Perceptions of homeless children

Mary Lou Young
Melissa Creacy

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/etd-project

Part of the Social Work Commons

Recommended Citation
http://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/etd-project/1040
PERCEPTIONS 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
Mary Lou Young
and
Melissa Creacy
June 1995
PERCEPTIONS OF HOMELESS CHILDREN

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

by
Mary Lou Young
and
Melissa Creacy
June 1995
Approved by:

Teresa Morris, Ph.D.
Project Advisor

Charlotte Laiva, MSW, LCSW
Director of Clinical Services

James Graham, MSSW
Director of Genesis Shelter Services

Teresa Morris, Ph.D.
ABSTRACT

Homeless children living in shelters perceive their experience in unique ways. This study utilized a Post-Positivist Design and explored the perceptions homeless children have about their past and present life styles. Interviews, group sessions, observations, and art projects were utilized to assess 30 homeless children between the ages of 6-17 residing in a shelter in the Inland Empire. Researchers learned that many of the children did not perceive themselves to be homeless. Children differentiated "homeless" to be living on the street or in a car. The results were interpreted for their value to Social Workers, Shelter Administration and Staff, Teachers, Parents, and most importantly the children who, hopefully, can achieve empowerment and the skills necessary to end the cycle of homelessness.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to thank our families for giving us the support and encouragement necessary to make this study possible and to ASI who provided a generous amount of funding to purchase supplies and rewards for the children. We would also like to thank the shelter for allowing us to conduct groups and collect data pertaining to the children’s perceptions about homelessness and Corliss Taylor-Dunn for the time and talent she put into putting the children’s perceptions to words. Lastly, we would like to thank the children and their mothers without whom this study would have been meaningless.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abstract</th>
<th>iii</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgments</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Tables</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus of the Inquiry</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fit of Paradigm to Focus</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where and from Whom Data is to be Collected</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Determining Instrumentation</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning Data Collection and Recording Modes</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis Process</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Findings</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homelessness and Shelter Life</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three Wishes</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dream Houses</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix A. Group topics, Board Games, Art Projects</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix B. Informed Consent</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix C. Debriefing Statement</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix D. Songs</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix E. Photographs of Art Projects</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Focus of Inquiry

Although the demographic composition of the homeless population varies across the United States, the greatest increase within the past two years has been in homeless families. According to the National Coalition for the Homeless (Fascarinas, 1987) more than 40 percent of homeless people are families, which represents the fastest growing homeless group. The total number of homeless persons are estimated at three million, of which at least 500,000 are children (Encyclopedia of Social Work, 1990, 18th Ed).

A growing subgroup of the total population is single-parent, female-headed families. Approximately 50 percent of women heading homeless families are between the ages of 17 and 25 with all ethnic groups equally represented. The vast majority of homeless mothers have had at least some high school education. Twenty percent of this group report having some college-level educational attainment. Employment histories tend to be sporadic, but almost 75% report having been employed at some point in their life in a regular job for a sustained period of time (Encyclopedia of Social Work, 1990, 18th Ed).

Researchers speculate about the reasons for women's homelessness. These seem to be largely accounted for by soaring divorce rates, coupled with defaults on child support payments, the increasing out-of-wedlock births, and the
growing number of women who have never married. Other explanations include family violence, lack of affordable housing, lack of economic and social opportunities (i.e., limited job opportunities available to women, overwhelming child care responsibilities and fragmented support networks). Many single mothers who work are unable to earn enough to support their families and those on welfare do not receive enough money to pay their monthly bills. Many of the mothers also never established themselves as functional, self-sufficient, autonomous adults due in part to having been socialized into a cycle of poverty themselves (Bassuk, 1993).

Many homeless women report major disruptions early on in life including an unknown or absent father; parental death; mental illness or alcoholism; physical abuse and or a violent family environment that created a severely diminished childhood experience. These circumstances contributed to a lifestyle in which social isolation was common and extended family support was lacking (Dail, 1990).

Bassuk and Rubin (1987) state that the problems of homeless children stem directly from the burdens of their parents; lack of affordable housing, family violence, and fragmented supported networks combined with the stressors that children experience when they do not have consistent, stable, or secure environments. Studies that address the experiences of homeless children assess the effects of moving
and the loss of incomes. These studies indicate that children frequently see life as temporary; people, places, and schools come and go beyond their control. Moving strains children's concept of self and world leaving them with no sense of space or possessions. Bassuk and Rubin's (1991) data on a sample of children living in shelters found elevated levels of depression, anxiety, behavioral problems, and lack of space and privacy.

Studies also indicate that homeless children experience feelings of low self-esteem, lack of identification, and hopelessness. Due to the ramification these experiences may have toward children, it is necessary that children understand that they are not to blame for what they are experiencing.

