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## A Transcendental Phenomenology of Homeless Parenting Youth in a Clackamas County Rehousing Program: Examining Their Lived Experiences and Educational Prospects

Francisco Garcia

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A Transcendental Phenomenology of Homeless Parenting Youth in a Clackamas  
County Rehousing Program: Examining Their Lived Experiences and  
Educational Prospects

by

Francisco “Kiko” Garcia

A dissertation submitted in partial  
fulfillment for the degree of

Doctor of Education  
in  
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University of Portland  
School of Education

2021

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**Francisco Garcia**

This dissertation is completed as a partial requirement for the Doctor of Education  
(EdD) degree at the University of Portland in Portland, Oregon.

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## **Abstract**

Literature is limited on the experiences of parenting homeless youth in rehousing and education programs. This study filled a research gap by discerning the experiences of parenting youth living with homelessness in the Clackamas County Youth Housing Initiative. Utilizing a transcendental phenomenology, this study explored how three Clackamas County parenting homeless youth experienced the housing program and the education services provided by the Clackamas County Youth Housing Initiative; and how the program and services impacted them during re-entry into mainstream daily life. Three young mothers, ages 18-25, were interviewed to extract respective experiences. Interviews were then analyzed to distill pertinent statements, themes, and essences to solidify a composite description of the youths' lived experiences with housing and education programs through the Youth Housing Initiative. The data revealed participants were at different points in their journeys, but also exhibited that the youth were bound by extenuating structures, such as sense of motherhood, sense of safety, ongoing impacts of homelessness, all while deducing who they could trust in the process of pursuing an education or providing for their young children. The study yielded an ongoing need for holistic and individualized support to assist these youth in their thriving. Also, the ongoing use of Positive Youth Development was cited as a practice with which to situate the evolving experiences of these youth in their housing and educational prospects. Future research prospects include studying a second evolution of the same youths' involvement in the Youth

Housing Initiative programming as well as studying how their distinct journeys with parenting might affect these youth in their second year of programming.

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## **Dedication**

For the Garcia family. I carry you in my heart every day, near or far. Mama y Papa, los quiero mucho. Gracias por su esfuerzo y apoyo siempre.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

During any particular year in the U.S. there are upwards of 3.5 million youth (ages 18-25) experiencing homelessness (Henwood, Redline, & Rice, 2018). Morton, Dworsky and Samuels (2017) asserted that the prevalence of youth homelessness is a significant challenge to the socioeconomic and educational norms of the United States. Also, Henwood et al. (2018) maintained that without appropriate housing interventions, homeless youth in the U.S. will compose the latest generation of chronically homeless adults. Appropriately, education is widely viewed as a social determinant of wellbeing, and as a tool towards offsetting homelessness since education and economic mobility are intertwined. Accordingly, through the Voices of Youth Count from Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago, Morton et al. (2017) relayed that a lack of a high school diploma or GED was the number one correlate for elevated risk of youth homelessness. That is to say, a lack of a high school diploma can contribute significantly to youth homelessness, putting a youth at 3.5 times higher risk to be homeless than their graduated peers (Morton, Dworsky, & Samuels, 2017). Reciprocally, in EdWeek, Klein (2019) reported that just 64 percent of homeless students graduate high school, compared to the average of 84.1 percent for all students. Subsequently, Klein's figures represented that homelessness may preclude youth populations from being able to graduate high school. The educational pursuits of homeless youth, which if not addressed, have wide reaching effects for not only the youth, but their communities.

It seems that homelessness is an ongoing issue that has yet been thoroughly addressed throughout the U.S. In one night throughout the U.S., Housing and Urban Development (HUD) (2018) estimated that upwards of 600,000 people are homeless. These estimates are numbers that are calculated by regional bodies tasked with addressing homelessness known as Continuums of Care (CoC), which physically count homeless subjects throughout their assigned locales. On a single night in January, every two years, CoC *point-in-time* counts are undertaken to count homelessness in respective CoC geographic areas. These recent CoC counts iterated that for every 10,000 people in the U.S. on any given night, 17 will be homeless (HUD, 2018).

The disaggregates of CoC homeless counts seem to be of great consequence for particular segments of society. Considering demographics, and these one-night estimates, HUD (2018) relayed that on any given night, roughly 20 percent of all people experiencing homelessness (sheltered or unsheltered) will be youth (112,000). These are youth who without the proper supports or interventions, will be left behind, as they are thrust into the world of early adulthood to fend for themselves. Geographically, HUD (2018) and its Continuums of Care iterated that on any given night, five states carried more than half of all homeless people. Those five states included California, New York, Florida, Texas, and Washington. It is notable to mention that these states carry substantial population centers, which often have greater ability to respond to homelessness, and attract folks for this very reason, including youth. Also, it is possible to disaggregate for HUD *on any given night* figures in order

to identify prevailing trends. For instance, disaggregating for unsheltered conditions, four states had more than half of their homeless populations under unsheltered conditions. These states included California (69%), Oregon (62%), Nevada (56%), and Hawaii (53%). Such realities may help HUD in identifying the unique challenges of homelessness of each region and state in the U.S.

Correspondingly, the ripple effects of homelessness have wide-ranging effects. Narendorf et al. (2020) noted that in order to survive, individuals who are experiencing homelessness are more likely to partake in high-risk behaviors including trading for sex, substance use, or other unhealthy activities. Moreover, there is added risk of poor mental health and suicide. Simultaneously, employment, education, social connectedness, and overall coping skills are often much lower in homeless populations, which means that homeless subjects are often at a loss for resources and are not able to contribute significantly to the communities of which they are a part. Added to this, stigma permeates the whole of the conversation, as homeless persons are often viewed as a liability to society. These consequences are even more pronounced in youth (Narendorf et al., 2020).

There are existing realities that shed light on what homelessness is in the U.S. Additionally, Jarpe, Mosley, and Smith (2019) posited that homelessness has often been viewed as a matter of public health, since homelessness is viewed by health professionals as a cause, as well as a consequence of poor health. As a result, the realities of being homeless included that those experiencing homelessness are at greater risk for a bevy of maladies, such as AIDS, Tuberculosis, and poor mental

health, among others. Nonetheless, Jarpe et al. (2019) relayed that between the years 2007 and 2016, chronic homelessness decreased by 27% during which progress has been led by HUD which holds the distinction of being the major funder to combat homelessness, with great discretion to set allocations along with services in relation to local needs in the U.S. Inseparably, Jarpe et al. (2019) maintained that, although there has been significant progress for offsetting homelessness in the U.S., there is much more progress to be made. Among such progress yet to be made, is youth homelessness, which often precludes this population from obtaining an education.

### **Continuums of Care**

There are ways that governments regionalize the issue of homelessness. Current national efforts to provide housing to homeless populations include Continuums of Care as integral components of solving such crises. Jarpe et al. (2019) mentioned that CoCs are regional bodies composed of service providers, local government agencies, consumers, philanthropic organizations, and local businesses working towards planning and administration of homeless services. CoCs in local regions submit single applications for funding from HUD and are tasked with determining service needs, implementing a homeless information management system, prioritizing of homeless initiatives with pertinent programs, and management, as well as oversight of funded projects. There are more than 400 of these regional bodies throughout the U.S., funneling all significant funding in the form of rapid rehousing to all locales. Rapid rehousing through a housing-first, low barrier-to-entry model has emerged as the foremost method to address pressing youth homeless needs. Rapid



rehousing also comes with an array of other supportive services, such as employment and educational services through workforce partners, non-profits, service providers, and other stewards of public dollars. There are many services that come with rapid rehousing depending on participant need. Some of these services include educational services, such as GED courses, alternative courses for mainstream schooling, financial education, technical and vocational certifications, or even life-skills courses. These all go hand in hand to help offset housing instability for youth (Jarpe, et al., 2019).

### **Localized Needs**

Regarding needs of regions, in Oregon, per HUD data, the youth homeless population was estimated to be around 1,500 (HUD, 2018). Disaggregating for counties, in Clackamas County, there are upwards of 600 youth needing homeless services, as well as resources, which consist of, but are not limited to, jobs-training, life skills, educational attainment, mental health support, and navigation of social service systems (Clackamas County, 2019). As Hsu, Rice, Wilson, Semborski, Vavanos, and Morton (2019) mentioned, HUD offers funding, contracts, policy, and programmatic guidance to local communities housing homeless youth. In most CoCs, which serve as the funding and policy coordinators, an interconnected system integrates housing resources to address the needs of homeless individuals. Through the Clackamas County Continuum of Care, youth experiencing homelessness encounter an intake resource (for example, designated emergency shelters, street outreach, or drop-in centers) in pursuit of housing support. This intake resource, known as Coordinated Housing Access (CHA), is a screening tool through the county

online and phone system that screens homeless youth as being eligible for the Youth Housing Initiative in Clackamas County. Thereafter, the prospective participants are assessed further for housing eligibility under HUD definitions. In Clackamas County, the Youth Housing Initiative is a source of support for homeless youth. There, the youth are also assessed for vulnerability and risk, using assessment through a client records management system run by the Continuum of Care and HUD called the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS). Depending on greater vulnerability or risk, through a Youth Housing Initiative health and housing navigator, it is decided how a youth is to be prioritized for housing (Hsu et al., 2019). Accordingly, when youth are afforded federally subsidized rapid rehousing, a lease is taken out in their names, which may last up to 24 months and cost up to \$1,050.00 per month in Clackamas County.

Substantial progress has been attained over the past decades in addressing the needs of homeless youth. Nonetheless, such progress is representative of the development of programs wishing to not only help homeless youth become housed, but also at preparing them for independent living, education, and self-sufficiency. These rehousing-based independent living programs afford the opportunity for homeless youth to have agency and to experience “real life,” while having access to supports when the adversity each of them faces arises (Dworsky, 2010). One such program aimed at independent living is rapid re-housing for homeless youth. Notably, Hsu, Rice, Wilson, Semborski, Vavanos, and Morton (2019) reported that in recent years, the federal government had promoted rapid rehousing as a shorter, less costly

option for confronting homelessness in the U.S. Rapid rehousing provides a more economical response by offering temporary support through rental assistance from three to 24 months, along with other relocation and stabilization services, which are aimed at helping people to exit homelessness quickly to then secure permanent housing.

