Immigrant Youngsters in Care

When the idea for this study was shared with a group of foster mothers before starting the research several of them came up with very enthusiastic referrals on the spot, but hesitated to go further with these because the youngsters were placed with them after coming from other countries. One woman said she was concerned that the immigrant youngsters had different backgrounds, different needs and problems from those born in Canada, and wondered if I planned to include these "successful grads" as well.

Excluding immigrant youngsters from the study had never been considered. Their differences from Canada-born and raised youngsters did not, at the outset, seem overwhelming. After all, they too suffered from significant separations, they needed to form relationships with strangers in a

familial setting, and many of them came from countries where families faced desperate conditions related to war and impoverishment. With respect to several aspects of identity development, however, especially those of the devaluing aspects of foster care, the perceptions of parental inadequacy, and identity deep-freeze, these youngsters turned out to be quite different indeed.

Immigrant participants seem to differ somewhat from Canadian born and raised youngsters with respect to their perceived devaluation. For some of these youngsters, stigmatization related to being in out-of-home-care is less palpable; they don't expect others to think less of them because their dependency needs are being met by adults not related to them, and they remain highly identified with the families from whom they are separated by distance.

Children who were sent to Canada, accompanied or unaccompanied, or brought to Canada from or by intact, functioning families or family members who cared for the child and planned the immigration for the child's benefit naturally experience out-of-home-care differently. They convey the feeling that something major was amiss and loss was experienced when they came to Canada and separated from their loved ones, their known social roles and negotiated home environment. Here are the most salient of the findings:

(i) Differences of Culture and Language

Putting these slightly different emphases for immigrant youngsters in more concrete terms, we can say that first, they experience their primary "differentness" from other youngsters with respect to their language and all the other stylistic and traditional subtleties of culture, before the differences inherent in being "foster" rather than "normal" youngsters.

Ramon described his first reactions to arriving here from Iran and experiencing those early days in school and in his first foster placement.

When I got here it was hard at first. I couldn't speak much and I couldn't take notes so I didn't know what, what's going on you know. In the classroom I was out of it...

"It's nothing like being there and a, everything was different, like food, the way you take care of your body and stuff, you know. But yeah, I was scared, I was worried. I was worried about where I'm going to end up and who's going to be taking care of me or am I going to be taking care of myself. And I didn't

even know how to take care of myself cause my mother did everything in the house.

Later, and only after my tape recorder was turned off, he stopped minimizing his pain at being forced to learn how to fit in to a totally new culture. Candidly, he enumerated the assaults to his pre-immigration high self-esteem, including his stress-inducing inability to speak English well and the loss of his social skills because he couldn't maneuver both linguistically and emotionally in a household where his position was neither ensconced nor respected. Sadness and loneliness resulting from his separation from the people he loved was mentioned last, but perhaps its position on the list is deceptive.

Mai-Lin, who left her family in Vietnam at the age of nine, said about this differentness and how she experienced it in the foster family:

Like I was an oddball I didn't fit in and I was always wondering how come I don't. You know, I could never be a part of a family, I always felt left out like an outcast but it was just myself. I was just too conscious of my difference. Like just forget about it, you know and mingle in. And the language, like that was the worst part for a long time. I didn't understand what they were talking about... like jokes in Canadian. Believe me it was hard to understand. Like very hard. And after a while like I guess two years, about two years, I fit in perfectly you know. I just, you know, I just fit in Vietnam.

About school, she remembered:

Well, I didn't fit in any school. I really felt like an outcast you know. Kids used to call me "chinks" you know, they (don't) know the difference between Chinese and Vietnamese.

The experience of devaluation because of race and gender were reported by other participants. Several examples of respondents' reactions to this kind of devaluation are included here because they, like the differentness of language and culture which leads to the devaluation of the immigrant child, make it difficult for youngsters to feel good about themselves.

...being in High School and having written a paper and knowing you did a really good job but because you're not a boy...you're not given the recognition you know you should be given. I think that's been the most difficult for me.

Unfortunately as a child growing up I had to face a lot of racism, and it wasn't subtle, it was rather blatant actually. I could remember one time it got really really bad and I ran into the bathroom and I closed the door and I started crying and sort of...it was really bad because by that time I wished that I was someone else. I wished that I was white and that I wasn't Black. And that I was a boy because then I could beat them up — or whatever, y'know.

Developing healthy self-esteem is extraordinarily complicated when there is additional stigmatization of the youngster because of gender, race or ethnic origin.

(ii) Positive Identification with Natural Families

For the most part immigrant respondents in this study evaluate their families of origin far more positively than do Canadian born and raised youngsters in care. It was not behaviours or inadequacies of parents which brought them into care, but rather their needs for parenting in a new land. They do not share the stigma or embarrassment about inadequate or otherwise incompetent parents. And therefore, they themselves maintain a strong self-evaluation as the children of adequate parents and as those who come from "good" families. This seems to be true whether or not feelings about their parents are ambivalent on other grounds. In some cases, the parent to whom the child was sent in Canada is a biological parent, but it doesn't appear to be the case that these youngsters are attached or identified with these newly custodial parents whose parenting inadequacy probably led to out-of-home care in Canada.

For Moustafa, whose parents sent him from the Middle-East to both afford him opportunities for higher education, and to keep him alive and away from the bullets and mine fields of his homeland, his parents are still held very dear.

Well my mother was always, my parents were always serious. They're very concerned so my mother, well my mother was more worried and my father was more ...didn't care. So it was like I didn't want to leave my mother cause we were pretty, like the way that cultures over there are, you're pretty close to your mother. Very close. I guess she had a, she had it rough when I had to move too.

There are several additional examples of this tendency towards acceptance of the foster child role. Claire was sent to Toronto by her mother in Jamaica to make her home with the biological father and step-mother, who were materially able to look after her. The reason for this move was that Claire's mother wanted her daughter to have more opportunities for higher education and security in a profession than would have been possible back home.

Home life in Toronto, unfortunately, broke down as the result of the step-mother's resentment at having to support and care for another woman's child, and father's inability to protect Claire. Finally, when both father and step-mother abused the very able and ambitious teen-ager, and a suicide attempt called attention to the situation, Claire was taken into out-of-home care. About her foster mother and both her own and her biological mother's assessment of this care, she said:

She treated me like her own child and used to like stress the same thing my mom did, education was very important to her, work was very important to her. So, we got along fine. I guess I was lucky compared to other kids. Some kids got bounced around from one home to another. But I was in the same home for three years. She was a single mother. So it was kind of like I was sent into the same situation I was in before with my mother. Even now I go home (from university, several hours away) to see her. Like I was just, I saw her just two weeks ago I went up to see her for the day and came back. I call her my other mother! She's like, she's my other family that's here.

Claire was asked what her loving and highly esteemed mother back in Jamaica thought about her being in out-of-home-care, instead of the placement with her biological father and his family. She replied:

My mom was very upset. She was very angry that I didn't let her know what was going on. Then she wanted to know what I wanted to do. And then by that time I was pretty much in school here, like I was in school and everything and I was used to the system so I told her I wanted to stay here to finish up... because I was doing so well in school here. To go back to Jamaica and start school over I would've missed like two years of school there so I would've had to start school again. Probably see people I don't even remember, I don't even know, anymore. So it's like I told her I wanted to stay.... I went down and we saw each other and we talked and we decided it was best if I stayed here. So she agreed for me to go into care.

Mai-Lin suffers still from the trauma of having to leave Vietnam. For years, she blamed and resented the mother who planned and paid for the execution of her children's flight from poverty and violence. Although she reports being careful not to let others know about her history of foster care because of the poor impression people in Canada have of youngsters in out-of-home-care, her image of her parents is not sullied; it seems to be idealized. When asked about the occupation or profession which will be her goal, she said

I would like to do something, like a job like a lawyer or doctor, something that would make my parents proud. I think that is my goal... because we paid a big price to get to Canada and I think this would make my parents proud.

And about his position as youngest child in his family and his parents' abilities Moustafa comments, "I still had it easy. A lot easier. Being the last child you were, you grow up better cause your parents are, your parents know what to do."

(iii) Expressions of High Self Esteem

The immigrant youngsters who came to Canada to find better opportunities tend to express strong self images and high feelings of self-regard. Here are an assortment of statements which express this phenomenon.

Ramon, who astoundingly is saving money as a student on a tight stipend:

I manage. Like I get the allowance from Children's Aid and that's good. Like I'm good with money.

Claire sums up her assessment of both herself and the mother with whom she is highly identified:

She's made me what I am today, which is 'emotionally wise' I guess if my mother wasn't really a strong woman I'd be like some of those women who have no back-bones."

There are several more positive self-evaluations. One relates to her large friendship network and popularity in several spheres of University life and work life, "I'm very good at making friends." And, finally, "I see myself as a person who's been through a lot. One who has pulled through really well."

Louise felt independent and competent to make adult decisions from the age of fourteen.

I wasn't going to let anybody stop me ...get in my way and I would basically do what I want. I'd sort of bring myself up even though I had a foster mother. She wasn't really you know, she wasn't my mother so I felt like I was, in charge of myself... so I mean she was there... she told me what to do but still I don't know how to explain. I was like my own person.

When asked to name the single factor which has had the greatest influence in making Patrina who she is today, she answered:

...Me. I do everything with myself. I could take advice from people but most of it is done by me. I come to decisions by myself. I do everything for myself. I've learned everything on my own. I've always been doing that so I think it's me. Yep, myself, yep!

And finally, in answer to my final interview question, "What didn't I ask you, that I should have, to get a better picture of who you are?", Mai-Lin's reply is very positive.

I like myself. You know a lot of people can't say that, right. I like myself you know I don't let other people know but I do, I like myself. ...I don't know why but I definitely choose to do right and like telling the truth, you know, rather than telling a lie kind of thing. ...I try to tell the truth most of the time and just do things that are right. You know, listen to that voice.

(iv) Seeking Concrete Aid from Out-of home Placement

To the extent that immigrant youngsters left functional families back home, they may evaluate their foster placements in a less personal and emotional respect, but consider, instead, the instrumental benefits or handicaps each placement affords. They seem to seek less mothering and fathering than the Canadian born youngsters, perhaps, but more concrete aids towards instrumental and goal-oriented ends.

For example, Ramon had severe difficulties with his first foster home, where foster parents clearly did not value him. He felt unappreciated and unloved for the first time in his life, and he suffered then, as he does today, the great loss of his homeland and his family. However, he has never allowed himself to dwell on these hurts.

I do miss them a little bit, both my parents and back home, the whole thing, but no not that it's going to make me dysfunctional or anything because I'm away from home, no.

He expresses the difficulties in his first foster home placement, primarily, in instrumental and concrete terms, instead of emotional ones.

The very first foster home I went to was really rough cause I couldn't study at all first of all because it was so slow and I was rooming with this other kid and he had anything on his mind but studying or academics or you know so it was a real tough atmosphere for me to study in or, try anything you know for that, right?

Asked if he considered discussing his problems with his social worker during that first placement, Ramon explains why he didn't express himself and ask for help.

The foster parents... they were pressuring me so much that "if you do this you're going to be kicked out" and it was in the middle of the school year and I didn't want that to happen because if I got kicked out I had to start everything over again. You know I may have ended without my credits that year. So I didn't do anything.

When Ramon did let his social worker know, at the end of the school year, that he was very unhappy in this foster home, she helped him move to a larger group home where he lived for almost four years.

"Yeah, I told her what happened. I lied to her so many times because I was pressured before, they would have moved me but I didn't want that because you know, I told you, it was in the middle of the school year."

The second placement foster parents related warmly but flexibly to the youngsters in their home, home life was easily stretched around the youngsters' schedules, there was enough room in the home to find a study corner. So even when Ramon's beloved older brother asked him to leave his placement and share an apartment with him, Ramon felt a real tug of longing to remain a part of this foster family. Although biological family relationships and cultural ties come first in Ramon's priorities, the second foster family developed an important bond with this young man. He significantly, once again, expresses the benefits of this four year placement in instrumental and concrete terms.

But there was a huge house and we all had our bedrooms and my roommate was studious as me. And I was in grade 11 and I was doing okay... much better than the year before, yeah. You didn't have to see anybody if you didn't want to. It was a huge house, just at the dinner table, that's about it. They let you do what you wanted to do. They let you pursue your goals. ...So it was much better like you had more space, more privacy and it was much better you know, they fed you better for one thing.

This rational, concretized and practical description of a foster home placement probably masks, and exists in addition to, the emotionally beneficial aspects of the family's relationship with Ramon. Yet, there is a ready conceptualization of what he needed in order to reach his educational

goals which is echoed in accounts from the other immigrant youngsters interviewed. Specific statements of need and instrumental conceptualizations are not easily detectable, however, in the non-immigrant accounts in this study. Rather, the needs and hopes expressed by the others are oriented, more often, towards belonging, being cared for and respected, and the more intangible aspects of family life. This tendency may be explained by the non-immigrant youngsters' longing for caring parents with whom they can identify and to whom they wish to belong. The immigrant children tend to already have these essential ties, but continue to need the concrete and instrumental factors which will enable them to succeed.

IV POTENTIAL FOR ADDING VALUE WITH OUT- OF- HOME -CARE

Life in out-of-home-care has provided a virtual smorgasbord of experiences and relationships, some helpful, others destructive, for the young adults interviewed. The relationships, experiences and ways of thinking about themselves and their lives which they identified as positive and adding to their strength and development will be examined within the five general categories they seem to inhabit. The first category contains examples of exposure to and availability of **path-finders** and **role models**. The second involves instances of seeking, finding or developing a **community**. Establishment and maintenance of **self-esteem** is the third category. Fourth is exposure to the greater world, its **experiences** and its **opportunities**, and the fifth category I call **protective thinking**.

A Few Words About Social Support

In a very general way, the helpful interventions, experiences and relationships recounted in the following pages can also be considered to fall under the heading of **social support**.

More than a few respondents additionally make the point that the support that was accepted at one age or level of readiness for change would likely have been rejected at another time. Others regret the fact that no support or guidance was offered at what is now seen, with hindsight to be sure, as a critical time for growth or change.

Social support is a vast and multi-dimensional concept. It is usually conceptualized in at least two general categories, the instrumental and the expressive (Hill, 1970; Lopata, 1987; Dean, 1989). Instrumental social support has a concrete, material, informational, guiding, supplying, preparing or providing aspect to it. This instrumental social support generally helps the person achieve something.

Emotional social support has a loving, validating, sympathizing, understanding quality. This latter type helps the person feel loved, valued and cared for. Within these two categories of instrumental and expressive fall many of the experiences of strengthening mentioned by participants. Conceptualizing all the positive experiences of respondents in terms of social support, however, would not have communicated, with sufficient specificity, the growth induced in youngsters by their exposure to role models, community, self-esteem boosters, opportunities and protective thinking patterns.

Social Workers

Many times respondents had very neutral or even negative things to say about the professional helpers in their lives, including social workers, child care workers, psychologists and psychiatrists. **Social workers**, as compared with child care workers, psychologists, psychiatrists and other kinds of therapists and helpers, are mentioned most often by the respondents with reference to the help received or not received from professionals. Surprisingly, however, social work interventions were characterized, most usually, as instrumental or practical as distinguished from the kind of therapeutic or counseling help some respondents got through referral by their social workers to other professionals.

This summary, from Craig, captures the negative attributions made to social workers by young people when they have not experienced the therapeutic and sustaining intervention potential in the work undertaken. In fact, this is a description of the social worker as case manager.

Social workers change every six months. I'll tell you what a social worker is. A kind of principal in school or vice principal. It's somebody you come in contact when you're in trouble but somebody you never see when you're doing all right. The value a social worker has in a young person's life is not seen by a young

person. Well, they help take care of the young person's physical needs, right? And if there's a real problem they take care of their emotional needs by referring to some type of professional counselor. But to a young person's life it means nothing.

Social workers who visit in foster homes were sometimes seen to be there for the foster mother, not for the youngsters, and sometimes represented nothing to the child or adolescent in the way of help, relationship or support. Protection and prevention social workers were often forgotten, impressions were cloudy, intervention seemed confused and confusing to the child, and even long periods of contact were unremarkable to the respondent when she or he looked back.

There are also many instances where an interaction or a relationship is seen as central, remarkable, supportive and even causal to a change of heart or life. It probably should be noted that many **negative and destructive experiences** and relationships live on the pages of the transcripts gathered for this study. For the most part, because the question of the study is "what helps?" overwhelmingly negative data are not the focus of this text. However, the following material does contain a few instances where participants recounted experiences or relationships that were destructive or painful for them. They are included here most often as comparative data to elucidate the high value placed on a corresponding positive relationship or experience.

Foster Families

Of course, a great many comments about **foster family members** came out of the interviews. As with the social workers, a large number of the comments pointed to short-comings in role performance. In three participants' lives, physical and sexual abuse took place in out-of-home care. In a few in-care histories foster family member behaviours ranged from misguided through unthinking to cruel.

The following remarks from participants emphasize the tremendous vulnerability children experience *vis à vis* the adults who care for them. In the lives of the youngsters who are quoted below, traumatic events were an aspect of foster placement. There was sudden, unanticipated replacement in the first case, sexual abuse in the next and total banishment in the last.

I enjoyed it there. I can say I had a really happy childhood.

I miss my last foster home. Oh, this is where I was sexually abused. Even though I felt like these are my parents, 'loving abuse'. Strange title but it was the first time I felt like I was loved, but I was abused, yeah.

I thought it was the best place I had before or after I was at the Children's Aid. That was the placement. It was the best. You couldn't top that.

What has become commonplace wisdom about parenting in general applies equally, or perhaps even more strongly because of the inherent challenges, to out-of-home parenting. For the most difficult job in the world many of us have limited preparation, and perhaps unfortunate deficits, in areas where we ourselves need healing before we can do well with children.

The following excerpt from Steve's story underlines the amazing potential for healing which exists in foster care, while also showing how these ties, because of the structure of our systems, often lack the strength and tenacity youngsters need in order to form and maintain attachments. Steve found and lost, through early and tragic death, a foster family whose care and expertise followed many placements where cruelty and exploitation had been the rule.

I clung to the foster mother a lot. She was always there for me. She knew something was going on, right from the start, when she first saw me. We had some kind of connection. She knew I was a real hurting unit... Out of all the kids you know, I was like this special kid who needs attention. ...She spent extra time with me. I stayed there for about a year and my school went excellent, you know. I started socializing with the other kids in school. I got a job at a newspaper... I loved her more than I actually loved my real mother cause I knew her more. ...It was a great house. I started getting close to the father but I always kept my distance, eh [there was a long history of abuse in foster homes, perpetrated by males]. My foster sisters were great. Elizabeth, she was like, she took the place of my sister, my original sister, my blood sister. She gave me special attention, she helped me with my art 'cause during school I did a lot of doodling, eh. She saw that I had a gift so she taught me some things about art.

Steve next describes an experience he has had several times, the sudden and unexpected moving of youngsters from one home to several or many different placements because of agency investigations into sub-standard treatment by foster parents, abusive behaviour among and between foster children, and other unexpected changes of circumstance. About the movement of a group of foster children to different and distant new homes, Steve has said they are "...scattered like mice and like dice." The very special relationship he had with the foster mother who had made important contact with him ended tragically:

Christmas time came around and she (the foster mother) died before Christmas. And then the foster father tried to hold it together. And he couldn't hold it together. Yeah and the dice scatter came again.

Many responses involve loving memories of foster care, ascriptions of powerful influence to foster families, beliefs about the central importance of foster family members, and supportive relationships which are maintained today and will transcend the years to come. For the most part, participants who have had the longest, unbroken relationships report the highest levels of satisfaction and appreciate the strong support and influence of their foster families. An exceptional group home employed for the benefit of adolescents, and providing a short-term in-care community as well as a family-community transcending youths' in-care career is also mentioned by several respondents for whom this short-term placement has made a great difference.

PARC

The reader will find a great deal of material referring to PARC in the following pages. This program, mentioned with respect to almost all the value adding categories, has been a substantial help to the nine respondents the program referred for this study. PARC stands for the Pape Avenue Resource Center, a comfortable house found nestled in a row of large, sturdy houses in a working class, residential Toronto neighborhood. The center, developed and maintained by both the Metropolitan Toronto Children's Aid Society and the Catholic Children's Aid Society of Toronto, provides a variety of services and opportunities for young people in out-of-home-care who

face emancipation. Among the services and opportunities offered the young adults are: work preparation and placement, educationally oriented guidance and counseling, personal counseling, geared to income housing, emergency financial help, laundry facilities, self-help groups, professionally led groups, money-earning projects for Center activities, a Newsletter, communitarian meals, Holiday meals, and other opportunities for advocacy and support to youth in out-of-home-care.

Education

For all the respondents, **educational experiences** were very significant aspects of life. For those already involved in or anticipating undergraduate or post-graduate university education, as well as for those in community college programs and others planning to return to school at some future date, education and life opportunities seem to be synonymous. So for all participants the idea of education is very important, although not every one personally experienced helpful or supportive contacts and challenges in their educational histories. The following material includes, therefore, both the very helpful and the debilitating examples of interactions with the educational system.

What immediately strikes the researcher upon exposure to this material is the enormous potential existing in the out-of-home-care system and its linkages with the schools and the community for adding value and appreciating the value of children. So many opportunities present themselves in every day life for making a difference, and many of them may not require additional resources so much as an appreciation of what makes the children strong.

A Path-Finders and Role Models

Role models are people who, just by virtue of being seen or known (or giving the illusion of being seen or known as with popular music stars and other famous personalities) allow the individual a glimpse of how it would be to live in a specific pair of shoes. As one participant put it, "And you need role models to see how people behave and things like that."

Path-finders are people closer to home, closer to the participant's age and stage in life and therefore identified as being not so different from one's

self. Path-finders have traversed ground the young person also needs to cross, and is sufficiently approachable to make his or her knowledge available for use. For example, the path-finder may be a year ahead in school, may be living in his or her own apartment having shared an "independent living" apartment within the child welfare agency structure, the year before. The path-finder may be someone who found summer employment through a governmental program and can share that expertise with the participant. Where the path-finder's specific qualities are important, that is, those which make him or her an acquaintance or friend who has successfully traversed the bureaucratic or hurdle filled road to participation and is available as a role model and a very practically oriented guide, the phrase will be used. Otherwise, in a more general sense, role model relates to a person with whom the young person identifies.

To imagine enjoying the status of the role model, to assess one's own ability to perform the activities of the model, to imagine resembling the model in face, body, or style, to consider having interpersonal relationships of the kind the role model has, these are all recognized to be useful rehearsals for adult role performance when undertaken by people during their adolescent years. The most important qualification for a role model seems to be the young person's willingness and inclination to **identify with** the person.

Before the interviews, however, the special significance of role models in this particular population was not fully appreciated by this researcher. For the young people separated from their families because of perceived parental inadequacy, specifically, parents are disqualified from the category of positive role models, and often appear as the exact opposite, a negative role model whose short-comings serve as a reminder or warning throughout youth. The spectre of the inadequate parent, which is discussed here in the category of **negative role model**, appears as a *leit motif* in many of these narratives.

The absence of parents and other family members as positive role models leaves a gap for these young people as well. The need to find role models in the immediate environment, in the community and from the media is expressed by a preponderance of study participants, and the willingness is great to identify, to emulate, and to learn from others who have "made it", both big and small.

Therefore, both positive and negative role models abound. The positive models are those who represent behaviours and attributes the young person

wishes to emulate and develop. These role models flesh out the function of setting goals for the young adults, representing, in real life, specific ways of living life which seem desirable and often attainable. The negative models establish characteristics and behaviours to avoid, while also creating a huge gap with respect to characteristics and behaviours to be emulated.

(i) Negative Role Models

Respondents used important people in their lives as negative role models, that is, people whose behaviours and/or attitudes they tried very hard to avoid, contradict and even oppose in their own lives. With many, the poor life outcomes they witnessed and experienced in their own parents' lives served as a challenge or warning to them.

For Paul, the absence of a father in his own life makes him feel vulnerable around the issue of parenting. Without a role model, he feels there is no path he is confident in following.

I don't know if I could be a good father, I don't know how you become a good father. I don't have a father and I don't think I could. I grew up without a father and I don't think like you teach a child to grow up to be a father you know.

Memories of early years with mental illness, alcohol addiction and violence have given John some pretty definite ideas about what he doesn't want when he is older, although he expresses his feelings about these early experiences by focusing on the physical condition and housekeeping deficits of the family home.

I don't know like my mother and father have always, I lived with them there, I was living in the past, like they have an old house, and they kept everything and stuff like that, and I always told myself that I would never be like that. I know I don't want to wind up like my parents, for sure.

Carly forcefully expresses her intention to protect her own children against adult men who try to sexually abuse them, a protection which was not afforded her by either her own mother or one foster mother.

I will not be like my mother or my foster mother. If my husband is abusing my children, he'd be out, he'd be out of the house within that second.

Brad imagines his future:

The one thing I do think about is when I, when I have a family I'll make sure I won't do the same mistakes my parents had done and I can learn from their mistakes. Well, with my mom they'd be obvious. Don't put your food in the blender and feed it to your kid... I'm going to make sure I choose a mother who... a wife who understands who I am, who will really share the responsibility of taking care of the kids. I mean someone who, someone who's a lot like me... But my mother had me when she was very young and I don't want to make the same mistake of having a kid when I'm young.

Steve was a substance abusing person living on the streets and engaging in prostitution in order to survive when he began to re-evaluate his life's direction:

And worst of all I saw myself becoming like my mother... what I always said I wouldn't become when I was a kid. ...I want to be better than them. I feel my parents, my mother's disgraced us, disgraced my name. ...And I had set my mind 'I'm not going to be like her'.

And on a related topic, Grace spoke about the fact that coming into out-of-home-care changed her way of seeing things.

I'd always wanted to be something other than ...like... my mother was a secretary and I didn't want to be like that. ...And really I didn't want to end up like my mom. Single mother you know and always, like, she had to work so much to make ends meet that I didn't want to do that and I knew if I set about [being a] secretary or you know some other job where I didn't have a lot of education and what not I wouldn't be able to do what I wanted and live the way I wanted to.

But mostly I didn't want to be like her. She's an intelligent person, hard working and those kind of qualities I like. And admire, but other things, like her lack of relationships with people, her relationship with me, her kind of job, her life, the way she had it, she really didn't have a choice. But that kind of thing I didn't want.

I guess I could say coming into care [experience that changed my way of seeing things...] because it gave me a, a different life style, different role models to look at from my mom, which was kind of important to me. Realizing that not everybody was like my mom and people were different, lives were different. That kind of thing.

Here is Kim's perspective.

I always had this kind of image of myself because of my mother, that I would follow in her footsteps, and I didn't want to... I always said 'No, I don't think so' ...right, so I always wanted to make sure I didn't.I think it's very hard being a parent anyways... but it's very hard on me to be a parent because I don't have a good role model... I really don't.... When I was younger, my biggest goal was just not to be like my mum. I'm older now and I know I'm not like her... so I've reached my goal.

Louise remembered:

I really didn't want my life the way my mother was so I knew I had to sort of look out for myself... what is this thing that they say like parents usually, like kids usually imitate their parents and there's no way in hell if I can help it ...I'm sure she said that too but I'm sure she didn't have a hellish childhood like I had so and I mean like she turned out that way.

And, in answer to a question about how Louise pictured her own family in the future, she explained that her choice of marital partner was determined, in large part, by avoiding men similar to her own father and, by extension, the family life into which she was born:

Different. Really different. Guess it's different but you know I said I would never marry you know a Jamaican man, so I don't know. Well, my father's Jamaican.

(ii) Positive Occupational Role Models

Paul wants desperately and single-mindedly to be a police officer. In his young adult life, he has a friend whose father is an officer, and a female colleague whose husband is as well. Paul observes what he can about the lives of these two men through his friends' accounts and also through his own

interactions with them. He is interested in their work lives, their relationships and what they have to say to him by way of guidance and advice. Asked to remember the genesis of Paul's desire for this career and role in his life, he recounted how, when he was a little boy of four or five, his increasingly mentally ill mother was gone one morning when he awakened.

I don't know, something was happening to her, she, this is, I don't know I'm surprised I can even remember... I woke up one morning and my mother wasn't there. I remember the ambulance came early on in the night.... when I woke up the police came and they took me somewhere to the foster home, I think it was, all these little children, I guess it would be a foster home or something. ...And the next day I went to a different one with big, big dogs, I remember being afraid of big, big dogs and I went back to my mother again, but I think the part of the police being for me, you know, when I was all by myself.

Another young person's dream of being a police officer also stems from an early experience. A police officer visited Steve's school when he was an eleven year old living in a foster home. The officer tested the children for bicycle safety knowledge and riding ability, and then gave licenses to the youngsters who passed the tests.

And I was all excited and I wanted to be the best and at that house we weren't allowed to have any bikes, eh. So what happened was I borrowed the bike, eh, like the cop had a bike, so I borrowed it. I went through the test and all that and I got my license and said 'hey, this is an excellent occupation. I want to be a cop'...I just liked the attention he was giving me at the time, you know. All these kids had their bikes and I was the only one standing outside of the group cause I didn't have a bike so he came across and he goes 'I have a bike for you.'

Although having a miserable foster home experience with an abusive foster father, Steve had a school to attend and was able to identify an adult who could help him without knowing everything about him.

Most of my time was spent in school, ...I went out to school and I met the gym teacher and he was a body builder before, eh... and I asked him how do you, can you teach me how to body build. How to be in this, this work? I want to learn it. So he got me into

body building. I loved it, eh. I started getting bigger. I started recognizing girls now.

Today, Steve's occupational role model is a native man who is a counselor in the drug and alcohol rehabilitation treatment center where Steve works night shift and was a patient himself. He's not only a role model with respect to occupation, however, he's also an older-brother role model, a fatherly role model and perhaps, a traditional native man in whom Steve sees many qualities he admires.

When I went to treatment I learned that my dad had taken his life, eh. My real dad. I was stuck in ruins. I felt so lost, eh. I broke my relationship with my stepdad even though there wasn't one in the beginning with him. So I felt so damn alone, you know, he saw my situation, this guy, and what happened was he asked me if I would like to be adopted into his family... So we went to a ceremony and we did our thing and I, I was adopted and his sons are my brothers now and I'm his son. His brothers are my brothers, right. Even though we're not linked by blood but in my heart we are, you know. Yeah. So we got that relation now. He's actually a counselor... a house manager for the treatment center. His job at the treatment center is to make sure the house is in order, all the bills are paid. If the situation gets bad eh, say someone our staff gets real sick or something you know he would take over the whole thing. Take over the house, necessities, right, as well as counseling people.

