A constructivist second year study of the social and educational needs of homeless children

Gloria Katherine Kelly

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A CONSTRUCTIVIST SECOND YEAR STUDY OF THE
SOCIAL AND EDUCATIONAL NEEDS OF
HOMELESS CHILDREN

A Project
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Social Work

by
Gloria Katherine Kelly

June 1995
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ABSTRACT

This study continued a constructivistic project initiated last year, which completed the first phase of exploring the social and educational needs of homeless children in one area of the Inland Empire. The initial phase found delivery of services to homeless children as inconsistent, often with gaps and overlaps between agencies. This second round of inquiries once again utilized the constructivist paradigm, data gathered was qualitative, and continued the hermeneutic dialectic circle process. The original stakeholders with additional new stakeholders were interviewed as part of the naturalistic inquiry. The second round found a consensus among stakeholders as reasons for homelessness and continued lack of adequate funding involved a global perspective. Issues identified in the second round as part of the global perspective included a need for affordable housing, literacy education, job skills training for homeless parents, mental health outreach services for families, community awareness, expansion of services, and sharing of resources between agencies. The social work practice role as a community intervention effort incorporated a networking conference meeting comprised of participating stakeholders in the community in order to focus on tangible solutions for solving the needs of homeless families in the Coachella Valley.
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INTRODUCTION

Focus of Inquiry

This study is an ongoing constructivist project which currently consists of two separate research inquiries. The original or first study was conducted in 1994 and the second study, which is reported here, was carried out in 1995. This constructivist inquiry continued the hermeneutic dialectic circle process which was begun in a study which completed the initial stage of exploring the educational and social needs of homeless children in the Coachella Valley. This second study addressed the social work practice arena of community intervention. As social workers serve as professional change agents to assist communities, who are comprised of individuals, groups, or organizations, in their efforts to deal with social issues, they are also in a strategic position to identify ways in which community intervention through the networking process can enhance public response to clients' and/or public needs and increase accessibility of community services to them.

The first stage of this project identified the social and educational needs of homeless children, the second stage or second round of interviews continued the naturalistic inquiry. The second stage included interviewing the original stakeholders once again and incorporating new
stakeholders into the naturalistic inquiry setting who had a vested interest in this social issue. Upon conclusion and analysis of emerging themes, a networking conference was held in order to discuss possible intervention strategies.

Children are the fastest growing group among the homeless in the United States, it is estimated that 220,000 school-age children today are homeless (Dimeglio, 1994). In 1989 the United States Department of Education estimated that number could reach up to 750,000. According to the United States Conference of Mayors in 1989, 38% of all homeless were families with children. The Department of Education for the State of California estimated that the number of homeless children could reach 28,000 nightly (Molnar & Rath, 1990; Wright, 1989). Homeless children are in a state of urgent crisis in every state of our country (Whitman, Accardo, Boyert & Kendagor, 1990). As noted by Dail (1990), homelessness represents unique problems that are the most difficult to overcome and the issue of homeless children becoming a generation of socially dependent adults could be the long-term consequence of this social dilemma.

Research examining the rates of school attendance of homeless children, a New York study looked at 6,433 homeless students, and found that not only did homeless children have higher rates of non-attendance but that attendance rates decreased as grade level increased (Molnar & Rath, 1990).
Truancy not only affects the educational adequacy of homeless children but their socialization skills are negatively impacted as well. The poor language development of homeless children is particularly troublesome because this skill is so crucial to their personal success (Raffety & Shinn, 1991; Whitman et al., 1990; Dail, 1990; Bassuk & Rubin, 1987).

Further research on the negative impact of homelessness on children revealed consistent behavioral and emotional problems at higher rates than children with homes (First, Rife & Toomey, 1994; Bassuk, Rubin & Lauriat, 1986; Bassuk & Rubin, 1987). The behavioral and emotional effects of homelessness which not only influence the educational and social experience includes such behaviors as depression, anxiety, sleep disturbances, regression, short attention span and aggression (Dail, 1990; Rosenberg, Solarz & Bailey, 1991). As reported by Dimeglio (1994), the U. S. study also stated that homeless children not only suffer from developmental and emotional problems but may suffer from chronic physical disorders and illnesses such as, malnutrition and asthma. Additionally, certain symptoms may also disguise developmental impairments not associated with homelessness, but nevertheless blamed on homelessness which results in loss of treatment (Rafferty & Shinn, 1991; Rescorla, Parker, Stolley, 1991; Whitman et al., 1990;
Bassuk, Rubin & Lauriat, 1986).

The implications of the developmental, physical and social delays and problems may have a long lasting and severe impact on homeless children due to the manifestation of these problems within this population. With the staggering increase of homeless children throughout the country this may indicate a sign of a growing separation from mainstream society, a pattern that may be the preface to other antisocial behaviors such as, dependent and demanding behaviors as well. The loss of socialization skills and escalation of poor language skills and speech difficulties may reinforce this pattern (Dail, 1990; Bassuk & Rubin, 1986).

These deficits are not only the result of poor school attendance this problem can also be attributed to frequent school changes, chaotic shelter environments and gaps in schooling created by erratic shelter housing (Whitman, et al., 1990; Ziesmer, Marcoux & Marwell, 1994). Social workers as change agents in agencies such as schools, child protective agencies, mental health agencies, and family service organizations are in a position to create programs and organize networking conferences that will reduce or even eliminate the impact of educational and socialization delays.

As the first stage of this project identified
inconsistent services provided by the two shelters, schools and various governmental agencies to homeless children and their families, this second stage of the project importantly utilized the networking approach in order to facilitate open communication between agencies to avoid overlap and close the gap between existing services (Germain, 1991; Toro, Trickett, Wall & Salem, 1991). This second stage also continued to apply social behaviors defined in relationship to homeless children as a frame of reference when seeking intervention strategies with participating key stakeholders (Milburn & D'Ercole, 1991).

Importantly community networking efforts developed group consciousness, community awareness, and empowerment techniques when working with this population (Gutierrez, 1990; Cohen, 1994). As reported by Rosenberg, Solarz & Bailey (1991), the expanding population of homeless people throughout our country places an immediate need for community advocacy through political action, preventative programs, and public awareness campaigns. This network approach also brought together a system of helpers as a interagency cooperation or community of interests that emerged into a "larger system" of decision makers striving for elimination of organizational barriers that prevented adequate provision of services within the community (Hardy-Fanta, 1986; Lappin & VanDeusen, 1993; Kahn, 1991).
Statement of Purpose

The initial phase conducted last year found delivery of services to homeless children as inconsistent, often with gaps and overlaps between agencies. The purpose of continuing this study, as a community intervention approach, was to inform the private/public agencies through a community intervention collaboration effort and address the identified needs of homeless children. This effort was implemented through a process of interviews and a networking conference meeting which consisted of key agency representatives from throughout the Coachella Valley. Also major focus of this community intervention effort included working on tangible solutions for strengthening delivery of services, information sharing between agencies, and organization of a collaborative group for the purpose of serving this fragile population as an ongoing process.

