

NARRATIVE CASE STUDIES EXPLORING  
HOMELESSNESS AND EDUCATION

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HOMELESSNESS AND EDUCATION

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University of Missouri-Kansas City, 2014

ABSTRACT

The purpose of these narrative case studies was to understand the experiences of families encountering homelessness and how children experience formal and informal education. Families experiencing homelessness were defined as groups of persons living without regular, fixed, and adequate housing. Narrative case studies on four families living in a homeless shelter in a Midwestern City were analyzed to investigate the following central research question: What themes were apparent in the perceptions and experiences of participants as reflected in their stories of being homeless as it relates to their children's educational experience? Sub-questions included: How did the adults experiencing homelessness describe their children's formal and informal educational experiences since becoming homeless? How did the children experiencing homelessness describe their formal and informal educational experiences since becoming homeless? How did the adults experiencing homelessness describe the events that led to homelessness, and how did these events affect the educational experiences of their children? Data were collected in the form of documents, interviews, and observations. Data were coded and narrative accounts were restoried. This information was organized and analyzed to determine the themes and patterns

related to homelessness and the effects it had on the education of children. The findings of this study revealed that the families experienced a transient lifestyle and frequent school changes before coming to live at the shelter. However, once identified as homeless, the families received various educational services through the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act.

## APPROVAL PAGE

The faculty listed below, appointed by the Dean of the School of Graduate Studies, have examined a dissertation entitled *Narrative Case Studies Exploring Homelessness and Education*, presented by Joanna Marlene DeVilbiss, candidate for the Doctor of Philosophy degree, and certify that in their opinion is worthy of acceptance.

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CHAPTER 1  
INTRODUCTION

**The Problem**

With the recent economic downturn, more American families are becoming homeless every day. According to the National Coalition for the Homeless (2011), “Fifty million Americans – one in five children - go to bed and awaken hungry... The country’s crippling economic crisis is resulting in record high spikes in poverty, unemployment, hunger, and homelessness” (p. 1). According to the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), “The number of homeless families increased by 20% from 2007 to 2010, and families currently represent a much larger percentage of the shelter population than ever before” (United States Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2010, p. 9).

The growing shortage of affordable rental housing and the increase in poverty could be one of the causes for the increase in homelessness. According Interlink Counseling Services (2012):

Homelessness and poverty are inextricably linked. Poor people are frequently unable to pay for housing, food, child care, health care, and education. Difficult choices must be made when limited resources cover only some of these necessities. Often it is housing, which absorbs a high proportion of income that must be dropped. Being poor means being an illness, an accident, or a paycheck away from living on the streets. (para. 1)

According to the Coalition for the Homeless, several studies have been conducted over that past decade and all indicate that homeless children and youth suffer

academically. “In almost all studies, homeless children performed worse on measures of academic achievement than their poor, but housed peers” (2009, p. 1).

As part of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, Congress reauthorized the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. McKinney-Vento was originally established in 1987 in response to a report revealing that up to 50% of homeless children were not attending school (Maine School Administrative District No. 41, n.d.). The McKinney-Vento Act defines homeless children and youth as “individuals without a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence” (United States Department of Education, 2004, p. 2). This includes children or teens that are living with other families, in hotels, at emergency shelters, in transitional housing, or from place to place. This also includes children awaiting foster care placement or foster care children who have been placed in a shelter.

Within the last five years, I worked as a public school district homeless liaison. This position is one of the requirements of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. As the homeless liaison, I worked with the district and the families to ensure that their children had the transportation and resources needed to stay in school. That means I first determined that a family was homeless. McKinney-Vento does not allow an investigation but does require parents to notify the school district and explain the circumstances. Next, I worked to enroll the children in school, even if they did not have paperwork such as immunizations, school records, and proof of residency that districts usually require when enrolling students. McKinney-Vento specifically requires districts to enroll homeless students immediately, even without documentation. Then, I called the Food Service Department and arranged free breakfast and lunch and worked with our

Transportation Department to facilitate transportation. Some children rode cabs from downtown shelters. Some rode the school bus from a hotel located within district boundaries, and some rode a school van from family or friends' houses in other school districts. Because homeless children and youth often miss school once they become homeless, it is the homeless liaison's responsibility to do everything possible to keep them in school.

Once I became a school principal, I often reflected on my time as a homeless liaison. I frequently wondered if the requirements and provisions set in McKinney-Vento made a positive educational difference on the lives of homeless children and youth. When I was a homeless liaison, I knew over 100 homeless families that were receiving some kind of assistance from McKinney-Vento. But I wondered about the ones I did not know. Were there families living in nearby shelters that were not benefitting from the Act? Were there homeless children and youth that were still missing school due to their precarious living conditions? From my perspective as a school liaison, our school district served homeless families well. However, I wondered about any families we might have missed. My curiosity and concern drove me to conduct this study.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of these narrative case studies was to understand the experiences of families who are encountering homelessness and how children experience formal and informal education. Homeless families were defined as groups of persons living without regular, fixed, and adequate housing. The units of analysis for this study were the adults and children experiencing homelessness.

This study utilized the theoretical traditions of case study and narrative inquiry. Yin (1984) defined the case study research method as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used” (p. 23). The phenomenon studied was homelessness. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) defined narrative inquiry as a method that uses the following field texts as data sources: stories, autobiographies, journals, field notes, letters, conversations, interviews, family stories, photos (and other artifacts), and life experiences. A survey document, interviews, and observations were utilized to inform these narrative case studies.

### **Significance of the Study**

According to the United States Department of Education (2004):

Changing schools significantly impedes a student’s academic and social growth. The literature on highly mobile students indicates that it can take a student four to six months to recover academically after changing schools. Highly mobile students have also been found to have lower test scores and overall academic performance than peers who do not change schools. Therefore, the McKinney-Vento Act calls for LEAs (Local Education Agency) to maintain students in their schools of origin to the extent feasible. (p. 14)

To address this issue, McKinney-Vento requires that local school districts allow students to stay in their “school of origin” and provide transportation to that school if that is deemed to be “in the best interest” of the child (2004, p. 13-14).

While McKinney-Vento is a federal mandate that penalizes states and local school districts for noncompliance, it does not provide funding. Local school districts are required to transport students across metropolitan and rural areas utilizing buses, vans, or



cabs. They are required to use any means necessary to keep homeless children and youth in their school of origin and/or school of best interest. While this is a logical solution to the problem of low attendance and an unstable environment, this policy is costing school districts hundreds of thousands of dollars. In a study conducted by the state of Massachusetts, the state is projected to spend over \$11 million in one year, ranging from a few hundred to half a million dollars per district (Barry, 2012).

The Washington State Agency Council on Coordinated Transportation conducted a study on the cost of providing transportation to homeless students in eight school districts:

The study found that homeless student transportation was expensive, in absolute terms and when compared to transportation of the general school age population. The majority of homeless trips (79%) cost the school districts from just under \$3 per one-way trip to over \$40 per one-way trip as opposed to an average of \$0.67 for the general student population. (National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, 2011, p. 6)

However, the same study found that, although expensive, transporting the homeless students did result in academic gains.

By comparing the performance of homeless students that stayed in their school of origin with those who moved, the study concluded that the test scores on the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) of students who stayed in their schools of origin were 'consistently better than those of homeless students who changed schools' and the grade point averages of homeless high school students who stayed in their schools of origin were higher than their counterparts who changed schools. (National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, 2011, p. 6)

Unlike the two quantitative studies just mentioned, my qualitative case studies convey the personal stories of homeless families and how homelessness has affected their children's experiences with education. The study examined the requirements of

McKinney-Vento and analyzed its effects on homeless families and children living in a Midwest metropolitan area. The two quantitative studies conducted in Washington and Massachusetts were primarily focused on determining the cost of McKinney-Vento requirements to local school districts. While the Washington report did paint a broader picture by including test scores and grade averages, there was no qualitative data on how McKinney-Vento is affecting the lives of those it is assisting. These qualitative case studies could improve practice by providing the real-life stories of homeless families and how the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act is affecting their lives. These case studies provide readers with a more complete understanding of homelessness and its effects on education.

This study should also improve practice by shattering the myths and misconceptions associated with homelessness. According to the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, two common myths about the homeless actually prevent organizations from providing help. These include the myth that providing services will cause homeless people to migrate from around the country to that area and the myth that homeless people stay homeless for extended lengths of time. In actuality, homeless people rarely migrate. In fact, 75% stay in the city where they became homeless. Homeless people do not usually stay homeless for long lengths of time. Forty percent report being homeless for less than six months, and 70% report being homeless for less than two years (National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, 2002).

Finally, this qualitative study should improve practice by expanding the use of qualitative research. In the past, many quantitative studies have been conducted revealing

numbers that barely scratch the surface of the problem being researched. According to Jakob Nielsen, “Quantitative studies are often too narrow to be useful and are sometimes directly misleading” (2004, para. 1). I believe this is true in the area of homelessness. Many Americans know that homelessness is a problem, but few know the stories behind this tragic phenomenon. By helping readers understand and relate to homeless families, this qualitative case study will encourage other similar qualitative studies.

One of the intents of this study was to examine the value of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act and, thus, strengthen the current policies concerning the homeless. By conducting a qualitative case study where homeless families are asked to describe their experiences with homelessness and education, I sought to help readers understand this phenomenon and determine if current federal policies are effective or if they need to be altered.

### **Central Research Questions**

The overarching research question for this study was: What themes are apparent in the perceptions and experiences of participants as reflected in their stories of being homeless as it relates to their children’s educational experiences? Sub-Questions included:

- How do adults experiencing homelessness describe their children’s formal and informal educational experiences since becoming homeless?
- How do children experiencing homelessness describe their formal and informal educational experiences since becoming homeless?

- How do adults experiencing homelessness describe the events that led to homelessness, and how did these events affect the educational experiences of their children?

### **Theoretical Framework**

A theoretical framework consists of the concepts and theories that support and inform the research. The concepts and theories that supported and informed the research in these narrative case studies included the following paradigms: past and present trends in American homelessness, demographics of families and individuals experiencing homelessness, formal and informal education, and the economy.

Due to the downward trend in the American economy and various other factors, homelessness is a problem that has worsened over the past few decades. However, homelessness is not a new phenomenon. In the United States during the 1920s through the Great Depression, transient workers and single men made up most of the homeless population. In the 1970s, many formerly institutionalized people lived on the streets after being dismissed from mental hospitals. In the 1980s:

Growing economic inequality, racism, a permanent decrease in the number of well-paid unskilled jobs, and a lack of affordable housing combined to make several million people—many of them African American women and their children—homeless on America’s streets, in shelters, in motels, and in substandard and temporary apartments. (Levinson, 2004, p. xxi)

This pattern continues today and has been exacerbated by an increase in unemployment. The purpose of these narrative case studies was to better understand homelessness and how children experience formal and informal education. The study also

sought to determine if the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act is making a positive difference in the lives of homeless children and youth.

The purpose of this section is to describe the theoretical or conceptual framework of a narrative case study. According to Maxwell (2005), “The conceptual framework of your study is the system of concepts, assumptions, expectations, beliefs, and theories that supports and informs your research” (p. 33). Creswell (2007) names case study as one of five qualitative traditions of inquiry:

A qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system (a *case*) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving *multiple sources of information* (e.g. observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports), and reports a case *description* and case-based themes. (p. 73)

Narrative studies are influenced by “phenomenology’s emphasis on understanding lived experiences and perceptions of experience” (Patton, 2002, p. 115). This naturalistic inquiry utilized the theoretical traditions of case study and narrative analysis by investigating the lived experiences and perceptions of homeless families. Detailed data collection included a survey document, interviews, and observations.

As I conducted research on the topic of homelessness in on-line articles, government web-sites, periodicals, and books, I found many studies and articles on this subject matter. However, while many researchers have collected quantitative data for the purpose of informing educators and government offices, only a few have performed qualitative studies. For example, in the journal, *Principal*, an article quoted the following quantitative data to help school administrators understand the growing numbers of homeless children in their schools:

There are more than 1.3 million children lacking a permanent residence on any given night. Further, 3% of the homeless population was comprised of children under the age of 18 in July 2009, the most recent date for which there is data. (Saxberg, 2011, p. 30)

Researchers at Wayne University in Michigan studied “the effectiveness of five tracking strategies (collateral contacts, internet databases, drivers’ records, letters, and community visits) used in attempting to locate homeless and housed adolescents 4.5 years after they were first contacted. “Collateral contacts were found to be most effective followed by internet databases” (Hobden, Forney, Curtis, Wyszacki, & Toro, 2011, p. 433).

In a study conducted by the Institute of Child Development at the University of Minnesota, researchers studied the effects of parenting quality on the academic functioning of young homeless children. They found that the quality of parenting practices does affect the overall academic performance of the homeless children (Herbers et al., 2011, p. 77). While these statistics are interesting and useful to educators, they do not provide a clear picture of the conditions surrounding the causes, implications, and effects of homelessness. They also do not discuss McKinney-Vento and how it is affecting homeless children and youth.

There is clearly a need for qualitative research to better explain the circumstances surrounding the quantitative data. Researchers at the University of Southern California agree. They and the United Way of Greater Los Angeles conducted a qualitative study on the financial implications of living on the streets of Los Angeles and the social and economic benefits of permanent supportive housing programs. Quantitative results had shown that current housing solutions generated positive results. However, qualitative

results revealed a clearer picture. Through the personal stories of individuals experiencing homelessness, that data pointed to ways to improve current practices (Yuba Net, 2009).

Peter Miller (2011) from the University of Wisconsin, Madison, conducted a critical analysis of the research on student homelessness. He found that there is “lack of general coherence in the research about how diverse conditions of homelessness affect students and how schools and communities can best serve them” (p. 308). This, again, points to the need to conduct qualitative research on the topic of homelessness and education.

In his book, *Rachel and Her Children*, Jonathan Kozol (2006) shares the stories and experiences of homeless men, women, and children. His qualitative study focused on homeless families living on the east coast of the United States and describes their experiences using their own words. Elliot Liebow (1993) tells the stories of homeless women in his book entitled, *Tell Them Who I Am: The Lives of Homeless Women*. His research also took place on the east coast and provided the personal stories of the homeless. These books represent the area of qualitative research that this study sought to expand. By interviewing homeless family members in the Midwest and learning about their experiences with education, I have contributed to this field of knowledge.

### **Past and Present Trends in American Homelessness**

Past and present trends in American homelessness will be the first topic discussed in the chapter two literature review. I will summarize the history, as well as, recent trends in American homelessness, including information related to the government’s response.

This information provided background knowledge as I examined families currently experiencing homelessness and how it has affected their children's education.

The United States government's response to homelessness will also be reviewed. As the homeless liaison, I was a board appointed representative for my school district. It was my responsibility to uphold the policies outlined in the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. This federal mandate ensures that homeless students have access to the same educational services as other students regardless of their homeless status. Districts are required to wave residency requirements and other documentation that might prevent a homeless child from enrolling in school. The district must also provide transportation to the school of best interest (United States Department of Education, 2004).

While McKinney-Vento was created to assist homeless families, I was curious about the actual effect it has had on them. My own observations have told me that without McKinney-Vento, homeless children would be denied access to schools. Most school districts have strict regulations regarding residency and access to schools within the district. Homeless families do not have electric or gas bills confirming residency. Due to difficult economic times and vast budget cuts, I feel quite certain that my own school district would not take these undocumented children if the federal government did not require it.

### **Who Are the Homeless?**

The second topic to be reviewed in chapter two will answer the question: Who are the individuals and families experiencing homelessness? While stereotypes are common in reference to families and individuals living in poverty and homelessness, studies show



that they have varying needs and characteristics. For example, many families experiencing homelessness are headed by single mothers, and people of color, particularly African American, are a group that is overrepresented. According to the Public Broadcasting System (2007), 41% of the homeless population are non-Hispanic Whites (compared to 76% of the general population), 40% are African Americans (compared to 11% of the general population), 11% are Hispanic (compared to 9% of the general population), and 8% are Native American (compared to 1% of the general population).

Because homeless children often perform poorly in school, maintain a lower attendance rate, and have more long-term absences (Solutions for America, 2003), these statistics are especially significant for African Americans, Hispanics, and Native Americans. I was curious to discover if African American, Hispanics, and Native American are under or over represented in the homeless population of this Midwestern city. I wondered if the majority of families consisted of children living with single mothers or fathers, two-parents, grandparents, or other family members. This study examined those details and revealed demographic patterns.

## **Education**

The third topic covered in the literature review defines both formal and non-formal education. According to Lingual Links, “Formal education refers to the structured educational system provide by the state for children. In most countries, the formal education system is state-supported and state-operated. . . Non-formal education refers to education which takes place outside of the formally organized school” (1999, para. 2).

Unlike most formal education, non-formal education is usually not required, does not lead to any kind of certification, and is not state or federally supported. My review of formal education will include the history of various curriculum movements in the United States, as well as, various aspect of democratic education. Formal and non-formal education was reviewed in the study to reveal how they affect children and youth experiencing homelessness.

### **Economy**

The fourth and final topic to be reviewed in chapter two includes the role the economy plays in family finances and overall well-being. Unemployment has grown over the past several years and there is a general belief that this has contributed to the increase in homelessness. Television news stories and newspaper articles claim this to be true. The narrative case studies shed light on how the economy has influenced the living conditions for four families living in the Midwest.

I conducted informal research on the homeless families that lived in our area during the past two years. During the 2010-2011 school year, the school district qualified 82 children as homeless. During the 2011-2012 school year, 152 qualified. That represented a significant increase. One could theorize that the current weak economy is causing more area families to lose their jobs and homes, thus creating more homeless families. However, this quantitative data cannot verify that theory. Only a qualitative study can answer specific questions about why families in our area are becoming homeless.

Families experiencing homelessness live in my city. I see them on the street. I saw them in the office when I worked as a homeless liaison. Many Americans can ignore this growing phenomenon. They can pretend that it only happens to the unlucky or the irresponsible. I am thankful that I have had the opportunity to be exposed to some of the realities of homelessness. I believe that this study provides deeper insights into their lives and gives readers the opportunity to know and understand this growing population. I believe that the information found in this qualitative study also sheds light on the effects of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act and has the potential to help school districts better serve this population.

### **Overview of the Design and Methods**

These qualitative case studies utilized the personal stories of adults and children experiencing homelessness to help readers understand this unique phenomenon, currently becoming more and more common in America. Numerous quantitative studies have been performed to investigate the American homeless population. Researchers have counted them, recorded how well their children do in school, and documented their job loss. However, these quantitative studies do not help us understand the circumstances under which these individual became homeless, how they cope with being homeless, or how they maintain educational opportunities for their children.

According to Polkinghorne (2005):

Qualitative research is inquiry aimed at describing and clarifying human experience as it appears in people's lives. Researchers using qualitative methods gather data that serves as evidence for their distilled descriptions. Qualitative data are gathered primarily in the form of spoken or written language rather than in the form of numbers (p. 137).

Qualitative research was appropriate for this study because the methods used provided a deeper understanding of the events that led to homelessness, the methods these families use to deal with their situation, and the effects that the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act is having on their children's educational lives.

Yin (2003) states that "case studies are the preferred strategy when 'how' and 'why' questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context" (p. 1). Patton (2002) quotes Bob Stake, an eminent qualitative methodologist, when defining case study.

A case study is expected to catch the complexity of a single case... We study a case when it itself is of special interest... Case study is the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances. (Stake, 1995, p. 297)

This study analyzed several cases to determine specific themes associated with homelessness. Narrative research was incorporated into the study. According to Creswell (2007):

As a method, it (narrative research) begins with the experiences as expressed in lived and told stories of individuals... The procedures for implementing this research consist of focusing on studying one or two individuals, gathering data through the collection of their stories, reporting individual experiences, and chronologically ordering (or using *life course stages*) the meaning of those experiences. (p. 54)

### **Site and Participant Selection**

A Midwestern metropolitan city was the setting of this study. The city has a population of approximately 463,000 with a median income of \$45,000. Residents of the

city are approximately 50% White, 30% Black, 10% Hispanic, 2.5% Asian, .5% Native American, and 7% other.

The participants in this study were chosen according to criterion and purposeful sampling. “Criterion sampling involves selecting cases that meet some predetermined criterion of importance” (Patton, 2002, p. 238). The criteria in this study included families experiencing homelessness; families with one or more parents and one or more school age children or youth; and families that represent varying races including Black, Hispanic, and White. Purposeful sampling targets a specific group. “This is a strategy in which particular settings, persons, or activities are selected deliberately in order to provide information that can’t be gotten as well from other choices” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 88). Because this study specifically focused on homeless families, only homeless families participated in the study. Homeless parents at a local shelter that meet the criteria were asked to fill out a survey if they were interested in participating in the study. Of those surveyed, all four families were chosen to participate in the study because they met the criteria listed above.

### **Data Collection**

Creswell (2007) lists four basic data sources that can be collected for a qualitative research study. These include observations, interviews, documents, and audiovisual material (p. 43). For three years, I served as the board-appointed homeless liaison for a public school district. This position is federally mandated by the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. To be in compliance with this Act, the district must not deny enrollment to homeless students and must provide transportation to the school of best

interest, even if the student is living outside of the area. The qualitative research in this study was intended to improve policies affecting homeless families. The McKinney-Vento Act states that

the term ‘homeless children and youths’ includes children and youths who are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason; are living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to the lack of alternative adequate accommodations; are living in emergency or transitional shelters; are abandoned in hospitals; or are awaiting foster care placement; children and youths who have a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings; children and youths who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned building, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings, and migratory children. (National Center for Homeless Education, n.d., para. 3)

While this definition of homeless children and youth seems very descript and inclusive, as a former homeless liaison I know that homelessness is a complicated problem that is unique for each family suffering from its effects. This study sought to improve policies aimed at helping the homeless. By providing individual stories, this study provided evidence that the policy has both positive and negative attributes.

A survey document, observations, and interviews were used as data sources. A survey document provided the first data source. “Records, documents, artifacts, and archives—what has traditionally been called ‘material culture’ in anthropology—constitutes a particularly rich source of information about many organizations and programs” (Patton, 2002, p. 293). A flyer inviting families to participate in a research study was distributed at a homeless shelter. Families that wished to participate were asked to fill out a survey and return it to the shelter manager.

The second data source, observations, was used to better understand the actual conditions under which the homeless live. According to Patton (2002):

The first-order purposes of observational data are to *describe* the setting that was observed, the activities that took place in that setting, the people who participated in those activities and the meanings of what was observed from the perspectives of those observed. (p. 262)

For this study, the shelter, the activities that take place there and the homeless families that live there were observed. Three observations were recorded through written journaling.

For the purpose of gaining the homeless perspective, interviews and personal stories were be utilized as the third data source. “Qualitative interviewing begins with the assumption that the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit. We interview to find out what is in and on someone else’s mind, to gather their stories” (Patton, 2002, p. 341). Four families were selected from the surveys distributed at an area homeless shelter. They were chosen because their families included school-age children, they were willing to provide information, and the four families represented a variety of racial groups. The adults were asked to write or recite their personal stories regarding their experiences with homelessness and how it had or had not affected education. In addition, they and their children were interviewed.

The information collected from a document, observations, and interviews was recorded as descriptive data and later analyzed to better understand how the homeless families came to be homeless and what they are doing to survive their condition.

## **Data Analysis**

According to Creswell (2007) the analysis of data collected in a case study “consist of making a detailed description of the case and its setting.” He recommends four forms of data analysis and interpretation. These include categorical aggregation where issue-relevant meanings may emerge, direct interpretation in which the researcher draws meaning from a single instance, patterns that the researcher establishes between two or more categories and naturalistic generalizations drawn from the case or apply to a variety of other cases (p. 163). For this narrative case study, four homeless cases were analyzed to determine issue-related meanings and patterns and how they relate to other homeless families.

This study examined how families experience homelessness and how their children experience formal and informal education. To provide a foundation of knowledge related to homelessness and education, I reviewed literature and past studies. This information is outlined in chapter two. In chapter three, I describe the design and methods used in the study and in chapters four and five, I explain the findings, results, and implications.



## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

To better understand the phenomenon of homelessness and how it relates to education, I will review literature related to four themes strongly associated with this condition. First, I will review past and present trends in American homelessness. Second, I will examine research associated with the specific characteristics associated with individuals and families experiencing homelessness. Third, I will review research related to the history of American curriculum and democratic education. This research will address formal, informal, and non-formal education. Last, I will examine current economic factors and the role they play in the phenomenon of homelessness.

#### **Past and Present Trends in American Homelessness**

##### **History of American Homelessness, 1700s-1920s**

Homelessness existed in North America before the signing of the Declaration of Independence. When the United States was a collection of colonies, unskilled workers became homeless as they traveled the countryside looking for work in agriculture, and immigrants struggled to find homes in an area where territorial disputes were common. The pervasion Puritan attitude of the time considered those experiencing homeless as “beggars” or “rogues” and showed little sympathy (Kusmer, 2002, p. 19).

As the country became more urbanized from 1820 to 1850, homelessness increased. The railroad and telegraph were rapidly changing American society. The resulting mills, mines, and dock work offered an increase in employment but a decrease in job security. Families and individuals could easily find themselves without a work or a

home as jobs moved across the nation. The government responded by enacting strict vagrancy laws (Kusmer, 2002, pp. 38-39).

With the advent of the Civil War in 1860, the homeless rate dropped, only to increase rapidly after the war. Following the Civil War, economic depression plagued the nation. Many veterans were without work as the unemployment rate rose to almost 40%. Train hoppers or hobos became the face of homelessness. The Post-Civil War era marked the beginning of homelessness among African-American citizens. General Sherman had promised 40 acres and a mule for freed slaves. Ultimately, however, less than 1%, about 3,500 freed slaves received their allotment (Shotgun's Home of the American Civil War, 2002). As African Americans worked and lived in their new country, few had land and assets to leave to their children. There were at least 1 million homeless Black Americans scattered all throughout the South, and many estimated the number to be closer to 4 million at the end of the Civil War (Slaughter, 1969, p. 92).

During this same time, children that became homeless due to the loss of a parent through death or abandonment often found themselves in orphanages. It was not uncommon for these children to be sent on the Orphan Train from eastern cities like New York and Boston to towns in Kansas and Iowa. Some of these adoptions ended well but others did not. Andrea Warren, author of *Orphan Train Rider: One Boy's True Story*, writes:

We'll never know the exact number, but we think as many as 250,000 children rode orphan trains between 1865 and 1930...It's estimated that perhaps 50% of the children found good homes. The other 50% were taken as workers or were shuffled from home to home or abused in various ways. Yet even these children frequently express their gratitude to the orphan trains for giving them at chance at

life—a chance often denied them in the brutal environs of a vast city that offered no shelter. (2012, para. 1-2)

### **History of American Homelessness, 1930s-2000**

Thursday, October 24, 1929 marked the beginning of the Great Depression and the United States entered into a time of economic turmoil, leaving many individuals and families suffering from poverty and homelessness. While the economy had finally rebounded from the Civil War during the early 1900s, the Great Depression saw another increase in unemployment. Twenty-five percent of Americans were without jobs, leaving many families without homes and traveling around the country looking for work. For the first time, children and youths made up a large portion of the homeless population. They traveled with their families, living in cars and temporary housing, as their parents looked for work. More than 250,000 teens chose homelessness by leaving their homes to hop trains looking for work or adventure. In his book, *Riding the Rails: Teenagers on the Move During the Great Depression*, Errol Uys writes that many schools closed during the Depression and, without work, many young people were left to wander.

By the winter of 1931-1932, the third year of the Great Depression, hope and desperation drove an army of boys and a scattering of girls to swell the ranks of the migratory idle moving across America riding the freights and hitchhiking. (2003, p. 2)

The government responded to the depression by implementing President Franklin Roosevelt's "New Deal. This program helped Americans purchase homes. However, of the \$120 billion in loans between 1934 and 1962, 98% of the funds went to Whites, leaving little money for African Americans. This inequity in services created a housing gap that continues today (Adelman, 2003).

