

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY
JOHN W. RAWLINGS SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

CRISIS OF YOUTH HOMELESSNESS
IN BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA

A Dissertation-in-Praxis Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education in Christian Leadership
by
Velma Annette Williams

Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA

2024

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ABSTRACT

The economic and educational conditions of Jefferson County, Alabama, have contributed significantly to the increase of homeless families with children (LaGory et al., 2018). The failures of the foster care system have exponentially increased the population of homeless youth ages 19 to 26 (Burge et al., 2021). The lack of efficient public transportation emergency and affordable long-term housing has created a permanent population of homelessness (Kelly, 2020). Within the homeless culture, the increased incidents of violence, substance abuse, and sexual and physical abuse combined with functional illiteracy create an environment that breeds repetitive behaviors that reproduce the homeless outcomes (Burge et al., 2021). This dissertation-in-praxis will provide a window into the cultural and systemic causes that exacerbate the homeless condition in Birmingham's youth as viewed by the Youth Towers' staff. The legal termination of segregation by the Civil Rights Act of 1964 created an exodus to the suburbs as a haven for those desiring homogeneous communities (LaGory et al., 2018). Subsequently, the infrastructure that supports thriving communities, such as successful schools, adequate public transportation, neighborhood job sources for youth, and extracurricular activities, has been dismantled (Garson, 2005). Ultimately, the infrastructure provides few options for citizens experiencing stressful life events to stop the downward spiral of the economic conditions that lead to homelessness (Hall, 2023). This dissertation-in-praxis identified gaps in services and political systems that, if amended, could reduce such incidences and create a path to stability that would result in ending the pipeline to homelessness among the city's youth.

Keywords: homeless, infrastructure, foster care, stressful life events

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to my deceased parents: Zilmon L., my father, who told me I could do anything anyone else can do and to get an education; they cannot take that from you. To Estelle, my mother, who unknowingly planted the seed for this doctoral degree by expressing her respect and pride in Dr. Helen Nunn, a Black female in my small town of Blytheville who had earned a doctoral degree; and to my late sister, Zela, who made me believe I could do anything, thank you! To my son, Aaron Alexander Williams, who I encourage always to do his best, be his best, and present his best, let this inspire you.

And finally, but always first in my heart, I dedicate this work to my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ! The famine, although tragic, blessed Joseph as the COVID-19 quarantine blessed me. It provided the quiet time needed to reflect, meditate, and complete the academic requirements for this degree. I desire that God will use this accomplishment to serve and develop His people and me for kingdom service.

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List of Abbreviations

Aid for Dependent Children (AFDC)

Department of Human Resources (DHR)

Housing and Urban Development (HUD)

Median (Mdn)

Public Service Announcement (PSA)

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

CHAPTER ONE: THE PROBLEM IN PRAXIS

Introduction

Birmingham, Alabama, has experienced a hardening population of youth homelessness (LaGory et al., 2018). Parents' homelessness or abandonment has caused children to reside in temporary housing, hospitals, residential treatment facilities, detention facilities, and emergency foster care (LaGory et al., 2018). One of the pipelines for homeless youth in Birmingham, ages 19 to 26, has been the Alabama Foster Care system (Kelly, 2020).

Once youth reach age 18, they age out of the foster care system (Kelly, 2020). If unable to maintain a stable life through gainful employment, pursuing higher education, or joining the armed forces, those youth become candidates for transitional living programs and wrap-around services for other issues that are barriers to independent living (Bowen et al., 2018).

Homelessness plagues all demographics to include race, gender, and education (Youngbloom et al., 2021). However, the youth population generally becomes homeless because of decisions or processes that are not their own (Barnett, 2020). Youths become homeless due to their parents' homeless states, attempts to escape abuse, the breakdown of the family, and aging out of foster care (Kelly, 2020). Some youths become homeless because of substance abuse and/or incarceration, which are decision-driven choices (Burge et al., 2021).

Factors that facilitate homelessness are inadequate education, public transportation, and available low-income housing. Therefore, this dissertation praxis has provided a strategic plan to incorporate seamless services to address those components of homelessness. In the youth population, the breakdown of family relationships and the pipeline to homelessness created by a failing foster care system were addressed. Remedies to eliminate youth homelessness were developed for those with the desire to work and achieve functional independence.

The Problem

Teens are aging out of the foster care system without the needed life skills to maintain an independent lifestyle (Appendix A). This pipeline often ends in homelessness for youth after age 19. Extended foster care continues in Birmingham, Alabama, through age 21 (LaGory et al., 2018). However, youth homelessness does not stop at age 21. Young people between the ages of 19 and 26 are a specific demographic facing homelessness in staggering numbers (Bowen et al., 2018). Members of this demographic are reachable, pliable, and, as a whole, desire to sustain a traditional lifestyle (Kelly, 2020). Youth homelessness has affected the community through lowered high school graduation rates, higher under or unemployment rates, increased crime committed by and to this population, and increased substance abuse; it also provides an at-risk pool for sex trafficking and other personal crimes (Courtney, 2009). Homelessness is exacerbated by mental and physical health issues (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2023). This cultural phenomenon creates a demographic that requires a temporary social network to reduce or eliminate long-term social stress from homeless condition implications and its long-term impact on human development (Bowen et al., 2018).

Problem and Response: Program, Process, or Product

The current Birmingham culture, with all its social services, has an increasing phenomenon of youth homelessness between the ages of 19 and 26 (LaGory et al., 2018). This population of homeless youth in Birmingham is a result of parental issues, interpersonal problems, criminal activity, and aging out of the foster care system at age 19 without the skills to live productive and independent lives (Courtney, 2009). The perpetual factor of homelessness is the lack of marketable skills to earn a living, thus being unable to provide food and shelter for

oneself (Bowen et al., 2018). Another barrier to gainful employment is the lack of a social network, which includes consistent public transportation (LaGory et al., 2018).

Affordable housing is lacking throughout the Birmingham-Metro Area (Gambrel & Blankenship-Mays, 2013). Long overdue remodeling of existing units has required abolishing some low-income housing communities altogether, further reducing the available low-income housing inventory (Gambrel & Blankenship-Mays, 2013). After reaching the age of maturity, adult children must leave their homes in a public housing community (Ghent, 2023). If the female does not have a child or a life skill, she is at risk of homelessness (Youngbloom et al., 2021). If the young male lacks the life skills to support his basic needs, he is at risk of becoming homeless (Youngbloom et al., 2021).

The exact impact is repeated with children in the foster care system (Courtney, 2009). After age 19, children age out of foster care, with extension possibilities to age 21 (Courtney, 2009). Therefore, without a transitional living safety net, these young people enter an adult world, in many cases, without the necessary skill sets to provide the basics for human existence. In addition, Alabama has attempted to make homelessness a crime by making two or more arrests for loitering, a Class C misdemeanor, punishable by a sentence of up to 30 days in jail and up to a US\$500 fine (Newsum, 2023). Therefore, homelessness, in itself, may become criminal.

Homelessness among the youth population ages 19–26 is a social issue with a complex but executable solution. Hall (2023) argued that the government must consider the needs of the poor and disadvantaged when making public policies concerning transportation, education, and business zoning. Therefore, a comprehensive plan that addresses homeless youth must be developed by a coalition comprised of Birmingham city leaders and planners, the local and Alabama State Department of Human Resources, the Birmingham and Jefferson County School

Boards, the Housing and Urban Development department, and local not-for-profits with a service focus to the homeless population. Each stakeholder must be willing to make concessions in some areas while receiving more resources and authority in others.

Many of these organizations address homelessness within their service delivery and strategic plans. Unfortunately, this shotgun approach to homeless youth does not provide long-term, sustainable solutions. Moreover, there is no unifying agent to knit the services together into a tapestry that provides a continuum of care that supports the homeless population or those at risk of homelessness. Subsequently, there are many targeted services for individual symptoms of homelessness. Unfortunately, no continuum of care helps alleviate or explain the smorgasbord of reasons for and the results of homelessness. Therefore, this dissertation-in-praxis developed a strategic action plan to reduce youth homelessness by 30% and start a path to eliminate repetitive homelessness in Birmingham, Alabama youth by 2030.

One organization that should rethink its service delivery plan was Youth Towers, a 501©3 organization providing comprehensive wrap-around services for homeless youth and their dependent children. Youth Towers collaborated with this dissertation-in-praxis research to identify ways to serve the homeless youth population better. Youth Towers currently provides clothes, food, shelter, transportation, education, and utility assistance with mental and physical health treatment through partnerships with other agencies. Youth Towers serves more than 200 homeless youth on any given day. That number is a fraction of those living on the streets, sleeping on friends' sofas, or existing in other transient forms of living (LaGory et al., 2018).

Defining Reality: The Current Need

It was important to know how many people comprised this population to create effective solutions to the youth homeless challenge. Therefore, the headcount of youth receiving services

through emergency and transitional shelters, domestic violence shelters, and those living in temporary housing paid with a voucher for a family member was invaluable (Kondratas, 1991). Then, an estimation of those who have run away and slept on the streets, in abandoned houses, commercial buildings, or accessible outdoor sheds, barns, or crawlspaces and those who live in parks and campgrounds along with those in institutions, such as hospitals, jails, and detention centers helped to quantify the problem (Sandonato, 2023).

The 2020 U. S. Census reported numerous barriers in counting people experiencing homelessness (Census Counts, 2020). Frequently, there is no legal shelter available to those on the street. Therefore, refuge is taken in business alcoves, parks after hours, and overpasses (Cassaday, 2023). These domiciles reduce the chances of interacting with the law and other authority figures for fear of becoming a part of the legal system (Cassaday, 2023). People experiencing homelessness choose not to interact with those outside of their communities to preserve their sense of safety and security (Kelly, 2020). Therefore, identifying the scope of the condition was intensely problematic.

Homelessness is an embarrassing state (Sandonato, 2023). Those experiencing it are reluctant to discuss the cause. With limited access to those on the street, the intake process for people in temporary housing, shelters, hospitals, and incarcerated situations revealed several adverse life events prevalent in the population: parental divorce, eviction, incarceration, inability to work with others, school expulsion, and physical and sexual abuse (LaGory et al., 2018). The victims of youth homelessness experienced one or more and generally three of the significant causes of homelessness, including physical, mental, sexual, emotional, and substance abuse (Burge et al., 2021). Often, members of this population feel isolated and have trust issues. Subsequently, determining the causes of the condition may be a time-consuming effort. If

children are homeless because they ran away to escape physical and sexual abuse in the home, there is a high probability that they do not trust adults (Burge et al., 2021). Even when placed in foster care, establishing trust can be a journey (Youngbloom et al., 2021). Unfortunately, the youth may have aged out of the program by the time the trust is established and may reenter the homeless population (LaGory et al., 2018). Just as lifelong criminals become institutionalized to prison life, youth can become institutionalized to homelessness.

Those who have been defined as chronically homeless are described as “an unaccompanied homeless individual with a disabling condition who has either been continuously homeless for a year or more or has had at least four episodes of homelessness in the past three years” (LaGory et al., 2018, p. 38). For the youth population, the chronic homeless segment generally consists of runaways (Sandonato, 2023). Whereas, for adults, the prevalent cause of repetitive homelessness is divorce or unsuccessful relationships (LaGory et al., 2018). This population tends to find shelter on the streets rather than using shelters. The general concern seems to be that the shelters do not have enough beds or methods to safeguard personal belongings (Youngbloom et al., 2021).

Homelessness is a social problem that encompasses much more than physical shelter (Kondratas, 1991). There is a need for wraparound services to include relationship and personal counseling, medical and psychological services, education, and job training, followed by assistance in finding affordable housing (Burge et al., 2021). The newly housed person needs a social structure for emotional and social support (LaGory et al., 2018). Living on one’s own requires many skills, including paying bills on time, not incurring late fees, grocery shopping and preparing meals, and getting up and working on time (Burge et al., 2021). These skills may not have been cultivated in the homeless state or mindset (LaGory et al., 2018).

After identifying the main reasons for continued or chronic homelessness in the youth population, developing programs to train and transition them to temporary housing is imperative to their journey to permanent housing (Youngbloom et al., 2021). Public transportation does not adequately serve areas with transitional or low-income housing as effectively as residents need services (Kondratas, 1991). Suppose one relies on public transportation for work. In that case, there may not be a route that supports the work schedule or allows one time to participate in health, educational, or emotional rehabilitation processes that support the journey to gainful employment (LaGory et al., 2018). In Birmingham, transportation is one barrier to reentering mainstream society (LaGory et al., 2018).

The deterioration of personal relations with family and friends plays a role in the emotional component of homelessness (Burge et al., 2021). A home incorporates the feeling of belonging, even if only to extended family and friends (McLeod, 2023). However, entering into homelessness can be accompanied by or a result of losing interpersonal relationships. Specifically, for males, divorce is a catalyst that can result in homelessness (LaGory et al., 2018). For females, there are unwanted or unplanned pregnancies that create stressful life events and increase the possibility of losing the child to the system due to unstable housing (Burge et al., 2021). In Birmingham, the Young Women's Christian Association provides temporary housing for mothers who are victims of violence (LaGory et al., 2018). However, as with most social service agencies, there can be a waiting period, which increases the chances of becoming a victim of crime or the loss of the child to the system (Kondratas, 1991).

The safe haven that a home provides is lost when one becomes homeless (Burge et al., 2021). Therefore, one has to learn to adapt to noise, dirt, insects, lack of food and water, shortages of bathroom facilities, privacy, security, and safety (LaGory et al., 2018). These

environments prioritize avoidance of the vulnerability of theft and personal attacks. Therefore, homeless people focus on ways to protect themselves and their personal property by finding remote places to bunker or becoming a part of a homeless group where they find some level of security and comradery (Cassaday, 2023).

A major goal of the intervention is establishing trust (Burge et al., 2021). To help in areas where the homeless person may admit to a need and not try to force services that they may not want or may not be ready to accept is a required skill to minister to people experiencing homelessness (1 Peter 2:17-25). Food, water, and clothing are basics that tend to create a pathway to a conversation and learning the priority for that person (Mcleod, 2023). Homelessness is much more complex than providing shelter. A holistic approach must be taken to address the physical, mental, and spiritual needs of the person and encourage change in the increasing instances of homelessness (Psalm 73:26). It is required of the believer to speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves and to defend the rights of the poor and needy (Proverbs 31:8-9).

Defining a Preferred Future: The Visionary Focus

Vision Statement

In developing a strategy to address homelessness from a servant leadership perspective, it was imperative to consider all stakeholders. The desired vision for this research was to have a comprehensive, seamless, and collaborative approach with government, business, and the not-for-profit markets to address the state of homelessness with an emphasis on prevention for youth for Birmingham.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this research was to develop a tool that would reduce homelessness in youth ages 19 to 26 by 20% over the next 5 years and by 10% each subsequent year until the pipeline is eradicated of repetitious and chronic homelessness in the youth population.

Objectives

While researching data on homeless youth in Birmingham, the following objectives were identified as barriers for the homeless having sustainable housing. If these objectives are met, it will create a stopgap to youth homelessness over time:

1. If we develop a skills program to teach basic reading, writing, arithmetic, and life skills, the cycle of homelessness can be interrupted and become non-repetitive through employment.
2. If vacated buildings are identified for repair, more affordable housing is available for youth placement.
3. If businesses are incentivized to locate in the city limits, available jobs would increase within the public transportation route.
4. If changes to public transportation goals can be negotiated, residents will have reliable transportation.
5. Suppose we address the foster care processes that perpetuate youth homelessness through the separation of families. In that case, we can slow the rates of youth entering the homeless state by aging out of foster care.

Outputs

Each objective was used to produce specific outcomes to eliminate homelessness in

Birmingham Youth. Each output is tied to an objective. Those outputs included the following:

1. Literacy increases in the youth population have been identified as a contributing risk of homelessness. Subsequently one of the focus areas of the Life Skills Program will be reading improvement.
2. Creating a community initiative that develops abandoned buildings, helps neighborhood citizens buy-in to the overall objective of clearing the blight and housing the homeless.

3. The business community can create excitement for potential good-paying jobs in communities that have been void of good-paying jobs. The creation of jobs will incentivize people to move in the neighborhoods to be close to their employment.
4. When engaged in conversations targeting transportation, one major focus point was more service routes using smaller buses until utilization increases to support the standardized buses.
5. Family unification and reunification has to be the primary goal in every aspect of foster care. Recommendations for policy changes around removing children from homes with effective intervention processes.

Outcomes

Typically, programs were measured by increased resources and the number of people served (Courtney, 2009). Ideally, success was measured by the number of people elevated from chronic homelessness to temporary homelessness in a shelter or emergency housing. Then, the gap in the continuum of care can be bridged from temporary housing to empowering them to gain and sustain permanent housing successfully (Kerman et al., 2009).

Emergency shelters and transitional housing services would be rewarded for shortening the length of stay by increasing movement to permanent housing (Youngbloom et al., 2021). Although, initially, housing may be based on the individual. However, program success is measured by the number of reunited households with wrap-around services to ensure healthy conditions that reduce the return to lifestyles that support homelessness, such as substance abuse, emotional or mental illness, and the lack of resources to handle life's stressful events (Napoleon et al., 2023). Temporary housing provides a temporary fix to a long-term problem.

Skill training is imperative to reducing and eradicating homelessness (Carson, 2023). Independent living is predicated on reading and comprehending basic instructions (Courtney, 2009). Homelessness is the result of converging social, financial, emotional, and often physical issues (Kelly, 2020). The provision of shelter alone does not successfully address the homeless

condition. Homelessness is a pathology just like any other disease, and it must be treated holistically. Services must be integrated to eradicate the condition (LaGory et al., 2018).

Certainly, the next level of success is contingent upon enabling the clients to establish strong social ties. Therefore, support in setting boundaries, establishing healthy friendships and intimate relationships, and managing family relationships become important to wholeness. Ultimately, the person's self-esteem increases, and they can see others through a lens of empathy and live in reality (Mcleod, 2023).

The Collaborating Organization, Team, and Coach

Organizational Description, Mission, Vision

Youth Towers is a 501(c)3 not-for-profit organization serving youth aged 19 to 26. It was founded in 2011 by Alice Westery. She received a Bachelor of Arts in Social Work with a minor in Sociology from the University of Alabama at Birmingham in 2003. Ms. Westery is a 20-year social work veteran working as the Jefferson County Department of Human Resources Independent Living Coordinator. In that role, Ms. Westery saw a need for support for those youth aging out of foster care at 19 without the life skills to live independently. She witnessed the cycle of homelessness resulting from a system that housed children rather than nurtured and developed children (Westery, 2020).

Organizational Description

By 2018, 7 years after its inception, Youth Towers had served more than 230 young people who had found themselves without permanent housing. Now, Youth Towers provides housing for more than 300 homeless youth, with four facilities. Through collaborations with like-minded organizations, Youth Towers provides life skills training, public bus passes, utility assistance, food, interviewing techniques, clothes, mentorships, and emergency hotel stays

(Westery, 2020). The organization is led by an 11-member volunteer board of directors and staffs one administrator, Ms. DeeZandria Barfield. She conducts intake interviews and makes placement recommendations. Mrs. Alice Westery is the executive director and final approving authority on intake and placement decisions (Westery, 2020).

Youth Tower placements are for 18 months. However, that timeline may be extended if funds are available, and the client is not ready to live independently. Youth Towers serves all demographics and provides case management and rapid rehousing if a client is unsuccessful in maintaining housing (Westery, 2020).

Youth Towers provides temporary housing while preparing the young person for permanent housing by teaching job search skills and how to maintain employment. Successful matriculation in an education or skill trade course is required. In addition, the young person must have a banking account, complete credit counseling, and a basic understanding of federal housing laws (Westery, 2020).

Organizational Mission Statement

Youth Towers is here to house and teach young people aged 18–26 to prevent homelessness and give them the tools to build a better life (Westery, 2020).

Organizational Vision Statement

The vision we work for is a home and bright future for every young person in our community, including the following components (Westery, 2020).

- We welcome all, including the unwelcomed.
- We treat each person with dignity and respect.
- We believe that competent and dedicated volunteers and staff are critical to our mission.
- We are effective stewards of the human and financial resources entrusted to us.

- We are a community-based organization.

Organizational Setting and Demographics

At the time of this dissertation-in-praxis, Youth Towers was an inner city-based organization in Birmingham, Alabama, with facilities in the West End, Central City, Western, and Southside communities. Youth Towers' clients were from all socioeconomic classes of Birmingham citizens (Westery, 2020). Therefore, it is essential to know the composition of Birmingham. Birmingham is located in central Alabama at the foothill of the Appalachian Mountains (City of Birmingham, Alabama, 2023). Birmingham was defined by iron ore, coal, and limestone 150 years ago (City of Birmingham, Alabama, 2023). Birmingham has transformed from a mining town to a vibrant metropolitan city. It hosted the World Games in 2022, is celebrated as a food and art destination, and is home to one of the nation's most prominent Civil Rights Museums (City of Birmingham, Alabama, 2023).

It is known for founding the nation's oldest and largest Veterans Day celebration (City of Birmingham, Alabama, 2023). According to the City of Birmingham, Alabama (2023), Birmingham had the largest economy in Alabama. It was divided into 99 neighborhoods and 23 communities. It had a population of 209,880, central to the Birmingham-Hoover Metro area, with a population of 1.1 million. The city had a median age of 35.7, with a median household income of US\$32,404. The median property value in Birmingham was US\$86,900, with a homeownership rate of 46.4%. The city was 71.6% Black, 24.6% White, and 3.5% Hispanic. (City of Birmingham, Alabama, 2023).

At the time of this dissertation-in-praxis, Birmingham City Schools served 23,000 students from K-12, with 18 elementary schools, 10 K-8 schools, eight middle schools, and seven high schools (City of Birmingham, Alabama, 2023). Birmingham was home to the University of Alabama at Birmingham, which ranked 15th in federally funded research public

universities, Birmingham-Southern College, Sanford University, 4-year private institutions, and Miles College, a private historically Black college. Birmingham was also home to Jefferson State and Lawson State 2-year colleges (City of Birmingham, Alabama, 2023). Birmingham had a host of technical schools, beauty schools, and barber schools (City of Birmingham, Alabama, 2023). Birmingham had over 550 technology companies employing over 6,300 skilled workers (City of Birmingham, Alabama, 2023). The Innovation Depot housed 112 startups in a 140,000-square-foot complex, the largest in the Southeast. Birmingham had the nation's highest per capita concentration of healthcare jobs. It was the nation's 12th largest banking center, with more than 18,000 skilled automotive workers and 20,000 skilled metals and machinery workers (City of Birmingham, Alabama, 2023).

Although Birmingham had a lucrative economy, it was plagued with homelessness (LaGory et al., 2018). Youth Towers' goal was to reach this population before they aged out of the foster care system while they still had a support system to help maintain a home. Youth Towers also strove to connect young people with employment industries that matched their likes and skill sets. Youth Towers also provided credit counseling to educate young adults about the pitfalls of being overextended in debt (Westery, 2020). Youth Towers planned to be the catalyst to establish a coalition of government, private businesses, and nonprofits to address the foster care policies that perpetuate a system that produces homelessness. Youth Towers aimed to streamline services, eliminate unnecessary duplication of services, shore up public transportation to be effective for this population's needs, and lobby businesses to locate within the city limits to provide access to jobs to this demographic (Westery, 2020).

Organizational Setting

At the time of this dissertation-in-praxis, the administrative office was in downtown Birmingham in the business district, at 601 19th Street North, Birmingham, AL 35203. Other residential location addresses were not published for security reasons. However, most of this dissertation's research, planning, and strategizing was conducted at the 525 Cotton Avenue SW site. This site provided a training area for volunteers and storage for gifted items, such as food, clothing, baby, and personal supplies. It was where initial consultations and temporary transitional housing placements occurred (Westery, 2020).

The Cotton Avenue location was in the Titusville Neighborhood. Titusville was a diverse community, with a racial makeup of approximately 90% Black, 6% Hispanic, 3% White, and 1% other (City of Birmingham, Alabama, 2023). The community's education levels ranged from high school dropouts to Doctor of Medicine (City of Birmingham, Alabama, 2023). It was home to Princeton Baptist Medical Center, which served more than 53,000 patients annually (Princeton Baptist Medical Center, n.d.). The community had a newly renovated low-income housing community and was home to three mega-churches, retired schoolteachers, and medical professionals (City of Birmingham, Alabama, 2023).

Organizational Demographics

During this dissertation-in-praxis, the paid staff consisted of two African American females: a baby boomer and a millennial. The board comprised nine females, six Blacks, one Latino, two Whites, and two Black males (Westery, 2020). The clients and service volunteers are diverse, with both groups being majority African American (Westery, 2020). Although Youth Towers served a predominantly Black clientele, its resources were provided by overwhelmingly White organizations (Westery, 2020).

Less than 50% of the clients finished high school (Westery, 2020). Two of three young females were pregnant or had at least one child when entering the program. Seventy percent of the males had at least one encounter with the legal system (Westery, 2020). Therefore, one must build trust with the clients early to influence their decision to enter and complete the program. This dissertation-in-praxis dedicated significant time to strategies to build trust and show the possible results during the intake process.

Organizational Leadership and Collaborative Team

As a Birmingham not-for-profit organization, Youth Towers addressed the plight of homelessness for youth ages 19 to 26. The program helped with finding affordable housing within a flexible 18-month timeframe. While in the program, the two paid staff assisted with employment, educational programs, transportation, personal finances, and housing laws.

A team of social workers and community volunteers rendered these services. The volunteers provided goods and services to address the needs of people experiencing homelessness and provide emotional and mental intervention if needed or requested (Westery, 2020). The volunteers guided people in acquiring basic life skills to support independent living and instructions on the risks of living on the streets. The volunteers also provided spiritual training through services and examples.