Demographic Profile

The Coachella Valley is located in the foremost desert region of Riverside County in an area known as the Inland Empire in southern California. This valley is situated within the core of the fastest growing county in the state. Population for this valley which includes nine cities and various unincorporated territories is 258,842 as of January 1994. Population has more than doubled since the 1980 census with 122,000 in 1980 to over 250,000 today. The
median age is 35.2 with males comprising 49.7% (128,663) and females 50.3% (130,179) of the population. Ethnicity breakdown consists of Anglo-Americans at 71.8% (186,046), African-Americans at 2.7% (6,924), and Other at 25.2% (65,872). Latino population consists of approximately 39.0% (101,002) if considered a separate group and included in Other as stated. Income per capita includes individuals at $17,358., households at $31,804., and families at $37,196. (Wheeler, 1994). Income levels within the valley vary from extreme poverty of migrant farm workers in the lower part of the valley to those whose economic status exceeds the highest income level nationally. Twenty-five per cent plus who reside in the lower valley live in poverty, approximately 30.6% to 45.5% are children (Valley Partnership, 1989).

Housing reflects the diverse economic conditions of the community from those living in migrant farm shacks or non-standard residences to multi-million dollar country club estates. Residents are economically dependent on agriculture, construction, specialty boutiques, and the tourist industry. Although once a retirement community, within the last twenty years this valley has experienced a demographic shift from retirees to families of all ages.

As reported by Miller (1994), approximately 10,200 children in the Coachella Valley lived in poverty in 1990.
With the dramatic rise in the homeless population partly due to poverty, local shelters must turn away those seeking assistance everyday. A local soup kitchen serves lunch five days a week to approximately 400-500 individuals with 200 being children. The founder of the soup kitchen reported that "there's a lot of homeless families on the streets that we cannot assist due to restricted resources" (Miller, 1994). One shelter located in the lower valley provided 47,645 meals to the homeless, housed approximately 12,553 with 8,715 comprised of families in 1994. The local shelter for domestic violence from September 1994 to September 1995 assisted 176 mothers with 263 children operating at half capacity or a thirty bed facility. The second shelter located in the western part of the valley housed 441 homeless or 131 families, assisted 120 families with rental assistance, and donated food to over 200 homeless individuals. As services are unable to keep up with the pace of this growing homeless population, children continue to suffer the consequences of this social dilemma.

METHOD

Research Paradigm

Homelessness is an illusive problem by definition, since to be homeless is to be invisible with no connection to society as a whole beyond moving in and out of shelter, soup kitchen, and motel room. So services to the homeless
vary from county to county, city to city, and even shelter to shelter. Furthermore, the homeless individual may be homeless due to various reasons which may be unique to that individual or that shelter or demographic location. Ultimately, individuals are homeless frequently in a periodic manner as they may obtain temporary housing or part-time employment (Whitman, et al., 1990; Wright, 1990; Dail, 1990).

As a result, the homeless are a difficult population to study especially through the use of a traditional research paradigm designed to conclude its findings through predictable and generalizable means to similar populations. Importantly, as most researchers who might study the homeless population has never been homeless, imposing a preconceived notion as to the needs of homeless, as is required beyond the exploratory level in a positivist paradigm, seemed to be self-defeating. With existing services to be inconsistent and inadequate, and in need of improvement, the constructivist paradigm was the only paradigm that addressed a particular problem and initiated action toward the resolution of the identified problems.

Also, since the constructivist paradigm successfully brought about a consensus regarding the social and educational needs of homeless children in the first stage of this study the use of this subjective emergent design
paradigm was continued. This approach provided productive results through gathering data on this researcher's interpretation, past community activist experiences, and community intervention efforts. Utilization of this research paradigm reinforced the notion of social action through community cooperation.

The Hermeneutic Dialectic Circle Process

The hermeneutic dialectic circle process utilizes interpretation as a characteristic with a synthesis of comparison and contrast of divergent views or themes. As stated by Guba and Lincoln, "the total set of respondents responding to the constructions of other respondents is termed a circle" (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper & Allen, 1993, page 124). The hermeneutic dialectic circle provides a visual construct of the stakeholders involved in the research project. Integral to the hermeneutic dialectic circle process are opportunistic and maximum variation sampling which were utilized in the first stage of research last year (Erlandson et al., 1993). The process is found to be both educative and empowering to those participating by enhancing their constructions and exposing them to divergent ones. Purposive opportunistic sampling allowed for flexibility and permitted the researcher to take advantage of sampling opportunities when they emerged. As part of the researcher's ability to maximize the identity of emerging
themes in this study, the purposive maximum sampling process provided for the inclusion of new stakeholders into the hermeneutic dialectic circle as determined by their availability to the researcher. Furthermore, their ability to provide new information or constructions to the ongoing analysis during the second round provided specific emerging themes or constructions.

Participants

As reported by Lincoln and Guba (1985), naturalistic inquiry as a contextual inquiry is carried out in a natural setting and requires a human instrument. "The human instrument builds upon his or her tacit knowledge as much as if not more than upon propositional knowledge"...(page 187, Lincoln and Guba, 1985). and is implemented through interviews.

Participants in the first part of this research project or "round" of interviews were stakeholders in the delivery of services to homeless children within the Coachella Valley and were integral in the data collection process. Figure 1 represents the first round of interviews.

Figure 1

Homeless Shelters

Homeless Families  School Districts

Research Literature  Public Health Department

Researcher's Own Construction

11
The alteration of the original hermeneutic dialectic circle consisted of eliminating agencies that felt that they had no significant contact with the homeless, agencies that were reluctant to participate, and agencies that had concerns with regards to the issue of confidentiality. The circle was considered complete by the researcher when no new significant information was generated and when all agencies who wished to participate had done so.

The second stage or "round" of interviews included interviewing the original stakeholders while integrating and providing emerging themes found in the original research project to the respondents. All participants were furnished with a copy of the original report and asked to review the findings in preparation for the next naturalistic inquiry session. The original stakeholders as part of the re-interviewing process were asked whether they agreed with the report or not. New stakeholders were integrated into the second round as suggested by the original stakeholders and original research report. During the interviewing process approximately 50% of those participating did not review the original report. As a result, a verbal summary was presented in order to maintain clarity and understanding to the issues addressed by those participating.

All participants were required to read and sign an informed consent form (see Appendix A) which detailed the
purpose, methods, and confidentiality of their participation. Participants were also given the right to discontinue their participation at any time they chose to. Participants were also given a debriefing statement (see Appendix B) containing the name and phone number of an individual at the university with whom questions regarding this research project could be discussed if necessary.

Figure 2 represents the proposed hermeneutic dialectic circle for the second phase.

Figure 2

Original Stakeholders
Additional Homeless Families City Governments
Mental Health Agency Community College
Local Hotels Churches

Current Research
As reported by Erlandson et al., (1993), "at the end of the interview, the respondent is requested to identify another respondent who has divergent constructions from his or her own (page 124)". At the conclusion of the interviewing process, agencies suggested by participants were added to the list of potential stakeholders by this researcher. The inclusion of suggested stakeholders into the hermeneutic dialectic circle was determined by both their availability to participate and their potential contribution of data to the ongoing analysis. The second
round of inquiry added to the depth of understanding, surrounding the needs of homeless children. The inclusion of opposing opinions or constructions to the consensus found ensured all efforts to incorporate maximum variation sampling in the second round.