As the Great Depression gave way to World War II, homelessness diminished. By the 1960s and 1970s, most individuals experiencing homelessness were injured veterans from the Korean and Vietnam Wars or the mentally impaired. But as the 1970s became the 1980s, sharp changes began to occur in the American economy and public assistance. “In 1973, the average private, non-supervisory, non-agricultural wage reached an all-time high of \$9.72 per hour. By 1983, adjusting for inflation, the same worker was paid \$8.76 per hour” (Carlson, 2011, slide 31). From 1980 to 1998, \$140 billion in Federal Programs for the poor were reduced. These programs included the United States Department of Urban Housing and Development (HUD), unemployment benefits, disability benefits, food stamps, and family welfare programs.

During 1981 to 1986, Union strength declined and millions of factory workers lost their jobs, leaving many to work service jobs that provided less income and a lower standard of living. In 1980, the gap between the highest and average paid worker was 42:1. By 2000, the ratio rose to 531: 1. All of these factors contributed to creating an American homeless population that no longer included individuals but entire families (Carlson, 2011).

As the homeless population grew in the 1980s, the United States Government responded to a report that up to 50% of children experiencing homelessness were not attending school (Maine School Administrative District No. 41, n.d.). In 1987, the U.S. Congress enacted the Stewart B. McKinney Act. The Act was later renamed the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act after the two congressmen who had introduced it. According to the Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program, the

McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act requires local school districts to “address the problems that homeless children and youth have faced in enrolling, attending, and succeeding in school. Under this program, State Educational Agencies (SEAs) must ensure that each homeless child and youth has equal access to the same free, appropriate public education, including a public preschool education, as other children and youth” (United States Department of Education, 2004, p. 2). The McKinney-Vento Act defines homeless children and youth as “individuals without a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence” (U.S. Department of Education, 2004, p. 2). This includes children or teens that are living with other families, in motels, at emergency shelters, in transitional housing, or from place to place. This also includes children awaiting foster care placement or foster care children who have been placed in a shelter. According to McKinney-Vento, Homeless children and youth frequently maintain a poor attendance rate. Researchers have found that this is often the direct result of barriers that public school districts present when homeless families attempt to enroll their children in school. Without proof of residency, most school districts will not allow families to enroll. Researchers also found that many homeless students do not regularly attend school because they are moving from place to place. They often lack reliable transportation to their home schools but frequently prefer to miss school rather than attend a new school every few weeks. All of these factors combine to create an environment where homeless children and youth miss school and struggle academically (U.S. Department of Education, 2004).

More recently, legislation was enacted that expanded the definition of “homeless individual” under McKinney-Vento: The Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing (HEARTH) Act. HUD issued regulations regarding the new definition of homelessness in December 2011, and they took effect on January 4, 2012. The HEARTH Act added categories to the way in which a person may experience homelessness, and moved away from what had been a requirement for literal homelessness. HEARTH added to the current definition those individuals and families who meet all of the following criteria:

1. They will “imminently lose their housing,” whether it be their own housing, housing they are sharing with others, or a hotel or motel not paid for by a government entity. Imminent loss of housing is evidenced by an eviction notice requiring an individual or family to leave their housing within 14 days; a lack of resources that would allow an individual or family to remain in a hotel or motel for more than 14 days; or credible evidence that an individual or family would not be able to stay with another homeowner or renter for more than 14 days.

2. They have no subsequent residence identified.

3. They lack the resources needed to obtain other permanent housing. (HUD practice prior to passage of the HEARTH Act was to consider those individuals and families who would imminently lose housing within seven days to be homeless.)

In addition, P.L. 111-22 added to the definition of “homeless individual” unaccompanied youth and homeless families with children who are defined as homeless under other federal statutes and who: (a) have experienced a long-term period without

living independently in permanent housing; (b) have experienced instability as evidenced by frequent moves; and (c) can be expected to continue in unstable housing due to factors such as chronic disabilities, chronic physical health or mental health conditions, substance addiction, histories of domestic violence or childhood abuse, the presence of a child or youth with a disability, or multiple barriers to employment. Another change to the definition of homeless individual is to consider anyone who is fleeing a situation of domestic violence or some other life-threatening condition to be homeless (Perl, 2012, pp. 7-8).

### **Current Trends in American Homelessness**

Because homelessness has become a common occurrence in the U.S., researchers have conducted a number of studies and written multiple reports on its effects on those that experience it. Families, children, and youth are of particular concern.

In the book, *Educating Children without Housing: A Primer on Legal Requirements and Implementation Strategies for Educators, Advocates, and Policymakers* by Duffield, Heybach, and Julianelle, homelessness is defined as “a lack of permanent housing resulting from extreme poverty and/or unsafe or unstable living environments (e.g., conditions of domestic violence, child abuse and neglect, or natural or other disasters)” (2009, p. 3). The authors blame the increase in homelessness on a shortage of affordable rental housing and increase in poverty. They state that the mean income of homeless families is less than half of the poverty line and that “a full-time minimum wage worker cannot afford the fair market rent for housing in any jurisdiction within the United States” (p. 3). They also cite the causes of homelessness in

unaccompanied youth (teens that have been thrown out, who have run away, or who have been abandoned as physical or sexual abuse by parent or guardian, neglect, parental substance abuse, or extreme family conflict.) According to their research, Duffield, Heybach, and Julianelle found that emergency shelters in urban and suburban areas often do not have facilities for families or they have restrictions on taking in unaccompanied youth. Emergency shelters in rural areas are scarce resulting in many homeless people living with other families or in hotels and motels.

Duffield, Heybach, and Julianelle focused on homeless children and their access to quality education. They found that there are two main issues that often prevent homeless children from receiving a quality education. The first issue relates to mobility. Children do not stay in one place long enough to receive long-term, quality education. “School transfers have a well-documented negative effect on academic achievement, as do lack of quiet, safe places to do homework, lack of school supplies, and lack of food” (p. 11). The researchers also found that many homeless children experience barriers when trying to enroll in school. Residency requirements, guardianship papers, delays in transfer of school records, lack of transportation, and immunization records often prevent homeless students from getting into new schools when they move. In addition to these barriers, homeless students often have difficulty with regular attendance and they have higher rates of illness.

The National Center for Family Homelessness, founded in 1988 and considered the nation’s foremost authority on family homelessness, released a report titled *America’s Youngest Outcasts*. Since 2009, the report has been updated yearly. According to the



reports, homeless children are defined as “children from birth to 18 who are accompanied by one or more homeless parents or caregivers” (2010, p. 9). This definition does not include unaccompanied children and youth. The 2010 report suggests that homelessness hurts children in a variety of ways. First, brain development is often negatively affected. Young homeless children experience more developmental delays, emotional problems such as anxiety and depression, and behavioral issues. Second, homeless children often experience more stress than other children. “Homelessness can result in toxic stress that triggers a range of harmful biochemical impacts on the developing child” (America’s Youngest Outcasts, 2010, p. 11). Third, parenting is also negatively affected by homelessness. Given the tremendous challenges faced by homeless parents, young homeless children may experience little or no positive interaction with adults. Fourth, school readiness is diminished by homelessness. Homeless children are eight times more likely to be asked to repeat a grade, three times as likely to be placed in special education classes, and twice as likely to score lower on standardized tests (America’s Youngest Outcasts, 2010). Finally, the general health and well-being of homeless children is poorer than their peers with homes. A study done by Chwastiak, Tsai, and Rosenheck found that children experiencing homelessness often exhibit more physical disabilities and emotional and behavior problems than children living in impoverished but stable homes (2012).

In a 2011 article titled *Record Homelessness: Impact on Children*, Giselle Routhier describes homelessness in New York City.

Amidst high unemployment, increasing poverty and an acute shortage of affordable housing, the number of people experiencing homelessness in New

York City has reached an all-time high. As of the end of October 2011, nearly 17,000 homeless children bedded down in New York City shelters – the highest number ever recorded. As a result, an ever-increasing number of homeless students are struggling to get a decent education, and facing even greater challenges (p. 1)

Routhier describes a study done in 2004 on homeless children. The study revealed an additional concern related to homelessness: The separation of children from their mothers or caregivers. Rafferty, Shinn, and Weitzman (2004) found that 44 % of the homeless mother participants had become separated from one or more of their children during their time of homelessness. Five years later, 79% of the children were still separated from their mothers at the follow-up interview.

Rafferty, Shinn, and Weitzman (2004) focused on the academic achievement of homeless youths. Their study found that homeless students changed school more often, repeated grade more frequently, and report worse school experience than their peers with homes. Homeless children “scored approximately six percentile points worse than housed children on both reading and mathematics achievement, controlling for earlier achievement prior to their shelter stay” (p. 188). Overall, findings are consistent with other recent studies of homeless school-age children, which suggest an underlying continuum of risk, with homeless children experiencing greater risk than their never homeless peers.

### **Proposed Services for the Homeless**

In the article, *Ending Child Homelessness in America* (2010), Ellen Bassuk describes child homelessness and circumstances surrounding it. She also proposes services to assist those experiencing homelessness. Bassuk points out that the number of

families without homes has increased in recent years. “Not since the Great Depression have significant numbers of families been on the streets in the United States” (p. 496). In 1980s, families made up less than 1% of homeless population. By 2009 they comprised 32%.

According to Bassuk (2010), about 6 million Americans have “worst case housing needs” (p. 497). This puts them at an increased risk for becoming homeless. These families spend more than 50% of their income on housing and yet still live in substandard conditions.

After studying homelessness, Bassuk suggests that programs for the homeless should include the following:

1. Rapidly Rehouse Families—Every effort should be made to rehouse families as quickly as possible, minimizing their time in shelter.
2. Respond to Immediate Needs—Programs must first work to ensure that families’ immediate needs for safety, housing, financial assistance, and pressing health, mental health, and substance use needs are addressed before engaging them in longer term care.
3. Link Housing with Services and Supports—For all families, housing is essential but not sufficient. Supports such as child care and transportation are critical. In addition, many families require specialized and sometimes intensive services at various times in their lives.
4. Assess Families and Create Individualized Housing/Service Plans—The needs of homeless families and children are heterogeneous, each with their

own strengths and challenges. Programs must assess the needs of each family member and create individualized housing and service plans.

5. Support Family Unity—Families experiencing homelessness should not be separated unless the health and wellbeing of children are at immediate risk.
6. Deliver High-Quality Services—Services provided to families experiencing homelessness must be effective and of high quality. They should be family oriented and employ evidence-based and promising practices that are strengths based.
7. Provide Trauma-Informed Care—And ensure the physical and emotional safety of all family members. Given the high rates of interpersonal and random violence experienced by these families and children, all services must be provided through the lens of trauma.
8. Address Unique Needs of Children—The needs of homeless children are often overlooked, especially in settings with limited resources. At a minimum:
  - a. Child-specific services and child-friendly settings must be provided.
  - b. Services must be developmentally appropriate.
  - c. Programs must help children access and succeed in schools.
  - d. Medical, trauma-specific, and mental health services must be available for children.
9. Ensure a Basic Standard of Care by Training the Workforce—All staff working with homeless families should receive basic training that supports the development of specific competencies. In addition, providing staff with

appropriate supervision, continuing education, and career development opportunities are important.

10. Monitor Progress and Outcomes—It is important for programs to understand the needs of the families they serve and the effectiveness of the services they are providing so that they can provide high-quality care (Bassuk, 2010).

According to Bassuk, Volke, and Olivet (2010), most of the efforts to help the homeless have been focused on homeless individuals not families. They discuss studies that mistakenly show that few homeless families need services.

Because of the scarcity of resources and the relative lack of empirical data to support the importance of services in ending family homelessness, misperceptions and biases have filled in – with many insisting that services are not necessary except for a very small minority of families. The current prevailing opinion is that only a small number of homeless families require services and supports. (p. 34)

However, Bassuk, Volke, and Olivet contend that their research shows that all families need a variety of services. They arrange these services into three tiers.

In Tier I, all families regardless of their socioeconomic status, need the following to survive and maintain their families: affordable permanent housing, jobs that pay a livable wage, child care, health care, transportation, and access to educational opportunities for their children. Tier II includes all of the services listed under Tier I but include additional services and supports. These include education and job opportunities, services for traumatic stress and mental health services, family supports, and services for children. Most homeless families fall under Tier II. They may need these supports and services for a short time or for an extended length of time (pp. 36-39). But most homeless families will require help to alleviate their homeless status. Tier III families

require income supports as well as lifelong ongoing, often intensive, services and supports in order to maintain their families in housing and ensure the well-being of all family members. Many of these families have a member with some combination of a serious medical, mental health and substance use problem. (Bassuk et al., 2010, p. 39)

Tier III is related to all families, not just the homeless.

This study examines the question of whether homeless families are different from low-socioeconomic families and concludes that they do have unique needs. Services and supports must be tailored to meet those unique needs.

We should each take a closer look at what all American families require to survive and thrive. As part of this picture, we must recognize the pervasiveness of traumatic stress and its mental health consequences in the lives of families and children experiencing homelessness – and provide the supports and services people need for recovery and healing. This recognition in no way blames the victim, but rather identifies real needs and commands our nation to respond. Only by acknowledging the critical place of services and supports in the lives of almost all American families – and their connection to permanent housing-- can we address the issue of family homelessness adequately. (Bassuk et al., 2010, p. 39)

### **Who Are the Homeless?**

Individuals and families experiencing homelessness come from cities and rural communities. They may be homeless for only a few days or for several years. Based on the amount of time individuals experience homelessness, researchers have created three categories (Kuhn & Culhane, 1998, pp. 210-212). These include the transitionally homeless who stay in a homeless shelter for a short time before returning to permanent housing; the episodically homeless who frequently move in and out of homelessness but do not stay homeless for long periods of time; and the chronically homeless who are homeless continuously for one year or have four episodes of homelessness in three years.

The chronically homeless are often mentally ill or abuse drugs and alcohol. Veterans also represent a higher percentage of the chronically homeless (Burt et al., 1999, p. 11).

### **Misconceptions**

There is a common myth that most homeless individuals are adult males roaming the streets begging for hand-outs (National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, 2002). This leads to a misconception about the homeless. In his book entitled *Tell Them Who I Am: The Lives of Homeless Women*, Liebow (1993) writes:

One of the most startling things about them (the homeless) is that from city to city and region to region, they look so much and act so much alike. Such persons seem to have lost dimensionality. They may indeed be “mentally ill,” “disaffiliated,” and otherwise different from the rest of us, but they tend to be different in the same way, hence their likeness to one another. (p. 2)

There are several other myths concerning the homeless that tend to make other Americans afraid and hinder assistance that they might otherwise provide if they knew the true nature of homelessness. For example, there is a misconception that many homeless people are criminals:

Most homeless people are not criminals and many of those who are technically criminals have only committed what are called status crimes. Status crimes include getting arrested for loitering, sleeping in public, or trespassing. Those are called status crimes because they are things impossible to avoid doing if one does not have a home (Shay, 2011, para. 6).

In a study conducted by the Johns Hopkins University in 1983, homeless people were found to be less likely to commit crimes against person or property than non-homeless people (National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, 2002). In reality, many of the individuals experiencing homelessness in America are mentally ill, veterans, single-parent families, small children, unaccompanied youth, and people of color.

## **Mentally Impaired**

According to the Johns Hopkins Institute for Policy Studies (2012),

Persons with a severe mental illness (SMI) are individuals with serious and long-term mental disorders that impair their capacity for self-care, interpersonal relationships, work and schooling. It is estimated that approximately 200,000 of the SMI population are homeless. These individuals tend to be relatively young, unmarried, poor, and with low prospects of long-term gainful employment; some also have substance abuse problems, are HIV positive, and find the transition from living on the street to living indoors exceedingly difficult. (para. 1)

Researchers have found that homelessness among the mentally impaired has increased steadily since the 1980s. In Roanoke, Virginia, for example, the homeless population increased 363% between 1987 and 2007 (Roanoke Valley Alleghany Regional Advisory Council on Homelessness, 2007). In Bangor, Maine, a homeless shelter opened in 1987 with 10 beds. By 2007, the shelter had 33 beds and a staff to care for people with mental and physical health problems (Gagnon, 2007).

Markowitz (2006) published data related to a study he had conducted on 81 U.S. cities. His research found a direct correlation between the decreasing availability of psychiatric hospital beds and the increase in crime, arrest rates, and homelessness. This research is consistent with past studies in Massachusetts and Ohio that reported that 27% and 36% of the discharges from state mental hospitals had become homeless within six months (Belcher, 1988a). It is also consistent with a study in New York that found that 38% of discharges from a state hospital had “no known address” 6 months later (Drake, Wallach, & Hoffman, 1989).



## **Veterans**

An American Veteran is a person who “served in the active military, naval, or air service and was not dishonorably discharged” (Social Security Online: Compilation of the Social Security Laws, 2012, para 1). A veteran qualifies as homeless if he or she meets the criteria set by the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (United States Department of Education, 2004) and the McKinney-Vento: Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing (HEARTH) Act (United States Department of Education, 2011). To estimate the number of veterans experiencing homelessness in the United States, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) conducts yearly point in time counts. On one night in January 2012, 62,619 veterans were homeless in the U.S., a number that was virtually unchanged from the year before (National Coalition for Homeless Veterans, 2012).

According to the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (2012),

Causes of homelessness among Veterans are similar to causes of homelessness among non-Veterans (interrelated economic and personal factors and a shortage of affordable housing.) Additionally, Veterans experiencing homelessness have distinct characteristics that make it difficult to regain stability. They are more likely to be unsheltered and to experience homelessness for longer periods of time than non-Veterans. Veterans have a high rate of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, traumatic brain injury, and sexual assault, all of which increase the risk of homelessness. About half of Veterans experiencing homelessness have serious mental illness, half have a history with the criminal justice system, and nearly 70 percent have substance abuse disorders. (para. 2)

During 2012, the United States Senate Appropriations Committee, asked the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness to conduct a study to determine if the efforts of HUD have improved conditions for homeless veterans. The Council found that collaboration between HUD and the Veterans Association had resulted in a 17% drop

in the number of homeless veterans. This was accomplished primarily through permanent supportive housing rental vouchers provided by HUD and case management provided through VA (U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, 2012).

## **Families**

While individuals experiencing homelessness clearly include veterans and those that are mentally ill, this study focuses on families, children, and youth. The typical family experiencing homelessness is one headed by a single woman in her late 20s with roughly two children, one or both under the age of six (Bassuk et al., 1996). According to the National Center for Family Homelessness (2008), 84% of homeless families are headed by single women and many of these women have two or three children. Homeless women have often been victims of domestic violence and they seldom have high school diplomas or job skills (Bassuk, 2010, p. 498). According to the 2008 U.S. Census Bureau, families headed by women are 2.5 times poorer than other families and tend to be poorer than the disabled and elderly. The Population Reference Bureau reported similar findings in 2010. They found that 24% of the 75 million children under the age of 18 live in a family headed by a single mother. The poverty rate of these families is 42.2%. Seventy percent of children living with a single mother are poor compared to 32% of children living in other types of families. The statistics are even more significant among people of color headed by a single female with young children: 50.9% of Hispanic families, 48.8% of African American families, and 32.1% of non-Hispanic White families live in poverty (Mather, 2010).

Although families experiencing homelessness are predominately headed by women, adults in these families are more likely to be married than individual homeless adults. According to the National Survey of Homeless Assistance Providers and Clients, 23% are married and 7% are not (Burt et al., 1999). Shinn and colleagues (1998) found that being married or living with a partner increased the risk of requesting shelter, but the relative proportion of families living in homelessness who are married in a particular study depends greatly on whether they are recruited from shelters that exclude men (1998). In 2003, shelters in 57% of the cities involved in the U.S. Conference of Mayors (2005) report indicated that families could not always be sheltered together primarily because many family shelters excluded men and adolescent boys.

Related to single-parenting, Shinn and her colleagues found that pregnancy is a risk factor for homelessness (1998). In one study done with both housed and unhoused families receiving public assistance, 35% of the women experiencing homelessness were pregnant at the time of the study and 26% had given birth in the past year, while only 6% of the housed women were pregnant and 11% had given birth recently (Weitzman, 1989, p. 175).

### **Children and Youth**

Not only are families experiencing homelessness predominantly headed by women, but they are disproportionately families with children, many of which are under the age of six. Culhane and Metraux (1999) found that preschool children, particularly infants, have the highest risk for homelessness, higher than the general population. In 2009, the U.S. Department of Housing and Development reported that 51% of the

children experiencing homelessness were below the age of six. Due to this prevalence, several studies have been conducted to determine the effects of homelessness on children, and many show that children experiencing homelessness often suffer various negative effects from living without stable homes.

Two studies by Wood, Valdez, Hayashi, and Shen (1990) and Bassuk and Rosenberg (1990) found that preschool children raised in homelessness experience more developmental delays than their housed counterparts. The researchers used the Denver Developmental Screening test to measure various skills such as walking by age two and speaking by age three. Wood and his colleagues found that 15% of the children experiencing homelessness had one developmental delay while 9% had two or more. This was significantly higher than children with homes. Bassuk and Rosenberg found that 54% of the children living without homes had a developmental delay compared to only 16% of their housed counterparts. Language and social behaviors were areas of significant weakness.

Miller and Lin (1988) conducted a study on the general health of children experiencing homelessness. They found that homeless children were four times as likely to be rated as having fair or poor health when compared to the general population, two times as likely when compared to low income children with homes.

When studying mental health in children, researchers often use *The Child Behavior Checklist* to identify the signs of mental health problems. Bassuk and Rosenberg (1990) used this instrument with children with and without homes. They found that 39% of children without homes and 26% of children with homes scored in the

clinical range. Girls without homes and older youths experiencing homelessness were more likely to score in the clinical range.

Rescorla, Parker, and Stolley (1991) conducted a study comparing the cognitive abilities of children ages three to twelve living with and without homes. They administered various tests of cognitive ability and reading achievement. They found that the children without homes scored lower than the children with homes.

Youths make up a significant portion of the American homeless population. According to the United States Department of Health and Human Services, the two major causes of youths living without homes is a “breakdown in family relationships and “inadequate interventions from systems that are charged with protecting, nurturing, and supervising youth when their families cannot...The primary reason youth consistently state for their homelessness is family conflict” (2007, p. 2). Foster care is also a contributing factor in youth becoming homeless. Without stable homes, many youth choose homelessness over the foster care system. According to Safe Horizon (2012), the largest organization in the U.S. committed to helping victims of crime and abuse, youths experiencing homelessness often suffer from mental health problems such as depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, substance abuse and suicidal thoughts. Forty percent identify themselves as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, or Transgendered which is a disproportionate amount when compared to the 10% of the general youth population in the U.S. that identify with these sexual orientations. Many youth experiencing homelessness sell themselves to survive and use drugs to cope with the hardship and isolation of homelessness.

## **Race**

According to several studies, families experiencing homelessness are more likely to be people of color, especially African American (Lowin, Demirel, Estee & Schreinder, 2001; Rossi, Wright, Fischer & Willis, 1987; Susser, Lin & Conover, 1991; Whaley, 2002). This is also true of homeless single adults. According to the National Survey of Homeless Assistance Providers and Clients, 62 % of families and 59% of single adults, compared with 24% of the general population, were people of color (Burt et al., 1999). The rates of risk are again highest among young children. For example, an annual rate of homelessness in New York City among poor African American children under the age of five was 15% in 1990 and 16% in 1995 (Culhane & Metraux, 1999).

According to the Public Broadcasting System (2007), 41% of the homeless population are non-Hispanic Whites (compared to 76% of the general population), 40% are African Americans (compared to 11% of the general population), 11% are Hispanic (compared to 9% of the general population), and 8% are Native American (compared to 1% of the general population). In a more recent study, the American Psychological Association (2012) reports that “the poverty rate for Black children was 38.2 %; 32.3 % for Hispanic children; 17 % for non-Hispanic White children; and 13 % for Asian children.”

There are various theories as to why African Americans and other people of color living in the United States are overrepresented in the homeless population. First, the gap between African Americans and Whites in wealth has been an ongoing problem in the United States since the country was founded. Even with progress made over the last two

decades, the gap remains. For example, Black married couples earn about 80% of what White married couples earn and they own only 27% of what White married couples own. This gap dates back to post World War II when White families were buying homes and Blacks were largely kept from doing so. These racial differences in wealth reflect a key difference between income and savings. Families that have an income can live day-to-day, but families with savings and ownership can survive negative events like a job loss or a downturn in the economy. Families that earn, save, and own less are more vulnerable to homelessness, and due to durable inequality, African Americans tend to earn, save, and own less than their White counterparts (Rosenheck, Leda, Frisman & Gallup, 1997, p. 632).

Second, the advent of middle-class African Americans moving to the suburbs has created a problem for the Blacks they left behind. Many communities lost their internal cultural strength. It also reduced job opportunities for Black men living in the inner city. This then led to an increase in homelessness (Rosenheck et al., 1997, p. 632).

Third, housing segregation has contributed to homelessness among African Americans. Blacks have been kept from moving into traditionally White neighborhoods for decades. It first happened officially through government policy. Then it became more subtly when such behavior was outlawed. Segregation has been shown to compound the problems associated with poverty and unemployment, and thus, affect homelessness as well (Rosenheck et al., 1997, p.633).

In a study conducted by Rosenheck and colleagues (1997), there were several differences between homeless Whites and homeless Blacks. Homeless Blacks are less

likely to have mental illness than homeless Whites. Homeless Blacks tend to have more social supports and stronger employment histories. These results suggest that mental illness and social isolation are factors in homelessness among Whites but that Blacks are more affected by the historical legacy of discrimination.

Since the 1960s, researchers have found that African American children lag behind White children in their performance on standardized tests. That gap appeared to be narrowing throughout the 1980s. However, results on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) now show that the progress is fading. The National Task Force Report of Minority Achievement found that this gap begins in early elementary school and persists into the upper grades. While poverty appears to play some part in this achievement gap, it is not the only explanation. The achievement gap between African American middle class students and European American middle class students is actually wider than those with low income backgrounds (Johnson, 2003, p. 2-3). “Through elementary and secondary school, blacks scored lower, overall, on mathematics and reading tests than whites. Even for children with similar test scores one or two grades earlier, Blacks generally scored lower in mathematics and reading than Whites” (National Center for Educational Statistics, n.d., p. 1). These academic statistics coupled with those related to homelessness creates a difficult reality for homeless African American children.

While Hispanics or Latinos are somewhat overrepresented in homeless samples, many researchers suggest that most are not being counted. Baker (1996) coined the phrase *The Latino Paradox*. This refers to the underrepresentation of Hispanics among



homeless people despite their high poverty levels. She provides four possible explanations:

- (1) Survey methods may systematically undercount Latinos in homeless samples,
- (2) Latinos may have lower levels of personal risk factors such as psychiatric or substance abuse disorders that reduce their risk of homelessness,
- (3) Latinos may face fewer social disadvantages than other groups, particularly compared to Blacks, and
- (4) exceptionally strong traditions of mutual familial support may be protective against homelessness. (p. 132)

Regardless of the lower occurrence of homelessness among Hispanics when compared to Blacks, the number of homeless Latinos is growing as they increase in population, immigrate illegally, and experience deeper levels of poverty and discrimination. Hispanic children are also behind their White counterparts in reading, math, and science. “In the spring of 2000, the average math test score was 45.5 for Whites in comparison to 40.0 for Hispanic” (Pew Hispanic Center Fact Sheet, 2004, p. 1).

While Native Americans make up a relatively small portion of the American homeless population, they are still overrepresented both on and off reservations. Alcohol abuse is often cited as a leading cause of homelessness among Native Americans as this is widely identified as a major problem among the Native American society. Alcoholism is identified by many researchers as just one of the consequences suffered for the genocidal treatment of Native Americans by European conquerors (White, 1992). Native American fourth graders read at an average of 2.4 grade levels and perform math at an average of 2.5 grade levels behind their White peers (National Council of Native American State Legislatures, 2008). Homelessness only adds to this gap in achievement.