Throughout this study, researchers incorporated empowerment as an ideology which framed a philosophy of services based as a method of enabling in which practice approaches were used to increase the population's control over the social and organizational environment. During the nine months of conducting groups, researchers continually provided encouragement, support, and validation to the children concerning their hopes, dreams, and wishes, current homelessness, and future goals. This philosophy of services given to the children employed as action enhanced their power by allowing opportunity, choice, and control regarding whether or not the children in these families are likely to
become a generation of homeless and socially dependent adults. According to Abraham Maslow's theory of self, every individual has an innate need to achieve self-actualization (realizing one's full potential). Within Maslow's theoretical framework, human needs are arranged in a pyramid with basic physiological survival needs for all animals being at the bottom level and the categorization of self-actualization being at the very highest level. Maslow stresses that the highest level (fulfillment of one's potential) can only be acquired if the "lower needs" such as food, shelter and safety, as well as the needs for love, a sense of belonging, self-esteem, and positive regard received from others have been met. It is the fulfillment that all these needs contribute to a basic sense of well-being that enables individuals to reach toward their full potential (Specht & Craig, 1982). This study explored homeless children's perceptions of being homeless and attempted to understand how homelessness affects their understanding of self and world. The study also examined the effects and impacts of homelessness on children's physical, emotional, and social well-being. The significance of this study for social work is that it provided knowledge about working with these children by understanding their perceptions of the conditions in which they live. This exploratory study also yielded information which will aid in heightening social
workers' awareness of children's needs during the transitional situation of homelessness. In addition, it will aid other professionals who have an interest in helping homeless children gain further knowledge and insight regarding the possible long-term effects of homelessness. Lastly, this study provided children with the opportunity to express feelings and emotions related to their individual experiences.

Fit of Paradigm to Focus

The orientation of this study is post-positivist. The post-positivist paradigm offers an approach to research which builds theory and suggests an exploratory methodology which is open to discovery. Building theory is a systematic way of discovering, synthesizing, and integrating scientific knowledge. Qualitative methods are used to uncover and understand what lies behind any phenomenon about which little is known. Qualitative methods also give intricate details of phenomena that are difficult to convey using traditional quantitative methods. For example, a strictly quantitative approach to this study would fail to acknowledge the "rich" backgrounds which lie within each of the children's experiences.

There are three major components of data collection in qualitative research: 1) data interviews, 2) observations, and 3) various analytic and interpretive procedures which are
used to arrive at theories or findings. These interpretive procedures include coding, nonstatistical sampling, the writing of memos, and the diagramming of conceptual relationships. Written and verbal reports make up the last component of qualitative research. Reports are presented in various forms from presentations at conferences and or writings in scientific journals. "The grounded theory approach is a qualitative research method that uses a systematic set of procedures to develop an inductively derived grounded theory about a phenomenon. The findings constitute a theoretical formulation of the reality under investigation rather than consisting of a set of numbers, as in quantitative research, or a group of loosely related themes" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 24).

A list of interview questions and/or areas of observations are developed based on concepts derived from literature and experience. Since these concepts do not have proven theoretical relevance to the evolving theory, these concepts must be considered provisional. Initial interviews and observations are only beginning guidelines and adherence throughout the study would limit the amount and the type of data gathered and prevent the researchers from achieving density and variation of concepts necessary for developing grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Discovery is foremost the aim of grounded theory. All
grounded theory procedures are geared at identifying, developing and relating concepts. Theoretical relevance indicates that certain concepts are deemed significant because they are repeatedly present or notably absent when comparing incident after incident.

The aim of theoretical sampling is to sample events that are indicative of categories, their properties and dimensions so they can be conceptually related. In sampling events, data is gathered about what persons do or don’t do in terms of action/interaction, the range of conditions that give rise to that action/interaction and the variations in how conditions change/stay and consequences of actual or failed action.

Theoretical sampling is cumulative and increases in depth of focus. Concentration is on development; density and saturation of concepts. A certain amount of flexibility is also required to pursue areas of investigation that might not have been foreseen or planned. Rigidity in sampling hinders theory generation which is the main goal of grounded theory.

In quantitative forms of research, sampling is based on selecting a portion of the population to represent the entire population to which one wants to generalize. Consideration is representative of the sample and how much it resembles the population in terms of specified characteristics. The reality is that one can never be certain that the sample is completely representative.
In grounded theory, the concern lies with representativeness of concepts in varying forms. Researchers presented the children with a theme for discussion and the children were allowed by way of interviews, groups, and written tasks to discuss what was relevant to the topic. Researchers inquired about the presence or absence of information which allowed additional perceptions of information to emerge. Further interviews and observations, allowed the opportunity to accumulate additional data, thus, creating greater density. This permitted wider applicability of the theory because different categories of perceptions were uncovered.