Figure 3 represents the modified hermeneutic dialectic circle.

Figure 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Homeless Shelters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Homeless Families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheriff's Dept.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Districts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Protective Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Health Dept.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Abuse Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soup Kitchen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dept. Social Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>County Supervisor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental Health Agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City Government</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Due to time constraints of data collection restricted within a ten week period and considerable time it took to interview the original stakeholders while incorporating new stakeholders into the hermeneutic dialectic circle proposed inclusion of local hotels and churches were eliminated. However, stakeholders in the second round as part of the hermeneutic dialectic circle represented primary caretakers in the delivery of services to homeless families. Possible future research could include these groups into the next research inquiry.
Successive Phases of Inquiry

PHASE ONE: The first stage of this research project utilized the initial phase of the constructivist paradigm which addressed a single round of stakeholders interviews. Stakeholders were individuals or agency representatives who had a vested interest in this area of study. General questions which explored major themes of the educational and social needs of homeless children were used.

PHASE TWO: This project conducted a second round of interviews which included re-interviewing the original stakeholders while incorporating additional or new stakeholders. This effort included a community social action approach aimed at the resolution of the problems identified in both rounds. A collaborative effort comprised of key community stakeholders explored and discussed the major themes or constructions that emerged through the naturalistic inquiry. Questions used that were general in the first round became more focused for the second round since various issues were identified.

PHASE THREE: According to Erlandson et al., (1993), in order to ensure validity, data acquired through the study must be verified through member checks. Relevant to compatible constructions, "compatibility of the constructed realities that exist in the minds of the inquiry's respondents with those that are attributed to them" and is
related to credibility (Erlandson et al., 1993, page 30). Since subjective realities have been collectively and individually gathered for this research, it was important that the data and interpretations of that data acquired be confirmed by those persons. At the end of each interview, summarization of the data with input from respondents as to whether any corrections must be made was conducted. Typed summaries were mailed to each stakeholder for their review and response. Any corrections made by participating stakeholders were incorporated into the final analysis phase for interpretation.

Member checking was supervised on a continuous basis. As the second round became more focused and goal directed, the organizational flow of one phase to the other included integration of informal communication efforts with participating stakeholders while maintaining interest among members in seeking tangible solutions. Another form of member checking was done by furnishing copies of the inquiry report to participating stakeholders for their input during the interviewing sessions. Upon review and verification of themes that emerged by both rounds and their subsequent participation in the community networking conference, this effort provided credibility for continuing this sequence phase of the research project as part of the member checking process.
Instrumentation

Being sensitive to the participants involved in this research project is an important factor to keep in mind when the researcher, who is an integral instrument in the process of inquiry, conducts interviews and observes as part of the constructivist paradigm. A literature review was conducted in order to augment information already collected which became supportive strategies for focusing on the emerging themes discovered during both rounds. Also, information from the literature review and constructions were shared with participants as a means of expansion.

As a means of addressing issues that emerged in the first round of interviews, personal interaction and persistant observations or prolonged engagement was employed with on-site visitations of involved agencies preceding the actual interviews. Also integrating personal involvements as a community activist for over twenty-five years combined with a self-awareness or world view of those living within this unique area, allowed this researcher to have sensitivity to the various issues addressed in this project.

Data Collection

According to Strauss and Corbin (1990), qualitative research refers to any kind of research that produces findings through the means of interviews or observations and not reached by means of statistical procedures. The
constructivist paradigm utilizes qualitative methods as the primary means in the inquiry process. Qualitative data collection as a non-probability approach, allows the researcher to "step back and critically analyze situations, to recognize and avoid bias, to obtain valid and reliable data, and think abstractly" (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, page 18). Importantly through the process of observations, note taking during interviews, rewriting comprehensive notes after the interview or summary, and analyzing the data, the researcher must have sensitivity when "tuning in" to what is happening at the moment.

As data was collected during interviews by means of handwritten notes, the same process was conducted in the second round. Since the first research effort involved was loosely structured in an informal open-ended discussion questions format, the second round focused on specific questions (see Appendix C) pertinent to emerging themes found in the study. Information analyzed was shared with the next participant with joint constructions emerging as a result.

As part of the organizational aspect of structure, files were organized through a set of index cards. Data was categorized and analyzed upon collection of information and record keeping by means of a field journal which enhanced the structural element of this research. As stated by
Erlandson et al., (1993), tape recordings as the fidelity element of research is possibly the most accurate means of reporting naturalistic observations. The second round included the use of tape recordings as a secondary source of data collection and as confirmation of what was experienced during the actual observation.

Quality Control

According to Erlandson et al., (1993, page 131), "establishing trustworthiness enables a naturalistic study to make a reasonable claim to methodological soundness". As every effort was made by the researcher in the original project to be comprehensive, the second round or final hermeneutic dialectic circle represented a range of perspectives on homeless children in the Coachella Valley. Additional stakeholders included in the second round were recommended by the original stakeholders and new participants.

As mentioned in phase one the accuracy of the constructions were verified through information contained on the back of index cards. Accountability of the trustworthiness of this study included implementation of a reflective journal which supported the credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability of the study. The original researcher was a peer debriefer throughout the research process and aided in the recording
of the journal as part of the audit trail. Input from the peer debriefer throughout the research process provided valuable insight to this researcher and eliminated alternative explanations which could have created "roadblocks" in the analysis phase. The debriefing sessions also included indepth discussions of the methodological design. Telephone interviews were utilized as part of the ongoing process of keeping involved stakeholders informed. This joint effort helped to avoid any confusion in the process and was also beneficial in the formulation and refinement of new constructions.

Also to ensure informational accuracy, prolonged engagement was utilized. This enabled the research to visit the research setting prior to the actual gathering of information in order to build trust and develop rapport with the stakeholders. Additionally, persistent observations added an obvious feature or point to the study which helped to identify pertinent elements of the problems being considered.

Triangulation also pursued credibility by using multiple derivations of data, methods, investigators, or theory. The scope of existing services were verified by obtaining the same information from more than one participant. Finally member checks were again utilized for the purpose of credibility. After each interview, summaries
were prepared and mailed to each stakeholder for their verification or correction. Their feedback ensured that emerging constructions identified by this researcher was accurate and could be shared with new stakeholders.

Final analysis of themes or issues that emerged through the data collection phase were summarized and reported to stakeholders at the community networking conference meeting. Stakeholders were notified by mail as to meeting date, time, and location with follow-up reminder telephone calls two days before the scheduled conference date. A local food bank and drug/alcohol multiple-city sponsored agency were included in the meeting but due to time constraints were not active participants in the interviewing process. The networking conference agenda consisted of presentation of agency information sharing by each representative present followed by discussion of identified issues and needs of homeless families in the Coachella Valley.