After many troubled years in care during which Carly had little confidence in her own ability to learn or to master experiences, she has decided to become a Child Care worker and to embark on the extensive training program to prepare herself.

I thought that I'd been with social workers all my life and brought up in that environment I thought well, maybe I want to go into that.

Developing confidence in her ability to complete higher education began with Carly's first job and her identification of a significant role model.

Okay, first starting off with Allison. She was a secretary at the PARC center and I want to be just like her. She started going part-time to school and I don't know. She helped me a lot.

Life changed direction 180 degrees for Carly as the result of meeting and knowing role models in the social services arena.

I had friends like social workers and child and youth workers who made me realize that I can go for a degree but I'm capable of going for that degree, that I'm capable of doing anything I want to do.

When John lived with relatives who worked at a profession, and who had children who were university bound, his ideas about his own life were molded.

My uncle's a doctor and like he's still in practice and everything and, and both his son and daughter were going to University. I guess I got it from them. I think living in an environment where that's what everyone's working for, it really makes you want... motivates you that you want to go. Or it's just people that you respect and you see them doing well and... I always, if I see someone doing it, or doing something I really like or whatever then I try to find out why, how could they, how did they get there and what makes them so special that they're there and I'm not there, right?

Becoming a doctor became Brad's goal when, in grade seven, visiting was resumed with his father, who was a doctor.

I loved him a lot and I still do and when I got to know him pretty well, that was during grade seven, and when I found out what he did, right, I always wanted to be like him... So when I found out what he was like it gave me something to strive for because I could follow in his footsteps... I guess I started to set out goals because he said he had expectations for me. He was proud of me for what I did ...like I would show him my report cards from earlier on. (Between ages six and twelve, when visiting did not take place.)

The linkage between the quality of the relationship and the choice of a person as a positive role model is exemplified here.

But he gave me confidence. He supported whatever I did and because he was so kind to me, because he was my dad and because I respected him, that's what made me want to set out these goals. To be more like him.

Ramon remembers his father as being an under-remunerated, over-worked teacher with little time for his son. An uncle who was close to Ramon in his earlier years, one who spent many hours with the young boy, became a significant role model. When he was six years old, the boy decided to become a dentist, like his uncle, a goal he maintains today, as a university student. Asked to explain his interest in dentistry, he remembered:

I just liked it. Like you know some people want to become doctors and stuff and when we played I used to be the dentist, you know. Me and my uncle were really close, like we used to go places cause he had kids too, right. And my dad was, he was really busy all the time cause he was a teacher and at exam time he used to teach extra. Tutoring and stuff. So I used to go around with my uncle and everything so he was a role model sort of thing. And I went to his office all the time. So I liked it, I just liked it.

In Patrina's account of the comings and goings of her Canadianized aunt, one hears the young person's perception of the life style related to an adult's occupation, which can hold promise of a challenging or glamorous way of life.

My aunt used to come from work and she used to talk about work. I forgot where she used to work but it just sounded so interesting, like when she'd talk about working on the computer and being a secretary and whatever. That's where I got the idea about being a secretary.

(iii) Following Path-finders

Sometimes the role model makes a path through a particularly thick part of the forest, as happened when Claire, newly arrived in Canada and knowing very little about how to choose courses at High School, met a slightly older

Caribbean-Canadian neighbour who advised her how to acquire the courses to make her eligible for university attendance.

The good thing for me was, when I came here there was a girl living downstairs from me and I was talking to her and then I found that I was [being kept] from the universities and such and I read up and I found that you needed advanced level courses. So, she was telling me that like you can make up your own schedule basically, you're supposed to take certain classes. So I knew what I wanted to do so I didn't even need to go see a counselor. She was a year older than me.

Laurie found women to lead the way at each stage of her life. At fourteen, she had a Big Sister.

And she was 21 and going to the Ontario College of Art, and the reason why they set me up with this girl was cause I was into art too at that time, and she, you know she was pretty good.

At sixteen, Laurie looked up to her foster parents' biological daughter.

"She was about 32 I guess when I was 16 and I admired her cause she was a success and traveled and I thought she was really beautiful and everything else, you know. Thought she was so mature and everything I wanted to be. So she's in my mind too.

And when asked, during the study interview, what she thinks is the single factor that has had the greatest effect on who she is today, Laurie answered:

In the past two years, I've had a friend who's had a great impact on my life so much. She's gone to university, got her masters in economics. She's really intelligent, she's very professional and she's really helped me out so much. Like I've settled down a bit and been kind of different. She's been the biggest impact on my life I'd say. Like recently.

(iv) Fictional Role Models

Several young people mentioned that they identified with characters in material they've read or seen on the stage and screen. One felt very close to a famous fictional character and wished to meet the creator of that character.

I have this book that I cherish because I can relate to her, she's a feminist and she's everything that I see in myself in her... and that's *Lady Oracle*, by Margaret Atwood. [Discussion about Ms. Atwood's living in the vicinity and having been present at a Women's Day March recently.] And I wouldn't mind meeting her one day.

Asked the reasons for Carly's strong identification with the central character in this book, she explains:

The fact that she, when she was in school she felt very insecure of herself, what I felt, insecure about myself. She was made fun of in school, she was abused by males and then she planned her death perfectly. That was her freedom; that was her freedom. My freedom was moving into PARC housing.

When Ramon described the way he felt as a teen-ager in his first foster home and family after coming here from Iran, he alluded to a surprising dramatic character with whom he identified, his lack of recognition and the downward mobility of his new life situation were evoked with deep emotion when he talked about this identification with a fictional character:

You know that musical, *Les Miserables*? You know the little girl, Cosette, I'm not saying I was her... but it was similar. Seriously, like I mean I'm 14 years old and they're treating me as if like I'm a slave or something.

(v) Positive Role Models With Respect to Mastery, Character and Behaviour

There are many instances in the interviews where participants name others whose behaviours, character, skills or role performance inspired or still inspires. Brad remembers how he began doing sports when he entered foster

care, by comparing himself with other youngsters who demonstrated mastery. These equals about whom a youngster thinks "if he (or she) can do it, I can do it" may be considered path finders to mastery.

Well, I would look at other kids. And they were bigger than me or, something that made me even more mad, kids that were my own age and size that were better than me. I would think I could do that because I had the same skates, I have two legs... I just thought I can do it. I didn't have any reason why I could do it. I didn't analyze myself but I could do it.

There is sometimes an amount of self-disclosure in the interaction between a role model and a young person. Paul's social worker made a real impact on him, as a role model, and began to be an important person to him when she disclosed the fact that she lived on her own, as he did.

She lived on her own. You can't relate to someone who won't understand what you're going through, but if they lived on their own... they eventually see through their experience, they can relate to you, you feel comfortable, right?

Mai-Lin attributed her goals and her values, which she thinks are the key factors in her success, to her foster parents in large part.

Goals and values. Like you know what is important to me as an individual. I think I saw that in my foster parents.

Foster parents are often models for specific abilities or characteristics which are admired. Mai-Lin says about the future, "My foster mom was excellent and like a mother, I would love to be just like her."

Some see a direct link between who one is surrounded by and what one achieves as a result. Mai-Lin tells about a saying in Vietnamese which is translated to mean that "...when you're near the light you're brightest but when you're near ink you become darker." She is very selective with respect to the people around her because she believes strongly in the influence of others on her. Other participants also experienced, and agree with the concept of, behavioural contagion, choosing to surround themselves with others who have similar goals and life styles which reflect the favoured path

or outcome. So Ramon found it difficult to live with other youths who weren't oriented towards doing homework and achieving at a high level in school, partly because of the noise and movement patterns generated around him, but partly also because the noise and patterns detracted from his own ability and determination to study and achieve. These two and the others who spoke of consciously surrounding themselves with people whose character and behaviours were positive models, thought about friendships, romances, room-mates and formal and informal group memberships in the same way, suggesting that for them, leaving the contagion of friendships and associations to chance was too risky.

Sometimes respondents model their character and their lives on someone they admire, as with Claire's understanding of the maternal line in her family, their personalities, their life choices and their self-reliance, all of which seem to be mirrored in Claire's own pattern.

When my mom got pregnant with me, she had the option of marrying my dad but she decided not to because he was not a very stable person.... But she's always taught us to be self-sufficient 'cause sometimes you cannot fall back on anyone but yourself... If it wasn't for my mother I wouldn't be the way I am... I guess if my mother wasn't a really strong woman I'd be like some of those women who have no backbones. My grandmother, she was also a very strong woman. Her husband died when she was fairly young. She was left with nine kids she raised them by herself. She's dead now but she was a very strong woman while she was alive. And she raised my mom the same way, to be strong, to try and be self-supportive because you don't know what will happen.

And June remarks on the ways her group home father has influenced her to grow and learn, just because he has the qualities she has come to covet for herself.

And I always wanted to be a better speaker or you know better writer. I want to just be better than I am now. Well, yeah I just want to keep improving and get higher and... higher and maybe be like Keith [foster father]. He has a lot of knowledge, he reads books, and he knows about everything. History, you know if I have a question for him he'll know because he's read a book or knows about it, and I just want to do that you know. I'd like to

think up some questions and I can just answer it right after that you know give somebody advice or help them out.

As Kim sees it, models for the way she wanted to live were all around her as she grew up. She fashioned her life and the life of her family on people she saw and admired through the years.

You just have to keep saying well, you look around you... you look at how other people are living and know that one day you'll live like that and that you'll be normal.

Whether avoiding the qualities and behaviours of parents, siblings, and acquaintances who have been judged inadequate, or seeking to emulate those of people identified as achieving, happy and respected in the community, participants have employed, and continue to employ a great variety of path-finders and role models for the purpose of finding their own way into the future for which they yearn. Youngsters raised without the continuing presence of parents and siblings they admire and seek to emulate may be even more in need of path finders, occupational models, behavioural models and fictional role models than youth raised in functional families.

B SEEKING, FINDING AND CREATING COMMUNITY

Most young people yearn to be identified with a group whose membership confers high status and respect in the community. The young people interviewed for this study were all astoundingly affiliative, belonged to at least one and sometimes many different groups, both formal and informal, and spoke positively about their many communities.

A few participants mentioned that each group represented some aspect of themselves, and sometimes the differing aspects, and groups, needed to be maintained separately. A good example of this phenomenon, John feels close to the following groups, with whom he spends a good deal of time: his girlfriend's family, his girlfriend's University attending friends, his own College attending friends, his work friends, his sports friends, his CAS graduate senior group and the young men he lives with, all of whom are in PARC geared-to-income housing. For reasons of incompatibility, as well as reasons of his own perceived upward mobility, John does not combine some of

these groups. Still, he continues to gain a great deal from all these affiliations because they seem to meet his needs to belong.

Some of these community experiences are fashioned by the professionals who understand the needs of these young people for belonging. Other experiences are very individual and were sought out by the youngsters themselves and found in places the professionals probably would not have predicted. Examples of these communities follow, and each membership experience strengthens the point that devalued youngsters have added value to their own and others' perceptions through community membership and identification.

(i) Service delivering, agency-based groups and programs for youngsters graduating from foster care

Some child welfare agencies offer a cluster of services directed specifically towards youth reaching emancipation. One such program is the Pape Avenue Resource Center (PARC) in Toronto, which affords young people many opportunities to become part of a youth-in-care and youth-graduated-from-care social and self-interest network, in addition to offering a wide variety of instrumental and concrete services and supports. PARC is a community.

Carly, talking about her PARC housing, an independent living apartment under the PARC umbrella, geared to income and affiliated with other PARC programs, shows how concrete service (housing) is often connected with emotional support.

It was financially supportive and I moved in with some roommates that were emotionally supportive. That helped a great deal. ...They did help me in a way because they have been through the same situation that I've been through which is Children's Aid, that sort of thing.

Louise talked about her affiliation with PARC.

The workers they used to talk to me, I don't know, it was just a little community and the kids who have been in care, they know what you went through or they have an idea and just the sort of background type thing and we did fun things together... Some of my best times.

Some of the groups and activities devised by staff or by the youth attending are very effective value adders, or builders of esteem both from the self and from others, for a significant number of participants. These groups and activities, requiring that the senior people advise younger people, encouraging youth to give public and child welfare institution in-house talks about their experiences, and asking youth to serve on committees and panels to advise these institutions, refute the devalued status of the "foster child" by transforming the role into one of respected advisor and helper.

Craig recounted some of his experiences in groups of senior foster care youth, brought together by PARC. Being a member of a group in which he is a leader and an expert has, according to him, increased his self-esteem.

With some groups I started experiencing some being able to speak out, being able to give people shit about things I didn't think were rightBeing able to express myself, you know, to develop some type of philosophy about where I've been and where I'm going, right? ...So here I am I got things in perspective, right. Starting to feel confident and then this is the big clincher, kind of, recently I spearheaded a little group that developed a Children's Aid funding proposal... for a youth group.

Today, Promilla is a busy mother and home-maker. Perhaps she is developing her own community. Unfortunately, she is too busy and living too far out in suburbia to attend the groups and join the activities which meant so much to her when she was eighteen.

I was part of a group up until I had my son... I can't do both... there's no way. There's just no way I can come down here twice a week, it's too much for me, it's too much for my son. Plus, I'm a mother and I'm a wife. It's very hard to get time to come to things like this... I would love to come but I can't.

Promilla went to PARC as an independent eighteen year old trying to live on a budget of \$416 a month, with rent of \$300. Starting with money management skills, the PARC environment turned into a supportive community for this struggling eighteen year old.

So any way that's how I got hooked into PARC and teaching me budgeting and banking and making new scheduling and grocery lists... So they've been a great influence in my life. They've been really helpful. Umm, I've talked some of my stories, like this, to conferences. I've gone to conferences and I've talked to the Board of Education. I really tell them off because there's a lot of kids like that out there, like me.[Here, Promilla referred to her graduating, with a prize, from 12th grade, but being functionally illiterate.] I think they're doing something. I don't know, maybe five, ten, years. Maybe for my child, it will benefit, who knows? But I've done my part, I feel. And that's what PARC's done. They've taught me how to be independent, and how to be myself. Well, I already know how to do that, but be more assertive and a little bit more confident.

And expressing her satisfaction with the communitarian aspects of PARC geared-to-income housing opportunities, Carly describes her living situation like this:

PARC has these houses and if you're a member of PARC and you go to school and, I think if you have a job too, then you get into these housing [units] with references from a worker that you have at PARC. I live with three other girls who've been through care and everything. We get along pretty well. We do a lot of stuff together so it's like a little family. ...It's rent geared to income so it's 25% of whatever our income is and it helps to save, you know, going to school you have to pay tuition and everything and you have to learn how to do everything on your own, so this housing really helps you save and stuff like that. Several remarks from other young women in the study express the ways PARC has been a community.

I used to spend a lot of time at the Center cause they had so many activities going and then they would cook dinner, so Wednesday I'd always take me carrots and so on and so on. I got involved with them [PARC] ...I was trying to find, I was 19, and I was trying to find a summer job... and then I went in and you know, that's how I got involved. There's a newsletter group and that's how I got involved... Well, they offered me a job. Sort of became a family ...it was just a little community and you know the kids who, they've been in care and they know what you went through or they have an idea and just the same sort of background type thing and we did fun things together.

(ii) Finding community in the foster or group home setting

In some instances, young people have become members of a foster family or group home community. When this happens, they feel comfortable in the setting, have a place and an identity in the group, and they carry these relationships into the years following emancipation.

Brad continues to visit the group home where he finally fit in. "I visit them quite a lot. I was just there yesterday. I got Mr. Z a father's day present, and I made him something. I always make him something."

Grace, who was in care in the same home for six years, says about her one six year placement:

And I mean stability has been a big thing for me. It really helped me a lot. One home and my foster parents have been there for me emotionally, whatever. Even now when I'm eighteen they've let me stay on as a room and a boarder, really cheap too. So they've been helping me out and they've been behind me.

Claire's long-term foster mother, a single parent who was Claire's only foster parent throughout six years of out-of-home care, remains the young woman's "other mother".

Miss B. was named after Claire's mother and grandmother as the third biggest influence in her life.

She always tried to do the things she knew would be the best for me, Miss B., because if it wasn't for her I don't know where I'd be. Well, she's the only foster mom that I've known. But I know that not everyone that's been through the foster care system would end up with really nice foster parents. And she was a very nice person and she was also very strong so she helped to mold me into what I am also.

She feels the foster mother shares values and many of the positive qualities of her much loved and admired birth mother and her roots in the Caribbean, "...so it was kind of like I was sent into the same situation I was in before with my mother." Claire continues to visit the foster home for reasons and on occasions she summarized very well.

It's like that's where I spent my Christmases, that's where I spent my Easters. She's like my mother, she worries about me. She wants to find out how I'm doing in school. She's like, she's my other family that's here. ...Ya, it's my home.

One pair of group home parents, specializing in adolescent placements, only provided a home for several respondents for a relatively short number of years, but they were cited as extremely helpful long-term connections by all the participants who spent time in the group home. They have maintained visiting relationships with the respondents, and have even extended an invitation to one of them to join the family, several years from now, in moving out of the urban area where they are now situated. June spent four years living in this group home; she left to become independent over four years ago. Today she visits the group home regularly and exchanges phone calls with the group home parents very often.

I just treat them like they're my real parents cause they're so understanding. They give good advice and you know they don't turn their back on you...And they really show me that somebody could love me without getting something, or doing something, for their love.

After one and a half years in the same group home, and two years after the placement came to a close, Moustafa says, in answer to the question: "When you have some great joy or happiness, or when you have things to talk over, who do you call?"

My foster mother, she practically knows everything about me. She can imitate my body movements, probably. I've gone there so many times that... practically every week I go, and I tell her what happens to me during the week. I shouldn't be telling you all this, she should be telling you. 'Cause she knows me better probably. She can tell you about me better. They're good friends and I like it that way. I like to keep them as good friends. Like they don't push you around. They don't say 'you gotta do this' and stuff like that, but you know if you have some respect for them they have respect for you and then, just by that, you can tell they obviously want for you to have a good future and stuff. Like they're pretty equal...which was good.

These remarks add some anecdotal evidence to the concept that it is not necessarily the long-term placement, or the "foster-family" (i.e. as much as possible approximating the nuclear family of two adults and 2.2 children) model, or the out of home experience which occurs in the earliest years which will make a lasting impression on, and contribution to, the growth of the young person. A setting, such as this one, in which the young person can **belong and can form a meaningful relationship**, in this instance with group home parents, is providing a community and a social life support system into young adulthood.

(iii) A religious affiliation or particular church or church group

Amy told me about the importance and meaning of her church community:

It grounds me in some way. I find that I have the courage and the strength to do different things. ...I have a sense of who I am, of where I belong and what I want to do. I think because I'm there, there's limits. So it gives me some sort of limits too, that for some people might be negative but to me, they're positive because it gives me structure where to put my life. Ummm, it gives me a sense of well-being about myself.

I think my church community is my family now more than anything else. But I connect, I call (the aunt who fostered her) and talk and I always go have dinner, I'm always fed, always. The door's always open for me, y'know. It's the good thing about church and everything, it gives me a sense of working things out.

(iv) A school group or affiliation

Grace spoke about her placement in a gifted program. [She also had one foster family for the same long period of time and with the same high level of satisfaction.]

If you're in gifted you went from this school to this school to this school so there's always a core group of people I knew going with me to each school so it wasn't very scary. It wasn't that big a change for me. I know some people from when I was eight.

About the teachers in her High School's gifted stream she said:

Oh my teachers have been wonderful. They're the kind who are very understanding. And the head of the gifted department would take a special interest in all her kids. She has hour long conversations with my foster mother. They're on a first name basis.

For Promilla, receiving abuse and rejection at home, school was the only outlet:

Because school was the best thing at that particular time. It was the place where I could communicate with my friends and do whatever. Like I always wanted to be in school, because school was a safe place.

(v) Finding community in one's ethnic group

Steve spoke about his growing relationship with other Native Canadians.

So we went to a ceremony and we did our thing and I, I was adopted and his sons are my brothers now and I'm his son. His brothers are my brothers, right. Even though we're not linked by blood but in my heart we are, you know. So we got that relation now.

And about his journey to meet his Native community and become a part of it.

...I went back to the streets. Then I said to hell with this, I'm off the streets... it took all week for me to get off the streets. I headed out to BC and I started asking elders, all the old people, all the questions in life and sharing my own past and asking them to help me with certain things. Stayed in BC with the grandmothers and they were teaching me about how to get in touch with the spirit inside. How to use it as a healer you know. I started all this cultural stuff and I came back and [the people at the Native Canadian treatment center] they said "we want you as a member of our staff working at the treatment center". So I got a job at the treatment center and I've been doing great ever since and I'm here today.

Developing a strong identification with other black students began in High School for Amy, and was intensified when she grew close to the black young people she met at church.

[At High School] we supported one another. There were girls who were West Indian that were in the music department ...Y'know you just supported, you encouraged anything. If one had made it on the Honour Roll, a name was up there, we knew it, ...so basketball, if they won [the boys], we had to be the fans. [And at church] ...the community there, family, and I guess I mean like say I've grown in my stage to ...it is all me, like you can't separate me.

(vi) The Community of Women

Talking about being a woman, Claire relates some of the ideas gleaned from her mother's remarks to her.

She always told us that we should try to be the best that we can be and not to let anyone tell you you can't do anything because it doesn't matter that you're a girl, don't let anyone say 'You're a girl, you can't accomplish this' cause you can always do anything you put your mind to.

Carly, recounting an experience where she considered whether to go to a college interview, which was very important to her, or whether, instead, to be a part of the activities taking place on International Women's Day.

I had to go for a college interview, and I was really upset that day because not only did I think I wouldn't get into College, but I missed this march that I really wanted to go to, it felt, I don't know why it felt important but it felt really important and I wanted to go to this march. Being a woman I wanted to go to this march. ...Once a month for a week I don't feel like I'm glad to be a woman but other than that I'm feeling that I'm really glad to be a woman.

(vii) Forming a family of one's own

Most participants long for families of their own, families which will provide the security, the love and protection they missed in their earlier years. Craig and his toddler daughter, Kim with her husband and two children, and Promilla with her husband and baby son have already formed their own communities in families of their own, and the two women have also become part of someone else's family through marriage.

Craig has formed a new family with his daughter, a child whose mother is Native Canadian who has decided to allow Craig to raise the child on his own. In forming this family of his own, Craig is also searching for community through his child's roots. He is learning all he can about the Native Canadian way, in fact he is studying Cultural Anthropology, specifically Native History and Culture in a University program, and wishes to develop Native Canadian curriculum when he has completed his studies. Part of his quest, it may be suggested, includes his own need to be part of a community. In learning and teaching about his child's culture and roots, he will probably become a part of that circle. He describes the goal this way:

I want to develop myself to a fully rounded type individual, right, and I want to develop myself into being a strong member of a community.

An example of a young person without her own warm relationship with a mother, but experiencing some of the positives of a family situation through her marriage can be seen in Promilla, who was positive about her regular visits with her mother-in-law.

She loves me and she loves her son and she loves her grandson. We get along great y'know. She means well. Y'know she wants to see us and how we're doing. And she loads us on with food every time she comes. But she's great, she's a great lady other than that.

Drawn to the warmth and integration shared by members of her husband's family, Kim spoke about her mother-in-law.

She had met me once before, when I was maybe thirteen. I was only a child. And I remember I offered her coffee and to this day she still sits down and remembers how I made her coffee and I baked a cake. I made her a cake. I guess that made an impression on her.

And about her husband's family she said:

They're closer together. They're more family oriented. Everything they do is for their families ...they live more for their families. They have a strong bond to hold them together. As a group, [her own family] we're all like floating around. There's nothing really to hold us together.

(viii) Reconciliation with biological family members

For some youngsters deprived of their own family, the dream of reconciliation with natural family members is very powerful. Kim talked about her large birth family which has been scattered by substitute care.

Well, the one relationship I would like to change is my family. I would like one day for us just to be able to get together and we can meet everybody and find out who everybody is. It would be very difficult.... we've each gone through different things so it's very hard for us to really be close and I would really wish that we could be. The whole bunch of them. We were all, like we were all born... we all came into like the same environment basically and we've all lived tremendously different lives, all of us.

Laurie, at the age of twenty, applied to Parent Finders and located her birth mother in Eastern Canada. She successfully engineered a reunion meeting which, while not the fulfillment of all her dreams, was the beginning of a relationship with Laurie's relatives and a process of learning where she fits into their family circle.

C ESTABLISHMENT AND MAINTENANCE OF SELF-ESTEEM

Examples of the establishment and maintenance of self-esteem and self-efficacy abound in the data. For some young people, positive thoughts and feelings about the self became evident very late in adolescence, and are only now being recognized by the individuals whose actions and behaviours reflect

self-actualization. For others, the sustaining experiences in their out-of-home-care years mirrored or continued a pattern of high self-esteem established in earlier years. And as some of the examples below will show, a **pattern of esteem-building experiences prior to care was not necessarily present for some of the young adults who have managed to build themselves up with some help.** Transformational and maintenance experiences and relationships with respect to one's self-esteem seem to start early or later, and they can last for many years or be significant despite their very short duration and seeming insignificance.

Social work interventions were named by most respondents with respect to their support or detracting from the individual's self-esteem. These examples include interventions of both positive and negative quality, and those interventions which were sustained as well as those that made a big difference because of the timing involved.

For example, Kim's childhood was marked by early neglect, loss of several siblings, expected and unexpected moves from foster homes to new ones, sometimes with little understanding and once under a cloud of being blamed for the rejection. Looking back, she views her early years as marred by losses, rejection and insecurities. At sixteen, she left care to move in with, and ultimately marry, her boyfriend, who was an older, more settled, and employed boyfriend with a large, warmly related, extended family. Interestingly, when asked, ten years later, what and who she believes contributed to her happy and productive family life and career today, she mentions her children's services social worker as the first and primary support to her, and especially at the turning point late in her life when she left out-of-home-care.

She didn't condemn me when I decided to make a move and just go on my own, [that is, to move in with her boyfriend and out of care]. She didn't say anything negative. I remember she asked me "are you sure this is what you want to do?" But she didn't condemn me or criticize me or put me down. **And that helps, like it makes you feel "well, maybe I am doing something right."** ...And she was the first person who worked for the Children's Aid who showed me that even though she worked for the parents and with the parents, she also showed me that she was there for the kids too. You knew she was always available. We had her number. We could always phone her if we wanted to.

We could always get in touch with her if we had to. None of the workers that were before... I never knew any of their numbers. I didn't even know their names, really.

Connie's bonding with her life-long foster family has been solid and satisfying, and she names them as the major source of her feelings of well being. As a small child, however, she benefited from contacts, perhaps at and around the time of placement, with one children's services worker, whose name not remembered, but whose attitude was encouraging and accepting of the child.

I remember as a very young child I had a social worker, her name was... and she was a very nice lady. Y'know I'd tell her the stuff I was doing in school and that and we'd talk and umm, I just got the feeling from her that she was very warm and very supportive. It was great. I think that sort of helped me in a sense to have people around me who were supportive and people who were encouraging and I think that really helped in terms of my development as who I am today. I think that's the only other main person who has influenced my life. I think I had her as a social worker for about five or six years. After that I had about, I think it's four or five different social workers after her.

Laurie remembers how her social worker helped her build self-esteem. She has many specific actions in mind which indicated to Laurie that there were feelings of caring and concern coming from the worker and directed at the child. This memory relates to the adult's help in strengthening Laurie's self-esteem.

She was always there, she really cared. Even littlest things like my 19th birthday, I wanted to have pictures taken of myself cause at that time, you know, I was looking really good and everything, right, so I'm like "oh God, gotta have some pictures taken". She did it. You know, she went to the park and took all these beautiful photos. She's nice.

And Promilla describes both instances where a social worker showed disinterest or contempt for her, thus blocking her self-esteem, and where another worker exhibited respect for her, thus elevating her self esteem. About the particularly frustrating relationship she states:

I had a lot of problems with her because she would always think it was my fault. She was terrible. I thought she was a bitch at that time and I still do think she's a bitch because now I know... I don't think she listened to me. She was more into her book work or what she had on file that represented me. She was never into my emotional stuff, she was always into the book-work. Well, the book says this and the book says that. She was never there to sit and listen to what Promilla had to say. She got information from the teacher, she got information from the police. She wasn't going by what I have to say. All those terrible experiences and I didn't deserve it, she was still going by that. She was judging me for what happened to me. I told her "I'm a different person, these things happened, whatever happened between me and my dad I didn't ask for it but I got it and get to know me, get to know me inside, not what you see outside." We couldn't get along, she didn't understand me. So I finally moved out when I was eighteen years old. I didn't leave care, I left the foster parents when I was eighteen years old, and I said I'm my own person now, I don't give a shit about any social worker...

Is this response just a youth's response to authority? Can we assume it's a kind of negativism, or that Promilla just couldn't accept the help when it was offered? Probably not, as evidenced by her response to recollecting the social worker who followed the negatively assessed one, who left her post when Promilla was nineteen, still attending school, and in receipt of extended care and maintenance. The new worker and that relationship is described here, with emphasis on the healing powers inherent in these interventions.

She was such a sweetheart. She listened to me. We would talk. She would spend time with me and ...like a normal person, y'know. It was my level. She wasn't all sophisticated, big words, no ridiculous book. With respect and treating me at her ...my level. Y'know I didn't wanna be looked down at. This other social worker, she was very up-front. I had to go by the rules, which I did go by the rules. I respect what she was saying and she also respect what I'm saying. And we may not agree on everything but we work around it y'know. She compromise, I compromise. We both knew what we were dealing with and I was so thankful that I had her y'know. ...I used her much more. XXXXX I saw once a month. This social worker I saw once a week. Ya I wanted to and she make the time to see me y'know and I know they're busy and I know they have hundreds of caseload but that doesn't

mean she should treat all her clients like that y'know. And it leaves a scar of a social worker.

Being treated with respect, and as an equal, seem to stand out here. When asked who would travel to make appointments with whom, Promilla answered that each would go out of her way to make it convenient for the other, taking turns meeting at Promilla's school or at the office.

Ya whatever's convenient. Mostly for her because I know she's busy. I would go to her or she would come to see me at school or vice versa, whatever, we'll give and take.

Foster parents, social workers and others maintained youngsters' self-esteem when they supported youths' own goals, and contributed to their attempt to achieve these goals.