### **The Youth Housing Initiative**

Under the Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) Continuum of Care, the newly formed Youth Housing Initiative in Clackamas County utilizes a housing-first, low barrier-to-entry, rapid rehousing model for youth. The Youth Housing Initiative officially started October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2019 and in its first fiscal year will have housed up to eight youth, ages 16-25, who are experiencing homelessness under HUD's definition of homelessness. For such purposes, HUD's definition of homelessness refers to an individual who has been continuously homeless for one year or more, or has experienced at least four episodes of homelessness in the last three years where the combined length of time homeless in those occasions is at least 12 months (HUD, 2018). Such a definition is predicated on targeting the most severe types of homelessness, which can then be afforded funding.

Frequently, rapid rehousing programs for youth have been examined through a systemic lens that involves providers, practitioners, and stakeholders prescribing services as well as policy to advance programmatic aims (Hsu, Rice, Wilson, Semborski, Vavanos, & Morton, 2019). Rapid rehousing, being part of the housing-first model of homeless services, rapidly connects families and individuals

experiencing homelessness to permanent, low barrier-to-entry housing, using a specific bundle of supports, which may include the use of time-limited financial assistance along with services, such as GED courses, secondary education options, alternative schooling, and post-secondary education. Other supportive services may be furnished along the way, to include transportation vouchers, childcare, food vouchers, as well as assistance in registering for supplemental or social services. Some of these services may include, but not limited to, health insurance, disability, financial aid, and mental health support. Besides the usual shelter programs and transitional sheltering, rapid rehousing is the formative model for housing youth, and providing resources towards self-efficacy, such as the types of assistance listed above (HUD exchange, 2020).

### **The Youth Housing Initiative and Service Delivery**

Every youth homeless program has its unique attributes in service delivery and the way it conducts programming. The Youth Housing Initiative is a joint-component transitional housing and rapid rehousing program for youth who are experiencing homelessness. In this regard, depending on the circumstance of screened youth into the program, the youth either start off in transitional housing or rapid rehousing (thus joint component), depending on one's level of independence and level of needs. For instance, with transitional housing, the Youth Housing Initiative essentially takes out a leased housing space in its name and can house a youth participant for up to a year using HUD leasing assistance dollars. Transitional housing is where the youth can begin to gain some stability in so far as immediate needs, including sustenance,

shelter, and safety. Per federal HUD regulations, a youth can stay in transitional housing for up to a year, whereupon one can either move into a rapid rehousing space for a second year as the lease holder or exit the program to be on one's own.

From the onset of programming, if a youth participant enters programming straight into rapid rehousing, this housing service can be utilized for up to two years, whereby the participant is given HUD rent assistance in proportion to their level of independence and financial contribution. It is important to note, per HUD regulations, that the participants will never pay more than 30% of their annual income as their share of rent. Rapid rehousing is often used by those participants who have some minimal wherewithal to carry their own housing lease, as well as who have some experience with being on their own (DevNW, 2020).

Nonetheless, resident program participants in the Youth Housing Initiative have often had significant experiences with trauma, and some have been re-traumatized by other systems and programs designed to assist them. Many have little experience living on their own or holding their own lease. As such, youth often need guidance and support navigating the housing process and setting up residence. Resident youth participants frequently cite the need for education and employment as key necessities, which Dworsky (2010) cited are socio-economic determinants of wellbeing. Moreover, per HUD and Continuum of Care regulations, the Youth Housing Initiative regularly uses the Coordinated Housing Access (CHA) platform to identify participants for programming. Whether it is a referral from an agency, private citizen, or community stakeholder, all current or prospective participants for the Youth

Housing Initiative will have gone through this screening platform. Within this platform, the Youth Housing Initiative has the ability to screen all homeless persons for a number of programs in the county's Continuum of Care, and can source participants in this respect, while other agencies can screen and refer clients to the Youth Housing Initiative program as well. The Youth Housing Initiative has also built community relationships with school district homeless liaisons, the Juvenile Department, the Oregon Youth Authority, non-profits, community groups, and many other community members who have all referred youth with whom they worked in other programs. This is essentially how the Youth Housing Initiative sources youth participants.

**Responsiveness as key for service delivery.** From a programming standpoint, once eligible and under Youth Housing Initiative services, participants are able to contact the program by email, call, or text. Service navigators generally offer to drive to meet participants for in-person meetings at locations that are convenient and comfortable for each youth. Responsiveness being key, program navigators regularly check-in with youth to identify developing needs, as well as evolving goals and ways clients can be supported to reach such goals. Many of these goals often evolve as educational needs, which the program gladly obliges. The practice of working with clients to identify their goals allows Youth Housing Initiative case management to be youth-driven and tailored to each individual circumstance. Equitable access is also a perpetual concern for the Youth Housing Initiative. All services, including case management, are available in a myriad of languages. Clients

are also informed that the services offered can be reasonably modified at any time to meet their needs. For example, if a youth is having financial difficulties, the individual's share of the rent can be sourced through an alternative means, with which the program will always help. Since the Youth Housing Initiative uses a housing-first model, in terms of eligibility, folks are not turned away for making too little money, nor are they kept out due to substance abuse, or mental health adversity, among other precluding factors. This is the very fundamental understanding of what housing-first actually is. Moreover, the program works with folks to overcome rental history or criminal histories that may present challenges to identifying housing. Additionally, staff are trained in fair housing law, and will help to ensure clients do not face illegal discrimination for their background, including race and other identities they may hold (Pence, 2020).

Further underscoring the Youth Housing Initiative's belief in equitable access, Pence (2020) asserted that the program regularly forges strong relationships with landlords and can leverage these to mediate between participants and landlords if any crisis comes up that may affect their housing, creating a plan to keep youth securely housed. The program also has partners and resources to help participants secure food and other necessities if they are running low on such essentials. Finally, the best plan is proactivity, and the Youth Housing Initiative makes a point to build trust with its residents so that when a crisis does occur, the youth feel comfortable reaching out immediately for support, before it is too late to respond.

Throughout the process, the Youth Housing Initiative will have helped residents connect to opportunities and resources regarding employment, education, and other benefits. As of yet, none of the youth residents have received eviction notices or lost their housing, which points to the voluntary and responsive nature of the programming. In order for youth participants to flourish and gain a foothold on normalcy, as well as gain equitable access to systems, to include educational aspirations, each component of programming funnels towards the overall goal of self-efficacy and independence for each participant. This means that in order to combat the ongoing experiences of homelessness and poverty, it is hoped that the participants will have achieved an individually driven level of self-efficacy through pertinent educational, employment, and life-skills opportunities. Through these opportunities, it is anticipated that participants will have offset the adverse outcomes associated with homelessness, in order to achieve the aforesaid employment, and individual educational aspirations. As such, self-efficacy is attained and informed by participants' own lived experience, and self-informed perspective (Pence, 2020).

### **Where the Education Opportunity Lies**

There are educational opportunities which can be undertaken by homeless youth in Clackamas County. Beyond housing assistance for participants of the Youth Housing Initiative, the education-related piece lies in the programming's initiative to educate the participating youth towards their own sense of responsibility and independence. Broadly, these may be enacted through the regional Continuum of Care which through county service providers can regularly help youth learn about



their secondary, as well as post-secondary prospects (jobs, education, trades/vocation). Also, within the Youth Housing Initiative an optional course called Financial Foundations may assume some of the educational programming for participants. This course consists of an eight-hour class teaching financial education, including credit usage, budgeting, and savings programs that can help the participants with their own practical finance skills. The overall programming led by youth choice is intended for the youth participants to think about their own life's necessities, all the while helping them to learn how to assume ownership for their circumstances. Such education is undertaken so that youth participants may become efficient managers of their lived housing situation, with the hope of not only offsetting homeless, but to thrive in order to move beyond the cycle of homelessness and poverty. Through an interconnected system of service providers in the Continuum of Care and tailored programming for the daily schedules of the youth, the alternative educational measures will promote education and self-reliance through the Youth Housing Initiative (DevNW, 2020).

### **Disrupting the Educational Process**

There are many ways that a homeless youth's education prospects may be interrupted. The Oregon Department of Human Services Homeless Youth Advisory Committee (2016) iterated that there are several circumstances that lead youth to utilize services, such as those of the Clackamas County Youth Housing Initiative. Accordingly, the homeless youth typically leave home in response to physical and/or sexual abuse, violence, neglect, addiction of a family member, family conflict, and/or poverty. Also, abandoned youth may be thrown out by families who reject their

sexual orientation, or because of gender identity, substance use, mental illness, behavior, and/or pregnancy, or abandoned by parents who are deported, incarcerated, or struggling with their own addictions or mental illness. Inclusively, youth with a history of systems involvement may become homeless upon release from residential treatment, the juvenile justice system, or the mental health system. Underscoring the need for further research regarding these populations, varying degrees of these circumstances conspire to disrupt the educational prospects of homeless youth.

Additionally, the Oregon Department of Human Services (ODHS) Homeless Youth Advisory Committee (2016) stated that youth with a history of foster care are disproportionately likely to become homeless, either after running away from a foster care placement or upon aging out of the child welfare system. What is more, the advisory committee also maintained that youth in homeless families can become separated from their parents due to shelter restrictions, parents' efforts to protect youth from the streets, or older youth's efforts to reduce the family's economic burdens. Older youth who are living independently can become homeless due to inadequate income or a lack of affordable housing options. Finally, for parenting youth already living independently, the economic and logistical challenges of taking care of a child can lead to homelessness.

Subsequently, the Youth Housing Initiative and accompanying supports, including education programming, in essence, are a form of alternative education. Throughout their time with the Youth Housing Initiative the youth are carrying and experiencing a wide spectrum of adversity. Youth may stay the duration of the

program (24 months), because the aim of the Youth Housing Initiative is for the youth to begin to formulate agency, becoming independent and responsible. Through their participation, it is hoped that youth will build the capacity to navigate systems, such as education and social services, to effectively enhance their self-determined success.

Thus, the rehousing and education services provided through the Youth Housing Initiative of Clackamas county have the goal of promoting self-efficacy among youth because this is a necessary condition for their success.

### **The Researcher's Interest**

This is where my interest was made apparent. Such interest on the plight of youth living with homelessness arose from my previous work as an educator, as well as being a nonprofit administrator at various organizations helping underserved communities, especially homeless youth. In these professional domains, many of the youth participants with which I worked, repeatedly experienced homelessness, while many were a part of a cycle of chronic homelessness. As a result of working with individuals in these settings, I often have received anecdotal feedback from youth participants that they felt they were being overlooked in the process while participating in programming for these systems, especially as to their educational aspirations. Within my current work as Assistant Director with the Clackamas County Continuum of Care's Youth Housing Initiative, I have wanted to solicit the experiences of the youth in order to improve educational programming, attain insight into how the participants see their experiences, what their needs were, and how these

rapid rehousing programs supported the youth in their educational prospects as well as pursuits.