FINDINGS

Data Analysis

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), planning data analysis follows four stages as part of the constant comparative method; identifying incidents or information, integrating categories, determining the construction, and finally writing the constructions. As consistent with the
first round, notes were once again reviewed and categorized highlighting each unit of information such as a single barrier to meeting the needs of homeless children in the second round. Since this is the second round in the hermeneutic dialectic circle, consensus that emerged in the first round were included. As each unit was identified, information contained in each unit was placed on five by eight index cards. On the back of each card the source of information, participant supplying the information, and site of agency represented were written. Upon completion of data collection from the original and new stakeholders, completed cards were studied for their content and grouped according to conceptual similarities. During this stage, the peer debriefer was utilized in order to provide valuable input during the auditing process.

As data analysis is an ongoing process (Erlandson et al., 1993), index cards containing conceptual similarities to those generated from the second round were grouped into stacks in order to identify reconstructions. Information from the cards were also shared during the second round, or with each new interview, until all stakeholders had participated and no new information was produced. The second round provided for a shift in the exploratory perspective from comparing to integrating constructions as relationships became more evident. Since this was a human
instrument for research as part of the interactive process as soon as data was collected and analyzed meaning was revised. Relationships between the categories were evaluated as part of the methodological phase in order to link categories and, hence, create joint constructions or reconstructions.

As noted in the third step of analyzing data collection, determining constructions is most costly in terms of time and energy spent which included searching of constructions and/or reconstructions in the interviewing stage. Joint constructions or saliencies from the first round as reported in summarized form, with inclusion of additional constructions that emerged during the second round, are presented in the following section. A complete copy of the first project is available in the library at California State University, San Bernardino (Becker, 1994).

**SALIENCIES**

**Beginning Constructions**

The first research study reviewed, existing literature in order to form a preliminary construction regarding the needs of homeless children and to determine whether their needs are being met or not in this community in comparison to other areas in the United States. This effort found that homeless children experience instability in their lives as a result of inadequate and inconsistent
services, poor health, frequent school changes and absences, chaotic shelter life, low self-esteem, lack of trust, and developmental and socialization delays.

As stated earlier, constructions that emerged through this second round process have been integrated into this report so as to enhance the original report that was representative of the homeless population in the Coachella Valley as well as the service providers. Significant constructions are discussed in the following sections.

**Homeless Characteristics**

Characteristics that were representative of homeless families in the Coachella Valley were constructed through integration of salient features found in the first and second round of this research project. Representative features were reported by participating stakeholders and research evaluators.

**Families - First Round**

Characteristics found in the first round consisted of a diverse population struggling with a multitude of problems such as drug/alcohol addicted parents, economic crisis, single parent family usually headed by mothers who are victims of domestic violence, migrant farm workers who barely are able to make ends meet, parents unable to work due to lack of job skills, and families "just passing through". Living conditions for many homeless families
consisted of living in shelters, garages, rooftops, cars, at a park, abandoned businesses, or temporarily housed with relatives or friends. Homeless families were found to display feelings of hopelessness. Parents were depicted by school stakeholders as in need of educational services, parenting skills training, and support groups.

Second Round

Stakeholders in the second round reported that parents struggle with issues of low self-esteem and low self-worth which contributes to their drug, alcohol, and child abuse issues. As reported by one social service representative, "if parents are still broken then they really can't help their children so agencies must first deal with parents issues." A majority of respondents felt that literacy was a key issue with many homeless parents. Often "parents are unable to fill out forms" and are too proud to ask for help. Respondents also indicated the importance of educating, training, and providing job skills for parents.

Even though respondents admitted that many homeless parents have experienced negative interactions with the "system" a former homeless mother and soup kitchen respondent strongly felt that homeless parents need to be responsible, get a job, and ask for help. They also felt that "homeless need to resolve their issues" by making the effort to help themselves.
Children - First Round

It was found in the first round that homeless children attended school sporadically which contributed to their tendency to isolate from peers and subsequently suffered developmental, academic and socialization delays. This report stated that approximately 80% of school age homeless children were below grade level.

Representing school districts stakeholders found that homeless children came to school with phobias, feelings of shame, anxiety, and feeling unsafe in their environment. Children were found to be ill frequently, poorly nourished with as many as 70% going to school without breakfast. Shelters were found to offer significant health care services to homeless families onsite or through referrals to outside service agencies.

Second Round

In the second round a school district respondent indicated the need for "a support system or safety net" for homeless children within the school arena where they can feel safe. A majority of respondents felt that the lack of adequate clothing negatively impacted school age homeless children. Students are embarrassed and suffer self-esteem issues because they can't "keep up" with the other students. Homeless teens often "do not want to go to school because they do not have the right clothing." A school district
tutor respondent felt that a liaison professional within the community could function as a coordinator and connect services between school districts and service providers throughout the Coachella Valley. A majority of respondents felt that this concept could be a workable solution but funding was a major issue of whether this could be feasible or not.

A mental health service respondent reported that outreach services to shelter residents is not available and as a result homeless children are not likely to be in treatment. A former homeless mother reported that her son presently "holds a lot in regarding issues from the past" and felt that mental health services to homeless families could have a positive impact on them.

A domestic violence shelter respondent reported that children come to the shelter with shame issues, abuse issues, low self-esteem, and lack of trust. Often this safe environment is a new experience for them and after a period of time they learn to share their feelings and act like normal children. "They were not allowed to act normal at home because of domestic violence issues" so being able to laugh and cry is something new to them.

Scope of Delivery of Services

Shelters - First Round

In the first round it was found that delivery of
services consisted of two shelters located at opposite ends of the valley, one shelter for battered women and their children centrally located in the valley, and one soup kitchen located in the lower valley. Shelters were found to be clean, pleasant and run efficiently even though they all must operate on extremely limited financial resources. All shelters enforced house rules, required drug free living, expected cooperation with daily upkeep of facility, requested respect among residents, and encouraged action toward independent living. Maximum lengths of stay consisted of as few as one day to over 30 days.

The domestic violence shelter allowed mothers and their children to stay up to 45 days or longer if necessary. One shelter facility allowed families to remain together sharing one apartment while the other shelter allowed families to stay but required fathers to stay in the dormitory for adult males. While at the shelters, families were assisted with resource referrals, bus passes, eyeglasses, childcare, food baskets, group therapy, spiritual guidance, etc. Resources were given to homeless when available such as, clothing.

Second Round

In the second round of this project, services to homeless families within the shelter setting were found to be in higher demand due to the dramatic rise in the homeless
population. The shelter located at the western end of the valley in 1994 provided shelter to 130 families or 441 persons, assisted 120 families with rental assistance to prevent homelessness, and handed out food to over 200 homeless individuals. This shelter reported that they have experienced a 10% increase so far in 1995. Also, this shelter due to increased demands regarding familial dysfunctional issues will implement a substance abuse program at their facility this fall for children ages 6 and older with a separate group for adolescents with an emphasis on education and prevention. Current programs include a support group for mothers, AA and NA meetings for fathers, and adult literacy classes and assessment tests.