Ramon cited very specific attitudinal and material advantages of one foster home over another when he talked about the contribution of foster parents to his success. The first foster home and foster parents' attitudes detracted from his ability to perform well in school; the subsequent placement supported his efforts to excel as a student.

Like they weren't... really ...I don't think they were educated. But that's okay, like I mean they let you do what you wanted to do. They let you pursue your goals. Whereas Mrs. X didn't really do that. Like she was restrictive; she didn't... like I went to the library a couple of times and I missed dinner, and I got in trouble when I came home. Like she gave me trouble for that. So I didn't want to study anymore, you know what I'm saying?

In the second placement, with the A's, however,

Well dinner was like earlier, right after school. And anyway there wasn't a library around there, at A's, so you studied at the, in the house. In the house you could always find a place to study. So it was much better like you had more space, more privacy, and it was much.... they fed you better for one thing. So it was much, much, better I think.

Connie's account of her experiences with the foster family she's known since earliest childhood is a good example of both being raised in a

community and the establishment and maintenance of self esteem. Connie is the only non-birth child in her family, the only girl among the children and the only black member of her family and of the rural community where she grew up.

And my parents have always loved me for who I was and they've accepted me as their daughter. In fact, sometimes my mom says "it's almost like I gave birth to you... I just feel so much like you're my daughter." ...So I've never felt as an outcast from my family. I've always felt that I was accepted and I've always felt as being part of the family.

Having to face a good deal of racism in school and in the community, she felt sufficient family support to get through the hard times.

As young child the two main environments that I was in was school and home, and so that's what I was dealing with, just those two things. In one situation you had a loving, supportive, encouraging environment and in the other one I didn't really have an encouraging environment, in fact at times it was rather negative.

They (family members) were there to say "you'll encounter people like this in the world and not everybody is really nice... they don't understand what you're going through." They were just encouraging, encouraging in whatever I was doing and they were always there to provide support and love and especially during this time when I had all these rotten stupid kids there. But also I think it helped to have three older brothers 'cause they were always there to stick up for me too, especially when I was going through this.

Asked to summarize what contributed most to Connie's development of strengths, she said:

I think the atmosphere that I was growing up in was quite good. Even growing up on a farm, it's relaxed. It's sort of nurturing, and sort of supportive, and I think also, I think I've been pretty fortunate in having good parents 'cause I know a lot of other kids who don't feel that way. And I think having that strong base, that strong touch base a loving and supportive and encouraging one is I think what has built my character.

In contrast to this life-long nurturing, June's story of beginning to feel better about herself in adolescence, in her final CAS group home placement, and following years of living in abusive situations is expressed this way:

And they really show me that somebody could love me without getting something, or doing something for their love

Many times, foster parents introduced a new perspective which, in later years, respondents considered especially useful and contributory to self-confidence and empowerment.

My foster mother, she kind of had a bit to do with it too [the realization that many other youngsters are in out-of-home care situations]. She always talked to me about it cause I didn't know there was such a thing as foster homes or whatever. So she said I can't go around thinking it's only me or dwelling on that I'm the only one it ever happened to cause there's other people just like me out there.

The learning of new skills and mastery of sports, music, or any body of knowledge or behaviour adds to the self-efficacy which is part of building self-esteem. Several participants stressed the help foster parents gave in their mastery of skills, as Moustafa relates about his group home parents.

"And actually when I was living there I learned to skate, ice skating, roller skating... stuff like that you know, neat things."

Like Promilla, receiving respect from adults was also considered of central importance to Steve. Steve's emphasis, throughout the account of his life, was on the opinion that those adults who were most helpful to his maintenance of self-esteem were those who didn't impose their wills on him, but rather found out from him what his needs and opinions were.

Interventions of teachers in the daily lives of children and youth are many and also potentially powerful, as assessed by Steve when he considered the adults who had given him strength through the years.

They lent their ears, that's all. They gave their opinion, they didn't force me into anything and they gave me their time. Very flexible people.

He also remembers that some teachers seemed to notice he was a talented child.

She saw my art work. She told me, she focused on my art work. A few other teachers too. I can't remember their names but I remember them being flexible with my schooling.

The schooling experience, filling each youngsters' days and consciousness for so many years, and in so many different areas of growth and change, provides the potential to transform poor self-esteem and maintain self-esteem which has previously been nurtured.

John recounts an educational experience which could have been one adding to the youth's self-esteem, but because administrators behaved as they did, the encounter exacerbated John's already serious problem with feeling devalued. At one point in high school, John moved into an Independent Living apartment. Presenting himself at the local High School for admission, he was treated with some hostility, which seems to have added to his natural inclination to feel uncomfortable about being in out-of-home care, and in fact, to often hide his status. He is angry and hurt today when he talks about this experience.

...There's the teachers who don't really like you and try to go to school like, it's the Beaches, like high school, they wouldn't even let me in. Like they didn't want to allow me into the school. They said that 'you have to go to school where your parents live' and I tried to explain that the Children's Aid... 'I live in the Children's Aid' and they knew that and, you know, they just said 'we... I'm sorry but you can't come into this school cause you have [to go] ...where your parents live and pay taxes, that's where you can go to school'. Even though I lived a few blocks away. And then I got my role model (in his Independent Living apartment) to phone them and I went back there and I said 'well, I'm coming to school cause I'm not going to go ten miles away.' ...And things like that you know. It's bothersome. Yeah, I guess it hurts too.

Carly's experiences underline the circular connection between mastery on the job, leading to heightened self-esteem and improved performance in school. There is the potential, for interventions in one area to have strong repercussions in the other. Having recently embarked on a five year college

and university program which will qualify her to be a professional in the child care field, Carly recalls that until she was twenty-one and already finished with her Basic level course in secondary school and a part of the working world, she never imagined she could be a college or university student.

When I was a little girl I always dreamed of going to Ryerson... And then I thought well, I wanted to go but I really didn't think I was capable enough of going to University or college or anything like that... I had teachers that weren't into support and who didn't think I could make it into university either... When you're in Basic level they don't really think of you as a university student. When you're in General they think of you as a college student. When you're Advanced they think of you as a university student.

When Carly began attending PARC she was looking for some support or validation of a general kind, along with employment and friendship opportunities. From one small employment opportunity as a receptionist, Carly moved into more responsible position, and her sights became elevated almost without conscious emphasis. Becoming first a secretarial student and then a college student seemed to be a natural progression.

Then I had friends like social workers and child and youth workers who made me realize that I can go for a degree, I'm capable of going for that degree, that I'm capable of doing anything that I want to do.

Asked if she could tell me about an experience in her life that she think changed its direction, Carly made the connection between her experiences at PARC and her growth of self esteem and self-efficacy.

PARC, yeah. PARC helped me, made me feel comfortable about myself, made me believe in myself, made me believe that I can do what I can do when I want to do it, slow pace, fast pace or whatever pace

And today, very proud of herself and ensconced in her student life and professional identity, she remembers:

The last foster home that I was in, when there was parent/teacher interview and I was going to go to high school they said that I belong in Basic, there's no where I'm, going to be going, I'm not going to be able to go to university not going to be able to go to college. I feel like going back to them and saying 'look, look where I am today!'

The potential power each teacher has to support and influence the self-concept of the child and thereby to influence that child's future is described by Craig in the following series of memories and thoughts on the topic.

Because life in his family and his community was 'so shitty', which is his characterization of years of chronic neglect and periodic abuse, he visualizes himself as a child:

...covered with a really big, thick, blanket of these fucking negativities... But I had to use these arms of strength reaching in, you know, and giving me positive type strength. I guess that's helped me to start... seeing the positive aspect of my life, right. Of myself and other things around me, right. You know like teachers were helpful with that. ...I remember a few who really showed a concern about me, right. Like my mother was physically abusive when we were children. ...And I remember my teachers showing generally concern about bruises on my body which if she didn't show any concern, like well, it wouldn't really help us, right. But I felt like somebody did care, you know. She just, I guess she brought me up on her counter and she looked at my bruises and I guess she comforted me a little bit and asked me how I got them and showed some concern. And I don't know if she called anybody or not. I think maybe she called my mom. ...And I had a teacher I fell in love with, you know. I also had a teacher who paid for the school year end trip to Montreal.

Craig's Big Brother (actually a Volunteer Probation Officer) with whom he maintained a relationship into his adult years, and from home into out-of-home-care. This man encouraged the very unhappy boy to read.

So when I was depressed at home, I would immerse myself in books, right. ...And it got to the point where if I was skipping I'd stay home all shut up in a really dark room, hiding from the world, right. But I would read like a book a day. And I guess I

developed this quick mind, right. I became smarter, and I guess the teachers saw my potential. They saw just how informed I was even though I was so strange or so weird. This was in my weird time too. But I guess they saw potential in me and that encouraged them to, you know, to work with me.

And finally Craig, a university student who plans to be a teacher and to develop curriculum himself, puts into words the power each teacher has to recognize the spark in a child, and probably to ignite one. The good ones showed,

...just a little bit of quality towards me, right. It was so small and so tiny it was almost invisible. It was almost non-existent to most people, right. I guess a child from a functional type home wouldn't even realize that had an effect on your life at all. You know, they'd say 'well that had nothing to do with it,' right. To me though, it was **huge**. It was **immense**. It was **incredible**. It was **powerful**, right. It was **wonderful**. You know, it wasn't anything special, it was just special because it was something I didn't usually get.

Amy also remembers how important one teacher's positive assessment of a youngster can be.

I really struggled with feeling not special for a very long time. When I was in grade seven I had a teacher, she was very keen, she picked up on me... I remember her once saying that I had charm and she said it to me, she goes 'it's something that you're born with, it's not something that you acquire, it's just about you'. And I remember that staying with me ...it's something very natural she said she found in me and I remember keeping that for a very long time and after that it was just a matter of ...I don't know... I tried more to please, or give people things special to say about me

In some of the participants' lives an individual is identified as a strong influence, without whose intervention the participant's life might have taken a different direction. These individuals seem to hold in common their unwavering affection for the child or youth, and the fact that the individual can be counted on to be there for that child.

Craig conjectured that this might have been the case with him, his own Volunteer Big Brother, originally a contract worker in a youth probation and after-care program, having been a long-time friend and influence. When Craig was in trouble with the law as a juvenile offender at the age of 9, Mike was assigned to become a person of meaning in Craig's life. As the years went by, Mike was no longer assigned through the formal structure, but he maintained an informal relationship with Craig for ten years after the assignment, a relationship which transcended Craig's placement into out-of-home care and followed him through a series of placements and, finally, into emancipation. Craig's account of this relationship, the constancy of it, and what it meant to him as a child, and today, follows:

...Instead of taking me out and spending money on me, it'd be things like you know buying me books, and encouraging me to read. And when I was doing well in school he'd take me out for an extra special treat. Or else when I was even when I got into trouble with the cops, right, he still had this involvement with me. That weekend he wouldn't do something special with me, we'd just go out for lunch, you know. He kept the visit short, but it was still there.It just more or less said that he cared, right. That's all, right? . Yeah basically he just cared. **His relationship with me wasn't on shaky ground, right?** It couldn't disappear, right? Which social workers are not like that ...It's the truth. I realize you're a social worker aren't you? Social workers change every six months or in replacement, whichever comes first!

But the basic idea is that we need some type of reference to reflect ourself against, right, but develop towards, right? To be a part of ... that's what I used that Big Brother guy for. Was to develop myself and to reflect myself at him, right? In such a way to give me an identity, right?

Other respondents spoke about maintaining a strong and positive self-image through traumatic events, disappointments and rejections because of the introjected characteristics, evoked in memories and images, of a beloved relative or friend. Sometimes the beloved other thought well of the child, sometimes the other taught important precepts, and always there was a feeling of being loved and loving in return which emerges from these early, or earlier, relationships.

A good experience with adults can elevate self-esteem to a level which carries a child through subsequent, sometimes difficult, experiences.

One mature couple took Promilla into care for several years when she was a young teen-ager, had suffered the loss of her grandmother in the Caribbean, had been rejected and abused by her relations in Canada and identified herself as "a bag lady." Soon, however, the English-Canadian, couple of retirement age left for Florida with some rest and better climate in mind.. They wanted to take Promilla with them, but for several reasons that was impossible. Attributing her hard-won sense of strength and self-confidence largely to her years with these foster parents, she says:

You know why it happened? I think because I had a good experience with those foster parents and I knew what life was about in that home and I said "if I take that with that positive attitude and be my own person, I will turn out a okay person." ...I think they really wanted to take me to Florida but because I was younger I couldn't or my social worker didn't think it was a great idea. So come to think of it, I think very well they would've taken me to Florida with them. 'Cause they loved me and I loved them to death. There's not a thing out there I wouldn't do for them cause they treat me with love, with respect, showing me what a person is, showing me what a person I am. You know, **this person that I had in me that I didn't know I had.**

About earlier loving, appreciating, and recognizing adults, her grandparents who remained in Guyana until they died, Promilla says:

I think they were the greatest persons, they raised me well up until I came to Canada. I had a life then. I was spoiled. It was very loving, warm. I remember vaguely, very little. My grandmother loved me to death. My grandmother always bought me a new outfit on Friday y'know when she would get paid every week I would get a new outfit. My grandfather always bought me something. They always gave me, gave me, always always. And now to look back ...I didn't know I was spoiled at that time because I didn't know any better but now that I look back I can see that I was spoiled... Lots of things. Lots of money and, not just physical things. Emotional, and I felt loved... And when I came to Canada it was ...I was a bag lady y'know... and I was beaten up, treated shitty y'know.

Similarly, Louise's great grandmother, today in her nineties, raised Louise until the child was nine and left Jamaica to reunite with her birth mother in Canada. When asked what person has been most helpful to Louise in "getting on in life", the reply is, "My great grandmother," although visits between the two have been no more than three or four since Louise left the island. Trying to convey the ways in which her great grandmother influenced and continues to influence her, she stated:

...if it wasn't for her I'd probably be a totally different person. She's you know, she's really kind and she's my strength and she's the one person who I really look up to. ...She raised me and I'm sure if I had come to Canada with my mother when I was a baby she'd probably be busy and she would be working and doing other stuff, but it was just me and my great grandmother so you know 'cause I was the last one that she raised, I was her baby and it's really special to her... just that love and support that's what really got me through everything. You know I remember her and I always think about her if something's not going great or whatever... I always think about her... I didn't get along with my mother... but I always knew there was my grandmother and whatever I do she's not going to hold it against me. She would you know, always love me. **She thinks I'm the greatest and I can't do anything wrong and stuff.** **Everybody needs at least one person, you know, somebody who they know would love them for sure.**

Interestingly, for these young adults and others, thinking about the influential person in their lives can be helpful, evoking a feeling of being loved or highly regarded seems to bolster and soothe, although the influential person may be miles and years away. This category of helping people who help maintain an individual's self-esteem in thought, when not in presence, will be reconsidered in Section E, when we examine the **thinking patterns and conceptualizations** participants found strengthening, and which we call "protective".

D EXPOSURE TO OPPORTUNITIES

The child can only grow and develop to the extent that she or he, first, survives and subsequently is exposed to, and helped to make use of, opportunities and experiences. Children raised away from their families,

especially where parental dysfunction has precluded parental intervention to provide stimulating experiences and opportunities, depend largely on those institutions responsible for their care and education to provide these roads to self-actualization. Opportunities are, as well, the presentation of a new turn in the road, a movement away from the predicted, and often a chance to circumvent disaster. An early teen-aged pregnancy without social support for example, will probably confine the young woman to a life filled with the kind of adversity she already knows. A chance to be trained or educated for a job or career which presents itself in the early teen years, however, may delay pregnancy until the young woman is better prepared for parenting, in a supportive spousal or communal arrangement, and can financially support a baby.

Coming into care as an opportunity. Several respondents pointed to the fact of out-of-home-care as the single most important experience that changed the course of their lives. Emphasizing the opening up of opportunities and experiences, Grace spoke to her life-changing experience:

I guess I could say **coming into care** because it gave me a different life style, different role models to look at from my mom, which was kind of important to me. Realizing that not everybody was like my mom and people were different, lives were different, that kind of thing.

Coming to Canada as an opportunity. Although circumstances subsequently necessitated Children's Aid care, arrival in Canada was seen as a major opportunity for some. In Patrina's estimation, an agency social worker, in making sure she was returned to out-of-home care, was heroic on her client's behalf. Patrina recalls that her social worker literally rescued her from a rural outpost in Jamaica where her family had hidden her after stealing the youngster from foster care and getting her on an airplane under false pretenses. Back in Canada, having been able to get here with money sent by her social worker and instructions given during long-distance phone communications, Patrina attended a Family Court hearing to establish where she should be living. The judge asked Patrina to get on the stand and testify,

...but I was too terrified so my social worker did that. They basically [her estranged family members] made her life hell while she was on the stand. She was actually crying.

This young woman compares her life before out-of-home-care with her opportunities and experiences since coming into care and attributes her estimable success to her own will, first and foremost, and to her opportunities in Canada, a strong second. For her first ten or eleven years, Patrina hardly attended school at all, first in Jamaica, she stayed home with the younger children while her mother looked for work and her older brother regularly attended. After being sent to Canada without the necessary immigration papers, she was unable to attend school for two years because of her 'illegal' status. And when she finally got to attend school regularly, Patrina was held back by one year. In seventh grade, when her new school wanted to hold her back again, her foster mother intervened and convinced school authorities to give her a chance with her age-mates.

Today, Patrina is graduating from a community college program where she has been prepared for secretarial and administrative assistants' work. Above all else, she believes in the value, perhaps even the potential salvation of education. When asked whether there was an event in her life that changed her destiny or her direction, she decided that coming to Canada was the most significant event because in Jamaica she would not have been able to have an education. And despite the fact that her father in Canada, his family and his new wife treated her disrespectfully, misused and abused her, she still feels grateful to them for bringing her to Canada.

Because I know people I left in Jamaica, they don't even have an education. They don't have a chance at finishing an education that they started because they either too old, or not even too old, they just don't have the you know, the strength of whatever to go for it and they always just end up with a family.... earlier than they want it.

When Ramon's parents sent him to Canada as an unaccompanied minor their primary, if not only, reason for doing so revolved around the paucity of educational and professional opportunities in their own country for the children of those not well situated in the political-religious structure.

There's also this how would you call it, there's this interview that thinks about your ethical system... They investigate your ethics, your religion... and it doesn't matter if you're a genius and you don't believe in the faith they believe in they're not going to let you in, you know. So that's another barrier, it doesn't matter what, what your academics if you don't believe in what they believe in then you don't get in.

As it was, Ramon's father was not a believer, which had a great deal to do with his own lack of success and, perhaps, recognition in his field. The paternal uncle who became a role model for the boy was a dentist, another uncle was a meteorologist and Ramon's own father a chemistry teacher, so clearly there is a suggestion that some choice among the sciences would come easily to Ramon, although he has chosen the path of dentistry, not so much because of the nature of the work as because both he and his own father see dentistry as a profession which is highly regarded, well remunerated and provides sufficient free time for a person to develop and nurture his personal relationships.

So Ramon was determined to be a dentist, but the opportunities in his own country were minuscule.

Well, there's like one million applicants, no two million, I don't know, I think it's between one and two million applications for universities and there's only like fifteen universities there and you know there things aren't very good. They don't have much facilities or they don't have anything. Like it's so outdated and there's this entrance exam you know, it's absolutely impossible to get to the thing that you want like there's only like 2% of those people get into medicine for example or dentistry or whatever you know. All the professional faculties their enrollment is really limited.

Because this youth's immigration to Canada and subsequent placement in foster care was all predicated on his ability to seize the educational opportunity afforded in this country, his education was the main organizing principle governing his actions and behaviours in placement. Suffering in a rejecting and difficult first foster placement while trying to achieve in school without any ability with the English language he said about that unfortunate placement "...they would've moved me but I didn't want

that because it was in the middle of the school year." Judging his next placement on the basis that it supported his achievement in school, he found it very satisfactory. For this young adult, education and the profession he's chosen are everything.

The education system as a series of opportunities.

Grace's natural mother, with whom she could not get along or live, had her daughter tested for the gifted stream in school shortly before the child left home for foster care. Grace attributes a great deal of her positive growth and development to her mother's early intervention on her behalf, therefore, although there were many serious problems in their life together.

The gifted educational stream provided security and positive regard for Grace throughout her educational experience, along with the enriched opportunities and experiences this kind of program affords. Her long-term foster parents, while supportive, were not particularly oriented towards university education for their foster or biological children, aiming generally for high school graduation, although in Grace's case it is assumed that a university career will be undertaken.

What does seem to stand out as a positive support for this young woman was the working partnership, actually the team concept, begun and maintained among her referring, biological mother (who had the foresight to have the child tested for the program), her foster mother and her teachers and principals throughout the years. About one of her teachers she states:

She'd take a special interest in all her, all the kids. But if also like on a personal level she knows every kid's parents by first name. She has hour long conversations with my foster mother. They're on a first name basis. And you know she's the kind ...if you see her in the hall, which is rarely, but if you see her in the hall she'll come up to you, she'll put her arm around you and say 'so how's it going, anything you want to talk about, you know,' and if there's a problem she'll be the one to look for you, search you out sometimes. You don't always have to go to her. That's really been good.

Another positive outcome from being a part of a gifted program, has been the small group of peers who have moved together from school to school, providing support for one another. As Grace expresses it "...there's always a

core group of people I knew, going with me to each school so it wasn't very scary. It wasn't that big a change for me." And about her potential career choice of teaching, she says:

For the teaching thing, I think my teachers had a lot to do with it 'cause of their effect on me. Their influence on my life ...and I realize that it'd be really great to have that kind of effect, that kind of influence on other kids.

Brad believes he developed his self-confidence as well as a healthy respect for the importance of others, at least in part, through experiences in school. In school, he was introduced to new skills and challenges, there were teachers who noticed his quickness in spelling and math, and perhaps most of all, he was accepted by some peers and learned to develop friendships. In fact, when asked what single factor most determined who he is today, Brad replied:

Meeting people. I guess school is, meeting people... Yeah, I guess it would have to be school, like because well if I didn't go to school I'd be home all day and I would be a vegetable...

Brad's life as the only child of a mentally ill mother is described as one of suffocating over-protectiveness and lack of exposure to the outside world. When he got to school for the first time,

I got to see kids my own age, the first time I ever saw kids my own age... I began to realize there's twenty-five individuals in a single room and sometimes someone's going to get the teacher's attention instead of me. I'm not going to get everything and as time went on I began to learn how to speak with people because for a while I was a really un-social. I didn't talk to people. I was real shy.

Because the public education system was established in North America, ostensibly to provide an avenue of social mobility for people of all circumstances, it is a great disappointment to experience the ways in which opportunities have been limited for some youngsters, adding to the list of hurdles thrown up by their life circumstances. Racism, sexism and class bias in public school education have detracted, in some respondents' narratives,

from the system's almost infinite opportunity to afford upward social mobility for children from disadvantaged circumstances. In the following accounts, young people share their frustrations upon meeting with these negative forces.

Amy is a university graduate embarking on the studies involved in a professional social work degree. When she entered grade nine, she was placed in a general, non-university bound program.

...they had advanced but when I thought about taking it and I asked and I was told y'know I had to get letters whatever, and most teachers would've recognized me because I was doing better than all my friends were doing in advanced. ...I just switched schools and I automatically took advanced courses and I was allowed to...

Black students were the minority at this second school, and most of them, as Amy experienced it, were separated from the mainstream students by class as well.

You know, they were coming from the Bloor, Runnymede, Jane area that was pretty... well, you know, those were the kids that went on music trips, and they went on exchange Switzerland, they were those sort of students and we weren't we were all ...living at X,... which is a pretty poor housing place, right?... So we were also in the wrong class, y'know.

Louise, another black woman, is sorry she didn't attend a collegiate because she now wishes she'd had the preparation needed for university study. Although her grades and ability were sufficient for pre-university courses, she didn't have the stamina or the know-how to get herself in to the university stream, and there was nobody in her life, including her social worker, her teachers, school counselors and her foster parents, who intervened to advise or direct Louise's educational plans.

Being realistic, or perhaps negative, about herself in earlier years, she says "I probably would have said 'mind your own business' but now I'm older and wiser, you know."

Although she has rationalizations for all the adults who could have helped guide her but didn't have the time or the responsibility to do so, still

she thinks "... foster parents should be aware about school and be involved in the kids' education." Louise is aware of the programs offered to youth in care today, programs which were not so available when she was making her choices in school. She sees a role for young adults who are foster care alumni, working with social workers and foster parents to guide youngsters in care educationally, so they can take advantage of the opportunities inherent in the public school educational system.

While still living with her father and his wife, Claire, a new arrival to Canada, experienced the school system as a racist institution where she fought for what she wanted and needed in the way of school placement and recognition. This view has transcended Claire's in-care placement, her high school graduation and half her university career.

Going to school and they're trying to tie you into general programs when you know you're more than capable of doing advanced level programs. Having professors talk down to you some of the time because you're a woman, and not only a woman you're a Black woman. It's kind of like the double whammy almost. ...It seems like in this country. It just always seems like you have to be trying double hard to prove yourself.

About the teachers and counselors she knew in high school, Claire remarks:

I don't know whether or not some of these teachers realize what they're doing... or they're innately racist and they don't realize it. They seem to think Black people should be taking general level courses. And I've seen it time and time again. So it's like kids are doing really well and they would come here [from the Caribbean] and they're told 'you take this, this, this,' and it's like all these general level courses. I've had friends who end up having to stay like two years extra in high school because they were told to take all these general level courses and they want to go to university and they can't get in with general level courses.

Claire learned about streaming, what to avoid and what to aim for in her class choices, and how to prepare for university from a neighbour she happened to meet in the apartment building where she lived with her father. She believes she avoided a lot of headaches and dead-ends by knowing what questions to ask and by having a good idea, herself, of what she wanted to do.

"I can't really say when I was going to school anybody was really interested"

This statement summarizes Kim's assessment of the support she received during her thirteen years of education. Although school came easily to her and she believes she expended very little effort in order to perform adequately, **she does not remember any person, either in school, in her foster families, or at the child welfare agency, who encouraged her to look into college or university education.**

A mother herself now, she recognizes how much parental investment is required for children to maximize their educational opportunities. I asked Kim whether she would have been likely to continue her education, had some outside person been encouraging. "To go to college? I would have, yes." Although she is happily married, enjoys her children and has a responsible full-time job, she seems to regret the fact that she didn't, when she had the opportunity, the freedom, and independence, go further in her education.

Promilla's attitudes toward school based on her very contradictory life evidence, lead her to say school both saved her life and let her down. She was bright, attractive, sociable and made friends easily. In many ways school gave her a chance to maintain high self-esteem although she wasn't much of a student, academically. She was able, through 'scamming,' to graduate from the twelfth grade, winning a student award of \$500, while being unable to read or write well enough to fill out an employment application. Today she is the mother of a small child whom she will not be able to help with his earliest school assignments because of her gaps in literacy. A bitter critic of the educational system that let her through, she says:

And my point is I wouldn't really care if you were forty years old and you had to be in grade 12, the point is I have to know how to read and write and know how to fill out an application. But they passed me along because I was getting older and because I was a good student, meaning I present myself well, I was always on time, I do whatever I was told, I was the best student in that way.

When it comes to doing my educational work I was shitty at doing it and my teachers were not smart enough to catch on that I have a problem. We used to take turns in class reading and we used to go around in a circle and I would wait for the second person to my right or my left or whoever was going to read next,

I would excuse myself and go to the bathroom, so when I come back I would lose my turn.

It hit me when I was graduating because I was looking for a job and I wanted to do other things and I couldn't and then I realized, it's a problem. It wasn't a problem in high school because I was getting it done for me and I was paying people to do it for me.

I really blame the system because it's a crummy system. And they have to really change it because they don't pay no attention whatsoever.

Still, for other reasons, school was the best place in the world for Promilla while she lived at home, with abusive parents and increasing conflict and chaos.

Like I always wanted to be in school, because school was a safe place. I didn't have to go home to face up to any nightmare. Umm, being with my friends and just hanging out at the library was the best thing I could ever want at that time. School was the only place I was allowed... and that's where I guess I love school that much for the socialize part but not the school work.

She wonders today whether, if life at home had been less tumultuous, she would have had the confidence to tell her teachers she had severe problems in learning. In a more perfect world, someone would have picked this up.

Promilla's case makes the point, as well, that the educational system provides many opportunities to experience the world, not simply the academic, but those avenues of sport, sociability, style, drama, art, music, organization membership, leadership, boosterism, and many other aspects of life which are, to the young person's developing sense of identity and self-esteem, essential. Literacy and numeracy are, however, equally important skills which must be acquired for the young adult to feel and be capable.

And Paul's ease in school was in direct contrast with the chaos, neglect and uncertainty he experienced at home. The fact that he still attends Community College and will fashion a career from his years of training is linked to the early years and his eagerness to be in school. "There's always the teacher that gives you one "A", he states, indicating one of the factors that have kept him motivated and interested in staying in school.

Paul, like Promilla, contrasts his life in school with life at home before coming into care. At home, his increasingly mentally ill mother, the abuse she suffered at the hands of his step-father, the chaotic conditions, the cruelty of extended family member who cared for Paul on a temporary basis, the moves and the uncertainty all created a very frightened boy. In school, life was structured, regularized and there were rules to follow, all of which seemed to suit Paul as a young child.

Self-improvement

Laurie takes courses, involves herself in new sports and systems of thought, and achieving mastery in new arenas as an important part of her life and her self-image.

This pattern, sometimes called "self-improvement," stands out, in Laurie's account of her continuous learning, change and growth, as a pattern whereby she adds to and creates herself from year to year. Perhaps the accoutrements of identity which lots of young people take for granted, are more concretely sought and added by youngsters whose identity is not easily accessible.

No one teacher or positive educational experience stands out in Laurie's memory, yet she is continuously positive with respect to learning and becoming involved in institutions of learning, and remembers as her only recognized, conscious, goal in life the achievement of Grade 12 graduation. In addition to getting this diploma, Laurie has studied Karate and achieved a high level of mastery.

After several years in the unskilled work world, she has enrolled in community college and is anticipating a career as a legal secretary. She wishes to begin voice and guitar lessons to continue to develop those talents, and is always interested in her artistic development. Laurie would enjoy having the time to write poetry and enroll in some poetry courses. In the future, she sees herself taking English courses at the college or university level for her own enjoyment and development. For Laurie, education is a way to grow and develop as a human being, and to increase her self esteem.