### **Problem Statement**

Nationally, it is known that homelessness reverberates into a bevy of negative outcomes for youth. Moreover, while the literature indicated that utilizing the perspectives of homeless youth in research and programming is beneficial (Schoenfeld et al., 2018), up until this study, youth perspective had not been solicited in the Youth Housing Initiative in Clackamas County, Oregon, especially since this is the first program of its kind, and it was completing its first year when the research began. Explicitly, the Youth Housing Initiative is predicated on self-efficacy and is a form of alternative education meant to hone the level of responsibility the youth carry with them moving forward. Since the Youth Housing Initiative is the first of its kind, the experiences of the participating parenting and homeless youth were intended to serve a purposeful role in improving programmatic outcomes, especially with respect to educational avenues, as well as allowing the community to see what youth experiences and outcomes had been created as a result of such programming. Also, these experiences and programming could hold implications for future funding for the Youth Housing Initiative.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of parenting (raising their own children as parents) homeless youth regarding rapid rehousing programs and educational services provided by the

Clackamas County Youth Housing Initiative. Within the research, the experiences of these homeless and parenting youth were extrapolated through semi-structured phenomenological interviews which involved experiences with the rehousing program and the youths' educational prospects throughout the duration of their engagement in the Youth Housing Initiative program. Also, the common phenomenon of being homeless and parenting among all the participants informed this study. Equally important, it was crucial to keep in mind that this study was predicated upon the understanding that the phenomenon of homelessness does not dissipate once the youth are in housing, because the ongoing prospect of a return to the reality of homelessness that looms over these youth, persists throughout the programming. Through discernment of the experiences the youth had in the Youth Housing Initiative's first programming year, findings revealed the youths' own lived experiences of the housing services, along with their explication of experiences with educational prospects while in the program.

This study included the aim of providing examples of the experiences of youth in the Clackamas County Youth Housing Initiative with respect to housing and educational services. Accordingly, this study was guided by three research questions.

- a) How do Clackamas County parenting youth who are living with homelessness experience the housing program provided by the Clackamas County Youth Housing Initiative?

- b) How do Clackamas County parenting youth who are living with homelessness experience the education services provided through the Clackamas County Youth Housing Initiative?
- c) How do Clackamas County parenting youth who are living with homelessness view the housing program and education services provided by the Clackamas County Youth Housing Initiative as impacting them in re-entry into mainstream daily life in order to thrive?

### **Significance of the Study**

Considering the study revolved around the experiences of parenting homeless youth in a rapid rehousing program and respective educational services, the results of this study are significant in a myriad of ways. First, the distilled experiences, themes, and descriptions aim to benefit the current and prospective youth participants. Appropriately, Henwood, Redline, and Rice (2018) contended that there was a burgeoning body of literature which upheld the perspectives of homeless youth as being crucial in program design for rapid rehousing service models and accompanying educational services. As such, in light of this transcendental phenomenological study, amplifying parenting youth experiences may inform outcomes for federally funded housing programs and their educational services. Equally important, Schoenfeld, Bennet, Manganella, and Kemp (2018) posited that organizations, along with communities who valued youth lived experiences in such programming, were more likely to have refined and improved systems for these programs.

Likewise, funders, such as HUD, through the Continuum of Care, may find value in the experiences of these youth, as justifying how public dollars are spent has often been of great consequence to HUD and CoC programs. Also, individual communities participating in federally funded and non-federally funded housing programs for youth may find the results of this study useful on how to strategically plan for programming. Such strategic planning would extend to non-profits, cities, and neighborhoods attempting to offset youth homelessness. Finally, this research sought to inform the literature by providing a description of the experiences of homeless parenting youth while participating in the Youth Housing Initiative's rehousing programs and educational services in Clackamas County, Oregon.

### **Definitions of Terms**

The following are operationalized definitions of terms that were used in this research study:

**Continuum of care.** (CoC) are local planning bodies responsible for coordinating the full range of homelessness services in a geographic area, which may cover a city, county, metropolitan area, or an entire state (HUD, 2018).

**Homeless.** (1) Individuals and families who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence and includes a subset for an individual who resided in an emergency shelter or a place not meant for human habitation and who is exiting an institution where he or she temporarily resided; (2) individuals and families who will imminently lose their primary nighttime residence; (3) unaccompanied youth and families with children and youth who are defined as homeless under other federal

statutes who do not otherwise qualify as homeless under this definition; and (4) individuals and families who are fleeing, or are attempting to flee, domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, stalking, or other dangerous or life-threatening conditions that relate to violence against the individual or a family member. (HUD, 2018, p.75, 995).

**Rapid rehousing.** is a housing model designed to provide temporary housing assistance to people experiencing homelessness, moving them quickly out of homelessness and into permanent housing (HUD, 2018).

**Homeless youth.** (16-25) are people in households with or without children who are not accompanied by their parent or guardian during their episode of homelessness, and who are between the ages of 16 and 25 (HUD, 2018).

### **Assumptions and Delimitations**

The following assumptions were present in the study. It was assumed that participants in the study answered the phenomenological inquiry forthrightly and honestly to the best of their knowledge. Also, it was assumed that these were the realistic experiences of youth in a rapid rehousing program in Clackamas County, Oregon. Moreover, the research study was predicated on the assumption that to the best of my ability, I as the researcher practiced epoche, a bracketing unique to phenomenology, and suspended all of my biases and prejudgments through the data analysis. Finally, it was assumed that all youth were, in fact, experiencing homelessness which was self-disclosed through documentation in rehousing programming intake (HUD exchange, 2020).



Finally, delimitations present in this study included that this study was only being conducted with parenting youth experiencing homelessness in the Youth Housing Initiative in Clackamas County, Oregon. The qualitative nature of this study was deliberate, as phenomenological interviews enveloped the scope of this study. Finally, the questions that were asked focused solely on the participants' experiences, excluding service providers and other community stakeholders.

### **Summary**

In Chapter one, a background of the problem and study was given, as well as the problem statement necessitating the study of parenting youth perspectives in a rehousing program and educational services offered. Simultaneously, it was cited that invoking parenting youth experiences in programming for such initiatives had not been utilized in Clackamas County, and as the researcher I wanted to know the extent of parenting youth experiences while living with the phenomenon of homelessness in these rehousing and educational programs found in Clackamas County, Oregon. Utilizing the concept of parenting homeless youth experiences, three questions were extrapolated to guide the discernment of this study. Correspondingly, accompanying terminology was defined for the purpose of understanding the study aims.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

The literature informing this study was composed of three main areas of interest: Intersectionality of Homeless Youth, Homeless Youth Perspectives in Rehousing and Educational Programs, Impact of Housing and Educational Interventions on Homeless Youth. Thereafter, a fourth section of the literature included the representation of a transcendental phenomenological framework which was utilized as the theoretical framework for this study. These components of the literature review served to inform the research questions, interview protocol, data analysis, discussion, and the research study as a whole. Since this study aimed to augment the existing literature, it was important to have information on which related literature already existed, so that the explicated research gap was rendered useful.

### **Intersectionality of Homeless Youth**

Youth who are homeless come from varied backgrounds and adversity. Narendorf, Jennings, and Santa Maria (2016) examined young adult mothers and fathers in unstable housing situations who fell under the HUD definition of homelessness. Their study collected survey information over four weeks during the Fall of 2014 in the Houston, Texas metropolitan area, collecting information from (N=352) young homeless adults, with demographics such as, whether participants were pregnant or parenting, living situation, historical risk indicators (Adverse Childhood Experiences Scale), current risk indicators, and protective factors as well as resources, that included level of health insurance coverage, education level, and social support. Using bivariate analysis, including Chi square testing and t-testing, the

authors then compared the parenting or pregnant group (n=109) to those who were not parenting or pregnant (n=243). It was found that the parenting/pregnant group was more likely to be female, was significantly older than their non-parenting study counterparts, and were more likely than other youth to have difficulty being housed due to an inability to pay rent. Moreover, Narendorf et al. (2016) found that the parenting/pregnant group had significantly more adverse child experiences, were more likely to report having been diagnosed with depression or bipolar disorder, yet scored higher on protective factors, including having more emotional support, job/school advice, and an adult who cared about them. Moreover, the parenting/pregnant group also had more healthcare coverage. Invaluably, the authors cite the specific and complex needs of parenting youth and non-parenting youth. Nonetheless, the study in question undertook a survey format, overlooking the pertinent qualitative experiences of participants.

Citing the impact of specific and complex adversity on homeless youth, Wong, Clark, and Marlotte (2016) investigated the subject by conducting a survey in Los Angeles at Children's Hospital for homeless youth (N=389) regarding housing history, experiences of violence along with victimization ( being robbed, harassment, intimate partner violence, or physical assault), mental health, and service utilization. Among the data collected were trauma prior to homelessness (sexual abuse, physical abuse, emotional abuse/neglect, and adverse homelife), and early compound sexual trauma. The variable "early compound sexual trauma" consisted of four groups. One group included individuals who reported none of the earlier traumas assessed. The second

group included participants who reported a single trauma (excluding those who only reported sexual abuse). Next, the third group included those who reported multiple types of non-sexual trauma (two or more). Finally, the fourth group consisted of those who experienced the types of earlier trauma that included sexual abuse. Also, the study captured data for depression, PTSD, and self-injury.

Subsequently, through bivariate analysis (correlation, t-tests, ANOVAs and chi-square testing) Wong et al. (2016) found that homeless youth experience a high rate of traumatic experiences. In terms of significance and predictors, the study also supported that the early compound sexual trauma variable (reporting traumas coexisting with and without sexual abuse) enabled the authors to discern the effects of multiple trauma experiences, which occurred prior to homelessness, on mental health outcomes for homeless youth. The findings also confirmed the authors' hypothesis that, in general, lived experience of multiple trauma types, irrespective of whether it includes sexual abuse, to be more harmful to mental health than any single trauma type. Also, for both PTSD and self-injury, the findings confirmed that experiences of multiple traumas occurring with sexual abuse were predictors of worse outcomes than the experience of multiple traumas of non-sexual nature. The findings of the study helped to illuminate the usefulness of the different ways to conceptualize complex trauma for parenting homeless youth. The literature was informed through what parenting homeless youth may experience in the process of being homeless and partaking in rehousing programs. However, the process undertaken for this study accounted for youth in a major metropolitan area, exclusive of parenting homeless

youth from suburban areas. Moreover, the study in question mostly took a concentrated approach towards trauma utilizing a survey method, whereas alternative approaches might include a focused lens using youth experiences in the form of qualitative data.