The second homeless shelter located at the eastern end of the valley in 1994 assisted homeless with 47,645 meals, housed 12,553 individuals with 8,715 being families. So far in 1995 this shelter has provided approximately 20,000 meals or a 20% increase, but shelter residency has dropped 5%, which shelter representatives attribute to present warmer climate conditions. Many homeless come to the shelter for a meal but continue to live under a tree, bridge, abandoned business, etc. Respondent also reported that the homeless population is still increasing but accessing accurate figures is difficult since the county does not maintain a census on this population.
The domestic violence shelter located mid-valley serviced 162 mothers and 376 children during their first year of operation, which was at half capacity or thirty beds, from September 1993 to September 1994. It was reported that approximately half of the children are school age. Due to community needs, this facility has applied for grant funds in order to open up the other half of the facility by mid July 1995. It is expected that within six months of operation, as a sixty-bed facility, this shelter will be at 100% capacity.

The domestic violence shelter director respondent was concerned with "mainstreaming children, who were staying at their shelter, into a regular academic setting because they now feel safe for possibly the first time in their lives" and another change would have a negative impact on them. Providing a protective environment for homeless mothers and their children is one of the main objectives of this facility, mainstreaming could create problems. Director respondent also felt that assisting mothers and their children to re-establish themselves within the community is often difficult because "agencies need to recognize the need for priority when servicing mothers and their children in domestic violence cases". Mothers "often have to go through hoops to get services" which makes their transition incredibly difficult. "Mothers lack a strong social support
system and often feel frustrated". Another issue facing mothers is the time-frame limit for residency "at this facility is a brief time in which to meet criteria expectations placed on them by various agencies". Today "society must revamp their perspective on mothers and their children, must place a value change that treats women as equals, and recognize how much mothers contribute to society".

A homeless mother, whose unemployed husband and five children were residents at the shelter at the western end of the valley, reported that they were recently evicted by their landlord. The mother reported multi-familial issues of domestic violence and drug abuse problems. The mother had attempted to leave her husband several times but lack of job skills training or experience prevented her from leaving. The mother reported that they had "no where to go, could not re-apply for homeless shelter funds through DPSS until the two year waiting period was over, so had to ask for help at the shelter where they were currently staying. The mother felt that "a support group would be helpful for her and her children".

Health Care Services - First Round

In the first round it was found that health care was available through county public health department, three school districts, local emergency rooms, and social service
department. It was reported by one public health care respondent that approximately 10% of the homeless utilize public health assistance, while many seek medical care through the "inappropriate use of emergency rooms at local hospitals". Shelters significantly assisted homeless with health care services within their setting or through referrals in the community.

Second Round

In the second round of this project, a child welfare provider respondent was concerned about the "global issue" of children's immunization and maintenance of records by homeless families because their transient lifestyle makes it difficult for them to keep records as required by service providers. Respondent also considered "health as a big issue" and indicated a need for more public health services to students.

School Districts - First Round

Significant assistance to homeless children through the two school districts was made available through the Stewart McKinney Homeless Assistance Act. Funds from this grant allowed two school districts in the Coachella Valley to offer outreach tutoring and academic supplies to homeless children who fit the act's legal definition of homeless (see Appendix D). Grant amounts consisted of $10,000. for one district and $14,000. for the other. The third school
district presently had not applied for this grant due to financial restructuring efforts within the district.

One school district tutor respondent acts as a liaison between homeless parents and school administration, conducts a "search and find" for identifying homeless students, and refers students to schools participating in this program within district boundaries. This tutor also "goes beyond the call of duty" by delivering food and clothing to families when visiting them for regularly scheduled tutoring lessons. Often lessons are conducted at motels or other non-standard home sites where families are temporarily housed, with parents "joining in the learning" session with their children.

Services as mandated through state law are provided to students from kindergarten through the twelfth grade. One school district assisted 70 students in 1993-94 with expected numbers to reach 120 the following year. The school district serving the domestic violence shelter at the other end of the valley often provides tutoring services to 20 school age children on any given day (Dimeglio, 1994, May 29). School districts also provides free lunches, health care referrals from low or no-cost services, independent study, counseling, and a schedule offering smaller class sizes with fewer teacher changes. Since schools provide a stable environment for homeless children, this grant has
provided enormous assistance and recognition to this population for the first time in the two largest school districts in the Coachella Valley.

Second Round

In the second round of this project, a university associate professor respondent, who assists school districts with grant writing applications and budget proposals, reported that Riverside County received $125,000. from the Stewart McKinney Homeless Grant for the 1994-95 academic year. In the Coachella Valley, one school district received $24,000., and the other $20,000. The third school district in the valley recently submitted their application for grant funds for the 1995-96 school year. Presently there is a major concern among school district respondents because this grant may be in jeopardy due to recent leadership changes on the federal level who have proposed future changes and cuts in governmental assistance programs.

University associate professor respondent also stated that Stewart McKinney Grant guidelines has recently incorporated a new "philosophical" shift of assisting children to achieve academic success and achieve a sense of belonging in the school setting through means of mainstreaming homeless students into the regular academic setting.

School districts during this academic year have
assisted twice the number of homeless students as expected, with one district assisting over 250 students and the other district assisting over 200. A majority of school and service providers' respondents felt problems of identifying and monitoring homeless students are key issues that school districts struggle with. School respondents indicated a concern that homeless students may sometimes "disappear or become phantoms in the system," often become just another statistic, and don't receive services that they need. School district respondents reported that they are doing the best they can and lack of funds prevents them from moving faster.

Department of Public Social Services - First Round

The Department of Social Services provides motel vouchers with a maximum of 16 nights stay, a security deposit when permanent residence is located, and payment of utility deposits. Families can only apply once every two years.

Second Round

In the second round of this project, the social service supervisor respondent reported that this agency often refers homeless families to the local soup kitchen when necessary, maintains a food bank on site for emergency cases, and often encourages families to register their children in school. Services are provided to approximately
65 families monthly.

Soup Kitchen - First Round

Meals are available daily, five days a week, to individuals and families in need. In addition, this community resource provides clothing and acts as a referral service to other agencies within the community. This facility also offers the services of a physician once a month during open hours at mealtime.

Second Round

In the second round of this project, founders of this church-based ministry which began in 1989, reported that their services have dramatically increased from providing meals twice a week to five times a week with approximately 400-500 meals served each day. This non-residential program also provides motel vouchers, with a thirty day limit, and assessments for medical and dental care referrals twice a week. This outreach ministry is supported by local churches, private donations, and federal and state grants.

Mental Health Services - Second Round

It was reported by a mental health children's services supervisor respondent that direct mental health services are provided only to children under Department of Public Social Services jurisdiction. Children who are parentless or under court custody receive treatment when they are experiencing behavior problems. Services are provided to children until
they reach the age of 18. Children at juvenile hall also receive ongoing mental health treatment. During 1993-94 approximately 312 children from the Indio office, 22 children from the Palm Springs office, and 250 from juvenile hall received treatment services. Presently this agency does not provide outreach services to homeless children staying at shelters in the Coachella Valley.

Child Abuse Council - Second Round

It was reported by the community child abuse council president respondent that their objectives are child abuse education and prevention. Key community professionals represent a diverse multi-agency effort, who volunteer their time to sponsor seminars and trainings to individuals and groups who have a vested interest in this issue. A major portion of their budget is allocated towards distribution of educational materials throughout the valley.