Generalizations to a larger sample of this population are not applicable, and the associated outcomes are only relevant to this particular time period and geographical setting. Theoretical formulation applies only to these circumstances. When conditions change, theoretical formulation changes to meet the new conditions (Patton, 1980).

The application and use of this paradigm allowed the student researchers to explore and discover what the children's lives, experiences, and interactions (attitudes, beliefs, and thoughts) meant to them individually, in their own unique, situational environment without attempting to fit them into predetermined standardized categories such as
response choices that comprise standardized questionnaires.

The major social work role being evaluated in this study is direct-practice. It is anticipated that this research will yield insightful information relative to children's issues pertaining to homelessness. During the course of this research project, student researchers were open to discovering and exploring the impact and effect homelessness has relating to each child's individual experience. Student researchers acquired knowledge regarding whether homelessness affects children's perceptions of how they see themselves and explored the significance of its meaning. Use of the post-positivist orientation assisted researchers in assessing and understanding how the children react to the multiple stressors engendered by the crisis of homelessness.

Children have basic rights to food, shelter, and safety. Without shelter, a child's sense of security is forever changed. A home provides more than just shelter; it anchors a family and provides children with stability and the safety needed to develop and grow.

The impact of homelessness takes a considerable toll on children's lives. Their health, education, emotional development and well-being are negatively affected because of poor living conditions, the lack of emotional and economic stability and the sudden disruption in their lives. What are the living conditions of being homeless or residing in a shelter?
This study was initiated so the researchers could explore the realm of possibilities of how homelessness affects children based on their perceptions. Social workers must continue to strive to understand as much about the varying conditions which these children are subjected to so that all professionals can respond more sensitively and develop better intervention methods for already existing services to help counteract the negative effects of homelessness.

Where and From Whom Data is to be Collected

The study was conducted at a homeless shelter in the Inland Empire. This shelter houses single women, couples with and without children, and single parents with children. The primary function of this agency is to provide shelter for these individuals and families, provide the opportunity for the adults to return to work or pursue education, ensure that the children receive unfluctuating instruction, and make sure that the children receive sufficient medical care. The population of interest were children from the shelter. The sample consisted of male and female children between the ages of 6-17. The lower age limit was established because the preschool child had difficulty in expressing his/her thoughts and feelings in a clear manner. "Preoperational children's thinking is also concrete. They have problems dealing with
abstractions or classifications and are concerned with physical events in the here and now" (Specht & Craig, 1987, p.91). The sample was a convenience sample and included only those children who chose to participate by sharing their specific perceptions about their experiences and situations. During the course of this study, the researchers worked with 35 children over a nine-month period. The study allowed for the inclusion of children who moved into the shelter once the study had begun.

Determining Instrumentation

In this study, data was collected in three ways. In the first data collection phase the student researchers conducted children's groups on the following topics: self-esteem, feelings, family life, memories, and shelter issues. The groups were used as a means of observing how the children interact and relate to one another, as well as to their situational environment. Board games that pose thought provoking questions to the children were utilized. In the second phase, the student researchers conducted interviews on a one to one basis. The interviews consisted of open-ended questions enabling the children to share their experiences. The interviews were held without time constraints and the participants were rewarded for their time with school and art supplies, cookies, toys, and a pizza party. The third phase
included art work submitted by the children. The art work was utilized as a medium of expression and a form of catharsis. Children were asked to keep a "life book" (memory book) or weekly journal whereby they expressed their thoughts and feelings by way of drawings and/or narrative. Children were also asked to draw and explain their "dream house" and "3 wishes". For a list of group topics, board games, and art work projects, see Appendix A.

The data collection instrument was the student researchers. They developed the initial questions, as well as built a rapport with each child. The strength of using people as instruments is the flexibility and sensitivity the student researchers were able to bring to the study. While sharing feelings with student researchers was strictly on a volunteer basis, attending groups was a mandatory part of the families' program. Research limitations included apprehension on the part of the parent in allowing the child to speak with researchers. Other restrictions included the inability of the child to speak with researchers at a level required to obtain data relating to the study due to painful memories or cognitive deficits. Because of the transitional nature of the population, another limitation was the parents' inability to complete the program offered by the shelter. At the request of the shelter administration, some of the families were required to move out due to their inability to
achieve and maintain sobriety. In other cases, some of the families were able to find housing prior to their maximum eight month residency. In either case, families separating from the shelter made it virtually impossible for the child(ren) to remain a part of the study.

Planning Data Collection and Recording Modes

Several things were accomplished to ensure that the study was sensitive to the uniqueness of the targeted population. The student researchers utilized a common language. According to Erlandson et al, 1993, "the careful choice of words in a question is one of the most important decisions a researcher can make during an interview" (p.87). Unclear terminology and or slang words not understood by both participants can negatively effect the content of information provided by the respondent. "The researcher identif[ied] those terms that are common to him or her and the culture [population] under study as well as those terms that have multiple or divergent meanings" (Erlandson et al, 1993, p.87).

