

2000

# Adolescents and Young Adults in Transition: from Homelessness to Permanent Housing

Tona L. Willand

Follow this and additional works at: <https://idun.augsburg.edu/etd>

 Part of the [Social Work Commons](#)

---

ADOLESCENTS AND YOUNG ADULTS IN TRANSITION:  
FROM HOMELESSNESS TO PERMANENT HOUSING

TONA L. WILLAND

Submitted in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Social Work

AUGSBURG COLLEGE  
MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA

December 15th, 2000



MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK  
AUGSBURG COLLEGE  
MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

This is to certify that the Master's Thesis of:

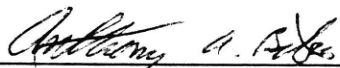
Tona L. Willand

has been approved by the Examining Committee for the thesis requirement for  
the Master of Social Work Degree.

Date of Oral Presentation: September 18<sup>th</sup>, 2000

Thesis Committee:

  
Thesis Advisor, Michael Schock, MSW, Ph.D.

  
Thesis Reader, Anthony Bibus, Ph.D., LISW

  
Thesis Reader, Randy Collins, MSW

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the teachers I have had over the years in the Minneapolis Public Schools, at Minneapolis Community College, especially the Human Services Program, and at Augsburg College. I thank Augsburg College for supporting my education through a transfer merit scholarship during my undergraduate studies, as well. I especially thank the Social Work faculty at Augsburg College in both the undergraduate and graduate programs.

I would like to thank my thesis advisor Micheal Schock, and thesis reader, Tony Bibus (former instructors) for their emphasis on strength-based social work practice. Their, as well as the department's enthusiasm for social work has been a positive influence on my professional development as a social worker. I would particularly like to thank Mike Schock for humoring my thesis-related delays and complaining, and being patient.

I thank my field instructor and thesis reader Randy Collins for mentoring and encouraging me. I would also like to thank Nancy Cusack for her example, and the "emergency shelter for runaway youth" where I did my field placement (which is unnamed to preserve the identity of the research participants...).

I would like to thank my co-workers at Mental Health Resources for being flexible and supportive of my learning needs. Team Two is the best, especially; Terri, Mary Ann, Shawn, Luke, Kim, Janine and Wendy.

I would also like to recognize and thank my former supervisors, Sue Esterbrooks and Doug Perry, for their moral support, mentoring, leadership and for hiring me.

I would like to thank my parents, Jon and Lois Willand, my great aunts, June and Kath Carlson, and my grandmothers, Otevia Willand and Leona Carlson. All have provided me with a long-term vision of higher education, and have planned the financing of my higher education from the time of my infancy. I thank these people, whom I've not seen as much during my years in school, as well as my good friend Randy Raymond.

I would like to thank my fiancé Donald Shope for being supportive, and patient with my anxious / avoidant habits, and any related domestic stress.

Finally, I would like to thank the God of my understanding for keeping my head above water throughout the graduate school process, and blessing me with the opportunities and privileges of higher education. I hope to use my education and skills to the best of my ability, as I am called.

## ABSTRACT

### ADOLESCENTS AND YOUNG ADULTS IN TRANSITION: FROM HOMELESSNESS TO PERMANENT HOUSING

#### A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INQUIRY

TONA L. WILLAND

DECEMBER 15, 2000

This study explores the intrapersonal and environmental factors associated with change in the transition from homelessness to permanent housing from the perspective of young women who have experienced it. Three young women were interviewed face-to-face in semi-structured interviews, using a non-probability convenience sample. Content analysis was used to identify intrapersonal and environmental factors that affected the process of change. Research participants identified goal-directed behavior, persistence and hope as intrapersonal factors in effecting change. Supportive relationships and practical assistance were identified as supportive factors in the transition period. The findings are discussed in relation to research from the literature, and the Transtheoretical Model of Change (Prochaska, DiClemente & Norcross, 1992). Implications for social work practice and future research are discussed.

## Table of Contents

Chapter	Page
1. Introduction.....	1
Background of the Problem.....	1
Purpose of the Study.....	1
The Research Question.....	2
The Research Participants.....	3
Summary.....	3
2. Review of the Literature.....	4
Definition of Terms.....	4
Demographics.....	4
Factors Associated with Homelessness and Running Away.....	5
Factors of Risk and Harm.....	7
Overview of Services and Social Policy.....	9
Barriers in the Service Continuum.....	12
Summary of Research Designs in the Field.....	14
Gaps in the Literature.....	17
3. Theoretical Frameworks of Adolescent Development.....	18
The Transtheoretical Model of Behavior Change.....	23
Application of Theory.....	25
Summary.....	27

Chapter	Page
4. Methodology.....	28
Research Question.....	28
Philosophical Background.....	28
The Role of the Researcher within a Phenomenological Context..	29
Research Design.....	30
Research Participants.....	31
Sample.....	31
Standards for Establishing Quality Research.....	32
Data Collection.....	33
Analysis.....	34
Procedures for Protecting Human Subjects.....	34
Summary.....	35
5. Findings.....	36
The Participants.....	36
The Early Experience of Living without Permanent Housing.....	38
Dilemmas of Being a Homeless Guest.....	39
The Strain of Being Homeless.....	40
The Process of Transition.....	41
The Process of Obtaining Formal Resources.....	42
Working with Caseworkers.....	43
Barriers To Formal Resources.....	44

Chapter	Page
The Challenge of Meeting Personal Goals.....	45
Entering the Independent Living Program.....	46
The Role of Personal Strengths and Actions.....	47
Turning Away form Harmful Influences.....	49
The Role of Supportive Relationships.....	50
Looking to the Future.....	52
Summary.....	52
6. Discussion.....	54
Barriers in the Service Continuum.....	54
Factors of Risk and Harm.....	55
Intrapersonal Factors Associated with Change.....	56
Environmental Factors Associated with Change.....	58
Summary.....	59
7. Implications.....	60
Strengths and Limitations of the Study.....	60
Implications for Social Work Practice.....	60
Implications for Social Policy.....	64
Future Research .....	64
REFERENCES.....	66
APPENDIXES	
A. Augsburg Institutional Review Board Letter.....	72
B. Recruitment Flyer.....	73

C.	Informed Consent.....	74
D.	Interview Guide.....	76



## Chapter One

### Overview

This chapter introduces the background of the problem and need for the study. The purpose and significance of the research are discussed in relation to the overall research question.

#### Background of the Problem

Youth who runaway or become homeless often come from backgrounds and families where they would be considered “at-risk.” Homeless and runaway youth continue to be at-risk when out of their homes or previous environments. Many have trouble meeting their basic needs of food, clothing, shelter and accessing needed services such as: education, housing, health care, or mental and chemical health treatment. Some continue to live on the streets and become a part of the growing homeless population.

#### Purpose of the study

This research study explores the transition from homelessness to permanent housing from the perspective of young people who have experienced this process of change. The purpose of the study is to identify the intrapersonal and environmental factors that contributed to the change experienced by the research participants. The body of existing literature describes familial, environmental and behavioral risk factors that affect the health and well-being of homeless or runaway adolescents. Review of the literature provides little information on young adults’ transition from homelessness to permanent housing, and yields little perspective of young adults on this process of change. This study explores the factors that affected this transition against a backdrop of

theory, relying on the perspective of three formerly homeless young women.

A phenomenological design provides a detailed, information-rich portrayal of the individual participant's experience. The purpose of this research is to learn from the experiences of the research participants so that social workers have more information about the experiences, challenges and supportive factors identified by young adults who have made the transition. This information is useful for social work practice, social policy and future research.

### The Research Question

The overall research question posed by the researcher is two-fold: (a) What is the experience of youth in transition from homelessness to permanent housing; (b) What intrapersonal or environmental factors do the research participants identify as factors affecting change during the period of transition? The following questions were asked of participants: What led you decide to seek permanent housing? Does anything stand out for you about the time when you were homeless? What did you do in past attempts to change your housing situation? Tell me what the barriers or struggles were. What made the difference this time? What actions did you take in order to get into this housing? What challenges did you face? How did you respond to those challenges, or what did you do? What did other people do that helped or contributed to your current situation? Are there people or relationships that stand out in particular? Can you identify any events or things that happened that led to your current situation in permanent housing? Does anything else stand out for you about what helped you get into permanent housing, such as personal strengths or any other factors? In addition, the researcher used techniques to clarify or further explore the responses of participants.

### The Research Participants

The research participants lived in an independent living program for formerly homeless young adults, in an urban setting. The researcher advertised the study at the site through informational flyers. Three young African American women were interested in the study and formed the basis of this research.

### Summary

This chapter described the background and need for the study. The purpose and significance of the research and the overall research question were discussed. In Chapter Two, a review of the literature explores what we currently know about the origins, effects and consequences of living as a homeless young adult. An overview of social policy and service categories is presented. Chapter Three provides an overview of theories of adolescent development and the Transtheoretical Model of Change (Prochaska, DiClemente & Norcross, 1992). In Chapter Four, the research design and methodology of the study are discussed. The findings of the research are discussed in Chapter Five. In Chapter Six, the findings are related to the theoretical overview and research from the literature review. Implications of the research findings and recommendations for the social work profession and future research are discussed in Chapter Seven.

## Chapter Two

### Review of the literature

This chapter provides a review of the literature, focusing on the demographics of homeless and runaway adolescents, factors associated with becoming homeless, and risk factors to the well-being of this population. An overview of social policy and predominant service categories is presented, as well as barriers to service utilization.

#### Definition of Terms

Social work literature and research use different terms to describe and categorize youth that are without shelter. The primary terms used in the literature describe youth as being homeless, throwaway or throwaway, and runaway (Ringwalt, Greene, & Robertson, 1998). The term “runaway” is used to describe a person under the age of eighteen who has left their home or legal residence without the permission of a parent or guardian. A homeless youth or adolescent does not have a place of shelter that provides care and supervision (General Accounting Office, 1989 via National Runaway Switchboard, 1999). The term throwaway or throwaway is used to describe homeless youth who have been rejected, forced to leave or abandoned by their parents, guardians, or by child welfare or juvenile corrections systems (Hier, Korboot, & Schweitzer, 1990; Ringwalt et al., 1998).

#### Demographics of Homeless and Runaway Youth

The exact number of homeless and runaway youth is unknown. Several authors cite the statistics of the 1989 General Accounting Office Report, which estimates there are 500,000 to 1.3 million youth who runaway, or are homeless each year in the United

States (Bass, 1992; Bass, 1995; Kurtz, Jarvis, & Kurtz, 1991; Kurtz, Kurtz, & Jarvis, 1991; Montoya, 1999; Ringwalt, et al., 1998). The U.S. Department of Justice cites the statistics of the GAO (1989) and estimates that there are 200,000 homeless or runaway youth who live on the streets each year in the U.S. (1990).

Based on the GAO report (1989), The National Runaway Switchboard (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services) estimates that of the 500,000 to 1.3 million homeless or runaway youth in the United States, 21% of those youth are homeless and 79% are runaways (1999). Youth between the ages of 13-17 years old account for 95% of the total estimated number of runaway youth, and 89% of the homeless youth. Male youth represent the majority of homeless youth (55%) and female youth represent the majority (65%) of runaways. The majority of homeless (60%) and runaway youth (70%) were described as Caucasian. Twenty-five percent of homeless youth and 17% of runaway youth were described as Black. Hispanic and Other accounted for 15% of homeless youth and 13% of runaway youth respectively (National Runaway Switchboard, 1999).

African American and Native American youth were found to be disproportionately represented among research participants in a survey of homeless and runaway youth in Minnesota (Wilder, 1995). Kurtz, Jarvis & Kurtz (1991) also found that African American youth were disproportionately represented in the homeless youth population in their research.

#### Factors Associated with Homelessness and Running Away

Youth have different motivations and life circumstances for running away or becoming homeless. Review of the literature illustrates a pattern of multiple problems

within the youth's family of origin, household or environment (Bass, 1995; Bass, 1992; Family and Youth Services Bureau, 1995; Kurtz, Jarvis, & Kurtz, 1991; Kurtz, Kurtz, & Jarvis, 1991; Robertson, 1991; & Steinmetz, 1999). Several common factors have been associated with running away, including; the escape from parental control, family conflict, conflict with institutional settings, trying to get away from the physical, sexual or substance abuse of family members, and feeling unwanted by their parents or caretakers (Adams, 1991; Bass, 1992; FYSB, 1995; Kurtz, Jarvis, & Kurtz, 1991; Robertson, 1991; Steinmetz, 1999). The National Association of Social Workers (NASW, 1992) and the Family and Youth Services Bureau (FYSB, U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services) found that runaway and homeless youth were more likely to have come from families living in poverty or with long-term financial stressors (1995).