Law Enforcement - Second Round

It was reported by a school district child and welfare attendance director that law enforcement officers/deputies bring homeless families to the attention of school district personnel. Law enforcement respondent indicated that officers usually deal with homeless adults who are easily recognized through their current home situation such as, rooftops, abandoned businesses, open desert area, bridges, and cars.
City Government - Second Round

This city is currently the second to the fastest growing city in the state, is centrally located in the valley, and maintains a strong economic governmental base as a result of capable leadership with futuristic foresight. Last year this city donated $15,000. in block grant monies to the homeless shelter located at the eastern end of the valley. This local governmental entity is currently coordinating a low-income housing development within their city limits. The local shelter director respondent suggested inclusion of this entity as part of the networking process. Participation and input by this model city may provide vital affordable housing information.

CONVERGENT THEMES

This two-year ongoing constructivist project presented characteristics of homeless families and delivery of services by agencies within the Coachella Valley culminating in persistent emerging themes pertaining to the conditions and needs of homeless children as a result of the two inquiries. The emerging theme in the first inquiry, as suggested by research literature, is inconsistent and chaotic experiences that exists in homeless childrens' lives. Participants in the second inquiry agreed with this consensus as reported in the first study.

A second consensus emerged, as a result of the second
inquiry and suggested as a possible emerging theme by the first project, as participants viewed reasons for keeping homeless families "homeless" as a global issue compounded by lack of societal awareness or acknowledgement of this issue and governmental restrictions and expectations placed on families. Important thematic areas which brought about both consensus are reported in the following areas.

**Consensus 1 - The Inconsistent Experience**

As reported in the first inquiry, the greatest challenge facing homeless children is maintaining continuity and consistency in their lives. Without continuity homeless children continue to suffer academic delays, emotional problems, physical ailments, and socialization skills deficits. Inconsistent experiences for homeless children were manifested in the following areas.

**Network - First Round**

It was found that due to the increase of this population and their needs key agencies were not able to mobilize as a service delivery network. Respondents also felt that "gaps" and overlaps" of services added to the homeless child's inconsistent experience. It was concluded that through a united agency effort and through regular joint meetings, these inconsistencies could be eliminated. Regular joint meetings would allow for agencies to "be aware of what the other is doing" in terms of delivery of services.
to the homeless population. School respondents felt that since it was difficult to identify and monitor homeless children and their families with most in need of mental health and health services this community intervention effort could provide tangible solutions for this fragile population.

**Second Round**

The majority of respondents in the second round of this project agreed to participate in the networking conference and felt that through networking we "could involve multiple agency assistance to homeless". County supervisor respondent felt that it was important for agencies to stay connected, share information, and share resources. With funding a priority issue among all agencies private or public, sharing resources could lessen this problem. Respondents also felt that with impending loss of vital revenue, networking efforts assumes an important role for initiating strategic community interventions. Furthermore, the majority of respondents felt that a networking conference could accomplish goals of information sharing and problem-solving strategies. Most respondents also felt that it was important "to move from theory to action" with networking efforts accomplishing this goal.

**Shelters - First Round**

While participants found shelters in the Coachella
Valley provide a clean, pleasant, and safe environment for homeless families, inconsistency in their daily lives is perpetuated through the "shelter loop" experience of families having to constantly move between the valley and other county area shelters in order to "keep a roof overhead".

Second Round

A majority of respondents in the second round indicated a concern for more shelters, outreach mental health services, and additional health services to homeless families staying at shelters. Respondents felt that the "system" must change policies to allow families to remain in facilities longer in order to get necessary job skills training. School district personnel respondents reported that they are providing additional educational and tutoring hours onsite to all three shelters in the valley for children.

Schools - First Round

The school experience is considered the second most important environment in a child's life after family, as a result school districts are an important link between family and administration in the Coachella Valley. Even though education is negatively impacted by the transient nature of the homeless child's existence, a majority of respondents felt that a weak link existed between homeless families and
local schools within the Coachella Valley. And although funds through the Stewart McKinney Grant enabled school districts to strengthen their link with families, school districts struggle with issue of identifying and monitoring homeless families due to a lack of phone number, permanent address, as well as the stigma of being "labeled" homeless.

Shelter respondents reported that often parents are unable to fill out forms because they are illiterate or are not motivated to do so. Another identified barrier that prevents a consistent academic experience is a lack of reliable transportation. Respondents felt that homeless children often are not able to receive necessary services because of a lack of transportation.

A majority of school respondents felt that some Coachella Valley schools in the past did not sufficiently accommodate to homeless children's special circumstances. It was reported that "homeless children were shut out of the school system because they could not show proof of residency". School district personnel were too rigid in applying residency regulations and reluctant to register children when it would be temporary. A majority of school and shelter respondents felt that current educational services are not comprehensive enough in keeping homeless children from falling through the gaps in the educational system. Furthermore, school districts are only now
beginning to realize their potential for providing a secure and structured environment to homeless children. Also, school districts are now in a better position to provide services to homeless families than in the past.

**Second Round**

The majority of respondents in the second round agreed that school districts struggle with barriers of parental literacy, transportation, and lack of parental motivation which contributes to inconsistencies in the academic experience in a homeless child's life as reported in the first study. School personnel respondents also felt that identifying homeless children was a key issue but restrictive funding prevents them from moving faster. Issues that were identified in the first study were agreed upon by participating stakeholders in the second round. A majority of respondents indicated a need for providing literacy classes for parents within the school setting or at shelters.

**Socialization - First Round**

The majority of respondents in the first study reported that life experiences of homeless children results in a fragmented acquisition of socialization skills. Issues of lack of trust, low self-esteem, social isolation, etc. further impacts the homeless child from achieving appropriate developmental growth in socialization skills.
Second Round

The majority of respondents in the second round felt that homeless children and their families could greatly benefit from outreach mental health services while staying at shelters. Professional counseling services from public and/or private agencies could assist homeless children cope with stressful issues and events in their lives. Services could also provide problem-solving strategies for children and help parents deal with their issues when needed.

Mental Health Services - First Round

A key issue identified by a majority of respondents was the need for mental health services for homeless families. Chaotic and inconsistent life experiences of homeless families integrated with parental substance abuse puts the homeless child at high risk for being mistreated or neglected. If these conditions go untreated, a high number of these children have a high predisposition to substance abuse themselves.

Second Round

In the second round of this project, every respondent felt that outreach mental health services are urgently needed for this fragile population. A majority of respondents felt that mental health problems contributes to homelessness because parents are unable to cope with their issues. As shelters in the valley provide the basics of
food, shelter, and clothing, it was felt by a majority of respondents that professional mental health treatment services would enable homeless families to enhance their social functioning, improve the quality of their life through better decision making skills, and feel a sense of belonging in their community environment.

**Consensus 2 - The Global Perspective**

**First Round**

The first round indicated a possible emerging consensus concerning the reason for homelessness, continued lack of funding in the fight against this issue, with implications of a global nature. A majority of the respondents felt that the nation did not view homelessness as a priority, as a result local service providers must do the best they can with their limited resources. As a consequence, limited funding meant restricted provision of services to homeless on an emergency basis only, with shelters and other agencies having to rely heavily on private donations and volunteer assistance in order to survive and meet the basic needs of homeless.