The study also took into account ethical considerations and respect toward those involved. "The first element common to every protocol is the researcher's respect for the person and group under study" (Erlandson et al, 1993, p.89). All participants and their families were looked at as full
partners in the study and research intentions were shared. Parents of interested participants were read and were asked to sign an informed consent explaining the purpose and design of the study. It was made clear to both children and parents that participation was voluntary and may be stopped at any time without loss of reward. Please see Appendix B for the informed consent form that was utilized. For purposes of protecting confidentiality and anonymity, ages were used in lieu of the children's names in the formal documentation of the research. Notes taken from groups and interviews were held in the strictest confidence and were kept in a locked file cabinet when not being analyzed. Notes were shared only with the researchers' faculty advisor. Based on exploratory findings, children's responses were grouped or divided by lower and upper age categories.

To ensure fidelity and structure, the student researchers began by acquiring "...the attitude of a learner in conversations, readings, [and in] determining the significance of the study..." (Erlandson et al, 1993, p.48). During observations, groups, and interviews both researchers were present and simultaneously recorded data by hand. The researchers clarified all information with the participant(s) before the close of each session, and discussed the session with one another immediately following its close. The student researchers wrote formal notes following their discussion.
The research team took part in peer debriefing whereby credibility was built "by allowing a peer who is a professional outside the context and who has some understanding of the study to analyze materials, test working hypotheses and emerging designs, and [who was able to] listen to the [student] researcher's ideas and concerns" (Erlandson et al, 1993, p.140). Children and family members were debriefed after participating in the study, whereby the research purpose and anticipated benefits were again identified. Please see Appendix C for the Debriefing Statement.

The formalized findings were shared and made available to both the shelter administration and other staff members, as well as to interested participants, parents and family members.

Data Analysis

Analysis in grounded theory is composed of three major types of coding: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. The lines of separation between each type of coding are artificial and the different types do not necessarily take place in stages. Forms of coding that are likely to take place in the earlier phases of the project/study, (i.e., open and axial coding) may also occur near the end.

Open coding pertains to the naming and categorizing of
phenomenon through close examination of data. During open coding, one engages in theoretical sampling. The aim of sampling is to uncover as many potentially relevant categories as possible. Sampling is open to those persons (interviewees), places (observational sites), and situations that will provide the greatest opportunity to gather the most relevant data about the phenomena under investigation. This requires skill and ability to probe for information without leading interviewees to act in expected ways. Sampling also requires consistency in being able to maintain a balance between gathering data about categories and in making discoveries and uncovering new categories or new properties or dimensions. Throughout the study, some categories were arrived at inductively while others came about as a result of deductive thinking during the analysis. Categories that were proven to be irrelevant were discarded, modified, or replaced.

The objective of axial coding is to relate more specifically the categories and subcategories uncovered during the open sampling and coding and to find evidence of variation and process with reference to them. Categories are related in terms of the paradigm (conditions, context, action/interaction, and consequences). During this phase, proposed statements in relationships were considered so that the student researchers could determine whether there were differences or changes in conditions, context,
action/interaction. Categories/subcategories were clarified in terms of relevance and meaning. Final integration is the next level of analysis. This is selective coding.

The purpose of selective coding is to integrate the categories along the dimensional level to form theory, validate the integrative statements of relationship, and consolidate the categories which need further development. Integration is similar to axial coding. However, it is a higher, more abstract level of analysis. During the process, the network of conceptual relationships are sorted and refined, and the patterns are identified and data is grouped accordingly. At the end of this process, data is now related at the conceptual, property, and dimensional level for each major category.

Process

Student researchers worked with the children (ages 6-17) at Genesis shelter weekly for a period of nine months. Children's groups were structured by age categories; ages 6 through 8, and ages 9 through 12. Teen groups were held separately in the evening. Throughout the study, participation for the 6-8 year old group was always continual and the children were always excited about coming. However, for the 9-12 year old group, participation seemed to be more of a social event until they became more comfortable with
their new environment. The teen group seemed to revel in group time spent with their peers and time spent away from their families. Whether or not participation output was optimal, children of all ages always seemed to always look forward to the snacks at the end of group.

During the course of groups, researchers utilized various projects to facilitate discussions. Many of the ideas originally developed to assist researchers in gathering data were modified or eliminated due to the children's abilities to follow through with tasks and complete activities that required basic reading and writing skills. To further explore the children's academic levels, researchers had several meetings with school administration and staff. During these meetings, staff members were able to share their perceptions relating to the children's abilities. It was stipulated by the staff members that the homeless children's capabilities appeared to be no different than the many other students who come from lower socio-economic backgrounds. As a possible future goal to enhance programs for children at the shelter and to help bridge the gap between school and shelter life, the shelter could incorporate "homework clubs" as a means to give additional assistance to children in targeted academic areas. In an attempt to maximize the current existing resources and to intensify the children's feelings of self-worth, researchers primarily planned activities that incorporated the children's strengths, such
as painting with water colors, drawings, thought-provoking board games, string-art, and quilt-making. The data from these activities lead to the development of songs sung by the children and their mothers at the annual "Celebrate Social Work" event at California State University, San Bernardino. A listing of the songs can be found in Appendix D. An art mural depicting the children's dream houses and wishes has become a part of the shelter's scenery.