In their research, Coolhart and Brown (2017) acknowledged the needs and experiences of youth transitioning into adulthood when they studied the experiences of homeless LGBTQ youth in shelters. Their study focused on collecting interviews from providers and LGBTQ participants in a homeless shelter for youth transitioning into adulthood in the Northeastern United States. After one-hour intensive interviews, for which the youth were compensated for their time (\$15), the data underwent verbatim transcription, followed by appropriate coding (initial, focused, axial, and theoretical) using grounded theory. Themes arising from this process included that for LGBTQ+ youth, shelters were not affirming of participants' LGBTQ+ status, there were problems with gender segregation in which LGBTQ+ youth were deliberately kept away from other participants, mistreatment by staff based on religious beliefs, as well as problems between LGBTQ+ youth and other residents. Moreover, findings showed that a space deemed as a safe space was not safe, and there was also a fear of mistreatment from staff by LGBTQ+ participants. As such, the experiences of the participants revealed that LGBTQ+ youth often did not view shelters as LGBTQ-friendly spaces and often felt mistreated by staff as well as other residents. Equally important, the study shed light on the unique needs and plight of the LGBTQ+ segment of homeless youth, providing empirical observation on how agencies and

rehousing providers may enact improvements to programming. It is important to note that Coolhart and Brown's (2017) study addressed only a segment of homeless youth by studying LGBTQ+ experiences in a Northeastern United States setting, and did not include parenting homeless youth who may or may not be of the LGBTQ+ community.

Consequently, the literature revealed that homeless young adults seeking rehousing and education programs have unique experiences in navigating homelessness. The Oregon Department of Human Services Homeless Youth Advisory Committee (2016) suggested that homeless youth have individual characteristics and needs that make them distinct from homeless adults and families, requiring tailored services and supports. Among these are that youth are still developing and require developmentally appropriate services and supports. Also, youth often enter homelessness before completing their education, with little or no work experience. Additionally, youth typically lack independent living skills, such as money management and housekeeping, as well as lacking experience with landlords, agencies, and institutions. Moreover, youth on the streets are at increased risk of victimization from adults, sexual predators, and human traffickers. Further, youth are often afraid to seek out assistance because of fear of being reported to the authorities, ending up in foster care, or made to return home. Youth may have the opportunity to resolve their homelessness through family reunification, but this process can be drawn out, requiring ongoing support. Homeless youth may also have difficulty accessing services, such as health care, as well as essential documents, including identification

and driver's licenses (ODHSYAC, 2019). The ODHSYAC's denoted information provides a backdrop of the challenges facing youth experiencing homelessness, some of which may be pertinent to parenting homeless youth.

### **Youth Perspectives**

One notion which helps to upend the diversity facing homeless youth transitioning into adulthood is enacting youth perspectives of housing and educational programmatic schemes, policy, and research (Pk, 2018). In King County, Washington, Sydney Pk (2018) spearheaded a participatory research group made of eight young adults at risk of homelessness or who were homeless. This group came about because youth of color were overrepresented in the homeless youth population in King County, Washington. Though the Northwest Network of Bisexual, Trans, Lesbian & Gay Survivors of Abuse (The NW Network), enacting a participatory community-based approach, The Youth of Color (YOC) Needs Assessment group initiated a report on the overrepresentation of youth of color among homeless and unstably housed young adults in King County, Washington. With a team of NW Network staff, community partners, and youth leaders, 12 focus groups with homeless youth of color across King county took place. The YOC Needs Assessment illuminated the voices of youth of color to clarify experiences, strengths, and needs. As such, the final report was provided to local government, providing recommendations to the county and integral stakeholders to strengthen resources towards support for youth of color in the region who were at risk for or who were experiencing homelessness. Among the themes that emerged from the assessment

were the need for confidential spaces for homeless youth to disclose private concerns. Also, the power dynamic between providers and youth needed to be reframed, as youth repeatedly noted that less formal mentorship was needed. Finally, the transactional nature of programmatic interaction took away from the meaningfulness that youth wished to discover, as programs were found to be paternalistic in nature. Additionally, the participating youth perspective was that there was an overarching need for safe space where youth would be able to discuss and learn from choices with a caring adult (Pk, 2018). Pk's research found meaning in focus groups for youth of color and reflected the need for youth perspectives and their holistic experiences, some of which may include youth of color who are parenting and homeless.

Utilizing qualitative co-coding analysis, Henwood et al. (2018) undertook focus groups with 18 homeless youth in Los Angeles. The study, undertaken at drop-in centers and shelters, distilled three major themes as a result of the four focus groups that took place. These themes included personal responsibility and deservedness, rising and falling together, and the need for youth to have individualized support. In terms of the first theme, youth mentioned that one's motivation for self-improvement should be considered in allocation of housing resources. Moreover, for rising and falling together, the young adults voiced the possible impact of social networks among rehoused youth, which could be beneficial, but also detrimental depending on the situation. Finally, concerning individualized support, the youth added that ongoing therapy and support were critical, and that job training and life skills were integral to the process. In this regard, the qualitative experiences reported by the youth proved to



be critical in improving housing interventions. Moreover, the findings of this study lend credence to the notion that young adults' wants and needs in housing interventions are quite distinct from adult population needs (Henwood et al., 2018). Such specialized needs may also include parenting homeless youth. The invaluable contribution of youth perspective may help to enhance programmatic and policy schemes for rehousing interventions among young adults transitioning into adulthood, especially young parenting adults experiencing hastened adulthood (Schoenfeld, Bennet, Manganella, & Kemp, 2019).

As Schoenfeld et al. (2019) mentioned in their article, exposing the lived experiences of youth may be critical in systemic responses to youth homelessness. The Austin, Texas area was chosen by HUD as one of ten communities nationwide to participate in the Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program (YHDP). The YHDP is a federal initiative designed during the Obama administration to effectively end youth homelessness by 2020 which did not occur. Youths' lived experiences played substantive roles in the development and implementation of Austin's response to youth homelessness. For instance, a group of twelve youth, the "Austin Youth Collective to End Youth Homelessness," or AYC, served as integral decision-making partners for the Austin YHDP. Participants in the AYC are heavily involved at all levels of the planning process, from the building of youth-centric housing options, designing educational avenues, to programmatic redesign efforts to ensure that youth do not leave the foster care or juvenile justice systems to homelessness. Ultimately, the article informed the literature in that youth perspectives, including those of parenting

homeless youth, may behold promising outcomes when integrating them in policies for ending youth homelessness. Nonetheless, future study on how the YHDP is informed by youth participation is needed, since this program was in its infancy, and there was no indication of measured outcomes, nor study of the experiences of youth in such programming.

Inclusively, Yen, Hammond, and Kushel (2009) iterated that the predicament of the homeless emerging adult is made more complicated as well as problematic by certain adversities in one's life. Their study considered youth who had aged out of the foster care system in the San Francisco Bay Area of California. By conducting focus groups among 31 youth transitioning into adulthood and a subsequent survey, the authors of the study utilized open coding on transcribed data, which then solidified emergent themes. Among the themes found in the study were: housing circumstances have direct and indirect impacts on access to healthcare; housing instability can impede the flow of information between social services staff and youth; housing circumstances and healthcare differed for men and women; service agency rules and structures may be developmentally mismatched with participant needs; emerging adults experience repercussions of institutional life including the suspicion of authority and mistrust of medical providers.

Thus, Yen et al. (2009) maintained that post-foster care housing instability was detrimental to many aspects of young adults' lives for which health and healthcare access are great necessities. Consequently, the authors utilized youth voices in the study to make suggestions which include providing the option to stay in the foster care

system longer, disseminating programmatic and services information to former foster youth in a variety of formats, (internet, social service agency offices) as well as to different audiences ( social workers, foster youth, and foster parents), and extending health coverage to older ages. Thus, the study highlighted the plight of the foster care segment of young adults seeking to remedy their rehousing situations, including the added adversity of pointed health outcomes, which is inextricably attached to the plight of most homeless youth seeking rehousing (2009). This study focused primarily on exiting foster care participants experiencing homelessness, some of which may or may not have been parenting homeless youth. Moreover, Yen et al. (2009) undertook their study in an urban setting utilizing a survey means that focused on communication between a system and its program participants. The study did not include youth from a suburban or rural setting.

Little is known about how economic empowerment may help to offset youth homelessness in the U.S. In particular, much less is known about African American homeless youth interest in entrepreneurial education, and how this may spur economic self-reliance and improved health outcomes. From December 2013 to March 2014, Jennings, Shore, Strohminger, and Allison (2015) utilized qualitative inquiry to examine such interests. Methods included nine focus groups, and one in-depth interview for 52 purposively sourced youth, ages 15-24, who had recently experienced or were experiencing homelessness in Baltimore, Maryland and Washington D.C. A developing and open-ended topic guide was utilized to explore reasons why youth would possibly want to partake in entrepreneurial education initiatives, barriers they

anticipated in pursuing entrepreneurship, as well as how pursuing entrepreneurial and economic empowerment education could possibly impact their physical and emotional well-being. The focus groups and interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed.

Accordingly, the results of the above study relayed four major themes concerning youth interest in entrepreneurial education: perceived inadequacy of traditional income and educational pathways, wanting to be one's own boss, desires for alternatives to joblessness and illicit income risks, and interest in building on current entrepreneurial activities. Added to this, commonly perceived barriers consisted of lack of mentorship, not knowing "what was possible," difficulty in altering mindset, along with anticipation of negative perceptions of peers. Through their study, Jennings et al. (2015) conveyed that the cohort of youth presumed such entrepreneurial education could help spur health-protective behaviors by offsetting poverty-associated depression, hopelessness, and anxiety. Although the study focused on youth perspectives of possible self-efficacy, it did not examine perceptions of these youth while being parenting and homeless, along with pursuing educational options. More so, Jennings et al. (2015) only examined financial education.