Organizational Leadership

The team was led by Alice Westery, a passionate powerhouse who watched the foster care system repeatedly fail to provide children with the skills to live independently. Children continue to age out of the system at 19 or extended care at 21. After leaving the foster care system, the cyclical pattern that produces homelessness for some youth begins. Mrs. Westery

decided to create a program that provided a stop-gap measure to the homeless state of youth in Birmingham (Westery, 2020).

Mrs. Westery embarked on a journey to find supporters and funding to build a program to serve the needs of homeless youth. In August 2011, she founded Youth Towers, which provided street outreach and a continuum of care for homeless youth and those at risk of homelessness.

Mrs. Westery stated that the Holy Spirit spoke to her spirit and that the time had come to step out and serve this population. Through relationships forged in her professional life as a social worker in the Department of Human Resources and a dietetic technician at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, Mrs. Westery built a support team from diverse backgrounds, including juvenile justice attorneys, chaplains, police officers, government officials, financial professionals, and social workers. This interdisciplinary team provided service perspectives and fundraising ideals to ensure the Youth Towers' clients receive the best transitional care.

At the time of this dissertation-in-praxis, the 11-member volunteer board of directors was led by a minister, Reverend Clifton McMillan, who believed that youth homelessness was a generational curse resulting from the enemy's attack on the family. Although Youth Towers was not a spiritual organization, the principles of Christianity were intermingled with the programs and the therapy to provide a holistic approach. All board members had Judeo-Christian perspectives on living successful and productive lives. Subsequently, those principles were expected to be reflected in the organization's strategic plan.

Collaborating Team

The collaborating team comprised Executive Director Alice Westery, Administrative Assistant DeeZandra Barfield, Board Chair Reverend Clifton McMillan, and a program participant whose name is withheld for security and confidentiality purposes. Mrs. Westery's

vision was to create an organization that provided a safety net for youth aging out of foster care without the requisite skills to maintain an independent life. Youth Towers also provided a pathway to developing the requisite skills Ms. Westery identified as crucial to independent living. She was a highly visible community leader, serving in several civic organizations. Those relationships provided fundraising opportunities and a base for volunteers to mentor clients and provide leadership to the organization.

Ms. DeeZandra Barfield provided the administrative function for Youth Towers, which included intake interviews and placement recommendations. She has a Bachelor of Arts in social work from the University of Alabama at Birmingham and is passionate about helping people experiencing homelessness. Ms. Barfield recounted how her mother guided her during childhood to select one of her Christmas gifts to give to people experiencing homelessness. Therefore, Ms. Barfield learned empathy for those living in a state of homelessness.

Although new employment opportunities for Ms. Barfield were scarce after her 2020 graduation due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the announcement of an administrative position with Youth Towers seemed to be a perfect fit. Although the position was being developed with 8 months of temporary funding, Ms. Barfield believed that Youth Towers was her destiny and applied for the temporary position (Westery, 2020). That 8-month grant-funded position had been funded for 3 years. Ms. Barfield and Mrs. Westery believed the funding would continue to maintain the position. Mrs. Westery could not design programs, execute programs, conduct intake interviews, manage all the organization's administrative needs, and raise funds alone. Ms. Barfield managed the day-to-day operations of Youth Towers, which freed Ms. Westery to seek additional funding sources, temporary and permanent housing, recruit mentors, and connect Youth Towers with other like-minded or support-minded organizations.

Reverend Clifton McMillan served as the Youth Towers' Board President. He has a Bachelor of Arts in Biblical Studies and a Master of Arts in Theology from Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia. He was the Senior Pastor of the Maranatha Seventh-day Adventist Church and served as a hospital chaplain. He is also a retired U.S. Navy sailor. Reverend McMillan lives a life of service. He believed that the family was the first building block of a successful society, and that the spiritual enemy of man used the breakdown of the family unit to destroy humanity. Subsequent to the destruction of the family is the plague of youth homelessness. Reverend McMillan addressed the causes and effects of homelessness through a family or relationship-type ministry.

The fourth member of the collaborating team was Client A. Client A entered the foster care system because of broken family relationships. She was removed from an abusive and negligent home and placed in foster care. She aged out of the foster care system at age 19. She was pregnant and without the life skills to raise a child, maintain a job, and manage independent living. Subsequently, Youth Towers became a safe haven for her and her then-unborn child (Westery, 2020).

The collaborating team and the writer met regularly to establish trust and an understanding of the dissertation-in-praxis process. The team members met once in person and regularly communicated via email or text. During the development of Chapter 3, more input from the collaborative team was required. The team developed a survey for other clients to assist in framing the needs of the target population. During this process, the team helped draft letters to invite other community leaders to the planning table. The development of Chapter 3 required intense input from the collaborative team.

Collaborating Coach

Mrs. Alice Westery served as the collaborating coach for this dissertation-in-praxis. She has a Bachelor of Science in Social Work and Sociology from the University of Alabama in Birmingham in 2003. She served as the independent living program coordinator for the Jefferson County Department of Human Resources for 13 years. Before that, she was a hospital dietetic technician/supervisor for 23 years.

Mrs. Westery and this writer became acquainted in the early 2000s while serving in the Birmingham Metropolitan Diversity Coalition, a nonprofit organization fighting for the underserved in Birmingham, Alabama. Mrs. Westery was also a Birmingham Community Affairs Committee member, formed in 1963 to address the racial disparities in Birmingham, Alabama. She chairs the Community Affairs Committee and Homeless Committee. In 2021, this writer became a Birmingham Community Affairs Committee member. This writer chaired the Public Relations Committee at the time of this dissertation-in-praxis. Service on not-for-profit boards was the thread that connected Mrs. Westery and this writer.

Chapter Summary

This dissertation-in-praxis collaboration provided Youth Towers with a strategy to form more meaningful relationships with constituents with political and civic power to move youth homelessness to the top of planning and appropriation discussions. Mrs. Westery developed all the organization's programs, processes, and policies with board approval. She was excited about coaching this research process to ensure that the final product served Youth Towers' needs and reduced the pipeline flow for youth homelessness in Birmingham, AL.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE FRAMEWORK

Introduction

One of Satan's strategies to destroy God's plan is manifested in the destruction of the family, which began in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:1-5). This dissertation-in-praxis researched the correlation between Satan's systemic destruction of the family and its impact on children. Satan knows God's plan for the family to be reflection of Christ and the church. The Bible describes the church as the bride (Ephesians 5:22-33). The research investigated the intended family relationship and current family relationship and how those relationships correlate to foster care.

Specifically, the research focused on humanity's attempt to correct the impact of failed families on children by creating a foster care system (Eby, 2023). According to Eby (2023), foster care was cited in the Old Testament and the Talmud, which created laws for dependent children's care. Further noted was the creation of boarding children with widows who were compensated with church collections. That practice ultimately, in 1562, became the English Poor Law which led to regulated foster care in the United States (Eby, 2023).

Unfortunately, the goals of the foster care system to nurture, protect, and provide homes for displaced children have not been as successful as imagined. Subsequently, foster care has become a pipeline to homelessness for youth in Birmingham, AL (LaGory et al., 2018). This review of literature includes a review of family issues that have created a need for a foster care system, the failures of the system that produce youth who are ill-prepared to live independently, biblical and theological, theoretic, and thematic principles and themes that support the impact of Satan on the family, the believer's responsibility to care for children, and society's culpability in the plight of homeless youth. This research focused on the work of the collaborative organization

lending its mission, clients, volunteers, and policies to support the work of this dissertation-in-praxis. The collaborative organization was a 501c3 in Birmingham, AL, named Youth Towers, which served homeless youth, most of whom had aged out of foster care (Westery, 2020).

Biblical and Theological Framework

God's connection to the downtrodden is evidenced in Scripture. The New Testament quotes Jesus: "Whatever you did for one of *the least of these* brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me" (Matthew 25:40). *The least of these* may be defined differently in various circumstances. However, for the sake of this literature framework, *the least of these* refers to children and their needs. In the kingdom, the children of God are equated to sheep, and their leader is viewed as a shepherd (Laniak, 2006). The shepherd protects, provides, and guides the sheep, mirroring the example of Jesus shepherding believers and protecting them from the enemy (John 10:1). One of Satan's attacks on God's plan is seen in the book of Genesis. God created man in His image and likeness (Genesis 1:27). Therefore, Adam and Eve were perfectly designed for the ecological environment created for humans by God. However, at the serpent's deception, Eve became convinced that God was withholding her ability and right to have His knowledge and become a god herself. Subsequently, the perfect synergy between man and the environment was disrupted.

In this deception, Satan used one of his three tactics, pride of life, which was accompanied by the tactic of the lust of the eyes (1 John 2:16-17). Satan was able to deceive Eve by tapping into her desire to be more like God spiritually and competitively. Satan understood the emotion of envy and used it to manipulate Eve into believing God was withholding abilities from her that were reserved for Him. For this reason, man is counseled to be thankful in all things and to be content in whatever state one may be found (1 Thessalonians 5:18). Some

scholars believed that the third tactic Satan used was lust of the flesh as exemplified in the use of the word *deceived* which can be translated as seduced (Luther & Luther, 2016). The word seduced is associated with persuading someone to engage in sexual activity, which is the most intimate engagement of the flesh.

Although Eve sinned, the act that separated humanity from God was Adam's consumption of the fruit. Immediately after Adam ate, both their eyes were opened, and they recognized that they were naked (Genesis 3:9-13). Subsequently, the husband turned on the wife and blamed God for giving her to him (Genesis 3:12). The wife refused to accept responsibility for her actions and blamed the serpent (Genesis 3:13). Unfortunately, they both were ashamed and hid from God because of the embarrassment of their sin and their knowledge of being naked (Genesis 3:7-11).

Each participant in the rebellion against God was eternally punished. God declared that if they disobeyed and ate of the tree, they would surely die (Genesis 2:17). This mention provides insight into spiritual and moral death, which is the separation from God (Ephesians 4:18). Paul describes this death as recoverable, in that one is quickened who was dead in his trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2:1). Nonetheless, man is doomed to work for a living (Genesis 3:19). Women shall bear children in pain (Genesis 3:16). Additionally, the serpent shall crawl on its belly (Genesis 3:14).

From this one act of insurrection, the order in marriage was eternally interrupted. Women are challenged to submit to their husbands, men are challenged to lead, protect, and provide for their families, and children are subjected to the fallout of the failure of the family (Isaiah 53:5). Subsequently, in the contemporary world, children are subjected to abuse of all types, such as neglect, the deterioration of family relationships due to mental, emotional, and physical abuse,

mental and physical illness, and substance abuse (Yoshioka-Maxwell, 2022). The family unit also cracks under the economic pressure of underemployment or unemployment (LaGory et al., 2018).

Helpless children become the casualties of the spiritual warfare targeting the family. The assault on children is spearheaded with weapons of gender confusion, role reversals in marriage, envy, strife, and jealousy (Timothy 1:10). Additionally, women are weaponized against families by economic deceptions. In an attempt to assist women and children in poverty, society or the government offered financial assistance to women with children as long as there is not a healthy man in the home (Roberts, 2022). That practice removed many men from the home, leaving families without a spiritual head as designed by God. Then the foster care system, was designed to be a safety net for children of dysfunctional homes with and without father figures being present. Unfortunately, the foster care system is housing young people without building the foundation to be self-sufficient (Kelly, 2020). Subsequently, there appears to be a pipeline for youth aging out of foster care into homelessness (LaGory et al., 2018).

Biblical Imperatives and Principles

The Apostle Paul prophesied in a letter to his longtime companion, Timothy, that in the last days, men would be wiser but weaker (2 Timothy 3:1-7). This passage references the attacks on the family by warning of people being lovers of themselves, idolizing oneself, and having a form of godliness but denying its power. It warns women of enemies of the home that will gain control and sway them with evil desires. The plight of children resulting from this sinful state is not specifically mentioned. However, it can be deduced that members of the family unit will be negatively impacted by the destruction of the moral fiber of mankind (Blount & Blount, 2015).

According to Blount and Blount (2015), Satan's goal is to destroy God's society by systemically destroying the family, especially Christ-centered families.

Destruction of the Family Foundation

God's first human relationship was established in the Garden of Eden, where Adam and Eve were to live holy before God and replenish the earth (Genesis 1:28). However, their disobedience relegated them to a state of darkness, giving Satan access to humanity. Subsequently, the family unit is being torn apart by divorce, common law marriages, immorality, and the legalization of same-sex marriage. Satan has been crafty in denying man the security, sanctity, and satisfaction of a godly marriage (Baker et al., 2008).

Satan's continued attack on the family is evidenced by the 2015 Obergefell v. Hodges, the U.S. Supreme Court decision to legalize same-sex marriages (Liptak, 2015). Although homosexual citizens may have the right to a civil union under the law, the institution of marriage is ordained and reserved by God for a born man and born woman (Matthew 19:10-12; I Corinthians 7:25-40). Similarly, some people in the United States of America are confused about the definition of a man and a woman (Gloor et al., 2022). Subsequently, the institution of marriage is being diluted by society's views, which do not align with a biblical worldview.

Satan's Attack on the Family Functions

God's design of marriage identifies gender roles and responsibilities. The husband is the head of the family, and the wife is to submit to his leadership (Ephesians 5:22-6:4). Piper (2013) emphasized the responsibility of husbands to lead, provide, and protect their family, while the wife submits and supports his leadership based on her skill sets. This paradigm perfectly exemplifies God's love for the children to follow and mimic. However, Satan has distorted these two constructs of the family by men being overly domineering in the family and women being

overly controlling and not respecting their husbands (Donahue et al., 2017; Ephesians 5:22-24; 1 Peter 3:1; Proverbs 22:10).

Impact of Marriage Failures on Children

In the Law of Moses, God commands children to obey their parents (Exodus 20:12). God also warned children to honor their parents in obedience to the first commandment with a promise of it being well for them while enhancing their ability to enjoy their life (Ephesians 5:22-6:4). However, the example being modeled in many homes is both parents disobeying God and dishonoring each other (Piper, 2013). Unfortunately, Satan uses insubordination of parental authority by children to disrupt the parents' authority in the home. The impact of the media, literature, music, and popular culture's destructive forces on the family results in children resisting the authority of parents due to what some believe is influenced by excessive screen time (Lee et al., 2022). Subsequently, children have grown up rebellious to authority and desire to live by their own rules. The father is responsible for leading the household, including the children, in love without provoking their children into anger (Ephesians 6:4).

Cultural Remedy for the Family Breakdown

Due to the demise of the family unit, children have been removed from dysfunctional homes or have voluntarily or involuntarily left environments that were deemed unsafe to them (Kelly, 2020). Unfortunately, many find themselves in similar or worse conditions, such as homelessness, unemployment, hunger, and sometimes worse (LaGory et al., 2018). Many of these young people are absorbed into the foster care system, which nurtures them as pseudo-parents until they age out of the system (Barnett, 2020). However, the system has innate problems that hinder the development of those served. One of the barriers built into the system is the bureaucratic leadership style deployed in foster care, which is better suited for industrial or

manufacturing industries (Northouse, 2019). Successful human leadership includes modeling, exchanging ideas, and having human interactions, as Jesus displayed repeatedly in His ministry. Most of His [Jesus] encounters with needy people display interactional and servant leadership. Examples of Jesus's leadership style include His interaction with the woman with the sick daughter (Mark 7:24-30), engaging in conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:4-42), and His forgiving Peter for denying him (Mark.16:7-14).

Another barrier to effective foster care systems is the introduction of pay-for services to children. The introduction of money can exchange bureaucracy for transactional leadership. This issue ripens the environment for exploitation instead of being rich in agape love to nurture the children. Opportunistic people identify this weakness and exploit it by gathering multiple foster children and providing minimal care to gain personal financial increase (Halla et al., 2016). Unfortunately, in some cases, the incentive to foster children is contaminated by the drive to make money.

Biblical and Theological Themes

Foster care is born from the need for children's care from the failure of families (Eby, 2023). The system's failures can be partially attributed to failed leadership (Blanchard & Hodges, 2003). The American foster care system is partially, if not totally, controlled by government entities (Halla et al., 2016). The government funds or regulates the processes of all foster care placements (Eby, 2023). However, in serving people, one must mirror the Master, who begins by operating in His nature: love (1 John 4:7). If the motivation to foster children is anything other than love, the endeavor is challenged at inception. Secondly, those involved in the program planning must see the end users as valuable. If not, the service recipients will feel disrespect and reject the services in part or whole. This value must be based on all men being

created in the image of God (Laniak, 2006). *Imago Dei* is Latin for the image of God. Being created in God's image speaks to God's trinity being expressed in three distinct persons: God, the Father, Jesus, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, the Comforter (Matthew 28:19). This image aligns with the threefold nature of mankind, including the body, soul, and spirit (Laniak, 2006).

Displaced young people may not behave in a manner that reflects God's image (Roberts, 2022). Reynolds (2023) discussed the shattered image of God in that the partial discard of the image of God in the Middle Ages had been partially restored in contemporary times.

Disobedience is the central theme that explains the distortion of God's image in man. The disobedience in Genesis broke the perfect synergy between man and God, which is reflected in the relationship between Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:9-10; Genesis 3:12). As Eve attempted to become equal to God, the people in Genesis 11 used their communication skills to unite and build a tower to heavens. This Tower of Babel caused mankind to be scattered with different languages, precluding their ability to work together (Genesis 11:1-9). Another biblical example of disobedience resulting in human punishment is the reign of King Rehoboam I, the fall of the Northern Kingdom in 722-721 BC. During this period, the king abused the people by following King Solomon's tax strategy regardless of mercy pleas (1 Kings 11). Ultimately, the 10 tribes of the Northern Kingdom became the lost tribes of Israel (2 Kings 17:6). Man's disobedience distorted God's image in man.

The fallout from man's disobedience also resulted in the breakdown of the family, the need for the ground to be cultivated, and women to bear children in pain (Genesis 3:16). Natural, adopted, and foster parents must demonstrate obedience to the Word of God to model the way children should respond to God (1 John 5:3; Proverbs 22:6). Subsequently, foster parents must lead by relying on the faithfulness of God's promises. The sacrificial love required to nurture a

displaced child can be taxing (Yoshioka-Maxwell, 2022). Similarly, to model good manners, parents must model their absolute trust in God. One's ability to love sacrificially reflects an acceptance of God's omniscience (Psalm 147:5), omnipresence (Psalm 139), and omnipotence (Genesis 18:14).

Lastly, one must remember that once saved, believers are adopted into God's family as His children (Ephesians 1:5). Therefore, armed with this knowledge, believers understand that their acceptance in the family was not earned. However, it is a gift bought by the blood of Jesus (Ephesians 2:8). This gift provides the perfect ecosystem for reciprocation of God's love by treating the foster child as one would like to be treated (Matthew 7:12). Foster parents should offer the same gift to foster children.

The family unit is self-contained, functioning with and within other self-contained ecosystems (Lowe & Lowe, 2018). The interconnected systems of the earth, atmosphere, and solar create an environment supporting human life, including nourishment and reproduction. However, humans are dependent on other ecosystems for their sustained existence. (Lowe & Lowe, 2018). Like man's interdependence on other ecosystems, the family unit is dependent on other ecosystems, such as educational, medical, communications, and financial systems, for the survival of the human race (Lowe & Lowe, 2018).

Leadership and Organizational Theory

The idea of caring for those less fortunate is a key thread in the fabric that creates the American tapestry. The U.S. Constitution is based loosely on the 10 Commandments (Osler, 2007). The Preamble to the U.S. Constitution references blessings, rights to protect oneself and family, ensures domestic tranquility, and promises state protection of other personal rights, including the right to court trials in criminal and civil cases (Osler, 2007).

Subsequently, the American culture expects the fair and ethical treatment of others. Although not explicitly stated, the standard of God to love one another as one loves himself is pivotal in framing the constitution (Matthew 22:39). This dissertation-in-praxis analyzed scriptural support for the vital role of the family unit (Baker et al., 2008). It investigated the scriptural attacks of Satan to destroy God's plan, beginning with the destruction of the family (Genesis 3:4-5). Those systemic failures will be used to support the development of the modern American foster care system (Eby, 2023). This research will further investigate the biblical principles that connect leadership styles employed by the foster care system to its success or failure. Therefore, this section compares biblical and theological themes that support the foster care system to show a biblical command to care for fatherless children. According to Machi and McEvoy (2016), this research section builds a framework to remedy the outcomes of the present-day system, which overwhelmingly results in homelessness for youth (Kelly, 2020).

Believers are called to be the salt and light of the world (Matthew 5:13-14). Foster care supports the needs of broken families by providing for children who are displaced (Yoshioka-Maxwell, 2022). Therefore, fostering aligns biblically through the efforts to bring about positive change in children's lives. Goad (2019) identified the usages of salt in the Old Testament. Similarly, salt was used to enhance flavor to foster parents who enhance the lives of foster children. Salt was used to preserve, mirroring the efforts of foster parents to preserve the childhood innocence of foster children. Salt was also used to sterilize. Similarly, foster parents create a new sterile environment for the children, absent of abuse, distrust, and the lack of basic needs.

As the light of the world, believers must illuminate the good in people and identify areas that are opposed to God's commands or sinful. Most importantly, Matthew (5:14-16) emphasizes

that believers possess a light that cannot be hidden. That light is reflective of the Holy Spirit dwelling within the believer's heart (Romans 8:9). Foster parents, as biological parents, are tasked to identify skills and talents within the child and to nurture those into assets that help the child develop into a productive and functional adult (Berrick & Skivenes, 2012).

Timothy, the Apostle Paul's companion, prophesized that in the last days, men will be wiser but weaker (2 Timothy 3:1-3:7). This passage references the attacks on the family with references to homosexuality, sexual immorality, idolizing oneself, and the deception of women in the household of faith. The plight of children resulting from this sinful state is not specifically mentioned. However, it certainly can be deduced that members of the family unit will be negatively impacted by the destruction of the moral fiber of mankind (Blount & Blount, 2015). According to Blount and Blount (2015), Satan's goal is to destroy God's society by systemically destroying the family, especially Christ-centered families (Baker et al., 2008).

The Psalmist (68:5) declares that believers must *be* "a father to the fatherless, a defender of widows," he further states, "The Lord protects the strangers, He supports the fatherless and the widow, but He thwarts the way of wicked" (Psalm 146:9). The Bible continues to declare the punishment for those that mistreat those who are fatherless (Deuteronomy 27:19). In Proverbs (31:8), God's response to sin entering world has been to exact punishment (Genesis 3). Unfortunately, the ultimate punishment for sin is spiritual death and eternal separation from God (Romans 6:23). Therefore, to bring intentional harm to a fatherless child or to refuse assistance is disobedience and is punishable as sin. The sin of omission is derived from James 4:17, which states, "Anyone, then, who knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, commits sin." Therefore, doing nothing is unacceptable when a believer knows a human need.

God's creation is based on relationships and the interconnectivity of ecosystems (Lowe & Lowe, 2018). Man is a complete and closed ecosystem in that he is self-sufficient as an organism. However, he requires the atmospheric, aquatic, agricultural, and scientific ecosystems to thrive (Lowe & Lowe, 2018). To thrive, man requires proper interconnectivity with his mind, body, and spirit, which mirrors the triune God. These components thrive based on relationships and one's ability to trust each other. In John (8:14), Jesus declares that He testifies of the Father. The Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, testifies of Jesus, which ultimately testifies of God the Father (John 15:26). The triune God works together to ensure that the Father is uplifted. This model is effective for teamwork and leadership, which values the work of each member (MacMillan, 2001). Subsequently, teamwork and relationships are the major components of Christianity. Moreover, man is mandated to love one another (John 13:34). Unfortunately, in contemporary times, the exploitation of single women and fatherless children continues from the Biblical male-dominated society (Poljak et al., 2023). Subsequently, James (1:27) reminds believers that orphans and widows are their responsibility.

Jesus disregarded the social mores between Jews and the Samaritans to heal the brokenness of the woman at the well (John 4:4-42). In this interaction, Jesus shows that man's present state is not the deciding factor of his end state if the proper intervention happens. Likewise, the broken child can be restored when the foster parent provides the proper intervention.

Foster families have the additional challenge of dual belonging that impacts building solid relationships. Although the biological family may be dysfunctional, the child may be conflicted about bonding with the foster family for fear of being a traitor to the biological family (Chartier & Blavier, 2021). Therefore, the development of positive relationships between the

foster parents and the biological parents creates a safe environment for the child to flourish without the psychological and emotional weight of betraying the biological parents. It also aids in the child's understanding of the need to be removed from the biological parents' care temporarily while they seek help (Berrick & Skivenes, 2012). Chartier and Blavier (2021) identified barriers and facilitators of good biological and foster-parent relationships, beginning with communication. Both parties must speak respectfully to the other, especially when the child is present. Barriers to relationship building are the failure to be forthcoming about the child's history. Hostility from either set of parents can cause an environment that is nonconductive to the child's healthy development.

Additionally, foster parents who assume a position of permanency disrespect the biological parents and may foster resentment from the child based on the disrespect shown to the biological parent(s). These behaviors can derail the fostering process (Chartier & Blavier, 2021). However, if communication is monitored and properly exercised, these behaviors can enhance the relationship between biological and foster parents, which helps to build a safe environment for the child (Chartier & Blavier, 2021).

