Vacation spots or homes?: Children who live in motels

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VACATION SPOTS OR HOMES?: CHILDREN WHO LIVE IN MOTELS

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

Katrina Michele Devine

June 2005
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June 2005

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ABSTRACT

Homelessness is a growing problem in the U.S., (Jencks, 1994) especially in the county under study located in Southern California (OCRM, 2004). This study will define what children living in motels identify as their needs. A convenience sample of ten homeless children (aged 8-12) was obtained from a program run by a Rescue Mission that helps children who live in a motel in the county under study with their homework. (The program takes place at the motel where the homeless children live.) This sample also includes four staff members from the program, who work directly with the children. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the children and staff. The discovery of these needs is significant because they will help service providers identify what the children think they need in order to have better lives.
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DEDICATION

To my mom who encouraged me not to settle for something I didn’t enjoy and encouraged me to pursue my education so I could reach my career goals and to my husband, Aaron, who endured my stressed out crabby days and lonely nights while I was writing papers and doing reading for class. Thanks for sticking with me through this trying process.

I love you both!
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ........................................................................................................ iii

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ................................................................................ iv

In the Homeless Hotel by Maria P. ......................................................... 1

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Introduction .................................................................................................. 2

Problem Statement ......................................................................................... 2

Homelessness ................................................................................................. 2

Laws Affecting Homeless Families ......................................................... 6

Purpose of the Study .................................................................................... 10

Significance of the Project for Social Work ............................................. 12

Who Cares by Sharneen ............................................................................. 15

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction .................................................................................................. 16

Homelessness ................................................................................................. 16

Homeless Children ....................................................................................... 19

Studies on Homeless Children ................................................................... 19

Children’s Perspectives on Being Homeless ............................................. 25

Families Who Live in Motels ................................................................. 30

Theories Guiding Conceptualization ....................................................... 35

Summary ....................................................................................................... 38

Homeless Saratoga by Mike ................................................................. 40
CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Introduction .................................................. 41
Study Design .................................................. 41
Sampling ....................................................... 42
Data Collection and Instruments ....................... 43
Procedures ..................................................... 44
Protection of Human Subjects ......................... 48
Data Analysis .................................................. 49
Summary ........................................................ 49
Family in Need by Bill ...................................... 51

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

Introduction .................................................. 52
Presentation of Findings .................................... 52
  Children’s Observations and Opinions .............. 52
  Staff Observations and Opinions .................... 59
Summary ........................................................ 62
Mixed Feelings of Being Homeless by Vivian ........ 64

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

Introduction .................................................. 65
Discussion ..................................................... 65
Limitations ..................................................... 71
Recommendations for Social Work Practice,
Policy and Research ....................................... 72
Oasis Rap by Navonni ...................................... 72
Conclusions ................................................... 75
In the Homeless Hotel
by Maria P.

Homeless we are called without a place to live,
Somewhere you can call a home,
A place where we can give.
   We are not pigs,
   We’re human beings with a race and creed.
   We are not animals that just mate and breed.
Once we were strong...But now in a way stronger.
Your pity not needed because we’re poor;
Our pride supports us and helps us endure.1
   Your pity not needed, but your understanding, yes.
   Being homeless is the saddest thing,
   Because some good people are suffering.
The banging on doors,
The screams in the night,
Even shootings on ground floors,
The pushers in flight.
The homeless scum is what they’re called...
   But what about me?
   Like you, I once had hopes and dreams.
   But they’re growing dim
...and I’m only sixteen.

(Berck, 1992, p. 15)
CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Introduction

The contents of Chapter One present an overview of the project. The problem statement and purpose of the study are discussed. Finally, the significance of the project for social work is presented.

Problem Statement

Homelessness

Homelessness is a problem in the United States, especially in the county under study. Homelessness has been a problem in the United States for decades. The Federal Government defines homelessness as:

(1) an individual who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence; and

2) an individual who has a primary nighttime residence that is:

(A) a supervised publicly or privately operated shelter designed to provide temporary living accommodations (including welfare hotels, congregate shelters, and transitional housing for the mentally ill),
(B) an institution that provides a temporary residence for individuals intended to be institutionalized, or
(C) a public or private place not designed for, or ordinarily used as, a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings (Legal Information Institute, 2003).

The homeless population is not a static population and changes as the economy changes (Burt & Aron, 2001). From the end of the 1800s to the beginning of the 1900s, the homeless population consisted of single men moving from construction site to construction site, following industrial development opportunities across the country, and then, when work was scarce, returning to low-rent sections of cities (Burt & Aron, 2001). During the 1930’s Great Depression era, unemployment reached astonishingly high levels and left an estimated one percent of the total population homeless at a single point in time (Burt & Aron, 2001). During the 1950’s and 60’s, the homeless population was mostly single men who did not live with any family members, but who lived in hotel rooms with other homeless people (Burt & Aron, 2001). From the 1980’s to the present, homeless individuals move frequently, tend to be
connected to at least one family member, and spend periods of time in motels or with relatives (Burt & Aron, 2001).

Homelessness is a growing problem in the U.S. (Jencks, 1994). Because of the nature of the situation, it is almost impossible to get an exact count of the number of homeless people. The best approximation is from a study conducted by the Urban Institute, which reports that approximately 3.5 million people in the U.S. are likely to experience homelessness in a given year and 1.35 million of those homeless are children (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2002).

The county under study is not an exception to the growing homeless population (OCRM, 2004). The population of this county is approximately 3.5 million (OCRM, 2004). Of the 3.5 million living in this county, approximately 35,000 are homeless and 70 percent (25,000) of them are homeless parents with children (OCRM, 2004).

Families with children are one of the fastest growing segments of the homeless population (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2001). The National Coalition for the Homeless (2001) reported that in the

The population of homeless families with children in the county under study is also increasing rapidly. It is estimated that 70 percent of the homeless population in this county are families with children (OCRM, 2004)

In the county under study, it is not uncommon to hear about people moving from motel to motel because they are not able to find affordable housing (OCRM, 2004) and many cities have a law which prohibits people from living in a room for more than 28 days. Unlike other counties, this county does not have public housing projects (Leaman, 1998). In 2003, the median price for a house in this county was $471,700 (National Association of Realtors, 2003) and the average rent for an apartment was more than $700/month, plus a deposit of the first and last month’s rent (Leaman, 1998).
Laws Affecting Homeless Families

Raising children in motels, and being forced to move approximately every 28-30 days has many negative affects on the family, and especially on the children (Daniels, 1992). Amendments to the McKinney Act (1987) put into effect in 1990 obligated states to provide services for homeless children, especially those living in motels and moving frequently, that were more comprehensive than services for housed students (Leaman, 1998). The McKinney-Vento Act "entitles homeless children and youth to a free and appropriate public education and mandates the elimination of barriers to enrollment, attendance, and success in school" (Duffield, 2001). Under this act, children were provided with free breakfasts and lunches, transportation to their schools of origin, and referrals for mental and physical health services (Leaman 2001). This act also defined homelessness in order to help determine who was eligible for services and who was not (Duffield, 2001).

Another law that specifically affects lives of children and adults living in motels is an ordinance that some cities enforce restricting the maximum number of days one can reside in any given hotel/motel
This ordinance necessitates homeless families living in motels to move approximately every 28 days. Not all cities have this ordinance. In some cities, this ordinance also states that no more than a certain percentage of the rooms may be rented to someone who will be occupying the room more than 28 consecutive days (Leaman, 1998).

Federally, Section 8 provides rental assistance to low-income families. In order to qualify for this program, certain requirements must be met. Unfortunately, there are so many people in need of this housing, there is a long waiting list and new people cannot be added until someone goes off the list.

The Federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) recognizes the need for affordable housing and has put several policies into place to help create this housing (Leaman, 1998). This approach is called Continuum of Care. “Continuum of Care, is designed to encourage the development of a comprehensive, long-term approach to addressing the contributing factors that push people into motels and shelters by assisting individuals and families in becoming self-sufficient and moving to permanent housing” (Leaman, 1998). The approach consists of two
key elements: a) community-based process that identifies needs and builds a system to address those needs, and b) doubling HUD's budget to provide homelessness assistance that provides communities with the required resources needed to carry out essential tasks.