According to a study conducted by Levinson (2004), in the 1980s,

growing economic inequality, racism, a permanent decrease in the number of well-paid unskilled jobs, and a lack of affordable housing combined to make several million people—many of them African American women and their children—homeless on America’s streets, in shelters, in motels, and in substandard and temporary apartments. (Levinson, 2004, p. xxi)

This pattern continues today and has been exacerbated by an increase in unemployment.

### **Formal, Informal, and Non-Formal Education**

As I endeavor to find information related to the education of families experiencing homelessness and how their living conditions impact education, I must define and clarify the three types of education: formal, informal, and non-formal.

Drawing on Coombs, Prosser, and Ahmed (1973), Baguma and Okecho (2010, p. 2) describe formal education as: “the hierarchically structured, chronologically graded educational system running from primary school through to University and including, in addition to general academic studies, a variety of specialized programs and institutions for full-time technical and professional training”. Generally speaking, formal education is considered to be the information and experiences students gain in a public or private school setting.

Informal education is what happens after the students leave the classroom. Informal education can occur at home, at libraries, in museums, or any location where individuals are obtaining new information. According to Jeffs and Smith (2011), informal education “is driven by conversation and being with others. It develops through spending time with people—sharing in their lives—and listening and talking” (para. 1).

Non-formal education is similar in that it is less structured than formal education. However, it is more structured than informal education. Non-formal education is organized and may or may not have a specific curriculum. It is usually led by a leader with experience. The Girl and Boy Scouts are two organizations that represent non-formal education (Eaton, 2012).

### **Formal Educational Movements in 20th Century America**

In the early 1900s, John Dewey (1859-1952) was promoting and practicing various aspects of democratic education and curricula. Dewey, a professor, author, and philosopher, gained national recognition for his work in experimental teaching techniques (Dewey, 1999). Dewey felt that education served two purposes: meeting the needs of each individual student and meeting the needs of the society where that student would work and live. This idea that education should concern itself with individual students is the basis for democratic education, especially if there is an awareness that all students come from different experiences and backgrounds, none being more or less important than the next.

Dewey's theories fell between two extremes. On one end of the spectrum was traditional education where students sit quietly and receive knowledge from an all-knowing instructor. Discipline and structure was strict and inflexible. At the other end of the spectrum, was progressive education where students direct the learning and there is little if any direction or focus. Dewey criticized both. Traditional education was too rigid and did not allow for individual differences. Students learned in a vacuum and got little opportunity to apply what they had learned to the outside world. Democracy was not

modeled and students were left ill-equipped for the democratic society where they will work and live. Progressive education on the other hand, was too unstructured. Freedom for freedom sake was not effective. Dewey felt that individual student needs should not override the need to learn skills that will prepare them for society (Neil, 2005).

Dewey stressed that students were individuals, each with differing experiences and genetic make-up. He felt that education should meet the individual needs of students. This then would model a democratic society where each person is valued. But ultimately, Dewey believed that schools should exist to create educated citizens that can effectively function in a democratic society. The popular school structure in which students receive instruction through an all-knowing authoritarian figure contradicted Dewey's ideas of democratic education. There were no democratic ideals to be gleaned from this model. Students should instead, Dewey argued, experience varying situations in which they learned how to solve real-life problems. He did stress that these experiences should still be led and facilitated in a structured environment by a qualified educator. He did not believe in a free-for-all where students and teachers floundered aimlessly through the classroom (Neil, 2005).

According to Banks and Banks, multicultural education can be defined as:

an idea, an educational reform movement, and a process whose major goal is to change the structure of educational institutions so that male and female students, exceptional students, and students who are members of diverse racial, ethnic, language, and cultural groups will have an equal chance to achieve academically in school. (2004, p. 32)

While Dewey was most likely unaware of this term during his lifetime, one could argue that his promotion of education to meet the individual needs of all students marks the

beginning of this ideal, one that would later provide hope in the quest to educate the diverse, poor, and homeless.

**Life Adjustment.** In the 1930s, the Life Adjustment movement in curriculum was introduced to American society. Similar to the ideas of Dewey, Life Adjustment was based on the assumption that school curriculum design should result from the needs and interests of the children rather than from the disciplines of knowledge. Advocates of Life Adjustment argued that past curriculums trained a minority of students for college or for skilled vocations. They felt that American children would be better served with a curriculum that was less abstract and more concrete, more practical than creative. Life Adjustment advocates felt that “most youth were incapable of mastering a traditional academic curriculum and lacked the intellectual capacity to pursue a college education” (Connelly, 2008, p. 465).

While the Life Adjustment movement appeared to have merit in that it sought to provide for individual student needs rather than forcing a predetermined curriculum, in practice, it tended to discriminate. Higher socioeconomic students were placed on a college track while lower socioeconomic students and children of color were placed on a vocational track. It did little to provide equal access and opportunity to all American students.

**Discipline-Centered Curriculum Reform.** In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Discipline-Centered Curriculum Reform was introduced. With the advent of the Cold War and the Space Race, politicians, scientists, and mathematicians across the United States argued that a curriculum based on Life Adjustment did not meet the modern needs

of a changing world. They felt that “the nation’s survival was its ability to make the scientific and technological advances necessary to maintain economic and military superiority over its rivals” (Connelly, 2008, p. 463). They pushed for a Discipline-Centered Curriculum based on intense rigor and intellectual development. The notion that American youth were incapable of intellectual learning and thought seemed out-of-step with the current world advancements.

The Discipline Centered Curriculum had merit in that it challenged students to think more critically. However, it focused on the curriculum only and not on the individual needs and abilities of the children. Ultimately, children that lacked background knowledge and experiences related to the curriculum were left behind. This often included low socioeconomic students, homeless students, and children of color.

**Basic Skills Instruction.** Due to the weaknesses to the Discipline Centered curriculum, a third curricular movement emerged in the United States. The Disciplined Centered curriculum required teachers to instruct high-level content in math and science. Unfortunately, many teachers were not trained in depth in these areas and, thus, taught these subjects without the higher-level questioning techniques that the founders had intended. This along with the many social issues dominating the late 1960s and early 1970s, led to Basic Skills Instruction. This curriculum movement was developed to meet the personal needs of students, address societal issues, and raise standardized test scores. Students were given a choice of basic skills and encouraged to learn content that interested them. More emphasis was placed on societal interests and concerns. As a result, rigor in education suffered.

**New Basics Instruction.** With the release of the now famous report entitled *A Nation at Risk* (U.S. Department of Education, 1983), critics condemned Basic Skills Instruction. They pointed out that American students were falling behind those in other nations and proposed New Basics to include yet another reform to the idea of a standardized curriculum. This was an attempt to raise the standards so that the basics were more rigorous. New Basics continue to influence high school standards today by defining the number of credits most high schools require for graduation.

Again, however, New Basics seemed to miss the mark. American children continued to lag behind the performance of other children in industrialized nations. On an international assessment taken in 2000, U.S. students ranked 15<sup>th</sup> in Reading, 19<sup>th</sup> in math, and 14<sup>th</sup> in science (Lyne, 2001). The American people began to more rigorously question an educational system that essentially discriminated against the poor and the diverse and did not produce students that could compete in a global arena.

**No Child Left Behind.** The fourth movement was actually a federal mandate called the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) and is very much a part of modern-day American public education. The act attempts to impact the variety of children living in the U.S. but is more about assessment and accountability than curriculum reform. As a result, districts are focusing less on what is being taught and more on how it is being assessed. Any curriculum development now occurs with the end in mind.

NCLB is the direct result of past curriculum movements and *A Nation at Risk*. While many of these movements had merit, they often operated in a vacuum. Life Adjustment offered students life skills to operate successfully in society. Discipline-

Centered encouraged critical thinking skills. Basic Skills encouraged more flexibility in learning, and New Basics guaranteed that all students would graduate with minimum requirements. All had value and yet all were lacking. None addressed the unique demands of lower socioeconomic students, homeless students, and children of color. NCLB is unique because it focuses not on what school districts are teaching but, instead, on how well they are teaching. It requires schools to provide assessment scores and examines how well students are achieving. It specifically focuses on how various subgroups are performing. These subgroups include Black, Hispanic, White, and those that qualify for free or reduced lunch.

***Criticism for NCLB.*** Several years later, NCLB has become a common acronym among American educators and politicians. However, results have been mixed at best. Diane Ravitch, former Secretary of Education under the first President Bush, is particularly critical of NCLB, even though she was a supporter in its beginning. She criticizes NCLB for diminishing curriculum construction and replacing it with assessment. In her book entitled *The Death and Life of the Great American School System*, Ravitch writes, “Tests should follow the curriculum. They should be based on the curriculum. They should not replace it or precede it” (2010, p. 16). According to the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), states are required to create standardized tests to determine if districts and individual schools are proficient. If subgroups within these schools do not obtain proficient scores, the schools are labeled as *in need of improvement* and must suffer a variety of sanctions. This directly contradicts what Ravitch believes about testing and positive ways to improve educational performance. Rather than



choosing a quality curriculum first then creating a test to determine if that curriculum is being taught, districts are required to adjust their curriculums to match the standardized assessment. Unfortunately, the standardized assessments often only test communication arts and math and do so through lower-level questioning techniques. If districts and schools are losing credibility by not performing well on the standardized tests, it only makes sense that those same districts will ignore untested subjects and concentrate on teaching students to do better on the assessments. The result is not better education and higher academic performance but better test-taking skills. Ravitch points out that higher test scores do not necessarily mean brighter students.

Ravitch writes that accountability through standardized testing was created by politicians to improve education and help students obtain higher levels of achievement. However, she stresses that standardized testing is not the way to achieve these goals. She urges educators and politicians to embrace a rigorous, high-quality curriculum where students learn about a variety of topics and are encouraged to demonstrate their knowledge of these topics through a mixture of measures. She also dares to acknowledge that schools alone cannot be held responsible for student achievement. She urges families and communities to take some responsibility for student learning.

Ravitch is especially critical of how NCLB did not address the findings of *A Nation at Risk*. ANAR reported that American schools had fallen into mediocrity with low expectations and little focus on high quality achievement. The report stated that “the primary cause of this inadequate academic performance was the steady erosion of the content of the curriculum” (Ravitch, 2010, pp. 25-26). ANAR made many

recommendations including raising high school graduation requirements and college admission standards and increasing the school day and year. It is important to note that ANAR did not suggest an increase in testing, choice, or accountability. And, yet, that is what occurred with the enactment of NCLB.

As a response to ANAR, politicians first began by attempting to write national standards. However, this fell flat when those standards could not please varying interest groups. To avoid controversy, the standards were abandoned and the government looked to a less messy (and less effective) way of measuring educational achievement. Instead of writing the standards and curriculum first, states were required to produce a test that would determine student proficiency in communication arts and math. Schools that did not reach a predetermined requirement of proficiency would be negatively labeled and subject to sanctions. This process was a far cry from the suggestions made by ANAR. There was no emphasis on expanding and enhancing curriculum. There were no incentives or funding for increasing the school day or school year. Districts were simply asked to teach students to become effective test-takers in two basic subjects. While ANAR sought to better American education by pointing out its shortcomings and suggesting a variety of ways to improve it, NCLB tries to better education through the quick-fix of assessments and sanctions.

Ravitch also discusses school choice as a way NCLB tries to improve the quality of American education. One of the sanctions associated with NCLB includes allowing students attending a “needs improvement school” to choose another school to attend. As a result of this practice, various charter schools have developed across the nation, providing

additional choices to these students. The idea is that low income students should have the same choices that higher income students enjoy. Proponents of charter schools also feel that choice will cause all schools to improve. Good schools will be chosen. Poor schools will not be chosen and, as a result, either improve or close. In practice, however, there have been very different results.

According to Ravitch's research, some charter schools have done exceptionally well, but most have done no better than regular public schools, and some have performed horribly. The development of charter schools has not, as predicted, improved the quality of public schools. Instead, charter schools often are not chosen by highly motivated students and families, leaving those students to attend public schools. This has caused a shortage of higher performing students at the public schools and further lowering the achievement and motivation of others attending there. Many of the charter schools are not equipped to educate English Language Learners and Special Education students. This, again, causes the public schools to have a higher proportion of special needs students, lowering overall school achievement. According to charter school advocates, charter schools should be a way of addressing the needs of the at-risk population common in urban areas, and, yet, the charter schools are not addressing these needs. Ravitch suggests that charter schools are not producing enough gains to justify the negative effects they are causing existing public schools. Again, Ravitch proposes that NCLB actually causes many schools to worsen rather than to improve, and this directly contradicts the goals of ANAR.

## **Informal and Non-Formal Educational Movements**

Around the same time the Discipline Centered Curriculum was being introduced in the United States, Paulo Freire (1921-1997), an influential Brazilian educator and philosopher, was speaking out against formal educational policies and curriculums like Discipline-Centered that did not address the needs of the low socioeconomic and students of color. He and several other educators emphasized the need to consider the informal education students were receiving at home and in their neighborhoods as a way to bolster formal education.

**Freire.** Freire is best known for his book entitled *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Freire wrote about the importance of respect in education. He insisted that education should not include one person acting on another but instead should be people working with each other. Freire believed that education should make a difference in the world and positively enhance communities. He was particularly interested in helping those that did not have a voice in the world, the oppressed. He believed that education should take place in the context of the participants (Smith, 2002). In his book, Freire (1993) wrote about what he believed education had become:

Education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor. Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiques and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat...In the banking concept of education, knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing. Projecting an absolute ignorance onto others, a characteristic of the ideology of oppression, negates education and knowledge as processes of inquiry. The teacher presents himself to his students as their necessary opposite; by considering their ignorance absolute, he justifies his own existence. (p. 72)

Freire's work can be outlined into five themes. First, he encouraged teaching to take place as a dialogue between teacher and students with all contributions considered with equal importance. Second, Freire stressed the importance of action based on the dialogue. He felt that education should make a difference in the world. Third, he was concerned about developing a conscious realization of the oppressed and how education should provide a voice to this group that often does not have one. Fourth, he "situated educational activity in the lived experience of participants" (Smith, 2002, p. 2). And last, he often drew his metaphors from Christian examples speaking of an "Easter experience" and being "born again" (Smith, 2002, p. 2).

According to Freire, the goal of traditional education had been to manage individuals and make them passive. The oppressed were expected to accept their role in society. Traditional education did not encourage critical thinking. The oppressed members of society were not encouraged to question their positions in society, learn from their experiences, or make positive change. Freire argued that pedagogy for the oppressed should do just that. He insisted that educators must provide a pedagogy that encourages the oppressed to create their own growth through their own experiences. Freire believed that students must create their own thoughts and words rather than repeat those of others. He encouraged the oppressed to be fully aware of their confinement and fight for liberation.

**Delpit.** In the book entitled *Other People's Children: Cultural Conflict in the Classroom*, Lisa Delpit proposes that the American educational system favors the dominant culture and diminishes children of color and lower socioeconomic status. Delpit

discusses a “culture of power” that exists in the American educational system and supports mainstream society. She believes that white, middle-class teachers consider students of color and low-income students “other people’s children.” These teachers are seemingly unaware of the power they hold and often prevent their students of color and lower income students from experiencing a higher level of success. Delpit (1995) states:

Indeed, in the educational institutions of this country, the possibilities for poor people and for people of color to define themselves, to determine the self each should be, involve a power that lies outside of the self. It is others who determine how they should act, how they are to be judged. When one ‘we’ gets to determine standards for all ‘wes,’ then some ‘wes’ are in trouble! (p. xv)

To remedy this unfortunate pattern, Delpit suggests that teachers acknowledge the imbalance of power and help students of color and low-income students experience success:

Teachers can . . . acknowledge the unfair ‘discourse-stacking’ that our society engages in. They can discuss openly the injustices of allowing certain people to succeed, based not upon merit but upon which family they were born into, upon which discourse they had access to as children. . . . Only after acknowledging the inequity of the system can the teacher’s stance then be ‘Let me show you how to cheat!’ And of course, to cheat is to learn the discourse which would otherwise be used to exclude them from participating in and transforming the mainstream. (p. 165)

According to Delpit, teachers should lead the way in embracing multiculturalism and, thus, transforming American society. She suggests that we use our educational system to “recognize and overcome the power differential, the stereotypes, and the other barriers which prevent us from seeing each other. Those efforts must drive our teacher education, our curriculum development, our instructional strategies, and every aspect of the educational enterprise” (Delpit, 1995, p. 134).

**Ladson-Billings.** Gloria Ladson-Billings agrees. Ladson-Billings is the Kellner Family Professor of Urban Education at the University of Wisconsin. She is credited with coining the term “culturally responsive pedagogy,” and is one of the leaders in the field of culturally relevant teaching. Ladson-Billings describes culturally relevant pedagogy as “a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (1994, p. 17-18). She adds that culturally responsive teachers develop intellectual, social, emotional, and political learning by “using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (1992, p. 382). Participating in culturally relevant teaching essentially means that teachers create a bridge between students’ home and school lives, while still meeting the expectations of the district and state curricular requirements. Culturally relevant teaching utilizes the backgrounds, knowledge, and experiences of the students to inform the teacher’s lessons and methodology.

In her book, *The Dream Keepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children*, Ladson-Billings examines the qualities in teachers whose African American students achieve academic success. Ladson-Billings stresses that teachers must make instruction relevant to the cultures of the children s/he is teaching if children of color are to flourish in the American school system. She also emphasizes the need for teachers to set high expectations and take responsibility for helping their students reach high levels of excellence. She describes the dream keepers as “teachers who focus on student learning, cultural competence, and sociopolitical consciousness in their work with African American and Latino students” (2009, p. 157).

**Gay.** Geneva Gay stresses the importance of culturally responsive pedagogy as a way to provide a more democratic form of education to all American students. Gay is currently a Professor of Education at the University of Washington-Seattle where she teaches multicultural education and general curriculum theory. According to Gay (2010):

Significant changes are needed in how African, Asian, Latino and Native-American students are taught in United States schools. Two characteristics of their current achievement patterns highlight this imperative. One is the consistency of performance patterns among ethnic groups across different indicators and measures of school achievement. The other is the variability of achievement of subsets of individuals within ethnic groups. (p. xvii)

She stresses that pointing out the educational gaps among racial and socioeconomic subgroups, as the federal mandate, No Child Left Behind, tends to do, does nothing to remedy the problem. She suggests that the issue can only be resolved through culturally responsive pedagogy.

Gay (2000) defines culturally responsive teaching as using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, and performance styles of diverse students to make learning more appropriate and effective for them; it teaches to and through the strengths of these students. Gay (2000) also describes culturally responsive teaching as having five main characteristics, all consistent with democratic ideals. First, it acknowledges the legitimacy of the cultural heritages of different ethnic groups, both as legacies that affect students' dispositions, attitudes, and approaches to learning and as worthy content to be taught in the formal curriculum. Second, it builds bridges of meaningfulness between home and school experiences as well as between academic abstractions and lived sociocultural realities. Third, it uses a wide variety of instructional strategies that are connected to different learning styles. Fourth, it teaches students to know and praise their



own and each other's' cultural heritages and fifth, it incorporates multicultural information, resources, and materials in all the subjects and skills routinely taught in schools.

### **Economic Factors Related to Homelessness**

While it is true that individuals experiencing homelessness come to this state through varying circumstances, it is also true that economics almost always play a significant role. The mentally ill and injured veterans often do not have a way to make a steady income. Single mothers often struggle to find jobs that sufficiently support several children, and families earning minimum wage fight a daily war to secure enough income to make it in American society. The economy can be defined as the management of expenses (Merriam-Webster.com, 2012). For the purposes of this study on families experiencing homelessness and how education is affected by homelessness, I will focus on the following features related to economics: The Great Recession, poverty, and affordable housing.

#### **The Great Recession**

Throughout the history of the United States, the economy has experienced a series of ups and downs. In the past century, the country survived the Great Depression of the 1930s and is still struggling to fully recover from the recent Great Recession that officially began in December 2007.

A recession can be defined as a period of general economic decline accompanied by a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) that is negative for at least two quarters.

Characteristic of a recession include high unemployment, stagnant wages, and fall in

retail sales. The GDP is measured by comparing how fast the economy is growing as compared to each previous quarter (BusinessDictionary.com, 2012).

The *Great Recession* is the term coined by former Federal Reserve Chairman Paul Volcker to describe the current economic downturn. The causes of the Great Recession include an “inflated housing market driven by easy credit, excessive leverage in the financial system, speculative excess in the hedge fund industry, staggeringly high trade deficits, and an American consumer that relied too much on credit to finance their extravagant purchases” (Manual, 2012, para. 5). For example, many Americans were buying houses they could barely afford believing that the value of the houses would continue to increase. However, in 2006, housing prices started to decline. Many homeowners realized that the value of their houses were lower than the amount they paid. This led to foreclosures.

By August 2007, banks became afraid to lend to each other because they didn't want these toxic loans as collateral. This led to the \$700 billion bailout, and bankruptcies or government nationalization of Bear Stearns, AIG, Fannie Mae, Freddie Mac, IndyMac Bank, and Washington Mutual. (Amadeo, 2012, para. 4)

By August 2008, unemployment was on the rise, further complicating the housing crisis.

In 2009, the government launched the economic stimulus plan. It was designed to spend \$185 billion in 2009. And in fact, it halted a four-quarter decline in GDP by Q3 of that year, thus ending the recession. However, unemployment continued to rise to 10%, and many business leaders still expected a W-shaped recession by the end of 2010. High unemployment rates still persisted into 2011. (Amadeo, 2012, para. 5)

According to Larry Summers (2009), American economist and Director of the United States Economic Council for President Barack Obama,

Economic downturns historically are of two types. Most of those in post-World War II-America have been a by-product of the Federal Reserve's efforts to control

rising inflation. But an alternative source of recession comes from the spontaneous correction of financial excesses: the bursting of bubbles, de-leveraging in the financial sector, declining asset values, reduced demand, and reduced employment. (para. 1)

Summers believes that the Great Recession falls under the second type. At the time he wrote this, 4.4 million jobs had been lost and the unemployment rate had already reached 8%. According to a study conducted by the Brookings Institute in 2010, “One in nine American children has an unemployed parent as a result of the Great Recession. These 8.1 million children are more likely to experience homelessness, suffer from child abuse, fail to complete high school or college, and live in poverty as adults than other children” (Isaacs & Loveall, 2010, para 1). The Brookings Institute names California and Florida as the hardest hit states in the mortgage crisis. “In California alone, more than 500,000 children have gone through a completed foreclosure. Another half million are living in homes where the mortgage is 60 or more days past due” (Panchuk, 2012, para. 7).

The Great Recession is the 11<sup>th</sup> recession since 1948 and lasted longer than other recessions. It officially ended in June 2009, but many Americans are still without work and teetering to survive financially (Isidore, 2010).

### **Poverty and Affordable Housing**

The two main economic factors most often cited as contributing factors to homelessness are poverty and the lack of affordable housing. According to a study done by the Southern Rural Development Center, children living in poverty greatly increased between 2000 and 2010. In 2000, the percentage of children under 18 living in poverty was 16.2%. By 2010, that number had risen to 21.6%. Small cities saw the greatest

increase with 18.5% in 2000 and 25.1% in 2010. Urban areas increased from 15.5% to 20.8% and rural areas increased from 21.2% to 27.2%. “The majority of counties in Michigan, through the mid-South to Florida and from Missouri to North Carolina experienced significant increases in their child poverty rates” (Gallardo, 2012, para. 11).

In a 2011 report done by the Brookings Institute, poverty not only grew in the first decade of the new century, it moved to areas that had previously not experienced it: the suburbs. The report found that more than 15% of American families lived below the federal poverty line, which is set at \$22,314 for a family of four. When examining the specific characteristic of the poor, researchers found that poor areas stayed poor while adjacent areas increased in poverty level between five and ten percent. For example, in Braddock, Pennsylvania the poverty rate stayed at a consistent 40% in the traditionally poorer areas. However, in the more affluent areas, the poverty rate increased to between 20% and 30% by the end of the decade. The study concluded that,

The population in extreme-poverty neighborhoods rose more than twice as fast in suburbs as in cities from 2000 to 2005–09. The same is true of poor residents in extreme-poverty tracts, who increased by 41% in suburbs, compared to 17% in cities. However, poor people in cities remain more than four times as likely to live in concentrated poverty as their suburban counterparts. (Berube, Kneebone & Nadeau, 2011, para. 5)

In the late 1960s, a family could live above the poverty level on a minimum wage job.

A generation ago, roughly two out of every 10 families spent more than 30% of their income on rent; today this proportion has doubled to almost four out of every 10 families. And while only 6% of families devoted more than half of their income to rent a generation ago, today that number tripled to almost 18%. We have now reached the point where today those earning the minimum wage cannot afford to pay the market-rate rent for a two-bedroom apartment anywhere in this country. (da Costa Nunez, 2012, para. 2)

In a city like New York, the average one-room studio apartment costs \$2,000 a month or \$24,000 a year. A person earning minimum wage would earn \$15,080 per year, well below the price for one small apartment (Watson, 2012). This clearly shows that a person could work and still not afford housing.

Access to affordable housing was not always a problem for low-wage earners. In 1970, the number of low-cost rental units was greater than the number of low-income renters. By 1995, there were the same number of units and an increase of 69.4% in poor households. “With rising poverty and a worsening shortage of affordable units, family homelessness and the number of shelters increased as well. In the early 1980s, shelters began to become the alternative to low-cost housing” (Institute for Poverty, Children, and Homelessness, 2012, para. 6). Ralph da Costa Nunez, president of the Institute for Poverty, Children, and Homelessness, calls homeless shelters “America's surrogate for low-income housing” (2012, para. 5). He proposes that shelter become communities of hope and opportunity where parents can receive education, job training, counseling, and financial advice. “If shelters are the new low-income housing alternative of today, and likely tomorrow, let's put them to work as residential educational training facilities, and as a tool used to end homeless, not a place to simply wallow in it” (da Costa Nunez, 2012, para. 6).

Clearly, recent economic woes have played a part in the increase of homelessness in America. While investors look for ways to pad their portfolios and politicians argue over policies that will ultimately serve their personal agendas, American families struggle to put food on the table and a roof over their heads.

## **Conclusion**

History tells us that homelessness has occurred in America for many years and for varying reasons. But as researchers examine recent events, it becomes clear that the economy is changing the face of homelessness. More Americans are currently unemployed. An increasing number of families are struggling to maintain stable homes. It is becoming more and more common for whole families to stay at homeless shelters. What does this mean for their children's education? Will they receive the same free appropriate public education that all American children are promised by our government? Those questions, along with others, were addressed in this study.

## CHAPTER 3: DESIGN AND METHODS

According to the National Coalition for the Homeless (2009), approximately 1% of the American population is homeless each year. That equates to over two million people, 39% of which are children. Children experiencing homelessness suffer from a variety of negative effects due to the lack of consistent housing. These include multiple physical and mental health problems, academic and cognitive delays, and social and emotional disorders. Children in homeless situations often perform poorly in school and maintain a lower attendance rate (Family Housing Fund, 1999).

The purpose of this narrative case study was to examine families experiencing homelessness and how children experience formal and informal education. Families experiencing homelessness were defined by the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act as “individual who lack fixed, regular, and adequate housing” (United States Department of Education, 2004, p. 2). The units of analysis for this study were adults and children experiencing homelessness.

The theoretical traditions of case study and narratology were utilized in this study. According to Yin, "The distinctive need for case studies arises out of the desire to understand complex social phenomena" because "the case study method allows investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events" (2003, pp. 2, 5-6). “Narrative descriptions exhibit human activity as purposeful engagement in the world. Narrative is the type of discourse that draws together diverse events, happenings and actions of human lives” (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 5).