Distinct segments of homeless youth often experience the educational process differently, depending on their housing arrangements. In pertinent research, Hallet (2012) mentioned that multiple families living together in a residential setting is the largest sub-group of the homeless youth population. Yet, this sub-group is the least studied. Essentially, living doubled-up, these youth have their own unique experience in the educational process. The seven-month long, multiple case study of four youth

(age not specified) in Los Angeles who were living among multiple families, sought to discern the effect of such living arrangements on educational participation. The study utilized three distinct methods of data collection, observations, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. Youth were contacted at least once a week over seven months of data collection, adding up to approximately 180 hours of observation. The duration of time with each participant varied from 30 to 60 hours, depended on availability. In particular, attention was given to how youth and families talked about and supported education. Additionally, the youth took part in three semi-structured interviews, lasting about one hour, which were digitally recorded, and generally took place in their residence or a public are, such as a coffee shop or library. The first interview concentrated on outlining residential histories, educational backgrounds, and social networks. The second interview sought to clarify issues that occurred during observations. Finally, the last interview consisted of clarification of details of the youth's lives and how they interpreted their living situation. Subsequently, youth were given copies of their own vignettes written about their own lives and were encouraged to give feedback on the accuracy of findings. Moreover, throughout the study, a variety of documents assisted in clarifying data. As such, documents specific to these youth included high school transcripts, letters from colleges, and homework assignments. At certain times documents were requested to verify information, such as high school transcripts for grade point average.

A qualitative data analysis software program, Atlas.ti, was utilized for organization and data management. Concerning results for Hallet's (2012) study, the

generalized findings upheld that families living together had the potential to encourage or discourage participation in the educational process, depending on the structure of the residence, such as having an encouraging leader in the household, or a family member who could influence educational pursuits. Also, collecting such youth perspectives in these arrangements revealed that every youth aspired for improvement in life, such as earning a college degree or acquiring residential stability in the future. Certainly, the different living arrangements were not deterministic, but were one component of how youth navigated educational processes. Conclusively, Hallet (2012) iterated that the assumption that these youth fit well into a category negates the different perspectives, resources, as well as risks of their respective living arrangements. Hallet's research informed the literature on how merged living situations for homeless youth are viewed by such youth. Moreover, although there may be parenting homeless youth living doubled up in such arrangements, these were not the focus of this study.

The perspectives of homeless youth who are young mothers and seeking education options informed this body of literature. McPherson's (2018) study examined how homelessness informed the life course of two young, single mothers, especially their employment trajectories, and educational attainment trajectories. The respective study utilized a narrative phenomenological methodology to discern the young mothers' life trajectories. Data were collected in one hour-to hour and a half long interviews, as well as follow-up conversations and emails when needed. The initial interview focused on participants' life histories from childhood through post-

compulsory education, while the second interview focused on certain parts of the life history, along with clarifying questions from the first interview. Then, the participant responses were transcribed and coded for appropriate themes. Consequently, the narratives revealed the distinct trajectories from homeless youth to homeless motherhood. As homeless mothers, Tammy (age 25) and Catalina (age 35) went through premature and truncated transitions, including motherhood, running away, and dropping out of compulsory education. Eventually, the subjects completed compulsory education requirements, as well as attained a post-compulsory education degree (medical and criminal justice respectively). The gravity of disadvantages lived by Tammy and Catalina stemmed not only from homelessness while being youth, but also from the causes of their youth homelessness. Both study subjects experienced child abuse and had unfit parents. Also, they experienced homelessness again as single mothers. As such, McPherson (2018) iterated that:

They belong to a segment constituting a substantial part of the homeless population: the homeless youth population accounts for 30% of all homeless individuals, 41% of the homeless youth population experiences multiple episodes of homelessness and single mothers make up 81% of the overall homeless population (p.12).

Notwithstanding, McPherson (2018) cited, their childhoods, consistent suffering of abuse, and poverty in adulthood, each mother was a post-compulsory student within a year of graduation at the time of the study. Their journeys highlight the gravity of their accessing and persisting in post- compulsory education.

Nonetheless, by contributing to the literature through the lens of young mothers experiencing homelessness, the study by McPherson identified a particular segment of homeless youth with specific needs for programming and outcomes.

The experiences of homeless and parenting youth may also provide themes common across this segment of homeless youth. In their study, Aparicio, Birmingham, Rodrigues, and House (2019) explored the lived experiences of Hawaiian youth who were parenting and homeless. Through their use of critical interpretive phenomenological analysis and semi-structured interviews of three parenting participants lasting around an hour, the authors of the study extracted pertinent themes, such as *They never raised me up*, *Becoming mommy and daddy*, and *Finding our place*. The theme of *They never raised me up* consisted of the neglect and absence of parental guidance the participants were left without into their adolescence. The second overarching theme in the study by Aparicio et al. (2019), *Becoming mommy and daddy*, consisted of the truncated nature of having to raise a young child while being homeless and assuming such a responsibility and navigating the circumstances of looking for dwelling. Finally, *Finding our place* considered the identity formation of each of the youth with their circumstances, such as being parents, finding dwelling, and overall identity moving forward. The study of native Hawaiian homeless and parenting youth utilized phenomenology of their lived experiences with a critical interpretive view related to Critical Race theory, as this segment of youth in Hawaii are disproportionately affected by systemic racial inequities that have transcended generations (Aparicio et al., 2019). Depending on the demographic



makeup of parenting and homeless youth being studied, such a critical lens may or may not be appropriate to extract experiences of youth in other studies.

Advancing the perspectives of homeless and parenting mothers through their own words in poetry is a research practice that puts participants thoughts in the foreground of research. In his peer reviewed article, Wright (2018) utilized the “found poetry” of four research participants to illuminate their experiences of being homeless and parenting. The participants who were sourced in Head Start centers throughout the Eastern U.S., ranged from ages 16-54. Using their own poems found in research transcripts and reflecting participant experiences, Wright wanted to illuminate the experiences of these mothers while parenting and homeless to iterate that modern research methodology, which is often researcher-centric, may obscure the true experiences of such research participants. Subsequently, the article’s findings were that poetry may serve as a means with which to foreground and situate the true experiences of research participants, especially through a qualitative and phenomenological means. The poems of the parenting and homeless participants were titled, *Life Insurance*, *I’m Not This Wallflower*, *One of Those Statistics*, and *Where it’s More Quiet*. Wright (2018) advanced that, “recasting the words of participants in poetry form can be useful in the process of data analysis.” Although poetry may serve a purpose in ethnographic terms and other types of studies, the usage of poetry alone may not help research to fully describe the experiences of parenting homeless persons in their fullest light.

### **Impact of Housing and Educational Interventions**

Of equal importance is what programs do to enact support for homeless youth for them to thrive in their educational pursuits. Therefore, it is pertinent to examine the literature on the impact of housing interventions and educational programs on youth. Pierce, Grady, and Holtzen (2018) studied Daybreak, a rehousing program in Dayton, Ohio as to its programmatic outcomes regarding 174 youth who had participated in the rehousing program between 2011 and 2014. Using empirically collected data from these years, researchers gauged three important metrics serving as indicators of program success, including educational attainment, employment, and wages. Accordingly, frequencies were utilized to extrapolate the characteristics of the population regarding demographics, life experiences, medical and housing histories, along with achievement of desired objectives, educational attainment, and employment as well as wages. Thereafter, chi-square testing was conducted on categorical data to see if participants were likely to increase educational attainment, increase wages, or work 20 or more hours per week at exit, based on such empirical data. In summary, 73% of youth accomplished positive results on at least one of the three outcomes of interest, which were either education, employment, or wages. Considering these possible outcomes, fifty-two percent of participants garnered positive results on two of these three outcomes, while 27% did so across all three outcomes. Nonetheless, Pierce et al. (2018) maintained that the data were originally collected to see individual progress, not to compare the population to one another. However, what the study did gauge is the associative factors of how rehousing

programs impact outcomes on youth homelessness which holds implications for how service providers enact programmatic formats for homeless youth, thereby affecting their ability to thrive. Although the study did measure markers of success, such as education, employment and wages, these data were not current, but rather from a previous span of three years. Equally important, since the study by Pierce et al. (2018) was retrospective, it did not capture any of the lived real-time experiences of the participants, including those who may have been parenting homeless youth.

Additionally, Kidd, Frederick, Karabanow, Hughes, Naylor, and Barbic (2016) maintained that there are also those youth who have made it out of homelessness and have reached basic stability, which in and of itself fluctuates due to personal adversity as well as systemic adversity. In their mixed methods study involving 51 homeless youth participants from Nova Scotia and Toronto, Canada, Kidd et al. (2019) gauged the level of rehousing program impact through a series of four interviews over a year-long period. The findings yielded that quantitatively, a bevy of mental health, community integration, and quality of life measures were used to describe how these indicators of wellbeing shifted in the yearlong period. Subsequently, it was found that progress was not made in community integration, quality of life as well as mental health were highly variable, and hope had declined substantially. Qualitatively, three major themes were found in the process of exiting homelessness. The themes included a significant fluctuation and instability, basic stability while being demoralized due to difficulties in achieving progress towards life goals, and a period of inroads with life goals creating a sense of hope (Kidd et al., 2016). Nevertheless,

while Kidd et al. (2019) took a mixed methods approach to gauging participants' progress during a rehousing program, the study provides minimal parenting homeless youth experiences with education programs which are often found in this sort of housing model.

Gathering homeless youth experiences through the literature provided insight into housing and educational program efficacy. Holtschneider's (2016) study examined 32 former program participants who had participated in a rehousing program run by a nonprofit in the Chicago area. The range of the participants included those who had participated one year ago, all the way through 11 years ago. Interviews were conducted on each former participant. Thereafter, transcription and appropriate coding aligned with a phenomenological approach were undertaken. As a result, findings included that though participants continued to struggle after exiting the rehousing program, data revealed the program as having had a significant impact on the former participants' lives currently. Overall, the study revealed that former program participants did not define success in the rehousing program through typical indicators of self-efficacy or programmatic effectiveness, such as sustained housing, stable employment, educational achievement, or health. Rather, the participants cited four outcomes distinct from typical metrics, which they assumed to be the most pertinent: safety and survival, permanent connections, giving back, and personal development.