Like I maybe try jazz for a couple of years, then try something else a couple of years. 'Cause I think in some ways if you just stick to one thing you're kind of, have tunnel vision in a way...

whereas if I do different things I have more of a broad perspective.

Laurie's favourite and longest term social worker (six years) helped her in many concrete ways by introducing her to programs, opportunities, money saving ideas, educational or skills experiences, for example, getting into an Independent Living program.

Marilyn helped me get into that program. It was a good situation. It was nice there and the girls really cared about me.

PARC

Among the study participants who were referred by PARC, its importance has been enormous in their exposure to new experiences and opportunities, late in their in-care careers. It is interesting to note how many different aspects of instrumental and emotional support are mentioned in the accounts. Opportunities for friendship, learning employment skills on the job, getting work, learning how to do one's taxes, OSAP form, resumes, and other necessary forms and papers, housing information, educational information, and many other categories of instrumental help leading to experience and opportunity are found in a setting like this one.

They were a one stop place where I could just pick up all the tools that they had available and start working with myself and getting feedback from social workers, and being able to make relationships with some social workers that I felt comfortable with.

I got the job from there (PARC)..Irwin talked to Lisa and then there was the nursery school job and I went and talked to the supervisor and she said 'yeah, okay, sure, come over.' This year again I went back... like I mean it's so hard to find a job now so it seemed like a good idea to do that again.

I was eighteen and I'd never had a job and then one of the workers sent me to PARC and said 'they have a job program you just go there and they'll set you up with a job'. And that's how I met Irwin. And then sort of Irwin helped me do my income tax, my OSAP form and resumés and you know it's been gradual and

I've known him for a few years now. I haven't been directly involved with PARC ...the kids who go there, some of them are a bit outspoken.... But now that I wanted to move into PARC [geared to income] housing, they said 'well, the best way you can do that is to be involved with one of the programs' so I sort of got myself involved with the network group... and so it's been continuing.

I think PARC helped me. That's probably helped me the most still cause I met a lot of people there... I thought I was the only one that went into a foster home or I was the only one who ever got abused or whatever. I found out otherwise that I wasn't the only one in that situation. That made me feel better.

I didn't really know how to fill out the OSAP form especially for foster children. I think one of the social workers, Cathy X, said 'get in touch with Irwin He's at PARC, and he'll help you with your OSAP form,' and we went down there, my mother and my father and I, and he helped me with the form, got that filled out and so, while I was there I just had an idea what was going on and I really liked him, Irwin is a very nice man, he's very caring. He takes time out to help, he's a very good person. ...This year, for some reason, I just made this decision that I should probably get involved and do something y'know to help people. And do some volunteer work... And I've just sort of gone down there and been part of the network group. Some of them [the youths involved] are independent, or it's just they're trying to cope with what is happening to them in terms of their housing and their education. And it's sort of like with the network group, they're sharing their experiences and they're also going over different things like camping trips and other stuff like that which gets them all together. And all the people who work at PARC also help to provide a support system for these kids, especially when they are trying to cope with all the new responsibilities which are being put on them like trying to find a home, trying to provide for themselves and I think it's really important that those people are there and that they're helping..

That's what PARC's done. They've taught me how to be independent and how to be myself. Well, I already know how to do that, but be more assertive and a little bit more confident.

At PARC, Irwin was very helpful and supportive... I like to call him my father. Like we joke about things like that. But he took

me underneath his wings in many ways and I guess he always helped me to see that there was a potential in me, that I had what to give. He helped me find jobs.

These accounts of opportunities offered and of supports available, instrumental and social, are impressive coming from young adults, more than a few of whom date their burgeoning self-awareness and self-esteem to their association with one specific program [PARC]. Of course, not every young person referred to this kind of program is able or willing to take advantage of what is offered. It should be noted that the openness and affability I found in almost all the study participants would have led those quoted above to step into a program like PARC and sample, perhaps, the wide variety of opportunities and experiences available.

E PROTECTIVE THINKING

Some large portion of the interview data involved the way participants thought about their experiences, their relationships and their selves. Some of these habits of thought, or ways of viewing the self and the world, seem to have a protective quality, that is, they seem to contribute to the strength and well-being of the young adults for whom the thought pattern has become habit. The most frequently noted patterns of thought, which are here called "protective" are exemplified in the following excerpts.

(i) Self-Reliance

Almost every participant in the study said something about the value of having been self-reliant, even as small children. Some said it in passing, others gave the concept a great deal of weight. And for some, the strength of self-reliance is paired with the problem of not being able to get close to others. As Grace puts it when asked how she sees herself:

Very independent, almost a loner sometimes. Even though I've lived with a foster family for six years and I mean I trust them and I like them and what not, I mean it's as my foster mother said, like I really probably could... this is not necessarily a good thing, I really probably could when I go to university, go off and have very little contact with them and it wouldn't bother me that much. Partly because ...it's my emotional deficiencies when

it comes to relationships... But also because I know I could count on myself first. It's hard for me to depend on people and to trust them too much because well, because I've been let down in the past and I know that if I want something done, really the one I can always count on doing it is myself.

Craig essentially concurs, remembering that from a very early age he felt alienated from those around him, including his family and his neighbours in the Ontario Housing development where they lived, as well as from the children his age who have always rejected him.

Right at a very early age I've been able to say 'I don't give a fuck'. But I don't mean I don't give a fuck about myself, right. I don't give a fuck about what people think about me, right and how people respond to me. I've learned from an early age that if people don't like me then they don't like me. Nothing I could change about that. And I started looking at myself as an individual very young, right. I started forming my own ideas and started being my own person. ...It's like my family wasn't my family. My family was just an empty thing, right. The characters are there but they just don't play. So I learned to depend on myself quite a bit, right. What sets me apart from most people who can't sit here? Well, what does set me apart is when push comes to shove, or whenever it comes down to the bottom line, I know that if I have to I can depend on myself. I can do it. I personally can do it.

It is interesting to observe that whereas Craig sees self-reliance in a totally positive and strengthening sense, Grace notes the "deficiencies" attached to being self-reliant, that is, the distance from others and the inability to trust easily. One wonders how much of this difference is individual to Craig and Grace, and how much can be attributed to the difference in the socialization of boys and girls in that we expect boys and men to stand alone, eschewing needs for others, while girls and women are expected to relate to others easily and find comfort in standing with others and depending on them.

These remarks, each from a separate participant, suggest the depth and scope of the concept of self-reliance as it is experienced by this group of young adults:

I think to this day I'm alone, by myself. I think ever since the age of six I've supported myself emotionally. Maybe not financially but emotionally.

I do everything with myself. I could take advice from people but most of it is done by me. I come to decisions by myself. I do everything for myself. I've learned everything on my own. I've always been doing that.

I left the foster parents when I was 18 years old. I was still going to school cause they still supported me and I said 'I'm my own person now, I don't give a shit about any social worker, I don't give a shit about no brother and sister, I don't give a shit about nobody, no social worker. This is my life, I'm taking control...' That's when it began. I said 'I'm living my life for Promilla, not the world, not for anybody. I have nobody. I have no family, I'm living it for me.

I don't know, just being in foster care and she was nice and everything but you know basically when I was in it I thought I brought myself up even though I had a foster mother. She wasn't really my mother so I felt like I was in charge of myself...so I mean she was there, but she told me what to do but still I don't know how to explain. I was like my own person.

'If I had a crisis I never went to a lot of people, I'd fix it, I'd do it myself. I didn't go to other people when I was hurting either, I'd cry. I'd pray a lot. I would cry to God when things really hurt. So, that was how I took care of things, so I didn't really trust people or depend on them a whole lot.

I think sometimes when you struggle so much you have to, you realize you're alone in this world and there's only you that's going to do the things for yourself. No one else is going to do it for you. When you come to realize that, that's when the things start happening. It's when you think 'there's only me. I have me to take care of so therefore I have to do a good job of it cause if I don't I'm going to break down just like a car will break down.'

First you have to learn to depend on yourself. Because if you're not self-dependent you won't have room to depend on anyone else, or you lose a part of yourself constantly dependent on someone. Because there's always a part of you that you have to be able to do that if something happens. You can have a perfect marriage and someone dies and if you're not able to come back

from that you're gonna be left stranded. So always be self-dependent.

And one young woman, when asked what has been the single most important factor in making her who she is today, said:

Oh gosh, the most important would probably be me. I guess my goals, my determination to reach them. It's just, it's always been an internal thing, what I always wanted to do and I guess my drive to do what I want, to get what I want done, and if people could help me that was great but I don't know if I could've done it without anybody, but I could do it without a lot, without too much.

(ii) Keeping it all on the Back Burner

Consciously not thinking about unhappy experiences, aiming towards 'normalcy', not talking about the past or focusing on it, have all been incorporated into the lives of several participants, and have been named by them as an adaptation to their troubled past which has worked. In out-of-home care, foster parents have supported this adaptation in some cases, by not allowing discussion of the past and making it impossible to ask questions about the parents, the family circumstances and the reasons for coming into care.

We never talked about it because like we were never allowed to talk about our mother or anything. You could never, we were never allowed to discuss the Children's Aid, our own family, anything. I don't know if that was to protect us? To try and make us forget? Because we were young? But I think that did more harm.

Kim, who is quoted above, stated that it would have helped her a great deal to be able to concentrate on the past, to have questions answered, to get information about her mother, etc. However, when asked to what she attributed the strengths which helped her become a successful wife, mother and career woman, she replied, "Just my ability to block it all out, I think," revealing the ambivalence around this adaptation. That is, nobody was completely happy about having buried all the bad experiences of childhood,

although some respondents felt they achieved some success because they didn't concentrate on those experiences.

(iii) Proving Others Wrong

A great deal of satisfaction seems to be experienced by some number of respondents as they consider how wrong others, usually adults in authority, were in their unfavourable estimation of the young person's talents, character or future. Perhaps proving others wrong, like revenge, is not a strong enough motivator to account for the success of these respondents, but it can be identified as an aid to individuals' self-esteem and self-satisfaction, both of which contribute to a state of well-being. Examples of this ideation follow:

Because I was always told, 'you're not going to be much, you're not going to amount to much. You'll probably be out of school before you're 16.' I just always made sure and said 'I'm going to graduate', and I did.

...it [other peoples' perceptions of what it means to be in Children's Aid care] affects what you see as well because if everyone tells you that Children's Aid [is bad, or means you're less worthy] ...you can almost agree with them because ...I guess dropping down to their level you have to look at it from their point of view. And then I can see why they were thinking, you have to sort of prove to them you're not like them.

But my foster mom and my social worker said 'you'd better apply to college' [as opposed to university] and I said 'What? I can't believe you think I won't be able to get in. I really worked hard.

It's weird because I look back and the person who Mr. X [foster father, conflict with whom caused respondent to leave the long-term foster home] would say would never amount to anything with any responsibility, no initiative, no get up and go, like I found the place [apartment in which he lives with others], I do the bills.

I want to prove to all those people that I can get a degree, a boat cruise, travel, and accomplish anything I think ...I don't want to go and show Children's Aid 'look I got a degree', but just for my

benefit to know that I got a degree and no one could tell me that I can't do anything when I know I can.

(iv) Assertiveness, Expressions of the Real Self and Feminism

Concepts which have important meaning for some participants are assertiveness, self-expression and feminism.. For some, finding a voice has been linked with the ability to work towards goals, gather achievements and break out of a world of negative self-evaluation. Although they may have achieved a great deal and feel satisfied in some areas, more than a few of these young adults are aware of a lack of assertiveness within themselves, it's an area they identify as coming from the circumstances surrounding, and subsequent experiences in, out-of-home care. Perhaps not having one's own family 'like everybody else' is linked to a feeling of powerlessness, and from powerlessness comes lack of assertiveness. Also, the obverse of the old adage, "Home is where, when you go there, they have to take you in", obtains in the histories of all these young people. More explicitly, they have had to behave in certain ways and meet many expectations from others in order to have a home. This need to conform and be acceptable leads, in some, to a life-long pattern of being afraid to express the authentic self. For these young people, becoming able to take the risk inherent in authentic self-expression has been difficult indeed.

For some of the women, there's a clear connection between exposure to feminist ideas, espousal of these ideas, and growing assertiveness, expression of the authentic self, and positive self-esteem and self-confidence. Those who had suffered from sexual and physical abuse as children seemed to gain a great deal of strength from their assimilation of an ideology which empowers women.

The following statements contain allusions to self-assertion, expression of the authentic self, and espousal of Feminist ideology. Some of the statements contain several; a few contain all three. The concepts are related for some respondents, and they are gathered together here because it is difficult to draw a line, from the statements, between the end of one concept and the beginning of another.

When you were told to do something I would never question my foster parents... and that was hard and now saying 'no' is a problem for me still. So I'm starting to say 'no' slowly but you know I think it's coming without offending someone, you know. And there's times when people take things for granted, if you always do what they want you to do and you don't want to do it, it's not really right, I think. ...You gotta be yourself.

Stuff's out there, you just have to go and start yelling at them 'excuse me, can I have that' or else they just ask you once and it's passed over... In a way Children's Aid, they're on a budget as well so, how can I say it ...it's sort of like the family who's trying to save and if you don't ask for it you're not going to get it. So I think it's difficult if you don't start asking or if you don't ask or stuff like that....[Kids in care] have to be more assertive.

But I think in a way too that I'm too soft, you know. Even now as an adult, people do things I don't have a say. You know, I'd be thinking something, I don't say anything or I don't act on it. I couldn't express my feelings. I couldn't talk about my feelings or anything. I always had to keep them inside. Like I wasn't allowed to be a person. I couldn't let myself out. I mean I cried but what could I do, nothing. I was powerless. I still feel that way now. Yeah that's right, I do. I feel powerless even now.

Well, at least I was able to give some type of direction. I was able to push back if somebody pushed me, right? If I didn't like something I was able to say, you know, I don't like that, right?

With some groups I started experiencing some being able to speak out, being able to give people shit about things I didn't like, right? Being able to express myself you know, to develop some type of philosophy about where I've been and where I'm going. Being able to bounce ideas off people and getting some type of play with it, you know. That process of self empowerment.

And it's like this one Black woman in the class and the lecture hall was like four hundred and fifty people. Sometimes it feels very lonely. But I've always been the type of person ...I'm really mouthy!

I was the coward. I hid, but my sister would fight, and she would get a lot of abuse... We stayed at our aunt's and they tried to

reunite us with our mother but we were adamant we weren't going back. ...[Religion] grounds me in some ways. I find that I have the courage and the strength to do different things.

But you should not grow up with 'I'm growing up and I'm gonna find some man to take care of me for the rest of my life.' That's not what my mom wanted for us. She had four girls and one boy and she always told us that we should always try to be the best that we can be and not to let anyone tell you you can't do anything because it doesn't matter that you're a girl, don't let anyone say 'you're a girl, you can't accomplish this' cause you can always do anything you put your mind to it.

In Grade 10 I realized 'Hey, this is it!. I don't have to be a sitting duck any more, I can do something'...and I think that really made a difference in my life.

I wouldn't call myself a radical feminist but I'm more of a feminist than some people, like some people just believe in equality but I believe in more than that. I would bring up my children to be non-sexist. My husband better not be sexist or else I will probably change that very quickly. I believe in my independence.

I've always [sought] male attention and never really cared about having female companionship but now I like it. I think it's great. And they're always there for you like they're not going to like be your friend and just dump you, right? They're not going to do that. So my female relationships are increasing. I'm meeting more females and find more like me and we get along and get together and have a great time.

Before then [an experience in which she gained a feeling of power] I was passive, very passive. I wanted to do good in school, but I think it also gave me a wider sense of not only are you just a girl, not only are you just a Black girl, but you are a person and you have feelings and needs and wants and all those are important. It also gave me a sense that in order to achieve your goals you have to do something yourself. You have to put input into it ...instead of just being passive, you've got to be somewhat aggressive as well.

(v) Epiphanies

Participants were asked whether they could name an event or an experience which caused them to change their thinking or their direction in life. Many could and did name such an experience, some of which are included here.

Connie, the only Black girl in her entire rural community and the recipient of racist treatment in school and in the community, told this story:

I remember one time where I actually, it was quite an experience because I think it made me realize that I wasn't supposed to be a victim of racism and that I could fight it. I just had to put my mind to it because I remember, as a child, I was very passive and y'know when someone would throw a racial slur at me I would just sort of shrink back and sort of go somewhere else or something and I would try to avoid them as much as possible. But at times you just can't do it and so one time in high school this one guy was saying something to me and at that moment I realized that I wasn't gonna take it anymore and all the years... this is in Grade 10 actually all the years of frustration and anger filled up in me and so I just turned around and started yelling at him. I said 'What's your name?' really loud, right, and he was with his friends and then his friends went away immediately because they were wondering, 'Oh my God, what's wrong with this person, what is she doing?' and so I just kept yelling at him that... and ...it was really interesting 'cause his face went all white and course he was scared and didn't know what the heck had happened to him and why, why I was retaliating, it wasn't supposed to work with his plans and he thought 'Well, y'know this is a girl, she's just a minority, she won't do anything' and yet I was yelling at him and screaming at him and then, finally, I realized at that moment that I wasn't a victim and that I could do something to fight this. But before then I didn't really know ...I didn't really have a tactic in order to fight this off ...not only did it give me a sense of power but it also gave me a sense that if I put my mind to something, and I want it to be done, then I can do it.

Craig recounts his epiphany, which was a realization he had when caring for his child:

Rude rude awakening, when I had my daughter... She [the mother] didn't want to raise this kid alone and then she says no, she doesn't want to get together. Thought she wanted to give it

up for adoption, right, and I had three months... this is three months before the kid is born. And so she said, 'let's put the baby up for adoption' right, and I chose to do it [raise the child] and I'm still doing it, right. [The child] is two and a half now and I had to get things in order, right, and I guess when I had her that was when I finally realized that I had this kid at my side and... [this led to his] success so far in the last two or three years. I know that there's more options available than my mother experienced. One of which was Ontario Housing bullshit, right, and I said 'well, I'm not taking any more chances... When my daughter was old enough to go to the day care I could get down to business. And I put my daughter in day centre when she was nine months old... went back to school and I haven't stopped since. You know, I don't even skip anymore. ...When she [his child] came it was like all of a sudden, I guess, I was faced, like I had to stay home for like months man, all day long, man. We'd get up every four hours to feed this fucking little monster who's going alien in my arms, there, right, like this is crazy, right. Cause all of a sudden I didn't have the choice of leaving... I had to. I was forced to, right I had to go home, had to stay home, right. I had to do something else that I didn't like doing, right. But I had to do it, right. So I just did what I had to do until I could finish doing it... real mystery, right? ...So the next pleasant surprise was that even though it's been a struggle, it's been getting more pleasant as I go along, right.

For Steve it was a suicide attempt, following a long stretch of life on the streets, which helped focus him on a new road.

Then I realized there's got to be another way. It took me like, it went down to the point where I was trying to take my life. I guess you could call it hit bottom. Yeah, so I hit bottom myself. 'Geez, I don't want to stay in this hole, I dug myself in so gotta get out of it.' It started when I was nineteen, I was in the hospital for a suicide attempt. My mother saw that there was no hope, eh. ...I was just sick in my brain and my mom saw that these doctors weren't getting to me, like they weren't getting through my walls... so basically what she did was, she brought in an elder...

Similarly, Claire attempted suicide while living with her father and step-mother and feeling hopeless about her future. She identifies this episode as a turning point in her thinking about her life.

There's a time that I thought death couldn't be any worse than this. I tried to kill myself by overdosing on aspirins. When I took them and I realized this is kind of stupid, what's my mom... like what's going to happen to my mom when someone tells her I'm dead? Is it worth it? What's after life? I thought to myself 'Hmmm, I heard that people who kill themselves end up in hell. Uh uh, this can't be any worse than hell.' So I think that was something I had to go through, cause in a way it made me even stronger and I thought to myself if I did this, this is going to say to my step mother 'You're right y'know, I'm not a very strong person, I'm not a very worthy person, so...you're right.'

And Mai-Lin is certain her mother's decision to send her to Canada from Vietnam not only changed her life, it also changed her relationships with other people, making it almost impossible for others to get close to her for fear of being betrayed or suffering loss. In answer to my question about any experience that changed the direction of her life she spoke first about leaving her family and homeland, and then about the steps she is taking to reverse her lack of trust in others, a characteristic she believes will be detrimental to her future if she can't work through it in some way. The following are excerpts taken from her account of these events and changes:

I think the hardest thing is to open up. I resented my mom for sending me away cause I didn't understand it. I didn't know I was going away and my mom said 'oh, pack your bag, you'll be going away on a trip with your brother,' and for a while I resented them. Subconsciously I'm thinking 'How can you do this? What makes you the expert on deciding what to do with me?' Cause I think right now if I had a chance to go back and do it again I wouldn't leave Vietnam. Even though I know I'm going to have a future and all that in Canada but who wants to leave their family and start somewhere you know, in a new country. I just decided to change with a lot of help from my foster parents, my brothers, and friends telling me 'your mom did the best, at the time she thought it was the best thing she could do for me.' Send me away. I should just stop resenting her and now I'm beginning to be able to establish a relationship with people... So that changed my life... The five years I lived with my foster parents I would get along with them really nice for like a week or two weeks and the next week I would be such a grumpy little girl because I'm like don't get too close. You're getting too close to my face and you know I have a wall around me and I did that

for so long they were confused and that's why the psychologist really helped. Breaking up with people like because 'I know you, you would screw me up if I didn't screw you up first.' Just protecting myself. I'm working on it.

(vi) Dreams, Fantasy and Unexplained Behaviours

It is difficult to know what importance one should attach to the many dreams, fantasies, and inexplicable behaviours young people talked about with respect to their earlier years, their futures and the circumstances that would surround them in times to come. Fantasies often came into play when respondents were younger children, and imagined an absent parent or a lost family life. Some of the fantasy material is included here to demonstrate the richness of it, but also to show how, in some instances, fantasizing was related to an outcome in real life, and might be explored as a step towards the realization of an outcome in real life.

Aside from the third, fourth and fifth quotes, all of which came from Laurie, each additional one is attributable to a separate participant.

She [much beloved grandmother] said, 'Never give up', whatever I want to do, just go for it and you know eventually everything will work out. I don't know, maybe she had a purpose for telling me that. Maybe she probably saw that something bad was going to happen later on in life when she wasn't around so maybe that was her way of telling me.

I pictured myself married. Being married and I think when I was younger I wanted to be a teacher.

And when we came, meeting my mom, she was a stranger and I sort of had very high hopes, very god-mother sort of... So I put her; I made her what I wanted her to be and then she didn't turn out to be that way so that was very painful.

...there wasn't no closeness there like I always fantasized about. I always fantasized about her embracing me and just holding me and you know 'oh I loved you so much, I missed you all these years, you're my daughter' you know. It didn't happen that way so it was a big disappointment for me. It wasn't realistic maybe thinking that but that's just the way I felt when I was a kid.

I had all these fantasies. I thought my mother would be really beautiful.

As soon as I graduated from school I got married, I had my first daughter, and we moved and it just happened that way, I saw, one day I was walking by a bank, I saw a Help Wanted sign and I just went in and I got it. I've been there ever since. Not the same location but within the bank. I always, when I was sixteen, seventeen, I always said 'I want to work in a bank'. I always said that and it was like a dream come true, but now you look back and sometimes say 'Why would I ever do that?'

I always wish or want to like have a great big office. I want to be an important person that everybody knows. Like have my name on the door... I try to think like maybe God or whoever's you know, created us maybe they have something in store for me. The reason why they didn't allow me to have a kid. I don't know..... Our religion is that the spirit's around all the time, you know. And for a long time after my boyfriend died it was like I felt like there was somebody always there and you know it was feeling that he was there watching over me, making sure I'm okay... I was walking up this road and my friends went ahead of me for some reason, and I was just going through this dark road and I stood there and saw somebody like standing there near this tree and standing there looking and I thought 'Who's there? He's dead' and this thing it was just standing there and in the shape of a person and it was all black and just wouldn't move or anything. I believe that it was my boyfriend following me and watching me, taking care of me.

I've always been interested in science. For as long as I can remember I've been wanting to be a doctor. But what really made me want to go into medicine is the fact that my cousin, I have a cousin who has the same birthday as I do and he was born when I was about ten years old and he was born with diabetes which made him blind, he was born blind from the diabetes. And that's when I wanted to become... go in to find out and try and cure whatever it was that made him blind.

When I was a little girl I always dreamed of going to Ryerson... When I first heard about Ryerson... it was sort of a spark... like I don't know, it was different.

When I was younger I didn't have friends so what I did is I had imaginary friends and I never names the imaginary friends... I don't know if it was a boy or girl but it was a friend, right. And I would talk to him or her and I guess about the age of ten or twelve or something like that, I decided to say good-bye to my imaginary friend.

I think from what I could understand from the day I was born I was alone. I was alone because my mother had a Cesarean so she was probably sleeping and my father was sleeping, he told me that, and so I think from the time of my birth I was alone. The day I was born nobody held me. You know, I just thought of that now. It never really dawned on me 'til now. 'Til this very second, that I was by myself from the day I was born.

Cause things can happen... I mean, if you asked me when I was twenty years old if I were to get married, I would say 'Are you crazy, are you ridiculous? Get married? There's no such thing, you know. Have a baby? Are you mad? Are you ridiculous? No way.' But things happen for a purpose and a reason in your life.

I would like to do something...that would make my parents proud. My father's dying and they're both illiterate. ...because we paid a big price to get to Canada and I think this would make my parents proud. It's hard to explain. I don't think it's money... it's more a position in life. Respected, just somebody who is looked up to.

F CONCLUSIONS

This study of "successfully launched" young adult graduates of the Child Welfare system asked participants to discuss the experiences, relationships and philosophies which served to strengthen their resilience. Interview data was gathered from a small sample of "successfully launched" young adults who were substantially raised, for an average of nine years, in out-of-home-care.

The findings with respect to the personal characteristics exhibited by these "successfully launched" young adults, are that **study participants are socially responsive individuals** who are able to interact with a stranger from another generation in a self-disclosing, trusting, and generous way, thereby making the interaction with them rewarding and exciting. This

social responsiveness, it is imagined, probably engages adults in the child care system, as well as the educational system and the community, thereby multiplying the interest, caring and energy expended on young people like these.

With respect to characteristics of the child welfare system, the pattern of referral arising from this study indicates that the interest in or ability to respond to a call for referrals of "successfully launched" graduates is centered in one program which works towards the emancipation of young people in care. Although small pockets of social workers, foster parents, and child care workers in other areas of the agencies did make referrals, the **overwhelmingly largest ability to identify or think about "successful graduates" came from the one preparation for independence and post-discharge program** jointly supported by the two agencies, suggesting that there may not be a sufficiently long view taken with respect to young people in care by those who work with youngsters early on, during latency and early adolescence. Of course there are more than a few alternative hypotheses surrounding this referral pattern, but if concentrating agency efforts on the long term effects of service for the consumer can be emphasized, there are many benefits to be garnered for each boy and girl who is exposed to out-of-home-care.

Although some study participants reported some positive, nurturing and self-esteem raising relationships and experiences before entering out-of-home-care, and others spoke of protective relationships and experiences which transcended the movement into out-of-home-care, others reported neither. Some strengthening relationships were extensive and continuous throughout the period of out-of-home-care while others did not take place until after emancipation and may have been of short duration. This finding suggests that **intervention may be useful at any age or stage** in the young person's life and that there are many opportunities to make a difference in the life of a child or youth.

Almost all the **participants in this study reported feeling devalued, or stigmatized by their status as foster children**, emphasizing the differences they have detected in how the world and relevant others evaluate and regard "foster" children versus "normal" children, those who are raised in their own families. One adaptation to this stigmatization, that of refusing to accept the negative definition of the role,

has made a great deal of difference for a number of participants. These young people have gained self-confidence and strength through and joining with others to advocate for foster children and youth, promote self-interest, advise the child welfare establishment and interpret the role of "foster child" to the community. Other adaptations to the status of foster child, or foster care graduate, for example hiding one's shameful status, might be predicted to detract from one's store of self-esteem.

Five categories of "value adders", or phenomena which added perceived and acknowledged value to most of the young people interviewed, emerged from the analysis of the data. Exposure to and use of **role-models and path-finders** helped all the young people interviewed, and in such number and with such variety as to make a strong statement with respect to the importance of this category, perhaps especially for young people without positive role models in their biological families.

The successfully launched graduates joined, found, searched for and developed **communities** for themselves. These communities included groups and programs provided by the child welfare agencies responsible for the youths' care, religious communities, ethnic groups, athletic teams, foster families and their extended families, biological families with whom the youngster had lost contact, school groups and associations and the families of spouses as well as families constructed with the young adult in the parental role. These community affiliations produced feelings of belonging and allowed the young person to identify with the values and status of a group larger than themselves.

Self-esteem building and maintaining relationships and experiences were remembered and noted by many participants, with special emphasis on the teachers, volunteers, social workers, foster parents and grandparents in their lives who recognized and encouraged the youngsters' special qualities or talents, or treated the youngster with respect. It was remarkable, with respect to this category, to hear how very tiny snippets of recognition and encouragement, received so long ago, made an enormous difference in the memory and present day functioning of some participants, by their own accounts.

Opportunities to learn, experience and try paths previously obscured, when offered to young people able and ready to accept the challenge, or desperate to make a change, have modified or completely

transformed the trajectory of lives. Other opportunities have altered the timing of events, put off a settling in until a future date at which a young person might settle in a way that better suits. Still others have been exposed to a person, a course, a trip, a conference, a job, even a book, play or concert, the experiencing of which moves her or him, almost imperceptively, to a different perspective from which returning to the old perspective is an impossibility.

And finally, there is the group of resilience building thoughts and attitudes here called **protective thinking**, which seem to help respondents cope with their histories, act in the present and look confidently toward the future. Self-reliance, refusal to dwell on the past, self assertiveness, expressions of the authentic self, adherence to Feminist thought and proving others wrong all appear in the data, and each constellation of thought and behavioural habits seems to have protected study participants from some of the negative outcomes we have come to associate with the high risk adversities in their lives.

This final category contributory to resilience in young people, “protective thinking”, is particularly compelling because, like the social responsiveness identified early on as being present with all the study participants, it relates to cognitive habits , behaviours, and ideological grounding which can be taught and learned. There is a suggestion in this data that social education and positive cognitive habits might be useful additions to the other therapeutic intervention which is already established with children and youth in out-of-home-care.