The overarching research question for this study was: What themes are apparent in the perceptions and experiences of participants as reflected in their stories of being homeless as it relates to their children's educational experiences? The sub-questions were as follows:

- How do adults experiencing homelessness describe their children's formal and informal educational experiences since becoming homeless?
- How do children experiencing homelessness describe their formal and informal educational experiences since becoming homeless?
- How do adults experiencing homelessness describe the events that led to homelessness, and how did these events affect the educational experiences of their children?

Homelessness is a tragedy that ultimately touches the lives of anyone living in the United States. As families lose their jobs and houses, the economy suffers from their lack of spending power and tax dollars. As children are forced to live out of cars, in shabby hotels, or on the street, they suffer negative long-term effects that prevent them from becoming fully functioning adults. Homeless children and youth often experience poor academic performance and attendance. This qualitative research study on homelessness and its effects on the education of children and youth provided insight into the causes of this phenomenon and possibly encourage new solutions. Currently, the United States Government has a variety of supports in place to assist homeless families with education. This study revealed stories related to these programs and could be used to inform future legislation.



This chapter describes my study design and methods including an explanation of qualitative research and the theoretical traditions. The data sources and how they were analyzed are described in detail. The chapter concludes with limitations and ethical considerations.

### **Rationale for Qualitative Research**

Qualitative research was specifically chosen for this study due to its value in discovering insights into real-life events as they are experienced by the participants. “Qualitative research is research that attempts not only to understand the world, but also understand it through the eyes of participants whose world it is” (Wilson, 1998, p. 1). Qualitative research uses a naturalistic approach that seeks to understand phenomena in context-specific settings, such as "real world settings [where] the researcher does not attempt to manipulate the phenomenon of interest" (Patton, 2002, p. 39). In quantitative studies concerning homelessness, many statistics are recorded regarding the number of homeless families, the amount of time they are homeless, the assessment scores homeless children and youth produce, and the number of days they miss school. While these numbers are interesting and valuable, they do not tell the entire story.

Qualitative analysis results in a different type of knowledge than does quantitative inquiry because one party argues from the underlying philosophical nature of each paradigm, enjoying detailed interviewing and the other focuses on the apparent compatibility of the research methods. (Golafshani, 2003, p. 600)

In conducting a qualitative research study, I began my research with several goals in mind. I was hoping to gain insight into how families become homeless. I wanted to understand what causes homeless children and youth to miss school and perform poorly on academic assessments, and I hoped to find out if homeless families are getting the

educational supports from local school districts that are mandated by the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. By surveying, interviewing and observing homeless families, I sought to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of homelessness and its effects on education. The theoretical traditions of case study and narrative inquiry were utilized to obtain these goals.

### **Theoretical Tradition of Case Study**

Case study research has a long history in the social sciences. The origin can be traced to studies in anthropology and sociology, including LePlay's study of families in the late 1800s, Malinowski's study of the Trobriand Islands in the early 1900's, and the University of Chicago's sociological studies in the mid-1900s (Creswell, 2007, p. 73). Yin defines the case study research method as "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used" (1984, p. 23). Research utilizing case study methodology "excels at bringing us to an understanding of a complex issue or object and can extend experience or add strength to what is already known through previous research" (Soy, 1997, para. 1). This case study extended the information already known about homeless families and their experiences with education.

A case study may contain a single or multiple case studies (Yin, 2009). This is a multiple case study comprised of four homeless families with children or youth. Each case consisted of a survey, interviews, and observations. Several families were studied to better ensure validity within the study. Yin (2009) stated, "Single-case designs are

vulnerable if only because you will put ‘all your eggs in one basket.’ More important, the analytic benefits from having two (or more) cases may be substantial” (p. 61).

Stake (1995) proposes a series of necessary steps for completing the case method, including posing research questions, gathering data, and analyzing and interpreting data.

Yin (2003) also provides a framework for conducting a case study:

1. Presenting a clear and adequate specification of the theoretical issues and, from this, the questions that frame the study.
2. Clearly defining the unit(s) of analysis, including possible sub-units if these are warranted.
3. Deciding on the appropriate number of cases to explore within the study.
4. Clearly specifying the selection criteria for choosing the case studies.  
Choosing an appropriate and effective data collection and analysis strategy.
5. Developing appropriate tests to ensure the validity and reliability of the approach taken in conducting the case study.

### **Theoretical Tradition of Narratology**

Narrative research originated from “literature, history, anthropology, sociology, sociolinguistics, and education” (Creswell, 2007, p. 54). Since its beginning, however, narrative research has evolved depending on the field of study. Tzvetan Todorov, a Franco-Bulgarian philosopher, coined the term *narratology* in 1969 during the modernist period (1950-1970) (Cuddon, 1992). Narratology is:

Dominated by structuralist approaches at its beginning, narratology has developed into a variety of theories, concepts, and analytic procedures. Its concepts and models are widely used as heuristic tools, and narratological theorems play a central role in the exploration and modeling of our ability to produce and process

narratives in a multitude of forms, media, contexts, and communicative practices. (Living Handbook of Narratology, 2011, para. 1)

As I conducted this qualitative case study, I utilized the theoretical tradition of narrative inquiry. Clandinin and Connelly (1994) describe narrative as a way to understand experience.

With narrative as our vantage point, we have a point of reference, a life and a ground to stand on, for imagining what experience is and for imagining how it might be studied and represented in researchers' texts. In this view, experience is the stories people live. People live stories, and in the telling of these stories, reaffirm them, modify them, and create new ones. Stories lived and told educate self and others, including the young and those such as researchers who are new to their communities. (p.iii)

For the purposes of this study, I interviewed the members of four families experiencing homelessness, encouraging them to share their personal stories related to education. White and Epston (1990) stated, "Not only do the stories that persons have about their lives determine the meaning that they ascribe to experience, but these stories also determine which aspects of lived experience are selected out for the ascription of meaning" (p. 40). Through these stories I learned causes of their homelessness and how these adults, children, and youth coped with the demands of their unstable living conditions. Through their stories, I discovered some of the ways homelessness is affecting the education of the children and youth and how the services provided by the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act were influencing those experiences.

## **Design and Methods**

### **Site Selection**

The setting for this study was a Midwestern metropolitan city. The population of the city is approximately 463,000, 60% White, 30% Black, 10% Hispanic, and 2.5% Asian, .5% Native American, and 7% other. The population of the entire metro-area is 1.7 million. According to a 2011 report by Fannie Mae, the median income for this metropolitan area is \$72,300. At any given day, the city has over 4,000 homeless individuals, 1,600 of which are children. Selected families were residing at a homeless shelter located in the city. The shelter serves families and individuals from the entire metropolitan area.

### **Participant Selection**

“Criterion sampling involves selecting cases that meet some predetermined criterion of importance” (Patton, 2002, p. 238). The criteria included families experiencing homelessness; families with one or more parents and one or more school age children or youth; and families that represent varying races including Black, Hispanic, and White. Purposeful sampling targets a specific group. “This is a strategy in which particular settings, persons, or activities are selected deliberately in order to provide information that can’t be gotten as well from other choices” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 88). Because this study specifically focused on homeless families, only homeless families participated in the study. Homeless parents at a local shelter that met the criterion were asked to fill out a survey if they were interested in participating in the

study (see Appendix D). Four families met the criteria for the study and received the flyer and survey. All four families returned the survey and were chosen to participate.

### **Data Collection**

Creswell (2007) lists four basic data sources that can be collected for a qualitative research study. These include documents, interviews, observations, and audiovisual material. For this study, I collected surveys, observation field notes, and interview transcripts. I triangulated this data to identify recurring themes, patterns, and categories. This assisted in ensuring that the study is valid and credible. According to Patton (2002), “You include triangulation of data sources and analytical perspective to increase the accuracy and credibility of findings” (p. 93).

I asked chosen participants to write or dictate personal stories about how they became homeless and how homelessness has affected the task of educating their children. I then interviewed the participants one more time within a month of the first meeting. I also observed the participants at the shelter.

**Documents.** The collection and analysis of documents is often an important source of data in a qualitative research study. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) state that documents “can be categorized as personal documents, official documents, and popular culture documents. Sometimes these documents are used in connection with, or in support of, the interviews and participant observations” (p. 133). Patton (2002) describes records, documents, and artifacts as material culture. He writes,

Organizations of all kinds produce mountains of records, both public and private. Indeed, an oft-intriguing form of analysis involves comparing official statements found in public documents (brochures, board minutes, annual reports) with private

memos and what the evaluation observer actually hears or sees occurring in the program. (p. 293)

The results of a written survey were used as the initial data for this study.

**Interviews.** Interviews often play an important role in the qualitative research process. According to deMarrais (2004),

Qualitative interviews are used when researchers want to gain in-depth knowledge from participants about particular phenomena, experiences, or sets of experiences. Using interview questions and follow-up questions, or *probes*, based on what the participant has already described, the goal is to construct as complete a picture as possible from the words and experiences of the participant. This can only be accomplished when the qualitative interview is open ended enough for the participant to provide a depth of knowledge on the research topic. (p. 52)

Patton (2002) stresses that interviews are used because researchers cannot observe everything. Feelings and thoughts cannot be known without actually speaking and listening to the participants.

We cannot observe how people have organized the world and the meanings they attach to what goes on in the world. We have to ask people questions about those things. The purpose of interviewing, then, is to allow us to enter into other person's perspective. (Patton, 2002, p. 341)

Interviews provided important data in this qualitative research study. Participants were asked to share their personal stories regarding the hardships of homelessness and how this phenomenon has influenced their lives and experiences with education. I believe that the information revealed in the interviews provides the reader a better understanding of homelessness. It should also help determine if current homeless educational supports are meeting the needs of this unique group.

In this study, the standardized open-ended interview approach was utilized with follow-up probing questions. "This approach requires carefully and fully wording each

question before the interview” (Patton, 2002, p. 344). Questions were asked to determine the cause of homelessness and how homelessness has influenced everyday life and experiences related to education (see Appendices F and G for interview questions).

One 30 to 60 minute interview was conducted with family members in a quiet location within the shelter. Parents and children were interviewed to determine their unique perspectives on homelessness and education. Parents were present when the children were interviewed. Standardized open-ended interviews ensured fidelity and validity among the participants. However, probing and clarifying questions allowed the participants to share more personal experiences, thus providing the opportunity for a deeper degree of understanding.

The interviews were recorded using audio instrumentation. Farber (2006) states,

Tape recording interviews is an important part of the interview process, because unless you are gifted with infinite memory, it will be necessary to record your conversations so that you can later go back and analyze the ‘data’ from your interviews. (p. 370)

The participants were informed that they are being recorded. Patton (2002) suggests that the researcher clearly explain the need for the tape recorder to the participant and secure permission. He also suggests that the researcher allow the participant to stop the recording if he or she chooses (p. 381).

Questions were developed and piloted with the stories of two nonparticipants.

Three main inquiries were formulated:

- How did you and your family become homeless?
- Describe your experiences since become homeless.



- Describe your experiences with homelessness and your child's education.

(Parent Question) OR

- Describe how homelessness has affected your experiences with school.

(Student Question)

Interview guides contained these generic questions. While the interviews began with standardized, open-ended questions, the probing questions, unique to each interview, made the theoretical assumptions more explicit and the data more limited and focused. I personally transcribed and analyzed the interviews.

**Observations.** While many qualitative research studies rely heavily on interviews, observations also provide quality information. According to Angrosino, “Even studies that rely mainly on interviewing as a data collection technique employ observational methods to note body language and other gestural cues that lend meaning to the words of the persons being interviewed” (2007, p. 729). Patton and Maxwell agree. “There are limitations to how much can be learned from what people say. To understand fully the complexities of many situations, direct participation in and observation of the phenomenon of interest may be the best research method” (Patton, 2002, p. 21). “While interviewing is often an efficient and valid way of understanding someone's perspective, observation can enable you to draw inferences about this perspective that you couldn't obtain by relying exclusively on interview data” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 94).

In addition to interviews and document analysis, observations were conducted during my study to better understand the phenomenon of homelessness and its effect on education. For the purposes of this study, participants were observed at the shelter. This

provided a natural setting. Angrosino suggests that observations of participants in a natural setting are important to fully understanding the phenomenon being studied. He points out, however, that the researcher inevitably influences the setting no matter how careful s/he is in collecting the data (Angrosino, 2007).

According to Creswell (2007), “The types of challenges experienced during observations will closely relate to the role of the inquirer in observation, such as whether the researcher assumes a participant, nonparticipant, or middle-ground position” (p. 139). As an observer, the researcher can take on one of four roles. The complete observer stays hidden. S/he does not interact with those being observed. This is achieved through the use of hidden cameras or two-way mirrors. The observer as participant identifies his/her role to the participants but limits his/her participation. The participant as observer participates in the activities with the participants and identifies with the group. However, his/her identity as the observer is still known. The complete participant requires the researcher to be a full participant while hiding his/her identity from the group; and the final role, collaborative partner, works with the participants as equal partners in collecting data. All identities are known to the group (Patton, 2002).

For the purposes of this study, I conducted observations as the observer as participant (see Appendix H for observation protocol). This allowed those being observed to know that they are being observed. However, I limited my interaction with the participants to ensure that I minimize my effect on their behavior. It is a well-accepted notion that an observer affects the behavior of those being observed no matter how careful the observer is to remain unnoticed (Angrosino, 2007). I acknowledged that

reality and incorporated my own thoughts and impressions into the observation notes. I also triangulated the data with the data collected through interviews and documents. This lends validity or transferability to the study and provide the reader with a clearer picture of homelessness and its true effect on education.

### **Data Organization**

Data management is an important consideration in both quantitative and qualitative research. As in most qualitative research studies, this project accumulated a large amount of data. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), “The main issues are ensuring (a) high-quality, accessible data, (b) documentation of just what analyses have been carried out, and (c) retention of data and associated analyses after the study is complete” (p. 45).

For this study, I collected a survey document and stored them in a well-organized filing system. As I observed the participants at the shelter, I took field notes on a lap top computer. After transcribing the interviews, I stored these transcriptions along with the observation notes and survey in separate files on my computer. The Microsoft Office software of Word and Excel was used to organize the material. I backed up these files to a zip drive and the main frame to ensure that the information was not lost. After the research study was completed, I copied everything to the zip drive and gave it along with all hard copies to my research advisor for confidential storage. All other copies of the data were destroyed.

## **Data Analysis Procedures**

These multiple narrative case studies integrated narrative in-case analysis and cross-case analysis to provide meaning and insight into the lives of four families experiencing homelessness and their experiences with education. Narrative analysis is a method utilized to better understand the lives of the participants. For this study, four cases were analyzed and compared to generalize the findings and deepen the understanding of this phenomenon. Narrative analysis was utilized on each individual case. The data within each case consisted of the families' surveys, personal stories, interviews, and observations. The data were then be coded and analyzed to determine specific themes and patterns. These themes and patterns were compared and contrasted among cases to establish generalizations and establish a deeper level of understanding.

The methodology of comparing and synthesizing multiple instrumental research cases has been termed cross-case analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994) or cross-case synthesis (Yin, 2009). Miles and Huberman (1994) defined cross-case analysis as searching for patterns, similarities, and differences across cases with similar variables and similar outcome measures.

### **Within Case Narrative Analysis**

Patton (2002) suggests that “the central idea of narrative analysis is that stories and narratives offer especially translucent windows into cultural and social meanings” (p. 116). As the participants shared their stories and experiences regarding homelessness, they provided insight into a world that only they and others like them have experienced. “Experience is what we study, and we study it narratively because narrative thinking is a key form of experience and a key way of writing and thing about it... narrative inquiry is

stories lived and told” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 18). These stories were used to discover possible causes of homelessness, the affects homelessness has on education, and the effectiveness of homeless educational programs.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) point out that a series of steps in the method of narrative analysis and interpretation does not exist. However, they describe a *three-dimensional inquiry space* that provides a scaffold for analysis and interpretation in the form of the three dimensions: the temporal, the personal/social (a continuum between the two), and place. Therefore, I read the texts numerous times to ensure understanding. I then used the three dimensions to restory them and categorize the information. This then enabled me to identify themes.

Enumerative and thematic coding was also utilized to analyze the data collected within each case. According to Grbich (2007), enumerative inquiry “involves the listing or classifying of items by percentages, frequencies, ranked order, or whatever is useful to the research questions” (p. 24). In the analysis of qualitative data, coding is an important step in making sense of that data. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), “Codes are tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during the study” (p. 56). Thematic analysis includes grouping those coded items into similar groups and classifying them into major themes. Braun and Clark described thematic analysis as “a qualitative analytic method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within the data” (2006, p. 79).

In this study, the standardized open-ended interview approach was utilized with follow-up probing questions. This encouraged a more natural flow of information. I

personally transcribed and analyzed the interviews. The data collected from interviews was coded according to words that relate to the research questions. These items were counted and sorted into themes relating to homelessness and education. I applied a similar coding system to the survey document and observations, closely analyzing key words and phrases to determine themes and patterns related to those found in the interviews.

To better understand the personal stories of the participants, I *restoried* them into a framework that is meaningful.

*Restorying* the process of reorganizing the stories into some general type of framework. This framework may consist of gathering stories, analyzing them for key elements of the story (e. g., time, place, plot, and scene), and then rewriting the stories to place them within a chronological sequence. (Creswell, 2007, p. 56)

The intent of this narrative analysis was to discover true and insightful information on how families experiencing homelessness were feeling and responding to their condition. The intent was to also discover if and how education was being affected. The coding and analysis systems reflect those intents.

### **Cross-Case Analysis**

After conducting narrative analysis within each case, I conducted a cross-case analysis to compare and contrast the data between cases. Creswell (2007) writes,

When multiple cases are chosen, a typical format is to first provide a detailed description of each case and themes within the case, called a within-case analysis, followed by a thematic analysis across the cases, called a cross-case analysis, as well as assertions or an interpretation of the meaning of the case. (p. 75)

The cross-case analysis within this study consisted of an in-depth description and interpretation of each case followed by a comparison of data among the cases. Miles and

Huberman (1994) suggest that cross-case analysis is important because it allows the researcher to make generalizations and better understand the data.

### **Limitations and Ethical Considerations**

As in all quantitative and qualitative research studies, I experienced a variety of limitations throughout my study of families experiencing homelessness. Even researchers that champion qualitative research admit that it can be particularly limited, depending on the techniques being used and the subjects being studied. According to Patton (2002), “Qualitative inquiry is rife with ambiguities. There are purposeful strategies instead of statistical formulas. Qualitative inquiry seems to work best for people with a high tolerance for ambiguity” (p. 242). I find myself to be one of those people with a tolerance for ambiguity. In my experience, true understanding occurs when the results are a bit messy rather than cut and dry. However, to address these ambiguities and ensure an acceptable degree of validity and reliability, I utilized certain safeguards.

In quantitative research, validity is defined by Joppe (2000) as “whether the research truly measures that which it is intended to measure or how truthful the research results are. In other words, does the research instrument allow you to hit ‘the bull’s eye’ of your research object” (p. 1). Quantitative research validity is defined differently. Some qualitative researchers even argue that validity is not applicable to qualitative research, though they acknowledge that there is some need for checks in truth in measurement. Maxwell (2005) points out that validity addresses the way in which the researcher will attend to how the study might be wrong or presents threats to validity. “Validity, as a component of your research design, consists of strategies you use to identify and rule out

these threats” (p. 106). Winter (2000) describes validity not as a single concept but “rather a contingent construct, inescapably grounded in the processes and intentions of particular research methodologies and projects” (p. 1).

Similarly, reliability is defined differently in quantitative and qualitative studies. In quantitative studies, reliability is defined as “(1) the degree to which a measurement, given repeatedly, remains the same, (2) the stability of a measurement over time; and (3) the similarity of measurements within a given time period” (Kirk & Miller, 1986, pp. 41-42). Like validity, some researchers feel that reliability does not apply to qualitative studies. “This measure (reliability) is arguably of limited relevance to qualitative research, since the experience of the researcher, and his/her professional but subjective interpretation of the research materials” (Association for Qualitative Research, 2011). But other researchers contend that reliability refers to the quality and trustworthiness of the study. Eisner (1991) states that a reliable qualitative study helps us to “understand situations that would otherwise be enigmatic or confusing” (p. 58). Yin (1989) points out that “the goal of reliability is to minimize the errors and biases in a study” (p. 45).

To conduct a qualitative research study that was both valid and reliable, I knew that I had to collect data in a way that prevented possible threats to the results (validity) and minimized the biases (reliability). In considering how to achieve these goals, I identified four potential limitations or threats to the validity and reliability of this study before the research began. These threats included (a) the accuracy of the data collected (b) the interpretation of the events (bias); (c) the researcher’s influence on the participants



during the data collection (reactivity); and (d) the researcher's background as a homeless liaison.

To address the first limitation, data were collected through three sources: a survey document, interviews, and observations. Using a variety of methods in collecting data is referred to as triangulation. "Triangulation strengthens a study by combining methods. This can mean using several kinds of methods or data" (Patton, 2002, p. 247). According to Maxwell, "This strategy reduces the risk that your conclusions will reflect only the systematic biases or limitations of a specific source or method, and allows you to gain a broader and more secure understanding of the issues you are investigating" (2005, pp. 93-94). By using a variety of data collection, the study was more reliable and valid.

To further ensure that the data collected was accurate and trustworthy, the subjects were interviewed with open-ended questions that elicited genuine responses and helped the researcher and readers truly understand the phenomenon of homelessness. Patton (2002) states that interviews should include "open-ended questions that offer the persons being interviewed the opportunity to respond in their own words and to express their own personal perspective" (p. 348). I recorded interviews and stories with an audio-recording device to ensure data accuracy. However, I did so in a discreet manner so that the subjects were influenced by this mechanical device.

The second limitation, interpretation of events and my potential biases regarding those interpretations was addressed in a variety of ways. As the researcher in a qualitative study, I was an integral part of data collection. Creswell (2007) refers to the "researcher as key instrument" (p. 38). He explains, "In some way—such as discussing their role,

interweaving themselves into the text, or reflecting on the questions they have about the study—individuals position themselves in the qualitative study” (p. 47). However, to ensure that my biases did not skew the findings of the study and avoid influencing the participants, I did not ask leading questions and I refrained from commenting on participant responses. An audio recorder was used to make certain that the information collected was not dependent on my memory and notes, but the recorder was kept from direct sight to prevent participants from being influenced by its presence. I asked participants to clarify unclear information and findings to help me better understand the true meaning of their stories. “Documents and records also have limitations. They can be incomplete and inaccurate” (Patton, 2002, p. 306). To address this limitation, I collected one survey prior to the interviews. I also compared the data in the survey to the interviews, stories, and observations.

The third limitation identified was the researcher’s influence on the participants during the data collection, called reactivity. Reactivity refers to “the influence of the researcher on the setting or individuals studied” (Maxwell, p. 108). While trying to control the effect of the researcher on the study is appropriate in quantitative research, qualitative studies assume that the total elimination of researcher influence is impossible. In qualitative research, Maxwell points out that the goal is not to eliminate researcher influence but to understand it and use it appropriately. Patton (2002) uses the term *reflexivity* to describe the researcher’s role in reducing reactivity.

Reflexivity reminds the qualitative inquirer to observe herself or himself so as to be attentive to and conscious of the cultural, political social, linguistic, and ideological origins of her or his own perspective and voices of those she or he observes and talks to during fieldwork... The observer, therefore, during

fieldwork, must observe self as well as others, and interactions of self with others.  
(p. 299)

I used reflexivity to control reactivity in this study.

My role as a school district homeless liaison is the fourth limitation in this study. Before becoming an elementary school principal, I served as the homeless liaison at a suburban school district located in the Midwest for three years. During that time, I encountered many homeless families and developed preconceived ideas about what it means to be homeless. While it was important to bring my personal experiences to this qualitative study, it was also important that I did not bring my assumptions. Much of the information that I had regarding homelessness before the study was incomplete and situational. I had never taken time in the past to truly understand this phenomenon. That was my motivation for the study. I wanted to understand the stories, lives, and circumstances of the homeless families I worked with on a day-to-day basis. I wanted to be open to their stories and let go of all preconceived notions that many American have about this segment of our society.

Because these qualitative case studies included interviews and observations, participants provided personal and revealing information about themselves. As a former school district homeless liaison and a current elementary school principal, I was in a position of power. It was highly important that I presented myself to the homeless families as a researcher looking to understand their stories. I made certain that I did not judge them and that they did not feel judged by me. I did not want them to feel that they were in any risk of losing their benefits or position within the district or shelter. I made this implicitly clear at the beginning and throughout the study.

To further validate the information I receive from the homeless families living within my school district, I interviewed only homeless families living outside my school district. These families did not know me as a homeless liaison.

Ethical practices and procedures must be followed to ensure that participants in a study are treated with respect and consideration. I followed the ethical standards set by the University Institutional Review Board, “a committee mandated by the National Research Act to be established within each university or other institution that conducts biomedical or behavior research involving human participants and that receive federal funding for research involving human participants” (University of Missouri-Kansas City [UMKC], 2011). These standards included informing participants of the nature of the study, utilizing only volunteer participants, ensuring the benefits outweigh the risks, and ensuring the risks and benefits of research are evenly distributed among the possible subject populations (UMKC, 2011).

In the next chapter, the findings from the analysis of the data are shared. The findings help to create a clearer understanding of the perspectives of the participants in regards to their experiences with homelessness and providing an education for their children.

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS

Homelessness is a problem that has plagued our nation for decades. The causes have evolved throughout the years, but the result is the same. Individuals and families are without places to safely live, thrive, and raise their children. According to a research report titled *The State of Homelessness in America 2013*, “The number of individuals experiencing chronic homelessness and those identifying as veterans decreased significantly” (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2013, p. 2). However, the “number of people experiencing homelessness as part of a family increased slightly” (National Alliance to End Homelessness, p. 2, para. 4). Homeless families have the added difficulty of providing a stable educational experience for their children. A 1987 report showed that only 57% of homeless children were enrolled in school (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2009, para. 7). In response to this report, the U.S. Congress established the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act of 1987. Due to strict residency requirements, families experiencing homelessness are often unable to provide the required documentation to enroll their children in school. These documents include utility bills to prove residency within the school district boundaries. McKinney-Vento declared that families experiencing homelessness must be allowed the same educational opportunities as families that prove residency. School districts must provide these families with transportation, free meals, and other services outlined in the Act.

The purpose of these narrative case studies was to understand the experiences of families who are homeless and how children experience formal and informal education.

For the purposes of this research, homeless families were defined as groups of persons living without regular, fixed, and adequate housing. The units of analysis for this study were the adults and children experiencing homelessness. My purpose was to discover how families became homeless and how homelessness was affecting the task of educating their children. According to the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act,

Homeless children and youths should have access to the education and other services that such children and youths need to ensure that such children and youths have an opportunity to meet the same challenging State student academic achievement standards to which all students are held. (United States Department of Education, 2004, para. 4)

This research study was conducted to determine if families experiencing homelessness in a Midwestern city had access to the educational opportunities promised by McKinney-Vento.

The central research question for this study was: What themes are apparent in the perceptions and experiences of participants as reflected in their stories of being homeless as it relates to their children's educational experiences? Sub-questions included: (a) How do adults experiencing homelessness describe their children's formal and informal educational experiences since becoming homeless? (b) How do children experiencing homelessness describe their formal and informal educational experiences since becoming homeless? (c) How do adults experiencing homelessness describe the events that led to homelessness, and how did these events affect the educational experiences of their children?

During the data analysis portion of this chapter, these questions will be addressed. First, the sub-questions are addressed in the data collected through the personal stories

and interviews. Parents described how they came to experience homelessness, and both parents and children expressed ways their lives have changed since coming to experience homelessness. They also shared how they are currently experiencing formal and informal education while living at the shelter. The central question regarding themes is addressed not only in the with-in case analysis, but also in the cross-case analysis.