Major concerns from a majority of respondents was the need for affordable housing, adequate employment opportunities, child care, adult literacy training, and educating parents with basic job skills, which further enlarged this global perspective. Respondents felt that
these basic concepts were either overlooked or not discussed as a possible solution to or cause of homelessness. Respondents felt that lack of parental education kept homeless unemployable, unable even to fill out simple application forms, or realize the importance of educating their children.

Respondents felt that in order to prevent homelessness and break the "cycle of financially dependent mothers", opportunities for education and employment skills trainings must be implemented. A majority of respondents felt governmental assistance in the form of Aid to Families with Dependent Children perpetuated the problem of homelessness by creating generations of dependent recipients.

Respondents also felt that many bureaucratic policies and procedures existed which restricted their control and that often these policies both caused and exacerbated homelessness. Existing global conditions consisting of lack of affordable housing, inadequate child care, poor parental education, and job training skills were seen as frustrating issues but manageable if addressed through a united community intervention effort. Respondents in the first round recommended expansion of services by providers, inclusion of the third school district in the Stewart McKinney Grant program, and regular network meetings comprised of agencies from all ends of the valley.
Second Round

A majority of respondents felt that society as a whole "does not realize there are homeless children in this valley", with many residents "unaware that a shelter is located in their area". As a result, lack of community awareness prevents assistance to homeless families. As residents fail to recognize this population, society as a whole often maintains both a physical and emotional distance from them also. Lack of understanding the needs of the homeless population or realizing the real depth to this social dilemma prevents societal intervention efforts.

Delivery of Services - Second Round

A majority of respondents were concerned that homeless families experience problems of "running into walls within the system". That the system keeps "people homeless" and perpetuates the situation and even the best services allows them to remain homeless. Respondents felt the "system" does not resolve issues and time constraints in the motel voucher system set by the department of social services and other shelter agencies prevents homeless from receiving mental health services, drug/alcohol counseling, and job training. Respondents were concerned with the "shelter loop" experience in which mothers and/or families re-enter the system, do not get out of the loop, and must keep moving around from county to county in order to get services.
Policies as "one facet of the system" prevent homeless from consistency in services such as, allowances for staying in one place longer. On a global level, federal and state funding restrictions and current budget crises prevent important policy changes and implementation of needed social programs. Without societal support and advocacy efforts these problems remain the same. As a consequence, service providers must do the "best they can with limited resources".

**Recommended Solutions - Second Round**

Respondents felt that in order to "effect permanent change within the system," agencies need to share resources, agency to agency. Also through a public awareness campaign, united efforts could foster community assistance in order to help this fragile population. A school district tutor respondent suggested that a liaison representative could successfully facilitate delivery of services to homeless families within the Coachella Valley. The liaison representative would identify homeless, work with school districts, shelters, and other service agencies implementing tracking and follow-up procedures. A majority of respondents felt that a liaison representative could be helpful by linking agencies, services, and homeless but were concerned that funding could be a issue of "how and who" would pay for this service.
Networking Meeting

The networking meeting was held at a city hall, located mid-valley, which was easily accessible to all participating agencies. Meeting time and date was scheduled to accommodate the local member of the county board of supervisor, who was interested in the issues addressed in this research project. Figure 4 represents the meeting agenda.

Figure 4
Homeless Children Research Networking Meeting
May 24, 1995
Agenda

A. Introductions

B. Agency Information Sharing

C. Discussion
   Identified Issues
   Families:
   adult literacy
   job skills training
   mental health outreach services
   additional health services
   transportation
   affordable housing
   Shelters:
   more shelters
Schools:
identifying and monitoring homeless children
funding

Global Issues:
agency restrictions and policies
community awareness
prevention through policy changes

Suggested Solutions:

networking regularly
sharing resources
liaison inter-agency representative
expansion of services

D. Future networking meetings?

Participants from the two separate research inquiries who attended the meeting represented the following agencies: drug-free community based intervention program for the nine valley cities, domestic violence shelter, western valley shelter, soup kitchen, food distribution and transportation resource center, child protective services, department of public social services, Riverside County Regional Access Project (RAP), Riverside County Office of Education, Riverside County Supervisor, Desert Sands Unified School District, Palm Springs Unified School District, Coachella Valley Unified School District, and the academic tutors for the two participating school districts of the Stewart
McKinney Grant Program. Also attending was the professor and research advisor for this project from California State University, San Bernardino, the former graduate student who was the original researcher for the first round and peer debriefer for this project, and this researcher for the second round who organized and facilitated this meeting.

Agency participants who agreed to participate but had to cancel due to last minute emergencies, represented law enforcement, the eastern valley shelter, public health department, city government, mental health department, and child abuse council. Participants indicated interest in attending future networking meetings and asked to be kept informed of this meeting outcome.

The first aspect of this meeting focused on information sharing, with most agencies supplying hand-outs about their organization, and answering any questions other agency representatives might have. This effort provided clarity and eliminated any confusion as to what types of services were offered in the valley for homeless families by the various agencies. As reported in the first round, agencies are often so overwhelmed with their daily tasks that they are unable to find the time to seek further resource information that could assist them with their objectives. Furthermore, agencies often are unaware of other types of services for homeless that are available in
their own community. This effort helped to eliminate this gap.

The discussion phase of the meeting focused on issues of lack of community awareness about homeless children and their families and barriers that school districts have created in the past by "turning children away" because they did not have a permanent address. One tutor participant indicated a concern that many homeless children presently are "out there in a non-existent" home and are not receiving academic services. School district representatives shared that homeless children is a "new" issue for them and they are still in the process of learning how to deal with this problem. Respondents admitted many school personnel within their school districts do not know how to work with this population and are often insensitive to their needs. As a result of this discussion, the county board of education representative suggested that his office could provide inservice trainings to all three school districts when requested.

Upon further discussion of identified issues, agency participants focused on possible joint networking meetings with the east and west valley networking groups already in existence. Additionally, shelter and child protective service representatives addressed the need for sharing affordable housing information resources with other
agencies. It was found that agencies work with a limited list of referrals that constantly needs updating. Working with clients to find affordable housing often necessitated representatives to literally drive around the valley seeking suitable housing arrangements. Participants agreed to compile a "housing list" representative of the entire valley and bring it to the next meeting to share with other agencies.

Representatives also agreed to participate in future networking meetings and suggested inclusion of G.A.I.N. and Housing Authority to this group. The majority of participants felt that more information was needed in order to address the issue of job skills training for parents. The majority of participants also agreed that "we need to change the public's perception of homeless" and continue to strive for expansion of services for this population. Agency participants agreed to meet in mid-July with this researcher coordinating time, location, and date with follow-up communication to all participating agencies. Copies of the present research project will be available to all of the respondents who participated in this project.