In a national study of homeless and runaway youth, the NASW found that a parent had abused more than two-thirds of youth in shelter (1992). A quarter of those youth had been abused by another family member, had a parent with substance abuse issues, and had been in foster care the previous year (Bass, 1992). The frequency of running away has been strongly associated with reported violence and abuse as reasons youth leave their homes (Kurtz, Kurtz, & Jarvis, 1991; Simons & Whitbeck, 1991,). Ringwalt et al. (1998) found that family histories of neglect, abuse, parental substance abuse, and prior involvement with child welfare services were more likely in throwaway youth as compared to other runaway or homeless youth. Runaway adolescents and their parent/caretakers reported high levels of family violence, sexual abuse, and low levels of parental monitoring and warmth in a study by Whitbeck, Hoyt, and Ackley (1997). The Wilder Foundation (1994) found that homeless youth are three times more likely to have

been physically or sexually abused, when compared with eleven to seventeen year olds from the general population.

Homeless and runaway youth often have historical placements in institutional settings, including; foster care, jail, juvenile detention, group homes, and psychiatric or mental hospitals (FYSB, 1995). Several researchers support the finding that homeless and runaway youth have historical placements in institutional settings (Bass, 1992; Ringwalt et al., 1998; & Wilder, 1994). The Wilder Research Center (1994) found that 60% of homeless youth have been in a residential placement, and 30% have spent at least one night in a correctional facility prior to becoming homeless. The NASW study (1992) found that 20% of youth arriving at emergency shelters came from foster homes or group homes.

#### Factors of Risk and Harm

Homeless and runaway youth are at risk of physical or sexual victimization, substance abuse, unprotected sexual activity, suicide, emotional problems, prostitution or sexual exploitation and engaging in illegal activities (Bass, 1992; FYSB, 1995; Steinmetz, 1999). Sexual abuse and sexual victimization have been found to be highly related to suicide attempts among homeless and runaway adolescents (Yoder, Hoyt, & Whitbeck, 1998, Kurtz, Kurtz, & Jarvis, 1991). Youth with histories of sexual abuse are more likely to have more sexual partners, use alcohol and drugs, and are less likely to have protected sex (Rotheram-Borus, Mahler, Koopman, & Langabeer, 1996). Victims of sexual abuse were found to report more personal problems than family problems and blame themselves, when compared to physically abused youth, in a study by Kurtz, Jarvis & Kurtz (1991). Mahler et al. (1996) found that males who had been abused before age

thirteen had more sexual partners compared with peers who have no history of abuse. In addition, males abused after the age of thirteen were more likely to have worked as sex workers. Youth who have been both sexually and physically abused were found to suffer more family and personal problems (low self-esteem, depression, and suicide attempts) than non-abused peers and to have been on run longer than non-abused peers (Kurtz, Jarvis, & Kurtz, 1991).

Homeless adolescents are at high risk for mental health and substance abuse problems and are less likely to receive treatment services (Bass, 1995; Ennet, Bailey, & Federman, 1999; FYSB, 1995; Robertson, 1991; Steinmetz, 1999). The Family and Youth Services Bureau reports that substance abuse is related to increased risk factors for physical and sexual victimization (1995). Thrownaway youth reported a greater frequency of high-risk behaviors such as drug use, suicide attempts, intravenous drug use, and participating in criminal activities in the study by Ringwalt, et al. (1998). Yoder et al., (1998) found that one quarter of 297 youth surveyed had attempted suicide in the last year, and over one half experienced suicidal ideation. Hier et al., (1990) found that homeless youth had higher levels of depression compared with adolescent norms, and that throwaway youth had higher levels of depression than runaway youth.

Homeless and runaway youth often have difficulty obtaining adequate housing, food and income, which can contribute to youth becoming involved in high-risk enterprises to make money, such as prostitution, drug dealing other illegal activities, and sleeping in places not intended for habitation (Bass, 1992; Robertson, 1991; FYSB, 1995). Lack of affordable housing and challenges related to non-legal status of minor youth are additional barriers faced by homeless youth (Robertson, 1991). The 1992 study



by the NASW (Bass, 1992) found that over 50% of runaway and homeless youths had problems in school. Many youth have had difficulty and interruptions in their education (Robertson, 1991; Steinmetz, 1999).

Homeless and runaway youth are also at high risk for HIV infection and other sexually transmitted diseases, and have little access to or numerous barriers to receiving health care (Bass, 1995; Ennet et al., 1999; FYSB, 1995; Robertson, 1991; Unger, Kipke, Simon, Montgomery, & Johnson, 1997; Steinmetz, 1999). Adolescent females who have been homeless are at greater risk of becoming pregnant than adolescents in households (Greene, Ringwalt, & Christopher, 1998). In a nationwide study comparing homeless and runaway adolescent females, Greene et al. (1998) found: A 48% lifetime pregnancy rate in youth living on the streets, a 33% lifetime pregnancy rate in youth living in shelters, compared with a 10% lifetime pregnancy rate in adolescent females living in households. In their study of high-risk behaviors of homeless and runaway youth, Bailey, Camlin, & Ennett (1998) found that being female, exhibiting symptoms of drug dependency, longer histories of homelessness and sexual activity were associated with nonuse of condoms.

#### Overview of Services and Social Policy

Societal attitudes and social policy have historically reflected a perception that runaway and homeless adolescents are deviant or criminal, misbehaving or rejecting parental authority (Bass, 1992). The Runaway Youth Act was passed as part of The Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974, in response to the demands of law enforcement to apprehend increasing numbers of runaway youth who were living on the streets (FYSB, 1994). The act provides funding for federal grant programs serving

runaway and homeless youth. The Act was amended in 1988 to include funding for drug education and prevention through the Runaway Youth Program. The act also provides funding for transitional housing and independent living services for older adolescents (Bass, 1995; FYSB, 1995).

The Runaway Youth Act currently funds several programs designed to provide safety, prevent harm and meet the basic needs and of homeless and runaway adolescents, while preventing long-term dependency on social service systems, homelessness and involvement with the criminal justice system (FYSB, 1995). The Family and Youth Services Bureau (1998) reports that 60,000 runaway and homeless youth are served by 400 agencies receiving \$62 million dollars in funding from the act on an annual basis. Services are designed to prevent common risk factors of homeless and runaway youth, including; sexual exploitation, physical victimization, substance abuse, mental illness, and diseases or pregnancy as a result of unprotected sexual activity (FYSB, 1995). Predominate service models funded by federal grant programs include emergency shelter, crisis intervention and family reunification services. Outreach services are funded to provide services to homeless youth to prevent harm through education and counseling. Transitional housing with supportive services is funded to promote the skills needed for independent living (Bass, 1992; General Accounting Office, 1989; Montoya, 1999).

The Basic Center Program provides runaway youth with emergency shelter for up to 15 days. Services are designed to provide crisis intervention and basic needs. Emphasis is placed on family reunification or locating alternative placement, with the intention of avoiding future involvement with the criminal justice or child welfare system (FYSB, 1998; Bass, 1992). The Basic Center Program funded 340 shelters nationally in

the fiscal year of 1998 (Montoya, 1999). The NASW found that 50% of youth who stayed in emergency shelters returned to their parents homes (Bass, 1992). The General Accounting Office (1989) of the U.S. Government found that approximately one third of homeless youth who used federally funded shelters returned to their parents and another third moved to other institutional settings.

The Transitional Living Program provides grants to community-based agencies that provide supervised living situations, and supportive services to homeless youth between the ages of 16-21, who are unable to return to their homes. The Family and Youth Services Bureau provided funding to 75 transitional living programs in the fiscal year of 1998 (Montoya, 1999). Services are designed to promote self-sufficiency and prevent future involvement with the criminal justice system, long-term use of social service or governmental aid programs, and homelessness (Bass, 1992; Family & Youth Services Bureau, 1998). Montoya (1999) reports that 74% of youth in transitional living programs were discharged to stable housing and 78% of youth in transitional living programs were employed.

The Street Outreach Program provides counseling, education and support to runaway and homeless youth through a youth development perspective (Bass, 1992). Services are designed to be youth-centered, culturally sensitive and accessible to youth at risk of sexual exploitation on the streets (Montoya, 1999; FYSB, 1998).

The National Support Systems for Youth incorporate several programs addressing homeless and runaway youth. The National Runaway Switchboard provides information and referral to youth and families affected by homelessness or runaway youth through a central telecommunications network. The National Clearinghouse on Families and Youth

provides information on services and social policy. The Regional Training and Technical Assistance Network provides training to agencies receiving federal grants to serve the homeless and runaway youth population. In the fiscal year of 1998, these programs served 75,000 youth. Of those youth; 20,000 reported experiencing physical abuse in their family household, 14,000 reported neglect, 9,000 reported sexual abuse, 13% reported attempting suicide, and 47% reported a household member was using alcohol or drugs (Montoya, 1999).

Through the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1988 (P.L. 100-690), Congress authorized research on the relationship between familial substance abuse, youth substance abuse and suicide attempts among runaway and homeless youth (FYSB, 1998). The Family and Youth Services Bureau designed the study and surveyed 7,736 youth nation-wide, including those in shelters, on the street and in households (FYSB, 1998). Based upon the study results, The FYSB presented recommendations to Congress that the outreach and transitional housing programs be expanded (1995). The Bureau further advised Congress that public education is needed about the reasons youth leave home, and recommended that services for families, substance abuse and teenage pregnancy be expanded to meet the needs of the homeless and runaway youth population.

#### Barriers in the Service Continuum

Runaway and homeless youth face difficulties accessing housing and shelter (Bass, 1992; deAnda, 1995; Robertson, 1991; Wilder, 1994). Access to short-term housing is limited by the availability of emergency shelter and transitional housing programs, and a shortage of affordable housing (Bass, 1992; deAnda, 1995; FYSB, 1995; FYSB, 1998; Robertson, 1991; Wilder, 1994). The Wilder Foundation (1994) found that

adolescents who are homeless and separate from their legal guardians are often refused services at homeless shelters serving adults because of their status as minors, and are less likely to obtain benefits from the government when compared with homeless young adults. Robertson (1991) also found that the non-legal status of minor youth presented as an additional barrier to housing. Age is also a factor of eligibility for transitional housing programs funded by the federal government (GAO, 1989), available to sixteen through twenty-one year old persons.

Few short-term housing programs are available in the private sector, and overall services are often inadequately funded or staffed (FYSB, 1995). Emergency shelters serve only a small percentage of runaway and homeless youth (de Anda, 1995). Estimates of the number of homeless and runaway youth greatly outnumber data on the number of youth served (GAO, 1989). The Family and Youth Services Bureau reports that it services 60,000 runaway and homeless youth on an annual basis (1998). Montoya (1999) stated that 70,000 homeless and runaway youth were served by federally funded programs in 1998, and 60% of those in shelters returned to their family home, while the GAO (1989) estimates there are 500,000 to 1.3 million homeless and runaway youth in the U.S. The Basic Center program funds limited shelter stays of 15 days and emphasizes family reunification (GAO, 1989). Youth whose needs are not met by family reunification face barriers related to the availability of transitional housing programs (Bass, 1992; FYSB, 1998).

Based upon their research, the Family and Youth Services Bureau recommended that Congress increase funding for additional transitional housing programs and extend the service period from 90 days to 18 months, in order to serve the

needs of homeless and runaway youth (FYBSB, 1995). Federal funding of emergency shelter and transitional housing programs was originally intended to provide a short-term service to youth, reunify families or prepare the youth for independent living.