The importance of providing physical needs as part of a healthy relationship is shown in Matthew (14:13-21). Although Jesus mourned the death of John the Baptist, He went to be alone on a boat. However, the crowds followed him. Subsequently, Jesus had compassion for the crowd and healed their sicknesses. Afterward, the disciples encouraged Him to send them away because it was late, and they did not have the resources to feed the crowd. At that moment, Jesus showed the importance of meeting physical needs by multiplying a small boy's lunch. After blessing it, Jesus broke the bread, multiplying it and the fish to feed the multitude. With this act

of service, He taught that providing humans with food, shelter, clothes, and other physical needs is imperative in creating healthy relationships and producing well-rounded children.

The majority of the research shows that psychological needs are high in foster populations (Steenbakkers et al., 2017). Unfortunately, this reality relates more to problems and the satisfaction of the foster child's needs without offering a true definition of needs. Subsequently, everything on the child's want list becomes a need. The literature defined elements necessary for proper development as needs (Steenbakkers et al., 2017). Therefore, food, clothing, shelter, and educational tools are necessities. However, the tendency to pity the children causes overindulgence in material things to equalize the child's removal from the home (Steenbakkers et al., 2017).

Teaching, Learning, and Group Theory

In light of the relevance of biblical themes to today's business world, it would seem logical to apply these themes to humanity's everyday concerns. Specifically, those concerns of displaced children include the loss of security and belonging (Yoshioka-Maxwell, 2022). It is evident that foster care issues are multifaceted and will require a team effort to address. Hartwig and Bird (2015) determined that effective collaborations were created when disciplines include the following: purpose focus, leveraging team diversity, inspiration instead of control, intentional decision making, and collaborative culture. One area of caution for this research is to prioritize issues. According to Hartwig and Bird (2015), making everything a priority guarantees that nothing is prioritized. This researcher tapped into the team's inspiration to maintain motivation to advance through the project. For this project, the collaborative team desired to create a safety net for youth aging out of foster care who were unable to manage independent living and subsequently found themselves homeless (Lee et al., 2022).

One of the remedies for homelessness after foster care is to help the youth with decision-making skills. Yount's (2010) discipler's model was used to help youth relate to the connection between education, skills, jobs, resources, or money and housing, food, and clothes. Although learning and teaching styles may vary, Discipler's Model was aligned with the goal of transformational learning. It encouraged students to focus on others, which would be new to them. However, the adventure of finding connections with and between others helped to incentivize students to continue to learn to add dimension to their sight, understanding, and worldview (Yount, 2010).

Foster children are to be absorbed into the family fabric (Kelly, 2020), as believers are adopted into God's family and given the right to become children of God (John 1:12). Therefore, foster parents are responsible for the children's education (Proverbs 1:8-9). As children mature, they are to be treated as other believers. Parents must bear their burdens and live in peace with their children (Galatians 6:2). Lowe and Lowe (2018) identified six areas of spiritual development:

1. *Spirituality* requires believers to pray for one another and build each other up while forgiving and loving each other.
2. *Morals* forbid believers to lie to one another, slander one another, or judge one another.
3. *Social* requires believers to be at peace with one another and hospitable.
4. *Emotional* requires believers to be devoted to one another, as well as encourage, comfort, and show concern for each other.
5. *Intellectual* requires believers to teach one another and speak to, stimulate, and admonish one another.
6. *Physical* requires believers to serve one another, greet each other, and wait for one another.

These areas of development apply to nurturing children as they become believers in Christ. Modeling these attributes will help the children develop into the image of God by modeling the parent. (Lowe & Lowe, 2018). This example behavior exemplifies Bandura's social learning theory (Bandura, 1977). Social learning, simplified, is the act of repeating or copying behaviors and responses of others.

Servant leadership is exhibited by and to each member of the family. Jesus used servant leadership most effectively to show the disciples how to win others to the kingdom (Luke 22:27). Parents are leaders in the family unit. Parents must be last and serve the children's needs to model Godly leadership (James 2:14). Klosterman (2014) exemplified leaders being last. This article explained the ideology that the captain always went down with the ship. The captain is not required to go down with the ship, but the captain is required to ensure that everyone has evacuated the ship before he abandons it.

Moreover, the servant leadership theory requires the leader to serve the crew by ensuring their safety, which could entail the captain losing his life to save the crew. This theory reflects the shepherd's responsibility to protect the flock (Laniak, 2006). That protection may present itself in the form of self-sacrifice. John (15:13) states that no greater love has any man than to lay down his life for a friend. This example is precisely what Jesus did to redeem man to God. In 1 John (3:16), John exemplifies the theory of self-sacrifice by depicting the Savior voluntarily laying down his life to reconcile the relationship between man and God.

According to Sinek (2017), leaders create a safe place supporting cooperation performance and inspiring trust. Moreover, one aspect of effective leadership is creating a safe environment for the group and the leader (Sinek, 2017). This idea corresponds to Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs theory, which identifies safety as a basic need of man, only second to

the physiological needs of food, water, and shelter. A contemporary example of creating a safe place for a subordinate through self-sacrifice happens daily on commercial airlines. Safety instructions are announced at the beginning of each flight (U.S. Department of Transportation, 2022). Within those instructions, passengers are instructed that oxygen masks will drop from overhead if the plane's cabin loses pressure. Passengers traveling with older adults, physically challenged, or children are instructed to don their masks before assisting their companions. Wearing the mask helps to create acceptance for the child or other challenged passengers and encourages them to model the behavior (U.S. Department of Transportation, 2022). Creating a safe environment for oneself makes it easier to create a safe one for others. Although the leader is not last, he is creating a safe environment.

Subsequently, obeying God creates a safe environment where God provides a hedge of protection for believers (Job 1:10). Serving foster children's needs will be honored by God (Philippines 4:9). According to Sinek (2017), one of the significant benefits of service is that it creates behaviors and atmospheres that protect the child and parent.

Theoretical Framework

Christianity is rooted in the theory that God is the supreme creator and the relationship between God and his creation is exemplified through the relationship between God and man. The first God relationship is shown between the three persons of the Godhead: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, then the relationship between God and man and then man to man (Matthew 22:36:40). God gave man the ultimate human relationship in marriage which exemplifies God's love and is purposed to replenish the earth (Genesis 1:28). Since the entrance of sin into the world, the relationship between God and man has been broken (Romans 5:12-19).

Sin also broke the relationship between mankind, evidenced by the deterioration of the marriage union and the detriment experienced by children (Piper, 2013).

This dissertation-in-praxis researched the attempt to correct one of the outcomes of broken relationships, resulting in children being placed in foster care (Eby, 20230). Although foster care is a good concept, the methodologies used in the system may create a problem equally devastating to children as it was designed to address (Kelly, 2020). According to Kelly (2020), the foster care system has become a pipeline to homelessness for youth. This literature framework compares leadership and educational theories that support and undermine the American foster care system (Spray & Jowett, 2012). The aim of this dissertation-in-praxis was to develop a plan to minimize the occurrences of foster care children aging out into homelessness.

Maslow's Hierarchy Theory

Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs provided a theoretical framework for assessing a foster child's needs. However, the research was criticized for overly leaning toward nature and excluding nurture in the analysis (Steenbakkers et al., 2017). Nonetheless, Maslow's (1943) theory remains a framework for assessing the needs of foster children as opposed to other theories, such as the terror management theory, which targets survival skills (Greenberg et al., 1997). Maslow's (1943) theory has been updated to include technology, making it more applicable to modern society (Steenbakkers et al., 2017). The theory is broad and covers a wide span; it fails to capture the specific needs of children experiencing and engaging in adverse behaviors before entering foster care (Berrick & Skivenes, 2012). It is also limited in identifying the needs of children with or at risk of special medical, behavioral, and emotional problems. Those problems can bleed into cognitive issues, requiring even more specific needs (Jacobsen et

al., 2013). Trauma can create behavioral problems and post-traumatic stress in foster children, as with other children (Greeson et al., 2011). Moreover, providing age-appropriate remedies that align with their personal histories is imperative (Berrick & Skivenes, 2012).

Jesus models the importance of a good shepherd protecting the sheep from harm (Laniak, 2006). Dangers were prevalent for sheep in biblical days. The shepherd had to protect them from themselves by keeping all sheep within the flock, protecting them from predator animals, and ensuring they received proper nourishment and water (Laniak, 2006). As children of God, believers must be reassured that they are safe relying on Jesus. Mark (4:39) shares a story of the disciples questioning Jesus's concern for them during a storm on the sea. Although Jesus was asleep when the storm started raging, He questioned their faith because He said they were going to the other side. However, Jesus rebuked the winds and the waves to quench their fear and demanded they be still. Immediately, the storm subsided. Likewise, foster parents must protect foster children from their poor habits and societal ills, resulting in bullying and other physical violence (Yoshioka-Maxwell, 2022).

According to Child Welfare Information Gateway (2015), foster children are to be protected from exposure to high incidences of domestic violence, at-risk behaviors, unplanned pregnancies, child abuse, and neglect. Exposure to domestic violence is generally combined with other negative behaviors that breed adverse outcomes, such as the desire to run away, substance abuse, and other at-risk behaviors. An environment that meets immediate safety needs and strengthens individual and community-level relationships is required to serve foster children successfully (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2015). Abuse presents itself in several ways. However, one prevalent expression of abuse is sexual engagement, both consensual and nonconsensual, based on the foster child's age (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2015).

Foster parents must discuss the child's value to themselves and others to help build their self-esteem. The child must hear that no action guarantees love, and that sex outside of the bounds of marriage is not love. The innate need to be loved may be anchored in man being created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). God is love (1 John 4:8); therefore, the need for love may be the link that reconnects man to God, for it was love that caused God to send Jesus to redeem man (John 3:16).

In establishing and sustaining a relationship, one must believe that one's value outweighs one's mistakes (MacMillan, 2001). In Mark (16:7), Jesus illustrates the restorative power of forgiveness after His resurrection. He requested the disciples to meet Him in Galilee and included Peter by name in the invitation. This act of forgiveness and inclusion eradicated the shame of Peter's denial of Christ to save himself. After receiving forgiveness, Peter was strengthened to preach the Pentecost sermon to thousands. Forgiveness can catapult one into his destiny. Therefore, foster parents must cooperate in forgiveness with the foster child, who will probably make bad decisions, misbehave, and disobey (Barnett, 2020).

According to DeGarmo (2017), love and forgiveness are inseparable. Foster children are seeking emotional shelter more than physical shelter. Without forgiveness, a true relationship has no foundation. The child and his parents must be forgiven for the circumstances causing the need for fostering, which removes the burden of hate that one carries with forgiveness (Ephesians 4:31-32). Remembering the price that Jesus paid for the world to receive forgiveness is critical to the process (Colossians 1:14). Foster parents must forgive but not forget the infractions of foster children, as negative behaviors require consequences. However, those consequences must be executed in a manner that brings changed behavior and does not add resentment and more stress to the foster relationship. Again, DeGarmo (2017) reminded foster parents that regardless of the

circumstances, children love their biological parents. Interacting with the biological parents in forgiveness and love shows the foster child parental respect, which will spill into the foster relationship. Foster care displays love through caring for orphans and widows in distress (James 1:27). Believers are called to do good: seek justice, reprove the ruthless, defend the orphans, and plead for the widows (Isaiah 1:17). These scriptures supported the theoretical framework concept of foster care that believers were called to care for one another.

Shepherd Leadership Theory

Biblical leadership is defined through the metaphor of shepherding (Laniak, 2006). The shepherd represents Christ, the Good Shepard. Believers have a responsibility to care for others as a shepherd. Good shepherds use their rods to save, direct, and protect the sheep (Ephesians 4:11). They also never take the spoils of the sheep. The protective nature of a shepherd can be described by an analogy of a mother's stewardship (Laniak, 2006). The journey is made safe by the shepherd. The sheep's needs are provided by the shepherd, who provides a place of rest (Laniak, 2006).

As the shepherd, the foster parent provides leadership for the foster child. Leadership is the ability to influence one's behavior and thought processes for the long term to bring a definitive change in character. Leadership requires followership (Laniak, 2006). Therefore, the foster parent has to lead the foster child to a place where he is willing to follow the parent's direction (Piper, 2016). Parents seldom describe parenting as leadership. However, qualitative and quantitative research methods show that the study of leadership is increasing in all areas of society (Northouse, 2019). It appears that foster parents who lead by guiding the child's behavior have a higher probability of success. In shepherding, the foster parents provide the nurturing the

child needs to develop and guides the child's progress. It is the goal of the foster parent to assist the child in becoming an independent and self-sufficient adult.

Servant Leadership Theory

Greenleaf (1970) coined *servant leadership*, which requires the leader to take on the nurturing and caretaker role. It speaks to the heart position of the person in leadership. Servant leaders put the needs of the one served before their own. To effectively serve the foster care child, their needs must outweigh those of the foster parent. Just as newborns' needs supersede the other family members' needs, so does the foster child until the family becomes a productive system and each member can effectively and confidently handle their place in the family (Greenleaf, 2002).

Greenleaf (1970) argued that servant leadership is a direct outcome of one's responsibility to help others succeed. Greenleaf (1970) noted that servant leadership creates healthier followers who want to help others reach their goals. Natural servants align with the needs of foster children in that they need nurturing and grooming to be self-sufficient. Servant leaders put others' needs before their own. However, one must assess the process to identify poor performance and negative outcomes.

Successful servant leadership requires the management of one's ego by understanding one's self-worth to eliminate the need for external validation. When one's ego is managed, one can pass praise to others and take ownership of the team's failures (Greenleaf, 1970). Valuing every member of the team allows shared learning. Subsequently, servant leadership develops everyone involved (Greenleaf, 1970). Therefore, the foster child develops as part of the process.

Foster care is managed through the governmental structure in the United States, which uses bureaucracy as the management style. The rigid nature of a bureaucratic system is not

congruent with human development (Harappa, 2021). The service of fostering would flourish better through leadership, specifically servant leadership, where the child's needs come first.

Jesus modeled servant leadership by washing the disciple's feet, which signifies one's ability to do what is needed to care for one another. In caring for one another, love is expressed through action. Jesus provided a model for expressing love through relationships and caring when the commandments were condensed into two. Both New Testament commandments are centered on love. Jesus taught the New Testament believers to love the Lord first and secondly to love one's neighbors as yourself (Luke 10:25-37). Therefore, as a microecosystem, the family is the first model of love. The family provides opportunities for applying leadership through relationships and education strategies that strengthen the bonds of family (Jones, 2023). These strategies are equally important in foster care relationships designed to imitate and reflect the bonds of the biological family (Spray & Jowett, 2012).

One's ability to be a servant leader requires a decision to pay the cost. As Jesus served by providing resources to pay their taxes (Matthew 17:23-27), among other things, He understood that ultimately, He had to give himself (Matthew 20:28). Foster parents using servant leadership must also give of themselves (Greenleaf, 2002). The foster parents must be able to give to the child and the biological parent, which is a balancing act between broken humans (Chartier & Blavier, 2021).

Transactional Leadership Theory

The foster care system has an innate process that lends itself to transactional leadership. Transactional leadership has *quid pro quo* characteristics (Northouse, 2019). *Quid pro quo* requires an exchange of goods or services for an action. In politics, it is the promise of an action for one's vote. In the foster care system, there is a promise of monthly payments for childcare.

The introduction of money for nurturing the child provides an avenue for the child to be exploited for the financial incentive instead of being placed to receive love and nurturing. Transactional leadership, which relies on a rewards and punishment system to incentivize job performance (Bass & Riggio, 2010), has become the inadvertent leadership style for foster parents within the government-led foster care system's bureaucracy (Eby, 2023). The transaction that has become central to foster care operations is receiving a service fee. In Alabama, a foster parent may receive up to US\$2,500 per child monthly (LaGory et al., 2018). In an economy with a median family income of US\$59,609 annually (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022), the foster care payment could equal up to half of the household income. That additional revenue could incentivize fostering for financial gain instead of the altruistic improvement of the child's life resulting through servant leadership.

Bureaucratic Management Theory

Government agencies manage the majority of foster care programs. In Alabama, the Department of Human Resources manages most of the programs (LaGory et al., 2018). Bureaucracies are task-oriented structured systems comprising six major characteristics: task specialization, formal selection, impersonal, hierarchical layers of authority, rules and regulations, and career orientation (Harappa, 2021). This structure is not highly flexible, which makes it challenging to lead processes related to humans (Harappa, 2021). Therefore, it may be too restrictive for effective foster care leadership.

Bureaucracies change slowly and produce the best result when used in a manufacturing system (Harappa, 2021). The bureaucratic management theory is based on strict division of tasks, authority, and power. It relies on rules, regulations, and consequences (Harappa, 2021). This regimented system reflects the ideology of the Pharisees more than the doctrine of Christ

(Matthew 12:1-8). It is also beneficial for managing things and systems that remain the same but may not facilitate a positive change in people due to the lack of relationships and flexibility.

Humans are complex entities. Therefore, building a structure that applies to all is not practical. Even God acknowledges the differences in individuals. It is noted in Scripture that one should use one's unique gifts to serve others (1 Peter 4:10-11). This scripture speaks to the individual nature of man. The Bible further says that each man's life call is different. Therefore, God acknowledges that individuals are gifted differently and have different life goals. According to Jeremiah (29.11), the Lord said He knew the plans He has for each man and declared that the plan is to prosper him and not harm him. Deductively, one may surmise that God created the world for each individual to act independently based on his skills and abilities.

However, Hossain and Korban (2014) further expanded on the theory of individualism by associating it with society. They argued that the individual operates within society, which is the customs and ethics of a group of people acting homogeneously due to geographical, philosophical, and/or religious beliefs and proximity. Subsequently, a collection of individuals creates a society. Covertly, society determines the proper use of individual gifts and talents. The interconnectivity of the individual and the culture provides the foundational need for flexibility in leadership, which is not inherent in bureaucracies, therefore underscoring the inappropriateness of bureaucratic leadership in the foster care system.

In early Jewish culture, men would lead the education system for children and adults, resulting in women receiving minimal education (Finkelstein, 1960). However, not all female children were denied education. Susanna disclosed that her parents instructed her in the Law of Moses (Daniel, 13:3). Therefore, not all biblical families subscribed only to educating males. In today's world, Christian education is designed to help mankind understand the Word of God and

ultimately understand God to share the Gospel (Anthony & Benson, 2003). This effort moves one closer to the image of God. However, in the Western contemporary church of today, women continue to be relegated to lesser roles, regardless of their education (Samra, 2006).

However, women's education evolved as the culture evolved (Anthony & Benson, 2003). That evolution also applies to the modern foster care system (U.S. Department of Education, 2023). As women in biblical times, foster children also represent a vulnerable segment of society. Although they may have intellectual abilities, they struggle academically more than their peers due to changing schools more often, which creates an unstable environment (U.S. Department of Education, 2023). The higher incidences of trauma create a barrier for foster children in the learning process. Subsequently, special technical assistance is needed to create a successful educational system for foster children properly (U.S. Department of Education, 2023).

Image of God

According to McKenzie (2022), the image of God or *imago Dei* is not a physical reflection. Piper (2023) echoed McKenzie (2022) when stating that the creation of man in God's image refers to their relationship. It is connected to the expression of love and the personal transformation to change one's behavior to reflect God. After sin entered the world (Genesis 3), the creation of man did not change, but his ability to operate as created changed. God's image was not diminished, but His plan for man was interrupted due to the fall of man to sin in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3: 1-24).

Subsequently, the interference of Satan in God's plan created the broken image. The broken image happened with man, not God (Strong, 2008). The broken image resembles looking at one's reflection in a cracked mirror. Although the reflection is not perfect, the face is perfectly made. It is possible to envision the whole face with the broken mirror reflection. The same

process applies to man. The Bible describes God's intended image of mankind, and with faith in Jesus Christ, which broken image can be restored (Romans 8:29). The consequences of sin fracture the image of God, but not the plan of God. Ultimately, regardless of the punishment for sin, the will of God will be executed (Psalm 37:23). Jesus's sacrificial death created a pathway to a restored healthy relationship with God (2 Corinthians 5:18-20).

Healthy relationships are foundational to the effectiveness of family units, educational systems, communities, and all human interactions (Castaldo, 2007). Developing a proper relationship foundation begins with trust, which allows one the freedom to be vulnerable and transparent with another (Psalm 37:5). As stated in Proverbs (3:5-6), "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths." Subsequently, the success of all relationships is built on trust. The foster care relationship is not exempt from the need to develop trust. Trust notwithstanding, this literature framework examined various theories that supported the vision of foster care and analyzed the impact of building trust in each theory.

The foster care system seeks to create teams of biological and foster parents, the foster child, and the servicing organization. According to Lencioni (2016), effective team members have three areas of operation that are central to success. Those three areas are hunger, smart, and humbleness. Hunger equates to one's drive to accomplish the determined goals. Smart references one's skills and abilities to achieve one's goals. Additionally, humbleness is the ability to value other team members and to be able to let their skill sets take a prominent role in the team effort. The common purpose and expectation of foster care is to provide proper nurturing to all stakeholders. Hence, reunification of the biological family is possible, and the child is prepared to live independently (Chartier & Blavier, 2021). In order to achieve those common purposes,

team members must refrain from distrustful behaviors, such as a lack of humility, which destroys the team's ability to work authentically together for fear of embarrassment or undermining. An effective team will develop clear roles and processes, solid communication, and accepted leadership (MacMillan, 2001). Properly connected relationships built on trust create successful teams that can provide a holistic approach to an issue.

Teaching, Learning, and Group Theory

Foster care is born from the need for children's care produced from the failure of families (Eby, 2023). The system's failures can be partially attributed to failed leadership within the governance (Blanchard & Hodges, 2003). The foster care system in America is partially, if not totally, controlled by government entities. The government is funding or regulating the processes of all foster care placements (Eby, 2023). However, in serving people, one must mimic the Master, who begins by operating in His nature of love (1 John 4:7). If the motivation to foster children is anything other than love, the endeavor is challenged at inception. Secondly, those involved in the program planning must see the end users as valuable. If not, the service recipients will feel disrespect and reject the services in part or whole. This value must be based on all men being created in the image of God (Laniak, 2006).

Yount's Discipler's Model

One of the remedies for homelessness after foster care is to help the youth with decision-making skills. Yount's (2010) discipler's model was used to help youth relate to the connection between education, skills, jobs, resources, or money and housing, food, and clothes. Although learning and teaching styles may vary, Yount's discipler's model aligned with the goal of transformational learning. It was used to encourage students to focus on others, which was new for most. However, the adventure of finding connections with and between others helped to

incentivize students to continue to learn and to add dimension, understanding, and well-rounded views (Yount, 2010).

With government oversight of the foster care system, it is challenging to teach the spiritual component of the discipler's model (Yount, 2010). However, servant leadership provides those designing and teaching the curriculum the opportunity to show the love of God. Yount's (2010) approach to teaching is holistic, as is that of Jesus Christ. Jesus models cross-cultural discipleship (John 6:35). He showed compassion for the shunned (Luke 17:11-19). He validated those who were hated (Luke 19:2-10). Foster children experience those emotions of being shunned, invalidated, and often hatred for themselves or others (Greeson et al., 2011).

During the education design development, the team was aware of students' prior knowledge, which could obscure the learning goals. They also considered the prior knowledge of the foster parents concerning their preconceived ideas about foster children and noncustodial parents. Designers made concerted efforts to eliminate assumptions that there was general knowledge, understanding, and application while not talking down to participants who might have appropriate and useful prior knowledge. Therefore, it is wise to incorporate activities that allow the students to recall prior knowledge of the current issue (Ambrose et al., 2010). It is important to engage student's prior knowledge productively. Ambrose et al. (2010) provided strategies to assess and identify the volume and quality of a student's prior knowledge concerning the course objectives. It is important to activate students' prior knowledge with instructional strategies that incentivize critical thinking.

An expected outcome of the critical thinking process was evaluating the decision cost. As with all decisions, believers were required to count the cost, which meant the investment analysis

followed the decision to invest (Luke 14:28-30). Even with that knowledge, there might be hidden costs that were not a part of the analysis, which might impact motivation at some point.

This literature framework has identified areas of weakness in the selection of foster parents, the training of foster children, and the creation of a holistic team. Yount's (2010) discipler's model provided a paradigm for servant leadership within the foster care system. Gaps in services continue to produce youth who, upon aging out of foster care, cannot live independently. This research provided a general direction for addressing the homeless problem youth encounter upon aging out of foster care.

The social work, psychology, educational, and theological theories identified in this research provided a foundation for the themes that would support the program development for the collaborating organization. Those themes included life skill development, education and employment, housing and independent living, and social and interpersonal skills. These themes provided the foundation for a program outline to slow and move toward a remedy for homelessness in youth aging out of foster care.

Development Approach to Learning

The developmental approach to learning allows each individual to operate at their level of maturity (Small, 2018). This approach recognizes the developmental differences in humans. Education aims for students to assimilate, react to, integrate, and use the knowledge taught (Lindberg, n.d.). Therefore, the life skills curriculum must be designed to build skills on each other. Additionally, one must be careful when introducing multiple skills simultaneously. Therefore, allowing the student or foster child to select the skill that most interests him or helps to determine their developmental level and their affinity for a particular subject or skill and progress to proficiency (Katz, 1994). Students learn in self-structured conditions with minimum

teacher guidance that allows the student the ability to define the problem and develop solutions. In a self-regulated environment, students create and assess their learning process. The foster child has experienced trauma that can impede the learning process; therefore, it is reasonable that foster children need flexibility in the developmental approach to learning (Greeson et al., 2011).

Ecological Systems Theory

According to Bronfenbrenner's (1974) ecological systems theory, children's development is influenced by environmental systems ranging from small homogeneous systems such as immediate friends and neighbors to large systems such as mass media, extended family, and political and economic systems. The author defined *human ecology* as a complex relationship between multiple ecologies. The theory advances that one's immediate setting and culture more influence one than other ecologies. This theory leans on interdependency and interactions between people and the environment instead of genetics (Bronfenbrenner, 1974).