### **Data Sources**

Three data sources were collected for this study. The first data source included a document in the form of a written survey. Patton (2002) stated, “Document analysis includes studying excerpts, quotations, or entire passages from organizational, clinical, or program records; memoranda and correspondence; official publications and reports; personal diaries and open-ended written responses to questionnaires and surveys” (p. 4).

According to the Research Planning Group,

Qualitative survey research is often used as a means of collecting verbatim statements from respondents. Written open-ended surveys allow respondents to offer responses within their own unique context, and the value of the information provided can be extremely high. (2011, para. 6

Four families living at a long-term homeless shelter in a Midwestern city that met the study criteria were given a flyer explaining the study and a survey to complete if interested in participating in the study (see Appendix D). All four families returned the flyer and survey. The survey in this study provided information regarding the demographics of the family members as well as a brief description of how the family came to the shelter and how their children’s education had been impacted by homelessness.

The second data source included personal stories and interviews. Interviews often play an important role in the qualitative research process. According to deMarrais (2004),

Qualitative interviews are used when researchers want to gain in-depth knowledge from participants about particular phenomena, experiences, or sets of experiences. Using interview questions and follow-up questions, or probes, based on what the participant has already described, the goal is to construct as complete a picture as possible from the words and experiences of the participant. This can only be accomplished when the qualitative interview is open ended enough for the participant to provide a depth of knowledge on the research topic. (p. 52)

Patton stresses that interviews are used because researchers cannot observe everything. Feelings and thoughts cannot be known without actually speaking and listening to the participants.

We cannot observe how people have organized the world and the meanings they attach to what goes on in the world. We have to ask people questions about those things. The purpose of interviewing, then, is to allow us to enter into other person's perspective. (Patton, 2002, p. 341)

Interviews provided important data in this qualitative research study. Participants were asked to share their personal stories regarding the hardships of homelessness and how this phenomenon has influenced their lives and experiences with education.

In this study, the standardized open-ended interview approach was utilized with follow-up probing questions. "This approach requires carefully and fully wording each question before the interview" (Patton, 2002, p. 344). Questions were asked to determine



the cause of homelessness and how homelessness has influenced everyday life and experiences related to education.

Parents living in the long-term homeless shelter were asked to write or recite their personal stories regarding how their family had come to live in the shelter (see Appendix E). All participants chose to recite their accounts in a quiet location within the shelter. Two 45 to 60 minute interviews were also conducted with each family. Parents and children were interviewed to determine their unique perspectives on homelessness and education. Parents were present when the children were interviewed. Standardized open-ended interviews allowed for fidelity and validity among the participants (see Appendices F and G for interview questions). However, probing and clarifying questions allowed the participants to share more personal experiences, thus providing the opportunity for a deeper degree of understanding.

The stories and interviews were recorded using audio instrumentation. Farber (2006) states,

Tape recording interviews is an important part of the interview process, because unless you are gifted with infinite memory, it will be necessary to record your conversations so that you can later go back and analyze the data from your interviews. (p. 370)

The participants were informed that they were being recorded. Patton (2002) suggests that the researcher clearly explain the need for the tape recorded to the participant and secure permission. He also suggests that the researcher allow the participant to stop the recording if he or she chooses.

I conducted observations as the third data source. While many qualitative research studies rely heavily on interviews, observations also provide quality information.

According to Angrosino, “Even studies that rely mainly on interviewing as a data collection technique employ observational methods to note body language and other gestural cues that lend meaning to the words of the persons being interviewed” (2007, p. 729). Patton and Maxwell agree, stating that “there are limitations to how much can be learned from what people say. To understand fully the complexities of many situations, direct participation in and observation of the phenomenon of interest may be the best research method” (Patton, 2002, p. 21). “While interviewing is often an efficient and valid way of understanding someone’s perspective, observation can enable you to draw inferences about this perspective that you couldn’t obtain by relying exclusively on interview data” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 94).

For the purposes of this study, participants were observed at a shelter. This provided a natural setting. Angrosino suggests that observations of participants in a natural setting are important to fully understanding the phenomenon being studied. He points out, however, that the researcher inevitably influences the setting no matter how careful s/he is in collecting the data (Angrosino, 2007, p. 730).

According to Creswell (2007), “The types of challenges experienced during observations will closely relate to the role of the inquirer in observation, such as whether the researcher assumes a participant, nonparticipant, or middle-ground position” (p. 139). As an observer, the researcher can take on one of four roles. The complete observer stays hidden. S/he does not interact with those being observed. This is achieved through the use of hidden cameras or two-way mirrors. The observer as participant identifies his/her role to the participants but limits his/her participation. The participant as observer

participates in the activities with the participants and identifies with the group. However, his/her identity as the observer is still known. The complete participant requires the researcher to be a full participant while hiding his/her identity from the group; and the final role, collaborative partner, works with the participants as equal partners in collecting data. All identities are known to the group (Patton, 2002, pp. 265-269).

For the purposes of this study, I conducted observations as the observer as participant. This allowed those being observed to know that they were being observed. However, I limited my interaction with the participants to ensure that I minimized my effect on their behavior. It is a well-accepted notion that an observer affects the behavior of those being observed no matter how careful the observer is to remain unnoticed (Angrosino, 2007). I acknowledged that reality and incorporated my own thoughts and impressions into the observation notes.

In the next section, Discussion of Findings, I report the findings by data set and through the identification of common themes and interpretive identifiers that became apparent through the coding process.

### **Discussion of Findings**

Four families were surveyed, interviewed, and observed for this study to determine how they came to experience homelessness and how this has or has not affected the task of educating their children. While some of the family members were more verbose than others, all provided deep insights into the experiences that led to homelessness and how their circumstances had come to influence their daily lives and

their children’s educations. The families were extremely open and gracious. I appreciated their willingness to share, and they seemed to appreciate the opportunity to be heard.

In an analysis of family demographics, two of the families were black, one was black and Hispanic, and one was white. A father and a mother lived with three of the four families. One family was headed by a single mother. All four families contained five or more children. All of the families were blended or had older children living away from the shelter (see Table 1.)

Table 1

*Study Participants*

Variable	Black	Hispanic White	Single parent	Four or more children
Family #1		x		x
Family #2	x		x	x
Family #3	x			x
Family #4	x	x		x

After the data were collected, I utilized a coding system to determine dominant themes. In the analysis of qualitative data, coding is an important step in making sense of that data. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), “Codes are tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during the study” (p. 56). I used enumerative and thematic coding to analyze the data collected. Enumerative coding “involves the listing or classifying of items by percentages, frequencies, ranked order, or whatever is useful to the research questions” (Grbich, 2007,

p. 24). Thematic analysis includes grouping those coded items into similar groups and classifying into major themes. Braun and Clark described thematic analysis as “a qualitative analytic method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within the data” (2006, p. 79).

In this section, I will first describe the setting of the study. I will then describe each case in detail and discuss the dominant themes that emerged through within-case narrative analysis and coding. I will follow these individual discussions with a cross-case analysis, examining the pervasive themes and how they compare and contrast among the cases. All participant names have been changed to protect privacy and ensure anonymity.

### **The Shelter**

The family shelter where the participants were living consisted of a two-story brick building adjacent to the short-term shelter and activity center. All were located right off a freeway in a major metropolitan city and surrounded by small houses and a few businesses. To obtain entrance into the family shelter, I was required to push a button and speak with the attendant on duty. (All entrances to the shelters were locked.) I had been told to say the name of the shelter manager so that I would be allowed to enter. After doing this, I met with the manager and he introduced me to each individual family. The families and I met in a small room containing reading material right off the main living area on the second floor.

The families I interviewed lived on the first or second identical floors of the shelter. In the center of each floor, there was a large communal area with two kitchen areas. The large area on the first floor was adjacent to the manager’s office, while the

second floor large room was next to the small library where I met with the families. Each family had an assigned table and cabinet where they kept condiments and other personal items relating to dining. Several small apartments surrounded this main room. Each apartment consisted of a small living room, one full bathroom, and two bedrooms. Within the rooms, the furnishings included a couch, chairs, beds, and dressers. Some of the apartments contained televisions while others did not. Televisions were not allowed in the apartments until the parents reached a predefined level in their shelter-assigned classwork. A common room with a television, laundry room, and a weight room was located in the basement.

### **Family One**

Family One consisted of a white father in his 40s (John), a 45-year-old white mother (Pam), a 13-year-old white son (Sam), and an eight-year-old white daughter (Lily). Sam was from the father's previous marriage and Lily belonged to both father and mother. The parents also have six other children from previous marriages. One of the older children had lived with them in the shelter while attending high school the previous school year, but he had moved in with his biological mother over the summer. The other children lived either on their own or with other parents. The two children currently living at the shelter represented the youngest members of their family. All of the children, including the ones that live with other parents, were described as having some kind of academic difficulties.

The parents and children had lived at the shelter for about ten months when they were interviewed. On the survey, Pam listed her husband's illness and job loss as the

reason for homelessness. She also wrote that the children's educational effort had improved since living in the shelter.

During the personal story and the interviews, both parents were talkative and relatively open about their experiences while living in the shelter and the experiences prior to that. The personal story appeared to confirm that homelessness occurred suddenly after job loss and illness. However, both parents also cited alcohol abuse as a contributing factor. Pam revealed that she struggled with alcohol. She had been charged with Driving under the Influence (DUI) in 2008, and since that time had not been allowed to drive. She named this as a reason she struggled with finding work. Prior to coming to the shelter, she had worked at K-Mart. She either walked to work or her husband took her there in the family truck. But because of the low pay, the family was still unable to pay all of their bills, including their lease payment. By the time the family came to live at the shelter, both parents were unemployed.

John and Pam talked about the stress of raising several children while struggling with alcohol abuse and low income. Pam stated, "We had a mixed family and we had a lot of times we had all the kids at one time. Their mother said 'I'm done with the kids. You take care of them' and I think that contributed a lot to the stress and the alcohol."

Immediately prior to living in the shelter, the children attended school at a suburban school district north of the city. John expressed a strong desire to keep the three youngest children in this school district. He even stated that the family would not have come to this downtown shelter and program if the children were not transported to this

home school district. “It was the first thing we checked into, whether they could stay in their school...”

The parents specifically cited the alternative high school as a reason they wanted their older son to stay in the suburban school district. (When I investigated this high school, I found that it provides a self-paced, computer-based instructional program.)

As the family revealed more information in follow-up interviews, it became apparent that, while the family had only spent ten months in the current shelter, they had experienced homelessness and household moves on several other occasions. This first came to light when they were describing the different schools their children had attended over the years. When they were discussing the tutoring program at the shelter, they mentioned that Sam “needed extra help just because he’s moved around a lot.” When I asked them about that, they explained that he had been in at least six schools in five different school districts during the nine years he had attended school. This was caused by moving between biological father and mother and by the residency moves both parents experienced.

When asked to describe their past living conditions, the parents and children described at least six houses, apartments, or duplexes. They also mentioned living at a friend’s lake house, their grandparents’ house, and in a hotel. Two years was the longest time span they had lived in one place.

The parents talked about the four younger children’s formal educational experiences before and after becoming homeless. Of these four, the oldest daughter had attended and graduated from the alternative high school program before the family came



to the shelter. According to her parents, she had struggled academically and attending the alternative program allowed her to graduate. The next son had also struggled academically before coming to the shelter so he was attending the alternative program as well. Sam, currently living at the shelter, was described by his parents as having difficulty with academics and behavior both before and after homelessness. John stated, “We have behavior problems with Sam, just a class clown...It’s touch and go. It started out better this year but he still has in-school-suspensions, having to go to summer school. It’s been touch and go with his grades all year.” John would like Sam to attend the alternative high school program that his other two children attended. He also mentioned that he would like Sam to get more involved in informal educational opportunities like basketball. Sam had been in the sport for a short while before coming to the shelter. It was never stated why he had stopped participating.

Lily was described by her mother as a good student. Pam stated that her daughter’s grades were about the same while living in the shelter as they were before coming there.

Lily had participated in various church activities before coming to the shelter. However, even while living at their past house, transportation had prevented her from attending regularly. Pam stated that her daughter usually attended only when another church member could take her daughter to the activities. While living at the shelter, both children participated only in informal educational opportunities offered at the shelter. These included tutoring, field trips, crafts, and various other activities at the shelter community center.

Sam and Lily described living and playing in a variety of neighborhoods before coming to the shelter. Both were social and seemed very interested in peer interactions. Even at the shelter, both had made a number of friends. When asked to describe what they liked about the shelter, Sam replied, "Having friends that live here with me and friends across the street." Lily replied, "That my parents aren't drinking no more and I can still hang out with my friends." During one observation, I watched as the son walked across the street from a neighbor's house to the shelter with another boy. They were laughing and seemed like very good friends. I later discovered that the other boy, black and about the same age as the son, lives in the neighborhood.

Sam and Lily attended the schools where they had attended before living at the shelter. Both had attended these schools for one year prior to coming to the shelter. Overall, parents and children made positive comments about the school district. They were happy that they were allowed to stay in the district despite the fact that they no longer lived within the boundaries. They talked about free school supplies and clothes they received from the schools. John and Pam were pleased that their children were receiving transportation from downtown to the suburban school. Both children were transported to and from school by a cab arranged by the suburban school district homeless liaison. While Pam was happy that transportation was provided, she was uncomfortable with her eight-year-old daughter riding in a cab. "At first, I was so scared for her, you know, having her in a cab by herself. I was real scared, but I had a free phone. We get a free phone and I gave it to her so I could talk to her. It was a blessing from God because it made me feel better." Pam also stated that their two sons were

embarrassed by the cab. “It’s still to this day. (Older son’s name) never told any of his friends that he rides a cab. It picks him up at the library. He’s kept that from his friends.”

The family had an overall positive attitude about the shelter. John and Pam were pleased with the counseling they had received and the classes they had attended. When asked who or what organization had been most helpful to them, they both chose the shelter and the programs offered there.

Mother: Well. The classes actually, they you know taught us how...

Father: Communication Class, Relationship Class, all of it was really...

Mother: Yeah, they did. That was a big help for us because we didn’t communicate a lot and with the alcohol it just, yeah, it was, I mean we still have our difficulties but it’s getting’ better.

Father: They have a whole career development program.

The parents also praised the shelter youth program. Pam said, “I don’t think Lily would have been content here if they didn’t have the youth program.”

When asked about how the shelter could be better, both parents spoke about the lack of consistency within the program. John stated, “Our schedules would change a lot. Our graduation date changed twice. It got pushed back, things like that. I understand that things just happen and the program has been amazing for us but they changed things a lot. Pam stated, “They were getting us on accountability on our actions and everything and they wouldn’t have to have accountable.”

Lack of privacy was also named as a negative at the shelter. Pam said, “Living here it was just sharing my family with everybody. This is my husband. This is my

daughter. This is my son. Yeah, that was the hardest thing for me to learn to overcome.” The children mentioned not being allowed to spend the night with friends as the thing they disliked most about living in the shelter.

**Themes.** Through analysis of the data collected from Family One, four major themes emerged: transient lifestyle, unemployment, the shelter, and the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. Two interpretive codes fell under transient lifestyle. The first code related to moving residences. These moves often occurred due to not having enough income to pay bills or a lease which then led to evictions. The data revealed that this family was transient long before they moved into the shelter. Over a period of ten years, they had lived in numerous homes, including those of other family members and hotels. Pam stated, “We were only there a year and then we were staying at the lake for a little bit. We stayed with my parents for a little bit prior to that and a hotel we stayed... I kind of liked the hotel it was kind of like a vacation actually, and then before that we had a house. We stayed there about a year... It was a five bedroom house. And then, we just moved a lot.” John added, “Before that, (Town, State) for a year. Then before that six years in the (North Midwestern City) area where we’re moving back to.”

The second interpretive code under transient lifestyle relates to school changes. Due to the numerous residency moves that the family had experienced over the year, the family frequently discussed how the children changed schools and school districts. Related to these school changes, they talked about their children’s academic achievement and behavior problems, and made various comments about the school system. When asked about the school districts his son had attended, John named five. He attributed

some of the moves to his ex-wife. “They were in (Midwestern City School District). Then they moved back with their mom, back to (Small District in town outside of city). Then their mom moved to (the northern part of the state.)” There his sons attended two more school districts. Related to changing schools, John, Pam, and their son discussed his struggles with behavior and academic achievement. John stated, “They wanted to hold him back in 8<sup>th</sup> grade but I told them, no, that I didn’t want to do that because we had held him back in first and I didn’t want to do that again.” When I asked Sam about school, he said, “It was kind of good but my grades weren’t good. I had to take summer school.” Lily’s academic experiences were mixed. In one interview, Pam stated that, “Her grades were good.” But in another interview she stated, “She’s not that avid on reading. She not real big but she’s average. She gets pulled out and goes to a special reading group.”

Related to changing schools, the family made several comments about the most recent school district and how they had assisted them while they were experiencing homelessness. Most of these comments were positive, especially in regard to the alternative high school program. Pam stated, “It’s a blessing that they will stay at this school district because there’s a program that our older boy, he was struggling because of the move between parents and stuff and he was struggling in school and we were afraid...John then stated, “Until he got into the program at (School District Name) at the high school, the academy program. It’s just a blessing. Completely turned him around.”

The second theme revealed by the data relates to unemployment. Two interpretive codes emerged under this theme: unemployment due to job loss and unemployment due

to criminal activity. The family talked about becoming unemployed due to illness and the poor economy. On the survey and throughout the interviews, both parents discussed how John had difficulty finding and maintaining employment because of illness, health issues, and the economy. Pam wrote on the survey, “My husband became sick and he lost his job. I couldn’t afford to pay all the bills.” In an interview she talked about her husband’s business and how the worsening economy caused it to fail. “Ten years and it was just starting to dwindle down and then, all of a sudden, he closed the doors on his business.”

The second interpretive code under the theme of unemployment related to criminal activity. This included succumbing to substance abuse and committing a felony. Both parents and Lily discussed the adults drinking alcohol. The parents named it as a reason for difficulty in keeping and maintaining employment. John stated, “I got in the cycle of going job to job for about two years. And also during that time my drinking had progressed and that, that was a contributing factor also to, um, not knowing what I was going to do next, work wise. I’d work a job three or four months then I started drinking more. It was just that cycle that went on for two years.”

In her story of how they came to experience homelessness, Pam discussed her difficulty in finding employment due to her driving restrictions related to a DUI she had received several years ago. “By 2008, I had a DUI and had been working, struggling with alcohol...” In the interview, she discussed how she could only drive if a breathalyzer was installed on her vehicle. “We haven’t been able to afford to put the thing on. It seems like I get the money to do that and something would happen and then we wouldn’t have the money to where I could get my driver’s license back.”

The third theme covered information related to the shelter and the programs offered there. The two interpretive themes included programs for adults and programs for children. The comments this family made about the shelter were almost three positives to one negative. Both parents frequently talked positively about the classes and the guidance they were getting from the program offered by the shelter. They cited the shelter as the most helpful organization since becoming homeless. Johns stated, "It's been a blessing. We came here voluntarily to try to fix our issues and we approached it with a positive attitude. We've really got a lot out of it."

John and Pam did have a few negative comments about the shelter and the programs offered there. They specifically did not like the lack of privacy and sharing their family with others. John and Pam also struggled with the regulations and schedule changes related to the program. John said, "Our schedule would change a lot. Our graduation date changed twice... We're held accountable for every little thing and they are really on it, disciplinary and all that... and when things are turned and you're expecting something from staff, well, it didn't happen or oops we made a mistake, you got to live with it... What about accountability? Shouldn't it go both ways?"

The second interpretive code related to programs like tutoring and informal educational opportunities specifically for children. Family One discussed various children's programs offered by the shelter. During an observation, I saw a Friday Family Night where Pam and Lily played games with other families from a visiting church. According to their interviews, the children had not participated in informal educational activities before coming to the shelter. They stated that the lack of transportation often

hindered their participation. “So the kids really didn’t get into sports or anything... She was supposed to get started in Truth and Training (Church Activity) but we didn’t have the means to get her back and forth to church on Wednesdays.” However, at the shelter, the children had access to several informal educational opportunities. Both parents discussed the activities:

Pam: After school they keep them. They do tutoring then after tutoring they just hang out.

John: They have a game room. They do arts and crafts. That place is just nonstop.

Pam: And they have them memorizing scripture which I’m impressed that she does because that youth program is an awesome program.

The fourth theme related to the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. Interpretive codes under this theme included awareness of the law through church and school and services related to the law. Family One’s awareness of McKinney-Vento first became apparent when John talked about how he was told by a man at his church that the children could stay in their current school even if the family moved to the downtown shelter. “It just so happened the gentleman that recommended who works here and goes to our church explained to us that some law just passed that they wouldn’t have to switch schools and they’d be cabbed into (School District Name) and we thought wow, okay, that would be better.”

Pam had become associated with some of the services related to McKinney-Vento when they had been living at a hotel. “When we were at (School District Name) there was a lady that talked about it and there was a sign posted there. And they helped us out



with stuff because I remember they got book bags or something from the school, being we were at a hotel. We were living in the hotel. Remember, the lady and principal took you home one time.”

The second interpretive code within to the theme of McKinney-Vento related to the services provided under the law. These services included providing various supplies and transportation to and from school. Pam mentioned several services and supplies given to the children while experiencing homelessness. “Every Friday she brings home some canned goods and thing like that...” John stated, “One of the schools homeless coordinators got us registered for the kids to have some Christmas.” Pam added, “It was a blessing. It was nice that she got to get some clothes. She was excited. She got a new pair of shoes, pants, and a shirt.”

Transportation to and from the homeless shelter was provided by the school district through a cab. While Pam mentioned that Sam and their older son were embarrassed to ride it, Sam named his school counselor as the one who had been the most helpful since becoming homeless. He said, “She’s the one who like sets up the cab. She helps with it. She cancels it if I wasn’t riding it or something.” Pam expressed an overall positive attitude toward and school district and the services they received. “I thought they would maybe treat us differently because of us being homeless but I didn’t see any mistreatment. I mean, no, it seemed like they were on board to help out.”

## **Family Two**

Family Two consisted of a 41-year-old black mother (Bev), a 15-year-old black daughter (Jayla), 13-year-old black daughter (Jaden), and 13-year-old son (Jaquan). Bev

also has an older son, 26, and daughter, 24. Both older children lived and worked on their own. On the survey, the 15-year-old daughter was described by her mother as having behavior and academic difficulties due to peer pressure, unrelated to being homeless. Bev described the younger two children as good students.

The family has been experiencing homelessness for approximately five to six years. They had been living at the current shelter for almost one year. Bev did not indicate a reason for their homelessness on the initial survey. This along with her children's educational experiences would not come to light until she told her personal story.

During our meetings, Bev was somewhat quiet and reserved. She was polite and kept her story and answers fairly short. Some aspects of Bev and her experiences with homelessness are still unclear. During our first encounter, Bev recited how she and her three children became homeless. She started by describing herself as a single mother of five. The father of her children sometimes paid child support but was not a regular part of their lives. Several years ago, she and her children traveled to a city two hours away to attend her biological mother's funeral. (Bev had been adopted as a baby.) She had no relationship with her biological mother but wanted to connect with the family when her biological mother died. "When she passed away I took my kids and went to pay my last respects and in the meantime I missed a payment so I was forced to pay the full amount of my light bill which became from \$100 to \$1,700." This then caused Bev's lights to be turned off which then ultimately resulted in homelessness. She and her younger three

children moved around to various places throughout the years including the homes of family and friends and shelters throughout the city.

Beverly explained that prior to experiencing homelessness she had worked and provided a stable environment for her family. For most of those years, she and the children lived with her adoptive mother in a suburb bordering the city. There, the older children attended one elementary, middle, and high school. “They didn’t get in trouble,” she stated. Bev was active in school-sponsored activities, and all of the children were described as good students. They participated in several informal educational activities including those offered at church and the community center. Bev drove the children to school and activities in her van. According to Bev, “When I had my van, they didn’t ride the bus. They was spoiled.”

After a few years, Bev and her children moved out of her mother’s house and into a house in the city. While living there, Bev lost her job. It was around this time that she and the children traveled to her biological mother’s funeral. Upon returning, she was unable to pay her bills and, as a result, lost the van and the house. While the family was living with relatives or in shelters, they came to depend on their grandmother and older siblings for help with transportation, food, and clothing.

All three youths attended the Midwestern city school district. Jaquan and Jaden attended middle school and Jayla attended high school. According to Bev, since becoming homeless, the educational experiences of her two youngest children have been “pretty much the same” but Jayla struggled with academics and behavior. While the twins seem to be good students now, Jaden was held back in second grade.

Bev said that the children had participated in a variety of church and community activities before becoming homeless. In our interviews, however, she named transportation and the shelter rules as problems in attending and participating in informal educational experiences while homeless. Bev stated that Jaquan would like to participate in sports after school and her older daughter would like to be in ROTC. However, the shelter required the children to participate in church-related activities. Bev was hoping that the shelter would eventually allow her children to miss these shelter-sponsored activities so that they could become more involved in school. Their school district did provide an after-hours bus to take students home from school-sponsored activities. But if the children were allowed to participate in school activities, Bev was worried about her own transportation. “When they have a game I would like to be there for support or whatever but it’s kind of hard being here.”

Bev described how the rules of the shelter were difficult for her and her children. She would like for the shelter to allow her other family members to visit. “My mom and my family, they support me and encourage me because there was plenty of time I wanted to leave this program but I didn’t.” Her three children struggle with the shelter rules and lack of freedom. According to Jayla, “It’s strict... We try to ask our mom to do something and mom’s got to get permission.” Jayden added, “It’s stupid to me.”

The children also did not like the tutoring they attended at the shelter community center. Jayla stated, “We have to go to tutoring like four more hours right after we get out of school.” Jayden added, “We can’t come back over here and do nothing. Like when we were home it was good. We could like go outside.”

However, Bev disagreed with her children about the tutoring and informal educational activities at the shelter. She stated, “Here at the shelter, they help out a lot with the tutoring. My kids complain about it but I like it because they keeping them busy. They don’t have a lot of idle time like they would at home so it’s helpful to me. I know where they at, that kind of thing. I’m thankful for that structure. They don’t like it. I like it.”

**Themes.** Through analysis of the data collected from Family Two, three dominant themes emerged. They included transient lifestyle, the shelter, and the extended family. Like Family One, the first theme, transient lifestyle, contained the same interpretive codes of moving residences and school changes. The survey indicated that the family had been experiencing homelessness for over five years. During that time, they moved in and out of the homes of relatives and various shelters, some of which were shelters for families experiencing domestic violence. Although none of the family members elaborated on the abuse, all mentioned the shelters. Bev stated, “We’ve stayed in domestic violence shelters, then we jumped around from family to friends. It’s just been a hopscotch thing.”

School changes for this family consisted of changing schools within one city school district. They described emotional problems and transportation difficulties as part of their discussion of changing schools. According to Bev, her children’s school experiences had not changed since living in the shelter. She attributed the problems her older daughter had with school to other factors. “It’s pretty much the same for the twins. But my daughter, Jayla, she’s 15 and I think it’s her peers she hanging around with that

get her in trouble. She got into some trouble this past school year and was suspended for 10 days.”

Both Jayla and Jayden mentioned that living in the shelter has caused them emotional difficulties that have negatively affected their school experiences. Jayden stated, “I feel like I be walking around being mad and stuff. I feel I be depressed because we’re in this building.” Jayla added, “I don’t pay attention, like I can’t pay attention. I don’t be doing my work.”

For Bev, the most difficult part of changing schools related to transportation for her children. “It’s irritating with the buses because the first two or three weeks of school the transportation, the buses will come at different times. The kids will wait at the bus stop for a long time and I start school in two weeks so they’re going to be at the bus stop by themselves. Just hopefully, the bus will come, because some days the bus wouldn’t come.”

Bev also mentioned that the school district homeless liaison assured her that the other students on the bus would not see that her children lived in a shelter. They would be picked up first and dropped off last. However, she complained that the driver often did not adhere to this policy, allowing other students to see where her children live. Bev stated, “The shelter kids, this is what I’ve been told, are supposed to get picked up first and then dropped off last just so they won’t be taunted.” Jayden added, “Our bus driver, she picked up the people from freeway first then us. We’re supposed to be picked up first because we in a shelter. She lets everybody see our business.”