The Family and Youth Services Bureau found that youth may choose to avoid emergency shelter due to their concerns about previous institutional placements or the requirement that their parents be notified when youth enter an emergency shelter. In addition the Bureau found that two-week shelter stays may not be an adequate amount of time to address the needs of runaway youth (1995). This recommendation supports the NASW findings that many youth have long-term problems and needs which cannot be adequately addressed through short-term service relationships, or be resolved by the time the youth turns eighteen (Bass, 1992). Bass (1995) reports that the need for long-term supports is challenging the existing child welfare services, juvenile justice and other intervening systems that have not adequately helped youth and families solve their problems historically.

#### Summary of Research Designs in the Field

Review of the literature appears to present a range of qualitative and quantitative research designs that include exploratory, descriptive, and explanatory foci. The quality of research findings about the homeless and runaway youth population varies from limited to strong, based upon; the research design, sampling methods, the parameters and representativeness of samples, and generalizations that can be made from the studies to the greater population of homeless and runaway youth. Research to date appears to be guided by a desire for improved knowledge about the population and their needs for the purposes of social policy, program development and informed practice. The works of

Kurtz et al. (1991), Wilder (1994), FYSB (1995) and NASW (1995) are reviewed to provide the reader with examples of research studies included in this thesis.

Kurtz et al. (1991) compared characteristics of homeless and non-homeless youth that used shelter-based services in 8 Southeastern states over a 12 month period (N=3,519). Kurtz et al. analyzed data from standardized assessment forms completed during shelter intakes, and used a chi-square test to test the significance between the two groups (1991). All clients that met the federal definition of homelessness were included in the research. Strengths of this research include; the sampling method used, the collection of data for a period of 12 months, statistical analysis from aggregate data, and the larger parameters of the study. These factors may increase the likelihood of a representative sample and findings, with greater generalizability among the greater population of homeless youth. The work of Kurtz et al. has been cited by many peers in the field and published in several professional journals.

The Wilder Research Center (1994) surveyed 114 homeless youth who were involved with service providers on one particular night throughout the state of Minnesota. Through purposive sampling, the research design provided descriptive information about the population and estimated the total number of homeless youth in the state. Wilder multiplied the total number of youth by a percentage used by the U.S. Government (2.7) to account for youth who were either doubled up with other persons, or were not involved with service providers to increase the accuracy of the estimated number of unaccompanied minors. Strengths of this design include the detailed information gathered through in-person interviews, and measures to correct for possible limits in estimating the total population. The research findings are more likely to be representative of youth

involved with service providers in the state of Minnesota, and less generalizable to the overall population of homeless youth.

NASW (1995) surveyed 360 agencies that provide basic shelter, crisis services, and transitional or housing services to homeless and runaway youth. A total of 169 providers responded and provided data about homeless and runaway youth that received services from the respective agencies surveyed. Strengths of this research include; the research design and pre-testing of detailed surveys by a technical advisory panel of national experts on the population. Also, NASW took measures to account for questions not answered by respondents (multiplication of the average response by percentage) for the purposes of obtaining nationally representative data. Limits of this research include; a greater emphasis on services provided to youth from the perspective of service providers, which may include a social desirability bias, or the data may not be representative of the youth's experiences with and beyond such service involvement.

FYSB (1995) surveyed youth throughout the nation, including youth in shelters, living on the streets, and in households. The research design included purposive sampling of homeless and runaway youth and youth in households, and was designed to measure; (a) the prevalence of high risk behaviors among homeless, runaway and throwaway youth (including drug use, suicide attempts and others), (b) the relationship between substance in youth and in their families, and between substance abuse and high risk behaviors among youth, and (c) the proportion of youth with historical involvement and access to preventative services or treatment. The shelter sample (N=640) and survey of youth in households (N=6,496) was nationally representative by design. The street sample was not nationally representative. The FYSB reports that the street sample was



the first multi-city sample. Strengths of this study include the breadth and volume of data gathered, and the nationally representative samples. In addition, the data is more likely to be generalizable beyond the sample's parameters.

#### Gaps in the Literature

Research about the period of transition between being homeless and obtaining permanent housing focuses on risk factors experienced by youth. Information from the perspective of young adults is scant, as is information about factors that are associated with change. This phenomenological study will provide information about the transition from homelessness of young adults through in-depth interviewing with formerly homeless young adults.

## Chapter Three

### Theoretical Frameworks of Adolescent Development

Adolescence is a term to describe the stage of development between childhood and adulthood when people go through the physical changes of puberty, or sexual maturity (deAnda, 1995). Adolescence is typically broken down into early adolescence, between the ages of ten to fifteen and late adolescence, from sixteen to twenty two years of age (Ashford, Lecroy, & Lortie, 1997). In addition to the physiological changes occurring in adolescence, adolescents are experiencing processes of psychological, cognitive, moral, social and emotional development (deAnda, 1995; Ashford et al., 1997).

Biological theories of adolescent development emphasize the process of puberty, which describes the sexual maturity of adolescents, enabling them to reproduce. Ashford et al. (1997) describe the bio-physical dimension of growth and development during the adolescent years, based upon widely accepted empirical research. Puberty includes a combination of a growth spurt, developing physical maturity and the development of secondary sexual characteristics, influenced by endocrine or hormonal changes in the body. By the end of puberty, adolescents appear adult-like in size, are able to reproduce human offspring, have experienced endocrine or hormonal changes and have asynchrony among body parts.

Psychosexual stages of development have been the predominate theories used historically to explain the changes occurring in adolescence (Ashford et al., 1997). Psychosexual theories focus on stages of sexual development, resolution of early childhood and early adult sexual conflicts (deAnda, 1995; Seltzer, 1982). Freud's stages of psychosexual development place the adolescent in the genital or puberty stage,

focusing on intercourse and the task of developing intimate relationships

(Ashford et al., 1997).

Cognitive developmental theories built upon the psychosexual stage theories and addressed the age-related development of logical thought processes (Steinmetz, 1999).

Major theorist Jean Piaget describes the structures of adolescents' cognitive development in the formal operations stage. (Ashford et al., 1997). Formal operations include the ability of the adolescent to use hypothetical-deductive reasoning, to accommodate new information and expand on their pre-existing knowledge (Ashford et al., 1997; Steinmetz, 1999). In this stage adolescents are able to think about themselves and their thoughts, the future and think abstractly about reference groups (Ashford et al., 1997; Steinmetz, 1999).

Theories of adolescent moral development describe the development of ethical or moral judgement in stages of growth (Steinmetz, 1999). Moral development is partially addressed within general theories of adolescent development (Erickson, 1950). Kohlberg and Gilligan are major theorists who expanded on existing models of moral development (in Ashford et al., 1997). Lawrence Kohlberg's stages of moral development describe three orientations of morality which are influenced by the environment, rather than the age of the individual. In the pre-conventional stage, punishment and reward are the guiding factors in decisions of morality. In the conventional stage, conformity to peer norms is predominant. In the final stage of Postconventional reasoning, individual behavior is based upon moral principles of right and wrong in relation to law and conscience (Craig, 1992).

Carol Gilligan developed her perspective of women's stages moral development in

response to her concerns of inherent gender bias in Kohlberg's theory of moral development, noting that women often did not reach the final stage of development in Kohlberg's stage model (Ashford et al., 1997). Gilligan critiques Kohlberg's theory as being male-oriented, focusing on justice and abstract concepts of right and wrong (Ashford et al., 1997; Steinmetz, 1999). Her critique of traditional theory is based on the gender differences related to socialization, identity development and the importance of caring and relationships with others (Steinmetz, 1999). Gilligan proposes that both female identity, and the female perspective of decision-making emphasize the individual's connection or relationship with other people and caring as a major influence in female moral or ethical development (Ashford et al., 1997; Steinmetz, 1999).

In the first stage of Gilligan's model, the interest of the individual is the primary factor in situational decision-making or morality (Ashford et al., 1997). In the second stage, the interests and welfare of others are the primary factors in decision-making. In the third stage, avoiding harm and identifying the best interest of the individual and others involved are equal factors in ethical decision-making (Ashford et al., 1997).

Psychosocial theories of development are based on Freud's psychosexual theory of development but incorporate social and cultural considerations in individual development (deAnda, 1995). Eric Erickson has been an influential theorist in psychosocial theory. Erickson's psychosocial theory of development addresses the shaping of the individual personality in eight phases of development throughout the lifespan. Erickson's stages of psychosocial development grew out of and corresponded with Freud's psychosexual stages of development but incorporate the impact of the sociocultural context of individual development, (deAnda, 1995). The stages occur in order and build upon one

another. Each stage has a crisis or conflict to resolve that contributes to successful healthy development (Waterman et al., 1991). When the conflict is resolved in a way that is comfortable and successful, the individual seeks to maintain the outcome. When the conflict is unresolved, the individual is uncomfortable and develops avoidant or defensive behaviors. Healthy individuals are not expected to resolve all conflicts entirely, but are expected to have more successful resolutions than unresolved conflicts or tasks (Waterman et al., 1991).

Identity vs. Identity confusion is the fifth stage of development, spanning the adolescent years. Adolescents' task is to achieve and choose their own identities and roles, and then plan for their future as a result of their own inner processes, reflection and critical thinking (Erickson, 1950). Identity achievement involves the development and commitment to a value or belief system, rather than accepting imposed beliefs from their parents or others (Erickson, 1950). Identity often includes philosophical, spiritual or religious beliefs, political beliefs, gender roles and sexuality, ethnicity, and career or vocational plans (Waterman et al., 1991). To accomplish identity, the adolescent must reflect on what their identity was, what it is now, and what they want it to be (Seltzer, 1982). This identity, once achieved, is relatively stable over time and often incorporates the cultural and learned-family values of the individual (Erickson, 1950). The main role that identity fulfills in adult development is allowing the young adult to risk their identity and open themselves to intimate friendships and committed relationships with partners (Erickson, 1950).

An identity crisis may occur in adolescence in response to the increasing social expectations of adult-like behavior and rapid physical and emotional changes occurring

in puberty (Schaie & Willis, 1986). Accepting the ideas, roles or values of parents or others without reflection may result in identity foreclosure (Erickson, 1950; Steinmetz, 1999).

Marcia (1966) identified four states of adolescent identity development, which build upon Erickson's stages of psychosocial development (in Ashford et al., 1997). In the first stage of identity diffusion, the adolescent has not established their values, future plans or belief systems and has not experienced a crisis. In second stage of identity foreclosure, adolescents have made commitments to their future plans and have developed belief and value systems, but have not explored independent alternatives or experienced a crisis. Identity moratorium is the third stage, describing adolescents' ability to think critically and independently about their belief systems and future plans, while simultaneously experiencing crisis. In identity achievement, adolescents have resolved their crisis and have made commitments to chosen belief systems, future plans and personal values (i.e. vocation, religion, and sexual orientation).

Eric Erickson's psychosocial stage of identity vs. identity confusion addresses past, present and future sense of identity. This identity formation or task incorporates the development of the individual belief system, including spiritual beliefs and values. This stage prepares the adolescent for identifying occupational or vocational plans, choosing relationships with others, and continued adult development.

Developmental theories describe the process of growth during the adolescent years, including; psychological, cognitive, moral, social and emotional development. A review of developmental theory is included to provide a framework for understanding any parallel processes in the stories of participants. In addition, this research focuses on several dimensions of change related to homelessness, from an

individual and environmental perspective. An additional theory about the process of change is included, describing experiential and behavioral factors involved with change.

### The Transtheoretical Model of Change

Prochaska, DiClemente, & Norcross (1992) developed the transtheoretical model of change, alternately termed the stages of change model. The model has become influential in health psychology and been applied to a variety of health conditions involving individual behavior modification including addiction, smoking cessation, exercise, dietary changes and weight loss (Green, et al., 1999; Prochaska et al., 1992). The three dimensional model includes the stages of change, the processes of change, and dependent variables of intentional behavior change (Green, Rossi, Velicer, Fava, & Prochaska, 1999). Individuals must complete each stage to reach the next, but may spiral backwards to previous stages related to intentional change (Prochaska et al., 1992).

The transtheoretical model suggests that a common set of experiential and behavioral change processes occur throughout the stages of change and provide an understanding of the covert and overt activities that change the intention, behavior or attitude of the individual (Green et al, 1999; Prochaska et al., 1992).