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DISCUSSION

I INTRODUCTION

Each young adult discussed here has been hurt and has suffered from the adversities in family life, through separation from it, and from some aspects of life in out-of-home-care as well. The youngsters introduced in this study are not invulnerable people who, despite having experienced many hard knocks, have not felt or been hurt by them. In each respondent's story, however, the young adult has incorporated experiences, relationships or knowledge which have added to her or his store of resilience. At specific times in their lives when they either were most able to incorporate change, or when they most needed to incorporate change, the young people have moved closer to becoming self-actualizing young adults.

The findings in this study call for further research and exploration. The many factors involved in the eventual successful launching of young adults from out-of-home-care create as many different scenarios and paths as there are young people. What is clear, however, is that young people need the supports and strengths we have come to expect from family life, in order to successfully cope with the challenges of adult life. What the young people in this study show, however, is that it is possible to find these supports and strengths in places other than one's biological family, and those involved in providing for youngsters growing outside of their birth families can increasingly provide the experiences and relationships which strengthen. Changing policies, economic conditions, educational opportunities and the social, psychological, economic and interpersonal specifics involved in each young person's distinctive characteristics, together with each biological and foster family's circumstances all vitiate against coming up with one pattern of practice which will ensure successful outcomes in all cases. Certainly

...it would be satisfying to discover simple guidelines that would enable practitioners to apply specific interventions to achieve successful outcomes of permanency, adequate functioning, and coping after emancipation. Like the search for such guidelines in clinical services, there are no easy answers (Fein & Maluccio, 1991, p.76).

And yet, the findings in this study are suggestive of support to on-going practice, additions to on-going service and modifications of practice which may improve the chances, in some situations, of young people approaching emancipation with resilience. Additionally, the data point to some changes in policy which would increase confidence in the child welfare system's ability to launch coping young adults.

This discussion will concentrate on four topics: 1) a summary of the research findings and exploration of how they relate to conceptualizations on the subjects of resilience, stigmatization, and practice with children and young adults, 2) the implications of selected findings for practice, 3) the implications of selected findings for policy in the child welfare field, and 4) the implications of these findings for further research in the areas of resilience and child welfare practice.

II SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND WHERE THEY FIT

a) **The successful young adult grads participating in this study were socially responsive, sociable, affable, friendly, open, somewhat trusting, helpful, and willing to talk and listen, even to a stranger of another generation.**

The source of this social responsiveness is unclear. Participants have experienced such a wide variety of childhood experiences, both before and during their years in out-of-home-care, that it would be impossible to form a generalization with respect to the role of experiences in the formation of this characteristic. Perhaps social responsiveness is one of the characteristics of temperament which is a dispositional or constitutional characteristic of the children who are known as "resilient" or "invulnerable"(Garmezy, 1971; Rutter, 1983; Murphy and Moriarity, 1976). It is also possible that social responsiveness is a learned set of behaviours which evoke positive responses from the adults in the child's environment and a coping style acquired by these young people who have felt the need to adopt patterns that secured their relationships with adults.

In short, these are young people who gravitate towards experiences which give them occasion to reflect, to relate to others and to help. Whether participants always had these characteristics is unclear. What is clear is that people who have these characteristics of sociability, affability and

cooperativeness are rewarding to parent and to relate to in both a friendly and a professional capacity.

Researchers who have studied youngsters at risk for emotional pathology because of their exposure to catastrophic or chronic adversity, have noted that some exhibit great strength and resourcefulness, and the absence of pathology, almost as if they were protected from the effects of adversity. These youngsters have been called resilient, and invulnerable by those who try to understand what strengthens them.

The notions of invulnerability and resiliency in children have been approached from a variety of directions. In his analysis of what is known about these children, Garmezy (1983) examined the research undertaken on this topic and stated that the work is broadly categorized into five approaches: longitudinal studies, war-time studies, research on competent inner-city children, epidemiological studies of mental illness, and examination of ego resilience.

The material analyzed by Garmezy yielded three broad categories of what he called protective factors which "provide resistance to risk and foster outcomes marked by patterns of adaptation and competence" (Garmezy, 1983 p.73). These three categories of protective factors were present in all the studies analyzed.

First, the resilient children exhibit **positive personality dispositions**. This category includes affability, social responsiveness, autonomy, flexibility of response, positive mood, cooperativeness, participation, reflectiveness, impulse control, an internal locus of control, and the ability to accept comforting.

Second, there is a **supportive family milieu**. The evidence suggests that there is a family milieu, perhaps only one parent or other relation, providing warmth, support and protection.

And third, there is an **external societal agency that functions as a support system for strengthening and reinforcing a child's coping efforts**. There are support people in the environment, in the schools and community who can serve as identification models for the child (Garmezy, 1983 pp.73-75).

The participants in this research study, by virtue of their social responsiveness, very definitely exhibit the personality dispositions suggested by an analysis of the literature related to resilience in children

and the protective factors noted in the literature. Also, although not all of them found, in out of home care, the supportive family milieu referred to by Garmezy's analysis, they have all found, in communities or relationships of their own choosing, some of the supports generally expected from a positive family or community system. These developmental supports or sustainers are named by each participant, although there apparently does not need to be a natural parent or relation, or even a "substitute" parent or relation who provides the support, as long as some person or group of persons provide the warmth, support and protection, or some part of it.

b) All these successfully launched young adults participating in the study have links to others who provide the kinds of support traditionally contributed by family. Those who are affiliated with PARC, for example, report a wide variety of supportive interventions, both instrumental and emotional, which are available to them as independent young adults. The occasional or a weekly dinner may be consumed, one can do laundry in the center's laundry facilities, a group meeting buoys one person's self-esteem and may help another fight depression. Young people who cannot afford housing in Toronto are able to manage because of geared-to-income housing provided by PARC.

Among many of the respondents not associated with PARC, ex-foster parents, including the group home parents who seem especially gifted in their relationships with older, and some very troubled, adolescents, continue to play an important role. Holiday dinners and visits form part of this picture, as do regular phone calls, talks with advice and consultation involved, as well as occasional emergency funds or food. Some youngsters have been offered a home with foster parents, paying room and board, at the end of foster care, and years later. For some, clearly, foster parents have undertaken a parental role although formally, they no longer have a contract with the agency through whom they entered into parenting the youngster, and there is no reimbursement for whatever expenses they might incur.

Three participants have constructed their own family systems by being parents to their own children, and, in two instances, by marrying into existing families which exhibit a good deal of affiliative and supportive behaviour. Several others have serious relationships with young people who live in strong, traditional and involved families. For one young woman, the

church and the church community play a supportive role in her daily life. Three respondents have older siblings in the Toronto area, with whom they visit, spend holidays, and whom they consider to be their family in Canada. One Native-Canadian respondent is in daily contact with an addiction treatment center where he is now employed. The Native-Canadian members of the staff are familial in their relationships with one another, and the young adult who is involved here is additionally learning about the history and culture of his people, which is, in a significant way, putting him in touch with a notional extended family in addition to the actual familial relationships he is establishing with those around him.

For a significant number of study participants there is family elsewhere in the world, which actively plays an instrumentally or emotionally supportive role with respect to the young adult, through the mail, by phone and with occasional visits.

It seems clear from the data that all of this support, formal and informal, institutional and familial, maintained through the years before and after the official launching of youngsters into what we call independence, is an important component of the young person's ability to continue growing and mastering the environment in young adulthood. In other words, these successfully launched young people are involved in relationships, both institutional and non-institutional, which support them in these years and through their young adulthood. These relationships, formal and informal, institutional and non-institutional, perform the functions we have come to expect from family life in aiding the development and socialization of children and youth. And finally, for some of the participants, these supportive relationships did not become evident or, indeed, possible until the period of time directly before or after graduation from care, at which time a great change seems to have entered the trajectory of the young person's life course.

c) A great deal of the focus on the person approaching graduation, whether one conceptualizes that young adult as the finished product, the consumer of services, the goal of the child welfare enterprise, or the successfully launched young adult, takes place in one center within the local metropolitan child welfare system. The referral pattern animated by the request for cooperation on this research project suggests that interest in

"successful launching" of young adults, and perhaps interest in "outcomes" from long-term care, is strongest in the PARC program, which was erected to better prepare youngsters for independence.

Of course, the referral pattern for this study does not lead only to the conclusion suggested above. Factors other than interest and focus of activity may be at work here. PARC personnel might, for example, be more interested in research than those in other areas of the system. Also, some might suggest PARC personnel have more time to involve themselves in research questions and projects, since contributions to research is part of their well-defined mandate.

Social workers and child care workers placed elsewhere in these agencies are inundated with many other competing concerns which, in the short term, seem unrelated to the prospect of "successful launching" of youth in care. These concerns include but do not stop with the protection of children, using the judicial system to insure children's rights and safety, negotiating with others in the community around the welfare and treatment of children, finding appropriate out-of-home-placements for youngsters, supporting and resourcing these placements, and continuing to monitor the well-being of children in out-of-home-care, through the structured every day activities as well as the crises.

Other hypotheses relating to personnel's investment in the concept of successful launching *vis a vis* their job descriptions and the focus of their positions could be examined. It does seem possible, however, that for whatever reason a large amount of the institutions' focus on these young adults resides in the PARC program. And this may have implications for the degree to which all the other personnel involved in providing out-of-home-care are focused on outcomes or planning for graduation.

In fact, the young people who seem to use PARC and its pre and post graduation facilities may be those who are not strongly attached to a foster home and care providing parents or natural family, in a supportive and abiding way, so those who use the program are those who, by default, really need it. This sample group of young people seems to reflect that dichotomy. That is, eight out of nine of those youngsters referred by PARC, and to whom this program has meant a great deal with respect to their development and security, are young people who tend not to have other strong and abiding familial or familial -substitute ties. On the other hand,

only four of the ten Branch referrals not associated with PARC are without significant familial or familial -substituting ties.

The question remains whether a program like PARC, which must provide the "independence" services for two large agencies, is able to reach as many youngsters as need to have access to it. Those youths who are without significant familial or familial substituting ties as they go through middle adolescence, it would seem, would be the primary candidates for these transition services. Do all the youngsters in care who need the service and support of a branch of service such as PARC have good access to it?

The other question which readily comes to mind is whether concentrating the people, resources and evaluative instruments focused on launching of youths into independence in one place in the system tends to detract from this focus elsewhere in the system, or conversely, whether this concentration of resources and focus will eventually lead to wide -spread dissemination of the expertise, and employment of the strategies, which are helpful to youth in care and graduates throughout the system.

d) Most participants experienced the devaluation, or stigma, of not being raised in a "normal" family. The term "stigma" refers to "an attribute that is deeply discrediting" The perceived stigma may be less severe where, as with unaccompanied refugee or immigrant children, a functioning family exists somewhere for the child. These youngsters also report being different because of their language, differing customs and culture and not being able to understand idiomatic language or, for that matter, jokes shared by others.

The stigma also seems less severe for Native Canadian and Afro-Caribbean youth. Of course, for parents from both these cultures, the mandatory giving up of parental rights to the authorities from a governmental agency, and under the mantle of protective custody, diminishes parental self-esteem and causes great and long lasting trauma. Nonetheless, both the Native Canadian and Afro-Caribbean cultures have the traditions for it to feel comfortable, under the best consensual conditions, for parenting to be undertaken out-of home (Johnston, 1983; Assembly of First Nations, 1989; Nobles, 1978).

Stigma is ruined identity. The concept of "identity" itself is complex in its definition. Unlike the more easily encapsulated "self-esteem", it does not just deal with how highly one regards one's self, but it does include that. Unlike "locus of control", it does not just relate to how much of one's life one feels in charge of, although it can include that too. And unlike the interpretation of life events, it does not deal only with one's habitual ways of thinking about the world, although it can include that as well.

From the psychoanalytic perspective, identity formation begins in infancy, where the separation and individuation of infant from mother begins and is perceived by the child. (Mahler, 1967) Heinz Kohut and other object relations theorists emphasized the role of "relevant others" in the child's formation of self-image and self-esteem. Where empathy and appropriate, supportive responses are not available to the growing infant and child, they argue, self image and self-esteem cannot be healthy (Baker & Baker, 1987).

We believe today that a healthy sense of self, of worth, of power and of likeability come from a childhood in which relationships with significant others offered support, empathy, caring and positive feed-back related to worthiness. This premise emerges directly from the psychoanalytic and object relations schools which emphasized the necessity for solid parent-child relationships in the building of a child's identity. Conversely, it is suggested, unhealthy parent-child relationships due to severe difficulty or pathology in the child-parent bond should result in identity formation problems which may be detected in childhood or early adulthood. Significant research has been undertaken with bonds in which these problems might be expected, such as those where small children are raised by seriously depressed mothers (Radke-Yarrow, Belmont, Nottelmann & Bottomly, 1990). The adaptations and coping mechanisms discovered in following youngsters through identity formation should yield knowledge which will be useful.

In addition to these ideas, the concept of attachment, popularized through the work of Bowlby (1969) posits the development of identity through the quality of constancy and the management of separations within the most significant bonding relationships between infant or child and the relevant adult. The emerging self or identity, it is suggested, feels worthy and estimable to the extent that these primary bonds have reflected,

through their warmth and constancy, that the child can and should count on an accepting and welcoming world.

The massive changes Erikson referred to as the stage of "identity vs. role diffusion" also known as adolescence, were expected to continue to around the age of twenty-five (Erikson, 1950). Erikson noted that the physiological changes of puberty caused youths to question how they were viewed by others, *ie*, how they now appeared from the outside. Many formerly established certainties about self or identity, he argued, became questionable during adolescence first, because of these changes and second, because of the young adult's need to match his or her self-esteem with acceptable social roles (*ie*. occupations, styles and social types) available in the culture. Although Erikson's division of the life cycle into specific age-related stages of development has come into question for its claim to the universality of the timing and sequencing of the stages, his connection of identity building with the biological and social transitions traversed in adolescence seems to be reflected in practice with young adults.

In Erving Goffman's work on the topic of stigmatization, three categories of the phenomenon known as ruined identity are discussed, those personal attributes associated with physical deformities; those associated with weakness of character arising from a record of mental disorder, imprisonment, addiction, *etc.*; and those associated with negative stereotypes attributed to one's race, ethnicity or religion, what Goffman calls the "tribal" stigma. The devaluation associated with out-of-home-care, as reported by respondents, seems to fall in the socially determined, second category of weaknesses of character arising from a record, that of being a "foster child". In Goffman's view, with all three categories of stigmatization,

...the same sociological features are found: an individual who might have been received easily in ordinary social intercourse possesses a trait that can obtrude itself upon attention and turn those of us whom he meets away from him, breaking the claim that his other attributes have on us. He possesses a stigma, an undesired differentness from what we had anticipated (Goffman, 1963, pp. 4-5).

Those who experience out-of-home-care as a stigma say they feel different from other young people, that they may be judged to be less than

others, and that they always wished they had been normal, by which they mean they would have liked to be more like other people, raised in their own homes, and by families they could call their own. And to some degree some youngsters have incorporated the devalued judgments they believe others make about them, into the judgments they make about others, and about themselves. As Goffman describes this series of cognitive maneuvers:

The stigmatized individual tends to hold the same beliefs about identity that we do; this is a pivotal fact. His deepest feelings about what he is may be his sense of being a 'normal person,' a human being like anyone else, a person, therefore, who deserves a fair chance and a fair break. ...Yet he may perceive, usually quite correctly, that whatever others profess, they do not really "accept" him and are not ready to make contact with him on 'equal grounds'. Further, the standards he has incorporated from the wider society equip him to be intimately alive to what others see as his failing, inevitably causing him, if only for moments, to agree that he does indeed fall short of what he really ought to be. Shame becomes a central possibility, arising from the individual's perceptions of one of his own attributes as being a defiling thing to possess, and one he can easily see himself as not possessing (Goffman, 1963, p.7).

Goffman lists three major adaptations to the stigmatized condition, all of which can be seen in the data. First, the stigmatized person may try to correct the identified condition, examples of which might be the stutterer undergoing speech therapy, or the illiterate person learning to read. Examples in our sample are difficult to name, since the fact of having been raised in foster care is incontrovertible. However, perhaps the young adults who are creating and parenting in secure families of their own may be seen to be correcting their situation, and similarly the people who become part of a boyfriend's or girlfriend's family may be attracted to the vision or the concept of having a legitimate place in a functioning and welcoming family unit.

Second, the stigmatized person may undertake to master an area of human behaviour or endeavor normally not feasible for a person in his or her category. Youngsters who have lost limbs and who subsequently learn to ski are in this category. In our sample, an example of unusual mastery might be the students engaged in university education. They are tackling

an area which is, mistakenly and unfortunately, not usually associated with youngsters in out-of-home-care.

Finally, the person with a shameful differentness can break with what is called reality, and obstinately attempt to employ an unconventional interpretation of the character of his social identity (Goffman, 1963, p. 9-10).

This **third** adaptation suggested by Goffman is seen in the data which pertains to the young adults who have, largely through the intervention of PARC (and nationally, the Children in Care Network, administered from Ottawa), moved their self-definition away from the stereotypical, unfortunate and devalued foster child and marched toward the new self-definition as experienced foster care consumers, advocates for children and youth in out-of-home-care, and advisors to the policy and program shapers in the child welfare establishment. In other words, they have been helped to reframe their identities as foster children.

These grads, for example Craig who has appeared in the various media to discuss and advocate for youth in care and has been a member of a committee to secure financial and community support for youth in care, Carly, whose story of the development of self-esteem and empowerment is welcomed and heard with interest in the media and at conferences on this topic, Steve, whose story is available and essential to policy makers in the area of Native Canadian child welfare, and Amy who sits on the Board of a Child Welfare agency as a representative of the interests of children who are in out-of-home-care, are refusing to accept any devalued role of foster child, with all they connect to that role. Instead, they assert an unconventional identity involving expertise, wisdom, and the ability to advise and, they hope, to change the system and the education of the citizenry with respect to out-of-home-care. Others, most notably those gathered together and stimulated to do so by the socialization available at PARC, have also gained strength from believing they have something important to contribute by virtue of having had the experience of out-of-home care.

We could say these young people have been heard and understood, by being a part of a group made up of others with similar experiences. They have also been strengthened by learning they have a role to play in advising

the professionals and the policy makers with respect to the needs of youngsters in care. They have been empowered in so far as each one of them has been granted a position of respect and responsibility . They have been politicized when they have discovered the power inherent in the association of people with like interests, standing together for what they need and deserve.

It is not possible to leave the topic of stigmatization, which seems to be central to the experience of the study's participants, without a cursory consideration of the concept of stigmatization, its source and its functions. In one examination of stigma approached from a multidisciplinary point of view, three aspects of the phenomenon are highlighted. First, there is fear, second is stereotyping, and third is social control (Ainlay, Becker & Coleman, 1986). In this exploration of stigma, the multiple contributors make the point that stigma is not an attribute of the individual, but instead it is a perception constructed by people, it changes over time, and it serves the function of legitimizing others' negative responses to human differences (Ainlay & Crosby, 1986). Isolating people who are different and making them feel responsible for their own stigma allows the rest of us to feel less guilty about perpetuating the conditions which create the conditions associated with the stigma (Barbarin, 1986). Sociologists have asserted that stigmatization is a form of social control exerted against those who violate norms, while others seem to be stigmatized because they are of little social or economic value (Stafford & Scott, 1986).

We should admit that stigma persists as a social problem because it continues to have some of its original social utility as a means of controlling certain segments of the population and ensuring that power is not easily exchanged. Stigma helps to maintain the existing social hierarchy (Coleman, 1986, p.228).

That many of the young people in this study have experienced the stigmatization attached to living in conditions other than their biological family is, I believe, very clear from the data. The question remains as to why their social category is feared, stereotyped and controlled by the rest of us who do not share this role. Is the fact that children do not have to be raised in the traditional, normative, family structure in order to emerge as

competent and self-actualized human beings a threat to our entrenched family ethic?

The "normal" family is a concept that most Marxists, feminists and historical sociologists would view as conservative and oppressive toward women and minorities. Critiques from these quarters would argue that all efforts to place family life within strict confines with respect to what is legitimate, acceptable and positively regarded have come from the class interests of the powerful and have oppressively affected the less powerful, and often stigmatized minorities. What Mimi Abramovitz (1988) calls the "family ethic" is a set of ideas about acceptable family life and behaviour which has served, partly through its incorporation into social welfare legislation and policy, to control women's lives. Abramovitz makes the point that the sense of "naturalness" inherent in the family ethic, like the naturalness implicit in our ideas about family normality, reinforce gender-specific role performances and make it difficult for women to question what seem to be the characteristics inherent in human nature.

The concept of biology as destiny keeps us from examining the inequality of opportunities and radically different kinds of socialization experienced by the individual according to sex, race and age. The central theme of the family ethic, that women's place is in the home, has existed, according to Abramovitz, since Colonial America where women's economic productivity was limited to the physical boundaries of the home. The concept of biology as destiny also holds up biological ties, no matter what their quality, as the standard against which other family forms are seen as inferior. The stigmatization of children raised in out-of-home-care may be a function of our desire, as a society, to maintain the hierarchy of status and power within the family structure as it is presently entrenched.

This concept of the stigmatized condition of children raised outside of blood family bonds is particularly interesting because it is almost never mentioned in the literature, although most professionals working in the child welfare field and many people who have lived in out-of-home-care as children are aware of the phenomenon. Perhaps the topic is not made explicit precisely because it is an understanding we all share, both consumers and professionals working with the children, at a level of acceptance which usually defies exploration and examination.

e) Role models, path-finders and negative role models are very important influences in the direction these participants have taken.

The negative role model seems to be most significant in those lives where parents and other biological family members are seen to be dysfunctional, rather than just absent, as in the case of immigrant or refugee youngsters. Garmezy's analysis of the literature on resilience contains a reference to "role models" in the community, on whom young people and children can rely as they move towards the goals they have chosen, and those who write about adolescents underline the centrality of the use of role models by youth in general, as they fashion an identity and move towards goals (e.g. Coleman & Hendry, 1990; Conger & Peterson, 1984).

f) The four protective processes or mechanisms suggested by Rutter (1987) are represented in these findings.

The young adults discussed in this research can be said to exhibit resilient tendencies because they are all approaching adulthood with good coping skills and readiness despite childhood experiences which have been identified as among the major vulnerability factors associated with serious emotional dysfunction in children. When Michael Rutter and his associates studied the six family variables previously thought to be associated with emotional dysfunction in children, they were able to show that the variables were, in fact, positively correlated with children's risk for psychiatric disorder (Rutter, 1975; 1975a). The factors included marital discord in the child's family, low socio-economic status, large family size with overcrowding, paternal criminality, maternal psychiatric disorder, and admission of the child into the care of the child welfare authorities.

While engaged in doing this research in London and on the Isle of Wight, however, Rutter and his associates were impressed with the appearance of positive factors, elements which seemed to influence more favourable outcomes for children. It seemed that factors, categorizable as inherent in the youngster, supportive in his/her family and sustaining in the community, kept some youngsters from psychiatric disorder despite the presence of several or more of the vulnerability risk factors mentioned above.

There is great appeal and promise in the concept that youngsters who have experienced a number of risk factors, increasing their chances of suffering from emotional disturbance, may evade the morbid outcome if they are subsequently exposed to protective factors which will act as a kind of after the fact inoculation. Certainly, for the children who require out-of-home-care, were the concept of ameliorating the effects of adversity and trauma on children not in existence, those involved in the provision of out-of-home-care would need to invent one. That is to say, it is a belief central to the provision of child welfare services that there is a combination of support and healing inherent in the care, whether temporary or long-term, youngsters receive from the system.

In his later work, Rutter (1987) would ask whether it was sufficient to name these protective factors which actually are the opposites of the vulnerability factors. For example, if one pinpoints marital discord as a vulnerability factor, what understandings do we increase by noting that a harmonious family life protects youngsters from psychiatric disorder? Instead, he postulated, perhaps there are processes or mechanisms which, working in a catalytic fashion, change the element of risk inherent in adverse conditions. He suggested that :

The focus of attention should be on protective *processes* or mechanisms, rather than on variables. These processes, by definition, involve interactions of one sort or another. In particular, focus is needed on the mechanisms involved in changes in life trajectory. The limited evidence available so far suggests that protective processes include those that **reduce the risk impact** by virtue of effects on the riskiness itself or through alteration of exposure to or involvement in the risk, those that **reduce the likelihood of negative chain reactions** stemming from the risk encounter, those that **promote self-esteem and self-efficacy** through the availability of secure and supportive personal relationships or successful task accomplishment, and those that **open up opportunities**. Protection does not reside in the psychological chemistry of the moment in the ways in which people deal with life changes and in what they do about their stressful or disadvantageous circumstances. Particular attention needs to be paid to the mechanisms operating at **key turning points** in people's lives when a risk trajectory may be redirected onto a more adaptive path (Rutter, 1987, pp. 328-329).

Let's examine several of the stories supplied by our successful graduates to explore the presence, the absence, and the form taken by the protective processes suggested by Rutter as well as other value-added categories suggested by the data.

Grace came into out-of-home-care, one gathers from her story, because the child welfare social worker feared for her physical and emotional health. The mentally disturbed and angry mother with whom this child lived, in some isolation from family members whom she had alienated, was presumably unwilling or unable to make changes in her customary ways of relating to this child, who remembers today her own unwillingness, as a younger child, to return to an unchanged mother following a short term placement. In fact, Grace recalls that it was her own decision to remain in care, a decision she made based on her certainty that her mother was unwilling to cooperate or change what seemed to be a rigid and punitive atmosphere at home.

Grace's admission to out-of-home-care **shortened the term of her exposure to the risk** inherent in her own mother's mental illness. However, admission to out-of-home-care carried its own accompanying and formidable risks, including the pain and difficulties associated with the separation (Grace's mother changed her address and phone number and literally disappeared after a few years), the identity impairment and stigmatization associated with the role of foster child (about which this youngster reports a continuing feeling of shame), and the insecurity and discontinuities often inherent in foster home placements and necessary replacements.

At the point of entry into the foster care system, two important factors were at work which would minimize Grace's exposure to the risk inherent in the foster care system, while also **stopping the negative chain reaction** often present when children are admitted to care. First, the child's mother had recognized her strong learning ability, and had, prior to Grace's admission to care, had her tested for, and placed in , the gifted stream in public school. This school placement turned out to be a sheltering, supportive, secure and esteem-building part of the child's life which additionally, because of the special attention and interest shown towards

children in the superior range of functioning, included the foster parents in a closely knit and regularly communicating triad of support for the child.

Also, Grace had only one placement in the out-of-home-care system, and that placement provided a nurturing and consistent family life for this youngster, while evidently furnishing on-going gratification for the foster parents, who have expressed an interest in having the child continue to live with them during her university years.

Her self-esteem continuing to be buoyed by the accepting and respectful atmosphere in school and at home, Grace was exposed to sports and became active in the athletic council at school as well as in girls' basketball. She studied violin for five years and still enjoys playing, although she does not, for the moment, have time in her schedule to continue studying. **Exposure to these opportunities for growth and mastery,** however, have accompanied her in her placement and at school.

Examining Grace's story we see a probable key turning point where she first entered care and possibly would have, without the continuity of educational placement and support, and the benign and consistent care provided in her foster home, been subjected to the negative chain reaction which often accompanies the child who finds her or his self in foster care following either chronically poor conditions or crises necessitating care.

The other two categories of findings not specifically mentioned by Rutter, but seen in large number in the value adding data, are those of **role modeling** and affiliation with a **community**. In this instance, the life story seems to incorporate both phenomena. With respect to role models, Grace has used the teachers in her life to formulate her plan for the future. She wishes to be a teacher in part, because:

For the teaching thing, I think my teachers had a lot to do with it cause of their affect on me. They're an influence on my life and I realize that it'd be really great to have that kind of effect, that kind of influence on other kids.

And related to finding a community, it seems clear that for Grace, school has been an experience where she has found her place, her voice, and the feeling of belonging similar to Amy's feelings about her church, Patrina's expressions of comfort with being affiliated with PARC, with Steve's assessment of his inclusion and acceptance in the Native-Canadian

substance abuse treatment program where he is now employed, and with Connie's description of her foster family as a haven where she is loved and supported.

1) Examining reduction of the risk impact:

That some of these successful youngsters have been protected from the risk factors in their biological families and neighbourhood environments is clear to them, from their accounts. Craig's increasing delinquency and feelings of isolation, Mai's recollection that she was raising herself at nine years old, and spending more and more time seeking comfort on the city streets, and Claire's growing despondency and eventual suicide attempt are examples of youngsters for whom exposure to risk factors was leading to serious emotional disturbance. With these three and many of the others, the risk inherent in the family or community was clear, and coming into out-of-home-care "reduced the risk impact by virtue of effects on the riskiness itself or through alteration of exposure to or involvement in the risk" (Rutter, 1987, p.329).

We can examine protection from risk factors from at least the two angles suggested by Rutter's work. **First, the risk itself can be altered by changing the way it is perceived, and when it is experienced by the child.** For example, by the time Grace came into care, after living with a mentally ill and increasingly angry and brittle mother, she was able to see that her mother was severely limited, to feel that she was in some control over the circumstances under which she was placed in out-of-home-care, and to understand that her mother had given her some important elements (e.g. having her evaluated for the school gifted program), although mother was an impossible person with whom to live. We may theorize that if Grace had not had a period of time to work out these relational understandings and to prepare her perceptions before coming into out-of-home-care, living with and leaving a mentally ill single parent might have yielded less successful results.

Alteration of the risk itself and how it was and is perceived can also be seen in many of the other life stories related in the study. Perhaps one of the most interesting is Brad's. In his interview data, Brad shows how important it is to his view of himself that his natural father was a loving man, a giving man and a man who was respected in the community.

Having been unable to care for his child in infancy and through the early years in care, Brad's father did, however, make an appearance in Brad's life at around the boy's eleventh year, and he maintained that contact until his death, when Brad was thirteen. In those two years of contact, years after the early years of mental illness and chaos of home, and following the first four years of foster care, separated from everything known, Brad's father was able to alter the effects of these risk factors on his boy with a relationship that showed the child, first, that he was loved, second, that his father was a person of substance, and that, third, his father thought well of him, recognized him and respected him. Here, the perception of the risk factor has been altered years after some of the exposure to risk actually took place.

And in discussion with Brad, it becomes clear that his perception of the risk encountered in his early days was altered, along with the effects on his self-esteem, by his father's intervention in later years.