**DISCUSSION**

**Summary**

This second study focused on future research suggestions for continuing this constructivist inquiry made
by the original researcher of this project. This naturalistic inquiry or constructivist paradigm involved key players, initiated continued dialogue among those players, and encouraged cooperative efforts among those key players for implementing action-focused strategies for empowering this fragile population. The purpose of this second round was successfully realized when a well-represented networking conference was held and their participation provided intense commitment toward's working together with emphasis on assisting homeless families to finally "get out of the shelter loop" so often experienced by most.

As noted by previous research review, this expanding population, compounded with limited service resources in the Coachella Valley, has stretched agency services to the limit. Services today in the 1990's are suffering from the consequences of political decisions and the economic background of the 1980's which resulted in a dramatic decrease in low-income or affordable housing, static minimum wages, and erosion of the service capability of many public/private agencies. The ultimate solution to the problem of homelessness includes preventative efforts such as, literacy and job skills training, provision of affordable housing, with inclusion of mental health services to existing shelters.

This macro-level social work approach not only brought
agencies together for the purpose of community intervention but through the interviewing process initiated agency support for this effort. The local child abuse council as a result of the naturalistic inquiry requested this researcher to be the guest speaker at their June 1995 meeting. This meeting will have TV news coverage and will be attended by various key agency personnel such as, district attorney's office, child protective service, sheriff's department, etc. Their interest further propels this issue into the community on a public level and continues agency dialogue interaction.

Taking into consideration various issues that were addressed earlier on a global level, this perspective must also include agency and community efforts towards eliminating the "basic needs" of this fragile population. Seeking complex solutions cannot be accomplished until homeless families feel safe within their own environment, have adequate food and clothing, and feel a sense of belonging within society as a whole. Importantly once these needs have been met, community and agency entities can assist homeless children with their social and educational needs.

Recommendations

Services provided today by shelters, school districts, and service agencies currently are doing the best they can with limited resources available. However, continued
networking meeting efforts can strengthen delivery of services through resource sharing strategies, provide intensive community awareness campaigns, and implement policy changes in order to better assist homeless.

Since this valley encompasses an extreme socioeconomic population base with a significant population living below the "standard of living" while at the other end of the continuum many residents having financial power and status, targeting those with ample financial means could enable shelters to expand services with possible construction of new shelters. Agency networking could also solicit financial support for services from the community.

Inclusion of additional private/public service agencies, homeless families, and interested individuals to encompass the entire geographic area of the valley could strengthen this effort immensely. Importantly educating the public about the causes and consequences of homelessness could be a tremendous step toward's eliminating inconsistencies in a homeless child's life.

This researcher recommends that participating agencies through their networking meeting efforts focus on the feasibility of utilizing a valley liaison representative as suggested by one of the respondents. It is also recommended that agencies pursue intense discussion regarding societal expectations and restrictions placed on mothers and their
children who are victims of domestic violence and consequently reside in temporary shelters. As these issues were brought to the attention of this researcher by the domestic violence shelter director, this perspective warrants agency discussion. Furthermore, as various representatives sought to include multiple sheltered families into the formal homeless definition, this issue could also be addressed through agency meetings. Furthermore, it is hoped by this researcher that another MSW student or private and/or public agency will continue this research project. Community intervention through networking meetings can accomplish many tasks and elimination of this effort may hinder this agency interaction already in progress.

**Limitations of Study**

Even though this second phase of this research project further explored and re-defined specific problems, issues, and needs of homeless families in the Coachella Valley, this researcher was unable, due to time constraints, to include all suggested potential stakeholders into the hermeneutic dialectic circle process. This research project involved twenty-four interviews, coordination of the networking conference, with several mailings and follow-up telephone calls, which could have easily utilized another research colleague.
Implications for Social Work Practice

This research project through a series of naturalistic inquiries presented the "truth" in terms of gaps and overlaps in the delivery of services and inconsistencies that homeless children experience almost daily as a result of their lifestyle. Rather than "blame" the system for creating or causing these inconsistencies, this research report considered a global perspective in terms of seeking feasible solutions to this social dilemma. Constructions that emerged as a result of this inquiry supported a united effort for sharing resources among agencies and working together to empower this population through educational efforts.

Furthermore, social workers are in a position to assist this population by utilizing the systems perspective through the person-in-the-environment assessment model. Integration of this perspective enables social workers to help this targeted population increase their competence, obtain resources, and reach their potential for successful social functioning in society. Utilization of the ecological systems model allows social workers to recognize the impact of environmental factors upon human functioning and assist target populations.
APPENDIX A - Informed Consent

The study in which you are about to participate in is designed to further explore the social as well as the educational needs of homeless children. This study is a continuation of a project originated by a former Master's of Social Work student last year. This study is being conducted by Gloria Kelly under the supervision of Dr. Teresa Morris, Professor of Social Work. This study has been approved by the Human Subjects Committee of the Department of Social Work which is a Sub-Committee of the Institutional Review Board of California State University, San Bernardino.

This research study will resume the constructivist paradigm approach by continuing the naturalistic inquiry. This effort will include interviewing the original stakeholders once again and incorporating "new" stakeholders into the naturalistic inquiry setting who might have a vested interest in this social issue.

In this study you will be asked to share your knowledge and opinions regarding the social and educational needs of homeless children, including how you believe these needs are being met, not being met, as well as your opinion on how they might be better met in the future. Potential benefits of participating in this interview might include
improved services to homeless children while potential risks might include the surfacing of unwanted or unforeseen feelings surrounding the topic being discussed.

Please be assured that any information you provide will be held in strict confidence, and at no time will your identity be revealed to anyone, but the researchers named above. Please, also, understand that your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that you are free to terminate your participation, and withdraw any information contributed by you, at any time without penalty. Additionally, at the conclusion of this study you may receive a report of the results, if desired.

I acknowledge that I have been informed of, and understand, the nature and purpose of this study, and I freely consent to participate. I acknowledge that I am at least 18 years of age.

____________________________________  ______________________________
Participant's Signature                   Date

____________________________________  ______________________________
Researcher's Signature                    Date
APPENDIX B - Debriefing Statement

California State University, San Bernardino, and the researcher conducting this study have a responsibility for insuring that participation in any research sponsored by this university causes no harm or injury to its participants. In fulfilling this responsibility, a debriefing session will be available to any participant who, has further questions about his or her participation in the present study. For further information, please contact either Gloria Kelly or Dr. Teresa Morris at 909)880-5501. Additionally, any questions or concerns regarding this research, or its findings, may also be directed to the above number.
APPENDIX C - Interview Questions

1. In your opinion do you agree or disagree with the original research project? Why?

2. In your opinion what are the key issues in meeting the social and educational needs of homeless children?

3. How do you think these needs are being met?

4. How do you think these needs are not being met?

5. What, in your opinion, can be done to meeting the needs identified in the original study?

6. What do you see as barriers to successfully meeting these needs?

7. Would you be willing to participate in a community networking social action effort for the purpose of solving the problems identified by providing solutions?
APPENDIX D - Definition of Homeless

Children who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence.

Children who have a primary nighttime residence in a supervised publicly or privately operated shelter for temporary accommodations.

Children residing in an institution that provides temporary residence for individuals who are to be institutionalized.

Children residing in a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings.
References