Findings

Throughout the study, several significant themes surfaced. Themes that seem to reoccur throughout the nine months were the following: Homelessness and Shelter Life, Three Wishes, and Dream Houses. The findings include several direct written and verbal quotes from the children. The quotes were left in their original form because the children's words were more meaningful than the researcher's interpretations of them.

Homelessness and Shelter Life

While some children did consider themselves homeless, the majority felt that as long as they were not living on the street or in a car, they were not homeless. The children's perceptions are best summed up by one teenager who stated, "I
don't look at me as homeless, cause I am not in the streets and do have a home to go to".

The experience at this shelter is unique. Not all shelters provide on site programming and support networks. Many shelters just house individuals. This particular shelter provides the parents with an instant support network and a sense of community spirit which the children quickly become a part of. It appears that because of this common bond and roof over their heads, the children never saw themselves as being homeless or alone as a result of the shelter family becoming their new extended family. The shelter was either considered "transitional" to give the family temporary assistance to get them back on their feet if this was a one time experience, or the shelter provided a means of being a stepping stone for the hopes of eventually getting something better, for example, an apartment or a house. As part of the support network at the shelter, most of the children perceived their parent(s) to be assisted in saving money so that the family could eventually be self-supported. This aid allowed the children to rekindle their hopes for a new beginning.

As time evolved for the children during the study, individuals became more comfortable sharing in greater detail exactly what shelter life had to offer. One high schooler shared, "I'm glad we came here, cause before I was running
the streets with hoods and going nowhere in life...but now that I’m here, the rules are too strict and you can’t go to the mall or 7-11 without your parents being with you.” Another grade school child related, “the shelter kinda helps me feel good about myself, but I get embarrassed by people who always make fun of me. They say ‘Ha Ha, you live in a shelter.’ Sometimes I just run away. It makes me feel sad; but I don’t care, I just want to beat them up.” For another, the shelter provides a “chance for your family and you to come together and get on your feet and find a place to live again, but while you’re there, your space is limited and it’s hard to keep track of your stuff.” While the children were thankful that they had shelter and a home environment, they were saddened by the fact that they couldn’t invite friends to visit after school or spend the night due to the limited space and confidentiality policy.

Three Wishes

Groups provided a forum for children to address or share their needs, feelings, frustrations, as well as their dreams. One exercise that the children participated in was Three Wishes, whereby the children were asked if they had three wishes, what would they wish for. The majority were preoccupied with wanting a significant amount of money, with the exception of one child whose wish stated, “I wish we had
just a little bit more money than what we have now...I don't want to be greedy." Researchers were not certain if this preoccupation with money had any correlation with their current situation.

Another wish with multiple responses pertained to wishing for lots of toys. The children shared that many of the toys that they had were either lost in their many moves or were in storage (locked away) and were unattainable. Many homeless individuals often forfeit their personal belongings as a result of not being able to pay storage fees. While making a collage that comprised various toys one seven year old shared, "I just want to have some of these. I like to play with toys. I don't have them now. They're in the storage—in a big box. There are three Power Ranger pads, and one samurai. I just want them real bad." It appeared to researchers that while the children wished for many types of expensive toys, their wishes did not seem to be inconsistent with the toys desired for by children of similar ages who were not homeless.

The children also wished for basic necessities including a Grandpa and a Grandma, and 1,000,000 good friends. One nine year old feeling frustrated with the exercise and his past experiences only would comment, "I'm not doing this because I'm sick of wishing for things that don't come true!" A thirteen year old shared, "I wish for enough wishes to last a lifetime."
Dream Houses

Children were given the opportunity through several mediums, collages, fabric paintings, water colors, markers, and a mural painting to combine their memories of past homes along with future hopes to design a dream home. The houses created were defined as being extravagant. Children wished for "castles, mansions with servants, homes with many rooms and a big back yard, swimming pools and jacuzzis. The homes were located on the beach or in the mountains with large acreage allowing for tennis and basketball courts. A reoccurrent theme and the most frequent response was a house for their mom. The children wanted a big house for their mom to live in so she wouldn't have any worries. Throughout the study, the children's hopes and dreams centered around "mom".

Photographs depicting a sample of the children's artwork including dream houses can be found in Appendix E.