The dependent variable dimension includes the decisional-balance, behavior and self-efficacy or temptation of the individual (Green et al., 1999). The self-efficacy construct was adapted from the self-efficacy theory of Bandura (1977). Self-efficacy refers to an individual's sense of confidence that they have the ability to change or engage in a specific behavior, or impact an outcome through their actions (Cancer Prevention Research Center, 2000; Green et al., 1999). Decisional-balance refers to the individual perception of the positive or negative impact of a specific behavior. Decision-balance and self-efficacy are outcome variables that predict movement from one stage to the next (Green et al., 1999).

Precontemplation is the first stage of behavior change. Individuals in this stage have not made a decision to change their situation within the next six months or near

future. In addition, individuals may vary in their perception of having a problematic behavior or in their desire to change the behavior (Prochaska, et. al., 1992).

Contemplation is the second stage of the transtheoretical model. Individuals in the contemplation stage believe that they have a problem and want to change it in the near future, defined as within the next six months, but they have not committed to changing through their own actions (Prochaska et al., 1992). Individuals may have considered the benefits or consequences of their behavior and the solution required through individual action (Prochaska, et al., 1992). Prochaska et al. (1992) found that individuals who were more conscious of the nature of their problems, and whose problems were central to their identity were more likely to reevaluate their problems.

During the pre-contemplative and contemplative stages, individuals experience the change processes of consciousness raising, emotional arousal (dramatic relief) and environmental reevaluation (Prochaska et al., 1992). Consciousness-raising involves increased awareness of the problem and its impact on the individual. Dramatic relief involves expression of the emotional impact of the problem in relation to self (Prochaska et al., 1992). Environmental awareness involves the individual perception of the impact of their problem in their social and physical environment (Brown, 1999; Cancer Prevention Research Center, 2000; Prochaska et al., 1992). Individuals in the stage of contemplation also engage in the process of self re-evaluation. Self re-evaluation involves reflection of individual feelings, thoughts and values about the problem (Cancer Prevention Research Center, 2000).

Preparation is the third stage in which the individual intends to change the behavior within the next month, has tried unsuccessfully to change the behavior in the last year, but have not yet identified the specific actions or solution to address the problem (Prochaska et al., 1992). Individuals develop a commitment to change the behavior and have begun to make small changes (Prochaska et al, 1992). Self-liberation is the process of change which enables the individual to believe in their ability to change



both the problem and their life, and fosters a commitment to taking action to change the problem (Prochaska et al., 1992). This process of change moves individuals from preparation to action and helps sustain the individual in the action stage (Green et al., 1992; Prochaska et al., 1992).

Action is the fourth stage of change, characterized by a specific change in the outcome of the desired behavior for a period of one day to six months, and the ongoing actions of the individual intended to change their identified problem (Prochaska et al., 1992). Action requires a commitment of both time and energy to be sustained. Accepting and utilizing social support from others helps the individual in their attempts to change the problem behavior. The use of social support is known as the process of helping relationships (Cancer Prevention Research Center, 2000). Helping relationships benefit individuals in all stages of change but often help the individual cope with the stress involved in the stage of action (Cancer Prevention Research Center, 2000; Prochaska et al., 1992). Reinforcement management is a process of receiving rewards from others or the individual for the changes made (Cancer Prevention Research Center, 2000; Prochaska et al., 1992). The processes of counter-conditioning and interpersonal systems control (or stimulus control) enable the individual to alter their environments or behaviors to avoid activities, actions or attitudes which support the problem behavior or problem and respond alternately (Cancer Prevention Research Center, 2000; Prochaska et al., 1992).

Maintenance is the fifth stage of change, in which the individual continues to take action to sustain the changes they have made and prevent the re-emergence of the presenting problem. Individuals in the fifth stage have been able to maintain the change in their behavior for at least six months.

#### Application of Theory

The nature of the study and research question involve the variables that impacted a transition from a state of being homeless to the achievement of permanent housing. This

research asks participants to identify intrapersonal and environmental variables that they perceive as contributed to their transition process. The questions of the phenomenological design may incorporate individual characteristics, issues of identity, and perceptions of self-efficacy as it relates to the individual contribution to change and behaviors supporting a successful transition.

The Transtheoretical Model of Change provides a framework for understanding the individual's relationship to change, incorporating a detailed stage model and the processes involved with transition. This theory is useful for understanding the intrapersonal and environmental factors associated with change, as we will see in this study.

The themes and information provided by participants in the study may reflect issues related to identity development, as illustrated in psychosocial models. Identity achievement indicates that young adults are able to view the future with confidence, self-assurance, have the ability to experiment and be active in learning new skills. As a result, young adults are able to review their lives and determine their own values, relationships and vocation. The participants are in the process of making plans for independent living; all work or go to school, which is the main task of the identity stage of psychosocial development. Participant's reactions and responses may be viewed in the context of psychosocial stages of development.

A strength of the theories in this framework are their application to the study's exploration of intrapersonal factors associated with change. Inherent in the focus of my research is the assumption that change will be associated with both intrapersonal and environmental factors. This research incorporates a dual perspective, viewing the individual within an environmental context. The theories in this framework incorporate few environmental components. The phenomenological design of the study and questions

asked of participants are intended to provide a detailed exploration of the personal and environmental factors associated with change.

### Summary

Theoretical models of adolescent development are reviewed, focusing on psychosocial life stage models. The transtheoretical model of change is described. Application of the theoretical framework to the research is discussed. In the next chapter, the research design and methodology are discussed.

## Chapter Four

### Methodology

In this chapter, I describe the research question, philosophical background of the research design and methodology of the study. The research participants, sample, standards for establishing quality research, data collection, and analysis are discussed.

#### Research Question

The purpose of the study is to understand the experience of young adults in transition from homelessness to permanent housing and discover the intrapersonal and environmental factors associated with change during the transition period, from the perspective of the participants.

#### Philosophical Background

The primary objective of phenomenological research is to investigate and describe the conscious experience of individuals in a manner which limits the preconceptions and presuppositions of the researcher (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2000). In such research, the scientist seeks to elicit personal and descriptive information from the participant about the story and meaning associated with the topic of inquiry.

The methodological concept of phenomenology was conceived by the German philosopher, Martin Heidegger in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Heidegger developed his concept of phenomenology from the Greek concepts of phainomenon and logos, which together mean "to let that which shows itself be seen from itself in the very way in which it shows itself from itself" (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2000).

Phenomenological research is guided by a principle used by Heidegger, called "verstehen", a German term which seeks an understanding of the individual's perspective

or reality, feelings, and meaning (Ruben & Babie, 1997). Verstehen is a component of experiential knowledge, used for interpretation of individual or collective reality. The creation of individual meaning through interpretation of one's experiences in the world illustrates another form of the concept of verstehen (Schutz, 1967). Incorporating verstehen in my methodological concept of inquiry, I will attempt to learn about the meaning and reality of the of the individual participants' experience and through a process of analysis, discover collective life experiences during the period of time in which the women in this study experience change in their lives and living situations.

#### The Role of the Researcher within a Phenomenological Context

I had personal interest about the population because of my parallel experience as a family-counseling intern in an emergency shelter for runaway youth. The youth I worked with at the internship were often in crisis and struggling with the challenges of being a runaway. The agency also had programs for youth who were in transition from being homeless, which peaked my curiosity about the changes that happened in their lives.

I am a twenty-six year old, Caucasian female from a middle class background. In addition, I am a student, who approached young women that I did not know and asked them to open themselves up and volunteer personal information to a stranger, for the purposes of research. These factors have the potential to influence the comfort, dynamics, and trust level between the researcher and participants because of the societal power differences in our cultural backgrounds, socio-economic status, and roles within the study.

To help the participants understand the goals of this research and my motivation, I explained the purpose of the research and my personal interest in the research topic for

educational purposes. I spent up to 90 minutes with each participant, and engaged them in a discussion about their experiences. I considered the participants as experts in this area, and assumed that their stories and experiences incorporated the phenomena I sought to learn about in the study.

### Research Design

I interviewed participants in face-to-face, semi-structured interviews using open-ended questions and prompts from an interview guide. The interview guide was designed to elicit a narrative and reflective response to the overall research question. I utilized reflective listening skills and engagement techniques (i.e. building rapport, verbal following skills, active listening), to make the participants feel comfortable telling their story, and elaborate on topics from the conversation. Interviews lasted between 60 to 90 minutes in duration and were audiotaped in their entirety and transcribed into a written record.

The qualitative, phenomenological interview guide prompts participants to tell their personal story. This can result in a detailed, information-rich portrayal of individual experience, which is not constrained by predetermined categories of analysis. The findings may present new insights for social work practice, such as supportive factors or the role of personal strengths in practice with the study population, or provide areas for further exploration. The findings in phenomenological research cannot be generalized beyond the parameters of the individual participants because the sample is small and selected. Variables are not manipulated or tested with control groups. The research design is subjective in nature.

### Research Participants

The research participants are between the ages of eighteen to twenty-one, and live in an independent living program set in a subsidized apartment building for young adults who have previously been homeless. All three participants are African American and female, work at least part time, and are considered poor according to federal poverty guidelines.

### Sample

The particular independent living program was selected because I was involved with the non-profit agency that runs the program, and had knowledge about the population type involved in the program. I was an intern at another location and had no contact with study participants prior to the research. I considered the age of program residents and their ability to consent to participate in research. By nature of their participation in a independent living program for people who have been homeless, I knew the participants had been homeless at one time.

I approached staff members of the independent living program and explained the purpose and method of the study. Research participants were recruited by voluntary participation through their response to fliers describing the research, which were posted in the general areas of the apartment building. This approach is considered non-purposeful, convenience sampling.

Participants contacted the researcher to indicate their interest in the study. Two of the participants left telephone messages indicating their interest in participating. The other participant approached me at the research site, expressing an interest in the study. I reviewed the purpose and methods of the study with all of the participants. We discussed

locations for the interview, which struck a balance between a convenient and comfortable atmosphere that was conducive to interviewing. Two participants chose to be interviewed in their apartments, the third participant chose to be interviewed in a lounge within the independent living program. Participants were given an honorarium in the form of a \$10.00 gift certificate, prior to the interview, in recognition of their contribution.

#### Standards for Establishing Quality Research

My research was guided by the phenomenological principle of “*verstehen*”, or to use the themes and information from participants in the context of which they were given (Ruben et al., 1997). I incorporated a number of strategies in the design to help guide the study in a manner that is consistent with the spirit of phenomenological research.

I utilized reflective listening skills and attempted to clarify my understanding of what the participant meant, when I felt uncertain of my understanding. Individual participants’ responses varied to the open-ended questions, but the use of a subject guide assisted me to gather information from similar subject areas.

The written transcripts of the interviews provided me with a historical narrative of the participants’ responses to the research questions. I reviewed the transcripts multiple times and used direct quotes from participants in developing my coding system, themes and conclusions.

I sought the perspective of other researchers to review my work, and compare the conclusions and themes that I drew from the interviews, with the responses and meaning given by the participants. I utilized peer de-briefing to review the transcripts and the themes of my content analysis in order to receive feedback and an outsider perspective of objectivity. Two fellow students in the masters program, a thesis reader and my faculty



advisor reviewed the transcripts of the interviews. The de-briefing group compared their understanding of the interviews with the results of my content analysis, coding system and findings. The debriefing group provided me with feedback related to the accuracy or congruency of my work. In addition, I used direct quotes from the participants in reporting the findings of the study. This provides the reader with examples or a context to place the themes within the findings, and gives voice to the participants in the research report.

### Data Collection

I used a qualitative, phenomenological research method to gather information through in-depth, open-ended, semi-structured interviews. An interview guide that included the following questions and general interviewing skills were used to elicit individual participants' responses to the overall research question: What led you decide to seek permanent housing? Does anything stand out for you about the time when you were homeless? What did you do in past attempts to change your housing situation? Tell me what the barriers or struggles were. What made the difference this time? What actions did you take in order to get into this housing? What challenges did you face? How did you respond to those challenges, or what did you do? What did other people do that helped or contributed to your current situation? Are there people or relationships that stand out in particular? Can you identify any events or things that happened that led to your current situation in permanent housing? Does anything else stand out for you about what helped you get into permanent housing, such as personal strengths or any other factors?

Interviews were between 60-90 minutes and were audiotaped in their entirety and then transcribed into a written record.