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) model consists of five main elements. The first element is the microsystems, divided into the most immediate systems: family, friends, teachers, and other immediate circles of influence. The second element is the mesosystem, which consists of the relationships between microsystems reflecting the interaction between family, friends, and family members. The exosystem is the third level of Bronfenbrenner's model, comprising the human social context, including government policies, social services, and mass media. Although direct contact may not be present at this level, it still influences a child's development. Then, the fourth level is the macrosystem, which comprises larger ecologies such as social norms, customs, ideology, and cultural beliefs. These cultural beliefs are generally shared by people with like histories. Lastly, the model's fifth and broadest system is the chronosystem, which is the outermost level of the model and explains the influence of time on individual development. This

model accounts for change in environments over time, just as people evolve (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model provides a blueprint for understanding the factors that influence a child's development. The interconnectivity of these modes is important in influencing a child's development. Therefore, foster parents must remain aware of the influences of the ecological systems that mold child development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This dissertation-in-praxis identified the failing components of the theory as it related to foster children and their high percentages of homelessness after aging out of foster care (Kelly, 2020).

Although this theory was developed over 5 decades ago, the basic theory retains merit. It maintains that the external ecologies of one's life shape the development and outcome of one's person. However, one criticism of this theory is that it excludes the influence of genetics on development (Christensen, 2010). A contemporary review of the theory maintains its significance today. However, due to the entrance of technology, expanded ecologies must be considered in combination with the five ecologies identified by Bronfenbrenner (1979; M. Kelly & Coughlan, 2019).

Change Theory

When working to affect change in a foster child, Kotter's (2012) eight-step model is a useful technique (Salman & Broten, 2017). Those eight steps include creating a sense of urgency, forming powerful guiding coalitions, developing a vision and a strategy communicating the vision, removing obstacles, empowering people for action, creating short-term wins, consolidating gains, and strengthening change by anchoring change in the culture (Salman & Broten, 2017). Kotter's (2012) model is simple, but it provides a clear picture and step-by-step instructions on how to lead the change process within organizations and organisms. It focuses on

the desired change more than the process. However, due to the sequential nature of the model, missing one step could derail the process. The multiple steps can catalyze frustration and dissatisfaction by prolonging the process (Salman & Broten, 2017). Subsequently, the initial enthusiasm and commitment could produce poor management and negative attitudes toward the goals instead of the process (Salman & Broten, 2017).

In Kotter's (2012) model, creating urgency is required to facilitate change, which is the first of the eight steps to Kotter's change theory. In the foster care system, removing a child from his biological parents creates that urgency for change. However, the complete change that may be required for biological parents to regain custody may be a slow process. Once the threats to the child have been identified and a strategic plan is developed to eliminate or manage the threat is required (Chartier & Blavier, 2021). Second to creating urgency is the relationship between the agencies, biological parents, foster parents, and other constituents to coalesce to make a partnership to lead the change effort. Third, one should create a vision to clarify the goals and direction for the foster care relationship. Although desirable, reunification with the biological parents is not always the goal of fostering. Therefore, creative and obtainable goals must be set. Fourth, one should communicate clearly and ask questions to ensure clarity and understanding. The fifth step is to remove obstacles. Change initiatives have barriers to success that may include finances, substance use issues, and physical, emotional, and sexual abuse. Each identified barrier to the foster relationship's success requires a designed action plan to overcome it. The sixth step is to identify short-term successes to encourage a continuation of the plan. The seventh step is to build on short-term successes, understanding that quick changes may not be sustainable. The eighth step is to connect the desired changes to the long-term fostering strategies (Chartier & Blavier, 2021). That connection helps short-term successes lead to long-term change.

Thematic Framework

The foster care system in America was developed in response to societal problems that resulted in the failure of traditional marriages (Eby, 2023). Although family failures manifest themselves in multiple ways, the specific failure researched in this thematic framework is removing children from the biological family (Gul & Nadeemullah, 2017). The research produced multiple theories that influence foster care. Through those theories, several themes emerged that contribute to youth homelessness after foster care (Kelly, 2020).

This thematic framework examines four themes that critically impact the foster care system and the operations of the collaborating organization, Youth Towers. Therefore, the relationships created through foster care need to be intentionally nurtured to create a successful team. Foster children, as biological children, need support, direction, and a safety net. Each person learns differently and at different paces. However, adulthood is generally categorized to begin at age 19. Without proper nurturing and relationship-building skills, it will result in unhealthy outcomes.

Relationship Theme

God's creation is based on relationships and the interconnectivity of ecosystems (Lowe & Lowe, 2018). Man is a complete and closed ecosystem in that he is self-sufficient as an organism. However, he requires the atmospheric, aquatic, agricultural, and scientific ecosystems to thrive (Lowe & Lowe, 2018). To thrive, man requires proper interconnectivity with his mind, body, and spirit, which mirrors the triune God. These components thrive based on relationships and one's ability to trust each other. In John (8:14), Jesus declares that He testifies of the Father (John 15:26). The Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, testifies of Jesus, which ultimately testifies of God the Father (John 15:26). The triune God works together to ensure that the Father

is uplifted. This model is effective for teamwork and leadership, which values the work of each member (MacMillan, 2001). Subsequently, teamwork and relationships are the major components of Christianity. Moreover, man is mandated to love one another (John 13:34). Unfortunately, in contemporary times, the exploitation of single women and fatherless children continues from the Biblical male-dominated society; subsequently, James (1:27) reminds believers that orphans and widow are their responsibility.

Jesus disregarded the social mores between Jews and the Samaritans to heal the brokenness of the woman at the well (John 4:4-42). In this interaction, Jesus shows that man's present state is not the deciding factor of his end state if the proper intervention happens. Likewise, the broken child can be restored when the foster parent provides the proper intervention. Therefore, the relationships created through foster care need to be intentionally nurtured to create a successful team. Foster children, as biological children, need support, direction, and a safety net well past the accepted age of adulthood, which is generally designed to start at age 19 (Balasundaram & Avulakunta, 2023).

Collaborative Teams

It is evident that foster care issues are multifaceted and will require a team effort to address them successfully. Hartwig and Bird (2015) determined that effective collaborations were created when disciplines included purpose focus, leveraging team diversity, inspiration instead of control, intentional decision making, and a collaborative culture. One area of caution for this research is to prioritize issues. According to Hartwig and Bird, making everything a priority guarantees that nothing is prioritized. As a foster care leader, one must tap into the inspiration of the team members to keep them motivated to advance through the project. For this dissertation-in-praxis, all collaborative team members must desire to create a safety net for youth

aging out of foster care who are unable to manage independent living and subsequently find themselves homeless (Lee et al., 2022).

Therefore, it will be imperative that team members are disciplined, show Godly character toward each other, define clear purpose and communication with effective leadership, and not control (Hartwig & Bird, 2015). To build a strong team, each member will have mutual and individual accountability for the work (Hartwig & Bird, 2015). Moreover, the collaborative team members will believe that the pipeline from foster care to homelessness can be slowed tremendously if not stopped and that this remedy will not negatively impact their livelihood. The collaborative organization will be willing to lose a percentage of its clientele to effectively produce practices to increase self-sufficiency when aging out of the foster care system (Kelly, 2020). This risk of losing an approach to problem-solving produces trust foundational for finding remedies to complex issues (Hartwig & Bird, 2015). Trust begins by acknowledging each participant's worth and value to the process. As members are valued, they will take more risks with solution suggestions without fearing retribution, humiliation, or ostracization (Hartwig & Bird, 2015).

Great teams value and use the skills of each team member. Leaders in collaborative environments inspire others to contribute their best to the outcome instead of forcing participation through control. However, failures in the foster care system may result from the team dynamic breakdown due to a lack of a clear purpose and direction or not valuing all team members and their contributions to the solution (Hartwig & Bird, 2015). Collaborative teams must create a safe zone for members to work authentically toward a common goal (1 Corinthians 12:14).

Ethics and Foster Care

Ethics refers to acceptable customs and approved behaviors in responding to situations (Shapiro & Slefkovich, 2011). Within distinguished groups, multiple ethical paradigms may impact one's decision-making ability, including the ethics of profession, justice, critique, and care. Certainly, the social work profession has an ethical mandate to ensure that the foster parents have met the state's fitness requirements, that their home is adequate for a child, and that they have the moral compass to nurture a child in a safe environment properly. The ethics of justice, which examine what is right to do, must be applied in the decision to remove the child from the biological parents. Lastly, the ethics of critique and care must be applied throughout the process to determine if foster care remains the best decision or if reuniting with the biological parents is feasible (Shapiro & Slefkovich, 2011).

When assessing one's ethics, one must be able to distinguish between facts and truths (Shapiro & Slefkovich, 2011). The facts pertain to things that are tangible and can be proven. The truth speaks to what God says. For example, God says that as a man thinks in his heart, so is he (Proverbs 23:7). Therefore, a parent may score in the lower quadrant of a fitness test for fostering but believe in their hearts that they can provide a safe, loving, and nurturing home for the child. Those internal beliefs must be factored into the decision process for placement.

Ethic of Caring

The ethic of caring includes the element of maintaining relationships and dependencies of humanity (Shapiro & Slefkovich, 2011). Caring ethics enhance the well-being of the caregiver or foster parent and the care receiver, the foster child, and the biological parent. Caring ethics is a practice of humanity more than a theory anchored in interpersonal relationships. It looks at situations individually and attempts to determine the best course of action that meets the needs of

all constituents within the framework of the governing policies and laws. Caring ethics permeates the social work profession because it provides services that sustain life and relationships. It acknowledges the differences between people and tries to determine just action. It cannot be shaped by or restricted to sentimental urges but is based on facts and truth combined with the motivation to do what is best for the care receiver (Mayeroff, 1990). The ethic of caring may determine that reunification with the biological parent is not feasible and may never be an option with this family. In foster care, ethical caring does not mean accommodating others but rather considering others' desires through the prism of accountability.

Ethic of Justice

The ethic of justice are anchored in individual rights and liberties. It holds that everyone has the right to equal opportunities as others with similar skills (Kohlberg, 1963). The ethic of justice evaluates man's free will choices as they align with the rights of others. Although Kohlberg (1963) considered the ethic of justice necessary, it is not the only element of ethical behavior. In the United States, the foster care system is generally managed by the government, subsequently making adherence to laws governing one's rights paramount in the decision-making process (Eby, 2023).

Critics have noted that the ethic of justice hold a premise that the finances should be distributed based on one's economic condition. Secondly, economic equality should be addressed by a weighted system that ensures that individuals are blocked from opportunities rather than providing equality within groups with equal abilities (Eby, 2023). However, in the foster care system, there is little opportunity for all constituents to have equal rights. It is more important that rights are distributed with equity (Eby, 2023). Ethical consideration must be given to the program design to ensure equity in administration and fairness in application.

Relevant Models

Educational, social, and economic constructs weigh heavily on the foster care system (Jacobsen et al., 2013). Developing programs and processes is generally the strategy to remedy social ills. The relevant programs in this research included education, socialization, and health.

Program Theme

As the program design came into focus, each team component must incorporate incentives to sustain the students' motivation, which "refers to the personal investment that an individual has in reaching a desired state or outcome" (Ambrose et al., 2010, p. 68). Although motivation may keep one engaged, the instructors must monitor progress to ensure that curriculum advancement is obtained. A successful curriculum comprises multiple strategies and learning models to help the students find the path that best suits their needs. After all, the evidence that mixed strategies create opportunities for all students to excel is displayed at Liberty University. The use of discussion boards to engage students with each other, video lectures, emailed greetings and updates, and an array of textbooks from highly technical to human interest stories shows how a design can incorporate multiple strategies. Something should resonate with every student to maintain engagement, motivation, and advancement toward graduation. The same is true with the components of training for foster care youth. However, instructors must be cautious and not rely totally on the student's motivation to remain engaged. One's desire and ability may not be equal, and there may be a need for intervention in some areas.

One curriculum design may focus on job search techniques. This process may include searching for open positions online, completing an application in person and online, and preparing for interviews, which may consist of a mock interview session. This curriculum may also include a section on professional dress, lunch etiquette, and public transportation. The

designer worked through the curriculum from the beginning to the end to ensure no learning gaps.

Some designs required pre and posttests to prove the program's impact. These tests should provide a baseline of knowledge prior to the program intervention (Anthony & Benson, 2003). Then, the posttest should provide a knowledge score after the intervention to determine the amount of change in behavior or thought as a result of the training. Yount's (2010) discipler's model was the most appropriate model for assessing the program's impact on the collaborative organization and how to transfer it to other organizations. This model was used to connect scripture to humanity for positive change, growth, and maturity. The discipler's model was used to bridge the secular psychology, which guided the foster care industry with the scriptures (Yount, 2010, p. 6). According to Yount (2010), "Unless our teaching produces an understanding of the Bible, with its commitment to Christ and his Church, all our teaching efforts produce very little. Education must be built upon the foundation of God's Word" (p. 6).

Life Skills Development

Life skills are foundational to independent living. However, the number of youths aging out of foster care in Birmingham, AL, who are ill-prepared to live independently has grown (LaGory et al., 2018). Foster care agencies, social workers, and foster parents are important to the life skill development of foster children (Henson et al., 2023). However, the research indicated that neither of these groups was involved in the assessment process. The barriers to these groups' participation were researched using surveys and semi-structured questionnaires. The research identified several theme challenges to service delivery, including the "lack of youth-focused resources, staff turnover, and minimum support to foster parents" (Henson et al.,

2023, p. 3). The research concluded that more targeted training and support are needed to reduce staff turnover and maintain a seamless system.

Health and Employment Themes

Research shows that good health is an intricate part of employment (Høy et al., 2022). Physical activity is needed to acquire and maintain good health and may be met through group sports. Unfortunately, this area of research is unavailable for American youth ages 18–30 who are not in education, employment, or training. However, the Danish have mapped the impact of physical activity on that population and the correlation between physical health, mental health, and exercise compared to employment rates (Høy et al., 2022). The study combined evidence-based approaches with employment interventions. The fieldwork spanned four counties and rendered positive experiences in health and employment. Health care is tied to employment in the United States, and the Affordable Health Care Act did not eliminate that aspect of American health care (Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs, 2022).

Housing and Independent Living

Through the study of 27 students with homelessness or foster care experience currently enrolled in a “Georgia four-year institutions of higher learning, long term housing pathways were identified: family homelessness, unaccompanied youth and foster care” (Skobba et al., 2023, p. 4). Frequent moves in high school were common in all pathways. Lack of finances for college room and board contributed to housing instability. Remedies may include rental assistance programs for college students. The research was incomplete but showed that foster children would value housing assistance to eliminate housing instability while matriculating through college (Skobba et al., 2023). As this program design was developed, there was a need to create

pathways for low-income housing and utility support; childcare assistance might also be beneficial in some cases.

Accelerated Adulthood

The foster care system ends the nurturing process at age 18. Accelerated adulthood causes anxiety and stress in young people (Palmer et al., 2022). Youth in healthy biological families maintain a safety net throughout their lives (Palmer et al., 2022). The youth are afraid of the sudden loss of support, categorized as a “care cliff” (Palmer et al., 2022, p. 787). The care cliff also occurs when youth transition out of the penal system (Brisson et al., 2020). Therefore, the sudden withdrawal of the nurturing element causes the same trauma regardless of the nurturer type.

Organizations, such as Youth Towers in Birmingham, AL, attempt to fill the gap for youth who have aged out of foster care and are unprepared to live independently. These organizations create programs that help with the job search process, skill development, childcare, budgeting, and other life skills that one may not be fully prepared to undertake at age 19. Additionally, such organizations provide mental health services to address the trauma that caused the foster care situations.

Chapter Summary

This dissertation-in-praxis investigated the major reasons children were removed from their biological homes and placed in foster care. It evaluated the scriptures that supported the spiritual responsibility for believers to look after the orphan and the fatherless (James 1:27). The analysis evaluated systemic leadership and management to identify areas of improvement. The research studied the relationships between all members of the foster care system. Moreover, it evaluated the leadership and educational theories that impacted foster care.

More importantly, the research focused on the ending of foster care services, which overwhelmingly led young people into a state of homelessness due to their lack of independent living skills. The research focused on the transition from foster care to independent living. The collaborative organization, Youth Towers, provided transitional assistance for an additional 2 year maximum. The research determined the appropriate length of time for these services and the levels of care needed to produce successful independent living.

The research considered the Biblical and theological concepts that supported the foster care system and the program's administration. The foundational theological concept that guided this research was the concept of *imago Dei*, or man being created in the image of God. Various leadership and management styles were covered and implemented within certain aspects of the program. However, the complementary aspects of the program, such as transactional leadership, were not as evident. Transactional leadership is a successful tool in its own right and with appropriate use. However, the motivation for foster care is not optimized by external incentives (Northouse, 2019). The teaching model was constructed through the discipler's model, which guided thinking, relating, and feeling the Holy Spirit, sealed with growth and anchored in the Bible and the person's needs (Yount, 2010).

The research techniques included surveys, one-on-one conversations, observations, and analysis of other research data. The goal was to develop a tool that provided graduate training to all constituents to prepare the foster child for independent living, which considered education, employment, housing, physical and mental health, and the creation of an adult support system. The tool had biblical, theoretical, and thematic overtones reflecting a comprehensive problem-solving approach.

CHAPTER THREE: THE STRATEGIC PLAN

Introduction

Removal from the home and placement in foster care is traumatic for all involved (Trivedi, 2019). That trauma has been addressed after foster care by organizations such as Youth Towers, a private not-for-profit in Birmingham, AL (Westery, 2020). The transition at age 18 from foster care to transitional living and then to independent living after age 26 causes repeated trauma of separation, insecurity, and often hopelessness (Greeson et al., 2011). Some youth make a successful transition from foster care into adulthood, while others struggle. The struggle often includes abuse, unplanned pregnancies, drug usage, under and unemployment, criminal activity, and homelessness (Kelly, 2020). Birmingham, AL, has an increasingly growing population of homeless young adults who have aged out of foster care (LaGory et al., 2018).

The local governments of Birmingham and Jefferson County in Alabama have researched the increasing numbers of homeless youth and identified several contributing factors (LaGory et al., 2018); however, a comprehensive approach to reduce or eliminate the incidents remains elusive. As a result, there is a need for an intervention program to address the systemic failures that inadequately prepare youth, specifically those in foster care, for independent living. Recognition of the growing problem is evident in the development of not-for-profit organizations with mission statements addressing components of the issue. However, comprehensive and targeted research on the pipeline from foster care to homelessness is unavailable. The information in this dissertation-in-praxis was intended to create a systematic approach to addressing homelessness after foster care in Birmingham, AL. This research addressed specific contributors to homelessness that included inadequate skill development, insufficient low-

income housing, lack of employment opportunities, and inadequate and unreliable public transportation.

Praxis Problem Summary

Regardless of the many organizations that address homelessness, including not-for-profit agencies in Birmingham, the rate of homelessness between the ages of 19 and 26 continues to increase (LaGory et al., 2018). The focus of this dissertation-in-praxis problem was the aging out of the foster care system without the skill set to live a productive, independent life. This state of homelessness is attributed to the lack of marketable skills to earn a living, thus being unable to provide the basic needs for oneself (Appendix B; Bowen et al., 2018). Parenthetically, Appendix B calls into question the criteria for receiving an Alabama High School diploma. Another barrier to being gainfully employed is the lack of a social network, including adequate public transportation (LaGory et al., 2018).

Another contributing factor to homelessness is the lack of affordable housing throughout the Birmingham-Metro Area (Gambrel & Blankenship-Mays, 2013). Females with dependent children are eligible to reside in public housing. However, males are ineligible to live in public housing unless disabled (Youngbloom et al., 2021). If the young male lacks the life skills to support his basic needs, he is at risk of becoming homeless (Youngbloom et al., 2021).

Homelessness among the youth population ages 19–26 is a social issue with a complex but executable solution. Hall (2023) argued that the government must consider the needs of the poor and disadvantaged when making public policies concerning transportation, education, and business zoning. This program was intended to develop a comprehensive plan to address homeless youth through a coalition of government agencies, businesses, and not-for-profits serving the homeless population. Each stakeholder was asked to look at the issue of youth aging

out of foster care and homelessness as a microcosm and be willing to make concessions in some areas while receiving more resources and authority in others.

The program was to dismantle the barriers between service providers that created a disconnected approach to the issues of homelessness, specifically homeless youth. They have not provided long-term, sustainable solutions. Additionally, it highlighted the need for a unifying agent to knit the services together into a seamless continuum of care that supported the young adult homeless population or those at risk of homelessness. Subsequently, there are many targeted services for individual symptoms of homelessness. Unfortunately, absence is a continuum of care that services the smorgasbord of reasons for and the results of homelessness. Therefore, this dissertation-in-praxis program developed a strategic action plan to reduce by 30% and start a path to eliminate repetitive homelessness in Birmingham, Alabama youth by 2030.

One organization that was asked to reevaluate its service delivery plan was Youth Towers, a 501©3 organization providing comprehensive wrap-around services for homeless youth and their dependent children. Youth Towers collaborated with this researcher to determine ways to serve the homeless youth population better. It provided clothes, food, shelter, transportation, education, and utility assistance with mental and physical health treatment through partnerships with other agencies (Westery, 2020). Youth Towers served more than 200 homeless youth on any given day. The 200 youths served by Youth Towers daily were a fraction of those living on the streets, sleeping on friends' sofas, or facing other transient forms of living (LaGory et al., 2018).

The young adult homelessness state in Birmingham was a challenge requiring a multifaceted approach to resolution. The population has to be identified to reduce the homeless young adult population by 30% in 6 years. Therefore, a follow-up program for foster care

agencies needs to be implemented to determine when a young adult falls off the grid and possibly into homelessness. Data from the U.S. Census Bureau (2022) helped establish baseline numbers, but the age of the data made it challenging to apply to today's environment. Subsequently, a follow-up strategy provided a better and more updated population to research. Then, the ability to quickly assess the reason for homelessness and offer immediate housing in a non-judgmental environment was crucial to the program's acceptance.

Vision Statement

The vision statement of this research was to provide Birmingham's leadership with a comprehensive, seamless, and collaborative approach including government, business, and the not-for-profit markets to address the state of homelessness with an emphasis on prevention for youth.

Purpose Statement

Birmingham will reduce homelessness in youth ages 19 to 26 by 20% over the next 5 years and by 10% each subsequent year until the pipeline is eradicated of repetitious and chronic homelessness in the youth population. This comprehensive approach to youth homelessness will address those wards of the State of Alabama to ensure that the care and adult preparation received is conducive to producing independent adults.

The following objectives were designed based on identifying the most prominent barriers to independent living among Birmingham's youth. However, as the research developed, it became clear that these objectives may need to be streamlined due to lack of adequate time to develop the relationships with leaders within the various industries. Those relationships were critical to learning the specific gaps and strategy failures within the service delivery system.

Objectives

Objective 1

1. If we develop a skills program to teach basic reading, writing, and arithmetic and life skills, then the cycle of homelessness can be interrupted and non-repetitive by employment.

The ability to access sustainable personal housing requires sufficient income to cover the cost of living and the life skills to make appropriate decisions based on needs and resources. Successful education strategies that target independent living as a goal will include decision-making skills in prioritizing needs. Students must first understand the difference between a want and a need. This goal was accomplished through activities where selections and outcomes are presented, such as the need for a pair of shoes and the choice between a US\$150.00 pair of sneakers and a US\$40.00 pair of sneakers. Both pairs met the basic needs; however, the more expensive pair may be more popular. Then, the participant had to articulate the rationale for the decision and its possible outcomes. Client individuality was a component that determined the instruction strategy that best fit participants' learning styles (Ambrose et al., 2010).

Jesus used multiple teaching styles, including stories, lectures, discussions, questions, and parables. These methods reflect Jesus's acknowledgment that people learn differently. Jesus used parables to explain foreign concepts to the people through everyday experiences (Matthew 13:10-15).

Objective 2

2. If vacated buildings are identified for repair, then more affordable housing is available for youth placement.

Neighborhood blight is problematic throughout the city of Birmingham. Homes have been abandoned for various reasons. The normal decay process has attacked the structures and added to the decreasing value of inner-city neighborhoods. If those structures could be restored

before they need to be completely condemned, then additional low-income housing is produced through the collaboration of businesses, Habitat for America, and volunteers.

The collaboration required the local government and business leaders to devise a plan that benefited property owners to relinquish their property if the state had not assumed ownership for defaulted taxes. The plan included the city executing lines attached to the property for weed abatement fees. The property may be a breeding place for snakes, rats, dogs, cats, and other animals, which present potential health risks that the Jefferson County Health Department could cite. In many cases, the possible legal options resulted in fines and fees that exceeded the property's value to the owner, removing the opportunity to repurpose the property and relieve the owners of the pending fees. Unfortunately, additional governmental concerns must be addressed (Blewett, 2023). Additionally, God honors property ownership (Genesis 23:17-18). Although there are governmental and legal restrictions on relinquishing property ownership, there is a spiritual view in the commandments that admonishes coveting another's property as a sin. Therefore, the plan required respect for property ownership before repurposing abandoned homes.

Objective 3

3. If businesses are incentivized to locate in the city limits, then there would be an increase of available jobs within the route of public transportation.

One of the barriers to sustained independence is the lack of employment opportunities within the public transportation routes. If companies were incentivized to locate within the city limits, they would be accessible through public transportation. Subsequently, the bus routes must be scheduled to meet the shift needs of the businesses. In the initial collaborations, staggered shifts among the businesses needed to be agreed upon to avoid overtasking the transit system.