The Continuum of Care Philosophy asserts that homelessness is not caused solely by a lack of shelter, but involves a variety of factors (Leaman, 1998). It proposes that coordinated community-based processes are the best approach to alleviating homelessness by providing a comprehensive response to the differing needs of homeless individuals and families (Leaman, 1998). Practically, this would be organizations within the community working together to provide services, including education as well as the government creating more affordable housing for the homeless.

Although individual cities within the county under study have many organizations that provide services for homeless people, few of them specifically target the motel population. Staff running these programs feel that only half of the motel families are aware of their services (Leaman, 1998). These organizations, both public and private, provide goods and services to help
Although there are services available for the families living in the motels, often times they are not aware of the services. When they are able to utilize the services, often times the services they receive are not comprehensive, but fragmented. If services within the community were coordinated with each other, allowing them to share information about their clients, the homeless would be able to access services to meet more of their needs.

Purpose of the Study

Homeless families with children are one of the fastest growing populations within the homeless population (National Coalition for the Homeless (2001)). This means that there are an ever-increasing number of children living in motels. Because of laws certain cities have put into place that limit the number of days one can stay at a motel and because of the nature of homelessness itself, these children have unstable lives.

The purpose of this study was to discover the needs reported by the homeless children who live in motels, in order to provide agencies with information that will help them better provide services for this
population. Adults know what theorists say children need for optimal development, but children say that they have needs that adults do not always listen to. One need that Maslow (1954) and children themselves say they have is to be heard and affirmed. In the process of this study, children were heard and had their needs affirmed.

This study took an exploratory approach to collecting information on the needs of homeless children living in motels. Interviews were conducted with children who resided in motels at the time the interviews took place and with staff members from the homework assistance and tutoring program who worked directly with the children; questions were qualitative in nature because they met the purpose of the design. This design is more child friendly than many other popular study designs. Not much research has been done on this population, therefore an exploratory design was an appropriate approach.

Qualitative methods were used to analyze the data collected. Semi-structured individual interviews were conducted with ten eight to twelve year old children and four staff members. After the data were collected, it was coded and themes were identified.
Significance of the Project for Social Work

This study utilized the first phase of the generalist practice model. Engagement was crucial for this study to be successful. Engagement began with the first contact with the population. The first step was developing professional relationships with the children and staff. This was accomplished by warmly greeting them and being pleasant. Orienting the participants to the process and then actively listening to them was essential in this process. The last step in the engagement phase was making sure the paperwork was completed, in this case, making sure consent and assent forms were signed.

The primary mission of the social work profession is to “enhance human well-being and help meet the basic human needs of all people, with particular attention to the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty” (National Association of Social Workers, 1996). This describes exactly why social workers need to be knowledgeable about the issue of homelessness, families living in motels, and the needs their children have. The children in these situations are vulnerable and living in poverty and the homeless population as a whole is oppressed.
As the homeless population continues to grow (Leaman 1998), the number of referrals that social workers receive will grow. It is necessary for social workers to become educated about this population because their involvement with these homeless children will continue to increase.

If social workers are going to be effective when working with homeless children living in motels, they need to understand the challenges in the homeless culture. This leaves them two options: to do their own research in the community by themselves, and/or to read research that has already been completed.

There are several issues social workers face when trying to provide services for children who live in motels. Homeless families who live in motels are transient; they move from motel to motel, as well as from room to room within the same motel. If the telephone in the room works, often times outgoing calls cannot be made, so it is very difficult for families to keep their social worker abreast of their movement. Many times families do not want social workers to be able to locate them so they use aliases when checking into new motels. This also aids those who are in hiding from abusive partners.
If social workers are going to be able to help these homeless children who live in motels become successful adults and break this cycle of poverty and homelessness, the children need to know that someone values their thoughts and ideas about their situations. In this process of caring, the children’s beliefs about their needs will be uncovered.
Who Cares
by Sharneen

Nobody really cares any more but me
No one wants to cry for me
Nobody wants to care for me
Who will sit down and then
Stand up for me
Nobody cares anymore but me
Who cares for me
My mother
She helps me solve my problems
and we share our love
We tell each other things
My brother cares to share our love
I really fight for people who are about me
My beautiful mother
And my brother

(Berck, 1992, p.109)
CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Chapter Two consists of a discussion of the literature that is relevant to homeless children who live in motels. Literature on homelessness will be reviewed first. Next, literature on homeless children will be reviewed, followed by a review of literature on the subset of the homeless population who live in motels. The section will be concluded with a review of theories, which guide the conceptualization of this study.

Homelessness

Morrell-Bellai, Goering, and Boydell (2000) uncovered several underlying factors that caused homelessness. They identified several macro and micro reasons for people becoming homeless and remaining homeless.

A representative sample of 300 single adult shelter users was selected from a shelter, along with 30 people who refused to use the shelter. This sample participated in a structured interview. From these
participants, a sample of 29 adults were chosen to participate in an in-depth interview.

These 29 homeless adults were interviewed using a semi-structured format with a representative sample from the larger sample. The interviewees ranged in age from 18-61 years old. Thirty-two percent (n=9) were female and 54 percent (n=16) had not completed high school. Twenty-eight percent (n=8) had no income, 36 percent (n=10) were on public benefits, 14 percent (n=4) worked, seven percent (n=2) received income from pan handling, and four percent (n=1) received income from family members. Only 18 percent (n=5) did not have a mental illness diagnosis and 64 percent (n=18) reported having been sexually, emotionally, or physically abused during their childhood.

Several macro factors were identified as causes of becoming homeless and remaining so. The factors causing homelessness included “loss of employment or public benefits, and a loss of housing” along with the inability to find employment at a wage above the poverty line. The factors causing people to remain homeless were a “lack of acceptable supportive counseling; decent employment at a livable wage; affordable housing in safe, drug-free neighborhoods;
and a general lack of incentives for individuals to change their situation" (Morrell-Bellai, Goering, & Boydell, 588-589).

Along with macro factors influencing homelessness, the authors identified several micro factors that initially cause homelessness and contribute to people remaining homeless were identified. The factors contributing to people becoming homeless are as follows: childhood physical abuse, neglect, or poverty; alcoholic parents; abuse as an adult; and mental health or substance abuse issues. Micro issues associated with remaining homeless include the following: an impoverished support network; chronic substance abuse; psychiatric symptoms; and loss of hope in changing their situation.

In summary, becoming homeless is a process of several factors, as is remaining homeless. The longer people remain homeless, the less likely they are to try to change their situation. The lack of affordable housing, lack of jobs that pay more than the poverty level, and drug abuse are the three largest barriers to finding a place to live and staying there.

Burt and Aron (2001) looked at homelessness from the late 1800's until today. This book began by
providing an historical overview of the problem of homelessness. The inability to afford housing was identified as the underlying reason for homelessness. The reasons for this inability were explored and it was determined that the lack of affordable housing was most likely the reason. How individual’s personalities and life circumstances affected their ability to afford housing and how the federal government has addressed this problem were also explored.

In summary, homelessness is a problem that people have been experiencing for decades. There are environmental or macro issues, such as lack of affordable housing, and personal or micro issues, such as lack of education or inability to hold a job, that cause homelessness. Becoming and remaining homeless is a process that develops over time.

Homeless Children

Studies on Homeless Children

Hicks-Coolick, Burnside-Eaton, and Peters (2003) explored the needs of homeless children and the shelter services available to them. This study was a mixed-method study that explored the services provided by shelters and the needs of the homeless. Qualitative
data were collected through open-ended interviews done with shelter or childcare directors at six different shelters in Atlanta, GA. The sample was determined through maximum variation sampling.