Regarding safety and survival, Holtschneider (2016) mentioned that participants in the study voiced being appreciative of having been kept alive as a result

of such services. Additionally, permanent connections mattered to the former participants, as all but two of them had regularly kept in touch with program staff and supporting stakeholders. Also, a sense of gratitude made the former participants want to “pay it forward” by seeking to help others in similar predicaments. Finally, personal development meant to the participants that they were afforded the capacity for self-discovery and maturity to confront the lives ahead of them. Holtschneider’s (2016) study and discovery of participant phenomena inform the literature in that, when afforded agency to flourish, participants in homeless youth programs may forge their own outcomes irrespective of typical metrics and programmatic schemes, even parenting homeless youth. While pertinent themes were discovered regarding this study, it only gauged the experiences of former participants, not current ones, nor parenting homeless youth.

### **Theoretical Framework**

In part of the literature, some of the studies used phenomenological methods and the experiences of youth to substantiate findings. In this study, a transcendental phenomenological framework *is* the theoretical framework. As such, the philosophical underpinnings of phenomenology can be used as a framework with which to view the experiences of participants. In this study of the Youth Housing Initiative, transcendental phenomenology is applied to extract the *essence* of something as described. The essence of a phenomenon is how the phenomenon functions in the lived-experience, and how it shows itself in consciousness as an object of reflection (Peoples, 2021). Husserl’s (1970) transcendental phenomenological

worldview iterated that the only true grounding with which to explicate the experiences of a lived phenomenon is through the practice of transcendental phenomenology. In this respect, as the researcher, by adding another framework or philosophy to the study, I may obscure the totality of the parenting homeless youths' experiences, acting as a filter towards wholly describing these experiences. Utilizing a transcendental phenomenological framework, this study was afforded a grounding framework with which to view and explicate the experiences of the youth living with homelessness, their experiences in the housing program, and their experiences with educational opportunities in Clackamas County. I will also provide extensive information about transcendental phenomenology in Chapter 3.

### **Summary of the Literature**

The examination of the literature situated this study. Accordingly, the identified gap conveyed that studies on parenting homeless youth, along with their perspectives in housing and educational programs has been limited, especially in programs funded through Continuums of Care (Henwood et al., 2018). In fact, none of the studies presented in the literature were derived from HUD's definition of homelessness, nor did they operate through Continuums of Care. Correspondingly, in reviewing the literature, there was no semblance of programs being studied that were in their first year of existence.

As a result, by viewing the literature's identification of the concurrent adversity homeless youth carry, their participation in associated research, as well as programs, and the impact of housing interventions on such youth, the research gap was

intimated. That is to say, there is limited research using phenomenological methods examining the experiences of parenting homeless youth in rehousing and education programs, wherein the perspectives of the youth are garnered to inform the individual and contextual dynamics.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

This chapter describes the methodology I used to understand and describe the experiences of parenting homeless youth in rapid rehousing programs and educational services in Clackamas County, Oregon. The chapter denotes specific items pertaining to the study, such as the research questions, rationale for the methodology, and the setting. Subsequently, included in the chronology of this research are the participants and sampling strategy, design and procedure, instruments, ethical considerations, role of the researcher, and data analysis.

#### **Research Questions**

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of parenting homeless youth regarding rapid rehousing programs and educational services provided by the Clackamas County Youth Housing Initiative.

The research questions guiding this study included:

- a) How do Clackamas County parenting youth who are living with homelessness experience the housing program provided by the Clackamas County Youth Housing Initiative?
- b) How do Clackamas County parenting youth who are living with homelessness experience the education services provided through the Clackamas County Youth Housing Initiative?
- c) How do Clackamas County parenting youth who are living with homelessness view the housing program and education services



provided by the Clackamas County Youth Housing Initiative as impacting them in re-entry into mainstream daily life in order to thrive?

### **Rationale for Methodology**

Phenomenology stemmed from philosophical traditions that evolved over a long period of time. Nonetheless, the modern understanding of the methodology arose from Edmund Husserl's (1970) belief that the object of scientific study should not be founded solely in objective observance of external reality, rather that scientific study could also be predicated on the premise that phenomena could be studied as perceived by an individual's subjective consciousness and experience of phenomena. Explicitly, this meant that scientific knowledge of phenomena rests in the consciousness and thereby is the lived representation of those living the phenomena. Moreover, Husserl asserted that, "Ultimately, all genuine and, in particular, all scientific knowledge, rests on inner evidence." Husserl's (1970) transcendental phenomenology emphasized the qualitative focus on the wholeness of experience and probing for essences of experiences, along with the viewing of experiences and behavior as integrated and inseparable relationships of subject and object.

Consistent with the Husserlian approach, in the mid 1990's, Moustakas (1994) provided a modification of transcendental phenomenological methods by Stevick (1971), Colaizzi (1973), and Keen (1975). As such, the usage of a transcendental phenomenological methodology in this research study provided a means to understand as well as describe the essence of the phenomenon of parenting homelessness affected-youth, making every effort to remove the subjective experiences,

assumptions, and ideals of the researcher to focus purely on the experiences of those experiencing the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). To do this, as the researcher, I had to strive to transcend biases and assumptions to see the phenomenon “freshly, as for the first time” and be open to its totality (Moustakas, 1994, p.34). As the researcher, I utilized this transcendence to the best of my ability from the onset of the analysis of the parenting and homeless youths’ experiences. Moreover, Husserl posited that those living a phenomenon have common experiences and that these distinct lived experiences also have a composite *essence* wherein the phenomenon presented itself as *something*, which signified the ultimate pursuit of this study, and meant that it was my task to illuminate these experiences in their purest form (Husserl, 1970).

Moustakas’ (1994) modification of transcendental phenomenological methods by Stevick (1971), Colaizzi (1973), and Keen (1975) was undertaken for this study because of a curiosity to obtain the firsthand experiences of homeless parenting youth in the programming for the Youth Housing Initiative in Clackamas County, Oregon as well as distilling commonalities among these experiences. Foremost, the three overarching research questions are what led the researcher towards an emphasis on a transcendental phenomenological methodology. Such a methodology allowed for the distilment of meaning-making using the lived experiences of the youth through appropriate interviews. Equally important, Padgett (2012) asserted that when seeking such meaning-making, phenomenology is best suited to help answer the research questions because it affords the researcher a vehicle to also take part in an in-depth inquiry as a co-researcher(Moustakas, 1994). Such in-depth inquiry is also a means

for validity in that the researcher is immersed in the *field*. Further, Padgett (2012) went on to state that, “Most topics in phenomenological analysis have resonance as aspects of the human condition that run deep” (p.41). Where Padgett further stated, “Phenomenological analysis puts the focus on deeper meanings achieved by prolonged immersions, that is, capturing the lived experience” (p.41). Moreover, the systemic procedures and detailed data analysis steps of Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology as outlined by Moustakas are optimal for assisting less experienced researchers (Moerrer-Urdahl and Creswell, 2004). Other methods, such as case study or narrative inquiry would not yield the substantive data for the pertinent research questions, nor would they align with the focus of lived experience and illumination of these by the researcher. Justifiably, other qualitative methods, including grounded theory, case study, narrative inquiry, among others, tend to focus on various sources of data, and focus on a myriad of lived factors. In this regard, my research was bound by one source of data which was the parenting homeless youth participants and their experiences in rehousing along with educational prospects. Accordingly, the lived experiences of parenting youth living the phenomenon of homelessness were considered for substantive inquiry and recorded for pragmatic purposes. Specifically, the research intended to obtain these perspectives as the youth related to what it was like confronting the phenomenon of parenting and living with homelessness, while being a part of the Youth Housing Initiative’s rehousing and respective education programing in Clackamas County.

Van Manen (2014) iterated that lived experience is the starting point for inquiry, reflection, and interpretation. This thought also professed the idea that lived experience provides the profound insight into the qualitative meanings of phenomena effecting people's lives. For instance, phenomenological science explores the dimensions of illness, such as Multiple Sclerosis or pain in the environment of clinical practice. Such practice focuses on the idea that the clinical path of an illness does not tell us how different individuals actually experience their own illness. In the case of homeless parenting youth in Clackamas County, it was known that the parenting and homeless youth were experiencing the phenomenon of homelessness, but what was not known was the unique path of each of these individuals regarding their reflection on the rehousing program and these youths' educational prospects. Such a journey was part of their ecological setting, and thus the "*laboratory*."

In the review of the literature, Holtschneider (2016) captured the experiences of rehousing program participants through a phenomenological lens. Using a phenomenological lens allowed for capturing homeless youths' experiences in the Youth Housing Initiative in a thoughtful, pragmatic, and considerate format. Such qualitative methodology afforded the study description, and interpretation of a phenomenon through collection of data from the individuals who have personally experienced pertinent realities, which was explicated through semi-structured interviews (Moustakas, 1994).

## Setting

The parenting youth participants of this study were all eligible youth in the Youth Housing Initiative's programming. Also, the Youth Housing Initiative, situated in Clackamas County, Oregon, operated under the County's Continuum of Care and is funded by The Department of Housing and Urban Development. Because of such a funding designation, this means the participating youth also fell under the homeless definition of HUD. For purposes of this research study, the operationalized homeless definition of HUD (2018) was:

(1) Individuals and families who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence and includes a subset for an individual who resided in an emergency shelter or a place not meant for human habitation and who is exiting an institution where he or she temporarily resided; (2) individuals and families who will imminently lose their primary nighttime residence; (3) unaccompanied youth and families with children and youth who are defined as homeless under other federal statutes who do not otherwise qualify as homeless under this definition; and (4) individuals and families who are fleeing, or are attempting to flee, domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, stalking, or other dangerous or life-threatening conditions that relate to violence against the individual or a family member. (p. 75995)

Moreover, from the onset of this study the Youth Housing Initiative was completing its first year of existence, wherein the youth had received rental assistance, as well as support with their educational aspirations, along with pertinent supportive

measures, such as childcare, food vouchers, transportation, including help with registering for health insurance, and financial aid, among other supports. Thus far, the programming had housed six participants with distinct variations of homelessness, along with the circumstances that led them there. Some of the participants may have been fleeing domestic violence or abuse, while some were former foster youth; others had lived out of their own autos, some may have been ostracized by their own family for getting pregnant; all had limited resources in confronting their personal journey with homelessness

### **Participants and Sampling Strategy**

With the assistance of staff in the Youth Housing Initiative, the researcher recruited three parenting youth participants, ages 18-25, who had participated in programming within the first year of the program's evolution. The parenting youth were chosen primarily because they made up half of the program participants at this point in time, and since transcendental phenomenology calls for a homogenous sample, the parenting youth made the sampling of experiences increasingly homogenous because of their parenting status. Beyond this, as the researcher I also thought it would be interesting to give voice to their experiences, as once in her life, my mother had once been a parenting youth without dwelling as well. The specific age requirement for participation in this study, ages 18-25, was made a delimitation because it assured that the youth could readily participate in interviews of their own volition and could readily give permission to participate in the study. Since I had specific participant characteristics in mind, the sampling strategy was purposeful in

nature, as was the delimitation of parenting young mothers. Accordingly, the delimitation that I set as the researcher was that the participants were to be parenting young mothers living with homelessness who had participated in the program in its first year, 2019-2020, in Clackamas County, ages 18-25, and fell under HUD's definition of homelessness in terms of eligibility for programming. In addition to being eligible participants within the first year of programming, the youth must have been in pursuit of an education track, educational courses, vocation, or technical training to be eligible for the study. In terms of garnering the youths' participation in the study, the researcher reached out to the first-year participants and gathered youth fitting the above requirements. Subsequently, the parenting youth living with homelessness were provided a consent form outlining their eligibility, ability to withdraw at any time, and reminder that their protection and confidentiality was paramount in the scope of this study. For such reasons of confidentiality, the youth were given the discretion to assign themselves pseudonyms to protect their identities. The letter of consent is found in Appendix B.