Discussion

Several factors affected the outcome of the study. One element pertained to the transitional nature of this population. It took researchers several weeks to build rapport and trust with the children before data collection was possible. During the beginning weeks of shelter life, children first needed to deal with the basic needs of food, shelter, and safety before they could focus on group
attendance and participation. Even when researchers were able to establish a rapport, some families decided to leave either by choice or at the shelter's request due to not adhering to the shelter's program requirements. This prevented students from being able to maintain that cohesive relationship with the children that left and required students to begin the process again with a new population. It was also difficult to get the children used to the structure required for scheduled weekly group meetings. Student researchers had to canvass and go door to door to ensure for greater attendance.

Another component was that the children were at times resistant and or reluctant to share their feelings and memories in groups and during interviews. The greatest resistance was among the older children, ages 11 to 17. Children shared with student researchers that memories were either too painful or "none of your business". Researchers speculate that reasons may be associated with the children's limited reading and writing skills. Lastly, researchers felt that the children's diminished self-esteem was relevant to their inability to share of themselves (in totality). Researchers felt that the children saw staff members as temporary connections in their lives. As a result, children were hesitant to become a part of this learning experience.
Conclusion

The study was beneficial for a variety of reasons. It gave students the opportunity to acquire more knowledge about homelessness through the eyes of the children who reside at the shelter. The children became empowered by being able to share their experiences about what it is like to be homeless through their artwork and eventually through their thoughts and words put to music. The children and their parents participated in a cooperative learning experience whereby the children benefited by seeing their parents become stronger role models due to their participation in the shelter's program. As the parents saw their children getting additional attention and support including validation and self-worth, their own self-esteem was also enhanced. As a result, the parents were able to project these good feelings back on to the children. This provided an opportunity for both parent and child to strengthen the parent/child relationship. Perhaps, thanks to this shelter, the children have benefited and now have an opportunity that they would have otherwise not had. In our learning experience, it was ascertained that everyone at the shelter felt that they had experienced growth as a result of being here. "[This Shelter] is a wonderful places to be lots of wonderful people here and you feel realy good about being here."
APPENDIX A

LIST OF TOPICS AND ACTIVITIES

Groups & Interviews
career
communication
concerns
current lifestyle (likes & dislikes)
dreams
family life
family needs
fears
feelings
friends
goals
hobbies
homelessness
hopes
individual needs
interests
memories
money
peers
possessions
previous homes
previous lifestyles
relationships
relatives
roles
safety
school
shelter issues
wishes

Art Work

collage
dream house
life book
journal
3 wishes

Board Games

It's About Time
The Happy Highway
The Ungame
Life Stories

26
APPENDIX B

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

I consent to allow my child(ren) to participate in the research study designed to explore the perceptions of Homeless Children. The nature and general purpose of the study have been explained to me and the following statement read to me by either Mary Lou Young or Melissa Creacy from the Department of Social Work at California State University San Bernardino.

I understand that the purpose of the study is to explore the perceptions homeless children have pertaining to their past and present living situations. The children involved in the study are between the ages of 6-17, and will participate by attending groups and individual interviews run by the researchers. The possible benefits include, but are not limited to the following:

1. Increased knowledge to social workers, shelter administration and staff, counselors, teachers, and parents how homelessness is perceived by homeless children, as well as by understanding their living conditions.

2. The opportunity for homeless children to talk about their experiences and share their personal stories so that they can feel like valuable human beings who hold a respectable place in society.

3. The opportunity for forums to be held on a regular basis for children to express thoughts about their situation and gain empowerment. Empowerment may enhance the necessary power needed to break the homeless cycle by allowing the opportunity to build the skills necessary to enable personal choice and control in their lives.

No risks to study participants are anticipated.

I understand that my child(ren)'s participation is voluntary, all information is confidential, and his/her identity will not be revealed. Furthermore, my child(ren)'s involvement in no way jeopardizes our stay in the shelter. Either myself or my child(ren) are free to withdraw consent and to discontinue participation in the study at any time without loss of reward. Any questions either myself or my child(ren) have about the study will be answered by the researchers or by an authorized representative.
California State University, San Bernardino, and the researchers named below have responsibility for insuring that participants in research studies conducted under university auspices are safeguarded from injury or harm resulting from such participation. If appropriate, the person named below may be contacted for remedy or assistance for any possible consequences from such activities.

On the basis of the above statements, I agree to allow my child(ren) to participate in this project.

__________________________
Parent's Signature

Witness' Signature

__________________________
Date

__________________________
Researcher's Signature

Researcher's Signature

(909) 880-5501

Campus Telephone Number
APPENDIX C

DEBRIEFING STATEMENT

The study in which you recently participated in, was conducted by Mary Lou Young and Melissa Creacy under the supervision of Teresa Morris at California State University, San Bernardino.

The purpose of the study was to discover the range of perceptions children experience living in shelters. Due to the study's exploratory nature, researchers chose to collect data by means of children's groups, observations, individual interviews, and art work. To assure anonymity and confidentiality, documentation was locked up when not being analyzed and participants' names were not utilized in the final report.