The interviews revealed that homeless children do not receive healthcare on a regular basis or in child-friendly environments; there is not adequate shelter space for all homeless families seeking it; and homeless shelter staff require more training. It was found that many of the shelters lack services in medical and developmental assessments, access to education, childcare, parent training, and on-site worker training. While the McKinney-Vento Act aids children with transportation to school, over half of the residents were unfamiliar with this law.

As a follow-up to the interviews conducted with the shelter or childcare directors at six different shelters in Atlanta, GA, a survey of 13 questions was developed from the information gathered in the original interviews. These surveys were designed to produce quantitative data. A convenience sample was taken of 600 agencies that provided services to the homeless and the directors of these organizations were mailed surveys. The return rate was only 34 percent, which is
quite small, but it was mailed to people who did not offer shelter services. The data that were analyzed were taken from responses from 102 shelters. A lack of shelter for homeless families and a lack of after school/child care was a major finding. Another discovery was that half of the respondents were not aware of the McKinney-Vento act.

The goal of Anooshian’s (2003) study was to show that economic stresses were directly related to the social rejection of homeless children. Three members in each of ninety-three families were selected, 77 of whom were homeless. The study found that the less money families had, the fewer parenting skills the parents acquired. As parenting skills decreased, social isolation and rejection of homeless children increased.

Duffield (2001) examined the causes and consequences of homelessness alongside the impact of homelessness on children’s school enrollment, attendance, and academic success. She found that one of the greatest causes of family homelessness was rent costs rising faster than incomes. In 1998, 40% of all poor persons had incomes that were less than half of the poverty level.
According to Duffield (2001), children without a home suffered poor health twice as often as other children and had a greater incidence of mental health problems. She stated that these children were twice as likely as children who were not homeless to experience hunger, twice as likely to have learning disabilities, and four times as likely to experience developmental delays.

These consequences are damaging and stick with these children throughout their lives. When school is missed, these children fall behind. Twelve percent of homeless school aged children were not even enrolled in school while they were homeless, and of those who were enrolled in school, 45 percent of them did not attend school regularly (Duffield 2001). This lack of education will repeat the cycle of poverty and they will continue to live life homeless.

Nunez analyzed data from a case study done of homeless families in New York City (2001), collected by the Institute for Children and Poverty, from 350 families, including over 600 children, who lived in shelters in New York City. After analyzing that data, he found several common themes among the families. These themes are as follows: families often live with
extended family and friends before becoming homeless; children rarely receive preventative health care; homeless children are exposed to violence at very early ages and have either witnessed or experienced it themselves; and children are denied access to the education they were guaranteed.

O'Leary (2001), through her own literature review, identified several issues that homeless children faced, which affected their education. She found that homelessness has a profound effect on the physiological development and academic achievement of children. The instability of homelessness may lead to health problems, hunger and poor nutrition, developmental delays, psychological problems, and educational underachievement. Education provides a place of stability for children where they have much needed structure, but they are often taken far from their schools due to their homelessness and lack of transportation.

O'Leary (2001), discussed the McKinney Homeless Education Act (1987) which was passed to address the educational needs of homeless children by providing them with transportation to their schools of origin. This Act made schools, where the children already had
friends, accessible in an effort to help them succeed. Despite this law, it is still difficult for children to get to school.

Ziesmer and Marcoux (1992) addressed the academic and emotional needs of homeless students. Data were collected on the characteristics of homeless elementary students in Madison, WI to determine whether homeless children have educational, material, or emotional needs that distinguish them from other children. The data were collected from teachers when they completed the Achenbach teacher report form on the identified students from 1987 to 1989. The students records were used to collect demographic data and data on educational performance.

The findings indicated that homeless students' needs cannot be determined simply based on the fact that they are homeless. Because the population is so diverse and varies from location to location, a range of services is necessary to help these children. This study also suggested that prevention is the key to helping these children and that direct services alone are not sufficient.

Daniels (1992) summarized the growing problem of homelessness that the U.S. is facing. She also
addressed the issue that school is a place of refuge and stability for homeless children. These children bring many problems with them that the school faculty and staff have not often faced and are not sure how to address.

In summary, the shelters and motels these children live in lack many services. It was shown that children who do not have a home are more likely to experience hunger and to have learning disabilities. These children are exposed to violence at early ages.

**Children’s Perspectives on Being Homeless**

DeForge, Zehnder, Minick, and Carmon (2001) conducted a study with the purpose of describing what it was like to be homeless from the homeless child's perspective. Fourteen school-aged children, who were living in shelters at the time, were interviewed about their homeless experiences. Five themes were identified: I’m not homeless; I like living in a shelter sometimes; living in a shelter is hard; stop the violence; and I need approval. Fear was the underlying issue in all these themes.

The purpose of Heusel’s (1995) study was to discover homeless children’s perspectives of being homeless. Thirty-three children from three homeless
shelters were interviewed using The Homeless Children Interview Schedule. Although the children were interviewed, data was primarily collected from the children’s parents.

Heusel (1995) uncovered several major topics in her conversations with the children and their parents. “Moving, leaving home, missing friends, changing schools, and being teased” are the major difficulties she discovered that homeless children face. Approximately one quarter of the students said that being homeless was not too bad. Others dreamed of living in houses or a permanent places.

Heusel (1995) made some suggestions to help homeless children. She stated that significant relationships are very important to school aged children and suggested that homeless children be provided with shelter in their neighborhoods where they would be able to continue attending their school and keep their friends. She saw that these children had trouble making new friends when they moved and suggested that teachers be educated on the lifestyles these children were living and the importance of supporting and encouraging them as much as possible. Heusel (1995) discovered that the children did not
consider themselves homeless when “living in apartments, motels, or with family members” and she suggested that homeless families be sheltered in apartments in order to preserve the family. Finally, children need areas that are safe to play in and suggested that homeless agencies and advocates for the homeless remember the importance of this space for children.

The literature shows that homeless children are complicated individuals. Hill (1992) conducted an ethnographic investigation in a shelter for homeless women. The study utilized participant observation with directive and non-directive interviewing and looked at the ways homeless children deal with loss. Hill conducted this study over the course of a year. The number of children in the shelter varied from five to 22. The ages of the children ranged anywhere from six months to 11 years old. The children’s total time of residency at the shelter ranged from a few days to almost one year.

Participant observation was used to collect the data. Hill posed as a volunteer at the shelter and the children believed that he was writing a book. He allowed the children to have a certain amount of
control over the topics they discussed and the progress of the conversations in order to ensure their attitudes were uncovered, rather than his. Hill also used the technique of looking for "exceptions to the rule."

Six main themes were uncovered in the interactions with the children. They were as follows: maintained and lost possession; life at the shelter; fantasies; rich kids; future homes; and dreams. From these themes, it was confirmed that fear permeates the lives of these children. They were afraid of losing a place to live, their cherished possessions, and their friends.

Berck (1992) interviewed more than thirty children who were living in or had recently lived in welfare hotels and homeless shelters in New York City. The children shared openly with her about what it was to be young and homeless. They told her about their first experiences living in the hotels and shelters and how wretched the conditions were. Even at a young age, they were able to provide her with detailed descriptions of the drugs and crime that took place at the places they had lived. They shared their frustrations about the lack of space, not having a quiet place to do their homework, and not having a
place to cook a real meal. Their comments suggested that they were deeply saddened over not being able to be children anymore or having safe places to play. Berck was able to spend time with them to get to know them and to learn about their situations. Berck collected a wealth of information about being a homeless child and what life was like for them.

Children had many different ideas about being homeless. Many issues that they face were uncovered and many different suggestions were made. All agree though, that the needs these children have are not being met.

In summary, the literature on homelessness revealed several things. People become homeless due to loss of employment, benefits, housing, and other personal issues, many of which are related to their upbringing. People remain homeless due to a lack of decent employment opportunities that pay a livable wage, lack of affordable housing, lack of counseling services, lack of a support system, and poor life choices. Shelter space is not adequate to accommodate all the homeless families that need housing and these shelters lack services to help families. The homeless lifestyle is very unstable, causing academic
underachievement and affecting physiological development. Finally, despite the McKinney-Vento Act, children still have issues getting to school and receiving services.