### Analysis

This study does not have a hypothesis as it is qualitative and exploratory, but looked for patterns and common themes and issues identified by the participants. The researcher tape-recorded the interviews and had transcripts prepared for evaluation of the data. The researcher reviewed the transcripts multiple times, noting common themes, issues and patterns. The researcher coded or indexed information into categories for classification. The researcher constructed a classification system to record themes, issues and patterns identified in the transcripts for content analysis. Themes identified by 2 of 3 participants were considered for content analysis.

### Procedures for Protecting Human Subjects

The researcher submitted a research proposal to the institutional review board of Augsburg College (IRB approval #2000-13-1, Appendix A). Participation in the study was voluntary and participants were informed of the purpose and procedures involved in the research. Participants were advised that their participation does not affect their housing status or services available through the independent living program or the non-profit agency.

Participants signed an informed consent form to participate in the research and had their questions answered by the researcher. The participants had a phone number to contact the researcher in the event questions arose. Participants were informed of possible risks and benefits associated with participating in the study, and of direct or indirect benefits from participating in the study. Participants were provided a referral source for counseling in the event that the research questions brought up unpleasant psychological or emotional issues.

Interviews were audiotaped to assure the accuracy of the data for analysis. Participants consented to be audiotaped, have direct quotations used in the research, and were informed that the researcher will keep transcripts until August 31<sup>st</sup>, 2000 and that their identifying information was removed from the transcripts. The participants were aware that academic advisors of the researcher and a transcriptionist will view the transcripts, the purpose of their access, and that such parties will maintain the confidentiality of research participants. The audiotapes and transcripts were locked in the researcher's home.

### Summary

This chapter identifies the research question and philosophy of inquiry. The research design, methods and analysis were discussed. In Chapter Five, a report of the research findings and themes identified through content analysis will be presented.

## Chapter Five

### Findings

In this chapter, I will give brief introductions to the participants. Findings of the participants' experience of transition from homelessness to permanent housing will be discussed. Themes identified through content analysis will describe the intrapersonal and environmental factors associated with change.

#### The Participants

Janelle (not her real name) is an eighteen year-old African American female. She ran away from her mother's home several times as an adolescent. Janelle reports her mother was not able to take care of her and provide for her basic needs because of her mother's struggle with drug addiction. There were times when Janelle's mother wanted her to leave home, and times when Janelle wanted to leave on her own accord because of conflict within their relationship. She reports that her mother's and her own desire for family reunification led her to return home on several occasions as well. Janelle described:

And I just kept trying to leave home. She would call me back and I'd just go back and forth. And I got tired of it. It seemed like the farther away we are, apart from each other, the better we got along... It was like hey, I see now that it's time for me to work on getting on my own... So I was like it's time for me to move on.

Janelle participated in numerous youth programs and found that the struggle of homelessness and finding housing was getting in the way of her work, well-being and

finishing high school.

Sherice (not her real name) is an eighteen year-old African American female. While living in between friends and family, Sherice learned that she was five months pregnant. She decided that she wanted to obtain stable housing, so that she could focus on her role as a parent. Her mother also encouraged her to find her own permanent housing for herself and her unborn child.

Sherice previously lived with her mother and 8 siblings and with different friends alternately, as her mother's house was over-crowded and later sustained damage from a fire. She stayed with her boyfriend's family for several months but became uncomfortable remaining at their home when she and her boyfriend ended their romantic relationship. She described:

Having problems with him, I really didn't feel like I should be there with his mom... I got tired of my baby traveling by cab after cab, back and forth, staying with friends... living out of boxes... And I'm like, I can't do this anymore. I got tired of running.

Sherice dropped out of high school while she was homeless. After learning of her pregnancy, she returned to school to work on her General Equivalency Diploma. She completed her G.E.D. and was employed while waiting to get into her apartment.

Tyra (not her real name) is a twenty year-old, African American female. Her mother passed away when she was 16. She was overwhelmed with grief at the time and decided to leave the residential vocational training program she was participating in. Though she had extended family members living in the area, Tyra did not feel she should ask to live with them because of their crowded living arrangements and the fact that they

did not offer to take care of her. Tyra began moving in with a series of friends and acquaintances for brief periods at a time, leaving each when she felt it was no longer working out. She described her experience of being homeless:

I went with the wrong crowd of people and stayed with them and then they started trippin', and I went to this place and these people and then before you know it I was sleeping in hallways, at parks, in basically anywhere I could lay my head, really... I think it was a struggle because I was so young and I didn't really know much.

Tyra stayed in several emergency and transitional housing programs during the majority of her years from the ages of 17 to 20 years-old. While in an adult shelter, she became involved with agencies serving homeless youth. When she was 18, Tyra got into an apartment. Not long after she got into an apartment, Tyra lost her job and reports she did not have the motivation she needed to get another job because of her depression. Unable to pay rent, she received an eviction citation and became homeless again.

Tyra lived at various transitional housing programs until she moved into her apartment in the independent living program. She did not want to live at the independent living program because she did not like people she knew lived there. She signed up for the waiting list because of a program requirement in her former transitional housing program. While living in transitional housing, Tyra was employed, saved money and achieved her General Equivalency Diploma.

#### The Early Experience of Living without Permanent Housing

The participants utilized their natural support networks and informal resources in the early period of homelessness. They turned to their friends and acquaintances to help

with temporary shelter and housing arrangements. Sherice stayed primarily with extended family members that were part of her support system. Two participants did not stay with family; Tyra felt uncomfortable asking extended family because she did not want to be a burden to them, and Janelle's extended family lived out of state. Janelle and Tyra stayed with close friends, familiar acquaintances, and then people had known for only a brief period of time. All of the participants had in common an experience of staying in a series of other people's homes and experienced challenges related to their informal housing arrangements.

#### Dilemmas Of Being a Homeless Guest

Staying with other people presented an uncomfortable dynamic to all of the participants. All participants were challenged by conflicting or changing expectations about their role and welcome as guests in other people's homes, as well as tension between themselves and members of the household related to their housing status. Tyra described her struggles of staying with others:

Being mistrustful because I'm not wanted... They know that you're homeless and you'll live anywhere, so they're like, "come stay with me" and everything and once you get there... after a while it's a different story. "You're not doing this", "you're doing that."

Sherice described:

Sometimes different personalities (clash)... Somebody saying like, 'she don't need to be there, she shouldn't be staying here.'

Janelle described:

And 'cause it even became a time where I had to sleep with a guy to stay with him, and I ended up with STD from that guy. So it was hard, it was real hard... Getting into fights, arguments, people telling me like I want to take their boyfriends... Saying I hit their kids, saying I'm a child molester... Getting accused of everything... (getting treated) like I was a child, like a little 12, 11 year-old...

Though they were initially invited to stay or live temporarily with others, participants found that household members came to experience dissension or conflict about the participants' status and role as guests. All participants experienced conflict with this dynamic, and were at times uncomfortable with their hosts as well.

#### The Strain of Being Homeless

All of the participants shared an emotional experience of feeling stress, frustration and fatigue as they moved from place to place, uncertain of the dependability of their housing arrangements. The two participants that did not have the support of extended family describe their struggle to survive and meet their basic needs for shelter and safety:

It's just all the stressing and problems. Everything going on at one time, so much stuff on my shoulders... It was the money and the stress... Then to stop from getting arrested, because I had to find some type of way to make money. (Janelle)

And:

I was homeless and I got tired of going house to house. You don't know if you're going to be at this place today or you got to leave, or go all back outside or something. It was really stressful when you're walking around



and you got nowhere to go...(Tyra)

At the time, the participants' lack of knowledge of available resources and services limited their options for meeting their immediate and future housing needs. Despite finding temporary shelter with family or friends, participants encountered additional complications as they stayed in other people's homes. The participants became tired of the stress and ambiguity involved with homelessness. Their focus shifted from meeting their immediate shelter and survival needs to the potential stability that permanent housing could allow them.

### The Process of Transition

The participants realized the use of other people's resources was not a long-term solution, and that they wanted their own living space. All participants described similar experiences of a turning point or realization that they could not continue living from one place to the next, and that they needed to take some kind of action to change their current situation. Though the participants appeared to be experiencing an undercurrent of fear at this point, the possibility of change and hope are evident in their thoughts. Janelle described:

I had a serious breakdown one night. And I can't remember where I was, I just was all alone and I had a breakdown, like why am I putting myself through this when I know I can do better? There's got to be another way. I just kept telling myself, there's got to be another way.

Tyra described:

So I think the motivation was one (struggle) because I always had my mama, so my mama was my backbone. I got to do it (change) and I don't

know how to do it so I'm scared... I just got tired of being at people's houses, I just was like, why don't I just go to a shelter? I remember a long time ago... my mom and I went to a shelter. (Tyra)

Another participant described:

I'm like, I can't do this anymore! I got tired of running. That's when I first had (the realization), you know... I could have had a setback or something, running back and forth... (Sherice)

Participants had located shelter resources through their natural supports and informal networks up to this point. The participants realized that they needed to find alternative approaches to resolve their housing dilemmas. They knew that they needed to do something different, and began to realize that other options or alternatives were probably available, though the solution was unclear. The participants made a decision to change their living situations, and began the process of determining the options and resources available in the community through formal support systems.

#### The Process of Obtaining Formal Resources

Participants sought help from community resources and youth service agencies to assist them in finding resources for temporary and permanent housing. Sherice and Janelle knew of an agency serving homeless youth because of presentations in school, and used that agency as a starting point to learn of additional resources. Tyra began her contact with formal community resources after staying at an adult shelter, which provided her with a list of community resources. Tyra and Janelle were able to access emergency youth shelters and transitional housing programs as they worked on their goals to achieve permanent housing. Sherice was not able to access temporary housing resources because

she had baby, and continued to stay with family and friends as she worked on her permanent housing goal.

All of the participants found it helpful to receive information about resources and utilized their peers, family members, youth-specific and social service agencies in addition to resource-referral services to identify potential resources. Through the process of identifying and investigating community resources, participants became familiar with the processes of referral, application and eligibility for obtaining services. All participants described the experience of calling agencies to learn about resources and following through with providers related to service relationships, or to reach the people they needed to contact.

#### Working with Caseworkers

All of the participants worked with a caseworker from youth service agencies to assist them with the process of locating resources, establishing plans for permanent housing, and to reach their future goals. Janelle and Tyra described positive experiences with their caseworkers and reported that they valued the encouragement that their caseworkers and other professionals provided. In particular, these participants benefited from practical assistance with independent living skills such as filling out applications, tips for interviewing, obtaining county benefits or formal identification, and learning to save money. Sherice reports her caseworker had inadequate knowledge of community resources, did not return calls to the participant and failed to show up for their appointments. Though the other participants did not experience barriers with their caseworkers, all of the participants experienced challenges within the social service system.

### Barriers To Formal Resources

Participants described learning how to respond to the challenges and barriers within the system, such as application materials being lost by the provider, or being removed from waiting lists. All participants at described difficulty accessing the people they needed to contact at some point, such as professionals not calling them back or attending scheduled appointments with the participants.

All participants described frustration with the application process and ongoing requirements of county welfare programs, including medical assistance, food stamps and cash assistance programs. All participants described difficulty obtaining health insurance and health care to meet their ongoing health needs. Participants described challenges with the response or lack of response of the welfare system to their needs:

“They run me over all the time.” (Tyra)

“They just gave me the run around. It was hard. It still is. I still don’t have medical.” (Janelle)

And:

It’s like too much and that made me want to work even harder... That made me want to hurry up and do what I got to do and never mess with the state, just do what I got to do...I was just like, give me medical. (Sherice)

Participants also encountered barriers with temporary housing programs, including limited availability, waiting lists for vacancies, and loss of services for not following program rules and requirements. Sherice was unable to stay in homeless youth shelters or transitional housing because she had an infant, and was simultaneously ineligible for adult family shelter because of her age. Tyra and Janelle had to leave

transitional housing programs and shelters on different occasions for failure to meet program requirements.

### The Challenge of Meeting Personal Goals

All of the participants wanted to live independently in permanent housing, and identified getting their own apartment as a solution. All participants reported that they worked and attempted to save money to help prepare them for accomplishing and maintaining this objective.

At one time, all attempted to get apartments. Two participants attempted to work with housing agencies, and all participants contacted apartments advertising units for rent.