Although much research has been done on homelessness as a whole, little appears to have been done on children's perceptions, feelings, and attitudes. It is hoped that the data from this research project will lead to a greater knowledge and understanding of the homeless child's experience.

A range of concerns, feelings and experiences were discovered throughout the process of this project. Researchers learned that many children did not perceive themselves to be homeless because they lived in a shelter. These children differentiated "homeless" to be living on the street or in a car. Children wished for dream houses, castles, and mansions with servants, thinking of mom as foremost to provide for.

If you have any questions, or need clarification concerning the research project, please do not hesitate to contact one or both of the researchers. Researchers can be contacted through the shelter administration or through the California State University, San Bernardino Social Work Department (909) 880-5501.

Your participation and your time have been greatly appreciated!!

Sincerely,

Mary Lou Young

Melissa Creacy
APPENDIX D

BONDAGE CHANT

I AM PLEADING THAT MY PEOPLE
WILL HAVE THEIR LIVES RESTORED;
'CAUSE WELFARE HELPS BUT SHAMES YA,
AND THAT'S A POOR REWARD!

BONDAGE SONG

FOLKS FALL DOWN AROUND THE WORLD,
NOT JUST BECAUSE OF BOOZE;
OF ALL THE WAYS TO ENSLAVE,
WHICH MASTER DID YOU CHOOSE?
LIVING IN THIS WILD WORLD,
SURE CAN BE ROUGH,
SURE CAN BE ROUGH;
KEEPING YOUR SELF-RESPECT
KEEPING YOUR SELF-RESPECT,
SURE CAN BE TOUGH!
SURE CAN BE TOUGH!
MAYBE I WASN'T BORN WITH...
MAYBE I WASN'T BORN WITH...
A SILVER SPOON OR CUP...
A SILVER SPOON OR CUP...
BUT, I DON'T HAVE TO PUT YOU DOWN
TO PICK MYSELF UP!
AND, YOU DON'T HAVE TO PUT US DOWN...TO PICK YOURSELF UP!

By Corliss Taylor-Dunn, Mary Lou Young & Melissa Creacy
(C) 1995 All Rights Reserved
TROUBLE!

TROUBLE COMES TO GET YOU WHEN YOU TURN YOUR BACK,
GONNA HIT YOU WITH THE BLUES
HEAR, HEAR!
I CAN HEAR OLD TROUBLE RUMBLING DOWN THE TRACK,
I BEEN HIT BY THAT SAME TRAIN, TOO
TROUBLE’S GONNA FIND YOU WHEN YOU TRY TO HIDE
AND GONNA KNOCK YOU RIGHT OFF YOUR SHOES
I CAN HEAR THAT TROUBLE CHOO – CHOO CHUGGING DOWN
THAT TRACK, I BEEN HIT BY THAT SAME TRAIN, TOO
TROUBLE’S GONNA GET YOU WHEN YOU TURN YOUR BACK,
WON'T BE QUITE THE SAME AS A BIG MAC-ATTACK;
IF YOU AIN'T CAREFUL, YOU’LL BE PART OF THE TRACK,
YOU’LL BE HIT BY OLD TROUBLE BLUES,
I’VE BEEN HIT BY THAT SAME TRAIN, TOO!
LORD KNOWS, YOU’LL BE HIT BY THOSE TROUBLIN’ BLUES,
YES YOU WILL---BE---HIT BY OLD TROUBLE, TOO
I BEEN HIT BY THAT SAME TRAIN, TOOO OOO OOOoooooo!

By Corliss Taylor-Dunn, Mary Lou Young & Melissa Creacy
(C) 1995 All Rights Reserved

FAITH

FAITH IS THE SUBSTANCE
OF THINGS THAT ARE HOPED FOR
THE EVIDENCE OF THINGS NOT SEEN;
IF YOU DON’T HAVE IT,
IT’S IMPOSSIBLE TO PLEASE GOD,
GOTTA PRAY THAT HE’LL HELP YOU TO BELIEVE!