Families Who Live in Motels

In 2004, O.C. Partnership developed a strategic plan to assist individuals and families residing in motels to reach and sustain stable housing in the county under study. In developing this plan, many hours went in to researching the background of homelessness within the county. A survey to assess the background and needs of the homeless population living in motels was administered to 198 people living in 20 different motels.

The study found that 28 percent of the rooms had two parents with their children, while 21 percent had a single parent with children. Thirty-eight percent of the people surveyed had lived in the motel for two or more years. Fifty-three percent of the people were living in the motels due to financial loss.

Many of the families reported that their children had missed school since becoming homeless. Half of the pre-school aged children had attended school prior to
becoming homeless and the children were not currently in school due to a number of different barriers.

The report concludes with the plan for helping families and individuals residing in the motels reach and sustain stable housing. The suggestions ranged from coordinating resources throughout the county to making service delivery more efficient; educating teachers on the challenges their students living in motels face; implementing after school and pre-school programs for children living in motels; expanding mobile health services; and providing more mobile job training programs for adults. It was noted that in order for any of these suggestions to work, relations with motel owners/managers needed to be improved and that the local communities needed to be educated on this sub population of the homeless community.

The Social Services Agency in the county under study put together a comprehensive report on Motel Families that looked specifically at seven cities within the county and identified the services that were available to the homeless/motel dwellers in each city (Leaman, 1998). The number of residential motels and the ordinances that govern them were addressed. Also discussed were each city's view of the problem and
plans to help alleviate the problem. Additionally, the same information was sought from the county.

In addition to inquiring about the homeless situation from the cities' viewpoints and the services they offer, 30 service providers were identified and interviewed (20 from community based organizations and 10 from shelters). These stakeholders were able to identify difficulties in providing services along with needs the children and their families have. The overlying theme identified was the lack of affordable housing, which children need in order to attend school regularly, get the medical treatment they need, and experience the social support and stability that is so important in their lives. Lack of affordable housing is a barrier to providing services to families that live in motels because they are constantly moving and service providers are unable to locate their clients.

The final section of the report covered the effects of poverty on children. Readers were reminded that children have no control over the environment they grow up in and that the bracket of family income affects adolescent wellbeing. The level of cognitive ability is adversely affected when children grow up in poverty. The report suggested that family income has a
greater impact on cognitive ability than it does on emotional wellbeing. Children who live in motels are also at a greater risk for being maltreated by their caregivers.

Kozol (1988) told the stories of several women and their families who lived in motels in New York City. The overarching theme was how hard the lives of these families are. They spend hours upon hours riding buses and standing in lines to get the bare minimum of what they need to survive. They encounter red tape daily and live in fear of being evicted from the vermin infested, run down room their family lives in.

Nothing in their lives seemed to make sense. Most of them experienced several hardships at the same time, resulting in homelessness. The loss of a job resulted in not being able to pay their mortgage/rent so they became homeless and then they were not able to get a job that paid enough for them to live on because they did not have an address. All it took was one event to start the downward cycle of homelessness and poverty.

Kozol (1988) found that many of the mothers did not care how people treated them, but when their children were not treated well, the mothers became very upset. They told Kozol that the children were not
responsible for their homelessness and they did not like the way their children had to live. For many of these women, their children were their life.

Kozol painted a graphic picture of life in the motels. The motels were not safe places for adults, much less children. Prostitutes were in and out of the motels regularly, as were drug dealers. Domestic violence was something that these children also witnessed and heard while playing in hallways painted with lead paint and a passed out drug addict in the stairwell. The rooms were not equipped with running water, refrigerators, or a place to prepare food. The beds had dangerous metal corners that caused the death of at least one small child (Kozol, 1988).

Despite these conditions, the women still had hope. They reported that the only thing that kept them going day after day was their faith in God and that He would not give them more than they could handle. They reported that they prayed daily and that their faith was what helped them get through their days.

In summary, living in motels is a hard, uncertain life. Often times not many of the families are aware of the few services available for them. Additionally,
children are exposed to many things children should not be exposed to. Many families have trouble surviving.

Theories Guiding Conceptualization

According to Maslow (1954), until people are able to regularly meet their basic needs, they will not be motivated to pursue intellectual challenges or develop a sense of positive self-esteem. When physiological needs (proper diet, adequate clothing, and health care), the first tier of Maslow’s hierarchy, are not met (because of their family's financial difficulties), children may appear listless, tired, agitated, or unmotivated to participate in school-related activities. When safety needs (a stable and safe environment to live in), Maslow’s second tier, are not met at home, children long to be in school where the structure and consistency of the school environment often represents a safe haven and a place where homeless children's needs for safety can be temporarily, yet predictably, met.

The need for love and belonging is part of Maslow’s third tier and yet another area where homeless children’s needs are not met because they move frequently and are unable to make attachments with
other children or adults. Given their parent’s high stress levels, the children’s needs are rarely met by their parents either. Maslow’s final level emphasizes the importance of developing a sense of self-esteem, which requires people to feel respected and worthwhile which is not very common for the homeless population due to the stigma that is attached to being homeless.

Daniels (1992) discussed Erik Erikson’s theory of psychosocial growth. The fourth stage of Erikson's theory is characterized by the crisis of industry versus inferiority (Erikson, 1980). During this time, children are striving to develop social, academic, personal, and physical skills. This process is frustrated by their many moves, environmental instability, and inconsistencies in the way their parents relate to them.

After describing the developmental needs of homeless children, Daniels (1992) went on to discuss how the education system can better help these students by offering them help to meet their basic needs and different therapy approaches that could work with them.

The theories mentioned above, by Erikson and Maslow, provide a framework with which to better understand the needs of homeless children living in
motels. According to Maslow (1954), the average child generally prefers an organized and predictable environment, which is free of unexpected events and where their parents are all-powerful and will protect them. Erikson (1980) believed that a child’s development is interrupted when family life has failed to prepare the child for school or when school fails to live up to the expectations the child has from previous stages of development. When children move from motel to motel, their education is disrupted, causing development to be interrupted thus providing some understanding to the needs of homeless children living in motels.

Empowerment theory is a way of understanding and helping homeless children who live in motels. According to Hepworth, Rooney and Larson (2002) empowerment is defined as “enabling groups or communities to gain or regain the capacity to interact with the environment in ways that enhance resources to meet their needs, contribute to their well being and potential, give their life satisfaction, and provide control over their lives to the extent possible.” This theory assumes that feelings of powerlessness are
linked to people who are part of ethnic minority communities or other oppressed groups.

Homeless children are definitely an oppressed group. Empowerment theory suggests that listening to what people think about their situations and valuing these opinions is the first step to helping them. It states that it is also important to discover and build on existing strengths and define the relationship as a mutual relationship where the child has an active role.

This study embraced and was based on empowerment theory. The goal was to investigate what the children thought the problem was and their ideas about making their living situations better. It was intended to value their opinions in an effort to help them feel like they had some power in their situations.

Summary

The literature important to the project was presented in Chapter Two. Homelessness is a growing problem in the United States due to the lack of affordable housing and alcohol and drug abuse. Several studies showed that families with children are the quickest growing group within the homeless population. The literature showed that homeless children are
complex and have needs that are unique to their population. According to Maslow and Erikson, being homeless may cause certain developmental issues, which cause unique needs. Empowerment theory showed us that it was necessary to listen to and value the opinions of children in order to help them overcome their current lifestyles.
Homeless Saratoga
by Mike

Living in here is really hard.
There's gates all around
and he windows got bars.

To leave the building
you have to sign
and you got to come in
at a certain time.

If you do something wrong
you will get kicked out.

That's what this place
is all about.