### **Data Collection, Design, and Procedure**

A phenomenological research design allowed me as the researcher to discern the phenomenon of parenting youth homelessness in a rehousing program and educational services with a homogenous group of participants, which is requisite in a phenomenological study (Moustakas, 1994). The respective data were collected through a series of semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions, with follow-up questioning and interviewing as needed for confirmation of experiences. The

interviews lasted approximately one hour. Integrated into the interview timeframe, as the researcher I guided the participants with information about the study, as well as clarifying terms used in the interview.

The interviews of all three participants took place over the month of December 2020. Additionally, a standard set of interview questions was used with all participants, including probing questions to extract more substantive responses from participants as needed. Individual interviews were conducted through the cellular phone application, Rev. The interviews were transcribed through the Rev platform, and input into the qualitative data analysis software, NVIVO. The qualitative software was mostly used for disaggregation of the data in which pertinent questions, statements, and themes would all have their respective nodes. Simultaneously, memos were written mostly for logistical purposes. Additionally, the practice of notetaking as well as journaling took place. Thus, journaling took place mostly to keep logistical operations, such as remembering when a participant's interview took place, or to set reminders to confirm certain points about the interview as well as for planning or to account for impressions of the data, including documentation of any subsequent interaction with the participants. Equally important, the guidance in transcendental phenomenological methods deems that routinely expressing biases explicitly through journaling is counterintuitive to illuminating all of the experiences of the participants. This is because in order to illuminate these experiences in their totality, no perceived filter should obscure the description of these youths' experiences, including the recollection of my biases as the researcher (Peoples, 2021).



Likewise, the transcendental phenomenological research design spurred thought on the subjective lived experiences of the individuals involved. Because of the examination of such lived experiences, the specified research design required the researcher to suspend all prejudgments about the phenomena and previous interaction with it. This item of suspending biases is a clear assumption within the Assumptions and Delimitations section of the research. The assumed suspension of biases through the practice of epoche (only initial bracketing specific to transcendental phenomenology) and throughout the analysis was crucial in garnering the totality of participants' experiences. Accordingly, before analysis of the transcripts, I had to write about any experience I had with the phenomenon, which can be found in the Role of the Researcher section of this methodology section. For instance, early in my youth, I experienced extended bouts of poverty with some housing instability. Also, I have previously worked with folks experiencing homelessness as a nonprofit administrator and educator. The practice of epoche, suspension of my biases, was assumed and was meant to stay in place during review of the notes, continuous revisiting as well as reading of transcripts, and a multitude of other points during disaggregation of the data. That is to say, after I wrote my Role as the Researcher and acknowledged my biases, I tried to not cognate about these, as they could prove to be a filter for the totality of the parenting youths' experiences (Moustakas, 1994). In a practical sense though, my biases still came into play during the interpretation of the findings and accompanying discussion. The phenomenological design for this research study allowed for collection of the data which came from semi-structured

interviews with open-ended questions, to subsequently include accompanying thematic coding and descriptive iterations.

### **Instruments**

The interview questions for this study were designed using themes of a qualitative nature found in the literature and from the guiding research questions. Additionally, these interview questions underwent a pilot phase in which they were reviewed by at least three doctoral candidates in the researcher's cohort. Further, piloting took place with two non-eligible youth who did not fall within the delimitations set by the researcher (the piloted youth did not partake in the first year of programming) to further distill the appropriateness of each question. Based on the colleagues' feedback, and the youth piloted, the interview questions then underwent revision to ensure that analyzable data were produced. The final interview protocol is located in Appendix A. Inclusively, audio recordings and logistical notetaking helped to situate the data. Moreover, intake forms from the Youth Housing initiative were used to confirm certain data points of the participants, such as how long they had been in the program at the time of the interviews.

Also, of significance is that prior to the interviews, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) process for the University of Portland took place, along with pertinent approvals towards establishment of the research. In accordance with the IRB process, the participants were furnished consent forms (See Appendix B). Additionally, as the researcher I explained to the youth participants that the interview would be audio-recorded, would not be shared outside of the bounds of the study, and that

confidentiality and privacy would wholly be respected throughout as well as after the research study. This information was included in the consent form.

Subsequently, the interview process for each youth participant began with warm-up questions to get the youth to think about the ensuing questions, as well as to establish rapport among the youth and me, the interviewer. Warm-up questions included, Can you tell me a little bit about yourself? What are your interests? Given the pandemic, how have things been for you these past few months? Where did you grow up? Thereafter, the substantive, primary questions of the interview took place. The warm-up and interview questions are found in Appendix A.

**Validity and reliability.** Considering the above, overall integrity of the research study was kept in mind throughout the study. Criteria for validity and reliability in this research study included the practice of epoche (bracketing) consistent with Moustakas's methodology. The practice of epoche, as Moustakas (1994) iterated, allowed me "to be completely open, receptive, and naïve in listening and hearing research participants describe their experience of the phenomenon being investigated." Another invaluable piece lending itself to both validity and reliability in this study was member checking in which participants were presented with findings, as well as being asked to read the interview transcripts, to assess these items for accuracy. Likewise, piloting of interview questions assured rigor in the interview format, as well as trustworthiness in the study. Also, continuous transcription reviews were crucial in harnessing the experiences of each individual to gauge the overall meaning-making of the youth. Each of these integral elements to discern information,

allowed me as the researcher to be intrinsically involved in the study, and more importantly helped to affirm overall validity and reliability of the study (Creswell, 2016).

Moreover, included in efforts to sustain validity and reliability, I took strides to maintain researcher reflexivity, prolonged engagement in the field, and to partake in thick, rich description. Creswell and Miller (2000) maintained that these cornerstones of validity-keeping are crucial for such integrity. As such, through reflexivity in a journal, I disclosed developments of the research, such as logistical observations, as well as solely considering the experiences of these youth. Moreover, prolonged engagement provided me as the researcher, the opportunity to make observations which in turn helped to confirm the interview data. Finally, the goal of the researcher was that by using thick, rich description in disclosing themes and verbatim examples, I provided an impactful research study by describing the experiences of the participants. In turn, doing so would provide a semblance of verisimilitude in which a prospective reader was virtually transported to the setting.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The primary step before commencing research was garnering the approval of the University of Portland's Institutional Review Board for permission to undertake the study. Simultaneously, the methodology was presented to the County's Continuum of Care and Youth Housing Initiative management team for approval. Youth participation was contingent upon the furnishing and return of a letter of consent which specified that the youth in no way were precluded from future

participation in programming because of these interviews. Regarding audio recordings, these interviews are stored in a password-protected computer and cloud to ensure complete confidentiality of the participants. Also, regarding confidentiality of participants, the youth were given pseudonyms of their own choosing to protect their identities throughout the process. Finally, the results of this study are anticipated to be shared confidentially with the Youth Housing Initiative, Continuum of Care, pertinent communities, the IRB, me as the researcher, and most importantly, the participants.

### **Role of the Researcher**

In the case of this research study, I consider myself an insider. Since 2004, I have worked in educational and non-profit settings, primarily with underserved youth in K-12 environments or young adult serving-systems, including the traditional school setting as a teacher, alternative learning schoolteacher, and youth development non-profit settings. I am intrinsically motivated to deconstruct top down approaches by bureaucracies and systems that overlook the experiences of service recipients, especially those facing homelessness on a daily basis. More so, I am committed to constructing narratives that situate the experiences of homeless youth at the forefront of policy and discussions regarding homeless youth empowerment. In effect, I see these youth and young adults being served by these systems as the true experts of knowing what is needed to empower them in their paths moving forward. Parallel to all my professional journey, along the way I also obtained an undergraduate degree and a graduate degree which informed my worldview in terms of advocating for marginalized, underserved populations. Through my education, I admit that I have

garnered privilege, but am also able to practice sympathy, empathy, and compassion, especially since I experienced poverty early in my life and adolescence, as explained in the first chapter of the section, Researcher's Interest. My previous lived experience informs how I feel towards, not only the programming being studied, but also the youth participants themselves, who I believe deserve compassion and are afforded human dignity from programming. Nonetheless, as the researcher, I continuously strived to suspend my personal beliefs and bias, to be keenly aware that data collection in this transcendental phenomenology and accompanying analysis were the primary objectives for this study (Moustakas, 1994). Furthermore, although I did not work with the parenting youth participants on a daily basis, I did operate their programming in the Youth Housing Initiative and I knew the full extent of their circumstances for joining programming, and made decisions for the respective services provided for these youth participants on a daily basis. I feel that my previous experiences inform me about the plight of these parenting youth enough to gain insight and describe their experiences, but to also refrain from having any deep seated assumptions, which I hope was fruitful in describing the shared essence of the parenting homeless youth in this study.

### **Data Analysis**

The data analysis ensued once the interviews all took place. In accordance, the telephone audio interviews were undertaken and transcribed, word-for-word, through the cellular phone application, Rev. Thereafter, the transcriptions were entered into

the qualitative analysis software, NVivo to compose data in a matter relevant to the research study, especially with classification.