(REPEAT CHORUS)

By Corliss Taylor-Dunn, Mary Lou Young & Melissa Creacy
(C) 1995 All Rights Reserved
WISH RAP

I’LL TAKE A HOUSE, A BIG, BIG HOUSE, CLOSE TO MY SCHOOL,
NOW, THAT’S REAL COOL!
I WANT A HOUSE, A BIG, RICH HOUSE; A MANSION WILL DO,
HEY, WHAT ABOUT YOU?
NAW, MAKE MINE A CASTLE... AND PUT IT ON A BEACH, WITH
LOTS OF TREES TO HIDE IT FROM THE STREET. A BASKETBALL
COURT WOULD MAKE IT COMPLETE!
WHAT ABOUT A CAR TO RIDE AROUND YOUR GROUND; IMPRESS EVERY
GIRL THAT CAN BE FOUND!
JUST GIVE ME A SET OF WHEELS...
YOU WANT THEM ON A BIKE?
NO, PUT THEM ON A POWERWHEEL, OR MAYBE A TRIKE!
GIVE ME A TOYOTA TRUCK! A MUSTANG SOUNDS NEAT.
...THEN PARK ‘EM IN MY BEACH GARAGE, BESIDE MY WHOLE FLEET!
A CASTLE IS EXPENSIVE; WHO’LL PAY ALL THE BILLS?
IF YOU DON’T HAVE CASH, THIS DREAM’S GONNA CRASH?
THAT’S EASY, YOU’LL SEE, I’LL BE AS RICH AS CAN BE; CAUSE
MOM’S CLOSE TO WINNING THE LOTTERY!! YEAH!
AW, MAN, UM, UM, UM HE’S NUTS.
COME ON FELLAS, LET’S BE REAL, DIDN’T SOME ANCIENT OLD
AMERICAN PRESIDENT SAY SOMETHING ABOUT THE LONG ROAD TO ANY
KIND OF GOAL STARTS WITH ONE SINGLE STEP?
YOU DON’T NEED TO WIN THE LOTTERY TO GET WHAT YOU WISH
FOR., BUT YOUR FIRST STEP OUGHTTA BE TO STAY IN SCHOOL AND
WORK AS HARD AS YOU CAN. GOD GAVE EACH AND EVERY ONE OF
US SPECIAL GIFTS; WE NEED TO FIND OUT WHAT THEY ARE AND
WORK FROM THERE.
OK. I WISH THAT I COULD SEE JESUS. I’D GO UP TO HIM AND
SAY, (LOOKING STRAIGHT UP AND SHOUTING AS IF JESUS WAS WAY UP
IN THE SKY) "SIR"!
(FRIEND COVERING EARS) YOU DON’T, YOU DON’T HAVE TO YELL...
HE’S NOT DEAF OR FAR AWAY...HE’S RIGHT HERE IN THIS ROOM.
SIR...IF YOU HAVE ANY SPARE....WELL, CAN YOU GROW ME UP TALLER
SO THAT I CAN TAKE CARE OF THE BULLIES AT SCHOOL?
SIR, CAN I HAVE A GAME GEAR, PLEASE?
CAN YOU SEND ENOUGH SNOW SO THAT I CAN BUILD A SNOWMAN?
WELL, I’D ASK HIM FOR A COMPUTER TO HELP ME WITH HOMEWORK...
AND ALL THE BOOKS I COULD EVER NEED
SIR...I’D SAY, CAN YOU PLEASE GIVE ME A NEW GRANDPA AND
GRANDMA? YOU SEE, I LOST MY OLD ONES LAST YEAR, AND
IF THEY HAVE A BIG HOUSE, MOMMY AND I COULD COME LIVE
WITH THEM, WE’D BE A REAL FAMILY AND WE WOULDN’T EVER
BE HOMELESS AGAIN.
BUT, YOU DO HAVE FAMILY...WE ARE YOUR FAMILY. WE AREN’T
REALLY HOMELESS, CAUSE WE ALL LIVE AT GENESIS.

By Corliss Taylor-Dunn, Mary Lou Young & Melissa Creacy
(C) 1995 All Rights Reserved
CHILDREN OF THE SHELTER

WE ARE THE CHILDREN OF THE SHELTER,
WE'RE LIVING HERE FOR NOW.
PLEASE LISTEN TO OUR VOICE;
IT NEVER WAS OUR CHOICE, TO LIVE IN A SHELTER.
WE WANT TO STEP OUT FROM THE SHADOWS,
AND TELL YOU WHO WE ARE.
WE'D ALSO LIKE TO SAY;
TODAY HAS BEEN A BRIGHTER DAY,
BECAUSE OF THIS SHELTER...
BUT WE WON'T LIVE HERE FOREVER,
WE HAVE HOPES AND DREAMS, JUST LIKE YOU!
GENESIS IS GOD'S NEW BEGINNING;
A BRAND NEW START, TO HELP OUR DREAMS COME TRUE.
TODAY, WE'RE CHILDREN OF THE SHELTER;
TOMORROW'S GROWN-UPS OF THE FUTURE...
(WE'RE ALL GOD'S CHILDREN...)HELP US MAKE OUR DREAMS COME TRUE.

By Corliss Taylor-Dunn, Mary Lou Young & Melissa Creacy
(C) 1994  All Rights Reserved
APPENDIX E
PERCEPTIONS
OF
HOMELESS
CHILDREN
GENESIS
REFERENCES


California Homeless and Housing Coalition. Hope For the Future: Educating Homeless Children and Youth. 1990, 120 Minutes.