(Berck, 1992, p.59)
CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Introduction

Chapter Three documents the steps that were necessary to develop the project. Specifically, it will discuss the design of the study and how the samples were selected. Chapter Three will also address how the data were collected, the instruments and procedures involved in doing this, and the process for ensuring the protection of human subjects. The Chapter ends with a discussion on how the data were analyzed and a summary of the chapter.

Study Design

An exploratory design was used to determine what homeless children who live in motels believe their needs are. Because there is very little research that has been conducted with children who live in motels and because qualitative research is concerned about understanding people from their own points of view, a qualitative study is most appropriate.

Like all studies, there were limitations to this study. The first limitation was lack of control over the interview environment. The second limitation was
difficulty in replicating the study because circumstances of the sample are constantly changing.

Sampling

Two different convenience samples were taken from the homework assistance and tutoring program. The first sample was taken from the students who attend the program. The second sample was taken from the staff members who work with the children who attend the program.

The first sample consisted of ten homeless students, between the ages of eight and twelve. (Children were considered homeless if they were living in the motel with at least one parent.) The second sample consisted of four staff members who provided direct services to the children.

The investigator interviewed all of the children and staff in this study. The criteria for selecting the children was as follows: consent from one of the child’s parents, the child’s assent, the child’s ability to speak English fluently, the child’s age being between eight and fourteen, and living in the motel at the time of the interview. The criteria for selecting the staff was as follows: consenting to
participate in the interview, having developed a positive relationship/bond with the children, and providing direct services to the children.

There are several reasons why these criteria were chosen. Because of the children’s age, they were old enough to understand the questions being asked and to understand that their needs were different at the time of the interview than when they were living in a permanent dwelling place. They were young enough to be cooperative, as well as around the same developmental stage. Finally, fluency in English minimized misunderstandings.

The criteria for the staff were chosen for several reasons. A positive relationship/bond with the children was important so that the staff were able to comment on various aspects of the children’s life situations. Interacting with the children and providing direct services for the children provided the staff with inside information about the children’s lives.

Data Collection and Instruments

Data that were collected consisted of ideas and thoughts on what children who live in motels believed
their needs are, as well as what the staff who provided direct services for these children believed the children need. These data were collected from semi-structured individual interviews, which consisted of open-ended questions.

The investigator developed two interview tools, one for the children and one for the staff. The tools began with "ice-breaking" questions and then transitioned to questions meant to elicit answers relevant to the study.

**Procedures**

The procedures for recruiting children from the homework program to participate in the study were similar to procedures for recruiting the staff. To recruit children from the homework program, staff from the Rescue Mission introduced the idea of participating in the study to potential participants. Staff members, who had already established rapport and trust with the students endorsed the study in order to get students to volunteer to be part of the study. This was advantageous to the children because the investigator did not develop a long-term bond with the children and
the children did not feel abandoned by the investigator when the study was completed.

The children who were interested and met the requirements were asked if they wanted to participate in the study. When children responded positively, the study was explained to them again and they were shown the questions. After they read the questions and confirmed they wanted to participate, the investigator and a male staff member went up to the child’s room with the child, to get their parent’s consent.

Once at the child’s room, the investigator introduced the study and explained it. The parents were given a copy of the questions, two consent forms, and the opportunity to ask any questions they had. This also let the parents meet the investigator so they knew whom their children would be talking with.

After the parents signed the consent form, the child and investigator went back to the room where the homework program was held and conducted the interview. Because of the nature of being homeless, there was no guarantee that the children would be back the next week. It was important that the interviews were conducted in a timely fashion in order to interview as many children as possible. Gift certificates to
McDonalds were offered as an incentive. At the end of the interview, whether it was completed or not, these tokens of appreciation were given.

The homework program was held at a motel within the county under study that houses many families. The interviews were conducted at this motel on the evening that the homework assistance and tutoring program was in session. The individual interviews were conducted in part of the room the homework program was not using. The children were not able to see other children, but they could hear them. Because of the nature and location of the program, there was not a private place for the interviews to take place, thus causing the children occasional distractions.

The interviews lasted approximately 10 minutes and were audio recorded. It was deemed that if the interviews were any shorter, adequate information would not be able to be collected. If the interviews lasted too much longer, depending on the age of the child, the interviewer would lose the child’s attention.

Recruitment for the staff members who work at the homework program was elementary. The staff members were already familiar with the study, as they had assisted in recruiting students for the study. The
investigator offered a more comprehensive explanation of the study and asked if they would be interested in participating. It was explained to the staff members that this was advantageous for the study. As the staff members had interacted with the students for a longer period of time, they were able to offer more insight into the lives of the students and the needs they had.

The staff members who were interested and met the requirements were asked if they wanted to participate in the study. When they agreed to participate, they were offered a copy of the questions to review. After they read the questions and confirmed they wanted to participate, they were asked to sign a consent form.

Once they signed the consent form, an appointment was made to conduct the interview. It was important that the interviews were conducted in a timely fashion in order to interview as many staff members as possible. Gift certificates to Starbucks were offered as an incentive. At the end of the interview, whether it was completed or not, these tokens of appreciation were given.

The interviews were conducted after the children went home in the room where the homework program was held. The interviews lasted approximately 20 minutes.
and were audio recorded. If the interviews were any shorter, adequate information would not be able to be collected.

Protection of Human Subjects

Human subjects' information was kept confidential. Participants were not anonymous, as face to face interviews were conducted and the interviewer knew their identity, as did the people working at the homework program and other students who saw them being interviewed. The names in the report, along with all other identifying information, were omitted so no one is able to identify them.

The participants were briefed as to what to expect from the study. They were informed that they could stop the interview at any point and for any reason. If the investigator sensed that they might need to stop, they were asked if they wanted to continue or to terminate the interview.

At the end of the interview, the participants were debriefed. The debriefing included a time for them to ask any questions they had and a time for the investigator to make sure the questions did not raise any issues they needed to further discuss. A business
card for the head of the mental health department at the rescue mission was given to each participant and it was explained that they could call and talk to that person if they started feeling like they needed someone to talk with.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed by coding and then identifying overarching themes. Interviews were transcribed and repeating themes were highlighted. These themes were then categorized into different types of needs.

The main themes were space, substandard living conditions, and programs. After these themes were identified, data were divided into these groups and then were looked at more intensely to identify the specific things homeless children see as their needs.

Summary

In summary, a qualitative, exploratory design was used to determine what homeless children who live in motels identified as their needs. A convenience sample of ten children and four staff members was obtained from the homework program run by the Rescue Mission and their personal information was kept confidential. The data, collected through semi-structured interviews,
consisted of ideas and thoughts that children who live in motels had of their own needs and the ideas and thoughts that staff who worked with these children had of the children’s needs. Finally, the data were analyzed by coding and identifying themes.
Family in Need
by Bill

Homeless people
Are people with blues.
Living their problems
In one little room.

Children live
In darkness with secrets
When wanting to talk,
Sometimes they’re speechless.

Parents are trying
For a better way
While some are distracted
And here to stay.

Giving up hope and
Stopping their trying,
More people are homeless
More children are crying

(Berck, 1992, p.59)
CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Introduction

Chapter Four presents a description of the two samples studied. The results of the study are reported next. The Chapter concludes with a summary.

Presentation of Findings

The study was comprised of two samples. The first sample consisted of ten children. The second sample consisted of four staff members who provided direct services for the children.

Children’s Observations and Opinions

The sample of children consisted of four females and six males, between the ages of eight and twelve who lived in the motel at the time of the interview and attended a program to get help with their homework. It should be noted that all children interviewed were enrolled in school.

The size of the family the children were from ranged from three to six people. Although three of the children stated that there were six people in their family, not all six people lived in one motel room as
two of the siblings were adults and had their own places to live.

All of the children lived with at least one biological parent (in the case of the children interviewed it was their mother) and seven lived with both of their parents, compared to almost half of the families studied by O.C. Partnership (2004) who were two parent families. Although the largest family was six people, the largest number of people living in one room was five, compared to the average of 3 in the study by O.C. Partnership (2004). Six of the families had adult children who were living on their own and one of these families had a father who was in jail.