The exposure to the risk factor(s) may be altered. Craig, Paul, John, Patrina and Promilla all spoke of their early efforts to avoid the risks of living with mentally ill or abusive parents, simply by leaving home during many of the daylight hours and finding friendship or escape elsewhere. Craig spent many long hours of escape in the video arcades of Yonge Street in Toronto. Paul and his little friends were lost in fantasy and adventure in the streets of the west side. Patrina tells about how she escaped to the warmth and acceptance of her grandmother's house when her own mother became too angry or abusive back home in Jamaica. And Promilla described her home away from home in school, where she was allowed to be, and where she found acceptance quite different from the abuse she suffered in her father's home. These are all examples of youngsters themselves avoiding exposure to risk factors, and thereby protecting themselves from the negative effects of those risks.

Exposure to risk is also affected by the child's own personality, malleability, and temperament. That is to say, some youngsters are sufficiently flexible to adapt to risk exposure without breaking. Some receive fewer harsh blows because they don't fight, they don't react aggressively, they don't challenge and they attempt to be peace-makers above all else. An excellent example of this last adaptation to risk is found in Amy's story.

Living with an abusive mother and two siblings, Amy realized early on that while she was afraid of the anger and abuse, her sister always stepped into the fray, battling to protect the other two and challenging their mother.

Like she'd go up against the dragon, y'know, and she didn't have David's sling but she would stand up even if she wasn't protected.

Amy, on the other hand, was always the peace keeper; the mediator. Today she is a graduate student in social work, reporting satisfaction with her work and relationships, while her sister continues to have severe and sad difficulties in her daily life.

I struggle with finding ways of taking care of her now, for all the care-taking she did for me. I worry about her because she's still so angry. She hasn't rested. She hasn't settled. She's always fighting.

The two sisters are good examples of differing modes of exposure to risk factors based on the children's individual personality characteristics, malleability and self-protectiveness.

We have come to realize and acknowledge through the years that when we admit youngsters to out-of-home-care, we expose them to new risks at the same time we are protecting them and removing them from the serious risks inherent in the family and community. Indeed, there is such recognition of the risks inherent in separation from biological family and known environment, that the law requires that child welfare workers and their agencies always "...recognize that the least restrictive or disruptive course of action that is available and is appropriate in a particular case to help child or family should be followed", and to recognize that children's services should be provided in a manner that "...respects children's needs for continuity of care and for stable family relationships" (Bill 77, p.4.).

Some of the risks inherent in placement in out-of-home-care include emotional damage from separation from known and loved others, lack of knowledge about self and roots, identity damage because of this separation and isolation from known family background, and these are just some of the separation and identity issues. Next, there are the risks inherent in poor foster or group home placements, that is, placements that are either

inappropriate for the particular child or untenable for any child because of foster parents' insufficiencies or problems. Also, some placements are poor because of their mix of other children and damaging relationships inherent in the foster-natural or foster-foster, or foster-adoptive sibling conflicts. And then there are the risks created by discontinuity in education, friendships, neighbourhood connections, sports interests and opportunities. Finally, there is a major risk inherent in the stigmatization of being a "foster child", that is, not living with one's own family. And that stigmatization, as we have noted, presents a risk of its own.

Therefore, if youngsters are going to be placed at further risk as a result of moving into out-of-home-care, the field needs to continue to develop ways to minimize the risks to which children will be exposed, or at least analysts should be increasingly able to identify and assess those new risks and consider the ways to control their effects.

2) Reduction of negative chain reactions:

In Rutter's work, he discusses "negative chain reactions", by which he means the kind of process which takes hold and may drag a youngster down as a natural and seemingly inevitable consequence of, for example, coming into out-of-home-care. Another good example of the negative chain reaction concept is discussed in recent work about children and divorce (e.g. Hetherington, 1989) where the event of parental separation tends to bring with it reduced interaction with at least one parent, reduced contact with the custodial parent due to her or his increased requirement to be in the outside world earning a living, reduction in family visits with at least one side of the family, changing friendships and discontinuities in education and extra-curricular activities especially if a move in households results, lower standard of living due to reliance on one (and usually the lower, female custodial) parental income, and the lower energy and self-esteem which often accompany family breakdown. In divorce, children are said to emerge from the experience on a stronger footing when interventions are aimed at short circuiting or avoiding the negative chain reaction described above. For one very simple example, when both parents remain very much involved, both emotionally and bodily, in the daily life of the child, depression and loss need not be so strongly associated with marital separation in the child's experience of it. When grandparents can

be involved in relating more often and concentratedly with the child, and when parents can agree to keep the child in the family home, neighbourhood and school district for as long as possible, the deficits usually associated with losing relationships and traumatic changes can be kept at a minimum, thereby increasing the child's chance at well-being.

We have looked into the lives of children requiring out-of-home-care and we know something about the negative chain reactions which ordinarily accompany this kind of life-wrenching experience for children. Some of the young adults interviewed talked about good examples of interventions which helped avoid the negative chain reaction which can be associated with out-of-home-care. One of those negative chains is that associated with impermanence, frequent changes and separations, and the eventual lessening of the ability to bond with or trust others (Steinhauer, 1980). In Connie's situation, which is much like an adoption, as with Mai-Lin, Grace, Claire, Patrina, and Amy, all of whom only identify one significant placement in their life stories, the negative chain of events related to impermanence is averted, and all these young women have identified the woman and family with whom they lived during these years in a positive and permanent way which transcends their movement into independent status. For Carly, Laurie, Julie, Promilla and Kim, whose moves were more frequent and sometimes caused by mistreatment in the foster home or situations interpreted by the girls (now women) as rejections of themselves, the transition to independence and feeling of support from the community is a more difficult conceptualization.

3) Establishment and maintenance of self-esteem and the provision of opportunities:

The availability of supportive adults, especially role models with whom the young people have identified through the years, in the community (*ie.* outside the home and within the child's life) abound in these accounts. For some of the PARC referrals, and Carly is a good example, social support and people with whom to identify were observable, possibly for the very first time. Carly's story is a very good example of the importance of establishing self-esteem, provision of opportunities, and the centrality, in both these endeavors, of role models and path finders.

When she arrived at PARC, Carly was recognized as a person with some potential, and for the first time she considered that she might amount to something. It started with her answering phones, being taught how by a friendly and welcoming woman who was the receptionist. When she convinced herself that she could do this job, as a relief receptionist, other clerical and secretarial duties came her way. From there, and following the advice and modeling of other young women on the staff and those her age, Carly embarked on more job training and several jobs at which she did well. Community college courses followed within a short time, partially encouraged by the fact that the young women working in PARC's office were always signing up for courses, and now Carly is working towards a degree that will prepare her for work with children and youth who need help.

This transformation, which took place over a year and a half after graduation from foster care, from the very vulnerable, sexually victimized, lonesome, self-doubting girl who was considered to be of limited intelligence in school, to a fun-loving, active, verbal young woman who identifies herself as a strong feminist and has big and ambitious plans for the future, took place, by Carly's account, because of the role models she met and identified at the PARC program. Staff members gave her the chance to try doing new things, which she found she could do, and her perception that these estimable and admirable adults with whom she had established friendly relationships knew her and thought she was worthy and capable, was sufficiently powerful to transform Carly's self image.

Craig joined a senior post-graduate group at PARC and learned he was a good teacher, speaker, and advocate, ideas about himself that were not conscious before this interaction, but which are at the basis for his University studies and plans for the future today. Patrina discovered she had power to get people together and to get projects accomplished. She had a strong and powerful presence, and was able to provide leadership in group situations. This realization, coupled with her understanding that many young people have lived in foster homes, and that she wasn't the only one with this history, helped her identify as the powerful young woman she is today. These and other respondents were afforded opportunities unlike any they'd had before, and in many cases these opportunities made a significant difference in the road taken, as they see it.

Role models of many ages and with respect to character, mastery, vocation, education, style, and other aspects of life have been found in the data, and in every participant's life, role models abound. The importance of this category of help in participants' lives seems to be central. Once the estimable person is identified and is willing to relate to the younger or less experienced youth, and if that estimable person reflects confidence in the youth's potential and capabilities, this is an endorsement as good as gold. The linkage between the world admired and coveted and the person who's a part of that world can almost seem like a hand reaching out and pulling the young person to a new level of performance. This is, from the accounts, very powerful.

g) Participants see themselves as self-reliant and they try to be authentic and assertive. More than a few of them are feminists. These are ways of coding themselves and their experiences which I have called protective thinking.

The data reveal several characteristic habits of thought which seem to strengthen and add self-value to the respondents. The most commonly found way of thinking which is protective is the "self-reliant" attitude expressed by most. That is to say, more than a few of these participants report having known, when they were very young and later on, that they could depend only on themselves, but that they could depend on themselves. As one young person said it:

It's hard for me to depend on people and to trust them too much because I've been let down in the past and I know that if I want something done, really the one I can always count on doing it is myself.

The protective aspect of thinking of one's self as able to meet one's own needs and reach one's own goals no matter what others think or do, is a feeling of power, of high self-esteem and certainty is connected with being in charge of one's own destiny. The possible negative side of being self-reliant, however, is reported by the same person as follows:

.. as I said like it's my emotional deficiencies when it comes to relationships. Being self reliant and independent is, partly, the negative side of it is that you have a hard time getting close to people.

Other identified philosophies or habits of thought which were reported included "keeping it all on the back burner", proving others wrong, assertiveness, expressions of the authentic self, and adherence to feminist analysis.

Kim, the person who reported most unambiguously that paying no attention to the past and trying to forget about it (the strategy entitled, here, "keeping it all on the back burner") were the elements which helped her achieve what she has, also reports that it would have been very helpful to discuss her natural family and the events which brought her into out-of-home care as a child, but she was encouraged to keep quiet about her history, as she perceives it, by her social workers and by the foster parents who showed disapproval with her questions about her mother and siblings.

An open environment, where her suspicions about her background and her growing identity could have been explored, she now realizes could have been a help to her as a child. Today she wishes she had access to this missing part of her childhood, especially for the purpose of raising her own children without fear. Their questions pose a threat to her, partly because she doesn't know many of the answers, and partly because of the negative attitude and information she does retain about the children's grandmother and the many ways in which she fell short of social norms attached to mothering. Probably Kim's own tendency towards identification with this long absent mother and her employment of mother as a negative role model, have been central to the ways Kim has constructed her own adult life.

"Proving others wrong" was a theme which came up many times, not necessarily named as a motivating factor, but perhaps those who report it experience extreme satisfaction at the prospect of prevailing over some adult who mistreated or misjudged them years before. In several instances, for example the story of Carly, "proving others wrong" may indeed have been a motivating factor where the prospect of becoming much more than all the school personnel, who thought she was quite limited in her ability to

learn, predicted, may have acted as a challenge and a support to her continued work and achievement. These relevant others who are perceived by a child as having made negative judgments about them can be incorporated into the fantasy lives of youngsters who then employ the symbolic challenge to their own benefit and goal setting.

In a sense, using these negative adult figures as a spur to higher achievement can be seen as the reverse of the phenomenon, also reported in this data, where the child or youth employs an introjected positive self-assessment derived from separated or deceased elders who helped establish the child's self-esteem early on. In the same way that youngsters have been seen to employ others as both positive and negative role models for the purpose of mapping out a road to goals in life, these introjected negative and positive assessors of the child's ability have both been employed to the child's benefit.

Epiphanies were reported by a few, but not by a large number of respondents. For those who reported these experiences, however, they were seen as important, perhaps even crucial, turning points. Taking as examples Connie's conscious birth of self-assertion and empowerment on the playground, or both Steve and Claire's conscious decisions to survive after suicide attempts, these thoughts and determinations which occur at turning points in these young lives certainly resonate with the mechanisms Rutter suggested are at work at significant turning points in peoples' lives. What Rutter did not, however, suggest but the data does, is the element of thought process, or habit of cognition, which can be seen to be a protective mechanism.

Assertiveness, authenticity and feminist philosophy and politics were all seen, by some respondents, as making a tremendous difference, in a positive direction, in their lives. All three areas of self expression, while different in major regards, have something important in common. All three suggest that these young people are aware they have been thwarted, and learned to repress their true selves in order to get along and be accepted, perhaps even to be cared for, in their daily lives.

Both men and women report that they have grappled with becoming more assertive as they have gotten older, and have valued experiences which contribute to feelings of power and confidence in asserting their wills. Promilla and Craig, in particular, made mention of adapting in

school and in care by developing a false front, and both expressed relief that they have had experiences, in later adolescence, which encouraged them to expose their authentic selves, thereby taking risks for which they were rewarded.

Connie, Claire, Carly, Patrina, and Laurie all expressed distinctively feminist philosophy, the last three of them having been exposed to feminism in a self-support group at PARC. Coincidentally or not, these three also were victims of childhood sexual abuse. Carly made the connection between her growing self-confidence, the change in trajectory of her life from unhappy, unfulfilled and ill-fated to self-actualized and goal oriented, and her having become a Feminist all within the same period of time. For the three who have been victimized sexually, exposure to Feminist ideology seemingly has increased their awareness of girls' and women's rights, as well as their power *vis a vis* boys and men.

The **dreams, fantasies and unexplained behaviours** reported by many respondents all had the quality of expressing, in a masked or hidden way, needs or longings that may not be consciously considered or understood. One excellent example of this phenomenon is seen in Kim's account of how she wound up working in the bank.

...as soon as I graduated from school I got married, I had my first daughter and we moved and it just happened that way I saw, one day I was walking by a bank. I saw a 'Help Wanted' sign and I just went in and I got it. I've been there ever since. ...I always, when I was sixteen, seventeen, I always said 'I want to work in a bank'. I always said that, and it was like a dream come true but now you look back and sometimes say "Why would I ever do that?"

This memory from a young woman whose biological family was so chaotic that she remains, today, unclear about what siblings of hers exist and who they might be. This chance happening occurred for a young woman whose earliest years were marked with chronic neglect and eventual abandonment, and whose out-of-care placements included one in which she was summarily forced out and replaced for reasons for which she, as a young child, felt partly responsible and partly confused. This career choice, made almost unconsciously and from a dream-like state,

seems to reflect a need for security and respectability which, for eight years now and projected into the future, seems to have been a good choice. It does seem possible, however, that some very important protective thinking and planning emerges from the unconscious or pre-conscious process in the form of dreams, fantasies and unexplained behaviours which, if examined in the light of what these coping young adults know about themselves and their needs, would bear a large quantity of logic.

It might be mentioned here that all the respondents, to some degree, had an ability to speak about their past, to try to make sense of it and to find patterns and logical explanations for the lives they've led. Some also attempted to see the meaning in their biological parents' difficulties, to understand these and to put angry or regretful thoughts and feelings to rest. This finding of the way these participants have attempted with some success to understand and be able to communicate their life stories, when asked about them, is congruent with the literature which suggests that in resilient children who have been maltreated as with adult incest survivors, what one makes of the adverse experiences and how one integrates the potentially damaging events into a world or life view may be an important element in the building of resilience. (Mrazek & Mrazek 1987; Silver, Boon & Stones 1983; Herrenkohl, Herrenkohl & Egolf, 1994; Beardslee, 1989).

h) Viewed in the context of pathways traversed from infancy to adulthood, the life span of each participant could be charted to examine the ways in which continuities and changes in the developmental picture were mediated by the factors suggested in the literature. The Rutters (Rutter, 1989; Rutter & Rutter, 1992) wrote about the pathways of development from childhood to adulthood and beyond, which Fanshel, Finch and Grundy (1990) called a "life-span perspective" in their retrospective study of over five hundred young people who had experienced out-of-home-care. The sample size employed in this study does not, of course, lead to generalizations with respect to the pathways traversed by all young people in out-of-home-care, but the data does suggest some directions for the construction of theory relevant for those who plan for children and those who help them grow. The difference, it seems to me, between the "protective processes and factors" and these "mediating processes or factors" is only a difference in perspective. Seen as a road from birth through death, one life

is quite different from another, even where some of the same adversities have been experienced. Most of all, our lives are made of patterns and linked experiences, which have a tendency to continue in the same trajectory in which they started, unless something brings about discontinuity in the pattern. The factors or processes which cause patterns to be entrenched, as well as the ones which cause discontinuity, are the mediating factors or processes, and those developmentalists who look at life as a continuous process of evolution with respect to the individual may examine mediating processes to try and understand stasis and change.

The role of **genetic and biological factors** in mediating continuity and change in this study's participants is difficult to establish, except inferentially, because the data which would support the examination of these areas was not gathered for this study. However, if we point to several of the highly intelligent study participants and examine the role of this genetically involved factor in mediating patterns of continuity and discontinuity in their lives, several interesting examples immediately emerge. Pointing to Grace's story, for example, we can see the child's ability to learn quickly and easily was identified by her biological mother and led to the child's placement in a special education (gifted) stream in school which served to support and protect the child throughout her growing up years.

High intelligence seems to have been a mediating factor with respect to both patterns of continuity and of discontinuities in Craig's life. Although Craig was intelligent in his early years, and was periodically recognized for his abilities by various teachers through elementary school, his was not a smooth path through the grades. His perhaps irritable temperament, anxieties and search for comfort on the streets away from his home and immediate neighbourhood brought him into conflict in school and, eventually, with the law. The delinquent activities led to Craig's introduction to an adult male, a volunteer probation worker who became his friend and role model up through the early adult years. It seems likely that Craig's high intelligence was one of the factors which may have helped this volunteer make a commitment of many years to a needy and troubled boy. When the volunteer gave Craig books and shared his love of reading and learning, the boy picked up on the suggestion and began to use books and learning to develop a place of comfort within a household and

neighborhood which were damaging and dangerous. The reading, in turn, helped more teachers to recognize Craig's potential in school. However, there was no pathway established, no continuous pattern of using that intelligence, being recognized and rewarded for gains made and trying to master more. It wasn't, in fact, until several other intervening experiences that Craig began to see himself as a person who would devote his talents to higher education and to teaching others. First, PARC supported Craig as a young man with a great deal of promise who was verbally adroit but educationally and emotionally still in the early stages of maturity. Giving him a chance to speak for himself first, and then for other young people in and graduated from out-of-home-care, the PARC personnel helped Craig find his leadership and communication capacities. He took on increasing amounts of responsibility in the program and seemingly grew uncomfortable with his old pattern of early exits, incompleting business and marginalized existence. Producing and, eventually, taking complete custody of his young child was the impetus for thinking about a future for his new family. It seemed important to Craig as a father that his future be filled with purpose and meaning. Gathering his considerable intellectual resources, he was able to complete his secondary school courses efficiently, to apply to universities and to begin a pathway which he envisions leading to a destination in curriculum development for Native Canadian children.

Kim's story exemplifies, for me, **the mediating influence of childhood experiences** in shaping the environment experienced in adult life. There are examples of this tendency to form the future through the steps we take in almost all the participants' stories, but these examples in Kim's story may be particularly interesting because they are seemingly unconscious choices made on the basis of what were, to her, unknown motivations, but which seem to come directly out of her early childhood experiences. That is, Kim was unable to understand or to say why she took the steps which will be recounted here, and in fact mentioned each of these steps with disclaimers such as "I don't know why I did that". Kim's early childhood was filled with adversity and insecurity. Her single mother gave birth to, but was unable to raise, at least two and perhaps three groups of children. After a series of abandonments and years of neglect, Kim and her immediate sibling group was taken into out-of-home-care. Kim doesn't

characterize her career in care. In fact, she was a strong proponent of the "keep it all on the back burner" philosophy and, until our meeting and interview, she had not considered looking into her past for answers she needed about her history, or seeking professional help for her feelings of , perhaps, being limited in some aspect of mothering her two young children. Subsequent to our interview experience, however, she reported feeling it was important to address some of the concerns arising from her troubled early years.

The care history Kim provides, however, seems to be a combination of protective and damaging elements. Her first foster home experience, the one where she received the longest period of parenting and security, also was permeated with unhelpful messages connecting her own future to her mother's abysmal (by her standards) life story. Kim was told not to talk about her biological mother and was separated from the siblings she knew. The termination of the placement, in which she felt cared for, took place for a combination of reasons Kim is not sure about today. First, she was impolite with a substitute foster mother during her foster mother's absence and second, her foster parents were getting to be too old or physically deteriorated to continue fostering. Neither of these propositions has borne much consideration through the years, and Kim maintains a friendly relationship with the foster mother she met when she was just five years old. Two less comfortable placements followed. At the age of sixteen, Kim informed her social worker she was going to be married and leaving out-of-home-care, a plan the worker did not support. Nevertheless this social worker, who is today a positive person and memory in Kim's life, was supportive of Kim in every way possible, treating her with a great deal of respect.

After her marriage to an older (early twenties) young man of a radically different ethnic background, Kim continued to attend secondary school in an area at great distance from where she lived. Graduation from 12th grade had always been her goal, and the marriage and travel were not sufficient impediments to her reaching this goal. After graduation, Kim had her first baby, and found her first job at a bank through seeing a "help wanted" sign while walking the baby in a stroller around her neighbourhood. Today, seven years later, Kim is still married to the same man and is the very concerned and involved mother of two young children. She has a large and closely knit family of in-laws, including a warm and

expressive mother-in-law, who are a regular part of the nuclear family's relationships and activities. At the bank, she has taken on progressively responsible positions to the point where she is management and considering some additional education to prepare herself for more senior management opportunities.

We may infer from this story that although Kim was not consciously aware of having addressed some of the unmet needs set up in her early years, she has actively made decisions and taken steps to address the deficits raised by her early childhood experiences. Her early marriage to an older, steadily employed fellow with a family as different from her biological family as night is different from day, her tenacity in striving for and achieving her secondary school diploma, giving birth to her children after being married for a while and in the bosom of a large and multiply connected family, and moving steadily upward in the bureaucracy of the bank are all decisions taken with masterful, albeit unexamined, planning. Each move, in addition, follows reasonably from the others, forming a series of secure structures in which Kim can continue to evolve.

The next mediating factor raised by Rutter relates to the **growth or loss of cognitive or social skills**. We've already discussed intelligence as (at least in part) a genetically derived mediating factor on patterns of continuity and discontinuity. Rutter has emphasized the protective potential of high intelligence, citing evidence that children like Grace and Craig, even when raised in high risk environments, are less likely than children of lower potential to develop psychiatric disturbances. However, social skills are asserted to be protective as well, leading to positive experiences and opportunities which might not have been available for the person less available, affiliative and rewarding in interaction. The relationship skills formed early on, however, are said to be shaping influences on relationships established later in life. Many of these participants suffered through very poor and damaging early relationships.

As noted above, I found these study participants to be socially responsive, sensitive to the needs of this researcher, and willing to share and cooperate. These social skills, possibly developed as a coping mechanism to deal with difficult adults and situations before and during the years of care and possibly partly due to inborn temperamental tendencies, undoubtedly helped these young people. It is easy to imagine

that foster parents, social workers, child care and youth workers, varieties of therapists, teachers and volunteers might find these young people rewarding and therefore want to interact with them on a continuing basis. Being assessed by the adults in their lives as rewarding, promising, sharing and gratifying youngsters might lead to more concentration of the limited resources available in child welfare practice, to opportunities of all kinds, to enriched programs and memberships in groups whose activities and mutually respectful interactions would raise the self-esteem of the young people so identified.

Rutter's suggestion that although we no longer believe in the immutable connection between earliest relationships and relationship forming and sustaining abilities throughout the life span (Rutter, 1989, Bowlby, 1951), the current literature seems to suggest a possible association between early institutionalization and the propensity towards developing relationships of less depth and selectivity later, in adolescence, seems to be borne out by this study's participants. The majority of respondents in this study offered the opinion that they have problems relating intimately with others, with several being somewhat despondent about the inability to form an intimate and abiding love relationship. Whether this self-assessment is also seen in most young adults with or without histories of troubled early childhood is not known. Perhaps, also, the self-reliance described by many of these young people, arising as it may from a difficulty trusting others to be there for them, also precludes an easy ability to form mutually trusting and intimate relationships. And finally, the stigmatized place in society experienced by so many of these young people, and accepted as a rightful judgment made about them and others like them, may make it difficult for these young people to be as open and disclosing about their life experiences and feelings as is required by an intimate relationship.

We have discussed the concept of self-esteem and self-efficacy as protective factors and interruptions in negative chain reactions arising from adversities. The role of **self-esteem and self-efficacy as mediating factors or processes** in the continuity or discontinuity of developmental patterns is observable in a great deal of this study's data. Carly's story is particularly instructive here. Having passed many of her twenty-four years in too many of out-of-home placements of dubious quality, Carly saw herself as severely damaged goods. Her abilities and intellectual

functioning were always assessed as poor, and throughout her early life she identified herself as a lonely, rejected and weak misfit. Exposure to a wide range of PARC programs came about after Carly was discharged from out-of-home-care. She became eligible for PARC's geared-to-income housing and through this she became involved in group activities on the site and just getting to know people around the program. Carly had fared very poorly in school and just barely had made it through secondary school at the basic level of studies. She thought herself able to do only the least skilled work.

Exposure to, and friendship with young women who did clerical and reception tasks in the PARC office led to Carly's to attempt these skills as a fill-in person. She learned quickly and it was clear that others enjoyed her company in the office setting and thought she was good at this kind of work. Carly sought and found an office telephone-reception job soon after this, which led to several more responsible positions at higher pay. By this time, Carly was beginning to feel pretty good about herself. She had learned new skills, made new friends, was known, liked and respected by a group of people, and she had begun to play a pivotal role in a feminist discussion group and in a group of out-of-home-care graduates who were beginning to advocate publicly for improved conditions and resources for youngsters raised in care. Her new friends included child care workers and social workers who thought Carly had the potential to do well as a child and youth worker. This respectful assessment of her potential buoyed her self-esteem sufficiently for her to experience success in several courses and, subsequently, to gain admission into a diploma community college program in child and youth care. It seems plausible, here, that the rise in Carly's self-esteem caused a discontinuity in her life-long pattern of low achievement and self doubt. The new efforts toward achievement in her life spawned greater efforts and a higher sense of self-esteem and realization of self-efficacy. In this way, a new pattern was established on the fuel of increased self-esteem.

The mediating power of established habits, cognitive sets and coping styles is suggested in this study's data, especially with respect to the patterns of thinking and behaviour I have called "protective", that is, those patterns to which study participants attributed some of their resilience. Self-reliance, self-assertiveness, and feminist thought have all been seen in

these participants and identified as habits and styles which have mediated against adverse conditions and experiences.

The general notion is that through repetition we develop habitual ways of behaving that become both self-reinforcing and reinforced by others. Moreover, these traits become internally organized through the development of cognitive sets about ourselves, our relationships and our environment...The notion that this is one way by which personality functions develop and become stabilized is plausible, but we lack knowledge on the processes involved. Research that focused on the associations between cognitions and manifest behaviour, and on the circumstances in which each altered in relation to circumstances would be helpful (Rutter, 1989, p.44).

Negative cognitive and behavioural sets and coping styles have been in evidence among the study's participants as well. Both June and Steve reported that they had habitually used alcohol and, for Steve, drugs as well, to deal with stress throughout adolescence. This pattern of behaviour, learned from family members in the past and accepted or supported by relevant others in the more recent context, became an independent problem area for Steve when he increased his alcohol and drug usage to meet the increasing stresses of his life on the streets, and also for June when her boyfriend died by suicide and the pain and guilt were unbearable. Both young adults have sought help to break these patterns, he through the healing of a Native drug and alcohol rehabilitation center, and she with a therapist, a job training program, membership on a baseball team and the support of her ex- group home parents and some older friends in the Native community of Toronto.

Laurie raised another good example of how coping and cognitive habits might become entrenched while being, at the same time, self-destructive. She expressed the intention, at the very end of our interview, to change her usual and historic relationship with men which had always been based on her self-evaluation as attractive but essentially of low value. In the past she has always been available to the men who have found her attractive, not because she expected anything from them in the way of love or caring, but because a few moments or hours of being sought after had become an emotional habit which was, in the final analysis, unsatisfying.

As Laurie has gained a stronger sense of self as a foster care graduate, an adoptee, a biological child and a woman, she has determined to change her habitual pattern of relating with the men who have, she's come to believe, been bad for her.

The link between experiences is a final mediating mechanism suggested by Rutter (1989), and this pattern is well established in the data in almost all these stories. Either starting early in their lives, when some spousal conflict or parenting incapacity led to neglect, abuse, abandonment or the planned choice to relinquish, or later in life when unaccompanied immigration or immigration with planning gone awry led to insufficiencies of support and care for the older child, parenting breakdown or separation led to institutional care. For some, linkages between a series of disadvantages led inexorably to continued disadvantages for a long period of time. Steve's biological family's disadvantage, addiction and hopelessness lead to his long life in out-of-home-care. A series of poor foster placements, each one's breakdown leading to a new emergency replacement, formed a chain link barrier against hope or change. When one foster mother made a connection with Steve and made him feel cared for, the boy began to attend school with a more positive attitude. His teachers started to recognize a potentially rewarding student, and to devote more attention and expertise to helping him develop. This schooling experience carried over into Steve's friendships and attitude about life, which began to show promise. The death of this much loved and longed for mother started a series of difficult and basically self-destructive relationships and experiences, with one poor school, foster home and friendship experience leading to another for many years in Steve's life.

Promilla described the linkage of experiences linked within the environment so well. When she was a small girl being raised by her hardworking and loving grandparents in the Caribbean, she remembers having beautiful things, being loved, pampered and sacrificed for, playing happily, having friendships and joyful school experiences. After several years of being in Canada with her biological father and his wife, the series of experiences beginning with feeling used as a baby-sitter for her step-siblings, being kept from school because of immigration status, suspicion and rejection from her step-mother and blaming followed by abuse from her father led to self characterization as a "bag lady". Ten years later, when

Promilla was interviewed for this study, a series of protective experiences in foster homes and in school, protective cognitive and social patterns employed in both places, and her association with people and experiences which raised her self-esteem in the PARC program had formed a chain of supportive and strengthening experiences which resulted in Promilla's self characterization as an assertive and caring young wife, mother and woman who is planning for an even more self actualized future.

From the stories in this study as well as the work of Rutter and Rutter (1992) and the edited collection of Robins and Rutter (1990) we have become interested in the specific transitions in the lives of these out-of-home-care graduates, and the earlier experiences which may have caused these young people to be vulnerable to change and perhaps growth at these times of transition. Although it is very difficult to glean, from this study's data which did not include an exhaustive account of each young person's life and early experiences, an identification of transitional times or experiences which could be said to be of importance to most or all of these participants, several themes of interest do emerge.