When trying to remedy this and other problems, Bev mentioned that the homeless liaison was difficult to contact. “But it’s hard to get in contact with the homeless liaison. I had some situations when we first got here, where I needed assistance with some different things, and I would leave messages to the point where I was just being overlooked so I had to go down there to the, walk down there to be seen in person but on the phone it’s really hard to communicate.”

The second theme related to the shelter and the programs offered there. The interpretive code of other shelters was added to programs for adults and programs for children. Bev seemed to have an attitude of acceptance about the shelter, the classes it offered, and the regulations she was required to follow. It was clear that she had been in a lot of places over the years, and she wanted this to be her last shelter. She was working hard to meet all of the requirements so that she could attend a local college in the fall. She realized that her children did not like the shelter, but she was steadfast in staying with the program and finding stable employment. “They (her children) used to me working. I’ve been through some things so I’m trying to get back in the work force. They used to having whatever they want, they don’t understand the program, you know, so they get kind of frustrated.” Regardless of her children’s frustration, Bev was proud of her accomplishments at the shelter, “I’ve completed the program so now I’m on education track...I took my test last month for school and I just found out that I will be starting school the 29<sup>th</sup> of this month.”

As Bev indicated, her children really did not like living at the shelter or the programs they offered the children and youth living there. In the interviews and

observations of the three teens, this became very apparent. The girls did not interact with other teens at the shelter. In the interview, they all complained about not being able to stay out late, stay all night at friends' houses, and have family members to the shelter for visits. They seemed quite annoyed that even their mother had to ask permission to do various things. I asked Bev if this shelter was stricter than others they had been in, and she said no. She explained that all long-term stay shelters required residents to attend programs and adhere to guidelines. She said that her children had been spoiled and that they just didn't like their loss of freedom.

In their interview, the teens made several negative comments about the shelter. Jayla stated, "They're just trying to control somebody's life...I don't like that we don't have our freedom." Jayden added, "It's like a foster care program. We have to ask about everything." Jaquan was unhappy about the curfew and holiday rules. "We have to come in at 10:00 like on holidays and stuff." Jayla continued, "Yeah, like we used to stay out late on Christmas and stuff with our family. We can't even do that."

A third interpretive code was added to the theme of shelter programs for this family. During the interview with the children, the teens mentioned several times that conditions at other shelters were better than where they were living. They discussed missing their peers and disliking their lack of freedom at this shelter. When talking about another shelter, Jayla stated, "It was fun because it was right by our school. We had a lot of friends so it was fun." Both daughters discussed how one of the other shelters they were in was less restrictive, allowing them more freedom to come and go.

Jaquan: We could leave for 24 hours.



Jayden: My mom could leave for two days and she'd come back and sign in.

Jayla: We could leave whenever we want.

Jayden: And no curfew.

While discussing tutoring, Jayla declared that tutoring was more fun at a church where they had once stayed. "It was fun. It wasn't even like tutoring."

Unlike her children, Bev appreciated the structure the shelter provided. She admitted that the rules were difficult for her children because they had been accustomed to less control. However, Bev made it quite clear that she appreciated the training she had received from the classes and the supervision and tutoring her children received at the community center. She expressed a great desire for her children to be successful and do well in school. "I just hope they keep focused on school and not get distracted from the different kind of company that goes on in school."

The third theme related to Family Two's extended family. Interpretive codes under this theme included living with extended family members and assistance from extended family members such as a grandparent, an aunt, and grown children.

Before Bev and her family ever became homeless, she and her children lived several years with her adoptive mother, the children's grandmother. After losing her job and home, Bev and the three younger children often lived with extended family members. "I stayed with my aunt and my grandmother. They helped me out a lot because I had twins..." Jayla and Jayden remember living with several relatives. Jayla stated, "We moved to Nana's house then we moved to (Shelter Name.) Jayden added, "We moved to

(Mid-western City), moved out of (Domestic Violence Shelter Name) to my sisters and then to our Nana's house.”

Both Bev and the teens spoke about how Bev's older children helped them with food, clothing, and transportation. When asked who had been most helpful to them since they had been homeless, Jayden replied, “My sister and my brother.” Jayla added. “They help us by buying us clothes and shoes.” When Bev was asked to describe transportation while experiencing homelessness, she replied, “I have two older kids so if I have to go to the grocery store or something they'll come and pick me up.” While she did have a few positive things to say about the school district and the shelter, Bev was most dependent on her extended family for support.

At the time I interviewed Bev and her children, she was preparing to attend a local community college to become an environmental technician specialist. She planned to stay at the shelter with her family until she graduated.

### **Family Three**

Family three included a black 54-year-old father (James), a black 35-year-old mother (Tamiya), a black 10-year-old son (Charles), and three black daughters: Kimara, eight; Simone, six; and Victoria, four. James also had an older daughter from a previous marriage and two grandchildren. His older daughter lived with her husband and children in another city. Tamiya described her children's education as stable and positive before the family came to this Midwestern city and experienced homelessness. According to her, once homeless, the children suffered greatly from the unstable living conditions and poor

school support. However, since coming to the shelter, the children's educational experiences had stabilized and improved.

The family had been experiencing homelessness for eight months, six of which were at the homeless shelter. In the survey, Tamiya stated, "In November 2012 we were evicted from our home. We had very poor money management skills. Addictions and health issues were beginning to hinder employment. In November we were living here and there and in a hotel and it was very emotional and overwhelming. We were having to put our pride down and do extreme matters." The personal stories and subsequent interviews would reveal that the family had moved from another state that previous July with the promise of employment for James. When that did not materialize, the family quickly exhausted their savings. Tamiya explained, "We could not find him (the man who had promised employment) and the little finances that we did have, we had to start using them in order to find housing because he was going to supply housing and put us up for a while until, you know, the job had gotten finished and my husband was established, you know, and that didn't work out and it was kind of like a domino effect, you know, just one thing after another. We couldn't catch a break."

Tamiya experienced difficulty finding employment because of a past felony. "I was in nursing school... Well, actually, I am done. I found out that the state of (State Name), they passed a law that someone with a felony cannot be registered here and I'm a convicted felon. So, I passed the state exam and everything. They did not tell me that and I took the state test and I passed but they told me that they had passed a law that they

would not hire a felon so no matter what the nature of it was like and I've even tried to fight and file an appeal but..."

According to James, once the family moved to this Midwestern city, they changed residences several times in just a few months before finally finding themselves on the street begging for money to stay in a hotel each night. "The first home we got when we got back here. It was a nice home. It was very well kept up. The landlord was a decent person, easy to get along with and, actually he tried to work with us as best he could cause when we got back here we had a little money like I said when money's going out and none's coming in. It don't take long. He worked with us best he could. Then we moved to a cheaper house on (address). That's when it started. Van got stolen, the kids, the school they was going to, they was in trouble, and then we moved about four blocks up to (address) and that place we just needed, actually they was selling it as is they would give me such and such down and start buying it. The house, it was in really bad shape."

Tamiya went on to describe their living conditions after losing that last house. "We had to start fending for ourselves and I mean we went through really serious extremes just trying to actually, prior, after we became homeless in November there were not shelters that had space for us at all. There's six of us and we had the little bit that we had left and we got a hotel and those finances ran out really, really fast and it got pretty desperate."

According to Tamiya, their lives and the children's educational experiences had been very positive while living in another state. The children attended one school and all were good students. James commented, "I sit back and think on that they had a good

educational system down there. They made sure that a child that needed special attention, they made sure he got it. Like Charles, he's a little slow and they worked with him until he got to where, you know, they was comfortable with it and everything." When the family moved to this city, however, the children's school experiences changed. Tamiya stated, "The way that (District Name) schools worked out. It was just a mess that second year. They had all my kids going to different schools. One provided transportation. Two didn't so I literally had to go around so I said this was not going to work so I had to go to the school board. So they finally sent them to all one school but it wasn't their neighborhood school. It was a school about 30 minutes away so I had to take them. But our van was stolen and finances were bad so I couldn't always get them there... Then they put them back in their neighborhood school and things was terrible by then... Everyone's grades went down."

Before experiencing homelessness, the family was active in the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) and other informal educational opportunities. According to Tamiya, the children played soccer and attended church functions. "It was a really small town, probably maybe three to four hundred people. So, yeah, soccer was the biggest thing... And anything that had to do with school, I was there." Since the family has become homeless, involvement in informal education opportunities have stopped, with the exception of those at the homeless shelter. Mom explained, "They're not in anything now. We just can't afford it." When asked if the children participate in the activities offered at the shelter, Tamiya replied, "At first they didn't but they do now. They're

getting a little bit better. Now they are familiar and know the children. Just transitioning and getting to know kids. They're kind of shy."

When Charles was asked about his formal and informal educational experiences, he could not recall any details related to the school he attended in another state. When asked about the school he had attended in recent years, he talked about experiences on the school bus. "We used to ride the bus but we don't ride the bus no more because bad things have happened on the bus. I mean like at first when we was at (School Name)...someone cussed at my sister and I didn't like it and I told my mom I didn't want to be on the bus no more." He was more positive about the school he has been attending since living at the shelter. "It's been great lately. I made a few mistakes there where I stole things. The teacher has been great. She's not mean. She's one of those kind teachers." He also described informal educational activities provided by the shelter including field trips and tutoring.

When asked about who had assisted them the most during their homeless experience, both parents named an outside agency that provided early educational child care and social services in the urban core. Their youngest daughter attended pre-school there and Tamiya was very pleased with the services they had received. "I have an advocate there because my daughter goes there. We meet once a month. We go over goals and different things to see where my life is at and see if there's anything they can help me with. She has just been really, really helpful." While Tamiya was happy that her family was living in the shelter and appreciated all they had done to help them, she did not always agree with the regulations. "They don't allow you looking for employment

until a time then they're only giving another time frame to how long we can stay past that just, you know, that time frame goes by really, really fast especially depending on how much debt you have and what you've got going on.

**Themes.** Through analysis of the data, three themes emerged: transient lifestyle, unemployment and the shelter. Like the first two families, Family Three had a transient lifestyle. According to the parents, they had experienced a stable lifestyle in another state where they both had jobs and the children attended one local school. According to Tamiya, "We was living in a townhouse and it was great, in a little town close to the reservations. It was great. I mean, we didn't want for anything. We had jobs. I was going to school. Kids was in school and things was just great." However, when the family moved to a Midwestern city with a promise of work, their transient lifestyle began. According to James, construction work became too difficult for him. Due to illnesses, he was having difficulty finding work and staying employed. Meanwhile his wife was in nursing school. When James had a chance to move back to his wife's hometown and work at a different job, he took the opportunity. Unfortunately, the job did not materialize. Tamiya explained, "We got here and the guy was nowhere to be found. We just put our hope and the last of our finances into that, thinking that it was going to turn out to be a good thing and it turned out to be the total opposite." Once in the new city, the family moved several times before eventually ending up on the street begging for money to pay for a hotel room. Tamiya stated, "We was out panhandling, taking money because the organizations and resources were dry. And we basically went up to total strangers to get a roof over our heads at the hotel every night. It was an everyday job. Half the time

we wouldn't get the money we needed until like six and seven in the evening and hotel hours go really fast. By the time you get in and get the kids all washed up and everything, it's time to get up and start all over again. My husband would take them to school and then me and my husband would go on the journey of trying to get money before they got home. Would we be able to stay here another night? Yeah, that was a lot because we had to do that two months." When her son, Charles, was interviewed, I asked about that time they spent in the hotel. He said, "It was like, a lot of bad things happened there that I don't want to talk about."

The second interpretive code under transient lifestyle was changing schools. For this family, negative experiences outnumbered positive school experiences three to one. Because of their transient lifestyle, the children changed schools several times. This then resulted in a variety of experiences that led to changes in academic achievement and behavior. The family also expressed many negative comments about how their school district did not adequately meet their needs.

Tamiya was quite vocal about the lack of support and the difficulties she had with the school district where her children had attended since coming to this Midwestern city. As is mandated by the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, the school district did enroll the family without documentation and provide free supplies and meals. However, the family struggled with the quality of instruction and supervision. "The kids at the school was always in fights and it was just terrible. So I went to the school and had it out with the principal. It was really just ugly and I pulled them out. I went to the school board and I said look, if you have to take me to jail if that what you have to do, but I will not be



returning back to school...I said my kids are not learning. My kids are having to fend for their own lives and my daughter is being groped every day. My son's being in fights. Kindergartens are throwing chairs at teachers... He said, 'Have you ever thought about homeschool?' I have but I don't have the time. But I did it. I did it for three months and I was just like, this is too much. The curriculum and all that I found the charter school and it was great from there...So they had to hold all of them back and that was really devastating to me...But it was the best thing they could have ever done. They all did a 100 degree turn around and they became A and B students."

Once Family Three enrolled their children in a charter school, they were pleased with the management and instruction but still experienced difficulty with transportation. Tamiya explained, "I take them and pick them up. They provided me with a monthly bus pass. That was their contribution with transportation." When asked if anyone had told her about a law that required school districts to provide transportation to homeless students, Tamiya replied, "Yes. I actually had to ask. Their school, if you don't ask they don't mention it. And someone, actually it was one of the ladies in the school support department, and we talk a lot. She was the one that told be about the homeless stuff and how all that works so I brought that up to the people at the charter school and they was like, 'How do you know about that?' And it was almost like a scary thing. They was just like nobody ever inquired about that."

The second theme that emerged from the data was unemployment. The interpretive codes under this theme included unemployment due to job loss, unemployment due to the lack of education or job skills, and unemployment due to

criminal activity. Tamiya stated, “My husband became ill. He was doing construction type work and he became ill to where he couldn’t work. I was going to school. I wasn’t working. I was staying home and money that we did have, things kept getting overwhelming and bills was out of control. Rent was past due and we just didn’t use our money wisely.” She also explained that getting help from her family was impossible due to their difficulties with job loss and finances. “I have brothers that, three of them are laid off from their jobs and they have just as many children as I do. So I don’t even attempt to ask because it’s just like something you don’t do. So everybody is going through it. They’re between jobs.”

The next interpretive code under this theme was unemployment due to the lack of education or job skills. James was 54-years-old when he was interviewed. He was very vocal about not finding work due to his lack of education and job skills. In his younger years, he was able to provide for his family with construction work. However, when his health began to fail, he could no longer maintain the physical demands of the job. With no other training, he struggled with finding employment.

In the interview, James spoke about the negative experiences he had in an urban school district and he explained why he never graduated from high school. “I went to a school named (School Name). Anyway, I got into trouble. The principal kicked me out. She said, ‘You gotta get out. I’m just done.’ So I went to, I think I was in 5<sup>th</sup> grade to (School Name.) And they was like if you just come over here, be quiet, and don’t say nothing you’ll graduate with your class... So I tell my daddy, that’s an insult... And they end up sending me to back to my old school... Back then they didn’t tell you was dyslexic

and all that stuff. They put me in a class called the upper lower level for the slower kids, right? Shoot, we went to the circus. We went to baseball games. I don't really remember doing any work. We played checkers. I was telling my daddy that I'd rather go to work. He said, 'I'd rather you go to work too.' I asked James how old he was when he left school and went to work. He answered 16-years-old.

James undoubtedly regretted the education he did not receive at the urban school district. He wanted more for his own children. "I told my wife, well, I said, if I could just get a job, something that I could do inside because my working outside is done. I gotta face the fact, but, you see, I don't have very much education. Those jobs are scarce. They're hard to come by. It used to be you could go up on a job and say fill out an application and they was willing to teach you the job. Now, if you ain't got a doctorate, you can't even sweep the floor... Things have really changed. That's what I try to tell my children. If you don't value nothing, value your education."

The last interpretive code under this theme was unemployment due to criminal activity. In the initial survey, Tamiya wrote that addiction played a part in their inability to keep work. However, she or the rest of the family did not mention this again. She did, however, share that she was a convicted felon. Before she and her family had moved to the Midwestern state, she had begun training to become a nurse. She had finished that program and passed the state test after the move. However, she soon found out that the state did not allow convicted felons to practice nursing. The state where she began her program did allow felons in this profession. When I asked her if they had considered moving back where she could find employment, she replied, "Well, I've thought about it

but don't really have the finances to do that. My van got stolen. The only transportation we had got stolen so even if we wanted to move back we have to start over from scratch. We have to find employment, find a vehicle, make sure that we have suitable housing, and we don't want to do what we've always done. Just get up and go because we learned a lot being here and we're trying to better ourselves and make better decision as opposed to just jumping into something...It's got to be a sure thing or we're back into the same predicament. It's not only a strain on us. It's a strain on our children too."

Like the first two families, the last theme related to the shelter. While the family seemed very grateful to be off the street and have a safe environment in which to raise their children, they tended to be negative about the regulations imposed by the shelter management. For example, Tamiya expressed frustration on the rules for spending their allowance. She felt that the shelter did not understand some of the specific needs her family had as African Americans. "We have issues with our girls and their hair and things we don't get approval to spend because we get \$5 as allowance and there's certain things we don't get approved to spend that money on and hair care is one of them and that's very disturbing to me because unless you have not experienced ethnic hair or have not known someone with ethnic hair then you will not understand...I'm like its predominantly African American here. I would think that would be something you know. But like my girls' hair is breaking off and like my older daughter her hair is coming out. It's very frustrating."

James expressed a different kind of frustration. He wanted to spend time with just his family and no one else. However, most of the shelter activities required families to

spend time with other families, and, without transportation, other options were often unavailable. “The most difficult part is really being able to come home to a home, you know? There’s days when you just want to go home and shake that day off and gather yourself and get ready for tomorrow. But here, it’s constantly this and that. They say family time, like yesterday they had a family outing but you never spend the time with your family. You know, that’s what I did. I gathered my family one weekend and you know what we did? I make some lunches and we took the bus and we went out to 63<sup>rd</sup>... We went out there and had a picnic and had a great time because it was just us.”

The second interpretive code under the theme of shelter programs was the children’s programs. Unlike the negative attitudes associated with the adult programs at the shelter, Family Three was very positive about the children’s programs. When asked about the difficulty of providing a formal education for their children since living in the shelter, Tamiya had the following response: “It really hasn’t been too difficult because here they get the extra tutoring that they need because they have great tutoring here. It really just helps them because they have, being in the program, mandatory tutoring Monday through Thursday... It makes me feel good.”

Tamiya also talked about other services her children received from the shelter. “They’re getting a lot of counseling and just learning new tools and tactics. My son has some behavior issues and just finding ways to handle conflicts and issues. It, you know, we as his parents try to do what we can from our insight and our upbringing but sometimes hearing it from someone else can make a difference. He’s really getting some positive feedback and he’s really applied it to his life so I have to give them some credit

for that.” Charles mentioned that he liked going to church and going places with the other children. “We don’t have to stick around here all day. We have responsibilities to do.”

At the time I interviewed Family Three, they were still attending classes related to the program offered at the shelter. Once they graduate, they will either take classes or try to find employment.

#### **Family Four**

Family Four consisted of a black 27-year-old father (Thomas), a Hispanic 35-year-old mother (Mariela), one twelve-year-old Hispanic daughter (Juliana), one black ten-year-old son (Trayvon), and one 12-year-old black daughter (Kara). Together, Thomas and Mariela had a total of eight children from other relationships. Juliana and Trayvon were living with them full-time at the shelter. Kara lived with them during the summer and every other weekend during the school year. The other five children lived with other parents in the metro area.

According to the initial survey, Family Four had been experiencing homelessness for two years. However, the interviews revealed that they had been homeless off and on for several years. When asked if they had ever experienced homelessness before coming to the shelter, Mariela replied, “I mean we did if we look back. We never thought about it but I mean like there was a time in between like two houses. We stayed with a friend for a month or so.” Thomas added, “But we never considered it homelessness because we didn’t have to come to the shelter. But now looking back, we were homeless.”

During our meetings, Family Four was friendly but slightly guarded. When asked to recite their story about this most recent experience with homelessness, both parents

named poor money management. They also described their last living arrangement and how that situation directly led them to the shelter. Mariela explained, “We had a plan worked out to live with a relative and we were going to save money and they were going to save money and then everybody could kind of on their own way. It just didn’t work out that way. We ended up paying a lot more than half and then when things got kind of...The situation got kind of sketchy between us because they wanted more money and weren’t going to give any more money. Then we had to move out.” At the same time they lost their residence, the family lost their truck and Thomas lost his job. Although Mariela was employed, she did not make enough money to pay the rent on a new home. Mariela stated, “One of us was always working. I was going to school for a while and so it was just like a lot of bad decisions and money management just caught up with us.”

The children living with Thomas and Mariela demonstrated positive academic achievement both before and after becoming homeless. On the survey, Mariela wrote that the children were “doing good in school” and that they “have always been good students.” The parents also stated that Juliana and Trayvon’s educational experiences had actually stabilized since coming to the shelter. Mom said, “They were going to different schools every year. And so when we came here I think it’s been a better school experience for them. It’s more stable.” Thomas stated that Kara had attended several schools within one suburban school district while living with her biological mother.

When the children described their experiences with school, they tended to have the same attitude before and after coming to live at the shelter. When asked about school before coming to the shelter, Juliana replied, “Good” while Trayvon said, “It was bad.

There were a lot of bad kids there.” When they were asked about school while living at the shelter, Juliana said, “I like it” and Trayvon answered, “It was kind of a bad school but it wasn’t really a bad school. We have a lot of smart students but they like to follow other students.” At the time of the data collection, the children were on summer break. During the next school year, Trayvon and Juliana will attend charter schools within the urban school district. Juliana will attend a Performing Arts Academy and Trayvon will attend a school with academic requirements. Both were required to apply for acceptance and both were approved.

Thomas stated that the most difficult thing about providing an education for the children while living in the shelter related to their peers. He described some issues they were having with Julianna. “Right now because she’s a pre-teenager, I think she’s trying to find her way in life and she attached to someone that’s negative. Even though she’s a bright young lady and she loves to read and loves to do her work, she attaches to someone that don’t like that stuff and she tends to kind of follow that way.”

When asked about the school district and the assistance they have provided, Mariela seemed happy with their services. “I think the school district has a pretty good program for, I forget what they call it, like transitional children, they call it or something. It’s really for homeless children.” She did express some concern about transportation. Because Trayvon and Juliana will be attending charter schools, a school bus will not be provided. They will have to take a public bus with a voucher provided by the school. Both parents are concerned about Juliana riding the bus by herself.



In the previous school year, Juliana and Trayvon had ridden a school bus to and from school. Mariela relayed a story about how Juliana was embarrassed about living in the shelter. “I think for our oldest daughter the difficulty about being here was people knowing that she’s living here. For a long time when they were being dropped off she was telling her friends that we worked here. And so that’s why she had to get dropped off here at the shelter. Our son, he’s younger and he don’t care, His friends don’t care, so he’s like, ‘There’s my room, right there.’ And she’s like, ‘What are you talking about? They work here.’ And she wanted him to lie for her because she didn’t want her friends to know that she lived here so I think that is probably a hard thing for her.”

Before coming to the shelter, the children had participated in a variety of informal educational activities. Mariela also mentioned that the children attended an after-school and summer program at a city community center where she had worked. Now that they were living at the shelter, the children did not participate in any informal educational activities except for those offered by the shelter. She cited lack of transportation as the problem related to not being able to participate in other informal educational activities. She was hopeful that the children could participate in extracurricular activities at their new schools.

When asked what organization had been the most helpful to them and their children, both parents named the shelter and the programs offered there. Mariela stated, “With the classes that you to take and I mean they have really just been a big part of a lot of change in our family...A lot of things we won’t do when we leave here.” Thomas

added, “As it is right now, my education at the learning center. My teacher’s really helped me with my education.”

They also liked the programs for the children. “I think that’s been really good because even though we were in this situation we came in the summer so it really helped a lot more because they could go to camp all day long so even though we’re in this situation of homelessness and at the shelter and we were here in the transitional living program they could be a kid all day long. They still do kid things.”

**Themes.** During the data analysis, three themes emerged: transient lifestyle, informal education, and extended family. Within the first theme, two of the interpretive codes, moving residences and schools, were consistent with the other families. However, this family also had the interpretive code of marital problems.

The first interpretive code of moving residences was apparent in the interviews. Mariela explained, “That house, we were there like a year with my brother.” Thomas added, “Yeah, we stayed at a hotel. That was like an in between times for us.” After moving approximately every year, the family devised a plan to live with a relative and share expenses. However, when that living situation did not work out, they had nowhere else to go except the shelter. When interviewed, they had been living there for over a year.

The second interpretive code under the theme of transient lifestyle was school changes. Due to frequent residence changes, the two children living full-time with Thomas and Mariela changed schools several times. Thomas explained, “They transferred from a Catholic School to (City Name) schools.” Mariela added that the

children had attended four schools since coming to the public school district.

Interestingly, Kara also changed schools several times even though she lived primarily with another parent living in an adjacent suburb.

The third interpretive code for this theme was marital instability. Thomas and Mariela described their relationship as core reason for their transient lifestyle. Mariela stated, “There was a couple of times in our marriage that we split up and so I would go live with family like my mom or my brother or something and he (Thomas) would bounce around. And then we’d get back together and try to work things out... When we got back together our families weren’t really thrilled about it so we couldn’t really stay with anybody so we went to stay at a hotel for a little while; then we went to stay with a friend. Then we got our own place again.”

The second theme that emerged from the data analysis was informal education. Interpretive codes included before homelessness and after homelessness. Prior to living at the shelter, the children in Family Four participated in a variety of informal educational activities. Mariela stated, “Our son was in drill team. Our daughter decided to take boxing classes and she got out of drill team.” She added that that they participated in activities at a local community center. “I was a site director for an after school program and they would go to that program after school and during the summer.” Kara talked about running track and Juliana discussed drill team practice.

The second interpretive code under informal education related to informal educational activities after becoming homeless and living at the shelter. Once the family came to live at the shelter, informal educational activities changed. They no longer

participated in activities outside of the shelter. “They’re not in drill team anymore because it interferes with the chapel activities they have here. They really don’t, they’re really not involved in a lot of extracurricular things, I mean, we do things with the church a lot like vacation bible school and things like that. They have day camp and like they went for a week at the...(Shelter Name) has a youth camp in (Rural Town, State) and they went to that for a week.” Observations revealed that the children also received after-school tutoring.

The extended family emerged as the final theme, but only one of the interpretive codes applied: living with extended family members. When Family Four moved from place to place, they often lived with relatives. Mariela mentioned several times that she lived with her brother or her mother when she and Thomas broke up. Thomas discussed living with his sister or uncle when he was on his own. Even when they were together, they sometimes lived with relatives. The home they lived in just before coming to the shelter was shared with an uncle. Mariela commented, “I would go live with family like my mom or my brother...” Even though Family Four lived with relatives in the past, they did not discuss receiving other assistance like transportation and clothing now that they were living in the shelter.

### **Cross-Case Analysis**

The central question of this research is as follows: What themes were apparent in the perceptions and experiences of participants as reflected in their stories of being homeless as it relates to their children’s educational experience? In an analysis of the data, all of the families shared the theme of a transient lifestyle. Three of the four families

shared three of the four themes, but the three themes varied for each family (see Table 2). Before coming to live at the shelter, all of the families lived in a variety of places including the homes of family and friends, hotels, and other shelters. Family One lived with family or friends and hotels over a period of at least 10 years. Family Two lived with family and other shelters for five to six years. Family Three rented several homes and lived in a variety of hotels for about one year; and Family Four lived with family or friends and hotels for at least five years. None of the families stayed at one home for more than a year directly before coming to the shelter.