The children reported that they moved frequently. All of them were able to remember living in an apartment or house before they started moving around. Six of them lived in several different motels. Three of them had lived with relatives and one had lived in a homeless shelter. Two of the children had recently moved to the motel and stated that this was the first time that they had not lived in a permanent residence.

The length of time that the children experienced homelessness varied greatly. Half of the children had been homeless for years, while the other half had been
homeless for a number of days to several months. Four of them were homeless for many years, one of them almost her entire life. Three of the children had been living in the motel for months. In addition, as previously stated, two of them had only been homeless for three days. These results were very similar to the results in the study by O.C. Partnership (2004), that found that families lived in the motel for an average of 30 months.

The first questions the children were asked were meant to ease them into the interview process and help them to feel comfortable with the interviewer. The questions were aimed at gaining insight into the children’s lives. These questions and the interviewer’s response to them set the stage for the rest of interview.

At first, the children were a little hesitant to answer the questions. Their answers were short and concise. As the interviews proceeded, the children seemed more comfortable and began to talk more openly. This indicated that the children were used to guarding themselves until they were sure they could trust someone, due to the unsafe environment they lived in.
When asked what the best thing about living in the motel was, half of the children answered that the homework program and other programs offered were the best thing about living there. Three of the children stated that they liked the fact that there were many other children who lived in the motel and that they were able to live close to their friends the best. Half of the children indicated that the amenities (room service, cable, pool, beds, candy/vending machine) the motel offered were the best thing. Two of the children liked the location of the motel stating that they thought it was nice to live close to their school and the 99 cent store. One of the children indicated that the quiet atmosphere was the best thing about living at the motel.

The children identified two main themes when they were asked what the worst thing about living in the motel was. The first theme was the lack of living space. Half of the children indicated that there was not a place for them to play outside. One of them reported that the room size was too small.

The other main theme identified was the substandard living conditions. One of the children indicated that the shady people who were at the motel
were the worst thing about living there. Another child indicated that the roaches in the motel rooms were the worst thing to deal with. The children reported being afraid at the motel because of these substandard living conditions (roaches, drunken people, drugs, gang members, lack of building upkeep). Two of the children were not able to identify something that they did not like about living at the motel.

Physical living space was the main theme uncovered when the children were asked how life could be better living in the motel. Four of them stated that their lives would be better if they had a place to play outside. Two children indicated that having more room would improve their lives, while one child stated that having a larger kitchen would be nice. One of the children disclosed that not having roaches in the room would make life much better while living at the motel, while three of the children were not able to identify anything that would improve their lives.

The children were not able to articulate ways that the motel staff could help make their lives better. Three of them answered that there was not anything that the motel staff could do and one child did not know how the motel staff could help make life better.
When asked what the staff at the homework program could do that would make their lives better, the children had a range of different answers. Three of the children communicated that the program and the staff did not need to change anything or do anything differently, as it was “good enough”. Four of the children’s answers were themed on the idea of wanting more. One of the children wanted the program to be offered every night, while a different student wanted more help with his homework. One of the other children wanted the staff to talk about the Bible more and another child wanted to staff to treat them more “delicately” and give them more chances when they misbehaved. Three of the children were attending the homework program for the first night and were unable to answer the question.

When asked about their teachers, three of the children reported feeling like they were in “no win” situations and that the teachers could make their lives better by resolving these situations. One of the children reported that racism was an issue and that if the teachers stopped being racist that would make life better. Half of the children responded that there was not anything their teachers could do to make their
lives better while they were living in the motel. One of the children suggested that the teachers could help with homework in order to get good grades, like the staff at the homework program did.

The two main themes identified when the children were asked what their parents could do to help make their lives better were “being together” and “quality of living”. Two of the children said that they wanted to spend more time with their families. Four of the children indicated that their families could improve the quality of their lives (getting an apartment, helping with homework, exterminating roaches). Four of the students stated that there was not anything that their families could do to make their lives better.

Half of the children indicated that if they behaved better, their lives could be better. Two of the children stated that listening to their parents and staff would improve their lives. Two of the children indicated that helping each other out and being nice to one another would improve their lives. One of the children stated that the other children vacuuming would help improve their lives. The other half of the children were not able to identify anything that they
or the other children could do that would make their lives better.

When the children were asked if there was anything else they wanted people to know about life in the motels, one of the children wanted people to know that there are many nice people who live in the motels. The rest of the students did not have anything else they wanted to say.

**Staff Observations and Opinions**

The second sample consisted of four staff members from the homework program who directly worked with the children. Two of them had only been working with the children for seven months. One of them had worked with the children for two and one half years. The final staff member stated that she has been working with the children in the program since its invention in 1999.

The richness of information divulged in the interviews directly related to the length of time the staff had worked with the children. The member who worked with the students the longest revealed the richest information, while the members who had worked with the students the shortest amount of time revealed the less in depth information.
The information the staff members revealed focused on individual and environmental issues. They stated that they thought the homework program itself and the sense of community among the families were the best things for the children living in the motel, "if there is anything good about living there". They reported that they did not hear the children talk about things that they liked about the motel, although they did hear the children talk about their friends.

The staff believed that the worst things about living in the motel were the children’s exposure to shady people/drug activity/violence and being transient. Parents in the O.C. Partnership (2004) study also stated that they frequently moved to escape the violence that their children were exposed to.

The staff reported that the most prevalent thing the children complained about was not having a place to play. They said that they also heard the children talk about how they didn’t like it when their friends moved away.

The staff presented different ideas when asked about what various people could do to help improve the children’s lives. First, it was suggested that that motel staff provide a place for the children to play.
and have more programs for the children. The staff thought that it was important for the children’s parents to focus on education, both their own and their children’s.

Finally, there were several different ideas on how the children’s teachers could help make their lives a bit better. Two of the staff members suggested that the children be tested to make sure they were enrolled in the proper grade and screened for learning disabilities. Another suggested that the teachers build relationships with the parents to find out their situations and the children’s needs. Lastly, education on nutrition was suggested as something important for the children to be taught.

When the staff members were asked if there was anything else that they thought people needed to know about the children who lived in the motel, they all had answers. The first staff member wanted people to know that “these kids are just like regular kids”. A second staff person said “...just don’t give up on them. They like to test the water...and we can’t write them off. You know, just cuz a kid grows up in a hotel doesn’t mean that they aren’t as smart... I mean, they’re just kids. And kids will be kids no matter where they are.”
The third staff member stated that they are "such sharp, smart students" and "they just need someone who believes in them". The last staff person thought that more people needed to be educated that there were families who were living in motels and that these families needed help.

It should be noted that children and staff members were asked about medical care the children receive. After the study was completed, it was deemed that these questions were not relevant to this study. Consequently, themes were not identified or categorized into needs the children had.

Summary

Chapter Four reviewed the results of the project. There were two major themes identified from the interviews with the children and the staff members at the homework program who work with the children. The first theme identified was a need for more living space, especially a space for the children to play outside. The second theme identified the substandard living conditions the children were living in. The children were not able to identify many things that other people could do to help improve their lives. The
The overarching theme was a need for an area to play outside.
Mixed Feelings of Being Homeless
by Vivian

Being homeless
makes me sad,
and living in this small pad
drives me mad.

and sometimes I feel like a freak
not able to seek
happiness,
until I'm out of here
and lose some fear.

But for now this is my home
which I could never bring myself to call
my own.

(Berck, 1992, p.49)
CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Introduction

Chapter Five is a presentation of what children who live in motels and the staff members who work with them think they need. A discussion of the children’s and staff opinions of what the children need will follow. Recommendations for Social Work Practice are presented. Lastly, the Chapter concludes with a summary.

Discussion

The study revealed that there are several things the children and staff think the children need to make their lives better. The children and staff all revealed the need for more space, especially for an area where the children can play and make noise. They also talked about how their living spaces are small. One of the children talked about how she had no where to go when she needed to get away from her family to be by herself.