First, for many of these youngsters the period of time leading up to discharge from out-of-home-care and shortly thereafter seems to be, especially for those who will not be returning to families in the near future, a time of substantial possibility and both strengthening and change. The provision of opportunities, experiences which heighten self-esteem, sites in which social skills can be practiced and group interaction learned, and an education in the very important areas of community membership and affiliative behaviour all seem to be especially useful to young people in the transition to life after graduation from care. The potential to reframe the stigmatization associated with having lived in out-of-home-care seems also to reside, at least in part, in this transition point for a number of young adults. Therefore, both our research efforts and our resources would be well invested in this transition and in programs, like PARC, which have the potential to provide not only support but, potentially, turning-points for young people whose trajectory, at the point of transition, may be linked with on-going experiences of disadvantage.

Second, transitions have specific meanings for the people going through them. Rutter and Rutter (1992), for example, compare the long awaited and adequately pensioned retirement from a stressful and

unrewarding occupation with the mandatory cessation of duties with minimal pension from an interesting and challenging career to underline the potential for differences of perception regarding life transitions.

On the other hand, some patterns seem to emerge with respect to how people experience life transitions. For example, from the data in this study, it seems that for the young adults for whom there is an intact and caring family somewhere, even at a great distance, the transition of leaving care, like the one of coming into care, should call for the support of foster parents and professional staff to help the young person plan around meeting those goals for the future cherished by the young person and the biological family. While the same respectful inclusion of the young person needs to be involved in those transitions for young people without caring biological family members, there is the added emphasis on building relationships with foster family members and professional staff, relationships which may provide a healing experience and, in effect, take the place of family relationships which no longer exist.

The transition point at which graduation from out-of-home-care takes place seems to be an extremely important one, in addition, for addressing the question of the stigma associated with living in families or institutions which are not the usual ones. It seems that for whatever the reasons associated with the need for out-of-home-care, a period of reframing the experience and the identity associated with foster child status is very important for many young people, and there seems to be a potential for transformation in self-evaluation and understandings at the point at which young people move into the community.

Finally, it appears that transitional times which are meaningful in the life of each youngster in out-of-home-care should be addressed with all the sensitivity and resources at our disposal. When the transitional times are past, perhaps they should and could be discussed and examined with the child or young person in retrospective therapy because making sense of one's life, even the severe difficulties, seems to add to the resilience of young people. The obvious transitions of coming to a new country, coming into out-of-home-care, becoming permanently detached from one's biological family (through the legal process or through death), placements and replacements in care, new educational settings, and other major changes in a child or youth's life are times of stress and can also become, when the

intervention and the young person's readiness converge, turning points of enormous importance in the life path direction to be taken.

i) As a researcher, I was able to understand and appreciate these young people from a perspective which seems quite different from the one I brought to meeting with children and youth in care during the fourteen years I was a front-line worker and supervisor within a child welfare agency. This finding, which emerges from the interview process itself rather than from the transcribed interview data, was raised in this report in the section presenting the methodology employed in the study. In a sense, it feels uncomfortable and almost unprofessional to lend as much importance to my own response in the interview situation as I've tried to afford the kinds and the contents of responses contributed by the study's participants. There seem to be at least three categories of material which emerged from the in-depth interview situation in this study. First, some of the data comes from questions and responses, or mutual wonderings and musings, often my own opening a line of inquiry and the respondent's coming along because that topic or suggestion is interesting, evocative or demanding in some way. Second, the participants often opened a line of inquiry, raising a subject of importance to them, sometimes a subject which was slated for appearance some time later in the interview, and sometimes totally unexpected and surprising. At moments of surprise, I always followed the lead of the participant, feeling confident that he or she was in good control of the vehicle and the path. After all, it was the perspective of the participant the research was designed to capture and understand.

The third category of material could as easily be attributed to all the participants as to myself as researcher; that is, our own personal, unspoken but experienced interview which was individualized by our perspectives, our histories and our psychological predispositions to the experience. I have no access to this material as it was experienced by the study participants. I do, however, have access to my own material as researcher and some of it seems, at first blush, to be more authoritative and worthy of being recounted than others. For example, in my estimation the participants in this study were socially responsive and cooperative people, and I had no hesitation in stating this and suggesting the importance

these personality traits may have had in the career of a child and youth in out-of-home-care. I grappled somewhat with making the assertion I have here, and in the Methodology chapter of this report, that my perspective developed as a researcher in this study has been a departure from the perspective I developed in the fourteen years I practiced social work specifically in a child welfare context. The development, as a result of the study experience, of a new perspective with respect to children and youth in out-of-home-care may have implications both for an understanding of the constraints inherent in the social work role within agencies delivering services and for practice within these agencies.

My understanding of the difference in perspective experienced by me as social worker within a child welfare institution and as a researcher coming from outside that same institution is congruent with the theory offered most memorably by Merton (1957) when he examined the negative effects of the efficient bureaucratic organization on the capacities of the trained person working within its structure. The necessities of the institution for its well being makes certain requirements of its workers. Among these requirements are reliability of response and strict devotion to regulations. Sometimes these regulations take on the character of absolutes without respect to a set of purposes. Adaptation to new situations and perspectives may be blocked by these absolutes and, in time, a "trained incapacity" to perceive information from a fresh perspective or to behave in ways not spelled out in the codified material set forth as requirements for action may emerge. In addition, Merton (1957) and other theorists of social structure assert that our perspectives within these large organizations are varied, determined in part by our positions in the structure and the requirements of our own roles.

My own experience with a very progressive child welfare agency effected my ability to perceive and learn from children and youth in out-of-home-care in the following ways. First, I never worked primarily with children and youth in long-term care, being associated with an agency that made a division between protection and prevention work on the one hand and, on the other hand, that work associated with children in out-of-home-care and the foster and group homes where they were placed. So while I and my team of social workers might make the decision to take a child into out-of-home-care when efforts to sustain the biological unit proved

insufficient, our involvement with that child on a long term basis would be unlikely although sometimes we might become somewhat informed through informal contact or knowledge. In short, my work unit was neither focused on, nor systematically involved with, what eventually happened to the children taken into out-of-home-care if they did not return to their families in a short period of time.

When older children were taken into out-of-home-care for short periods, the responsibility for these placements became those of the protection and prevention team. Often, in my experience, meetings with older children and young adults in care revolved around placement problems, replacement needs and problematic behaviours exhibited in the foster or group home and transmitted, often as a last resort and under the kind of duress normally associated with placement breakdown, to the social worker. In these situations of stress, where a placement is on the edge of breakdown or where the young person's behaviour is such that he or she, or others in the home are placed in danger because of it, there is a strong imperative for the social worker involved to do something or, in the best of processes, to engage with the young person in work which will address the needs of the moment. These processes and interactions do not dispose the social worker to be an open listener as much as a problem solver, a negotiator, a situation manager or a person, in short, who puts out fires.

The role of the social worker in a child welfare agency is multi-faceted and permeated with enormous stress. These professionals are responsible for making decisions which may result in the life or death of a child, and they do this within a structure which proliferates rules and protocols for the purpose of standardizing service and making professionals thorough but also accountable. In my child welfare experience, especially when I compare it with my other experiences working with children in clinical contexts, there is seldom the opportunity or the freedom to sit down with a young person and learn, from him or from her, about the past, the future, hopes, dreams and fears. Instead, meetings with children and youth are driven by a necessity of the organization or of that moment in the life of the child. The child or young person seen in the child welfare institution context, in short, needs to be helped, assessed, moved, stopped, motivated, convinced of something or warned against something else.

Compare the picture above, which I don't think is excessively dramatic, with the ease and the pleasure of speaking with a young person for whom one has no responsibility and from a vantage point detached from the institution under discussion. In these interviews undertaken for the purpose of learning about the perspective of the participant, I felt, as indicated in the Methodology chapter of this report, neither expert nor teacher. In fact, my stance became almost immediately that of a listener, perhaps also a supplicant to the extent that I felt the need to engage each young person in the interview process for my own goal of completing the study, but also I experienced these young adults as equals who engendered an overwhelmingly positive feeling of respect. Perhaps it is this perception of equality which does not invariably enter into interactions between the adult social worker and the child in most helping contexts, both in child welfare and other clinical settings. After all, the adult is not only more powerful and more knowledgeable about most aspects of life, the social worker comes to the interaction with specialized knowledge about how the system works, how children and youth grow, and what will help the child. What may be overlooked in the ordinary interaction between child and adult in the child welfare system is what can be distilled into an interview held at some distance from both time and site, that is, that the child or youth who is the client has all the knowledge about that very important content which is at the center of the work we do together, and that content is the subjective experience of life, in this specific case, life in out-of-home-care.

While it would seem, on the face of it, that professional social workers can always bring an open attitude and respect to their interactions with their child and youth clients, it is often true that the demands of the system in which the practice takes place force us to reach closure sooner than we might, to be more sagacious and directive than we might given our limited knowledge of the young person and his or her circumstance, and to listen with only the first ear due to a surfeit of impatience arising from deadlines to be met and actions to be taken. Can effective practice take place under these circumstances? Both Kim and Promilla spoke specifically to the importance in their lives of foster parents and social workers who treated them with respect. Others also spoke about respect when they remembered adults who supported their efforts to reach their own goals, or, alternatively, when they voiced their regrets about not having been

included more often, and starting at an earlier time, in the planning around their future and on-going life decisions.

Listening to these young adults, even for only a morning or an afternoon, and subsequently going over the data to understand something more about their experiences in out-of-home-care, has modified the way I would conceptualize the role of the social worker in their lives. If we come to view development as a pathway from infancy to young adulthood and beyond, with many opportunities to contribute to the continuity or change of vulnerable or resilient patterns, we need always to provide service with the future adult in mind. Social workers at all sites and in all capacities in the child welfare organization would do well to be thinking about the outcomes which will eventuate from the interventions undertaken today. These interventions will have a multiplicity of effects on the paths taken and the destinations reached by that infant, child or youth on the way to adulthood.

III IMPLICATIONS OF THE FINDINGS FOR PRACTICE

Practice Should be Informed by Consumer Input and Conceptualized in a Life Span Context

As a researcher who has been engaged in interviewing "successful" young people who have lived in out-of-home-care, I have gathered impressions, factual information and a perspective about these lives to which I would have had different and perhaps limited access as a practitioner in the system with respect to these same young people. Regarding the experience, specifically, of youngsters in out-of-home-care it is therefore suggested here that practice within the child welfare system should routinely be informed by feedback from the children, youth and adults who have lived, or are living, the life.

At regular intervals, or on an on-going basis, practitioners at one point in the system (*e.g.* working with children in their own homes) should be exposed to youngsters and situations elsewhere in the system (*e.g.* children in care or graduated from care) for the purpose of maintaining and reinforcing the bigger picture *vis a vis* youngsters and their client careers in the child welfare system. Meeting with and learning about young people further on along the path of out-of-home-care or post-discharge from care will help social workers and child and youth workers

focus on the importance and long lasting implications of the decisions made along the pathway.

An exit interview with each child, youth and young adult who has lived in out-of-home-care would be not only an aid to improvement of service delivery, the process would also help young people with the task of making order and sense out of their lives. Other forms of feedback are not just interesting, they are necessary to the provision of adequate service. In order to engender full and forthcoming feedback, of course, a relationship where communication with agency personnel is possible and fruitful has to be established early in the out-of-home career of each child or youth. Youngsters should feel convinced that a social worker or child and youth worker is there for them. Privacy, individual attention, the exchanging of names, schedules, phone numbers and, in general, the provision of access to the adult representing the child welfare agency should be clearly established, both for the treatment goals involved as well as for the purpose of establishing a pattern of communication that will inform the system with feedback from the consumer.

Feedback from youngsters and therapeutic intervention with them at times of transition and crisis in the out-of-home experience may be particularly useful. When re-placements are contemplated and after they are completed, for example, there is a great deal to be learned from children and youth about the placement and about their own needs and difficulties which may, if incorporated into the treatment plan for that youngster, result in adding to the child's resiliency. Youngsters suffer greatly from misapprehensions about their own failure in and responsibility for the breakdown of a placement, often attributing a greater role to their own behaviour or character than is reality based. Some youngsters believe they are all alone in facing a placement breakdown, and that other young people have not had similar experiences. The data collected in this study indicate that graduates from foster care tend to view their histories as segmented into foster home and group home placements, which are the most prominent demarcations in their autobiographies. Concentrated and supportive intervention with youngsters at these junctures in their lives has the potential to yield more than just the information about how the system helps or hinders, the intervention at this time can also serve as an important protective mechanism, building and

maintaining a youngster's self-esteem during a time of crisis and conceptual fluidity.

Protection Against Stigmatization

One significant finding from this study, that some youngsters who have been substantially raised in out-of-home-care report their status as "foster" children to have been an element of negative self-image, or stigma, leads directly to the areas of practice which could substantially change the way these youngsters are valued by themselves and, perhaps, by others.

The children who find themselves in out-of-home care at very young ages need to see themselves as "okay" and of value equal to the children who are raised in their biological families, in order to develop a good level of self-esteem. The tentative quality of temporary wardship which generally surrounds placements of young children, however, and the challenges involved in clarifying the status of the child and planning for his or her return home take precedence, in the early days, over helping the youngster to conceptualize out-of-home-care and what it means in his or her life.

For the large majority of youngsters who enter care early in their lives, return home or adoption will be the eventual outcome; a very small number will be substantially raised in out of home care, and identified as foster children. The important point is that practitioners are not always able to predict the outcome of a placement early in the child's life, nor can the agency accurately assess the long-term meaning and effects of these placements on the psychological growth and development of children. It is to all children's benefit, regardless of the eventual outcome of out-of-home-care, to be exposed to a positive socialization experience with respect to the meaning of this care in their lives.

We may think and assume that foster parents are the conduit through which this socialization is made available to the child in care. Unless agencies involve foster parents in training around the process, establish on-going support to the process and monitor the success or problems in the process on a continual basis, child welfare agencies and practitioners will not be sure that youngsters in their care are getting the socialization they need. Bi-weekly or monthly group programs, age and geographically determined, could be a part of out-of-home care for every child. Foster parents, social workers, child care workers or, at later stages

in the group's development, youth in care or graduates of care could help or lead the children's groups.

The form of the group process should emphasize affiliation, membership, friendship and community. The content, almost as an extension of the form, would include sharing ideas about family problems, exchanging views about out-of-home-care, getting information about the needs of youngsters and how some families and communities need help to provide for youngsters, separation from loved and ambivalent parental figures, adjustment to temporary placements, the court process, working towards going home and what that entails, preparations for leaving care, adoption, changing placements, the use and benefit of relating to professionals in the system, what their jobs are and how to tell them when they're needed, living with and adjusting to foster family members and other youngsters placed in the same home. Role playing could be an exciting and practical method for these young people in order to practice interacting with others around difficult and potentially embarrassing material, for example, how to interpret one's living in out-of-home care to the other children at school. These are just a few of the many topics these children could discuss and should be encouraged to discuss in their support groups when they are appropriate and meet the needs of group members. Foster parents probably would do well to keep in touch with the material raised in order to support the child's continuing exploration of these issues at home. In fact, foster parents who were interested would add a great deal to the groups as group leaders, as well as serving as a conduit for impressions, information and techniques of discussion which would be of great use to other foster parents.

Probably emphasis should be placed on the areas where children can learn about what they have in common, how each situation is different as well, the individual strengths and talents each child has to develop and contribute, and the very important acknowledgment and reinforcement of the idea that the child in out-of-home-care is neither responsible for his or her situation, nor completely without power in the situation.

For older children, the group process might borrow from the very effective group process used by PARC, and other programs focused on preparation of youth for discharge from out-of-home-care. However, the group process should be on-going and available for children of all ages in

care, not just before discharge or directly following it. Pre-teens, youth and senior youth in care need to learn about the ways they are wise and strong, perhaps wiser and stronger, in many ways, than their friends who have not been in out-of-home-care. As disenfranchised people benefit from becoming politicized, and exploited workers have historically gained control of their labour power through unionization, young people in care need to go through a process in which they join together to find strength.

There should be opportunities for youth in care to advise care-givers with respect to the policies and practices which help. As well, there should be regular opportunities for youth in care to meet with the public and to demystify the image, often a devalued one, of the ward, perhaps even to challenge the concept that there are "our" children (that is, children born into and raised in their biological families) and there are "their" children (that is, the children born into and often not raised in dysfunctional, "broken" homes) (Wolock & Horowitz, 1984).

Opportunities for mentoring are important to youngsters. Becoming advocates for other children and youth in care can be an empowering and effective learning experience. Sometimes, advocating for self-interest of children and youth in care will bring youngsters in care into conflict with the care-giving institution itself. In a way, what we suggest here is practice which supports youngsters to individuate within an institutional context, in much the same way that youngsters in the family are supported to make claims on family resources, to disagree, at times, with the ideas and the values of their parents, and finally to move away from home and establish an independent identity and life style. And from this independent place, graduates who have become independent young adults are in an excellent position to advise the inform the agency's practice with younger children.

Practice in the area of child welfare with respect to youngsters in care should be oriented towards their eventual reframing of the definition of "foster child" and refusal to be stigmatized by the attributions placed on them by others in the community, for whom being raised in out-of-home-care is a devalued position. If we don't actively plan for this outcome, it won't happen. And the young adults who emerge from child welfare care will experience themselves as second class citizens, no matter how accomplished and caring they are.

Promoting Social and Cognitive Skills that seem to Protect:

The findings in this study suggest that social responsiveness, assertiveness and feminist thought all seem to be associated with feelings of strength in participating young people and their ability to engage in mutually satisfying interactions with others. This protective thinking and protective interaction, it is asserted here, may be able to be taught through social group work or other avenues of education and socialization. Practice with children in out-of-home care could include some aspects of social teaching which would incorporate those habits of thought and behaviour which have been shown to be associated with social competence and strong levels of self-esteem. Assertiveness training and social responsiveness, for example, could be considered for possible teaching and positive sanctioning with even very young children.

With respect to feminist thought, there is a suggestion in this study's data that girls and young women, both those who have been subjected to experiences as painful as sexual abuse and those who experience the quiet and pervasive gender inequities which are part of our educational and social system, benefit from exposure to the concepts related to the potential strength of girls and women and the benefits to children of growing up in families where males and females are equal. For many of the young women and men who have suffered abuse at home or grown in a family where their mother was subjected to assault and abuse by male partners, there is great value to being aware that there are nurturing men, that some men share in domestic labour, that men and women can live together as equals, and that women are strong and able, both individually and when united to see to their interests. The women interviewed in this study found these ideas and this knowledge to be important to them and for some these ideas have heralded and supported a transformation from victim of life to survivor.

Feminist thought should be part of any socialization/strengthening/educational system erected for the benefit of youngsters in care. As it stands today, some youngsters are exposed to this ideology by chance, in school or through friends, some (for example, Claire) come from backgrounds where mothers and grandmothers have instilled pride and confidence in girls and young women, and some have been exposed to the ideas in group experiences, like those at PARC, where feminism was an

interest or emphasis of a particular youth worker or social worker involved with youth in care. Because this ideology has the potential for being so powerful for many young women and men, especially because of the likelihood of their early experiences in violent or otherwise abusive families, the child welfare system should ensure exposure for as many of its youngsters as possible to feminist and gender sensitive thinking which, on a preventive level, can prepare these young people to form unions of their own based on gender equity.

Making Even More Use of Role Models:

Every young person interviewed for this study named other people in their lives on whom they have, or would have liked to, model their behaviour, style, career, character, gender-related role performance, family role performance, talents or material status. Some discussed role models predominately from the negative standpoint, that is, they based decisions and goals on not reflecting the character and lives of important feared, pitied, hated or lost parents, parent-substitutes, or siblings.

Some had a path in mind, and consciously or pre-consciously found people ahead of them, on that path, to lead the way. Some chose a path based on the acceptance and friendship offered by a particular person, whose own path subsequently became traversable because the individual was approachable and accepting. So many instances of role modeling are named and discussed by these successfully launched young people, the data leads to considerations of practice models, both for youngsters in out-of-home care and, as well, with youngsters living at home but needing a path, which would incorporate role models in a planned way.

Mentoring programs have grown in recent years (Freedman, 1992), and especially with respect to minority groups who face the additional struggles inherent in racism and ethnic bias, the potential benefit to pairing children and youth with young adults who have succeeded in becoming self-actualizing people is increasingly recognized. Mentoring programs have also been established within specified career categories, with emphasis placed on reaching out to minority and challenged groups. Recent attempts have been made to provide mentoring in the sciences and mathematics, engineering and law, for girls and young women who have

talent and interest which could easily be extinguished by the gender inequities facing young people in these fields.

For youngsters in out-of-home-care, many of whom have few or no familial positive role models to suggest, or to lead the way, the finding of role models probably should not be left to chance. Although the young people in his study were able to find and use a multitude of role models along their paths, it is likely that these youngsters have an affinity, an ease or an openness to the influence of others, and have therefore been able to choose and use influential others for their own identity growth and benefit. Other young people in similar situations but not as confident at identifying influential others and making contact with them, may well be left on the side of the path.

Mentoring programs can be made available for youngsters at all ages and on many different bases. Foster care graduates, for example, could be asked to help youngsters for whom the path through care and into emancipation requires one committed pathfinder or model. Adults with specific career lines or talents could be matched with youngsters interested in these areas of future or continuing endeavor. Matches could also be made along any other lines, including political interests, artistic interests, the areas of sports or recreation and others. The category of race and ethnicity can either be included prominently in the matching or placed in a minor position compared with another, more compelling reason for matching, depending on the needs and preferences of the child or youth.

Older children in care could serve as path-finders and role models for younger children, not just in the same foster household, but in the same school, or geographic area. Older children in the community could also be role models for youngsters in care, so that a teen-ager, for example, who practices gymnastics at a particular gym program could be identified to be role model for a six to twelve year old in care, who also attends the same gym. They might also meet outside the gymnastics program, perhaps once a month or so, for informal time spent together, talk about gymnastics, or an occasional outing. Older youngsters, both in care and not in care, should be sought to be guides for younger children in out-of-home-care, through the development of programs which will contribute to the confidence and the development of the older and the younger participants.

When helping adults think in terms of providing role models and path-finders for children in care, many ideas about helpful associations of youngsters with others emerge.

Planning to Expose Children and Youth to Many Opportunities and Experiences:

Practitioners and their supervisors, with the help of check lists and inventories for regular reminders, need to focus on exposing their young people in out-of-home-care to as many new experiences and opportunities as possible, including those which may develop the child's talents and skills in a new or potentially challenging area and those which may build to increased self-sufficiency and security when the youngster becomes emancipated. In other words, the system which parents the child should continue, where it is now practice, and increase where the practice is now minimal, efforts to approach the best parenting possible, with respect to planning for the child's future. And every child in out-of-home care should be engaged, early on, in a process of visualizing and planning the future and preparing for young adulthood, in the same ways youngsters and their parents engage in this activity in supportive families.

As the in-care system exists in many places, the planning for a child's future is largely happenstance, based on the child's interests and talents as they are presented in school and at home, and based also on the social worker's and foster parents' personal and particularistic expectations for the preparation and education of youth. The data shows that the child's interests and talents may be thwarted by a school system and indeed a society where racism, sexism and stigmatization of "other peoples' children" are institutionalized and also personalized. Perhaps to insure the adequate exposure of youngsters in out-of-home-care against inequities of opportunity inherent in our institutions, the child welfare system should be organized around principles which transcend the particularistic interests, energies and expectations of the foster parents and the social work or child care staff. The opportunities for exposure to jobs, for introduction to job training, and for planning with respect to avenues of education leading to careers could and should be addressed for each youngster far in advance of the last year before discharge from out-of-home-care.

Because opportunities in the wider world potentially open doors and pathways for youngsters, agency practice should include regular opportunities for exposure to music, arts, travel, recreation, sports, theatre, crafts, and other areas of knowledge and expression which provide potential stimulation for the child in out-of-home-care. Where financial resources are required, ingenuity can be harnessed to enable a partnership between child welfare authorities and vendors of productions, training or commodities. Youngsters can be given the chance to earn access to some of these opportunities. The emphasis should be placed on socialization that tells the child the future is his or hers to create, and everything is possible. Because foster parents, group home parents and supervisors, social workers and child care workers vary widely with respect to their interests and activities, as well as what they think is essential in the lives of children and youth, the institutions should be setting standards and expectations for the exposure of youngsters to these opportunities and experiences.

Planning to Introduce Children and Youth to Community Involvements:

Exposure to communities can be expanded, conceptually, to include not only what is familiar to a specific foster parent or geographic area in the way of community, but also what is in traveling distance and therefore feasible for a child or youth whose development in a particular community would be significant. In other words, linking a child or youth with the activities and communities habitually and most comfortably accessed for all children in the X family is clearly not as useful as linking the specific child with a community which would benefit her or him, though this may require additional travel or a change in mind set from agency staff or foster parents.

A good negative example of this, taken from the story of a first year university student not included in this study sample, was the attempt of his foster parents to link him, an urban, Afro-Caribbean and recently arrived in Canada youth with the Boy Scouts organization and, upon finding he didn't want to attend, deciding he was a "non-joiner". Looking back today, that young man says he probably would have gained a great deal from activities in the Afro-Caribbean-Canadian community, which might have been accessed with a bit of difficulty, but accessed nonetheless. The Native-Canadian participants in this study, as well as several of the Afro-

Caribbean-Canadian young women emphasized the significance to them of the knowledge about their roots as well as the associations they were able to forge with people and activities in their own communities. Several expressed some frustration that links with their communities were not established earlier in their out-of-home-care careers.

In many ways, the community involvements which have meant so much to these study participants sound like what we know as family involvements. The pattern seen in this group of coping foster care veterans certainly reflects the pattern of many young adults growing in their own families, where throughout the years of education, and often into the years of getting settled, getting started, becoming employed and, very frequently today being under-employed and unemployed, parents and extended family provide what material support they can on a continuous, and then sporadic, basis as needed. Of course, the emotional support and validation of family can be important to us throughout our lives. Therefore, we need to take note of the many community involvements and supportive relationships reported to us by these "successful" graduates, and begin to conceptualize the preparation preceding discharge from out-of-home-care as preparation for community life, for connectedness, or for mutually supportive relationships instead of preparation for "independence" or "emancipation".

Making Education a Priority:

A recently issued compilation of research findings with respect to children receiving child welfare services, usually youngsters who have been neglected and abused, and their abilities to succeed in the public school system, found that in Toronto, as in many other research sites in North America which are reported in the literature, these children fare poorly in school.

Both children receiving home-based services as well as children in foster care do equally poorly in the school system. Given the importance of school in these children's lives it is essential that we continue to seek new approaches to ensuring that school will provide abused and neglected children with the positive experiences that they so critically need (Trocme & Counce, 1993, p.28).

Because our public, democratic and free educational system is the main avenue for mobility in our social system, as well as one of the two important sites of socialization and development for children and youth, liaison with the school system around the progress of each and every child and youth in care is a matter of great urgency and importance. This major conduit or obstacle to the young person's development has to be tended and maintained at a high level of communication and support, and this needs to be accomplished whether or not the particular foster parent, child care worker, or social worker has a great interest in education or a facility with being a support to the child's journey through the educational system.

The young person's academic ability, in addition, should not be the only focus for the agency-home-school communication triangle. The findings in this study suggest that school can provide opportunities for mastery, growth, and elevated self-esteem in the recreational, musical, social, dramatic, athletic, and stylistic spheres of life, and when young people cope and feel adequate in their school milieu, the confidence established can help them in other areas of endeavor.

Some programs are being considered, others have been established, to place a liaison person in the equation between school and foster parents, in order to ensure that each child in out-of-home-care gets the attention and the educational support necessary. It would be really a major achievement in the provision of out-of-home-care if child welfare agencies took a truly "parental" role with respect to the educational experiences of children in their care, including the child in the design of a school program, seeing to the maintenance of the program and also to the periodic evaluation of the young person's experience. The concept of "wrap-around" services which are oriented to each child, ensuring that no child falls outside what is available, makes good sense here.

Of course, many foster parents already intervene effectively with their local schools, to the benefit of children in their care. Many school personnel are also sensitive to the needs of children in out-of-home-care, and provide extensive support and opportunity for youngsters in their world. And some social workers and child and youth care workers are dedicated to the educational advancement of each youngster on their caseloads to the highest level of her or his potential. On the other hand,

some foster parents are not particularly comfortable with or interested in formal education, some educators overlook or are biased against children and youth in out-of-home-care, and some agency personnel, whatever their other areas of strength and competency, are not focused on the potential for coping and growth inherent in each child's school program.

The achievement in practice would be to provide a structure which could grab the attention, motivate, support and evaluate all the links in the education-child welfare partnership with one goal in mind, that is, the provision of the best educational opportunity possible for every child in out-of-home-care. Perhaps this standardization of agency practice would begin with a mission statement, coming from the Board of Directors, including the concept that the agency intends to be the best parent possible for the children in out-of-home-care, and this intention includes a thrust in the direction of supporting each child or youth to fulfill his or her potential in school (as much as potential can be accurately assessed), in the same way parents support their children in school, when they are being the best parents they can be.

Programs and practice which emanate from this mission statement might include a school-home-agency liaison position in each community, ensuring high levels of communication and understanding among the team members. Foster parents who require or request the coaching could be provided with practical and supportive information and suggestions about contacting school personnel, talking with teachers about a concern, setting up a cooperative home-school working relationship, monitoring a child's school performance, relating to a teacher who is perceived to be uncooperative, setting goals, requesting feed-back, and sharing information about a child or youth and his or her learning or coping style which will help the child and the school to work well. Agency personnel might be stimulated to explore and recognize the many functions and opportunities for coping and mastery provided by the school system. Some of them may also request or require help to relate comfortably with school personnel. And certainly, at some level of both the educational system and the child welfare system where influence is seated, a partnership should be formed to ensure the excellence of parenting and schooling for children and youth in out-of-home-care.

For that small group of young people who qualify for college and university entrance but who will be discharged from care to independence, meaning the total lack of family support both material and affective, a cooperative relationship between the Ministries of Community and Social Services and Education and Training could ensure that the youngsters who qualify for higher education will get it. Mentoring, path-finding, role modelling and social support could be made available to inexperienced students through the volunteer efforts of older foster care graduates who have weathered several years within each institution.