This process will take 3 to 4 years to implement; however, conversations with the Better Business Bureau and the local Rotary Clubs can produce a plan to finance this idea.

1 Corinthians 10:31 admonishes all believers to do everything to the glory of God. Therefore, business leaders are expected to show their love of God by providing and tending to the sheep (John 21:17). In the 1980s, a paradigm shift occurred in the culture to produce a concerted effort for corporations to become community partners and stakeholders. Spinks (2021) revived the concept of businesses being community partners by showing how being a corporate citizen increases the return on the investment.

Objective 4

4. If changes to the goals of public transportation can be negotiated, then residents will have reliable transportation.

Another barrier to gainful employment is the lack of reliable transportation. Although the city and state governments worked on gaining the titles to abandon properties, the transit authority could have developed a plan to service the new industrial areas and as many neighborhoods as possible. These initiatives are not complicated, but when working within bureaucratic systems, one must allow time for the process. Although 3 to 5 years may initially seem like a long time, it coincides with the marketing, educational development, and implementation plans. Unfortunately, Birmingham's mass transit system has not moved quickly or efficiently to solve public transportation needs.

Therefore, this issue may present an opportunity for a public/private venture in which private transportation companies provide services to new and existing businesses within the city with staffing needs (Birmingham Jefferson County Transit Authority, 2022). Max Transit has experienced a massive turnover in recent years, which has impacted the continuity of services. Stabilizing the administrative force will allow for progress in future planning (Transportation

Management & Design, Inc., 2020). According to the Bible, a generous person will prosper, whoever refreshes others will be refreshed (Proverbs 11:25). By refreshing, in this sense, it means to ease one's burden of seeking transportation to get to a job cost-effectively and to maintain the dignity of financially supporting one's home.

Objective 5

5. If we address the foster care processes that perpetuate youth homelessness through the separation of families, then we can slow the rates of youth entering the homeless state by aging out of foster care.

One of the most important components of this proposed praxis program is to slow the entry into homelessness of youth aging out of foster care. In order to effectively address this issue, the Department of Human Resources must be willing to evaluate its processes. The policies for child separation should be revisited to create safe pathways for families to remain united. The administration must consider all areas that need revamping and actively work toward policy changes that reverse the social construct that allows children to matriculate through a system that little prepares them for the next stage of life.

Outputs

Output 1

1. Literacy increases have been identified as a critical need of youth at risk of homelessness.

The target population needed to have increased reading, writing, basic math literacy, and decision-making skills. The skills required for entry-level jobs in warehouses and assembly lines require the ability to tell time and read and write one's name, address, and other identifying information. Simple addition and subtraction may be needed in some positions. Moving a person from illiteracy to elementary proficiency may be done within a 6-month program, improving their ability to make choices (Kolinsky et al., 2017). Paul applauds believers in Rome who had

the knowledge and the ability to teach others. Therefore, teaching is appreciated in the kingdom (Romans 15:14).

Intended Output(s) 2

2. Creates a community initiative that develops abandoned buildings.

Due to federal restrictions, the city's initiative that addresses weed abatement and condemn structures may not cover this project (Blewett, 2023). However, the city and county leaders may draft new guidelines for condemning properties that will shorten the timeline. Suppose mold, asbestos, lead paint or other hazardous materials are found in the property. In that case, citing it as a health threat due to environmental issues may make condemnation easier (Team, 2023). Although this initiative will be time-consuming, it will benefit the legitimacy of the proposal to have this topic and the lawmakers at the table for discussion. The more government officials are involved, the more publicity the effort receives, which increases the probability of action from others involved (Johnson & Diaz, 2023). These participants can speak for those who cannot speak for themselves and their rights (Proverbs 31:8-9).

Intended Output(s) 3

3. Creates excitement for potential good paying jobs in communities that have been void of good paying jobs.

New industries create excitement for potential good-paying jobs in communities void of businesses and industries. Adding a neighborhood grocery store, general retail, or gas station would be uplifting in some Birmingham communities. These entities bring jobs to the neighborhood and resources absent from the city (City of Birmingham, Alabama, 2023). The scriptures declare that if one does not work, he shall not eat (2 Thessalonians 3:10-13). Therefore, those who can create and offer employment honor God by providing opportunities for others to work.

Intended Output(s) 4

4. Discuss more service routes using smaller buses until utilization increases.

Revamping Birmingham Metro Transit will profitably create more public transportation service routes by using smaller vehicles until utilization increases. Smaller multiple-passenger vehicles may meet the demand for some routes in unserved communities. Ultimately, Birmingham must incentivize all citizens to use public transportation to improve air quality and congestion produced by the lack of parking in the city (City of Birmingham, Alabama, 2023).

Intended Output(s) 5

5. Recommendations for policy changes around removing children from homes with effective intervention processes.

Revamping policies that define the removal of children from homes and establishing more intervention processes will reduce the number of youths aging out of foster care. Removing a child helps in the destruction of the family, which was Satan's first target in attacking God's plan (Genesis 3:1). When a family is broken, believers are commanded to look after the orphans and widows (James 1:27).

Outcomes***Intended Outcome 1***

This program intended to create the capacity to serve 10% more youth in temporary shelters or emergency housing to bridge the gap in the continuum of care from temporary housing to empowering them to successfully gain permanent housing by moving those in temporary housing to permanent housing more efficiently and quickly.

Intended Outcome 2

The program intended to develop incentives for shelters to reduce the length of stay by increasing placements in permanent housing at a more rapid pace.

Intended Outcome 3

The program intended to create a training program focusing on basic skill development in reading, writing, mathematics, and life skills.

Intended Outcome 4

The program intended to establish strong social ties, which included setting boundaries, establishing healthy friendships and intimate relationships, and managing family relationships. These relationships should become important to wholeness.

Summary

Typically, programs are measured by increases in resources and the number of people served (Courtney, 2009). Ideally, the success of this proposed praxis program would be measured by the number of people elevated from chronic homelessness to temporary homelessness in a shelter or emergency housing. Then, the gap in the continuum of care can be bridged from temporary housing to empowering them to gain permanent housing successfully (Kerman et al., 2009).

Emergency shelters and transitional housing services would be rewarded for shortening the length of stay by increasing the transition pace to permanent housing with additional resources for clients and agency recognition and resource gifts by the mayor (Youngbloom et al., 2021). Although, initially, housing may be based on the individual, agency success is measured by the number of reunited households with wrap-around services to ensure healthy conditions and reduce the returns to lifestyles that support homelessness, such as substance abuse, emotional and mental illness, and the lack of resources to handle life's stressful life events (Napoleon et al., 2023). Temporary housing provides a temporary fix to a long-term problem. Skill training is imperative to reducing and eradicating homelessness (Carson, 2023). Reading

and comprehending basic instructions is important for living independently (Courtney, 2009). Homelessness is the result of converging social, financial, emotional, and sometimes physical issues (Kelly, 2020). Only providing housing does not eradicate the underlying causes of the condition. Homelessness is a pathology just like any other disease and must be treated holistically. Services must integrate the goal of eradicating the condition (LaGory et al., 2018).

Certainly, the next level of success will be contingent upon enabling the clients to establish strong social ties. Therefore, support in setting boundaries, establishing healthy friendships, creating intimate relationships, and managing family relationships became important to wholeness. Ultimately, the person's self-esteem increases, and they can see others through empathy and live in reality (McLeod, 2023).

Essential Terms

1. *Foster Care Youth*: Children and young adults up to age 26 who have become wards of the foster care system due to being removed from their homes (Barnett, 2020).
2. *Homeless Youth*: This term is used throughout this dissertation-in-praxis interchangeably with youth. This term(s) refers to individuals between the ages of 18 and 26. This praxis also denotes it as those who have aged out of foster care (Westery, 2020).
3. *Homelessness*: This term is used to describe a state of being without permanent housing, lacking adequate shelter from the weather and necessities for human life, such as water, plumbing, and lights for extended periods or repeatedly within 12 months. These accommodations do not include transient housing, emergency or transitional shelters, public buildings, or couch surfing with friends and family (LaGory et al., 2018).
4. *Seamless Continuum of Care*: The term refers to a comprehensive menu of services that if properly connected, will provide complete services for a social condition, specifically, homelessness for youth aging out of foster care (Palmer et al., 2022).
5. *Target Group*: The people considered eligible in this research must be between the ages of 18 and 26 and have aged out of foster care services.

Operational Plan

The goal of strengthening the educational skills of the target group was to increase basic reading comprehension levels, writing skills, basic math, and life skills. This goal was accomplished by collaborating with training agencies such as the Birmingham Urban League. The Urban League is a community-based organization dedicated to empowering communities and changing lives in education, jobs, housing, and health (Barns, 2020).

Once skill levels were determined, varying schedules were established to offer flexibility for the youth. The Urban League currently offers GED preparation classes and GED testing. Therefore, this project was not an added burden to the organization's mission or operations. The United Way of Central Alabama provides funding for the Urban League and uses increased services as a metric for additional funding. The Urban League also offers basic computer classes, including business email writing, Excel, Word, and PowerPoint, as well as job readiness classes that complement this goal.

The second goal of identifying vacated properties to renovate was achieved by searching the public tax records to determine property ownership. If the property's taxes were delinquent, the property could be redeemed through a process outlined by the county's tax assessor's office (Hendricks, 2019). To restore these properties for habitation, there was a recommended collaboration with Habitat for Humanity, a not-for-profit that builds affordable houses for purchase and rent. Habitat for Humanity requires at least 250 volunteer hours and other criteria (Habitat for Humanity Birmingham, 2023). This collaboration would have produced additional houses for rent through Habitat for Humanity and properties that the redirected homeless youth may purchase. This collaboration would have provided volunteer opportunities to help build the volunteers' resume for skills and community service.

The local Housing and Urban Development Office (HUD) was contacted to solicit a representative to work with the team to identify future public housing availability and to ensure that the most recent HUD rules were being taught to ensure housing readiness when the client was eligible. Eligibility for public housing is generally geared toward women with children, older adults, and disabled individuals. However, some youth qualified, specifically women with children (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, n.d.).

Thirdly, attending city council meetings provided information on companies considering expanding or relocating to the Birmingham area. This process provided lobby opportunities for those businesses to be located within the city proper, where public transportation was available to provide employment opportunities for the community residents. The local city council representatives, county commissioners, and state representatives could have applied additional political pressure on those businesses. Additionally, community neighborhood leaders could have lobbied for those jobs in their neighborhoods, which would also help to provide employment opportunities and lower crime.

Fourthly, public transportation must be addressed. The MAX system is ineffective for servicing people experiencing homelessness. There are no incentives to utilize public transportation (Birmingham Jefferson County Transit Authority, 2022). Therefore, Birmingham is plagued with traffic congestion, poor air quality, and parking shortages. Large commercial buses cover routes with two or three passengers. Citizen pressure will cause the transit board to rethink its operation model. Investment in smaller buses will be more efficient and cost-effective. Incentives to park and ride, as other metropolitan cities have done, will increase utilization. Additionally, more routes with prompt and efficient schedules will increase public faith in the

transportation system. Subsequently, those without personal transportation will have reliable transportation to appointments, school, and work.

Lastly, the foster care processes that perpetuate youth homelessness by failing to prepare youth for aging out of the system properly must be considered. During this process, skills and learning goals were identified for elementary, middle, and high school children. These skills were added to the individual educational plan for the children to ensure that the lessons were taught and mastered. These lessons need to be incorporated into their normal school activities. However, the most effective delivery system is the foster parent. The foster parents will be taught the lessons and must be held responsible for teaching the child. Therefore, each child in the foster care system will have two additional sources of independent learning: school and the foster parent.

Youth Towers' staff and board members must contact principal stakeholders from the proposed collaborating organizations. These conversations will include the dire state of youth aging out of foster care, the increased number of homeless persons within the city, the decrease in city attractiveness resulting from the homeless population, the increase in crime due to their unemployment, the increase in health issues, mainly sexually transmitted diseases, unplanned pregnancies, and the shortage of affordable housing (LaGory et al., 2018).

In building this collaborative team to address youth homelessness, all constituents must see the value of their organization. Therefore, making the public aware of the problem is paramount, and this started with a grassroots campaign. Birmingham is comprised of 99 neighborhoods within 23 communities. Each neighborhood has a leadership committee structure comprised of a president, vice president, and secretary. Those neighborhood committees meet monthly and are under the leadership of the city government, which gives them direct access to

the city council members and the mayor (City of Birmingham, Alabama, 2024). Having representatives from each neighborhood speak at the neighborhood meeting about this initiative educates the community citizens participating in the neighborhood meetings. Then, inviting all the local faith leaders to a Zoom meeting to educate them on the dire condition of youth homelessness and soliciting their assistance in educating their congregations will increase public awareness. Then, a campaign to the Greek, civic, veteran, and sports organizations will enlist their public service charge and create more people advancing the information. With targeted marketing within 3 months, the message of youth homelessness could be one of the hottest topics in the city (Johnson & Diaz, 2023). Educational flyers or brochures can be distributed to restaurants, bars, beauty and barber shops, and hospital and doctor office waiting rooms. With the quality of copiers, the cost of printing is nominal for paper and printing ink. Youth Towers serves up to 200 youth daily (Westery, 2020). One of their activities could be distributing printed materials as part of their volunteer hours.

Once community awareness has been raised, the local news stations and radio stations will be more inclined to provide public service announcements about the plight of foster care youth after aging out of the program. Several local radio talk shows reach a demographic that the television announcements and other initiatives may miss. Therefore, the Youth Towers staff and others must be trained to participate in live interviews. Like most major cities, Birmingham has several local philanthropists who would love to engage first with funding. With the groundswell of community and local philanthropists, the governmental organizations must engage because they are elected officials who want to show goodwill toward initiatives that the public supports.

Now that the constituents are at the table, the problem must be clearly articulated with facts and figures to support the allegations. Once that information is communicated, a

preliminary operation plan must be presented with some critical information missing. This process allows those convened to have meaningful input and accept responsibility for the plan's areas. The long-term goal is to reduce youth homelessness by 30% by 2030. Within that timeframe, the team can establish short-term goals, creating more ownership of the product and the outcome (Chen, 2015).

Some recommendations are not new. However, some strategies require a new way of providing the same services with an emphasis on collaboration instead of silo operations. Public transportation, for example, has been struggling for years in Birmingham with continuous staff turnover. Unfortunately, Birmingham's public transportation is viewed as transportation for the poor. Unlike other major metropolitan areas, public transportation is not viewed as an alternative to parking issues downtown, although they exist. Public transportation is not embraced as a viable alternative to reduce the use of fossil fuel or its impact on the air quality. Perhaps embracing the role of providing transportation for the poor and saving the ecology may breathe new life into the operations. Those goals may provide the stability needed for the organization to rise to the occasion and produce solutions. The Birmingham Urban League failed to answer inquiries to determine their role in addressing youth homelessness. Perhaps a new funding sources would incentivize the Urban League to join with other organizations to fight youth homelessness. A more defined collaboration with Youth Towers to address youth homelessness through education and job readiness may be the program needed to raise additional funds. The Department of Housing and Urban Development and the Birmingham Housing Authority can use this initiative to help with the public perception of these government agencies. Goodwill goes a long way with public perception (DeChesare et al., 2023). The most time-consuming goal is the creation of additional affordable housing through Habitat for America. And it was the most

impractical. Although the idea was innovative, it did not align with Habitat for America's mission. However, as individuals become more independent and financially stable, Habitat for America is a resource for obtaining individual homes.

A public information campaign is vital to gaining public support for investing in low-income housing and neighborhood revitalization. The local news media is constantly seeking public interest stories. Therefore, requesting media coverage and advertisement to support the housing efforts will educate the public to the needs and the possible solutions. Once the public service advertisements begin, there will be media coverage at community meetings to assess the progress and commitment to the efforts and to keep the citizens informed of changes. For those in the political arena, this initiative presents free campaigning opportunities, or it could be devastating if politicians are perceived as barriers to the solution. If the roll-out is executed correctly, there may be more constituents than initially considered because everyone wants to be part of a positive message.

According to John Kotter (2012), change is dependent on the people involved and their motivation to remain involved in the change process. This motivation is based on the urgency of the matter, the skills of those involved, the clarity of the vision, the division of roles, identification and plans to address roadblocks, short-term achievable goals, and a plan to maintain changes. Successful development and implementation of this plan is contingent upon deploying the right change agent. A major component of success is the groundswell of public opinion to thrust this concern into the spotlight so that long-term systemic changes can occur (Table 1).

Table 1

Plan to Reduce Birmingham, AL Youth Homelessness After Foster Care for Youth Towers: Operations Plan CLED 887

Goals	Strategy	Activity	Lead party	Resources needed	Start date	End date
1. Develop basic and life skill programs.	Identify basic reading, writing, and math skills to become functional.	Develop skill activities for reading, writing, and math.	Birmingham Urban League	Skills Assessments	TBA	TBA
2. Locate properties for low-cost housing.	Collaborate with Habitat for America and local major contractors.	Collaborate with the property revenue board to identify and plot potential properties.	Youth Towers' Board members	Relationship building skills	TBA	TBA
3. Increasing good-paying, low-skill jobs.	Collaborate with the city and county governments and the Neighborhood Associations.	Host a brainstorming session with decision-making representatives	Youth Towers' Board Chair	Industrial Long-Term Plan for Birmingham	TBA	TBA
4. Assist with developing efficient public transportation.	Collaborate with MAX, the local governments, and Youth Towers' Director	Identify ways to serve more people with less waste of resources.	Project Manager and MAX	Incentives for car owners to use public transportation	TBA	TBA
5. Addressing the failures of foster care.	Collaborate with the local Department of Human Resources, which develops foster care policies.	Host a brainstorming session with DHR and Youth Towers' staff.	Project Manager	Open and honest communication	TBA	TBA

Assessment Plan

The first assessment point was the effective communication of the problem to the public through face-to-face conversations, digital mediums, print material, television, and radio. There must be a dual track of educating the general public and those key constituents to ensure the right people are at the table. Those critical to the process must be contacted within the first week of public education. Therefore, they were made aware of the public groundswell before the public

started asking them questions about their failure to be a part of the solution. The critical constituents were leaders of HUD, Birmingham Public Housing Authority, Department of Human Resources/Foster Care, Birmingham Urban League, Birmingham Board of Education, Habitat for Humanity, Birmingham Transit Authority, and the leaders of Youth Towers.

Building an assessment design required the input of each constituent. Therefore, work circles determined reasonable delivery timeframes within the program goals during the first meeting. Options for timelines were 2 weeks, 30 days, 6 weeks, 90 days, and 180 days. Progress was charted based on deliverables being completed. For the first month, weekly meetings were scheduled using the community room of local libraries, which were free venues equipped with Wi-Fi and projectors for presentations.

Success was determined by recruiting and maintaining a minimum of 25 participants in the program at all times, with at least 20 of them becoming gainfully employed or enrolled in a trade school or institution of higher education by the time they aged out of transitional care of the Youth Towers program at age 26. Those participants in the foster care program showed marked progress in their academic scores and life skill development through role play and classroom activities.

Table 2*Assessment Plan: Plan to Reduce Birmingham, AL Youth Homelessness After Foster Care*

Goals	Evidence of success	Risks
1. Develop basic and life skill programs.	Reading comprehension, writing, and math skills improved to a functional level, as evidenced by passing the driver's exam, learning to follow recipes, and counting money.	Lack of cooperation from Birmingham City Schools, DHR, Urban League, and foster parents.
2. Locate properties for low-cost housing.	Creation of additional low-income housing.	Meeting initial financing and other agency requirements for residency.
3. Increasing good-paying, low-skill jobs	Businesses locate within the city proper and commit to hiring program participants.	Job creation is too slow, or inadequate position availability.
4. Assist with developing efficient public transportation.	More routes, smaller vehicles, timely schedules.	Lack of usage, funding to revamp services, and city support of efforts.
5. Addressing the failures of foster care	Identifying policies and practices that need amending to address the issues of homelessness.	Bureaucratic red tape, lack of accountability, resistance to the process

Note. Critical factors to success are reliable city transportation, new employment opportunities, and more affordable housing planned within the first year. Public interest and support are the catalysts to a successful plan. A political solution may result from public support and influence for Assessment Plan CLED 887.

Quantitative Assessments

Typically, programs were measured by resource increases and the number of people served. Ideally, success was measured by the number of people elevated from chronic homelessness to temporary homelessness in a shelter or emergency housing. Then, the aim was to bridge the gap in the continuum of care from temporary housing to empowering them to gain permanent housing successfully. Seeing the utilization of emergency shelters and transitional housing services decrease and shorten the stay by increasing movement to permanent housing was a quantitative measure.

The data were collected through surveys that target the length and frequency of homelessness, the education level, employment status, rate of pay, and reasons for loss of permanent housing. Regression analysis examined trends and relationships between factors. Within the regression analysis, the correlations between factors were quantified to determine the

strength of the relationships. The challenge with correlations is not to view them as causation (Baldwin, 2018).

Each process had target goals measured by the number of print pieces distributed, the number of times neighborhood meetings were attended, and youth homelessness was discussed, the number of civic organizations partnered with Youth Towers to help spread the information, and the number of public service announcements on television and radio. Also, target goals were measured by the number of faith organizations supporting communication, volunteers, and finances; the same was true for Greek and civic organizations. This goal entailed building a grassroots initiative like community organizing. With the pressure of the public, the governmental agencies were required to commit enough resources to show good faith and continue if the project appeared successful. Therefore, the initial goals must be achievable to maintain the collaboration.

Qualitative Assessments

Excitement about remedying youth homelessness from failed foster care programs meant communication and marketing were working. Through observations, local not-for-profits' commitment and engagement showed a level of success. The willingness of the youth to participate in the program was another success marker, which indicated that the target population felt safe and respected. Therefore, they were willing to follow the program guidelines, believing in good outcomes.

When researching social issues, situations may not have been measured because they generally focus on questions that discuss how a phenomenon began and the social impact it creates compared to measurable entities (e.g., time, length, weight, height, distance, etc.). A survey was developed to determine the appetite for addressing these concerns and the public's

awareness of concern about and willingness to address homelessness in youth. Qualitative data is subjective to individual perspectives. For example, pain intensity is generally described on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being the unbearable pain. Although that definition was comprehensible, it was not definitively measured because different people defined unbearable differently. Qualitative responses were entered into SPSS, a statistical program designed to quantify qualitative data for statistical data analysis (Baldwin, 2018), to assess the data and show relationships between the information.

Summary and Significance

This dissertation-in-praxis was designed to address the core issue of readiness for independent living when aged out of foster care. Admittedly, the foster care system removes children from homes that are deemed unsafe for the child. However, the responsibility of parents, biological or foster, is to develop well-rounded children who can be self-sufficient. Each child develops at different rates under the best of circumstances. Therefore, it is understandable that children who have experienced the trauma of family separation and often other traumatic events as well may require a long period of adjustment for independent living.

However, children with average intelligence who are 18 or older find themselves unable to read with comprehension, solve basic math problems, and develop a basic household budget, which adults have failed in their lives. This praxis addressed those issues and offered concrete solutions while creating a collaborative team of business, government, and not-for-profit leaders to bring their resources to bear on the issue of youth homelessness in Birmingham. However, highlighting the number of youths under the age of 26 who were homeless after being in the care of the government brought a particular edge to the story that made government participation mandatory.

Youth Towers served more than 200 homeless youth daily at the time of this praxis. Not all of those 200 aged out of foster care, but a significant number did. Unfortunately, Youth Towers did not have the physical or financial resources to address the core issues. However, the staff and the board of directors were ready and able to publicize the problem and offer plausible solutions to those with the resources.

The main barriers were obtaining and retaining government cooperation from the city, foster care programs, transportation, and housing. This process required continued pressure from the community, demanding that progress be made, and visible solutions be developed. Skill development, transportation, employment opportunities, and available employment were the barriers to these youths' having adequate housing. All of these barriers could be addressed with the resources available. It would take some renegotiation of services and a little tweaking of service delivery plans. However, this project would have been doable if agency leaders had remained committed to the outcomes.

CHAPTER FOUR: IMPLEMENTATION AND ASSESSMENT

Introduction

The purpose of this quantitative correlation study was identify methods to reduce homelessness in youth exiting foster care in Birmingham by 30% by the end of 2030. This will be achieved by examining trends and relationships between public transportation, academics, career readiness, and Youth Tower satisfaction to address the core issue of readiness for independent living after leaving foster care and reducing homelessness in Birmingham, Alabama, among youth aged 19 to 26. This analysis aimed to establish whether there had been an increase in literacy, development of abandoned buildings, employment, and public transportation, as well as a decrease in health concerns and the number of adolescents aging out of foster care. Teens are aging out of foster care without the necessary life skills to live independently, and this pipeline frequently leads to homelessness for adolescents over the age of 19. In Birmingham, Alabama, extended foster care is available until age 21.

This dissertation-in-praxis addressed the primary focus of preparing for an independent life after leaving foster care. Admittedly, the foster care system removes children from families that are judged unsafe for them. However, it is the responsibility of parents, whether biological or foster, to raise well-rounded children who can live independently. Even under ideal conditions, each child develops at a different rate. It is reasonable that children who have experienced the trauma of family separation, as well as other traumatic experiences, may require a considerable period of adjustment before being able to live independently.

This chapter summarizes the study's results and findings, starting with an overview of the data collection procedure and moving on to descriptive and inferential statistics (correlation and linear regression) for the major variables. The objectives of the study guide the presentation of

the findings. The chapter is broken into four sections: (a) Introduction, which sets the setting for the study, (b) Descriptive Statistics, which provides an overview of the findings, (c) Results, which shows the data analysis results, and (d) Summary, which provides a concise overview of the findings and their significance.