Table 2

*Study Themes*

Variable	Transient Lifestyle	Shelter Programs	Unemployment	McKinney-Vento	Extended Family	Informal Education
Family #1	x	x	x	x		
Family #2	x	x			x	
Family #3	x	x	x			
Family #4	x				x	x

During those years leading up to living at the shelter, all of the children attended a variety of schools. The children in Family One attended numerous schools within several school districts. For example, Sam moved between his mother and father attending schools in districts around the city with his dad and rural schools with his mom. The children in the other families attended no more than two school districts, but changed

schools within those districts. For example, Mariela and Trayvon attended four schools within one school district. Charles had attended two schools and was beginning a different school in the fall. All are part of the same Midwestern city school district.

Despite the commonality of school changes, academic achievement and behavior performance among the children varied. The children in Family One and Family Three had low academic achievement and some negative behavioral issues, while the children in Family Four demonstrated high academic achievement and positive school behavior. The children in Family Two demonstrated mixed academic skills and behaviors. The twins seemed to be successful in school while their older sister was not.

Three of the families shared the theme of shelter programs. In my interviews with the families, all of them discussed the assistance and guidance they were receiving at the shelter. However, while Family Four did have a few comments about the programs offered at the shelter, the other three families were far more talkative about the subject. Some comments were positive and some were negative. Family One was quite positive about both the programs for adults and children. Their positive comments outnumbered the negative one by three to one. They were particularly happy with the counseling, classes, and tutoring. Their daughter even mentioned that living at the shelter was better because her parents were sober.

On the other hand, Family Two had a far more negative view of the shelter. Their negative comments occurred eight times as often as their positive ones. Upon closer analysis, however, the negative comments occurred mostly during the interview with the children. While Mom did have a few negative things to say about the shelter, it was the

teens that were most verbose. While all of the families mentioned a dislike of the lack of privacy, the strict rules on overnights, and limitations on family visits, the teens in Family Two also adamantly disliked the curfew and their mother's limited rights. In the interview, they spoke of almost nothing else. The girls even suggested that they were experiencing depression and behavior problems because they lived at the shelter.

Family Three was also mostly negative about the shelter. Again, while they did express appreciation for the assistance they had received from the shelter programs, they disliked the strict rules they were forced to follow. The father disliked the lack of privacy and family control he had enjoyed while living in their own home, and the mother disliked being told that she could not spend their meager allowance on hair care products for her daughters. However, unlike Family Two, Family Three had a positive view of the shelter programs provided for their children. They seemed to greatly appreciate the tutoring and counseling the children received there. They even provided a specific example of how their son had benefitted from guidance he had received to better manage his behavior.

Two families shared the theme of unemployment. While all four families experienced difficulty with employment, Family One and Family Three spoke frequently about it. Before coming to the shelter, the parents in Family One spent many years struggling with maintaining employment. According to their personal story and interviews, John lost his siding business due to a poor economy. He then had difficulty finding and maintaining work due to illness and alcohol abuse. When he had been

working, his wife stayed home with the children or worked at retail stores. When she received a DUI, she no longer could drive and, as a result, could not sustain employment.

The parents in Family Three spoke about a time when they had stable employment but were suddenly forced into a poor economic status due to the father's illness. His poor health resulted in the inability to stay in the construction field. Related to that, he talked extensively about his difficulty in finding indoor work that would accommodate his health problems. He showed resentment to the school district that had not prepared him for the work place. Unfortunately, his wife also had difficulty finding employment. Although she had recently finished a nursing program and passed the state exam, she could not acquire a position as a nurse because of a past felony.

Two families shared the theme of extended family. While Families One and Three did talk about their extended families, Families Two and Four were far more dependent on their relatives. Both talked about frequently living with their extended family members and neither considered themselves homeless during much of that time. Family Two was unique, however, in that they depended on their extended family to help them with food, clothing, and transportation. None of the other families had this kind of support.

In addition to the common themes, the four families had other similarities. While only one family spoke frequently enough to have McKinney-Vento as a dominant theme, all four families were aware of the Homeless Assistance Act, even if none of them knew it by name. All talked about a time when they became aware that the school district would provide transportation and services to them because they were experiencing



homelessness. For example, before Family One moved to the downtown shelter, they were told that their current school district would cab their children to school due to a “new law.” When they had stayed in a hotel for a short time a few years before coming to the shelter, the mom talked about the school arranging a cab to pick up the children. Bev in Family Two talked about the *homeless liaison* and how she went to the office to get assistance because the liaison would not return her phone call. She also talked about getting transportation set up for her children each time they moved to a different shelter. Tamiya in Family three discussed the time that she talked with a district representative and found out about the assistance the children should have been receiving due to their homelessness. When she talked with the charter school staff, they admitted that they should have been providing more assistance. That is when the school gave her the public bus passes so that she would not have to pay to take the children to school.

Finally, Family Four mentioned the law only two times but they did reveal that they were aware that the law existed. When I asked them how the school could assist them better, they replied that the district had a pretty good program for transitional or homeless children. They praised the district for helping them in the past but they were worried about losing some of that assistance when their children started attending a charter school.

While not a theme because it was mentioned infrequently, substance abuse or a felony was disclosed by three of the four families. Family One talked about how the father’s alcohol abuse and the mother’s DUI had caused difficulties with maintaining employment while Tamiya in Family Three shared how her felony had prevented

employment as a nurse. She also wrote in the survey that “addictions” were beginning to hinder employment; however, she never mentioned it again. The only comment about substance abuse in Family Four came from one of the daughters. When asked about the home before coming to the shelter, she said, “My dad and my dad’s wife used to do drugs.” When asked to describe anything she likes or dislikes about the shelter she replied, “I like it when he lived here because he used to be like a drug person and he’d go crazy, take drugs, get drunk and when he came here he changed.”

While all of the families experienced school changes, attitudes surrounding school and the children’s academic achievement and behavior varied among the families. For example, Family One expressed a strong, positive attitude toward the suburban school district where their children had most recently attended. Even though none of their children displayed strong academic skills and some struggled with behavior problems, they remained loyal to the school for the support they received and made very few negative comments.

The children in Families Two, Three, and Four attended school at the city school district where the shelter was located. Family Four had an overall positive attitude toward the school district and their children displayed positive behavior and high academic achievement. Even though they had moved several times, the family seemed to maintain a positive school experience. Family Three, on the other hand, had a negative overall attitude toward the school district. According to the mother, Tamiya, their children had attended school district in another state where they had received strong instruction and personal attention. When the family moved to the city, the children began having

academic and behavior problems. She felt that the expectations for behavior and academics were low. She was even concerned about the children's safety. When Tamiya talked with administrators, she received little assistance. However, once she found a charter school within the district that better suited her children's needs; she did express more satisfaction in regard to the school district.

Bev in Family Two had mixed feelings about the local school district. While she felt that her younger children were receiving an acceptable education, she worried about her older daughter who seemed to be struggling both academically and behaviorally. However, she tended to blame this less on the school and more on undesirable peers.

### **Summary**

The purpose of these narrative case studies was to understand the experiences of families who are homeless and how children experience formal and informal education. Through the administration and analysis of surveys, personal stories, interviews, and observations, data were collected to determine how families experience homelessness and how homelessness affects their children's formal and informal education.

During the collection and analysis of data, I found both similarities and differences among the four families. The families were different in that they varied in age and race. The families were similar in that they all had moved multiple times before living at the shelter. All of the parents, with the exception of one, did not have job training or education past a high school degree or GED, and, with the exception of one, all struggled with substance abuse or had committed a felony. Despite these difficulties,

the parents in all four families seemed optimistic and hopeful that their lives would change for the better.

While all four families resided at the same shelter, school and day-to-day living experiences varied. One family sent their children to a suburban school district where the children had attended before coming to the shelter. The district provided a cab to take the students to and from school. While the children did not exhibit high academic achievement, the family was pleased with the services they had received from the district. The other three families sent their children to the urban school district that served the area where the shelter was located. Some of the children attended charter schools, and some attended district schools. The educational experiences of these three families were both positive and negative. They were happy to receive various services provided to families experiencing homelessness but struggled with several issues related to the district itself. These issues included transportation difficulties and poor student behavior management.

The four families also varied in their attitudes toward the shelter. While all appreciated having a safe place to live, all were unhappy with at least some aspect of the shelter. Several of the families mentioned the positive lessons they had learned from the classes offered at the shelter and the effective tutoring their children had received from the youth program. However, most did not like the stringent rules and lack of privacy. A few of the teenagers seemed unhappy with everything related to the shelter. Overall, the data collected from this qualitative research study revealed the circumstances related to how these four families came to experience homelessness and how they have persevered through that journey. It uncovered some of the challenges they faced in providing

positive formal and informal educational experiences for their children; and it provided some insight into whether or not homeless assistance programs such as McKinney-Vento are making a difference.

In chapter five I will discuss the implications related to the data collected in the study. I will also make personal recommendations and suggestions for future research based on these findings.

## CHAPTER 5

### RESULTS

#### **Implications of Findings**

The purpose of these narrative case studies was to understand the experiences of families who are homeless and how children experience formal and informal education. The intention was to discover how families came to be homeless and how that journey has or has not influenced their children's education. The units of analysis for this study were the adults and children experiencing homelessness.

The theoretical frameworks of narrative inquiry and case study were chosen for this study because both allow the researcher to delve into the detailed stories and experiences of the subjects being studied, allowing for a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. In this study, families were asked to describe their encounters with homelessness, and particular attention was paid to how their children were experiencing formal and informal education.

The data collected through surveys, observations, personal stories, and interviews were used to answer the following questions: What themes are apparent in the perceptions and experiences of participants as reflected in their stories of being homeless as it relates to their children's educational experiences? How do adults experiencing homelessness describe their children's formal and informal educational experiences since becoming homeless? How do children experiencing homelessness describe their formal and informal educational experiences since becoming homeless? How do adults experiencing homelessness describe the events that led to homelessness, and how did

these events affect the educational experiences of their children? What strategies have different homeless adults developed to address their children's education since becoming homeless?

To answer the research questions, I knew that I would have to identify families with school-age children that were currently experiencing homelessness. I would then have to design a study that would not only unveil how they became homeless but also how they and their children were experiencing formal and informal education.

Individuals and families experiencing homelessness often live in different locations from day-to-day. I knew that if I were to conduct a successful study, I would need to meet and observe these families over an extended length of time. That need led me to a long-term family shelter in the center of the city. Unlike many shelters where individuals were allowed to stay for only one night at a time, this long-term shelter took in families for extended periods of time. This setting allowed me to find families with school-age children that would be available for study over a longer period of time.

I began the study by asking the director of the shelter to distribute a flyer and survey to the four families that met the study criteria. After two weeks, I returned to the shelter and collected the surveys. All of the families returned the survey, expressing interest in participation.

I met with each of the four families two to three times during two months of the summer. Each visit lasted from one to two hours, depending on the amount of information each family member chose to share. For example, one mother provided fairly

short answers while another provided details scenarios. One child said very little while a group of teens were quite talkative.

During my visits with the participants, I collected data in two ways. First, one or both parents provided a personal story on how the family had come to experience homelessness. I had originally thought that they would write these stories. However, when asked if they would like to write or recite the stories, each family opted for recitation. These stories were recorded and I later transcribed them.

After this initial story, I then asked the parents to answer open-ended questions. I also asked probing questions to allow for clarification and deeper understanding. Some of the parents chose to be interviewed together while others chose to be interviewed separately. This was also true with the children. All were interviewed with their parents present, but some chose to be interviewed alone while others chose to be interviewed with their siblings. I allowed this flexibility because I wanted all participants to be comfortable with the interviews and, thus, provide more information. In all, seven adults and nine children were interviewed in a shelter office and seven adults and twelve children were observed in and around the shelter. Three of the children were too young to be interviewed.

When I began the study, I was concerned about how the participants would view me. I was worried that they would think that I was somehow judging them and their circumstances. In our initial meetings, I worked at being genuine and warm, hoping that would put them at ease. I emphasized that they were helping me complete my studies and that I was very appreciative. At each initial meeting, all of the families were polite and



cooperative, but some divulged more information than others. Two of the families began by telling detailed stories and accounts then went on to reveal even more at later visits. They clearly seemed to trust me. But two of the families seemed to hold back when providing information. I feel certain that I would have gained more insight if I had visited more often and spent more time with them.

When I designed the study, I knew that I needed several families so that I had enough data from enough subjects to make the findings valid. This was accomplished with the four families, all varying in size and demographics. I also asked each family the same open-ended questions. This, again, addressed validity. While I did not have the informants read the findings, I did ask clarifying questions to insure that I understood their statements. To avoid skewing the data with my reflexivity or biases, I was careful not to lead the subjects during questioning or interject my own thoughts and comments. Each time I met with the participants, I reminded myself that I was there as a student not a school district homeless liaison or principal. I was careful to dress and act as a student, not a person of position or power.

I analyzed the data in two ways: within-case and cross-case. By conducting both within-case and cross-case analysis, I was able to identify themes unique to each case then compare these themes with each of the other cases. As a result, several prominent themes emerged. These included transient lifestyle, shelter programs, unemployment, and extended family. Other similarities included the families' knowledge of services required by the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act and the parents' involvement with substance abuse or criminal activity. These themes and similarities not only revealed how

families began and traveled their journey of homelessness but also demonstrated how their children's education was affected.

As I reflect on the themes identified through this study, I am struck by the implications and associations that can be made from these findings. When I first conceived the idea to conduct this study, I intended to learn ways that educators can better address the needs of students experiencing homelessness. While I do believe that the study fulfilled my initial intent, I also suspect that it provides valuable information for other institutions that seek to assist the homeless, including community shelters and legislators.

The central question of this research questions is as follows: What themes were apparent in the perceptions and experiences of participants as reflected in their stories of being homeless as it relates to their children's educational experience? The following addresses this question.

### **McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act**

The most prominent theme, a transient lifestyle, was supported by data in which all four families described living in multiple places before actually considering themselves homeless. During that period of time, most of the families were living with relatives. This was associated with another dominant theme, extended family. Two of the four families often spoke about living with and receiving help from other family members over a period of several years. They also discussed living in hotels. During this transient time, their children attended different schools with each move. According to a study released by the Cunningham, Harwood, and Hall (2010), "The residential

instability associated with homelessness has the potential to disrupt children's educational progress by necessitating frequent school changes" (p. 4). My data support this statement.

According to the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (U.S. Department of Education, 2004), "Changing schools significantly impedes a student's academic and social growth. The literature on highly mobile students indicates that it can take a student four to six months to recover academically after changing schools" (p. 14). McKinney-Vento was created to help students experiencing homelessness maintain a more stable educational environment and, as a result, achieve at higher levels. According to my study, all four of the families demonstrated a transient lifestyle long before coming to live at the shelter. The families were often changing residences and, as a result, their children were changing schools and most were achieving at lower levels. It was not until they entered the shelter and called themselves homeless that the services required by McKinney-Vento went into effect. Once the services began, their children stopped changing schools, began a more stable educational routine, and improved their academic performance. What does this teach us about McKinney-Vento and how it is meeting the needs of children experiencing homelessness? The results of this study suggest that children moving from place to place would change schools less frequently and benefit academically if the services offered by McKinney-Vento were put into place before the family claimed homelessness.

Families in this study did not consider themselves homeless until they came to live at the shelter. However, upon reflection, they admitted that they had actually

experienced homelessness frequently over a period of several years. They then went on to describe several schools and districts that their children attended during that time. Three of the four families stated that the school district did not offer services required by McKinney-Vento until the families began living at the shelter. The law clearly defines a homeless person as an individual without a “fixed, regular and adequate nighttime residence” (2004, p. 31). Living temporarily with relatives or in hotels does meet this requirement, yet only one family mentioned that the school district offered services while they were living under these conditions at a hotel. It is unclear if the district did not know that the families were experiencing homelessness or if they were choosing to ignore their living conditions until the families asked for assistance. Regardless, McKinney-Vento requires local school districts to appoint a district homeless liaison to identify homeless families. In my study, I did not see this being done proactively.

Why are school districts choosing to wait to provide the services required by McKinney-Vento? Past research suggests that it is related to finances. The Washington State Agency Council on Coordinated Transportation conducted a study on the cost of providing transportation to homeless students in eight school districts.

The study found that homeless student transportation was expensive, in absolute terms and when compared to transportation of the general school age population. The majority of homeless trips (79%) cost the school districts from just under \$3 per one-way trip to over \$40 per one-way trip as opposed to an average of \$0.67 for the general student population. (National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, 2011, p. 6)

In a study conducted by the state of Massachusetts, the state was projected to spend over \$11 million, ranging from a few hundred to half a million dollars per district (Barry, 2012). As a former homeless liaison, my school district paid over \$100,000 to

transport fewer than 200 students experiencing homelessness to and from school. Clearly, school district finances play a part in servicing families experiencing homelessness.

**Recommendations.** If schools and legislators sincerely seek to assist all students in obtaining a stable, quality education, the results of this study suggest that identifying families living a transient lifestyle must occur sooner. Students that have changed schools within a short period of time need to be identified and this needs to happen before they lose months or years of consistent instruction. Currently, school districts wait for families to claim homelessness before they offer services. This is most likely due to the financial strain of providing those services.

Until the federal government provides funding to local school districts to offset the expenses related to providing services to students experiencing homelessness, school districts will most likely not proactively seek out homeless children attending their schools. This is unfortunate because the findings of this study suggest that students living place to place would have more stable educational experiences if local school districts would recognize the pattern of school changes and offer transportation to help them stay in one school. One solution might be to allow school districts to utilize Title I funds for homeless transportation. Currently, these funds are allocated to schools with high numbers of low socioeconomic students and some of that money is set aside for children experiencing homelessness. However, current regulations specifically prohibit using these funds for transportation. By allowing districts to utilize those funds for transportation, the federal government would be assisting with McKinney-Vento requirements and helping students stay in school. According to this research, by the time

many students are identified as homeless, they have already changed schools multiple times and are academically behind. With the help of federal funding, school districts could better identify struggling families and, thus, more fully implement McKinney-Vento.

Regardless of the shortcomings listed above, this study does suggest that the McKinney-Vento Act is making a difference in the educational lives of four families. Once identified as homeless, the families were not required to prove residency before sending their children to school. School districts provided transportation through school buses, public buses, or cabs, even when the students were living outside the district boundaries. Schools were providing free meals, uniforms, and school supplies. Most of the children in this study were experiencing school stability, some for the first time in their educational history. The results of the study suggest that the goals set by McKinney-Vento are being achieved. This would then support that the Act should be continued and, perhaps, expanded.

### **School Districts**

While all of the students in this study received services mandated by McKinney-Vento, an analysis of the data revealed that the quality of those services varied. The family that had lived in a suburb north of the city before coming to the downtown shelter chose to have their children stay in the schools they had been attending in that northern suburb. The district sent a cab to take the students to school each morning and return them to the shelter each night. The parents in this family made many positive comments about the school district. They spoke about clothing, school supplies, and additional

instruction their children had received from the school district. Mom also commented on the friendliness and the helpfulness of the school staff. She talked about how she feared that the children would be singled out for being homeless but that they were treated respectfully and equally instead. Even the middle school son mentioned his school counselor as the most helpful person to him since becoming homeless. (He said that she frequently helped him with the cab.) He was the only child that specifically spoke about someone at school helping him with something directly related to his living conditions.

The other three families sent their children to the school district where the shelter was located. The services these families described varied in quality and seemed related to the specific schools where the children were attending. It also seemed associated with whether or not the children were attending charter schools or regular public schools within the district. According to a law practice brief on McKinney-Vento created by The National Center for Homeless Education (2013):

To the extent that transportation is a barrier to school attendance, Local Educational Agencies (LEAs), including charter schools that are LEAs, must provide transportation to and from the school of origin even if they do not provide transportation for any other students. Charter schools should include funds for transporting homeless students to and from their school of origin in their annual budget. Charter schools should explore the use of public transportation and community partnerships, or consider reimbursing homeless parents for mileage for driving their children to school or providing them with gas vouchers. (p. 4)

In my study, I found that the parents that were sending their children to charter schools were often worried about transportation. One charter school knew that a family with young children was living at the shelter and that the parents were struggling with getting the children to school consistently and on time. However, the school still did not offer transportation. When the mother spoke with another agency about the problem, the

representative told her that the school should be transporting the children to and from the building, even if it was a charter school. Only after specifically asking the charter school for transportation did the school finally issue the mother and children bus passes. This required a parent to accompany the children on a public bus to and from the charter school. As a result, both parents could not work a full day while the children were at school. One was always needed to chaperone the students to and from school.

Another family had sent their children to public schools within the district in previous years but had just procured places for them in two more exclusive charter schools. I interviewed them in the summer. Both parents stated that they were worried about how they would get their students to the charter schools. Both were in middle school and the parents worried about their safety on a public bus. The mom was currently working hours that would prevent her from accompanying the students to school. Her husband was hoping to have completed his General Education Degree (GED) and find employment before the children started school. He too would most likely not be able to chaperone the children.

Despite the transportation issues, both of the families mentioned above specifically sought out the charter schools for their students to attend. One family spoke extremely negatively about the expectations, instruction, and overall culture they had experienced while their children were attending the city's public schools. It was not until they enrolled their children in charter schools did they begin to feel more positively about the district. The other family mentioned above had sent their children to the district's public schools but were moving them to charters for middle school. Their children had



done well academically and behaviorally at the public schools but they were concerned that many of the students were allowed to behave and achieve poorly. Both families expressed concern that the public schools had low expectations.

The third family attended the city's public schools and seemed satisfied with the overall education they were receiving there. The mom was pleased with her younger teens' academic performances in school but was worried about her older daughter's poor grades and negative attitude. She did not, however, blame this on the school district but instead expressed concern for the peers her daughter was choosing while at school. The mom in this third family was mostly disappointed in the transportation the district was providing for her children to and from school. Because they were attending regular public schools within the district, they rode school buses. However, the mom complained many times to the district homeless liaison that the buses were difficult to set up at the beginning of each school year and were often late once set up. She also expressed concern that other students could see her children being picked up and dropped off at the shelter. She had been told by the homeless liaison that shelter students were picked up first and dropped off last so that others would not know where they live. This prevented bullying and embarrassment. But Mom complained that the bus drivers rarely followed this policy and that her children suffered as a result.

What can this tell us about how different districts implement the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act? This study suggests that the overall quality of the organization influences the implementation of McKinney-Vento. The urban school district and suburban school district referenced in this study differ in their accreditation

standing. According to the Sulzberger (2011), the state board of education “cited the continued failure to improve academic performance and the continued instability in district leadership as driving its decision to revoke the urban district’s accreditation” (para. 3). On the other hand the suburban school “is nationally accredited by the North Central Association's Commission on Accreditation and was the first school system in (state) to meet that organization's rigorous district-wide quality standards” (Neilsen, 2013, para. 2). While the quality of services provided by the two districts appeared to be different in this study, more studies are needed to determine if accreditation is a factor in that quality of service.

The study also addressed the differences between the homeless services provided by charter schools and regular public schools. Both families sending children to charter schools did not fully understand their rights to transportation. Charter schools are often not held to the same state accountability requirements as regular public schools. However, once the families discovered that the charter school was required to follow McKinney-Vento and asked for transportation, they only received bus passes, an allowable solution according to the policy. The results of this study suggest that charter schools are not providing practical transportation for families living at the shelter. This then suggests that charter school transportation should be reviewed and more closely monitored to better meet the needs of students experiencing homelessness while attending charter schools.

**Recommendations.** Because the results of this study suggest that the services provided to families experiencing homelessness vary between school districts and

individual schools, it might be necessary for the state to more clearly guide and monitor these organizations. When I served as a public school district homeless liaison, it was my responsibility to insure that our district was in compliance with the McKinney-Vento Act. The state then monitored our services through yearly audits. I knew that if our school district came under scrutiny from the state educational department, I would be the one they would look to for answers. I assumed that our school district was meeting the needs of our families without homes because the state was satisfied with our audits. Now I am wondering what our families would say. Were they having transportation problems or need additional services but not reporting them? To find answers to these questions, the state could interview or survey these families to get a more accurate view of how the school districts are meeting their needs. Another solution might include school districts self-monitoring their services so that they are informed and can improve programs based on parent and student feedback. This could provide more accurate information and help to improve overall services, especially in the area of charter schools. It is misleading that providing public bus passes to children living in shelters meets the transportation requirements of McKinney-Vento. By listening to the stories of the parents using public transportation to get their children to school, it is possible that this policy would come under review.

To better meet the needs of urban and suburban school districts that are experiencing an increase in homelessness, the state or federal government might need to provide higher quality guidance and additional funding. This study suggests that district

would greatly benefit from additional state and federal aid to better meet the needs of their families experiencing homelessness.

Because some of the parents in the study described various ways that the schools were insensitive to their plight, school districts should consider providing sensitivity training for all employees, including bus drivers and office personnel. While the homeless liaison might know the circumstances related to homelessness, many other do not. By providing professional development in this area, staff members would be less likely to negatively stereotype this vulnerable population and, thus, more likely to provide better service.

### **Shelter Programs**

Three other dominant themes included shelter programs, unemployment, and substance abuse or criminal activity. It is not surprising that the shelter programs, those for adults and those for the children, were often mentioned by the participants of this study. All four families were currently living at the shelter and, like many shelters, it required that the residents participate in classes and follow strict guidelines. The themes of unemployment, substance abuse, and criminal activity are related to the adult shelter programs because many of the classes and guidelines specifically addressed these areas. Many of the adults I spoke to were taking classes to help them pass the GED, gain job skills, or address their addictions.

According to Crisis, the national charity for single homeless people (2006), “Sixty percent of homeless people have low or no qualifications, putting over 80% of job vacancies beyond reach; and 37% of homeless people have no qualifications whatsoever”

(para. 7). The Coalition for the Homeless reports that many homeless single mothers do not have the skills to make a living wage for their families (2013, para. 1). The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (2003) estimates that 38% of homeless people are dependent on alcohol and 26% abuse other drugs (para. 2). The data collected in my study support these findings. Most of the adults in the study did not have higher education or job training. All struggled with finding and maintaining a job that would sufficiently support their families. Three out of the four families reported having some sort of substance abuse, and two had been convicted of felonies.

The adult shelter programs were mentioned many times by the participants. Most expressed appreciation for the training they were receiving, and they seemed to look forward to the opportunities for better employment. While most of the comments were positive, there were some that were negative. Some of the adults complained about schedule changes and a general lack of organization. They resented being held to strict guidelines while those in charge seemed to model inconsistent behavior.

The implications of these findings suggest the shelter is right on target with providing adult education to complete the GED, earn a college degree, obtain job training, or recover from substance abuse. All of the adults in the study clearly appreciated these programs and understood their importance. However, the data also suggest that the shelter and employees that manage the programs need to self-reflect on their practices. Are they asking their residents to meet higher expectations than they are willing to meet themselves? Are they respecting the residents and taking into account their feelings when changing timelines and requirements? The implications from these

data suggest that the residents at this homeless shelter sometimes feel diminished by the very staff that should be helping them.

The shelter programs for the children drew mixed reviews. All of the parents spoke very highly of the tutoring and counseling services their younger children were receiving. They consistently showed appreciation for having a safe place for their children to play and receive informal educational opportunities. Even the mother of the teens was happy that her children had a supervised place to hang out.

It is important to note that this study specifically sought information related to the informal education of children both before and after homelessness. The findings were somewhat surprising. Before coming to the shelter, most of the children participated in few if any informal educational activities. Lack of money and transportation often prevented their involvement. Both the parents and the children described more informal educational opportunities after coming to the shelter.

While the shelter did provide various informal educational opportunities, the teens tended to complain that these activities conflicted with those offered at school. They insisted that the shelter required them to participate in their activities such as chapel and did not allow them to participate in informal educational activities at their middle and high schools such as sports. The parents in another family also complained about this. Research shows that extracurricular activities help students achieve at higher levels and improve overall behavior. “Participation in an after school program that is designed to build self-esteem, had positive effects on standards test scores in math and reading” (Cosden, Morrison, Gutierrez & Brown, 2004, p. 223). Education World states that

“Participation in school activities, especially athletics, leads to higher self-esteem and enhanced status among peers, which some argue is deterrent to antisocial behavior” (Brown, 2000, para.6).