Considering a Modification of Service for Immigrant Youth Seeking Opportunity in Canada

Young immigrants, sometimes unaccompanied minors, whose familial custody arrangements have broken down are being sent to Canada for opportunities not available in their country of origin. Adolescents in this category may benefit from placements which specialize in goal-oriented, goal-supportive, short-term needs which do not require parenting as much as the continuation or extension of the parenting already established back home. Some of these youngsters may be able to contribute a great deal of helpful input into choices about placements, their type and the content; to work in conjunction with others to map out a plan to meet their needs. Youths who come to Canada for the purpose of gaining opportunities in education, as well as those who come because their parents fear for their safety in their country of origin, may benefit from placements which are not family groupings so much as youth and adolescent centered settings which are established with a strong education and training support component, and the ability to help youngsters achieve the goals they have set for themselves.

For immigrants and refugees arriving in Canada as youths, placements in group settings and school districts emphasizing the minimization of culture shock, the rapid learning and usage of English, and socialization into Canadian society should be developed. Incorporation into the treatment plan of the young person's own goals as well as the biological family's input will help the young person to experience socialization in Canada in a way which minimizes the conflict generally

arising from clashes between what the family back home expects from the youngster and what is possible in Canada.

Practice with immigrant youth requiring care could be fashioned to better meet the real and immediate needs of these youngsters, as distinguished from the youngsters whose family life in Canada is insufficient for a youngster's protection and care. The practice model should reflect the maturity and independence of the youngster, the instrumental supports needed to achieve strongly stated goals, amelioration of culture shock and expedient socialization into Canadian life and culture, and an attempt to gain input and on-going support from the intact family which sent the child to Canada.

Of course, there are many situations where a young person's needs for out-of-home-care will be remedial in nature, despite the fact of having been sent to Canada for the purpose of achieving a better education or job opportunities. No young person should be slated for the less familial oriented youth setting without an assessment of individual history and needs.

IV IMPLICATIONS OF FINDINGS FOR POLICY

YOUNG PEOPLE LAUNCHED FROM LONG-TERM FOSTER CARE SHOULD HAVE ACCESS TO TRANSITIONAL FUNCTIONS USUALLY PERFORMED BY FAMILY. For young people raised in out-of-home-care, agency responsibility or partnership, as in families, should be maintained, at some level, until it is no longer needed. Very few young people can be completely independent at the age of twenty-one; it is just about impossible for most at eighteen or sixteen. Economic and employment trends have changed our expectations for the independence of children *vis a vis* their families. Many children are graduating from institutions of higher learning at later ages, due to their needs to take time away from studies and earn the moneys necessary for tuition and living expenses while attending college or university. Young people who have difficulty finding regular, full-time, employment with a future are going back to college or university in large numbers. After graduation, many young adults will not find the kind of employment they expected and worked towards; many do not find employment at all for long periods of time. These frustrated and

stressed young people may take a number of jobs to tide them over until a real opportunity arises. For many, living in their own rooms or apartments, even after graduation from institutions of higher education and being twenty-two or older, becomes an intermittent impossibility, leading young adults to ask their families if return to the family home, on a short-term basis, is possible.

Many youngsters in long-term foster placements are presently discharged from out-of-home-care lacking the family supports presently available for young people raised in both biological and adoptive families. Legislation should reflect these youngsters' needs to continue to relate, should this be mutually acceptable, to foster family and always, potentially, to the agency providing the out-of-home-care. There could be a category of fostering which either goes through the foster family or emanates from the agency itself, which provides some of the instrumental and affective supports young adults need today. For example, young people who have moved away from home, but who need to temporarily room in a family or group setting, with controlled rent and payment for board, would find this through their child welfare agency. Young adults needing low interest loans could have the agency co-sign for them, or could borrow from the agency directly. In effect, in instances where the province has undertaken to raise young people without on-going family ties, an agency contact, which could change from person to person through the years, should always be available for the purpose of providing some instrumental and affective support at times of need or desire for this back-up. The content of the supportive interventions available would need to be determined with respect to prevailing resources, both financial and human, in each area of the province. The form, however, should be established to signify that people raised by arms of the province always have an affiliation and a personal relationship with a representative of the province who stands in for the family members who once were there for the person for whom the province has become the parent.

AN OFFICIAL GUARDIAN OR TRUSTEE TO BE APPOINTED FOR THE PROVINCE, specifically with respect to overseeing the interests of youth in care, and insuring that planning takes place in preparation for the discharge of young people in the care of child welfare agencies. At present,

the Crown Ward Review, undertaken annually by the province to evaluate treatment and placement decisions affecting a number of children and youths who are permanent wards, monitors the progress of each child only once every twenty-four months, and neglects the large number of youngsters in out-of-home-care who are Temporary Wards or Non-Wards with in-care careers spanning years. For some who are not Crown Wards, those very important years before discharge may be spent wholly or substantially in out-of-home-care, without the benefit of a review of a discharge plan.

Reinforcing the parental role of the State in being truly responsible for young people in its care, practice should reflect a policy stipulating that children and youth should have one agency person who acts as a parent, perhaps following from after intake through discharge, with as few changes of personnel as possible. That person can be a social worker, children and youth worker, and eventually the quasi-parental contact role may become available for some trained and experienced volunteers attached to the child welfare agency.

Some agencies already provide for coverage of a child or youth from first agency contact, perhaps into out-of-home-care, perhaps home again, or through to discharge by one designated professional or team. Other agencies are considering this continuity of care because they realize that each child and youth needs to have someone for whom his or her life, today and in the future, is central and significant.

UNIVERSITY AND COLLEGE EDUCATION should be guaranteed by the child welfare system. Linkages between Ministries of Education and Training and Community and Social Services should fashion a partnership so that tuition for post-secondary education is available for the youngsters who wish to, and are able to, avail themselves of these opportunities. For young people who require other kinds of education or training to become independent, for example adult literacy or numeracy classes, a skilled trade apprenticeship, business school, job training program through the government, vocational course, etc., the cost of this training or education should be underwritten by the Province for young people who are substantially or wholly parented by the state. The need to make economic provisions of this kind could probably be supported by the

economic data showing the cost involved in raising youngsters in out-of-home-care, and the subsequent cost to the taxpayer for each graduated young adult who is under-educated and under-trained, thereby requiring continuing support during years which could have been productive and satisfying.

CHILD WELFARE AGENCY BOARDS OF DIRECTORS should be required to include a number of voting members from the community of out-of-home-care graduates. This simple act of inclusion, already undertaken in some child welfare agencies, insures greater advocacy for the children and youth who are clients, but it also informs the boards, generally, with respect to the human effects of their decisions.

THE PUBLIC SHOULD BE EDUCATED with respect to recognition that young people raised in care are neither necessarily more damaged nor less able than other young people, and they deserve our recognition and respect based on their individual talents and achievements. Out-of-home care is different from the biological family, but the children raised in its families have dreams, and should have entitlements, commensurate with those of children raised in their own families. Planning and programming for a re-framing of the way society views children in out of-home care might begin in the Ministries of Community and Social Services of the provinces, where position statements and plans to enlist the information and suggestions of consumers and practitioners in the field are developed and implemented.

V RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

More than a few questions are raised by the themes emerging from this exploratory study. There is the question of whether a group of recent foster care graduates decidedly not considered to be "successfully launched" from out-of-home-care, perhaps a group, matched for gender, ethnicity and age with the participants in this study, but living on the streets or in temporary hostel situations, would respond very differently to the interviews and questionnaire administered in this study. Would these young people talk about role models, opportunities, self-esteem, community affiliations and protective thinking in the same way? Would they look

similar or very different from the "successful grads" with respect to their in-care histories, birth family histories, and preparation for independence? Would their pattern of responses reveal totally different categories on the topic of what has helped them? Would they name people and events that could have helped, if they had been able to accept the help offered? Would they have completely different ideas about what would have helped them and what more could be done, now, to shore up coping skills and build self-confidence?

A longitudinal study, following successful graduates such as the ones studied here, five years later and perhaps at five year intervals after that, might tell us a great deal about the correlation between today's adaptations and the future. For the participants whose educational or career paths take a completely unexpected turn, we could learn something more about how to prepare young people for unexpected turns in the road. It may be possible, also, to work towards governmental policy which will provide the essential supports for young adults without family, if we can reasonably predict the points at which they will be in need of financial support, education loans, low interest loans to start a business, etc.

Another very important question, around which one study should be designed, relates to the times and situations in the lives of children and youth where they are most available for relationships and experiences which make them more resilient. Youngsters presently in out-of-home-care, graduates of care, social workers, child and youth workers and foster and group home parents and supervisors should be interviewed on the specific question of when changes, turn abouts, new adaptations, epiphanies, and the observed growth of self-determination, goal orientation and increased self-esteem have been experienced and observed. If practitioners working in the field were better able to predict what events or developmental stages made young people more open and available for the interventions discussed here as well as others, practice might reflect the knowledge.

With respect to the topic of stigmatization, we might learn a great deal about the actual depth of feeling and roads to healing experienced by people who have lived in out-of-home-care as children and youths. It might greatly influence policy and practice if we had the answers to the questions concerning the self-image of out of home care grads, and how it was and

remains affected by the stigmatization surrounding this social category. Feedback from a large number of graduates, especially with respect to how they have dealt with these circumstances, and what they think would help children growing up today, would yield very useful data. An historic and sociological study of the role of the foster child through the years, in an attempt to better understand the social forces leading to the stigmatization of children outside the traditional family configuration, would be a useful adjunct to this experiential material from ex-wards.

A study involving one group of in-care youngsters who are exposed to the socialization group experience suggested above, incorporating a reframing of the role of "foster child" in a supportive and sharing group experience, and a control group of in-care youngsters without this experience should be designed. Self-image, stigmatization, self-shame, discomfort and comfort levels with being foster children, and locus of control measures would tell us quite a bit about whether or not, and how we should be dealing with the very important stigmatization problem experienced by young people in care.

The various aspects of protective thinking named and discussed in this study should be operationalized in a series of socialization/education modules which could be taught youngsters in care. These would include exposure to, for example, assertiveness training and to feminist thought and analysis at the level of children and youth. After the modules are completed, participants could be interviewed and assessed with respect to, for example, self-esteem, internal versus external locus of control and self-assertion.

The youngsters' teachers, foster parents and social and child care workers would also be asked to contribute estimates of whether and how the different modes of socialization/education have affected the young people. It may be possible, in the future, to develop the socialization/education models which will meet some of the needs we now have so little hope of meeting through the other clinical and therapeutic methodologies which are impossible to provide for each and every young person in need.

VI CONCLUSIONS

The data suggest that many of the protective and resilience building experiences and relationships ordinarily attributed to family and community life at its best are being contributed by child welfare personnel and many other members of the community for some young people deemed "successfully launched", who were unable to have their needs met in their biological families. The difference between how some needs have been met in the study data and how needs could more consistently be met as outlined in the sections entitled "Implications for Practice" and "Implications for Policy", lies with **planning**. The elements named by participants as adding to their resilience, as well as those elements recounted by participants as useful and important and subsequently connected by me to the concept of resilience have been identified as the following: 1) strategies which ameliorate the stigmatization associated with being a "foster child", 2) relationships with path-finders and role models who make goal attainment in the near and far future imaginable, 3) community membership and the feeling of belonging, 4) experiences which establish and maintain self-esteem, 5) new experiences and opportunities which can change a young person's thinking and open a new door, and 6) "protective thinking", those habits of thought and view which seem to have a strengthening and supporting effect. The assertions have been made that first, these elements seem to have been important to the participants, and second, that they could be and, in some cases, should be incorporated into the planning for young people raised, substantially, in out-of-home-care, with special emphasis on those who will be discharged from care without family support.

The stigmatization attached to having been foster children is a significant burden for many of the study participants, as they recount in almost every instance, having experienced or today still experiencing a sense of shame and abnormality around their family status. This issue of stigmatization, and its accompanying sense of disempowerment, may undermine the young person's sense of well-being and competency, if nothing is done to counteract the negative ideas. Those youngsters who seem to deal best with this have thought about it, have been exposed to experiences and socialization that has changed their conscious ideas and feelings about their identity and their power in the system, and have

become advisors, wise seniors, and advocates with respect to the system delivering services to children and youth in care. These young people have refused to accept society's definition of their stigmatized status, and this study would indicate that the child welfare establishment needs to provide a massive education, socialization and politicization for its young people in care, helping them to reframe their historical status and to advocate for their self-interest.

Participatory research, where graduates' input and feedback into the system serves both to inform practice and to support graduates' feelings of empowerment and reframing of their identification as foster children form an essential loop in a system fashioned to provide an improved growing up experience.

The provision of path-finders and role-models, experiences with community membership, the building and maintaining of self-esteem and exposure to opportunities are all essential facets of the resiliency building these youngsters have experienced and recounted. Grouped among the protective mechanisms and protective processes in Michael Rutter's work, these elements, when available at times of the child's willingness, ability or even need to incorporate new relationships or experiences, have changed paths for some of the study participants and heightened the potential of others. Yet another protective mechanism or process discussed by participants in this study, but not discussed by Rutter or others in the resiliency literature, is the area of protective thinking, which contains the group of thought habits (which have extensions in behaviour) and views which seem to have strengthened the young people in this study. These include self-reliance, assertion of the authentic self, positive explanatory style and feminist ideas.

Three additional suggestions emerging from this study include the following. First, the area of the two large, progressive, Child Welfare agencies in Metropolitan Toronto seemingly most readily focused on the successful graduate of out-of-home-care is the PARC program, established by both agencies to prepare and support young people in care directly before and after discharge from out-of-home-care. Referrals to this study of successfully launched young adults from areas other than PARC were, proportionally, significantly lower, and this despite the fact that the overwhelming majority of youngsters approaching discharge from care do

not have a history with the PARC program. One difficulty this finding could, conceivably, represent is a lack of substantial concentration and planning for the eventual adulthood of the youngsters presently in out-of-home-care, a focus which should be evident in all areas of these child care agencies where agency personnel are acting as parents for children and youth. An area of opportunity associated with the same finding lies with the dissemination and further development of the ideas and programs developed by PARC for use by all the practitioners who play a significant role with children and youth who will not return to their families.

Second, the young adults referred for this study had in common an ability to interact in a socially responsive manner, providing the interviewer with a very positive human interaction, and displaying, again and again, the ability to trust, to consider, to try to help and to grow through the experience of the study interview. It is noted above that people with these interactional skills and charm are rewarding in relationships, both working and social. It may well be true that the social responsiveness noted here can be encouraged and modeled, in which case, consideration should be given to how that could be accomplished in a child welfare context. The social responsiveness noted above is also related to the desire and efficacy inherent in setting up a program whereby young people could regularly channel their reactions to the in-care experience through the system. This would help the young people to develop, in each instance, a cogent view of their own lives and development *vis a vis* their experiences, while informing the child welfare system about the effects of its services on the client group. This concept of clients informing service would seem to be central to the provision of that service.

Finally, the finding which holds out the most hope to policy makers and practitioners in the field of child welfare is that which suggests some children and youths can, even when they have little history of positive or supportive nurturance in their early environments, and even with a later history of neglect or abuse in care or in the community, still maintain the ability to make use of experiences, relationships and opportunities which will add to their self-esteem, competency and resilience. The child welfare system, the educational system and the community have so many opportunities to stop the negative chain reactions accompanying adversities in the lives of children and youths and, in so doing, to add to the store of

resilience each young person carries into adulthood. These young people will judge us, in years to come, by our degree of commitment to taking advantage of these opportunities and reaching out to each of them.

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APPENDIX

LETTER REQUESTING REFERRALS

Dear Colleague,

Let me thank you in advance for your help with the research project I have undertaken, in part, to complete an advanced Social Work degree. The question addressed by my research was also compelling for me during the fourteen years I worked at CASMT. That question, briefly stated, is how so many youngsters who experience major life disruptions and very serious trauma do become self-actualized, thriving, young adults. Resilience and the factors which contribute to it are at the center of my inquiry.

To study resilience, I hope to interview, in depth, a number of "successful" foster and group care graduates, and to learn from them to what they attribute their strengths. Young people from CASMT, CCAS, and PARC will be included.

You probably have some or perhaps many "success" stories. I have defined "success", for the purposes of this study, at a level I think we can all accept. The successful young person will meet the following basic requirements, although you may refer those who are achieving in many additional ways (e.g. scholastically, artistically, athletically, or in personal relationships, community service, religious life, etc.)

The participant:

1. Works or attends school or training, or both. Parenting in a caring way is certainly considered to be work in the home.
2. Has a permanent residence.
3. Has at least one other person with whom to share life's problems and joys.
4. Has friends or acquaintances with whom to socialize.
5. Develops interests, hobbies or activities which animate or interest her/him
6. Feels basically positive about self and in substantial control of the future
7. Exhibits some self-reflectiveness and knowledge.

Age: Participants should be between 16 and 25 years of age.

Status: They should be out of foster or group care, but may be on extended care/maintenance. That is, they should be living on their own or with friends, but can still receive financial and other minimal support from the Agency.

Care History: Participants should have been in care at least three to five years. Young people who returned to their families after a substantial period of time in care can also be considered, especially if you know them to be experiencing high levels of growth and self-actualization in their late teen and young adult years.

When you decide on potential participants, you should contact them and ask if they would be willing to participate in a confidential two hour interview examining the experiences of "successful" young Child Welfare graduates. Those young people who agree will then be contacted by me and I will set up the interviews, take care of the necessary paper work (that is, the consent form which each participant will sign and retain in copy form) and then conduct the interviews.

Please feel free to call me at 531-5882 with any questions or ideas around this study, as well as with your names and numbers for inclusion. When all the data has been gathered, analyzed and written up, I hope to be able to give you a report which will be interesting and helpful, and whatever I learn from the participants will be shared with them, as well.

Thank you once again for your interest, your involvement and your help with the research. I hope the findings will be an aid to you in your very important work.

CONSENT FORM FOR STUDY

To Whom It May Concern,

It has been explained to me by Susan Silva-Wayne that she, as a doctoral student in the Faculty of Social Work, Wilfrid Laurier University, is conducting a study that will add to our knowledge about the experiences and strengths gathered by young adults who were in foster care for a significant number of years. I understand that the primary purpose of this research project is to learn more about what has helped young people who have, despite hard times and serious family problems, been identified by social and child care workers as growing and coping well with the challenges of young adulthood.

My participation in this study will involve completing a pen and paper questionnaire, as well as taking part in a taped interview, both of which should take about two hours of my time. In the interview, I will be asked questions about how I think about myself, my life and my future, how I thought about these issues as a child, and what influences and supports have been most important in shaping me.

I understand that everything I say will remain confidential. It will not be reported in a way that could identify me or any member of my family, foster family or friendship network. The only persons who will have access to the tape of my interview will be Mrs. Silva-Wayne, and her doctoral advisor, Professor Robert Basso, of the Faculty of Social Work, Wilfrid Laurier, University. The tape and any other identifying information associated with this research will be kept in a secure place and will not be available to anyone but Mrs. Silva-Wayne and her graduate advisor. I also understand that the tape of our interviews will be destroyed once the data have been coded and analyzed.

Finally, I understand that I am free not to take part in this interview and study and I may also withdraw my participation at any time in the interview and/or refuse to answer any question. Mrs. Silva-Wayne is available to me to discuss any concern I may have about this project at 531-5882 in Toronto. If I wish to discuss the research with her advisor, Professor Robert Basso, I can reach him by phone in Waterloo at area code 519, 884-1970. Mrs. Silva-Wayne has given me a copy of this consent form for my own convenience and information.

Dated at-----, this-----day of -----, 19-----.

Interviewee's Signature_____.

Interviewer's Signature_____.

PARTICIPANT- DEMOGRAPHIC AND IN-CARE SUMMARY

Name	Sex	Age	Occ. Status	Ethnicity	Reasons for Care	Care History	Major Strengthening Factors	Referral Source
Craig	M	22	Single father, First Year University student.	English/ Canadian	Chronic neglect and abuse, delinquency	4 homes, 1 serious rejection	10 yr. Volunteer, high intelligence, PARC and other leadership opps. A few teachers and others who cared, being a dad.	PARC
Louise	F	25	Community Coll. diploma, works	African/ Carib.	Physical and emotional abuse	3 homes, still has contact with #3	Great grand-mother who cared to age 9, Foster Family #3, PARC and its community/work opps.	PARC
Connie	F	23	4th Yr. Univ.	African/ Canadian	Given up by biol. parents in infancy.	1 home	Secure family, facing racism and sexism, developing assertiveness. PARC opportunities to advise.	PARC
John	M	21	Comm. Coll Grad., First year Univ. Works	E. Asian/ English	Parental mental illness, alcoholism, abuse	1 ext fam 1 foster Independ Living.	Many role models, high expectations from self and family, PARC Opps. good work history	PARC
Carly	F	24	Student in degree prog. for Child and Youth Care	English/ Canadian	Mental illness, parenting incapacity and sex. abuse.	10 families, several abusive	PARC opportunities for work, re-definition. Intro. to Feminism, growth of assertiveness	PARC
Patrina	F	22	Comm. Coll. Grad. Works as Admin. Asst.	African/ Carib.	Abuse, sexual and physical	2 ext. fam 3 foster	Independence and assertiveness, grandmother's influence, PARC's instrumental supports.	PARC
Amy	F	24	U. Grad., S.W. student, Works	African/ Carib.	Physical and emot. abuse	1 ext. fam	Caring mother "sub" in Carib., supportive sibbs, Religious Community PARC	PARC
Promilla	F	23	Mother of 1 Grade 12 grad.	S. Asian/ Carib.	Phys. and emot. abuse from nat. father and step-mom.	2 foster, Keeps contact with #1	Loving Gr. parents in Carib., Good rel., with first foster parents, Social supp. in school, PARC.	PARC
Kim	F	26	Mother of 2 Grade 12 grad. Full-time career	English/ Canadian	Chronic neglect and abandonment	3 foster, Keeps contact with #1	First foster parents met physical needs and were warm. Excellent social work; marriage and family. "back burner"	BRANCH SOCIAL WKR
Laurie	F	23	1 yr. Comm Coll 4 yrs work	English/ Canadian	Adopt. mom died, Adopt. dad unable.	2 foster Ind. Liv.	School, PARC support, esp. Housing, 2 social workers, other role models.	PARC
Paul	M	19	2 Yr. Comm. Coll.	S. Asian/ Canadian	Mentally ill mom., violent home, neglect.	1 ext. family. 1 foster, Ind. Liv.	Long-term goal, many role models, friendships and relationships.	BRANCH SOCIAL WKR
Ramon	M	21	3rd Yr. Univ.	Mid-East	Unaccompanied minor at 14	2 foster	Family in Mid-East loves him, self-reliant, good with S, recognized in school.	BRANCH SOCIAL WKR
Grace	F	19	OAC Year.	Chinese/ Canad.	Single mom., mentally ill	1 family	Secure placement, Gifted stream in school, self-reliant.	BRANCH SOCIAL WKR
June	F	22	Grade 12 grad. Full-time work	Native Canadian	Neglect and sexual abuse.	1 group home	Healing placement, finding support in Native culture and concepts.	BRANCH SOCIAL WKR
Steve	M	21	Completed 10th Grade. Works	Native Canadian	Neglect, abuse	Many and poor placements. Abuse.	Intro. to Native culture and concepts, Native role models and friends, one foster mother who cared.	BRANCH SOCIAL WKR
Claire	F	20	3rd Yr. of 4, U. Works pt-tme.	African/ Carib.	Abuse in father and step-mo's care.	1 foster	Excell. foster home, loving family in Caribb., assertive feminist	BRANCH SOCIAL WKR
Brad	M	18	OAC Year.	English/ Canadian	Mo. mentally ill, father unable.	1 foster 1 grp home Ind. Liv.	One loving foster mom, recognized in school, ident. with father, role models, path finders.	BRANCH SOCIAL WKR
Mai	F	20	2nd Yr. Univ.	Viet-Namesc	Minor in care of older bro., needed protection and guidance.	1 foster home	Foster family supportive, very self-reliant, introject of natural family's expectations.	SOCIAL WORK SUPERVISOR
Moustafa	M	21	2nd Yr. Univ. and works	Iranian	Un-accompan minor at 14	1 group home	Nat. family support and expectations, self-reliant, close rel. with group home mother.	BRANCH SOCIAL WKR

CONTRIBUTIONS TO RESILIENCE IN CHILDREN AND YOUTH: WHAT SUCCESSFUL CHILD WELFARE GRADUATES SAY

Summary of the findings:

1. All the participants share the personal characteristic of **social responsiveness** which, whether they were born with this strength or developed it along the road, makes it pleasurable to interact with them. These young adults can make contact with a stranger from another generation, they listen well, they actively engage in conversation and they are both receptive and willing to share. Most have tried, with some success, to make a logical and understandable structure from their life stories to date, and many express relief and/or appreciation for the opportunity to talk about their lives during the interview situation.

2. Proportionately, the **PARC program** referred a much larger number of "successfully launched" graduates for the research than any other area of two large child welfare agencies, indicating that perhaps more of a focus on the condition of young people graduating from out-of-home-care is centered in this program, and that this focus on outcomes needs to be shared by practitioners in all areas of the agencies.

3. Most participants report they have been, or are still, ashamed of being in out-of-home-care because of the negative prejudice which exists in society against foster children and youths. Many report having **felt different and set apart from other "normal" youngsters** living in their own, biological, families, some express shame around the problems their parents experienced which made them unable to care for their children, and some place emphasis on the problem of being raised without knowledge about and contact with their roots and the background of their personal identity.

PARC and some foster parents or school programs have been effective at helping these young people to reframe their ideas about what it means to be a foster child or youth, providing new definitions for the role and more respect for the young adults as activists, speakers, group leaders, project directors, group members and advisors to the agencies who provided the out-of-care-services they required as children.

4. Most participants have **used role models extensively**, to master skills in childhood, to get into training or educational programs, to form ideas about how they want to behave or look, to gain confidence that a particular path or goal is possible for them, and, using biological parents often as negative role models, also to develop a life's plan which in no way resembles the life experienced by the negative role model.

5. Most participants have **sought and found family-like relationships** and activities in communities of all kinds. Some are members of many communities, each of which reflects one aspect of the person's interests or personality. Especially for members of visible minority groups, membership in or contact with their roots and their communities has been of particular value and interest, and has made them feel stronger about their identity. For most of these young adults, the contacts with their communities was not facilitated by the agencies providing foster or group care, but were sought or found by themselves.

6. Most participants can name experiences and relationships which established some higher level of **self-esteem** or maintained a level already achieved. Foster parents, volunteers, teachers, friends, relatives, social workers, child care workers and others all

had opportunities to help each young person feel better about her or his self. Some of these experiences or relationships didn't enter the participant's life until very late in adolescence; for at least one young woman, the beginning of her building of self-esteem is attached to experiences and relationships rooted in the post-care years.

One very significant way relevant adults have helped in the area of self-esteem has been the support of a child or youth in their attainment of their own goals. Taking the young person's interests and opinions seriously and working with her or him in an area of great importance to the young person both raises self-esteem and empowers the young person.

7. Most participants are aware of having been exposed to **opportunities and experiences** which offered a new path or avoided a dangerous one. Sometimes the opportunities were offered by the in-care system (including PARC programs and experiences), but often these were offered to, or sought out by, the young person outside the in-care experience. Many opportunities were possible in the school system, but some participants were not welcomed or sought out by educational personnel. Some participants noted that racism, sexism or class bias seemed to lock some doors to opportunity in the education system.

8. These resilient young adults all reported ways of thinking that I've called "**protective thinking**". The most often mentioned was the concept of self-reliance, which most of the young people felt they had. For some, self-reliance meant being able to depend on themselves, but also being unable to trust or depend on others, which made it difficult to form intimate relationships. Still, most participants felt that if worst came to worst, they could count on their own abilities and strengths to get them through.

Feminist thought was protective for some of the women interviewed, and was especially strengthening for women who had suffered abusive relationships as children. The strengths of women and potential for equal power between the sexes are ideas and avenues which held promise for many of the women.

Optimism, or the ability to experience life events with hopefulness and a constructive attitude, seems to be present in this group of young adults.

Self-assertion and being able to **express one's real feelings and opinions** without fear, both are goals of more than a few participants. They report that they will be happier, and will experience a higher level of well-being when they can be more assertive with others.

Some implications for practice and policy:

A. **Instead** of preparing adolescents for "emancipation" or "independence", we should be preparing them for community contacts, familial relationships, networks in their friendship or interest groups, or other affiliations which all of the participants have established and maintained in order to manage in society. The formalized cut-off points such as the designation of 16, 18 or 21 years of age as the age at which young people no longer need or deserve support represents a minimal form of parenting, which is not the way independence is achieved in biological or adoptive families.

Instead, we need to design the movement into independent or community-related adult life for each young person, individually, leaving foster or group care; and when a young person needs continued support of a material or emotional nature, it should be provided by the people responsible for working with that young person. In other words, when the agency becomes parent to the child or youth in long-term care, the agency should be a real and a good parent, attempting to meet the young person's needs in a familial way.

B. Creative energy and resourcing needs to be focused on the de-stigmatization of the foster child role. Group programs for youngsters in out-of-home-care, starting early on and being offered closer to adult age, may allow young people to consider and rethink the role of "foster child", what they have to offer other young people in the way of knowledge and role modeling, what they can offer the child caring system from their experiences as consumers, and how they have increased their flexibility and strength through their experiences in care. The system should be aiming for a day when it will be a distinction to have been a foster child.

C. There needs to be stronger advocacy for each youngster in care with respect to the school system. More in terms of achievement should be expected from youngsters in care, and more in terms of working together with the school should be expected from foster parents and social and child care workers, so that children's educational needs are met and each child's opportunities are maximized.

D. Exposure to assertiveness training, Feminism, immersion in the culture of their background and "roots", and possibly, training in reality-based optimistic patterns or habits of thought may all be helpful for children and youth in out-of-home-care. All of these areas of "protective thinking" as well as others (for example, the development of social responsiveness through group process) show promise of helping young people develop resilience, and research based group experiences where these areas are developed with children and youth should be considered for the agenda.

E. Research and practice with children in out-of-home-care must include the young people themselves, their opinions, their experiences and their designs for the systems offering service. Knowledge and practice will be improved by the feedback and creative thinking of the users of the system themselves, but also the consumer is empowered and enriched by the continuing opportunity to consider her or his own experience, to interact with others and communicate about it, and to be effectively contributing to her or his own welfare, as well as the welfare of others.