Praxis Project Plan

This dissertation-in-praxis problem was the aging out of the foster care system without the skill set to live a productive, independent life. This state of homelessness was attributed to the lack of marketable skills to earn a living, thus unable to provide the basic needs for oneself (Bowen et al., 2018) and (Appendix B). Parenthetically, Appendix B calls into question the criteria for receiving an Alabama High School diploma. Another barrier to gaining employment was the lack of a social network, including adequate public transportation, housing, and jobs (LaGory et al., 2018).

This researcher interviewed a DHR social worker, executive director for the Regional Planning Commission, Birmingham, and Birmingham Community presidents. The research included an interview of a Birmingham City educator, who provided insight into the public education curriculum that advances independent living. Seventy-three homeless individuals, ages 18 and above, were surveyed to determine the correlation between foster care and homelessness in youth under age 26.

Vision Statement

This research intended to develop a comprehensive, seamless, and collaborative approach with government, business, and the not-for-profit markets to address the state of homelessness with an emphasis on prevention for youth, specifically, those youth aging out of foster care.

Purpose Statement

This research will develop a plan to reduce homelessness in youth ages 19 to 26 by 20% over the next 5 years and by 10% each subsequent year until the pipeline is eradicated of repetitious and chronic homelessness in the youth population. This comprehensive approach to youth homelessness addressed those wards of the State of Alabama to ensure that the care and adult preparation received is conducive to producing independent adults.

Objectives

The following objectives are created to address conditions that have surfaced throughout the research as contributors to homelessness in the target population. If they do not cause homelessness, they can exacerbate the condition. These objectives are to be reached as a result of implementing the research plan design.

Objective 1

1. If we develop a skills program to teach basic reading, writing, and arithmetic and life skills, then the cycle of homelessness can be interrupted and non-repetitive by employment.

Obtaining and maintaining stabilized housing, sufficient income to cover living costs, and the life skills to make appropriate decisions based on needs and resources. Successful education strategies that target independent living as a goal prioritize decision-making to distinguish needs and wants. This goal can be accomplished through activities where selections and outcomes are presented, such as the need for a pair of shoes and the choice between a US\$150.00 pair of sneakers and a US\$40.00 pair of sneakers. Then, they must be able to articulate the rationale for the decision. The research showed a positive correlation between Youth Towers and academics. Therefore, decision-making is enhanced through the programming at Youth Towers, which translates to housing sustainability.

Objective 2

2. If vacated buildings are identified for repair, then more affordable housing is available for youth placement.

Neighborhood blight is a problem within the city of Birmingham. Homes are abandoned for various reasons. Normal attacks the structure and adds to the increasing blight of inner-city neighborhoods. If those structures could be restored before being completely condemned, additional low-income housing would be produced.

Repurposing these homes will require the local government and business leaders to devise a plan that will benefit property owners to relinquish their property if the state has not assumed ownership for defaulted taxes. The city may have a lien against the property for weed abatement fees that may incentivize owners to release the property. The property may be a breeding place for snakes, rats, dogs, cats, and other animals, which may cause potential health risks that the Jefferson County Health Department may cite. These possibilities may result in fines and fees that exceed the property's value to the owner. Therefore, creating an opportunity to repurpose the property and relieve the owners of the pending fees is important. Unfortunately, additional governmental, social, and political concerns must be addressed (Blewett, 2023). Although this variant was not tested, available housing is critical to placements. Therefore, housing availability must be addressed.

Objective 3

3. If businesses are incentivized to locate in the city limits, then there would be an increase of available jobs within the route of public transportation.

Another barrier to sustained independence is the lack of employment opportunities within the public transportation routes. If companies were incentivized to locate within the city limits, they would be accessible to public transportation. Subsequently, the bus routes must be scheduled to meet the shift needs of the businesses. In the initial negotiations, staggered shifts

among the businesses needed to be agreed upon to avoid overtasking the transit system. This process will take 3 to 4 years to implement; however, conversations with the Better Business Bureau and local Rotary Clubs can produce a plan to advance this idea and revive the concept of businesses being community partners through corporate citizenship. The career readiness level when opportunities arrive might be skewed because it measured the participant's assessment of their readiness instead of implementing an assessment to measure readiness.

Objective 4

4. If changes to the goals of public transportation can be negotiated, then residents will have reliable transportation.

Another barrier to gainful employment is the lack of reliable transportation. The transit authority can develop a plan for the new industrial areas and as many neighborhoods as possible. These initiatives are not complicated, but when working within systems, one must allow time for the process. Although 3 to 5 years may initially seem like a long time, it coincides with the marketing, educational development, and implementation plans. Unfortunately, Birmingham's mass transit system has not moved quickly or efficiently to solve public transportation needs. The .956 standard deviation for transportation compared to readiness for independent living reflects a ratio of nearly 1:1. Although the standard deviation does not imply causation, it reflects a high relationship between the variables.

Objective 5

5. If we address the foster care processes that perpetuate youth homelessness through the separation of families, then we can slow the rates of youth entering the homeless state by aging out of foster care.

One of the most important components of this proposed praxis program is to slow the entry into homelessness of youth aging out of foster care. In order to effectively address this issue, the Department of Human Resources must be willing to evaluate its processes, identify

areas that need revamping, and actively work toward policy changes that reverse the social construct that allows children to matriculate through a system that ill-prepares them for the next stage of life. Foster care was not a variable that presented as a reason or cause for homeless youth. However, the data showed that variables other than those tested would have significance and may predict homelessness.

Intended Outputs

The desired end to this project is the conceptualization and groundbreaking program development for a holistic and seamless approach to eradicate youth homelessness, as shown below. Additionally, in light of the modifications to this project, the following reflects a more targeted approach to confronting homelessness by addressing life skill development.

1. The target population will have increased reading, writing, basic math literacy, and better decision-making skills. The skills required for entry-level jobs in warehouses and assembly lines require the ability to tell time and read and write one's name, address, and other identifying information. Simple addition and subtraction may be needed in some positions. Advancing a person from illiteracy to elementary proficiency may be done within a 6-month program, which will also improve their ability to make choices (Kolinsky et al., 2017). This life skill improvement will better position the homeless person to become gainfully employed.
2. The target population will have more available low-income housing and communities will be rid of abandoned and deteriorating properties if those identified are remodeled for low-income housing. This initiative will develop abandoned buildings, eliminate blight, and potential health concerns. However, due to federal and state restrictions, the city's initiative that addresses weed abatement and condemns structures may not cover this project (Blewett, 2023). However, the city and county leaders may draft new guidelines for condemning properties that will shorten the timeline. If mold, asbestos, lead paint or other hazardous elements are found in the property, the property may be a health hazard. In that case, citing it as a health threat due to environmental issues may make condemnation easier (Team, 2023). Although this initiative will be time-consuming, it will benefit the legitimacy of the proposal to have this topic and the lawmakers at the table for discussion. The more government officials are involved, the more publicity the effort receives, which increases the probability of action from others involved (Johnson & Diaz, 2023).
3. New industries create excitement for potential good-paying jobs in communities that are void of businesses and industries. Adding a neighborhood grocery store, general retail, or gas station would be uplifting in some Birmingham communities. These

- entities bring jobs to the neighborhood and resources that are absent from the city (City of Birmingham, Alabama, 2023).
4. Revamping Birmingham Metro Transit will profitably create more public transportation service routes by using smaller vehicles until utilization increases. Smaller multiple-passenger vehicles may meet the demand for some routes in unserved communities. Ultimately, Birmingham must incentivize all citizens to use public transportation to improve air quality and congestion produced by the lack of parking in the city (City of Birmingham, Alabama, 2023).
 5. Revamping policies that define the removal of children from homes and establishing more intervention processes will reduce the number of youths entering and aging out of foster care.

Intended Outcomes

As these practices become common, their outcomes will become the norm. The outcomes this researcher sought included the following:

1. Developing life skills will reduce youth in temporary shelters or emergency housing by 10% by bridging the gap in the continuum of care from temporary housing to empowering them to successfully gain permanent housing by ensuring they have the skills to sustain permanent housing.
2. Develop incentives for shelters to reduce the length of stay by increasing placements in permanent housing at a more rapid pace as more delinquent properties are developed for occupancy. The incentives must be tied to life skill development to ensure sustainability in permanent housing.
3. Create a training program focusing on basic skill development in reading, writing, mathematics, and life skills. This process will increase career readiness when businesses locate with public transportation routes.
4. Incorporate more exercises to build a framework to establish strong social ties, including setting boundaries, establishing healthy friendships, establishing intimate relationships, and managing family relationships in the foster care requirements.

Praxis Project Assessment

Assessment of Project Antecedents

The Need

Homelessness is an embarrassing state (Sandonato, 2023). Therefore, those experiencing it are reluctant to discuss the cause. With limited access to those on the street, the intake process

for those in temporary housing, shelters, hospitals, and incarcerated reveals several negative life events prevalent in the population: parental divorce, eviction, incarceration, inability to work with others, school expulsion and physical and sexual abuse (LaGory et al., 2018). The victims of youth homelessness have experienced one or more, and generally, three of the major causes of homelessness include physical, mental, sexual, emotional, and substance abuse (Burge et al., 2021). Often, members of this population feel isolated and have trust issues. Subsequently, determining the causes of the condition may be a time-consuming effort. If children are homeless because they ran away to escape physical and sexual abuse in the home, there is a high probability that they do not trust adults (Burge et al., 2021). Even when placed in foster care, establishing trust can be a journey (Youngbloom et al., 2021). Unfortunately, when trust is established, the youth may be aging out of the program and reenter the homeless population (LaGory et al., 2018). Regardless of the stated, presumed, or statistical rationale for homelessness, Birmingham's human condition requires attention.

The Participants

Precision Consulting, LLC, performed the statistical analysis. Table 3 summarizes the demographic characteristics of the study participants. The sample size was 73 individuals, with 67.1% male ($n = 49$) and 32.9% female ($n = 24$). The age distribution was as follows: 16.4% were aged 18 to 20 ($n = 12$), 26% were aged 21 to 23 ($n = 19$), 12.3% were aged 25 to 26 ($n = 9$), and 45.2% were 27 or older ($n = 33$). In terms of race, the majority were Black (63%, $n = 46$), followed by White (30.1%, $n = 22$), Hispanic/Latino (1.4%, $n = 1$), and other races (5.5%, $n = 4$). In terms of current residence, 6.8% reported living on the street ($n = 5$), 13.7% were staying at a friend's house ($n = 10$), 21.9% owned their own home ($n = 16$), and 57.5% were classified as different forms of living circumstances ($n = 42$). Regarding foster care experience, 9.1% of

participants had been in foster care ($n = 4$), whereas 90.9% had not ($n = 40$). The average age when individuals first encountered homelessness was 28.0 years, with a standard deviation of 12.9 years.

Table 3

Demographic Characteristics

	<i>n</i>	%
Gender		
Male	49	67.1
Female	24	32.9
Age Group		
18 - 20	12	16.4
21 - 23	19	26
25 - 26	9	12.3
27 or Older	33	45.2
Race		
White	22	30.1
Black	46	63
Hispanic / Latino	1	1.4
Others	4	5.5
Current Residence		
On the Street	5	6.8
At a friend's House	10	13.7
In Own Place	16	21.9
Other	42	57.5
Ever in foster care?		
No	40	90.9
Yes	4	9.1
Age first experienced homelessness - <i>M</i> [<i>SD</i>]	28.0 [12.9]	

The Context

The study used a series of multiple-question Likert scales to determine whether there had been an increase in literacy, the development of abandoned buildings, employment, and public transportation, as well as a decrease in health issues and the number of teenagers leaving foster care. These multiple-question Likert scales assess latent variables, or hidden or unobservable characteristics, such as youth attitudes toward public transportation, academics, career readiness, and youth tower satisfaction, to address the core issue of readiness for independent living after leaving foster care. Because these are difficult to measure and observe in real life, measuring

them using a set of correlated questions that covered many aspects of the construct of interest was preferable. The answers to the individual item questions were aggregated to generate a scale. This study examined four scales: public transportation, academics, career readiness, and youth tower satisfaction. One method to determine if these scales, made up of linked individual items, were consistent and reliable was to determine the scale's internal consistency-reliability, which was the degree to which individual items differed or were closely linked as a group.

Resources

The survey participants were volunteers from homeless shelters in Birmingham, AL. Those shelters were Youth Towers, the primary benefactor of this research, Jessie's Place, a shelter for young homeless women who are victims of domestic violence, Brother Bryant, which provides shelter for males with substance abuse issues, and Project Hope, a street outreach and drop-in day shelter for homeless youth. The participants were surveyed using four instruments, which measured services received and needed, demographics, and career readiness (Appendices C to F). Table 4 presents Cronbach's statistics for these instruments.

Table 4

Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Statistics

	<i>n</i>	<i>n</i> Items	Item <i>M</i>	Scale <i>M</i>	Cronbach's alpha
Public Transportation	70	4	3.368	13.47	.743
Academics	72	8	3.564	28.51	.924
Youth Tower Satisfaction	65	8	3.715	29.72	.985
Career Readiness	40	7	2.704	18.93	.830

Assumption Analysis

The study examined the relationship between public transportation, academics, career preparedness, and Youth Towers' client satisfaction in Birmingham, Alabama, to address the main issue of preparing adolescents for independent living after leaving foster care and reducing

homelessness among those aged 19 to 26. Multiple regression and Pearson correlation analyses were used to see whether there was a statistically significant relationship between these parameters to address the central issue of preparation for independent living after exiting foster care and minimizing homelessness. However, the data must always meet specific assumptions in order to conduct multiple regression and Pearson correlation analyses conclusively and with acceptable results. Although these statistical procedures are quite robust, it is typically recommended that the quality of the results be assessed by measuring the degree of divergence from these assumptions. This study examined six assumptions: (a) observational independence, (b) a linear relationship between the dependent variable and each of the independent variables, (c) heteroscedastic variances, (d) no multicollinearity, (e) no significant outliers, high leverage points, or highly influential points, and (f) residuals (errors) that are roughly normally distributed.

The Durbin-Watson statistic was used to test the assumption of observational independence. The Durbin-Watson statistic assumes that the data observations are independent of one another, which means that one observation's value does not affect another's value. This statistic has a value range of .0 to 4.0, with a value of 2.0 indicating no correlation between the residuals (Turner, 2019). Values less than 1.0 and larger than 3.0 are deemed troublesome and suggest serial correlation in the model. This score was 1.270, indicating that the assumption was not violated.

Scatter plots were created to test the assumption that a linear relationship existed between the dependent and independent variables, followed by a visual evaluation of the scatter plots to determine linearity. The scatter plots for the linear connection showed no U-shaped pattern or

identifiable shape (see Figure 1, Figure 2, & Figure 3), indicating that the assumption of linearity was met.

Figure 1

Scatter Plot of Public Transportation and Youth Tower Satisfaction

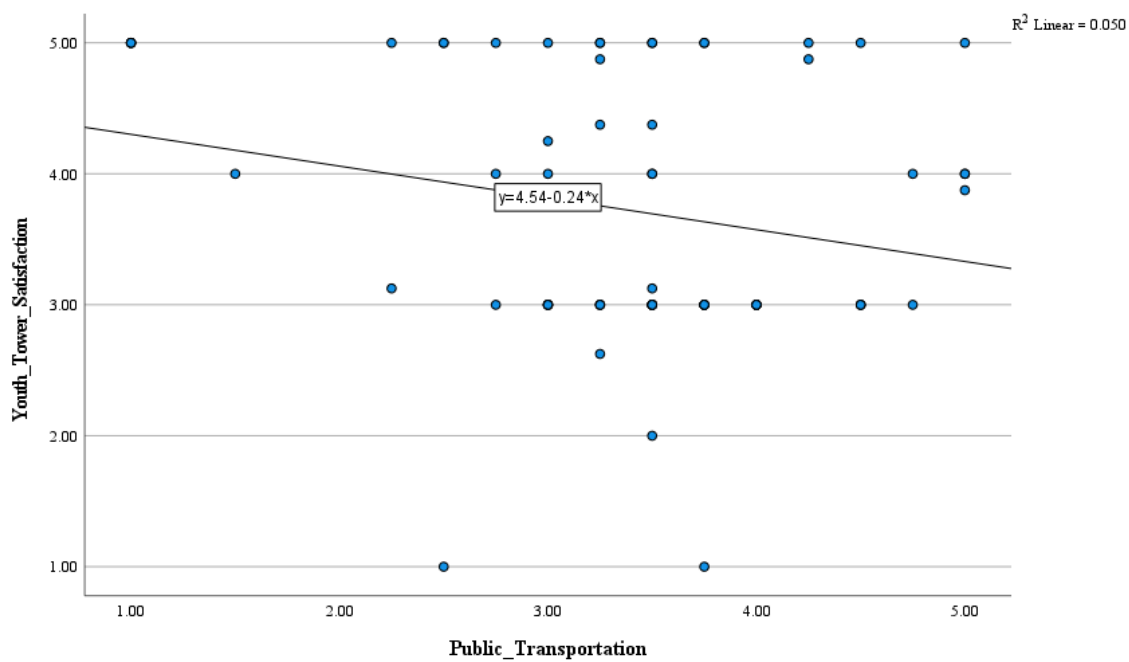
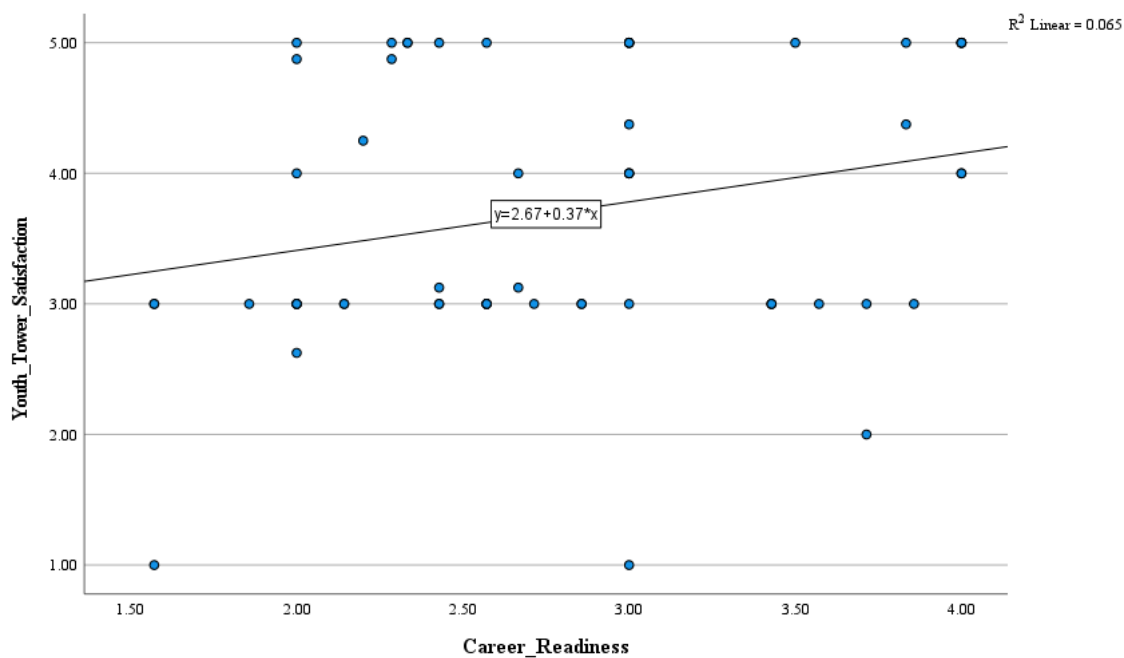
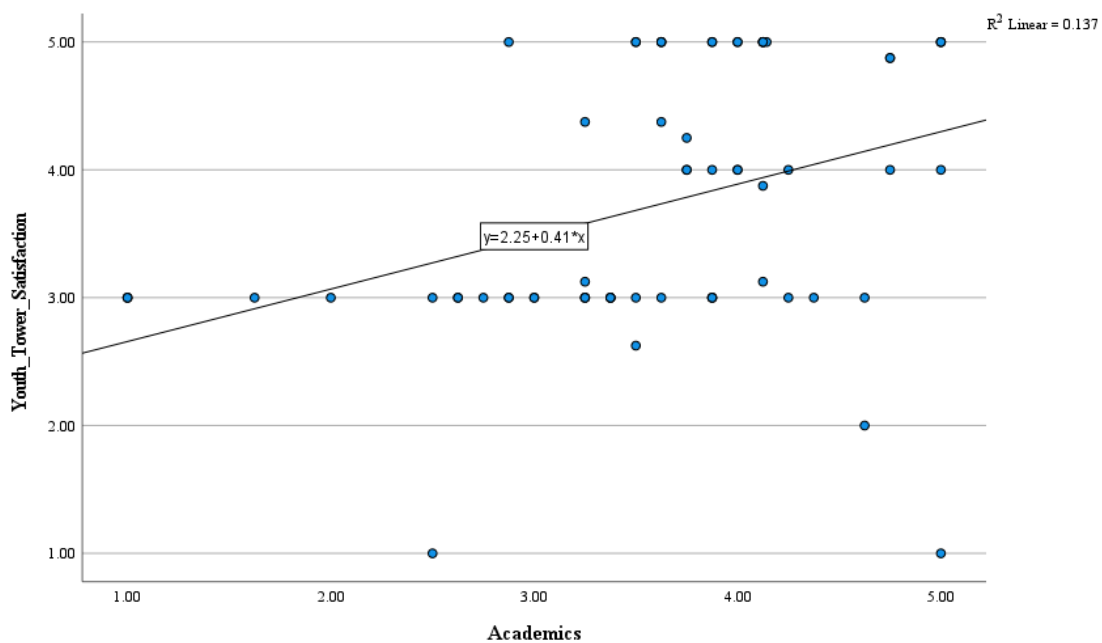


Figure 2

Scatter Plot of Career Readiness and Youth Tower Satisfaction

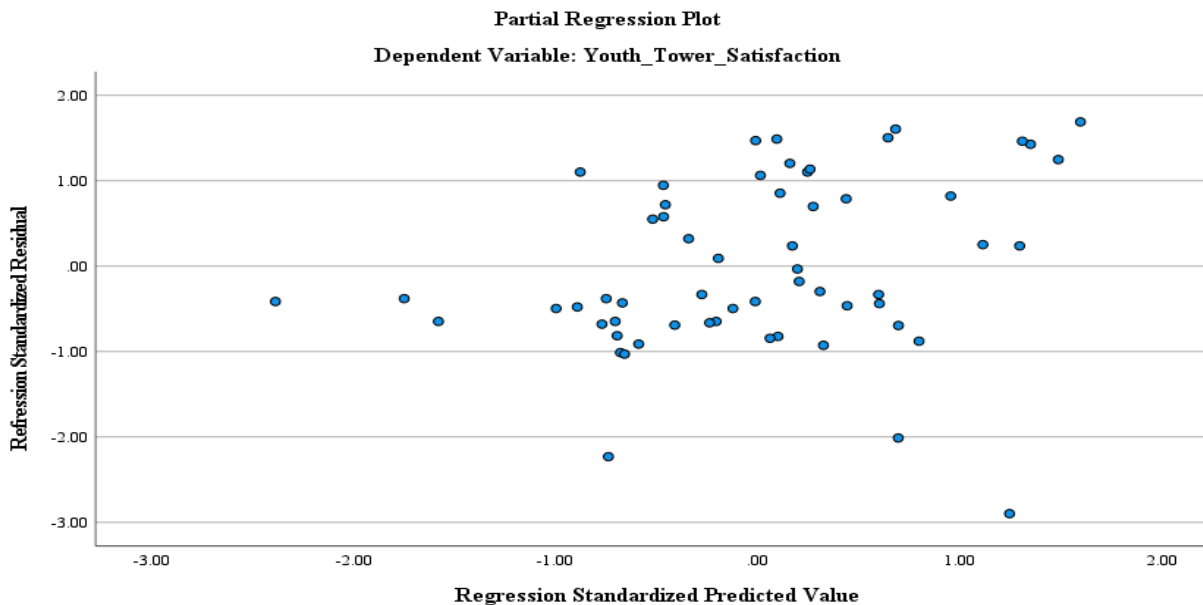
**Figure 3**

Scatter Plot of Academics and Youth Tower Satisfaction



A residual scatter plot (see Figure 4) was used to test the assumption that reported variances must be heteroscedastic, indicating that the residuals' dispersion around the regression line must be constant across the whole range of the predicted dependent variable. The scatter plot in Figure 4 supported the visual assessment for heteroscedasticity, highlighting that the residuals had unequal variance. There were no visible trends in the scatter plot.

The Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) was used to test the assumption that the data did not exhibit multicollinearity, suggesting that the two independent variables are not correlated. Multicollinearity raises the variance of the estimated regression coefficient for an independent variable, as measured by the VIF. A VIF score of 1 indicates no multicollinearity between the variables, but a score of 5 or more indicates significant multicollinearity between the variables, and the assumption is not met (Vörösmarty & Dobos, 2020). The study's VIFs for the three independent variables ranged from 1.025 to 1.102, indicating that this assumption was not violated (see Table 5).