According to the children Berck (1992) interviewed, this was also a real problem for them. One child reported going to a small area in the room
where the refrigerator was to get away from her sister because that was the only place she could be by herself. Another girl stated that it was so hard to find a quiet place to do her homework that she went from being a straight A student to failing. Throughout Berck's book, countless other children mentioned how the lack of space to play, or simply live, negatively affected their lives.

Another space issue is the need for a kitchen. Many of the children do not eat food that is healthy. The results of these poor eating habits were observed first hand as I watched a child of a healthy weight gain what appeared to be fifteen pounds in a matter of five weeks. One of the staff members also reported seeing many families buying pizzas at a local chain for $5 each. Fast food is cheap, and without a place to prepare food, families do not have many other options.

Kozol (1988) confirmed this problem. In his work with homeless people living in hotels, he witnessed first hand how many of the rooms lacked refrigerators and places to prepare food. Without these amenities, families tried to prepare food on hot plates, but these were often times not allowed in hotel rooms.
The homework program was one of the first things that the children said was the best thing about living in the motel. The homework program was also the first thing that half of the staff named as being the best thing for the students. The homework program provided a place for the children to get help with their homework, but also provided for many of their other needs. The children were given attention and validated in their thoughts and feelings. It was an atmosphere where they were able to be children. The staff taught them about spiritual issues, but also provided them with bag lunches at the end of the night that they would be able to either eat or save.

Providing bag lunches may seem like a simple, unimportant act, but this meant a lot to the children. Many of the children would devour the lunches as soon as they were handed out. If there were extra bag lunches, they were given to the children with siblings who did not attend the program. These lunches were also important to some of the children because they were then able to take a lunch to school, just like their classmates who did not live in motels.

This program demonstrates elements of empowerment theory. The staff members looked to find strengths
within the children to build on. The children had positive relationships with the staff members, where the child played an active role in shaping the relationship. The staff listened to the children's needs and feelings about their lives. The program was also able to help them meet some of their physical needs by providing lunches.

One of the children was very concerned about passing to the next grade in school. He stated that he had failed last year and he really wanted to pass this year. The answers to many of the questions were centered on what others could do to help him pass.

Several different studies found that homeless children do not do as well in school as children who have permanent places to live. Duffield (2001) found that homelessness greatly affects academic success. O'Leary (2001) identified several different issues that affected homeless children's educations and often led to academic underachievement. The children in Berck's (1992) interviews also shared how hard it was to do well in school because of all the moving they did and all the distractions where they lived. O.C. Partnership (2004) also found that students needed
extra help with their schoolwork because of their living situations.

Unsafe living conditions was also a theme that was mentioned many times by both staff and children. Several of the children mentioned that they were scared when they were at the motel because of the activities that went on and the types of people who lived there.

One student and staff member both told the same story about a shooting and stabbing that happened at the motel. Similarly, the staff and students talked about the drug and gang activity and how there was now a security guard employed at the motel, although this did not ensure anyone's safety when drugs and weapons are involved. Staff also talked about pedophiles and other killings at the motel.

The literature also illustrated how prevalent violence was in the lives of children living in motels. One of the themes that Nunez (2001) found in the data he analyzed was that homeless children were exposed to violence at an early age. The child telling the story above was ten years old. DeForge, Zehnder, Minick, and Carmon (2001) discovered that the children they interviewed were fearful and wanted the violence to end.
Kozol (1988) confirmed this situation with his interviews from parents in hotels in New York. The parents Kozol interviewed reported regular prostitution and drug activity in the hotels. They also talked about the domestic violence their children were exposed to while playing in hallways.

Despite all the negatives of living in the motel environment, these children did not verbalize many complaints. Several of the children stated that they have good lives and are happy. In Heusel's study (1995), one quarter of the students interviewed also reported that being homeless was not bad. Other children could not think of things that they did not like other than not having a place to play. This was unexpected, considering how the literature paints a grim picture of life in the motels.

One of the reasons these students did not find life to be so bad living in the motel was the presence of the homework program that was available one time per week. This was definitely a high point in their week, and it appeared as if this gave them hope and something to look forward to. The children Berck (1992) interviewed looked forward to their summers because they knew that there would be activities available for
them to participate in. These programs allowed the children an area to play and forget about their lives for a little while.

Limitations

There were several limitations to this project. The first limitation was that some of the children were coached not to answer the questions that inquired as to what different people could do to make their lives better. Living in motels is very tentative. Not everyone can be trusted, so there was no guarantee that the children would not be able to be identified. Even though the people who work at the motel would not be given copies of this project, that does not mean that someone else might not tell them what a certain child said about the conditions of the motel, thus causing the family to be evicted from their room. There could have been many other reasons why the one father had not wanted his children to answer those questions.

Another limitation was that the interviews were conducted in a place where the children were easily distracted. The interviews were held in part of the room where the homework program was taking place, which became quite noisy at times. Several times during the
interviews other children interrupted the interviews to get something or to ask a question. Frequently it was hard to gain the child’s attention again.

The small sample size was also a limitation. All of the children interviewed lived in the same motel and participated in a program, creating a bright spot in their weeks. Although this meant the sample had a common experience with a program, the findings cannot be generalized to all children living in motels.

Recommendations for Social Work Practice, Policy and Research

Oasis Rap
by Navonni

At Oasis club we do art,
We go to the library, we go to the park.
On Saturdays we head outside.
We take lots of trips with a subway ride.
  We exercise, can’t you see?
  We work out to be as healthy as can be.
  We get picked up each and every day,
  We learn to read in an awesome way.
We put up a Learning Tree,
So we could learn to Read Read Read!
OASIS. OASIS! It’s better than other places.

(Berck, 1992, p.92)
Based on the information gathered from this study, it would be reasonable to recommend that motels with a large population of families who make the motel their primary home be given incentives by the county to provide areas for children to play. It would also be reasonable to suggest that these motels be given resources to provide extra-curricular type programs or activities for children.

In addition to providing programs for school aged children, preschool type programs would be an asset for families who have small children. Many small children can be found living in motels who have never attended pre-school. Early education is critical for children to get a good foundation, especially children who are considered at-risk. This recommendation was affirmed by O.C. Partnership (2004), stating that school readiness programs targeting 3-5 year old children residing in motels are needed. Conclusions in Ziesmer and Marcoux’s study (1992) also indicated that prevention is the key to helping these children academically and that alone, direct services are not sufficient.

Several of the staff members who worked with the children believed that they needed extra attention at
school. Some of the children were believed to have undiagnosed learning disabilities. O.C. Partnership (2004) also suggested that extra attention be given to these children and promoted extra funding for programs geared to helping these children succeed in school.

Programs to educate the staff who work at schools in the areas that residence motels are located in could also greatly help the children. If the teachers were aware of the conditions some of their students were living in and what life was like for the students, they would better be able to help these children succeed in school. Additionally, extra programs geared towards helping the children who live in the motels with their homework or providing a quiet place for the children to do their homework would go a long way to help these children succeed in their educations. Daniels (1992) confirms that extra programs could help these children meet their basic needs.

A recommendation to all state governments would be to begin an education/informational campaign at the residence motels. This campaign would inform families who live in the motels about the McKinney-Vento Act which guarantees homeless children an education. It would also provide information about other programs
that are available to help families with food, clothes, and shelter.

This was also a recommendation that O.C. Partnership (2004) made in their report. O.C. Partnership (2004) believed that necessary services needed to be advertised at the motels to ensure that the residents were aware of the services available to them.

In order to help these homeless children, more research needs to be done. Very little research has been done on the needs of children who live in motels. More information needs to be gathered on what the children themselves think they need, as well as what their parents identify as needs. It would also be helpful to interview staff at programs that provide services for these children and to interview the teachers at schools that have large populations of homeless students.