When they applied for apartments, the participants found that they did not have the backgrounds that landlords wanted. The most significant barrier the participants found was that they did not have the rental history that landlords wanted. In the current housing market, landlords look for tenants with established rental histories, in good standing. Tyra faced an additional barrier, having received an eviction from her only apartment. By nature of their age, none of the participants had the type of rental or credit history required in the housing market.

All participants shared common goals of supporting themselves financially, continuing their education and taking care of their health. All participants were employed in part-time or seasonal jobs, which did not offer health coverage. Participants found that the emotional stress and multiple tasks involved in living without permanent housing interfered with their jobs and educational plans, resulting in leaves of absence from work or school. All had dropped out of high school but became involved with programs to get their general equivalency diplomas while in the process of finding housing and

maintaining employment. Janelle described:

Going to school is the hardest challenge I've had... It (being homeless) took a lot away from school. I missed a lot of days from school and I had to keep calling school, like "my mom's kicking me out, I have nowhere else to go, I can't come to school today". Going to work, being able to show up for work.... I had to call my job, "my mom's kicking me out, I need a leave of absence".

### Entering the Independent Living Program

At some point in the process of finding housing, the participants learned of the independent living program. Two of the participants wanted to move into the program, and the other participant was required to apply as part of a transitional housing program she participated in. The participants applied for the independent living program and were put on a six-month to one-year waiting list. Unable to rent apartments on their own, participants continued to work on employment and education goals and saved money to prepare for the time when they had opportunity to move in to the only independent living program in the metro area.

The participants stayed in contact with the program to check their number on the waiting list and keep the program informed of their whereabouts, to ensure that their referral was in good standing. Participants reported they were assertive and persistent in their attempts to contact and meet with staff of the independent living program, based on their experiences in complex social service systems. Janelle described the actions she took to get into the program as:

Actually going through with it. Actually being able to call and come and go though with it, push myself to say hey you know it's about that time... Going through with the planning, going through with the finding out about the program, putting in the application, calling and letting them know where I'd be at, stuff like that... I had to stay in touch with them 24/7, like cause I was hopping from place to place to place to place, so I had to let them know I'm at this number, I'm at this address, if you need me call me at this number, whatever. (Janelle)

All of the participants reported that they kept track of their number on the waiting list. Tyra discovered that her name had been removed from the waiting list through a communication glitch, and was able to get her place back on the list. Janelle carried a pager so that friends and service providers could contact her wherever she was. After periods ranging from six months to over one year, all participants' names came up on the waiting list. At the time of the interviews, participants had been living in the independent living program for under six months each.

#### The Role of Personal Strengths and Actions

The participants' description of transition went beyond the processes, material resources or steps they or service providers took to achieve permanent housing. The following findings move in to the intrapersonal and environmental factors associated with the phenomena of change.

One of the topic areas I posed to the participants included an exploration of the personal qualities or strengths that they perceived contributed to their ability to achieve permanent housing. What I found was that their perception of their personal strengths,

which all called “being strong”, provided the participants with an attitude that helped motivate them and sustain their continued efforts to surpass homelessness. Two participants describe:

“Staying up on your feet... It’s just being strong.” (Janelle)

“It made me wiser and stronger... I think it was just me being strong...”

(Tyra)

All participants also shared a perception that their intelligence and judgment enabled them to achieve the outcome of permanent housing.

“I’ve got a positive head on my shoulders and I’m intelligent.” (Sherice)

“Keeping a straight head on my shoulders...” (Janelle)

“I’ve learned a lot. I mean, people learn from their mistakes and whatever else.” (Tyra)

In addition, all participants emphasized the importance of staying focused on their goals. Participants shared a belief that they had wisdom and the potential to achieve the outcomes they wanted through personal action and perseverance. This theme was communicated as of “taking care of business” and “doing what I’ve got to do”. Sherice described:

I’m glad I take care of business and don’t let it take care of me because I think if I wasn’t to take care of business I probably wouldn’t be here right now... Taking care of business means doing what you’ve got to do every morning, just to know what you’ve got to do and do it... Go to work and just do what you’ve got to do... Staying up on your feet... It’s just being strong. I was a weak person, cried all the time... I just keep myself



motivated and stay happy. Having a positive attitude on what I'm going to do, and I would do it and get through it and get on and be by myself...

Janelle described:

Taking care of business... Trying to be motivated... Telling myself I can do it... Kickin' it with positive friends... Staying occupied. Praying everyday, going to church... being real religious, Christian... Keeping a straight head on my shoulders... A closed mouth never gets fed. Open your mouth and say, "Hey I need this, I need that". (Janelle)

Tyra described:

Doing what I have to do... to survive, work and make money. I think it's because I want to be doing it and stuff, like work and everything... It's helpful (goals) because you have a plan and you know what you're doing. You're not just sitting around or something like that... I've learned a lot. I mean, people learn from their mistakes and whatever else. It is basically the only thing I did from that time for the last 3 ½ years or whatever, it made me wiser and stronger... I think it was just me being strong... and the lessons of God. (Tyra)

The participants' belief in themselves and optimism about their futures helped sustain their efforts to achieve permanent housing. In addition, the participants described other changes that they made in their lives to help them reach their goals.

#### Turning Away from Harmful Influences

Participants spoke of turning away from relationships or behaviors that were stood in the way of the outcomes they wanted to achieve. All participants described the

importance of detaching themselves from relationships with friends or peers that they believed were a negative influence on them. Two participants described learning from past experiences as sources of wisdom and inspiration for current dilemmas. Sherice described:

“Don’t let anybody bring you down. Because some people want that. And I’m not about to let it happen.”

Janelle described:

Trying to get away from the negative and into the positive... If I can move from being a drug dealer, being a drug user, being an alcoholic... if I can go from that I know I can move on to getting on my own. Just sometimes you’ve got to push friends aside... Sometimes you just got to say, ‘hey, you ain’t trying to get yourself together, I’m trying to get myself together and if you ain’t trying to help me, hey, I’ll see you later...

Tyra described:

I have a motivation problem, I got to keep motivated because if I don’t I go down... I could have been in prison or I could have been dead just by where I was living with or where I was sleeping at, parks and stuff. I used to be like that’s ain’t going to happen to me. I ain’t going to jail for nobody. No. I just left them alone. I got to go... Not letting others get to me... I’m not here for them, I’m here for me so they could just go on somewhere.

### The Role of Supportive Relationships

Participants shared a common theme of relationships with friends and adults that

provided them with encouragement and support. These relationships helped foster hope and motivated the participants to continue their efforts. All participants mentioned the role of their faith providing them with strength and hope. Participants included a teacher, members of the clergy, God, staff at agencies serving youth, and immediate or extended family members as persons who made a difference to them during the transition period.

Tyra described:

(Having) a good worker by my side that helped me really well... They was like a auntie or grandmother to me ... They helped, they did any of my needs. Always with me... They helped me find housing, but you know they had that struggle too, right along with me... I got God and my mom on my side. And nothing (bad) happened.

Sherice described:

The family I come from, we're very smart and all that... My mom and her mom... Me and my sister, we so tight....(She) was the type of mom that motivated us and all that stuff, go to school and do what you got to do... If she wasn't (a community leader) I don't know where I would be today.

Janelle described:

Talking to a pastor, talking to a deacon... My pastor praying with me, saying it's going to be okay... Tell me you how you can do it if you have a strong head... I talked to one of my counselors at school about the situation I was having at home and hooked up with a program... One of my favorite teachers... I used to stop by and we used to conversate (sic) about everything... And it's like nothing she don't know about me.

### Looking to the Future

All of the participants expressed plans to continue their education and attend college, related to career advancement, and get their own apartments following the completion of the independent living program. Two participants expressed their desire to share their experience with other youth. One participant worked as a peer educator for a local youth agency, and had a history of peer-education in school. Another participant plans to become a social worker.

### Summary

The young women who participated in this study encountered multiple challenges and barriers in the process of obtaining short term and permanent housing. The participants found that the struggles of living without permanent housing interfered with their education, health, employment, and emotional wellbeing. Participants sought resources and services through a process of problem-solving, in order to meet their needs and attain immediate and future goals in these areas. The participants had both positive and frustrating experiences while attempting to access services and resources within social service systems, and developed skills to meet their needs within limits of the system. The participants focused their actions to achieve the goals they wanted to attain and were persistent in following through with their own objectives and with service providers. They reported that having a positive attitude helped their ability to be persistent in their efforts to change their living situations. Participants were encouraged by motivation from others, by their spiritual beliefs and their beliefs about themselves and their capabilities. Finally, relationships with caring adults, friends and family provided resources and support to participants.

In Chapter Six, I will discuss the findings in relation to supporting research from the literature and the Transtheoretical Model of Change (Prochaska et al., 1992).

## Chapter Six

### Discussion

In this chapter, I will discuss the findings of the participants' process of change and transition in the context of the Transtheoretical Model of Change (Prochaska et al., 1992). Parallels will be drawn between the research findings and existing research described in the review of the literature.

In review, the Transtheoretical Model of Change (Prochaska et al., 1992) describes stages of change, along with a set of common experiential and behavioral processes that impact intentional behavior change. The stages of change include; (a) Precontemplation, (b) Contemplation, (c) Preparation, (d) Action and (e) Maintenance.

#### Barriers in the Service Continuum

This study supports previous findings that homeless youth have difficulty obtaining affordable housing, transitional living programs and emergency shelters due to a shortage of programs or resources (Bass, 1992; deAnda, 1995; Robertson, 1991). The participants found that there were waiting lists or a shortage of the programs they needed, and they were unable to rent apartments in the community. The participants did not have the rental or credit histories required in the housing market of their community. This confirms the finding that homeless youth have difficulty obtaining housing as a result of their minor status (Robertson, 1991). Local and national research indicated that youth of color are disproportionately represented in the homeless and runaway populations (Kurtz et al., 1991; Wilder, 1994). The participants were African American, and are likely to have faced the additional barriers of racism and social exclusion.

The participants identified health issues they experienced, and described the

barriers they faced in obtaining health insurance in order to access needed services. This experience supports findings from the literature that homeless and runaway youth have difficulty accessing health care (Bass, 1992; FYSB, 1995; Wilder, 1994). Obtaining benefits from government institutions was a struggle related to obtaining health care and other benefits needed by participants, supporting the findings of a study by the Wilder Foundation (1994).

### Factors of Risk and Harm

The findings of this study are consistent with several areas identified in the literature review related to physical and emotional wellbeing of homeless and runaway youth. Participants experienced consequences from unprotected sexual activity, consistent with previous research that homeless youth are at risk for unplanned pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases (Bass, 1992; Ennet et al., 1999; FYSB, 1995; Greene et al., 1998; Robertson, 1991; Steinmetz, 1999; Unger et al., 1997). The participants also described their struggle with emotional stress, coping and substance abuse. This theme illustrates previous findings related to the risks of mental health and substance abuse issues in homeless youth, cited by several authors in the literature review (Bass, 1992; Ennet et al., 1999; FYSB, 1995; Steinmetz, 1999).

The findings of this study also lend support to previous research that indicates homeless and runaway youth are at risk for disruption in their education and becoming involved with crime. Participants mentioned turning away from drugs and crime as a means of supporting themselves, because they did not want to go to jail or experience harmful consequences. Several authors found that inadequate housing and financial resources contribute to the risk of becoming involved in criminal enterprise (FYSB,

1995; Robertson, 1991). All participants shared a sense of pride that they were able to work and support themselves. This happened to occur in parallel to their transition from early homelessness and their concerted efforts to find stable housing and reach future goals.

During the transition period, all participants reported that their education was disrupted. This finding supports findings from the literature that homeless youth are at risk of disruption in their education (Bass, 1992; Robertson, 1991; Steinmetz, 1999). All participants had goals to finish their high school education and pursue further education.

#### Intrapersonal Factors Associated with Change

The participants came to a realization that being homeless was challenging and that living without permanent housing was emotionally and physically draining. Descriptions given by the participants parallel the processes of consciousness raising and dramatic relief proposed in the Transtheoretical Model of Change (Prochaska et al., 1992). The participants decided that they wanted another outcome, to find stable and safe housing, and to be relieved of the struggles of living without a permanent home. This shift illustrates movement from the stages of contemplation and preparation, and the process of self-reevaluation in the Transtheoretical Model of Change (Prochaska et al., 1992). Two of the participants indicated they had a point of realization that they needed a new plan of action and that they would have to put forth effort into planning and action, common in the end of the preparation stage (Prochaska et al, 1992).