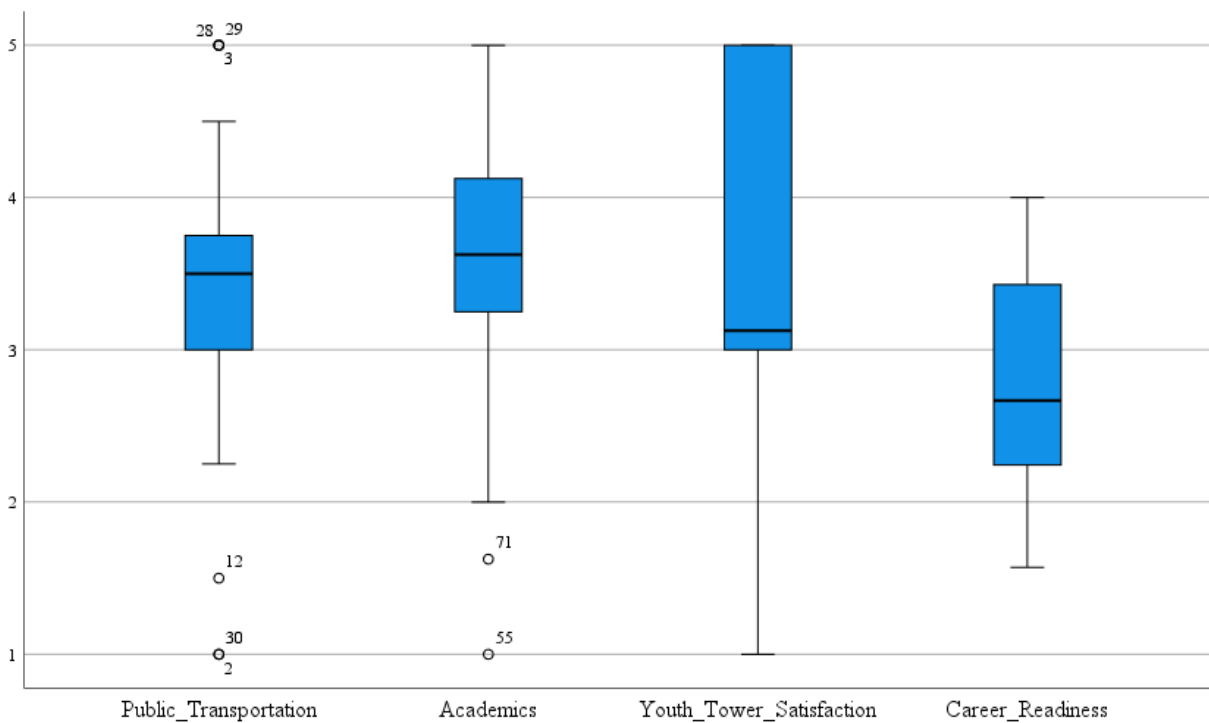
Figure 4*Partial Residual Regression Plot***Table 5***Collinearity Statistics*

	Tolerance	VIF
Public Transportation	.975	1.025
Academics	.920	1.086
Career Readiness	.907	1.102

In the following assumption, no notable outliers, high leverage points, or very impactful spots should exist. This assumption was tested using box plots (see Figure 5). Some outliers were found in the independent variables of public transportation and academics. Cooks distance was investigated in addition to visual inspection of box plots to test the undue influence of outliers on the analysis. For this model, the Cook's distance ranged from .000 to .270. Values of 1.0 or above are troublesome, and extra diagnostics would have been carried out to assess whether an undue influence existed (Gress et al., 2018).

Figure 5

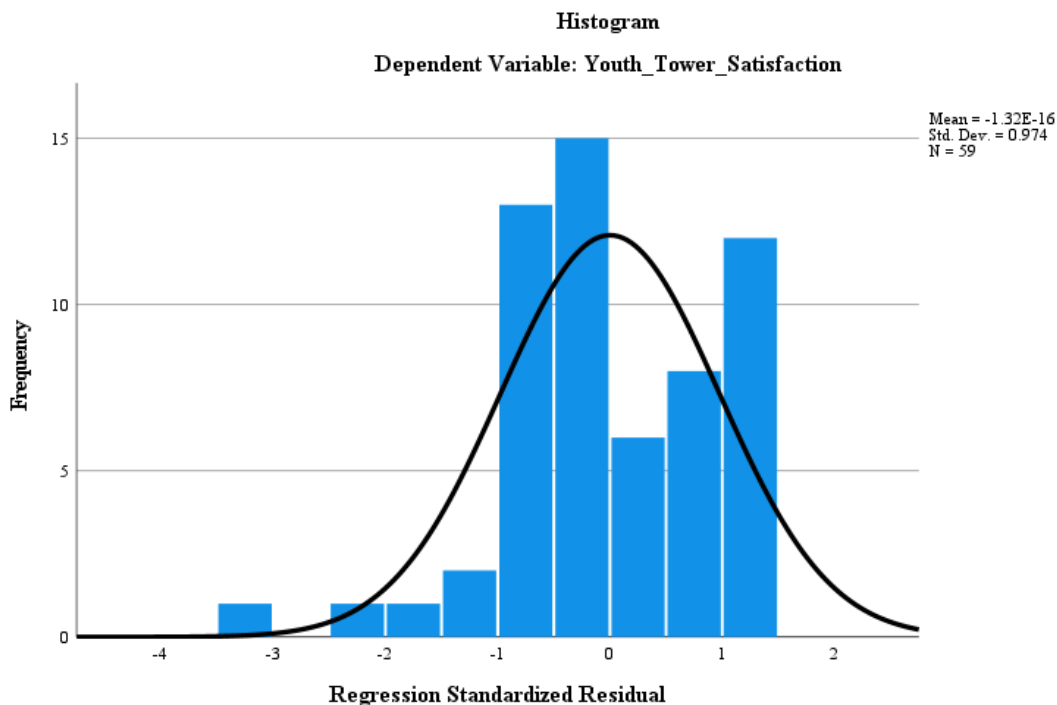
Box Plots of the Main Variables Showing Distribution of Values



The residuals (errors) should be nearly normally distributed for the sixth and final assumption, which was tested by creating a histogram (with a superimposed normal curve). The histogram via the bell shape of the normal curve (see Figure 6) revealed a normal distribution.

Figure 6

Histogram Showing Distribution of Residuals



Results

The data for this study were gathered through surveys that questioned youngsters about their perspectives on public transportation, academic advancement, career readiness, and satisfaction with the Youth Tower program. Table 6 provided descriptive statistics for the study's primary variables before conducting the main analysis. The factors in this study were assessed using Likert scales ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*), except for career readiness, which had a maximum value of 4. The average score for public transportation was 3.325 ($SD = .956$), indicating that participants moderately agreed that it reflected their needs. The skewness value of $-.613$ suggested a slight negative skew, implying that more responses leaned toward higher agreement. The academic construct had a mean of 3.572 ($SD = .935$), indicating that most participants believed their academic advancement was satisfactory. The skewness

value of $-.928$ suggested a moderate negative skew, which means that more participants regarded academics positively.

The Youth Tower satisfaction survey had a mean score of 3.720 ($SD = 1.024$), indicating that participants generally agreed that they were satisfied with the Youth Tower services.

Skewness was $-.233$, suggesting a slight negative skew, implying that responses were somewhat balanced but leaning toward higher satisfaction. Regarding career preparedness, participants expressed a modest level of agreement because they felt prepared ($M = 2.808$; $SD = .702$). The skewness ($.204$) suggested a slight positive skew, implying slightly lower ratings.

Table 6

Descriptive Statistics for the Main Variable

	<i>n</i>	Min	Max	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mdn</i>	Kurt	Skew
Public Transportation	73	1	5	3.325	.956	3.500	.492	-.613
Academics	73	1	5	3.572	.935	3.750	.973	-.928
Youth Tower Satisfaction	66	1	5	3.720	1.024	3.125	-.382	-.233
Career Readiness	65	1.57	4	2.808	.702	2.714	-.964	.204

Note. Min = Minimum, Max = Maximum, Kurt = Kurtosis, Skew = Skewness

Correlations

Table 7 shows the Pearson correlation coefficients among the four main variables: public transportation, academics, youth tower satisfaction, and career readiness. Public transportation was negatively correlated with academics ($r = -.240$, $p = .041$), suggesting that better public transportation was associated with lower academic ratings. This correlation was significant at the $.05$ level. Public transportation negatively correlated with Youth Tower satisfaction ($r = -.223$, $p = .072$), but this correlation was not statistically significant. It was also negatively correlated with career readiness ($r = -.128$, $p = .309$), and this correlation was also not statistically significant.

Academics were positively correlated with Youth Tower satisfaction ($r = .370, p = .002$), indicating that higher academic ratings were associated with higher satisfaction with Youth Tower services. This correlation was significant at the .01 level. It was positively correlated with career readiness ($r = .201, p = .109$), but this correlation was not statistically significant. Youth Tower satisfaction was positively correlated with career readiness ($r = .255, p = .051$), suggesting that higher satisfaction with youth tower services was associated with higher career readiness, although this correlation was marginally significant.

Table 7

Pearson Correlations Between Main Variables

	1	2	3	4
1. Public Transportation				
2. Academics	-.240*			
3. Youth Tower Satisfaction	-.223	.370**		
4. Career Readiness	-.128	.201	.255	

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Associations of Factors to Youth Tower Satisfaction Services

The study investigated the relationship between public transportation, academics, and career readiness and the impact on youth tower satisfaction. The impact of these factors was analyzed with standard multiple linear regression ($\alpha = .05$; two-tailed). The independent factors included public transportation, academic performance, and career readiness. The dependent variable was the satisfaction level with the youth tower services. The null hypothesis suggested that no significant association exists between public transportation, academics, career preparedness, and young tower satisfaction. Preliminary analyses were conducted to determine if the assumptions of multicollinearity, outliers, normality, linearity, homoscedasticity, and residual independence were met; no notable violations were discovered.

Table 8 displays the univariate and multivariate linear regression analysis results, with Youth Tower Satisfaction as the dependent variable. In univariate analyses, public transportation showed a negative but not statistically significant relationship with Youth Tower Satisfaction ($B = -.243, p = .072$). Academics had a significant positive association with Youth Tower Satisfaction, indicating that greater academic accomplishments were linked to higher satisfaction ($B = .410, p = .002$). Career readiness showed a slightly significant positive connection with Youth Tower Satisfaction ($B = .372, p = .051$). Being female (relative to male) had a marginally significant positive effect on Youth Tower Satisfaction ($B = .463, p = .087$). Compared to 18–20 years, the "27 or older" age group had a significant negative relationship with Youth Tower Satisfaction ($B = -.875, p = .004$). Finally, in univariate analyses, being Black was significantly more positively associated with Youth Tower Satisfaction than being White ($B = .772, p = .006$).

Multivariate analysis revealed that the model accurately predicted Youth Tower satisfaction scores, $F(9,49) = 4.047, p < .001, R^2 = .426$. The R^2 score demonstrated that the linear combination of predictor variables explained about 42.6% of the Youth Tower satisfaction levels variation. After correcting for other characteristics, public transportation was not a significant predictor of Youth Tower Satisfaction ($B = .085, p = .576$), and academics were not a significant predictor in the multivariate model ($B = .140, p = .361$). When correcting for other characteristics, career readiness was not a significant predictor ($B = .278, p = .128$).

Table 8*Associations of Factors to Youth Tower Satisfaction Services*

	Univariate						Multivariate					
	95.0% CI			SE	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	95.0% CI			SE	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
<i>B</i>	Lower	Upper	<i>B</i>				Lower	Upper				
Public Transportation	-.243	-.508	.023	.133	-1.828	.072	.085	-.219	.390	.152	.563	.576
Academics	.410	.153	.668	.129	3.185	.002	.140	-.165	.445	.152	.923	.361
Career Readiness	.372	-.002	.745	.186	1.994	.051	.278	-.083	.638	.180	1.547	.128
Gender												
Male	Reference					.087	Reference					.300
Female	.463	-.069	.996	.266	1.740		-.318	-.929	.292	.304	-1.048	
Age (Years)												
18 - 20	Reference						Reference					
21 - 23	.326	-.323	.974	.325	1.003	<.001	.470	-.277	1.216	.371	1.265	
25 - 26	.566	-.183	1.315	.375	1.510		.696	-.177	1.570	.435	1.602	.133
27 or Older	-.875	-1.458	-.291	.292	-2.998		-.719	-1.509	.071	.393	-1.830	
Race												
White	Reference						Reference					
Black	.772	.233	1.311	.270	2.861	.018	.270	-.381	.921	.324	.832	.623
Other	.239	-.740	1.219	.490	.488		-.098	-1.039	.844	.468	-.208	

Note. *B* = Unstandardized Coefficients, CI = Confidence Interval, SE = Standard Error, *t* = *T* statistics, *p* = significance at .05 level.

The Resources

This research was conducted through a battery of surveys. Demographic information was collected through a short survey with multiple-choice responses (Appendix C). Data about the individual assessment of one's academic performance was gathered through a survey using

responses rating their agreement level from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree* (Appendix D). An open-ended survey was used to assess participants' career readiness (Appendix E). Finally, the participants were asked to evaluate the services received by Youth Towers, if applicable (Appendix F).

Assessment of Project Processes

Change, flexibility, and acceptance of reality have been the keywords and learning lessons from this project. This researcher's initial thoughts were to follow the Alabama 5th Grade Reading Comprehension Assessment guidelines to develop a tool for teens (see Appendix F). This information was provided by Angela Allen, a Birmingham elementary educator (AL Course of Study). A collaboration with Charles Ball, Executive Director of the Regional Planning Commission of Birmingham, will be established to address the need for adequate transportation to underserved populations, specifically the homeless (Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham [RPCGB], n.d.). In the meantime, Brittany Lindsey, a social worker at the Department of Human Resources, provided personal and professional accounts of the foster care process, including successful practices and those that may leave long-term trauma (Children and Family Services). Conversations with Jimmie Coleman, North Birmingham Community President, revealed the hesitancy of neighbors to accept intentional housing of homeless youth in their neighborhoods. Regardless of the data, the perception is that crime, drugs, and blight will increase, which will lower homeowners' property values. Youth Towers' main desire was a solution to the housing shortage or a pathway to enlighten the citizens on the benefits of using vacated properties to serve the less fortunate.

Cronbach's alpha (or coefficient alpha), developed by Lee Cronbach in 1951, is the most widely used assessment of internal consistency (reliability). Cronbach's alpha typically ranges

from 0 to 1, a 1.0 alpha value indicates great measurement consistency, whereas a .0 alpha value indicates no measurement consistency. Although negative coefficients are uncommon, they can indicate erroneous scoring, such as when a survey item with negative language is not correctly rated (Cho & Kim, 2015). Cronbach's alpha should be at least .70, according to most sources. Based on the intended cut-off, the reliability investigation (Table 2) shows that all scales produced were judged consistent and thus reliable. Cronbach's Alpha was more than .7 on all four scales.

Assessment of Project Outputs and Outcomes

While conducting the research for this dissertation-in-praxis, the core tenets of the project became increasingly illusive. It became increasingly clear that the bureaucracy of the city government, the Department of Human Services, and the Regional Planning Commission would make solution determinations within the prescribed time impossible. Therefore, with counsel from my collaborative instructor and input from my collaborative coach, I submitted a request to the IRB to reduce the project's scope (Appendix H). Fortunately, the request was approved without requiring an amended application.

To support Youth Towers' goal of housing and stabilization, the project's focus became strengthening the clients' skill sets to ensure placements in independent living settings were successful. Youth Towers collaborates with several local agencies for skills training. Those agencies are the Dannon Program for GED services, Community Care Development Network, which provides financial literacy, math, and job skills, and RESTORE, a juvenile reentry program for youth in state custody for at least 30 days after committing a criminal act. Only four of 73 (9.1%) participants have been served through foster care. Although that is not a statistically high percentage, it shows a positive correlation between foster care and homelessness. It would

require more extensive research to determine what characteristics are contributory to foster care participants' homelessness. Therefore, the premise of the dissertation praxis failed. However, another point of impact surfaced as a contributory factor to youth homelessness that can be addressed through this dissertation-in-praxis.

That factor is a successful life skills program that would increase independent living sustainability. The program will comprehensively connect all the service providers, creating a structured service delivery system that analyzes client progress as Youth Towers' programs serve one. The Public Estates Authority Tollway Corporation (2024) provided educational checklists for parents and schools. For this dissertation-in-praxis, the Public Estates Authority Tollway Corporation Life Skills Checklist was modified to meet the needs of Youth Towers' client base. Those applicable areas where a client is planning to start or needs support will be evaluated in each monthly review for progress. If, during those client assessments, the Youth Towers' staff determines the client needs individualized support or remediation, they will be referred to a collaborating organization specializing in that area.

Actual Outputs

The research resulted in the development of an assessment tool for life skills. This tool allows the caseworker to analyze the program participant's current state of independence readiness and design the intervention to move the client forward on the trajectory of independent living. It also provides quantitative data for referrals to collaborative organizations for intervention. Although this process is not new, it is a new way of collecting and analyzing data.

Actual Outcomes

The pilot cases provided definitive information for the caseworkers to build a narrative to support resource requests. It also gave the participants a visual of their current status and a goal

for being ready for independent living. These tangible results strengthen the case that Youth Towers is a productive intervention agency in independent living readiness.

Summary of Results

This quantitative correlation study investigated trends and relationships between public transportation, academics, career readiness, and youth tower satisfaction to address the core issue of readiness for independent living after leaving foster care and reduce homelessness among youth aged 19 to 26. Being 27 years or older was a significant negative predictor of Youth Tower Satisfaction in the univariate analysis, while academic accomplishment and being Black were significant positive predictors. After adjusting for other variables, none of the predictors in the multivariate analysis continued to be significant. This finding implied that additional variables might impact the significant connections found in the univariate analysis.

Chapter 5 goes into the objective and scope of this quantitative investigation. The findings are explained, interpreted, and summarized in Chapter 5. The study's shortcomings are acknowledged. The study's benefits are also examined in Chapter 5, along with recommendations for further research. The implications for good social transformation are also discussed in Chapter 5, as is the conclusion.

Although Chapter 4 focused on research and data analysis, it must be noted that the education, transportation, housing, and government industries did not readily participate in this project. Valuing those who seemed lesser did not shine through as an organizational value. Although band-aid remedies were suggested, there was little to no interest in being part of a solution. This researcher spoke with Charles Ball, Executive Director of the Regional Planning Commission. He noted that several services were offered to assist the disenfranchised, such as Birmingham on Demand, which cost US\$1.50 for transportation in certain city areas (RPCGB,

n.d.). He suggested a federal program to add transportation to EBT, food stamps, and allocations. However, there is a ParaTransit program for citizens at least 60 years old with disabilities (RPCGB, n.d.). Certainly, these are good programs, but they do not address the needs of people experiencing homelessness.

Birmingham is entering the final 3 years of a 10-year plan to end homelessness (City of Birmingham et al., n.d.). Birmingham is proposing a plan for tiny homes (Garrison, 2023). Unfortunately, the community neighbors do not want the structures or population in their neighborhoods. Additionally, the homeless population does not support the idea. Some comments from the population are that the structures are similar to a jail cell (Garrison, 2023). Therefore, the construction is being delayed and possibly halted.

Brittnay Lindsey, a DHR social worker, provided insight into both positions of foster care. Brittnay was removed from her home as a pre-teen. The emergency placement was deemed best for her by the social worker, but she recalls that social worker as being the executor of her worst nightmare. The social worker was the monster who physically stole her from her home and placed her in the care of strangers. Then, the social worker tried to develop a trusting relationship to help work through the trauma of the home and the removal from the home. According to Brittnay, the perpetrator cannot be the healer. Brittnay referred to several DHR practices that require revisiting (Alabama Department of Human Resources, n.d.-b). However, the turnover within DHR prevented a discussion with the decision-maker.

Angela Allen, a fifth-grade teacher in Birmingham Schools, provided guidelines for elementary basic skill assessments. The diagram shows specific skill knowledge requirements for specific grade levels (Alabama State Department of Education, n.d.-a). Theoretically, students advancing to the sixth grade should have the academic skills to read instructions and follow them

to cook a meal, assemble simple structures, and comprehend the basic driving laws.

Unfortunately, those theories are not manifesting in the daily lives of Birmingham students.

Therefore, those who become homeless after high school show that remedial academics are needed for them to survive.

With all the good intentions expressed through these interviews, it became apparent that the guiding principle was to present the organizations positively to maintain goodwill within the community. However, the conversation was devoid of reflection on corporate citizenship or Christ's mandate that every human was known by God before being formed in his mother's womb (Jeremiah 1:5). One's personal responsibility to be his brother's keeper for fear his blood would cry out was also absent (Genesis 4:10). Birmingham is in danger of falling prey to the things of the world and not caring for God's most vulnerable. As idolatry led to the fall of the Northern and Southern Kingdoms in the Old Testament, Paul warns us in the New Testament in (1 Corinthians 10:7-14) to not be idolaters, as some of them were. Humanity must be careful to do good work instead of being applauded for talking about good work.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION, IMPLICATIONS, APPLICATIONS

Findings, Impact, and Conclusions

The research, which seemed so enticing on paper, became evermore elusive with each contact made. It seemed that elements that would address homelessness among youth up to age 26 would be magnetic for the political, local government, transportation industries, and other agencies that provide services for the disenfranchised. It very quickly became evident that building a coalition to address the plight of homeless children who either aged out of foster care or became the victim of another social ill that led to homelessness was not as simple as this researcher had anticipated. The comprehensive plan that was initially developed started to dissipate as agencies failed to return inquiry calls; the reality of governmental constraints with property ownership and the unwillingness of some agencies to step outside the box to create a new comprehensive strategy for homelessness eventually had to be redefined.

As the research dwindled to a fragment of its original design, this researcher worked intensely on a product that would slow the growth of homelessness and lay a foundation for others to seek solutions. This program provides a personal intervention that builds the individual to thrive as an independent agent. As others consider the plight of children in foster care and other environments that breed homelessness, this research will serve as a launching pad to start meaningful conversations and collaborative teams. As biblically noted, each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms (1 Peter 4:10). If each identified stakeholder would apply their resources, intellect, and energy to reimagine the solutions to this social problem, a real and executable plan could be implemented in 90 days using this research as a foundation.

Findings

The research sample size was 73. However, depending on the question, as many as 29 participants chose not to answer. Unfortunately, 29 participants failed to answer the one demographic question correlated to the praxis which was the question about receiving services from foster care. Of those who did answer the question about foster care, only four responded that they had been served through foster care. Approximately 5.4% of the participants acknowledged receiving services through foster care, which completely dispelled the researcher's assumption that in Birmingham, foster care is a pipeline for young people into homelessness. This research did not reflect the national statistics, which found that 31% to 46% of youth in foster care experienced homelessness, and others experienced it before age 26 (Dworsky et al., 2013). Other studies show that these young people remain homeless for up to 27.5 months, which is longer than their peers at approximately 19.3 months (University of Nebraska-Lincoln, 2016).

In this study, 63% of all respondents were African Americans, and 57.5% had no place to identify as a current residence, including shelters. As expected, the 24 females in the study were either victims of dissolved family relationships or family breakdown. This statistic was expected because those respondents were from Jessie's Place, a shelter for abused women, and Youth Towers and Project Hope, of which this researcher had in-depth conversations with some respondents (see Table 3 in Chapter 4).

After looking into the eyes of children and adults who were completely blank, this research became more personal after each interview. Before this research, people experiencing homelessness were the beggars on the street corner who may or may not be homeless and need help. This research put a face and experience with each response. Because the research was

anonymous, no identifying information was collected. However, the eyes remain in this researcher's memory bank. The story of a young 20-year-old mother told of being repeatedly beaten by her fiancé and running for her life from an adjoining state with her baby, a baby bag, and her child's AFDC allocation, and her SNAP card remains with this researcher like the anxiety felt when watching a terrifying movie. This researcher sees the despair and the hope while receiving an education from a 19-year-old man, who advised that the best way to stay warm is to have a tarp, not a blanket. The tarp insulates and regenerates one's body heat. Amazingly, this young man did not live in the next state, city, or county. Via the city bus, his family lived 15 minutes away in a neighboring community, yet he was homeless and sleeping on the streets. He was the product of failed family relationships.

As this researcher contemplates the real stories behind the numbers, it is a sobering thought that Paul reminds believers, but for the grace of God, I am what I am (1 Corinthians 15:10). This scripture also reminds believers that it is God's grace by which one has what one has to include relationships, homes, jobs, food, and clothes, most of which are taken for granted. It is so easy to trust horses and chariots inadvertently (Psalm 20:7), but God gives the power to obtain wealth (Deuteronomy 8:18).

Impact

The initial desired outcomes would have provided increased affordable housing, job opportunities, adequate transportation, policy reform, and basic life-skill development. The utopia of holistic and seamless services was outlined perfectly. However, responses from the identified organizations that needed to devise the plan showed less enthusiasm for the project than this researcher had anticipated. The silos of each autonomous organization would not let the thought of idea infiltration change the monopolies of their organization. Some did not engage at

all. However, the most startling response was from the community members at large, who did not want an influx of previously homeless residents in their neighborhoods, regardless of the blight.

To be fair, Birmingham Mayor Woodfin offered the development of modular housing to alleviate the plight of homelessness (Garrison, 2023). Unfortunately, the design was met with resistance from the neighborhood citizens, professionals serving the homeless population, and those experiencing homelessness. The homes represented prison cells without dedicated bathroom facilities but group showers. Conversations voiced that the concept was inhumane. Others feel that the development would be a breeding ground for crime. Some prefer to remain on the streets.

Subsequently, the goals of the dissertation-in-praxis had to be adjusted to be executable. The research focus was narrowed to one element that could be controlled in the research. The focus was implementing basic life skills training, evaluation, and implementation. The decision came with much trepidation. It required a second approval from the collaborating coach and the IRB. Once approval was granted, this researcher began to execute the 4 surveys devised to evaluate the homeless condition of youths in Birmingham.