Conclusions

There is still much work that needs to be done in order to meet the needs of children who live in motels. The children and staff all agree that the children need more room, especially room to play. They also agree
that more programs are needed in the motel to help meet the children's needs. It would be beneficial to the families to conduct more research on the programs that these children need the most and then to advocate for funding to implement them.
APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE: CHILDREN
Interview Schedule:
Children

1. Tell me something about yourself.
   a. What are some things you like to do?
   b. What grade in school are you?
   c. What do you like about school?
   d. How many people are in your family?
   e. Who do you live with?

2. What is the best thing about living in a motel?

3. What is the worst thing about living in a motel?

4. When you get sick do you go to the doctor?
   a. Do you see a doctor at the doctor’s office?
   b. Do you always see the same doctor?

5. How could your life be better while living in a motel?
   a. Are there things the motel staff could do?
   b. Could the (name of homework program) staff do anything differently?
   c. What about the teachers at your school?

6. Are there things that you or the other children could do to make your life better?
   a. What about your family?
APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT: CHILDREN
Consent to Participate in Study on Needs of Children Who Live in Motels

The study your child is being invited to participate in is designed to explore the needs that children who live in motels believe they have. This study is being conducted by Katrina M. Devine, a Social Work student at California State University San Bernardino working on a Masters degree, under the supervision of Dr. Nancy Mary, D.S.W., Professor of Social Work. This study has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board of California State University San Bernardino.

In this study your child will be asked some questions about their personal likes and dislikes, and how school, motels, and other organizations might be more helpful to them. This study will require one interview session of approximately thirty minutes which will be audio recorded. Whether your child agrees to be interviewed or not, will not in any way affect the services they or your family get from (name of homework program) or (name of rescue mission).

Please be assured that any information your child provides will be held in strict confidence by the researchers. Identifying details will be changed to protect you and your child’s privacy. At no time will your child’s name be reported along with their responses.

This study is designed to give your child an opportunity to voice his/her needs. By participating in this study, your child will be able to help communicate his/her needs to people who provide services. Not much study has been done on children who live in motels and not much is known about what they need. By participating in this study, your child will provide information that will be helpful in shaping services that may be offered for them in the future.

During the interview unpleasant memories or feelings may be brought up. If you feel like it would help your child to talk to someone about memories or feelings this study brings up, please call (name), (phone number), the manager of the Mental Wellness Program at (name of rescue mission).

Please understand that your child’s participation in this research is totally voluntary and that he/she is free to stop the interview at any time without penalty, and can refuse to answer any questions. In appreciation, your child will be given gift certificates to McDonald’s, whether the interview is completed or not.

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please contact Dr. Nancy Mary, 909-880-5560 or by email at nmary@csusb.edu

I acknowledge that I have been informed of, and understand, the nature and purpose of this study, and I freely give consent for my child, _______ to participate. I acknowledge that I am the legal parent/guardian of the above named minor and am at least 18 years old.

Parent’s Signature ______________________ Date __________
Researcher’s Signature ____________________ Date __________

By initialing here, I give my consent for the interview will be audio recorded.

* At the end of this study, the results will be made available through (name of homework program).
Child’s Assent to Participate in Study on Needs of Children Who Live in Motels

My name is Katrina. I’m a college student and I want to find out about the needs that children who live in motels believe they have. I would like to ask you some questions about things you like or don’t like and how school, the motel, and other people might be able to help you better. We will meet one time for about half an hour and I will record what we talk about so I can remember everything you say. By talking with me and giving me your opinions, you will be able to help adults know what you feel like you need. In the future, your answers could help make life a little better for you or other kids.

Everything we talk about will stay between you and me. I will not tell anyone what you tell me. When I write my report, anything that could identify you will be changed. No one will be able to identify you. Do you have any questions about this?

Your participation in this interview is totally voluntary and if you want to end our conversation at any time you just need to tell me. You’ll still get the gift certificates, even if you don’t finish answering all the questions.

After I have the results, you will be able to get a copy of them from the staff here.

Does that all make sense? Do you have any questions before we begin?

___ ____________________________
Child’s Signature Date

___ ____________________________
Researcher’s Signature Date

By initialing here, I give my consent for the interview to be tape recorded.
APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE: STAFF
Interview Schedule for Staff

1. How long have you been working with the students?
2. What have you observed to be as the best thing for them living in the motel? Have the students told you about anything they really like about living here?
3. What have you observed to be as the worst thing for them living in the motel? Have the students told you about anything they really don’t like about living here or anything that they’re afraid of?
4. How long does it seem like the children live here?
5. Have you noticed if the children get sick very often? Do you ever hear them talk about going to the doctor when they get sick?
6. Have you heard the students make comments about things that people could do that would make their lives better while they’re living in the motel?
   a. Are there things you think that could make their lives better?
   b. Things the motel staff could do?
   c. Things their teachers could do differently?
7. Are there things that you think they or the other children could do to make their lives better?
   a. Things their families could do differently?
8. Is there anything else you want to tell me about the children who live here?
APPENDIX E

INFORMED CONSENT: STAFF
Consent to Participate in Study on Needs of Children Who Live in Motels

You are being invited to participate in a study that is designed to explore the needs that children who live in motels believe they have. This study is being conducted by Katrina M. Devine, a Social Work student at California State University San Bernardino working on a Masters degree, under the supervision of Dr. Nancy Mary, D.S.W., Professor of Social Work. This study has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board of California State University San Bernardino.

In this study you will be asked some questions about how long you have worked with children living in motels, observations you have made about their lives and things they need, and services that might be beneficial for them. This study will require one interview session of approximately twenty minutes which will be audio recorded. Whether you agree to be interviewed or not, will not in any way affect your involvement with (name of homework program) or (name of rescue mission).

Please be assured that any information you provide will be held in strict confidence by the researchers. Identifying details will be changed to protect your and the children’s privacy. At no time will your name be reported along with your responses.

This study is designed to give you the opportunity to voice your opinion on what children who live in motels might need. By participating in this study, you will be able to help communicate the children’s needs to people who provide services. Not much study has been done on children who live in motels and not much is known about what they need. By participating in this study, you will provide information that will be helpful in shaping services that may be offered for them in the future.

Please understand that your participation in this research is totally voluntary and that you are free to stop the interview at any time without penalty, and can refuse to answer any questions. In appreciation for your participation, you will be given gift certificates to Starbucks, whether the interview is completed or not.

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please contact Dr. Nancy Mary, 909-860-5560 or by email at nmary@csusb.edu

By signing this form, I acknowledge that I am at least 18 years old and give my consent to participate in the study.

______________________________  ________________
Signature                               Date

______________________________  ________________
Researcher’s Signature                 Date

By initialing here, I give my consent for the interview to be tape recorded.

* At the end of this study, the results will be made available through (name of homework program).
APPENDIX F

DEBRIEFING STATEMENTS
Debriefing Statement for Children

You have just participated in a study on the needs of children who live in motels. The questions you were asked might have brought up unpleasant memories or feelings. It is completely normal if this happened to you. It is also normal if these questions did not bring up any unpleasant memories or feelings.

If you want to talk to someone about memories or feelings this study brought up, now or in the future, you can contact (name of counselor) at the Rescue Mission. Here is his information. (I will hand the students a card or paper with his contact information on it.) You can call him whenever you need to.

Thank you for participating in my study and for providing information that could make life for children who live in motels a little bit better.
Debriefing Statement for Staff

You have just participated in a study on the needs of children who live in motels. The questions you were asked might have brought up feelings of helplessness. It is completely normal if this happened to you. It is also normal if these questions did not bring up any unpleasant feelings.

If you want to talk to someone about the feelings this study brought up, now or in the future, you can contact (name of counselor) at the Rescue Mission. Here is his information. (I will hand the staff a card or paper with his contact information on it.) You can call him whenever you need to.

Thank you for participating in my study and for providing information that could make life for children who live in motels a little bit better.
REFERENCES


O.C. Partnership (2004). A Strategic Plan for Assisting Individuals and Families Residing in Motels to Reach and Sustain Stable Housing DRAFT. OC Partnership.