Participants identified situations, relationships, attitudes, previous behaviors and other factors that they perceived stood in the way of the outcomes they wanted for themselves. They decided that they would avoid or prevent those things from getting in



the way of the outcomes they sought, such as distancing themselves from people or friendships. These descriptions illustrate the process of change known as interpersonal systems control, identified by Prochaska et al. (1992). Participants described taking proactive steps to ensure they received needed services when they were aware of potential barriers to their desired outcome. Participants described their efforts to monitor and track their referrals at the independent living program, advocate for themselves when needed, and to keep the program up-to-date with their current address and phone number.

The planning, investigative efforts and actions of the participants while in transition from being homeless and achieving permanent housing illustrate the action phase of the Transtheoretical Model of Change, and the demonstrated commitment to change required in this phase (Prochaska et al., 1992). Participants illustrated this theme with the concept of “doing what I’ve got to do”, and “taking care of business.”

In addition, participants believed that they could impact the outcome of their housing situation through their actions, though their actions were not always effective because of environmental factors such as housing barriers. Participants sought resources and programs, and even attempted to get apartments, though they did not meet the eligibility requirements or faced resource shortages. Participants adapted their actions when faced with barriers and sought alternate solutions and resources to impact their housing situation. The participants illustrated themes of persistence through their continued efforts, despite the challenges they encountered with waiting lists. All pursued additional goals related to their overall goal of independent living, including employment and education. This illustrates the concepts of self-efficacy and self-liberation identified in the Transtheoretical Model of Change (Prochaska, et al., 1992). Their belief in

themselves and of their abilities supports the developmental tasks of industry and identity achievement of Erickson's psychosocial model, and the self-efficacy component of the Transtheoretical Model of change. In addition, participants identified the impact of feeling a sense of hope and feeling support from others, or reinforcement of their ability to continue their efforts to achieve housing.

#### Environmental Factors Associated with Change

Participants identified the key role that social support and encouragement played in their ability to put forth the effort and time required in the action stage of change.

Participants described the impact of support on their sense of hope and motivation as well. This illustrates the process of change known as helping relationships, but suggests that helping relationships were not only helpful in the action phase, but in the process of self-liberation and the participants' sense of self-efficacy.

Participants were willing to receive support, seek help from and develop relationships with caring adults and important people in their lives. Participants received practical assistance, ideas and encouragement from caring adults as well as peers. These findings illustrate the helping relationship process of change, identified by Prochaska et al. (1992). The role of spirituality provided a sense of encouragement and motivation for participants as well.

The existence of programs and services for homeless young adults and the individual and community knowledge of those resources were additional factors that contributed to the change in the participants' housing situation. Participants identified relationships with schools, churches, and youth agencies within the community. The focus of the study concentrated on the participants and the factors they identified with

change. It is likely that there were additional assets that contributed to change within the participants' environment.

### Summary

This chapter discussed the findings in relation to the stages and processes of change identified in the Transtheoretical Model of Change (Prochaska et al., 1992). Parallels were illustrated between the research findings and the risk factors and barriers in the service continuum, contained in the literature review. Implications for social work practice and future research will be discussed in the final chapter.

## Chapter Seven

### Implications

In this chapter, I will describe the strengths and limitations of the study, implications for social work practice and future research.

#### Strengths and Limitations of the Study

The qualitative design provides an information-rich portrayal of the participants' experience. The design gives participants a chance to express their experience in a guided narrative form, while providing the reader with a detailed, in-depth description of that experience. The study is not constrained by predetermined categories of analysis. It is constrained only by the large research parameters of the foci and the questions asked by the researcher. The shared cultural background and gender of the participants increases the likelihood of shared cultural and female themes.

The findings from the data cannot be generalized beyond the parameters of the individual subjects because of the small size of the sample, and selective process of identifying research participants. The qualitative research design is subjective in nature. The theoretical framework of the research was largely individualistic and cannot account for political, economic or environmental factors not identified by the participants. I was able to show how this model can include environmental factors such as social support and relationships.

#### Implications for Social Work Practice

The intrapersonal factors associated with change in this study illustrate the role that participants' individual strengths played in their ability to achieve permanent

housing. The young women that participated in the study were able to take action based on their belief about their personal potential and abilities. They perceived that they had choices, and had the motivation to try to effect change. They were able to endure stress, and continue taking action despite adversity. The participants were able to trust other people, and seek help or support from a variety of sources within their environment.

These personal characteristics are qualities that social workers and many others in the community attempt to reinforce in young people, especially young women, young people who could be considered “at-risk”, and young people of color. Because of the limited scope of this study, the factors that contributed to the development of the individual strengths in the participants cannot be identified. Social workers can use this information to continue designing programs and using strength-based practice methods that reinforce the self-esteem, empowerment and self-efficacy of young people.

The study found that setting personal goals and objectives were successful strategies for achieving both short-term and long-range goals. Traditional social work practice often incorporates a problem-solving model that identifies the changes or outcome that clients want to achieve. The practice of setting program or treatment goals is also a common in social service agencies. The experience of the participants lends support to the usefulness of setting personal goals and objectives.

The participants described the strain they experienced as they tried to cope with multiple stressors and challenges, and trying to complete numerous tasks or steps related to their housing, employment and educational goals. Social work practice with homeless youth may require the practitioner to help clients prioritize their goals and efforts when dealing with multiple stressors and tasks simultaneously.

When dealing with multiple issues, clients may fall short of their goals or not follow through with the steps in their plan. The client's response may not meet the expectations of the social worker or program. The use of the strengths perspective can help practitioners reframe the struggles that clients experience, and view the resiliency, adaptability, and durability of these youth instead.

While completing this research, I found myself wanting to validate the struggles and stress that the participants experienced. Supportive factors that were identified by the participants include; relationships with peers, family, caring adults, and spirituality. These supports provided the participants with encouragement and helped motivate them. Practitioners can incorporate an assessment of the client's support systems in practice, to determine existing resources and identify areas of need with the client. Practitioners can also incorporate family-centered or peer-group models, which strengthen the support system of individual clients.

The participants experienced barriers to accessing their caseworkers and human service professionals. These barriers included worker inconsistency, being late or not showing up for appointments, and not calling clients back. Providing responsive service to clients is a common professional standard. The experience of the participants serves as a reminder of the importance of following guidelines of professional practice.

The participants learned to advocate for themselves and obtain the services that they needed. This was accomplished by locating resources, familiarity with procedures for obtaining resources, and tracking their referrals within various agencies. This finding may suggest that social workers teach clients how to locate and utilize resources on their own behalf. When clients face systemic barriers, social workers can help clients access

benefits by helping them navigate around systemic barriers or bureaucracy. Helping mobilize groups can also increase the power of individuals to address issues they face collectively.

Programs serving homeless youth can examine existing practices and make adaptations that will enable clients to get past barriers in local housing markets. Programs that require clients to work can provide clients with rental histories if clients are required to pay rent towards the cost of their housing. Two of the participants lived in transitional housing that required them to work, but did not require them to pay rent. Creative partnerships with landlords or other community partners may help provide access to young adults in the competitive housing market. This could take the form of providing a co-signer for leasing, or sub-leasing apartments to clients.

Partnerships with legal agencies may help clients with situational or systemic discrimination of clients based on their age, public-assistance status or any other legally protected status in housing and obtaining needed benefits. In addition, agencies serving youth can seek alternative funding from additional sources to create or replicate innovative service designs that do not fit the exact requirements of federal funding streams.

Several community agencies that serve homeless adults and battered women offer voicemail to clients. This resource allows clients to stay in contact with social service providers, and provides a vehicle for communication with potential landlords, employers and others. This resource may be useful for homeless and runaway youth as well.

Participants expressed their desire to share their experience with other youth and gave examples of sharing resources as well as providing peer-education in collaboration

with agencies serving youth. Young adults who have survived homelessness provide a wealth of information and could be utilized as resources for peer-education, mentoring or other forms of support.

### Implications for Social Policy

Advocacy is needed to change federal policies that determine the housing services available to youth under the Runaway Youth Act. Increasing the period of transitional housing could help clients obtain rental histories and plan successful transitions to permanent housing. The Basic Center program could be expanded to allow a service continuum for youth and families who are unable or unsure of their ability to be reunified in their living arrangements. Funding stream requirements can be made more flexible so that grant recipients can pilot innovative and creative service designs, such as the independent living program in the study, which allow for more long-term housing and independent living skills opportunities.

### Future Research

Longitudinal or outcome studies of formerly homeless or runaway youth could provide information about the short and long-term consequences, supportive factors and risk factors of being homeless or runaway. Little is known about the factors associated with transition, supportive factors of transition, or what becomes of formerly homeless youth. Research about housing discrimination could identify systemic or community-specific barriers to stable housing. Cities, counties, states and the federal government could attempt to record data about the prevalence of homelessness and running away. This could be accomplished by cooperation with the Bureau of Census, community providers, or other partners determined to be useful in such a task. And finally, continued



research is necessary to determine the needs of families in crisis and what can be done at multiple levels prevent family breakdown and promote stability.

## REFERENCES

- Adams, G. (1991). Runaways, Negative Consequences for. In R. Lerner, A. Peterson, & J. Brooks-Gunn (Eds.), Encyclopedia of Adolescence (pp. 947-950). NY: Garland Publishing.
- Ashford, J., LeCroy, C., & Lortie, K. (1997). Human Behavior in the social environment: A multidimensional perspective. Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole.
- Bailey, S., Camlin, C., & Ennett, S. (1998). Substance abuse and risky behavior among homeless and runaway youth. Journal of Adolescent Health, *23* (6), 378-388.
- Bandura, A. (1997) Self-efficacy: Toward a unifying theory of behavior change. Psychological Review, *84* 191-215.
- Bass, D. (1992). Helping vulnerable youths: Runaway and homeless adolescents in the United States. Washington, DC: NASW Press.
- Bass, D. (1995). Runaways and Homeless Youth. In R. Edwards, & J. Hopps, (Eds.), Encyclopedia of Social Work (19 ed., pp. 2060-2067). Washington, DC: NASW Press.
- Craig, G. (1992). Human development. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- de Anda, D. (1995). Adolescence overview. In R. Edwards, & J. Hopps, (Eds.), Encyclopedia of social work (10 ed., pp. 16-33). Washington, DC: NASW Press.
- Erickson, E. (1950). Childhood and society (Rev. ed.1963). New York: Norton.
- Encyclopedia Britannica (2000). Phenomenology. Brittanica.com. Available: <http://www.brittanica.com/bcom/eb/article/5/0,5716,115435+8+10861,99.html>
- Ennett, S., Bailey, S., & Federman, E. (1999). Social network characteristics

associated with risky behaviors among runaway and homeless youth. Journal of Health & Social Behavior, 40 (1), 63-78 [online]. Abstract from: PsychINFO Article : CB1295960. Available: [http://web2.infotrac.galegroup.com/itw/s...36787113w3/13!xrn\\_8\\_0CB1295960&bkm\\_1](http://web2.infotrac.galegroup.com/itw/s...36787113w3/13!xrn_8_0CB1295960&bkm_1)

Family and Youth Services Bureau (1994). FYSB celebrates the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the runaway and homeless youth act. Administration on Children Youth and Families. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Available: <http://www.ncfy.com/compend.htm>

Family and Youth Services Bureau (1995). Youth with runaway, throwaway and homeless experiences. Administration for Children and Families. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Available: <http://www.ncfy.com/>

Family and Youth Services Bureau (1998). Compendium of critical issues and innovative approaches in youth services. Administration on Children Youth and Families. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Available: <http://www.ncfy.com/compend.htm>

General Accounting Office (1989). Homelessness: Homeless and runaway youth receiving services at federally funded shelters [On-line]. Abstract from: WAIS Document Retrieval Available: <http://waisgate.hhs.gov/cg.../waisgate?WAISDo=902351494+3+0+0&WAISactio=retriev>

Greene, G., Rossi, S., Rossi, R., Velicer, W., Fava, J., Prochaska, J. (1999). Dietary applications of the stages of change model. Journal of the American Diabetic Association, 99(16), 637-679.