This change created a plan to assess the life skill aptitude of program participants, implement skill development with collaborating agencies, and assist in determining if a client was capable of sustainable independent living. The change was accepted but not relished by the collaborating coach. Ms. Westery was initially concerned about this approach adding value to Youth Towers. As the research was conducted, Ms. Westery began to see the responses to the surveys, and she became more accepting that the outcomes could benefit the Youth Towers' clients by enhancing their ability to sustain independence.

The subsequent surveys showed the intervention's impact, including academic education through the Dannon GED program, reading with Better Basics, or employment coaching from the Restore Program were vital parts of the current and future continuum of care. The assessment tool proved invaluable in making referral decisions. If the participating organizations in the current continuum of care, were to participate in planning a more efficient service delivery plan, the Life Skills Assessment would be a valuable component to service delivery.

Conclusions

Although the homeless state among youth ages 19-26 in the research population did not support the theory of foster care being a pipeline to homelessness, it provided valuable information on areas that exacerbate the condition. The configuration of the homeless research groups changes daily. Therefore, depending on the sampling day, the demographic data could be substantially different than the data in this research. However, the reliability of the research suggests that regardless of the population, there would not be a relational correlation between the variables studied. The variables tested did not impact the satisfaction of Youth Towers' services. Interestingly, race appeared to play a significant role in Youth Towers' satisfaction, but those data were skewed because all of the respondents to the questions about Youth Towers were African American. Although untested, African American youth may find it comforting that Ms. Westery and Ms. Barfield are African American social workers who quickly connect culturally to young African American youth.

The core issue of readiness for independent living after leaving foster care and reduced homelessness among youth aged 19 to 26 were addressed in this research. This research investigated trends and relationships between public transportation, academics, career readiness,

and Youth Tower satisfaction. None of the predictors in the multivariate analysis were deemed significant.

Implications for Organizations and Leaders

Homelessness among youth ages 19–26 is a reversible trend. However, the major barriers were found in the will of community and industry leaders. Early in this research, the idea was that some program participants would need to relinquish authority, power, and control in some areas and focus more on other services to build a full-service, comprehensive program to address sustainable housing. With multiple agencies addressing the same concerns, there is an overlap and repetition of services, which limits the scope because each agency focuses on the immediate needs and may not have the resources to develop long-term solutions.

Suppose a contract was developed before convening the needed constituents that outlined that process and committed to not negatively impacting the organization's financial resources or individual staff. In that case, the process may be more palatable and less threatening. It seemed that those who did not choose to participate in the research were being protective of their services, income, and position. These are valid concerns that were overlooked in developing the research structure, thus acknowledging that it is not likely that anyone will participate in a process that may negatively impact them.

Applications for Organizations and Leaders

The ability to work together for a common cause is imperative for social service organizations. Not-for-profits and other agencies have mission statements that enhance the human condition. However, those organizations compete for the same funding, which determines how much is served, the extent of the services, and the pay scale for staff. Therefore, any idea that threatens their comfort zone will not be embraced. Attention to the idea's impact on

participating organizations must be accompanied by an element that replaces actual or perceived losses.

Those in positions of influence must also create an atmosphere that fosters confidentiality and a commitment to agreement before plans are distributed to anyone outside the planning committee. Successful planning organization requires trust in the process and the security of each participant's interest. Trust is the main element of relationships, specifically those with associated risks. The psalmist declares that committing one's ways and trusting in God results in Him acting on one's behalf (Psalm 37:5). Deductively, trust will be established if one commits to the organization's ways and acts on one's behalf.

Advice to Future Research Practitioners

Future researchers must investigate other variables that may lead to homelessness in Birmingham. Although the ones measured in this study may impact the longevity of homelessness, there was no link between them and the causation of homelessness. In order to reduce and eliminate homelessness, the condition's causes must be identified. As discussed earlier, nationally, foster care is a major contributor to youth homelessness. Maybe that variant needs to be measured using a different question. It is concerning that almost 40% of the respondents failed to answer the question. That suggests that Birmingham may not be an anomaly. The participants might not have trusted answering that question.

Furthermore, before reaching out to possible constituents, determine what negative impact to those organizations could come from participating in this research. Although this researcher identified the possible loss of scope, control, and organizational changes, the plan did not build a safety net to show organizational leaders that their mission or livelihoods would fall prey to the process. A contract is recommended to protect all involved, and a commitment to

confidentiality is imperative. As a researcher, Youth Towers requires a signed confidentiality statement before disclosing any information about current or past clients. Subsequently, the trust that the researcher would protect the organization's intellectual properties was nurtured from the first day.

As this researcher learned, this pursuit definitely will test one's will. Roberts and Hyatt (2010) compared the dissertation-in-praxis journey to an analogy of climbing a mountain with the steepest incline at the top. When reading that analogy, it warned of the energy and stamina it would take to complete the process. However, there is no way to explain how this final leg of the journey completely consumes every thought and decision. It requires an ad hoc support system to encourage, push, and pray for the researcher. It also requires tenacity, strength, and commitment, which this researcher has not previously tapped. Build relationships with people who can advance this cause. Certainly, the Birmingham library staff have become partners on this journey. A support circle is critically important. Consider everyone who plays a part in the project as a valuable member of the support circle, first because they are. Secondly, their role is pivotal to the research's success. Remember to treat others with the same respect and appreciation that the researcher desires. Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount to treat others as you want to be treated (Matthew 7:12).

Project Summation

Youth homelessness continues to be a social problem for Birmingham, AL, and the country at large. Unfortunately, the data obtained for this research did not show a specific indicator of causation for the problem. The indicators identified are, at a minimum, contributors to the homeless state. Youth Towers in Birmingham, AL, provides the services needed to place homeless youth in temporary housing and prepare them for permanent housing. However,

multiple organizations within the city provide duplicate services, such as career readiness, independent living skills, temporary placements, utility assistance, and other needed services. One of the initial intended outcomes of this dissertation-in-praxis was to develop a plan for seamless, coordinated service provisions to maximize the services' effectiveness.

Unfortunately, the unexpected barriers were less penetrable than the expected barriers of the bureaucratic government systems. The silos of protectionism exhibited in the not-for-profits and municipal organizations were focused on their interests to the detriment of the research. In multiple cases, agencies offered their website for research analysis. Initially, these suggestions were baffling. Usually, an organization's website is designed as a marketing tool to increase services, sales, or donations. Therefore, it is unrealistic to suggest that a researcher would gain information other than history or marketing from a website. By the end of the research, it became evident that the tenants of service that need support or revision expose the organizations' weaknesses and may impact funding. Therefore, exposing those organizational weaknesses may not be a wise business decision.

Although good work is being done, there is room for much improvement. The multiplicity of factors that exacerbate, if not cause, homelessness includes, but are not limited to, lack of affordable housing, adequate public transportation, lack of full-time employment, foster care policies, and life skill development. Further analysis is required to identify causation. Although our current human processes are inadequate to serve or eliminate homelessness, specifically youth homelessness, the work addresses the issues within the current structure.

Unfortunately, the financing of social services often restricts their effectiveness and curtails the attainment of goals. Therefore, the impact of money and the love of it, power, and position must be factored into the research design. Whether poor in spirit or finances, the Bible

says, “He who oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker, but whoever is kin to the need honors God (Proverbs 14:31). This research highlighted the need for believers to be reminded that the poor and rich have one thing in common, both were made by God and in His image (Proverbs 22:2).

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**Appendix A: Gender by Age for 1,343 of 1,414 Homeless Persons Responding to a
Birmingham Alabama Metropolitan Area Survey, January 17-28, 2005**

Age		Men	Women	Total
10–14 years	Count	1	1	2
	% within Gender	1%	2%	1%
15–19	Count	9	7	16
	% within Gender	1.00%	1.70%	1.20%
20–24	Count	40	43	83
	% within Gender	4.20%	10%	6.20%
25–34	Count	137	111	248
	% within Gender	14.5%	27.7%	18.5%
35–44	Count	321	127	448
	% within Gender	34.10%	31.70%	33.40%
45–54	Count	327	73	400
	% within Gender	34.70%	18.20%	29.80%
55–59	Count	70	28	98
	% within Gender	7.40%	7.00%	7.30%
60–64	Count	24	8	32
	% within Gender	2.50%	2.00%	2.40%
65–74	Count	10	3	13
	% within Gender	1.10%	0.70%	1.00%
75–84 years	Count	3	0	3
	% within Gender	3%	0%	2%
Total	Count	942	401	1,343
	% within Gender	100%	100%	100%
Summary	Mdn age	44 years	38 years	42 years
	<i>M</i> age	43 age	38 years	41 years
	<i>SD</i>	10 years	11 years	11 years

Appendix B: Education Levels of Birmingham Area Homeless Persons

Educational level (<i>N</i> = 161)	Number	Percent
Four or fewer years	0	0.0%
5-7 years	6	3.7%
Completed grammar school (8 years)	6	3.7%
Some high school (9-11 years)	30	18.6%
Complete high school (12 years) or GED	69	42.9%
Business or trade school	10	6.2%
Some college (13-15 years)	37	23.0%
Completed college	3	1.9%
Total	161	100.0%

Appendix C: Demographic Survey Instrument

Demographic Questionnaire

1. What is your gender?
 - a. Male
 - b. Female
2. What is your age?
 - a. 18-20 years old
 - b. 21-23 years old
 - c. 25-26 years old
 - d. 27 years or older
3. What is your race?
 - a. White
 - b. Black
 - c. Asian
 - d. Hispanic/Latino
 - e. Others
4. Where are you currently living?
 - a. On the streets
 - b. At a friend's house
 - c. In my own place
 - d. Other, please specify: _____

Statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I have access to public transportation.					
I have money to ride a public transportation.					
Public transportation is conveniently located to me.					
I always choose to rider the public transportation.					

Appendix D: Example of Survey Form

Instructions: Please answer each question using the 5-point scale to answer each question so that it accurately reflects what you do or have done as a student. Be as honest as possible because the information can be utilized to discover areas of strength.

Scale:

SA - STRONGLY AGREE **A** - AGREE **N** - NEUTRAL **D** - DISAGREE **SD** - STRONGLY DISAGREE

Questions	SA	A	N	D	SD
1. I made myself ready in all my subjects.					
2. I pay attention and listen during every discussion.					
3. I want to get good grades in every subject.					
4. I actively participate in every discussion.					
5. I start papers and projects as soon as they are assigned.					
6. I enjoy homework and activities because they help me improve my skills in every subject.					
7. I exert more effort when I do difficult assignments.					
8. Solving problems is a useful hobby for me.					

Appendix E: Career Readiness Assessment Tool

Are You Career Ready?

Career Readiness Self-Assessment Tool

Career readiness is the awareness and development of the skills students need to confidently and successfully meet employer expectations and transition into the workplace.

Take this self-assessment to see what professional competencies you need to develop and practice to be career ready and experience workplace success.

COMMUNICATION:

Articulate thoughts and express ideas effectively using oral, written, visual and non-verbal communication skills, as well as listening to gain understanding. The ability to deliver information in person, in writing, and in a digital world.

need to develop 1 2 3 excelling

Ways to develop this competency:

- Develop and deliver a presentation for a class.
- Check for understanding by asking clarifying questions.
- Proofread on-line and written communication to avoid errors.

Ways I am developing: _____

Next steps for developing: _____

TEAMWORK AND INTERPERSONAL:

Build and maintain collaborative relationships to work effectively with others in a team setting through shared responsibility, empathy and respect. The ability to manage ones emotions and conflict with others while contributing towards a common goal.

need to develop 1 2 3 excelling

Ways to develop this competency:

- Collaborate with others on a class project where responsibility is shared and not divided.
- Handle difficult conversations in person with respect.
- Join a student organization or team on campus where you can help achieve a common goal.

Ways I am developing: _____

Next steps for developing: _____

LEADERSHIP:

Leverage strengths to motivate, collaborate and guide. The ability to use a positive attitude to influence and empower others to reach a shared goal through strategic thinking and effective decision-making.

need to develop 1 2 3 excelling

Ways to develop this competency:

- Take on a leadership role in a group or organization.
- Demonstrate initiative at your job/internship by taking on additional responsibilities.
- Motivate team members with a positive attitude and leverage their strengths when delegating work.

Ways I am developing: _____

Next steps for developing: _____

CREATIVITY AND PROBLEM-SOLVING:

Exercise sound reasoning to analyze issues, synthesize information, make decisions and solve problems. The ability to think critically and strategically to develop original ideas and innovative solutions.

need to develop 1 2 3 excelling

Ways to develop this competency:

- Develop an action plan with specific steps to solve a problem.
- Brainstorm solutions to a problem before bringing it to a supervisor/professor.
- Activate your mind – read, do puzzles, write, etc.

Ways I am developing: _____

Next steps for developing: _____

PROFESSIONALISM AND PRODUCTIVITY:

Demonstrate integrity, resilience, accountability and ethical behavior. The ability to take initiative, maintain effective work habits (prioritize, plan and manage work) to produce high quality results and project a professional presence.

need to develop 1 2 3 excelling

Ways to develop this competency:

- Use a planner or calendar to prioritize work/assignments and meet deadlines.
- Attend a networking event to learn more about professionalism.
- Review your social media through the eyes of a future employer and determine appropriateness.

Ways I am developing: _____

Next steps for developing: _____

GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE:

Respect the viewpoints of those from diverse cultures, races, ages, genders, religions and lifestyles to build collaborative relationships and communicate effectively. The ability to appreciate, value, and learn from other cultures and perspectives.

need to develop 1 2 3 excelling

Ways to develop this competency:

- Attend an event on campus that encourages you to step outside your comfort zone.
- Engage in conversation with individuals who have different perspectives than your own.
- Participate in a study abroad or volunteer experience to broaden your horizons.

Ways I am developing: _____

Next steps for developing: _____

DIGITAL FLUENCY

Maximize new and emerging technologies in order to work, learn and live in a digital society. The ability to apply digital technology to enhance quality, improve productivity and communication, solve problems, and streamline processes.

need to develop 1 2 3 excelling

Ways to develop this competency:

- Create projects and express ideas through digital tools.
- Learn a new technology or design skill through Lynda.com
- Work with a Virginia Tech librarian to find relevant and credible sources through on-line research.

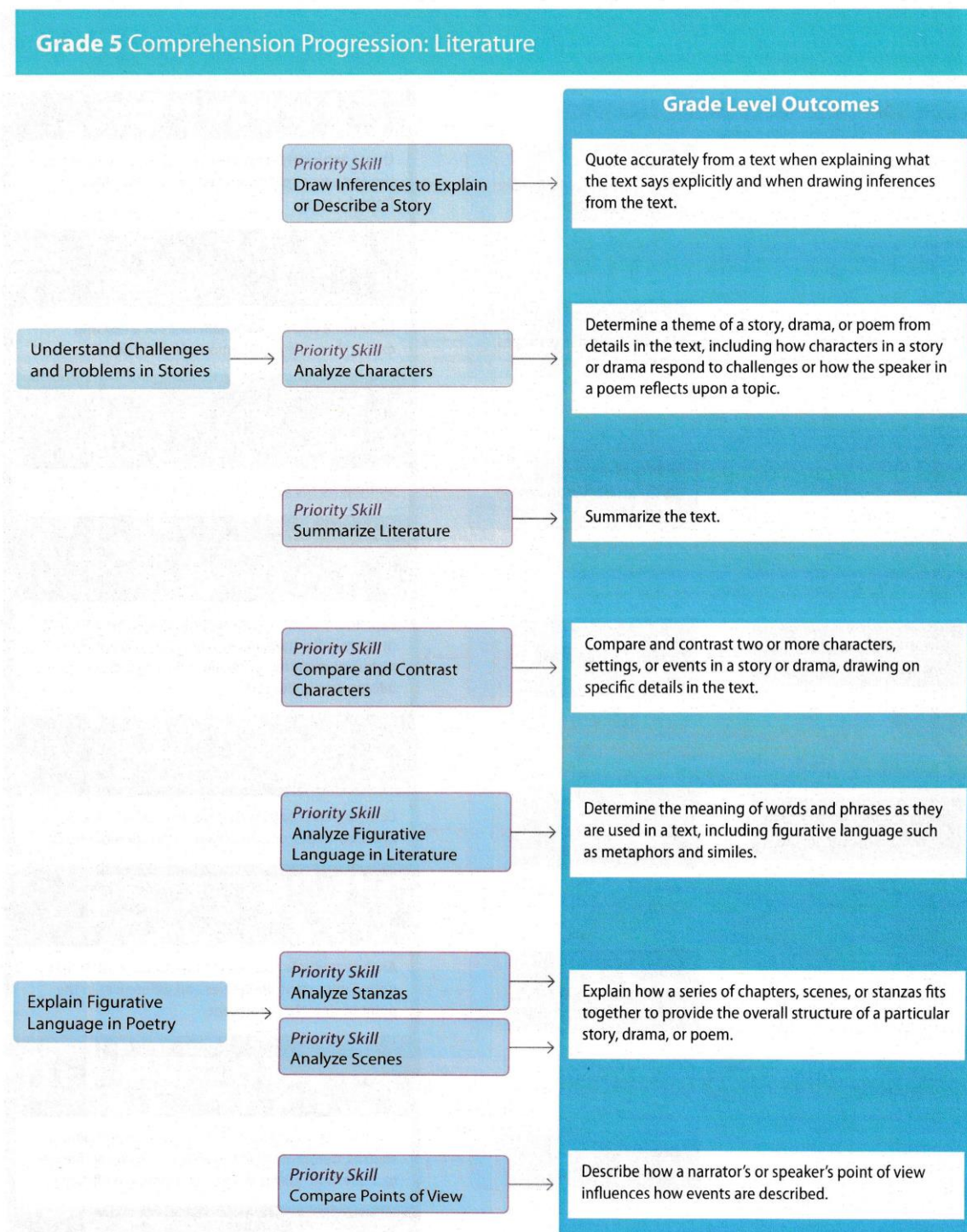
Ways I am developing: _____

Next steps for developing: _____

Appendix F: Youth Towers Program Satisfaction Survey

Statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I am happy to be part of the Youth Towers program.					
The Youth Towers program has helped me progress.					
I am satisfied with the clothing assistance provided by Youth Towers.					
I am satisfied with the food assistance provided by Youth Towers.					
I am satisfied with the shelter assistance provided by Youth Towers.					
I am satisfied with the transportation assistance provided by Youth Towers.					
I am satisfied with the education assistance provided by Youth Towers.					
I am satisfied with the utility assistance (mental and physical health) provided by Youth Towers.					

Appendix G: Comprehension Progression for Literature



Appendix H: Institutional Review Board Approval

April 15, 2024 Velma Williams Deidra Jackson Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY23-24-1524 CRISIS OF YOUTH HOMELESSNESS IN BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA Dear Velma Williams, Deidra Jackson, The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application per the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data-safeguarding methods described in your IRB application, and no further IRB oversight is required. Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:104(d): Category 2.(i). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met: The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; **For a PDF of your exemption letter**, click on your study number in the My Studies card on your Cayuse dashboard. Next, click the Submissions bar beside the Study Details bar on the Study Details page. Finally, click Initial under Submission Type and choose the Letters tab toward the bottom of the Submission Details page. Your information sheet and final versions of your study documents, **which you must use to conduct your study**, can also be found on the same page under the Attachments tab. This exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account. If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu. Sincerely, **G. Michele Baker, PhD, CIP Administrative Chair Research Ethics Office**

Attendee panel closed

[External] IRB-FY23-24-1524 - Initial: Initial - Exempt

(434) 592-5530

Liberty University/Training Champions for Christ since 1971

From: Velma Williams <[REDACTED]> **Date:** Tuesday, May 21, 2024 at 9:34 AM **To:** IRB, IRB <IRB@liberty.edu>, Velma Williams <[REDACTED]>, Williams, Velma Annette <[REDACTED]> **Subject:** [External] Question regarding modifications

You don't often get email from [REDACTED]. [Learn why this is important](#)

Okay, thank you! Thank you for the clarification. Noted. Thank you.

Reply Reply all Forward

VW

To:IRB, IRB;+2 others

Tue 5/21/2024 8:34 AM

Good morning,

My name is Velma Williams. Based on my research, it seems that one of the given goals is implementable. In speaking with Dakota this morning, he didn't think it would require a modification. However, we want to be safe and seek your opinion.

My research is focused on foster care children aging out of the system into homelessness. There were 5 initial goals to address this phenomenon:

1. Life Skills Development
2. Increased low-income housing
3. Better transportation systems
4. Increased full time employment opportunities within the city
5. Changed Foster Care Policies to require better preparation for independent living.

While conducting the research and reaching out to change agents within these bureaucratic systems, it has become painfully clear that I will not be able to implement proposed changes and/or evaluate their success within the prescribed time. I have spoken with my collaborative coach and she feels that the most immediate and effective remedy is life skills development.

The research strategy remains the same. No additional goals have been added. There are no changes in the survey tools required. The proposed change is to focus on one of the five components that can be implemented and evaluated within the time frame allocated.

Feel free to contact me at [REDACTED] for additional information or clarification.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Velma Williams

From: IRB, IRB <IRB@liberty.edu> **Sent:** Tuesday, May 21, 2024 1:28 PM **To:** Velma Williams <[REDACTED]>; Williams, Velma Annette <[REDACTED]> **Cc:** Jackson, Deidra K (School of Divinity Instruction) <[REDACTED]>; IRB, IRB <IRB@liberty.edu> **Subject:** Re: [External] Question regarding modifications

Good Afternoon Velma,

A modification is not needed to remove previously approved goals and only focus on one.

Best,

G. Michele Baker, Ph.D., CIP Administrative Chair Office of Research Ethics

Appendix I: Personal Life Skills

PERSONAL LIFE SKILLS	CAN DO NOW	NEEDS PRACTICE	PLAN TO START	NEEDS SUPPORT	NA
Daily shower/bath with soap					
Brushes teeth daily					
Uses deodorant					
Combs/brushes hair					
Shaves, as needed					
Selects clean clothes based on weather conditions					
Can use, update, charge phone					
Can set up and manage voicemail					
Washes hands before eating					
Asks for help when needed					
Makes life choices independently					
Can recognize and report abuse, neglect or danger					
Nutrition/Dietary Skills	CAN DO NOW	NEEDS PRACTICE	PLAN TO START	NEEDS SUPPORT	NA
Make a grocery list and locate items in store or online					
Can identify healthy and unhealthy food and drink choices					
Can identify bad food (expired, smells, color) and knows not to eat it					
Can plan a balanced meal					
Money Management	CAN DO NOW	NEEDS PRACTICE	PLAN TO START	NEEDS SUPPORT	NA
Knows the value of money denominations					
Can use card or cash to shop					
Understands bank balance and overdraft					

Can do simple math or use a calculator					
Can compare prices/use discounts					
Understands the difference between a need and a want					
Has a bank account					
Understand deposits and withdrawals					
Understands limits on food stamps and other government allocations					
Can create a simple budget					
Understands gross and net pay					
Knows how and when to file taxes					
Understands late payment fees and interest					
Understands how to use credit cards					
Knows their social security number and how to protect it					
	CAN DO NOW	NEEDS PRACTICE	PLAN TO START	NEEDS SUPPORT	NA
Health Skills					
Can refill a prescription					
Take medication without supervision					
Understands and gets needed immunizations					
Tracks appointments					
Can let someone know they aren't feeling well					
Knows their height, weight and birthday					
Can take their own temperature					
Can safeguard health insurance cards					
Knows how to contact doctor					
Can treat minor sickness and injury					

	CAN DO NOW	NEEDS PRACTICE	PLAN TO START	NEEDS SUPPORT	NA
Sexual Health Skills					
Label body parts correctly					
Understands various types of birth control					
Manages menstrual periods; gets and uses supplies					
Understands consent and can recognize it and can give it					
Understands private and public places					
Understands private and public behavior					
Interpersonal Social Skills					
Introduces themselves to others					
Engages in conversation					
Understands and manages personal space					
Knows how to ask for help					
Is courteous to others					
Knows how to resolve conflict					
Takes turns (if playing a game)					
Can say "no" if something feels wrong					
Accepts the answer "no"					
Appropriately interrupts					
Appropriately expresses anger or frustration					
Kitchen Skills					
Safely operates appliances					
Can use common kitchen tools (can opener, measuring cups/spoons, peeler)					
Plan and prepare a meal					
Can follow simple recipe					

Uses dishwasher/hand wash and put away dishes					
Clean kitchen (floor, counters, trash)					
Laundry Skills	CAN DO NOW	NEEDS PRACTICE	PLAN TO START	NEEDS SUPPORT	NA
Puts dirty clothes in hamper or other place					
Properly sorts clothes					
Can operate a washer and dryer					
Knows how to use laundry detergent					
Folds clothes					
Puts clothes away					
Household Skills	CAN DO NOW	NEEDS PRACTICE	PLAN TO START	NEEDS SUPPORT	NA
Cleans house as necessary					
Makes bed and changes sheets as needed					
Puts items away correctly					
Can do minor home repairs (change lightbulbs, batteries)					
Knows who to call for major repairs					
Picks up and disposes trash					
Sweeps and operates a vacuum					
Community Skills	CAN DO NOW	NEEDS PRACTICE	PLAN TO START	NEEDS SUPPORT	NA
Can use public transportation					
Knows to be alert in unfamiliar places					
Consistently wears seatbelt					
Knows how to search the internet					
Orders from a menu					
Crosses streets safely					

Keeps driver's license or state ID up to date					
Uses the post office					
Uses bank services					
Knows where to vote					

Public Estates Authority Tollway Corporation. (2024, June 14). *Life Skills Checklist*.

<http://www.peatc.org/>