Another negative related to the shelter that was repeated by all four families was the lack of privacy. All of the families longed for a place away from the other families and for freedom to do activities just as an individual family. According to the adults in the study, the shelter often planned family activities, but the families were made to feel obligated to mix with the other families. There was a common theme that the families just wanted some time to themselves.

Three of the four families also complained about the strict rules enforced at the shelter. The older children did not like the curfew. All of the children missed spending nights at their friends’ houses and having friends come to their rooms. One of the parents worried about the strict timeline for getting a job and paying their bills. These findings again imply that shelters that serve families experiencing homelessness could better serve these families by considering their feelings and opinions when making policies. I suspect that the shelter has reasons why they plan large group gatherings for the families to attend. I’m sure most if not all of the rules are there for specific reasons. But does the shelter provide transportation, space, and time for each family to spend time alone? Do they honor the human need for at least a small amount of autonomy and privacy? Again, by reflecting on these findings, the shelter could make some small changes that could positively impact the families living there.

**Recommendations.** The results of this study suggest that shelters that serve families experiencing homelessness should continue to provide education, job training, and substance abuse counseling for the adults and that they continue offering tutoring and informal educational opportunities to the children. The data clearly showed that all of the families in this study felt that these services were valuable. The parents admitted repeatedly that they needed help to be more successful with finances, employment, and parenting. They showed great appreciation for the assistance they had received from the shelter. The positives of this program suggest that more long-term family shelters are needed. One of the families discussed waiting for a month before room became available at this shelter. This suggests that there might be other families that would benefit from the program, but who had not been able to gain entrance due to a lack of space.

This study and other studies suggest that the shelter should allow the children to participate in school activities and waive the informal educational opportunities at the shelter if students choose to participate in school events. The data collected in this study along with other research shows that allowing the students to participate in sports and other informal educational opportunities at school would be in the best interest of the children living at the shelter. One of the objectives of McKinney-Vento and other programs aimed at helping homeless children is often to provide the same opportunities for them as children living in stable homes. Not allowing them to participate in school activities seems to go against this objective.

The results of this study suggest that shelters should evaluate their policies, rules, and guidelines associated with helping their families obtain success and independence. It



is quite probable that the shelter had reasons for their policies. However, the families in this study expressed a need to more respect. Parents expressed a need for more time alone with their children. A mother wanted to be trusted to spend their meager allowance on hair supplies for their daughters. A father expressed a strong desire to take his family on a picnic in a park. The data collected in this study suggest that the families wanted some autonomy and decision-making power. To meet this request, shelters might need to evaluate and change policies. For example, current policies seem to emphasize that families spend time with other families and shelter staff members and actually limit their private time as nuclear families. Perhaps, families would be better served if they were allowed to cultivate and develop agency within their own lives, thus preparing them for a time they will no longer live at the shelter.

Finally, the results of this study suggest that there is an overall need for cultural awareness and sensitivity within the shelter and among the staff members enforcing the rules. One of the Black mothers expressed great concern that she was not allowed to spend her allowance on grooming her daughters' hair. By understanding the varying needs of different cultural groups, the shelter would improve the overall atmosphere of their program. All of the families seemed to appreciate the opportunity to openly express their feelings about the shelter. Perhaps by allowing the families to provide anonymous feedback the shelter could better facilitate and serve the needs of this vulnerable population.

## **Education**

A final implication for this study is the general need for quality education and job training in this country. None of the parents in this study reported living a homeless lifestyle while they were children, but they did report a general lack of education and job training. Some of the parents attended the same unaccredited school district where their children were attending. This implies that without a quality education, adults are more likely to fall into a downward spiral that leads to homelessness. The journey begins in their teens. Due to a lack of job training, they obtain low-paying employment. Due to the daily struggle of barely paying their bills, they are more likely to succumb to substance abuse. These two variables lead to unpaid bills and the loss of a home. The saddest part of this scenario is that their children often suffer educationally, leading them to the same deficient in job skills, doomed to repeat their parents' fate.

While the data in this research does point to the lack of education and job skills as a contributing factor in the onset of homelessness, other surveys do indicate that even educated individuals with higher paying jobs are in danger of losing their homes.

According to a survey done in 2011,

Even those with higher annual household incomes indicate they are not guaranteed to make their next housing payment if they lost their source of income... Ten percent of survey respondents earning \$100K or more a year say they would immediately miss a payment. (Bay, 2011, para. 1)

**Recommendations.** The results in this study suggest that schools and communities should look at ways to break the cycle that leads to homelessness. The shelter is on the right track with education, job training, and counseling. The adults in these families needed help to get them into the job market to make enough money to

support their families. The shelter is clearly working to meet this need. However, if we are to stop the cycle, we must address the needs of the children. Every parent I spoke with expressed a strong desire to keep their children from following the same path they had traveled. Most of them seemed to understand that their children must be better educated than they had been if they were to avoid the same results. However, one family discussed how their teens were graduating from an alternative high school program. When I asked about job training, they were unable to name any job skills their children were receiving. In today's society, a high school diploma is often not enough to obtain a job that will support a family. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2011), the average income of a worker with only a high school diploma was \$30,000 a year in 2011. According to the 2013 Federal Poverty Guidelines, that income falls just under the poverty level for a family of six (Families USA, 2013.) The results of this study suggest that school districts and parents look beyond high school and provide students with specific job training or prepare them for college success. The services provided under McKinney-Vento are a good start in meeting the needs of students experiencing homelessness, but additional attention needs to be paid to how well these children are prepared to enter the job market. Without that additional piece, each of them could be back on the streets experiencing the same misfortune as their parents. Currently, the United States Congress funds Job Corps for low-income students. "Job Corps is a no-cost education and vocational training program administered by the United States Department of Labor that helps young people ages 16 through 24 improve the quality of their lives through vocational and academic training" (United States Department of Labor, 2013,

para. 1). By combining the efforts of McKinney-Vento and Job Corps, homeless students would be more likely to find employment and avoid homelessness as adults.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

While these case studies did shed some light on how four families came to experience homelessness and how that has affected their children's education, there are still many unanswered questions. After analyzing the data, I am now curious about the roles several different factors played in contributing to the findings.

### **Districts and their Implementation of McKinney-Vento**

In this study, children attending different districts and different schools experienced varying services in the name of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. All of the schools eventually acknowledged that the families living at the shelter were entitled to transportation, meals, and various other benefits of the Act, but each seemed to differ in how they carried out the mandate. When comparing the two school districts, one urban and one suburban, the data suggest that the family attending the suburban school district received more satisfying services. For example, the family attending the suburban school district discussed how the district provided a cab to take the children to and from school. During that discussion, there was no mention of being unhappy with this service. In comparison, the three families that attended the urban schools showed concern for their children's transportation needs and two of the families had concerns about the overall quality of their children's instruction. When comparing the charter schools to regular public schools, it would seem that the public school

provided more convenient transportation but that the families were more satisfied with the educational quality of the charter schools..

Despite the findings listed above, this study did not have a wide enough sampling to make any kind of generalizations related to the services provided by different school districts and different schools. More research is needed related to the district perspective to determine what district and school factors hinder or help in providing effective services listed under McKinney-Vento.

### **The State's Role in McKinney-Vento**

In addition to studying the role that school district plays in the implementation of McKinney-Vento, more study could be conducted on the state's role as well. When I was a homeless liaison, I was monitored and audited by a representative from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. It would be interesting to discover how well the state complies with the mandate as a whole and how the state compares to other states.

### **Shelter Programs**

This study specifically focused on families experiencing homelessness and how that has affected their children's education. It did not examine the effectiveness of shelter programs aimed at assisting the homeless. However, the study did point to ways shelters could possibly change their programs to better meet the needs of the people they are housing. For example, how effective are the job training programs? What percentages of graduates obtain employment? Why have shelters implemented strict rules for the families that live there? How are shelters helping or hindering informal educational opportunities for children? How do shelter compare to each other? Do they all have

similar rules? How are the rules determined? Additional research focusing on shelter programs is needed to address these questions, and thus, better serve this vulnerable population.

### **Cycle of Homelessness**

This study did not suggest that homelessness is a cycle. None of the adults that participated in the study had been homeless as children. However, few of the adults had higher education or job training, and many of the children were behind academically possibly due to frequent school changes. As a result of the lack of education and job training, will the children experiencing homelessness experience it again when they become adults? A longitudinal study following children raised in homelessness would help to determine if homelessness is repeated across generations.

### **A Quantitative Study on Student Academic Performance and Psychological-Emotional Well-Being**

It would be quite valuable to discover how students experiencing homelessness perform academically when compared to students in stable homes. It would also be important to learn about their psychological and emotional well-being. Some studies similar to this have been done in the past, but few since the implementation of McKinney-Vento. For the more valuable results, this kind of study would require quantitative research over a period of several years.

### **Same Study, Different Location**

Finally, the same study could be conducted in a different location, either within the same city at a different shelter or in another city. It would be enlightening to find out

if the patterns revealed in this study are repeated in other locations, or if other patterns emerge. It would also be interesting to discover how other school districts implement McKinney-Vento and how different shelters work to meet the needs of their patrons. Are other districts identifying students earlier, and if so, how? Are the families satisfied with the services they are receiving from the schools and the shelter? Did the adults experiencing homelessness experience it as a child? As in most studies, this one generated more questions than it answered.

### **Final Thoughts**

The findings of this study provided information on how four families were coping with homelessness and how their living conditions were affecting the education of their children. The study showed that the attributes of each family experiencing homelessness varied in some ways but that they also shared several common themes. All four families had lived a transient lifestyle for at least a year before coming to live at the shelter. All of the families had struggled with maintaining stable employment, and three out of the four struggled with substance abuse or criminal activity. All were at least aware of some of the services provided by the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, and all spoke about the impact the shelter had had on their lives, both positively and negatively.

The findings in this study suggest that McKinney-Vento is making a positive difference in the lives of children experiencing homelessness. Without this mandate, one of the families would not have been allowed to stay in their home school district; another family would have had to change schools with each move to a different shelter; and all of the families would have struggled with transportation and paying for fees and supplies.

The findings also suggest that parents experiencing homelessness need more education and better job skills to get and maintain employment that will pay a wage sufficient enough to support a family. For years, most of the families lived on the brink of homelessness due to low wages and unstable employment. By obtaining training at the shelter, all were hopeful that the cycle of financial instability would stop and that their families could put homelessness behind them.



## APPENDIX A

### ADULT CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATION IN A RESEARCH STUDY

#### Narrative Case Studies Exploring Homelessness and Education

##### **Introduction**

The purpose of this narrative case study is to understand the experiences of families who are homeless and how children experience formal and informal education. You are being asked to volunteer for a research study. This study is being conducted at a Kansas City Area Homeless Shelters.

The researcher in charge of this study is Dr. Jennifer Friend, as associate professor at the University of Missouri Kansas City. While the study will be supervised by Dr. Friend, Marlene DeVilbiss, a doctoral student, will work with her and will collect data pertaining to the study.

The study team is asking you to take part in this research study because you are homeless. Research studies only include people who choose to take part. Please read this consent form carefully and take your time making your decision. The study doctor or staff will go over this consent form with you. Ask him/her to explain anything that you do not understand. Think about it and talk it over with your family and friends before you decide if you want to take part in this research study. This consent form explains what to expect: the risks, discomforts, and benefits, if any, if you consent to be in the study.

## **Background**

Families with school-age children that are experiencing homelessness are being asked to participate in this research study. Selected families will be asked to share their stories related to homelessness and their children's education. They will also be interviewed and observed.

## **Purpose**

The purpose of this narrative case study is to understand the experiences of families who are homeless and how children experience formal and informal education. Families experiencing homelessness can be defined as groups of persons living without regular, fixed, and adequate housing. The Central Question is: What themes are apparent in the perceptions and experiences of participants as reflected in their stories of being homeless as it relates to their children's educational experience? Sub-questions will include: How do adults experiencing homelessness describe their children's formal and informal educational experiences since becoming homeless? How do children experiencing homelessness describe their formal and informal educational experiences since becoming homeless? How do adults experiencing homelessness describe the events that led to homelessness, and how did these events affect the educational experiences of their children? This study will provide information on the experiences of the homeless and how homelessness affects education. This will possibly inform future legislation for the homeless.

You will be one of about four to six families in the study at Kansas City Area Homeless Shelters. About eight to twelve subjects total will take part across all the places working on this study.

### **Study Procedures and Treatments**

If you agree to take part in this study, you will be involved in this study for three to six weeks. You will be asked to write an account of how you became homeless and how it has or has not changed your life. You will be interviewed two to three times over the three to six week period. If you agree, your children will be interviewed about homelessness and their educational experiences before and after becoming homeless.

This research will take place at the homeless shelter where you are staying.

### **The following study visits and procedures will occur:**

1. Participants will be given one week to write an account of how they became homeless and how homelessness has or has not changed their lives. They will be asked to provide specific examples and details.
2. After one week, the researcher will come to shelter to collect written accounts. At that time, interviews will be conducted regarding homelessness and education. With parental consent, children will be interviewed. Researcher will observe the family at the shelter.
3. After two weeks, researcher will come to shelter to interview families again and clarify any misconceptions from last interview. Researcher will observe the family at the shelter.
4. Upon completion of written account, two interviews, and observations, families participating in study will receive **one** \$50 Wal-Mart Gift Card **per family**.

### **Possible Risks or Side Effects of Taking Part in this Study**

The risks involved in participating in this study are slight. There is the possible risk of the loss of privacy or breach of confidentiality. However, every precaution will be taken to protect your family's privacy.

### **Possible Benefits for Taking Part in this**

A possible benefit for taking part in this study includes knowing that your contribution could inform and influence policies and legislation related to homelessness and education.

### **Costs for Taking Part in this Study**

*There is no cost for participating in this study.*

### **Payment for Taking Part in this Study**

To compensate you for your time you will be paid **one** \$50 Wal-Mart Gift Card **per family** for completing a written statement, two interviews, and shelter observations. You will be paid at the end of the researcher's third visit.

### **Alternatives to Study Participation**

The alternative is to not take part in the study.

### **Confidentiality and Access to your Records**

The results of this research may be published or presented for scientific purposes. You will not be named in any reports of the results. The study information that has your identity may be shown to the University of Missouri-Kansas City, Institutional Review Board (IRB) (a committee that reviews and approves research studies), or other governing agencies. This is to prove which study procedures you completed and to check the data reported about you. The study team will keep all information about you confidential as provided by law, but complete confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

If you leave the study or are removed from the study, the study data collected before you left may still be used along with other data collected as part of the study. For purposes of follow-up studies and if any unexpected events happen, subject identification will be filed at the researcher's office under appropriate security and with access limited to research personnel only. Every precaution will be used to protect the identity of the participant. The University of Missouri-Kansas City appreciates people who help it gain knowledge by being in research studies. It is not the University's policy to pay for or provide medical treatment for persons who participate in studies. If you think you have been harmed because you were in this study, please call the researcher, Dr. Jennifer Friend at 816-235-2550.

#### **Contacts for Questions about the Study**

You should contact the IRB Administrator of UMKC's Adult Health Sciences Institutional Review Board at 816-235-5927 if you have any questions, concerns or complaints about your rights as a research subject. You may call Dr. Jennifer Friend at 816-235-2550 if you have any questions about this study. You may also call her if any problems come up.

#### **Voluntary Participation**

Taking part in this research study is voluntary. If you choose to be in the study, you are free to stop participating at any time and for any reason. If you choose not to be in the study or decide to stop participating, your decision will not affect any care or benefits you are entitled to. The researchers, doctors or sponsors may stop the study or take you out of the study at any time

- if they decide that it is in your best interest to do so,
- if you experience a study-related injury,
- if you need additional or different medication/treatment,
- if you no longer meet the study criteria, or
- if you do not comply with the study plan.

They may also remove you from the study for other administrative or medical reasons.

You will be told of any important findings developed during the course of this research.

You have read this Consent Form or it has been read to you. You have been told why this research is being done and what will happen if you take part in the study, including the risks and benefits. You have had the chance to ask questions, and you may ask questions at any time in the future by calling Dr. Jennifer Friend at 816-235-2550. By signing this consent form, you volunteer and consent to take part in this research study. Study staff will give you a copy of this consent form.

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**Signature (Volunteer Subject)**

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**Date**

---

**Printed Name (Volunteer Subject)**

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**Signature (Authorized Consenting Party)**

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**Date**

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**Printed Name (Authorized Consenting Party)**

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**Relationship of Authorized Consenting Party to Subject**

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**Signature of Person Obtaining Consent      Date**

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**Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent**

## APPENDIX B

### CHILD ASSENT Form

#### **A Study about Children that are Living with No Home and How that might Change Going to School For Children between 7 and 18 Years of Age**

My name is Marlene DeVilbiss. I am a student at a college near here. I would like to invite you to take part in a *research study* I am doing for my school. A research study is a special way to find out about something. I am trying to learn more about how kids feel when they don't have a home that they share just with their families and how that changes going to school.

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to write or tell me about your life and how it has or has not changed going to school. You will be asked to meet with me to answer questions about homelessness and your school experiences, but your mom and dad will be there too. The questions won't take very long to answer. You might not want to answer some questions and that's okay. You don't have to answer anything you don't want to answer. I will also be coming to visit you at the shelter. I might record some of our conversations. We don't know if being in this research study will help you. But you may be helping other kids that don't have homes.

If you agree to help us, your teacher and classmates will not know what you have said. If you decide to be in the study or if you decide to say "no" your choice will not affect your grades or whether people like you.

When we are done with the study, we will write a report about what we found out. We won't use your name in the report.



Please talk this over with your parents before you decide if you want to be in my study. I will also ask your parents to give their permission for you to be in this study. But even if your parents say yes you can still say no and decide not to be in the study.

If you don't want to be in this study, you don't have to be in it. Remember, being in a study is up to you and no one will be upset if you don't want to be in it. If you decide to stop after we begin that is okay too. Remember that no one else, not even your parents will know what you have told me.

You can ask any question that you have about the study. If you have a question later that you didn't think of now, you can call me or ask your parents to call me at 816-335-5689.

Signing here means that you have read this paper or someone read it to you and that you are willing to be in this study. If you don't want to be in this study, don't sign.

\_\_\_\_\_

Printed Name of Participant	Date
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\_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_

Printed Name of Investigator	Date
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\_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Investigator

## APPENDIX C

### PARENTAL PERMISSION LETTER FOR PARTICIPATION IN A RESEARCH STUDY

#### **Parental Permission Letter**

##### Narrative Case Studies Exploring Homelessness and Education

Dear Parents,

My name is Marlene Devilbiss. I am a graduate student in the Department of Education at the University of Missouri-Kansas City. I would like your child to take part in my research. During the spring of 2013, with your permission, I will be asking your child some questions about living in the shelter and how that has affected his/her school experiences.

All of the information I get from your child will be kept confidential. Your child's name will not be used on any of the forms they complete, and no information about your child will ever leave the shelter with a name attached. The interview information that your child provides will be marked with a number I select but no one who works in the shelter will ever know this number or the responses of your child.

The final report will not contain any INDIVIDUAL information about children. I will use the information from this study to publish articles in professional publications, so that readers can learn more about homelessness and education. Once again, I will never report individual information.

Your child does not have to participate in the interviews. There are no direct benefits to you or your child for participating in this study. The information from the interviews should help us learn more about homelessness and how it affects education. There are no known risks associated with participation in this study, and most students enjoy the opportunity to share their stories. However, if your child becomes upset, he/she will be able to stop the interview.

While every effort will be made to keep confidential all of the information you complete and share, it cannot be absolutely guaranteed. Individuals from the University of Missouri-Kansas City Institutional Review Board( a committee that reviews and approves research studies) , Research Protections Program, and Federal regulatory agencies may look at records related to this study for quality improvement and regulatory functions.

The University of Missouri-Kansas City appreciates the participation of people who help it carry out its function of developing knowledge through research. If you have any

questions about the study that you are participating in you are encouraged to call Dr. Jennifer Friend, the investigator, at 816-235-2550.

Although it is not the University's policy to compensate or provide medical treatment for persons who participate in studies, if you think you have been injured as a result of participating in this study, please call the IRB Administrator of UMKC's Social Sciences Institutional Review Board at 816-235-5927.

If you and your child agree that your child may take part in the research please return a signed copy of this form to me in the enclosed envelope. You may keep the other copy for future reference.

You have read this permission form and agree to have your child take part in the research.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Student

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of Parent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Parent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

APPENDIX D

RESEARCH STUDY FLYER AND SURVEY

**Attention Families Living at a Kansas City Shelter**  
**Participants are needed for a Research Study conducted by a Student at  
the University of Missouri-Kansas City**

Participants must be:

- Families currently living full-time at a shelter
- Families with at least one school-age child
- Willing to participate in three interviews and observations at the homeless shelter

Participants will be asked to write or recite how their families came to live at the shelter, participate in two to three interviews, and allow the researcher to observe their families at the shelter. Families that choose to participate and complete the study will receive one \$50 Wal-Mart Gift Card **PER FAMILY**.

If you are interested in participating in this research study, please fill out this form and return it to Stacey Shope.

Yes, I am interested in participating in this Research Study.

**Today's Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Family Member First Names and Ages:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Amount of time you have been without a permanent home:**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Where do your children attend school?**

\_\_\_\_\_

**What is your ethnicity?**

**Choose one or more:** Asian \_\_\_\_\_ Black or African American \_\_\_\_\_ White \_\_\_\_\_

Native American \_\_\_\_\_ Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander \_\_\_\_\_

Number of children: \_\_\_\_\_ Ages of children: \_\_\_\_\_ Hispanic/Latino? \_\_\_\_\_

**What is the ethnicity of your children?**

**Choose one or more:** Asian \_\_\_\_\_ Black or African American \_\_\_\_\_ White \_\_\_\_\_ Hispanic

Native American \_\_\_\_\_ Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander \_\_\_\_\_

**(Please See Back)**

On the lines below, please write a brief description of how you and your family came to live at the shelter. (You may choose to leave this section blank.)

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On the lines below, please write a brief description of how your child's education has changed since you lived in a more permanent home. (You may choose to leave this section blank.)

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If you choose to participate in this study, please return this survey to **Stacy Shope** within the next week.

Thank you for volunteering for this research study!

PLEASE SEE BACK

APPENDIX E

WRITING PROMPT

Dear Research Study Participant:

Thank you for participating in this research study titled *Narrative Case Studies Exploring Homelessness and Education*.

To provide a better understanding of families experiencing homelessness and how it affects the task of educating their children, please write a detailed account on the paper provided or on your own paper of how you and your family became homeless and how your lives have been affected by homelessness. Please include details about how homelessness has affected your child's education. A researcher will collect your account at the shelter on \_\_\_\_\_.

Thank you again for participating in our study.

Sincerely,

Dr. Jennifer Friend, Associate Professor, University of Missouri-Kansas City

Marlene DeVilbiss, Doctoral Candidate, University of Missouri-Kansas City

## APPENDIX F

### ADULT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

#### **Narrative Case Studies Exploring Homelessness and Education**

##### **Adult Interview Statements and Questions:**

1. Describe your most recent permanent home where you lived with just your family.
2. Describe your family's day-to-day experiences when you were living in that place.
3. Describe your child's formal educational experiences (organized school) when you were living in a more permanent place.
4. Describe your child's informal educational experiences (activities like dance and sports) when you were living in a more permanent place.
5. Describe the transportation you used before coming to the shelter.
6. Describe your family's day-to-day experience now that you live at the shelter.
7. Describe your child's formal educational experience (organized school) now that you and your family live at the shelter.
8. Describe your child's informal educational experience (activities like sports and dance) now that you and your family live at the shelter.
9. Describe the transportation you use now that you are living at the shelter.

10. What do you believe is the most difficult part about not having a home for just your family? Please explain.
11. What do you believe is most difficult about providing a formal education for your child now that you do not have a permanent home?
12. What do you believe is most difficult about providing informal educational opportunities for your child now that you do not have a permanent home?
13. What do you think your child would say is the most difficult part about living in the shelter and not having a permanent home?
14. Who or what organization has been most helpful to you since you lost your permanent home? What have they done to assist you?
15. Who or what organization has been most helpful to your child since you lost your permanent home? What have they done to assist you?
16. What could the shelter do to better assist you and your family?
17. What could your child's school do to better assist you?
18. What could your child's school do to better assist your child?
19. Please share any information related to your current living conditions, your children, and your child's education that you wish to share but have not had the opportunity to do so.



## APPENDIX G

### CHILD INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

#### **Narrative Case Studies Exploring Homelessness and Education**

##### **Child Interview Statements and Questions:**

1. What kind of place did you live in before you and your family came to the shelter? (Continue asking about places until child names a relatively permanent home that s/he shared with just his/her immediate family)
2. Tell me about what your family did every day when you lived in that place.
3. Tell me about what going to school was like when you lived in that place.
4. Tell me about the things you did when you were not in school but were living in that place.
5. Tell me about how you got to and from school and other activities when you lived in that place.
6. Tell me about what your family does every day now that you live in the shelter.
7. Tell me about school now that you live in the shelter
8. Tell me about the things you do when you were not in school now that you are homeless.
9. Tell me about how you get to and from school and other activities now that you are homeless.
10. Tell me about what you like and dislike most about living in the shelter.

11. Who has been most helpful to you since you have been living in the shelter?  
What have they done to help you?
  
12. What do you think could be better at the shelter?
  
13. What could your teacher and school do to better help you?
  
14. Do you have anything else you would like to share? If so, what?

APPENDIX H

OBSERVATION PROTOCOL

**Observation Title:**

**Location:**

**Participants:**

**Researcher:** J. Marlene DeVilbiss

**Date of Observation:**

**Research Questions:**

What themes are apparent in the perceptions and experiences of participants as reflected in their stories of being homeless as it relates to their children’s educational experience?

**Sub-Questions:**

- How do homeless adults describe their children’s educational experiences since becoming homeless?
- How do homeless children describe their educational experiences since becoming homeless?
- How do homeless adults describe the events that led to homelessness, and how did these events affect the educational experiences of their children?
- What coping strategies have different homeless adults developed to deal with educational problems since becoming homelessness?
- What coping strategies have different homeless children developed to deal with educational problems since becoming homelessness?
- What educational support systems are described by the participants?

**Observation Objectives: To observe homelessness families and discover information related to:**

- How homelessness has affected their overall educational experience.
- How homelessness has affected their access to education
- How homelessness has affected their personal lives.
- How they are coping with homelessness

**Observation Notes:**

Observations	Feelings

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## VITA

Marlene DeVilbiss was born Joanna Marlene Evans in Chillicothe, Missouri on April 15, 1963. She graduated from Chillicothe High School in 1981 and attended the University of Missouri-Columbia. There she graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in Elementary Education in 1984. She also married Rex DeVilbiss in 1984 and moved to the Kansas City area where she taught at the Raytown School District for five years. During that time, she earned a Master of Arts degree in Reading Education from the University of Missouri-Kansas City, graduating in 1990. After staying home with their two sons for several years, Marlene returned to Raytown School District as a reading teacher in 2000. She later became an instructional coach and earned an Educational Specialist degree from the University of Central Missouri-Warrensburg in 2007. In 2009, she became the Director of Extended Learning and Federal Programs for the Raytown School District. During that same time, she began a Ph.D. program in Educational Leadership Policy and Foundations and Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Missouri-Kansas City. After three years as a director, she became the principal of Eastwood Hills Elementary School, also in Raytown. Upon completion of the Ph.D. program, Marlene plans to continue working as an elementary principal. In the future, she aspires to be an assistant superintendent.

Marlene is a member of the Missouri Association of Elementary School Principals (MAESP). She was awarded the MAESP Distinguished New Principal Award for the Kansas City Suburban Area in March 2014.