Greene, J., Ringwalt, C., & Christopher, L. (1998). Pregnancy among three national

Samples of runaway and homeless youth [online]. Journal of Adolescent Health, 23 (6), 370-377. Abstract from: PsychINFO

Haley, M. (1997) Self-determination at a homeless youth serving agency. Masters Thesis. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg College.

Hamilton, S. (Eds.), Social problems and social contexts in adolescence: Perspectives across boundaries (83-103). NY: Aldine de Gruyter.

Hier, S., Korboot, P., & Schweitzer, R. (1990). Social adjustment and symptomology in two types of adolescents: Runaways and throwaways. Adolescence, 25 (100), 761-771.

Kurtz, P., Jarvis, S., & Kurtz, G. (1991). Problems of homeless youth: Empirical findings and human services issues. Social Work, 36 (4), 309-314.

Kurtz, P., Kurtz, G., & Jarvis, S. (1991). Problems of maltreated runaway youth. Adolescence, 26 (103), 543-555.

Meeus, W. (1996). Toward a psychosocial analysis of adolescent identity: An evaluation of the epigenetic theory (Erickson) and the identity status model (Marcia). In K. Hurrelmann, & S. Hamilton (Eds.), Social problems and social contexts in adolescence: Perspectives across boundaries (83-103). NY: Aldine de Gruyter.

Montoya, P. (1999). Statement of Patricia Montoya Commissioner Administration on children, youth and families. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services on the reauthorization of the runaway and homeless youth act before the committee on education and the workforce Subcommittee on early childhood, youth and families. U.S. House of Representatives. March 25<sup>th</sup>, 1999[online]. WAISgate, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Available: <http://waisgate.hhs.gov/cg...waisgate?WAISdocID=9023514594+1+0+0&WAISaction=retrieve>.

- National Runaway Switchboard (9/29/99). Statistics [On-line]. Available:  
<http://www.nrcrisisline.org/stats.htm>
- Prochaska, J., DiClemente, C., & Norcross, J. (1992) In search of how people change: Application to addictive behaviors. American Psychologist, 47 (9), 1102-1114.
- Research Triangle Institute (1990). U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services. Youth with runaway, throwaway, and homeless experiences: prevalence, drug use, and other at-risk behaviors [On-line]. Available: <http://waisgate.hhs.gov/cgi...waisgate?WAISdocID=9023514594+6+0+0&WAISaction=retriv>
- Ringwalt, C., Greene, J., & Robertson, M. (1998). Familial backgrounds and risk behaviors of youth with throwaway experiences. Journal of Adolescence, 21 (3), 241-252.
- Robertson, M. (1991). Homeless youth: An overview of recent literature. In J. Kryder-Coe, L. Salamon, & J. Molnar (Eds.), Homeless children and youth: A new American dilemma (pp. 33-68). New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers.
- Rotheram-Borus, M., Mahler, K., Koopman, C., & Langabeer, K. (1996). Sexual abuse history and associated multiple risk behavior in adolescent runaways [online]. American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 66 (3), 390-400. Abstract from: Expanded Academic ASAP Article: A18636718
- Rubin, A., & Babie, E. (1997). Research methods for social workers (3 ed.). Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole Publishing Company.
- Schaie, K., & Willis, S. (1986). Adult development & aging (2 ed.). Boston: Little, Brown and Company.
- Seltzer, V. (1982). Adolescent social development: Dynamic functional interaction.

Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath and Company.

Simons, R., & Whitbeck, L. (1991). Running away during adolescence as a precursor to adult homelessness. Social Service Review, 1991 (June), 224-247.

Steinmetz, S. (1999). Adolescence in contemporary families. In M. Sussman, S. Steinmetz, & G. Peterson (Eds.), Handbook of marriage and family (2 ed., pp. 371-423). New York: Plenum Press.

Unger, J., Kipke, M., Simon, T., Montgomery, S., & Johnson, C. (1997). Homeless youth and young adults in Los Angeles: Prevalence of mental health problems and the relationship between mental health and substance abuse disorders [online]. American Journal of Community Psychology, 25 (3), 371-395. Available:

[http://web4.infotrac.galegroup.com/itw/sessions/187/179/36683708w3/66!nxt\\_19](http://web4.infotrac.galegroup.com/itw/sessions/187/179/36683708w3/66!nxt_19)

U.S. Department of Justice (1990). Missing, abducted, runaway and throwaway children in America, first report: Numbers and characteristics. National Incidence Studies, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. Washington, DC

Waterman, A., & Archer, S. (1991). Erickson, Erik Homburger. In R. Lerner, A. Peterson, & J. Brooks-Gunn (Eds.), Encyclopedia of adolescence (pp. 319-323). New York: Garland Publishing, Inc.

Ward, S. (1991). Moral development in adolescence. In, R. Lerner, A. Peterson, & J. Brooks, Gunn, (Eds.), Encyclopedia of adolescence (pp. 663-668). New York: Garland Publishing.

Whitbeck, L., Hoyt, D., & Yoder, K. (1999). A risk-amplification model of victimization and depressive symptoms among runaway and homeless adolescents. American Journal of Community Psychology, 27 (2), 273-275 [online]. Available:

[http://web2.infotrac.galegroup.com/itw/session/645/46/37407298w3/3!xrn\\_8\\_0\\_A5548](http://web2.infotrac.galegroup.com/itw/session/645/46/37407298w3/3!xrn_8_0_A5548)

Whitbeck, L., Hoyt, D., & Ackley, K. (1997). Families of homeless and runaway adolescents: A comparison of parent / caretaker and adolescent perspectives on parenting, family violence and adolescent conduct. Child Abuse and Neglect, 21 (6), 517-528 [online]. Available: [http://web2.infotrac.galegroup.com/itw/session/645/46/37407298w3/3!xrn\\_8\\_0\\_A5543338](http://web2.infotrac.galegroup.com/itw/session/645/46/37407298w3/3!xrn_8_0_A5543338)

Wilder Research Center (1994). Minnesota statewide survey of persons without permanent shelter (Volume II: Unaccompanied Youth ed.). St. Paul, MN: Amherst H. Wilder Foundation.

Yager, N. (1999) Grieving the loss of a partner: The ways of isolation. Masters Thesis. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg College.

Yoder, K., Hoyt, D., & Whitbeck, L. (1998). Suicidal behavior among homeless and runaway adolescents. Journal of Youth and Adolescents, 27 (6), 753-771 [online]. Available: [http://web4.infotrac.galegroup.co\\_itw/session/187/179/36683708w3/54!nxt\\_7](http://web4.infotrac.galegroup.co_itw/session/187/179/36683708w3/54!nxt_7)

AUGSBURGC • O • L • L • E • G • E

MEMO

2 June 2000

To: Ms. Tona Willand

From: Dr. Sharon Patten, IRB Chair  
Phone: 612-330-1723

SKP

RE: Your IRB Application

Thank you for your response to IRB issues and questions. As we discussed over the phone earlier this year, your study was approved (IRB approval number 2000-13-1). Please use this number on all official correspondence and written materials relative to your study.

Your research should prove valuable and provide important insight into an issue in social work practice, planning, and policy. We wish you every success!

SKP:ka

cc: Dr. Mike Schock, Thesis Advisor



# *Would you like to tell your story?*

*I would like to interview you about your transition from being homeless and getting into permanent housing as part of my thesis.*

*Interviews will last approximately 60 minutes and can be done on site.*

*Would you like a \$10 gift certificate to Rainbow Foods for your contribution?*

*To volunteer or get more information, contact Tona at (651) 523-0334*

**The experience of young adults' transition from homelessness to permanent, independent living:  
Consent Form**

You are invited to participate in a research study seeking to understand the perspectives and experiences of young men who have been homeless and currently have permanent housing. My name is Tona Willand. I am a social work student at Augsburg College working on my master's thesis. As part of my thesis, I am interested in interviewing people about their experiences for my research.

You were selected as a possible participant because you are between the ages of 18-21, and live in an apartment building that offers an independent living program for young adults who have been homeless. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and is not a condition or expectation of your participation in The Archdale Apartments.

I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

**Procedures:**

If you agree to be in this study, I would ask that you do the following things:

- Participate in an interview with me about your experience getting into permanent housing after being homeless. I will ask you additional questions to clarify my understanding of your story, such as "tell me more about that...what was that like..." The interview will last approximately 60-90 minutes.
- Allow me to tape record the interview so that I can have a transcript or written record of our conversation, and use direct quotations from your interview in my research. I would like to have a written record of our entire conversation so that I can see the whole story you told so that I can review all of what you said and the way or context you mentioned it in. I would like to use direct quotes from the interview to give examples of your experience or illustrate themes I find when comparing other participants' experiences.

**Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:**

You are being asked to share personal and private information about your life. The telling of your experience may have potential risks and / or benefits.

There may be psychological or emotional risks in participating in this study. Sharing your experiences may bring uncomfortable thoughts or feelings such as pain, anger, or any reaction that you may have about your experiences in life. In the event you need to talk to someone about any issues that arose from reflecting on your life experiences, please contact the Walk In Counseling Center. They have counselors available at no charge. They are located at 2421 Chicago Avenue South, Minneapolis. Their telephone number is (612) 870-0565.

There may be psychological or emotional benefits in participation in this study. Sharing your experiences may cause you to see strengths, wisdom, or growth, which may enhance your self-esteem.

Direct benefits of participation are a small gift certificate (\$10.00) to Rainbow Foods to recognize your contribution of time. You will receive the gift certificate prior to the interview.

Indirect benefits to participation are contributing to an academic knowledge base.

**Confidentiality:**

The records of this study will be kept private. My thesis will not include your name. Records and transcripts will be kept in a locked file, only the researcher and academic advisors assisting the researcher in the writing of the thesis will have access to the transcripts of interviews. Academic advisors will review transcripts for verifying that the overall themes the researcher identifies are in the spirit in which the participants expressed them and are an accurate reflection of what the participants meant. A

transcriptionist will listen to the audiotaped interview and type our conversation word for word. The transcriptionist will sign a contract indicating that they will maintain the confidentiality of the interviews and will not release any information to anyone other than researcher.

The raw data (transcripts) will be kept by the researcher but all identifying information, such as your name, will be removed. I will destroy the transcripts by August of 2000 when I am finished with my thesis.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

Your decision whether or not to participate in this study will not affect your current or future relationship with Augsburg College, with The Archdale Apartments or the Bridge for Runaway Youth. If you decide to participate, you are free to quit or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

**Contacts and Questions:**

The researcher conducting this study is Tona Willand. You may ask any questions you have now. You may also contact the researcher's thesis advisor Michael Schock at the Augsburg College Department of Social Work at (612) 330-1725.

If you have questions later, you may contact Tona Willand at (651) 523-0334 until June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2000. You will be given a copy of the form to keep for your records.

**Statement of Consent:**

**I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.**

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of researcher \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**I consent to be audiotaped and allow the researcher to use direct quotations from my interview.**

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of researcher \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## **Interview Guide**

**IRB Approved #2000-13-1**

Questions asked by the researcher:

- **What led you to decide to seek permanent housing?**
- **Does anything stand out for you about the time when you were homeless?**
- **What did you do in past attempts to change your housing situation?**
- **Tell me what the barriers or struggles were.**
- **What made the difference this time?**
- **What actions did you take in order to get into this housing?**
- **What challenges did you face? How did you respond to those challenges, or what did you do?**
- **What did other people do that helped or contributed to your current situation?**
- **Are there people or relationships that stand out in particular?**
- **Can you identify any events or things that happened that led to your current situation in permanent housing?**
- **Does anything else stand out for you about what helped you get into permanent housing, such as personal strengths or any other factors?**

Prompts:

- **Tell me about a time when you...**
- **Tell me more about that**
- **What was that like**
- **What does it mean to you**
- **Give me an example of..**
- **Like what..**
- **How...**
- **Why....**

Interviewing Skills

- **Clarification of information content, individual meaning**
- **Paraphrasing**
- **Non-verbal attending skills of eye contact and posture**

Augsburg College  
Lindell Library  
Minneapolis, MN 55454