Subsequently, I utilized the data analysis guidance established by Moustakas's (1994) modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method of analysis of phenomenological data. First, the analysis began with me as the researcher undertaking epoche (bracketing unique to phenomenology) in which the researcher seeks to suspend all preconceived notion and bias, along with disclosing his experiences with the phenomenon being studied. I essentially wrote about my experiences and biases with the phenomenon in the Role of the Researcher section and suspended these biases throughout my analysis to the best of my ability. Through epoche, I strived to constantly reach a meditative sort of state in which a phenomenological attitude was assumed, which meant, as Moustakas (1994) mentioned, "to be completely open, receptive, and naïve in listening and hearing research participants describe their experience of the phenomenon being investigated." For me, this meant that the phenomenological attitude was a reality in that each experience with the data was new, valid, and as seen for the first time; an exercise in supreme objectivity, with only the subjective experiences of the participants as the only referent to be distilled.

Secondly, for each participant's interview transcript, I extracted significant statements, which from a participant's consciousness, illuminated the experience of the phenomenon of homelessness and the programming that the youth participants were experiencing. Third, the significant statements were clustered into meaning

units, or what are known as themes. For example, this may have consisted of a participant alluding to themes, such as hopefulness, resourcefulness, or stress within certain statements. Fourth, as the researcher I wrote a summary description of *what* each participant's experience was of the phenomenon which Creswell (2013) called a textural description. For instance, the textural experience may be the theme of stress wherein such a textural description would include verbatim examples from the individual interview about a theme such as stress gleaned from the interviewees themselves. Subsequently, within the third part of the analysis, I also wrote a structural description which contemplated *how* the phenomenon was occurring. In the instance of the *how* structural description, the description underscored the substantive reality of an experience, such as a sense of stress inducing bouts of depression and anxiety, that only the participant could feel within the confines of their lived theme of stress. Fifth, Creswell determined that a summary of the essence for each participant's experience was necessary and combined elements from the textural description with the structural description. In the fifth step, as the researcher I sought validity by checking with each interview participant to see if the description of the experience was accurate. Finally, once each of these steps was undertaken for each participant, I then solidified a composite *essence* summary of the phenomenon utilizing the common themes (textural) and structures (structural description), from all participants. In effect, this would be the *essence* of the experience, and culminate the transcendental phenomenological text and study for parenting homeless youth in the Youth Housing Initiative in Clackamas County, Oregon.



Through an understanding of Moustakas' (1994) methodology, especially the experiences obtained from the interviews, the writings reflected the existential dynamic of the study at that particular point in time. In turn, a composite description of the essence of all the participants' experiences solidified the phenomenological text which was central to the inquiry. Accordingly, the writing process was the focal point of this research and unequivocally *was* the research (Moustakas, 1994). In this regard, the accounting of the experiences of those living the phenomenon of homelessness were brought to the forefront and illuminated to provide insight into what it was like to be experiencing homelessness and receiving housing and educational services in Clackamas County.

### **Summary**

In this chapter on methodology, the rationale for using a phenomenological inquiry was situated. Appropriately, the methodology chapter included the research questions, rationale for the methodology, and the setting. Subsequently, the methodology included the participants and sampling strategy, data collection, design and procedure, instruments with data and reliability measures, ethical considerations, role of the researcher, and data analysis. Ultimately, the methodology employed for the proposed research was aligned with the purpose statement regarding the experiences of youth in a Clackamas County homeless youth rehousing program and the youths' educational prospects while in the program. Also, the guiding research questions which gave life to the interview questions, helped to discern the experiences

of the youth which as van Manen (2014) mentioned, were the starting point for inquiry, reflection, and interpretation.

## Chapter 4: Findings

As stated in successive chapters, the purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of homeless parenting youth in a rapid rehousing program along with their educational prospects in Clackamas County, Oregon. This included the aim to synthesize the data into an essence of the experiences of youth in the Clackamas County Youth Housing Initiative. The study sought to mediate discourse on the experiences of these youth in the Youth Housing Initiative rehousing program in Clackamas County, what these youth experienced from such rehousing programs and educational services; and the extent to which these programs impacted these youth in re-entry into mainstream daily life. First, a demographic and biographical background of each participant is necessary to understand who the parenting youth were and what sort of identifying factors they carried as part of their experiences in the transcendental phenomenological analysis. The demographic and biographical background information for the parenting youth participants can be found in Table 1 below. Secondly, the findings of the research are represented in this chapter through themes arising to help answer each research question through table 2. Moreover, as themes are represented as findings for the research questions, they are also elaborated upon in chapter 5 to solidify the overall research study.

In addition to representing the findings through themes for each research question, it was imperative to illustrate the phenomenological process for each participant by conveying the findings for each youth through relevant statements,

themes, a textural description of these themes (what they experienced), structural description (how they experienced it), and finalizing a phenomenological text through the formulation of a composite essence for all of the participants. After finalizing the phenomenological text in this chapter, subsequently this essence is discussed further in chapter 5. Accordingly, the breadth of this study was guided by three research questions.

- a) How do Clackamas County parenting youth who are living with homelessness experience the housing program provided by the Clackamas County Youth Housing Initiative?
- b) How do Clackamas County parenting youth who are living with homelessness experience the education services provided through the Clackamas County Youth Housing Initiative?
- c) How do Clackamas County parenting youth who are living with homelessness view the housing program and education services provided by the Clackamas County Youth Housing Initiative as impacting them in re-entry into mainstream daily life in order to thrive?

Table 1 highlights the parenting youth participants' demographic and biographical information, including youth name, age, ethnicity, occupation, education (attained at time of interview), time in program (at time of interview), event (causing homelessness), as well as the parenting youths' children and age.

Table 1

*Youth Participants' Demographic and Biographical Information*

Youth Name	Age	Ethnicity	Occupation	Education	Time in Program	Event	Children and Age
Bonnie	23	White	Fred Meyer	Preparing for G.E.D. exam	11 months	Landlord Neglect	Son, 3 yrs.
Missy	26	White	Youth Action Board	Completed H.S. Diploma	14 months	Parental Abandonment	Daughter, 10 months
Ivy	22	White	Postmates	Preparing for G.E.D. Exam	11 months	Domestic Violence	Son, 6 Months, Daughter, 20 Months

The findings for this transcendental phenomenological study can be represented through themes associated with the overarching research questions for this study. Table 2 below represents the findings to the research questions by theme and the youth who experienced each of these themes.

Table 2

*Findings to Research Questions by Theme*

Research Question	Theme	Youth Experiencing the Theme
RQ A: How parenting homeless youth experienced the housing program	Besides the outer part I feel safe.	Bonnie, Missy, Ivy
	Figure it out on my own.	Bonnie, Missy, Ivy
	I do not know where I'd be. Places not meant for human habitation.	Bonnie, Missy, Ivy
	It gave me opportunities.	Bonnie, Missy, Ivy
	Others to trust and depend on, like Bobby.	Bonnie, Missy, Ivy
RQ B: How parenting homeless youth experienced the education services	Feeling empowered by people and systems.	Bonnie, Missy, Ivy
	Needing more guidance on educational services.	Missy
	Urgency and COVID.	Bonnie
RQ C: How parenting homeless youth viewed these services as impacting them to thrive	Paying it forward and helping others.	Bonnie, Missy, Ivy
	Thriving when all is said and done.	Bonnie, Missy, Ivy

*Note.* Pertinent statements associated with these themes and youth are found below in Individual Phenomenological Process for Each Participant.

### **Individual Phenomenological Process for Each Participant**

The themes arising from the phenomenological interviews were only a part of the greater process of analysis, which finalized the phenomenological text, and thereby essence of the experiences, and which Moustakas (1994) iterated was the paramount objective of this study. In the previous section, themes and their exemplars gave answers to the poignant research questions of the study, but the study necessitated further analysis about the experiences of these youth. Therefore, the results of each youth in the transcendental phenomenological process are delineated further to reflect the essence of their individual experiences. Thereafter, a composite finding of their collective essences, the overall essence of the experience of all the participating youth in this study, will solidify this study. For the phenomenology to be solidified for the three parenting youth participants of this study, Moustakas (1994) iterated that the following take place:

1. Extraction of the pertinent statements from the transcripts towards the phenomenon (known as horizontalization).
2. Delimiting these pertinent statements towards invariant horizons or meaning units.
3. Clustering these meaning units into themes.
4. Constructing a textural description based on the themes, using verbatim examples and writing about the *what* of the experiences.
5. Constructing a structural description and writing about *how* these experiences were lived (known as imaginative variation or intuition).

6. Composite textural description-structural description of the essence for each individual.
7. Synthesis of the textural and structural meanings and essences (known as Intuitive Integration).
8. The final composite description becomes the invariant structure or ultimate essence given to the experience of all participants being studied.

### **Bonnie**

Bonnie, age 23, had a job in retail at Fred Meyer, and had recently finished the academic portion of her GED program. Her next step was to pass the GED examination, and begin a vocational track at Portland Community College to become an electrician, with the hopes of joining a union. Bonnie had a 3-year-old son at the time of her research interview and had been in the Youth Housing Initiative for 11 months.

**Textural (what) description of Bonnie.** The importance of safety in Bonnie's home was important to her, this was reflected in the theme of *Besides the outer part I feel safe*:

My apartment itself, the inside is very nice, and I do like it. However, since I was in such a rush to try and find something, I picked a really bad neighborhood. That was really unfortunate. I live in a very ghetto neighborhood. For the most part, I have insomnia now from not being able to sleep because of how bad it gets there. Besides the outer part, I love my home.



I love being able to have a home with my son and to have his room to play in, to do his schoolwork, to be able to sit in the living room and watch movies together and cook in the kitchen together.

Also, Bonnie's independence and figuring things out on her own were of significant importance to her which was evident in the theme of *Figure it out on my own*:

Not really, I'm pretty closed off when it comes to stuff like that. Even when it came to school, I mean, like Bobby, he helps me obviously, and it's really great, but like overall, I'm pretty closed off when it comes to that stuff. I'm a little bit hard-headed and I try and get it figure it out on my own. Unfortunately, I don't really have anybody for that.

Being in a habitable place for her and her child was important to Bonnie, as evident in the theme, *I don't know where I'd be...places not meant for human habitation*:

I have been in the car with the baby. I don't even have that car anymore. It broke down. I've had to get a whole other vehicle. What would have happened with that? Would I have had to live in shelters, or would I have had to find random people to live with? That's what I mean by I don't know where I would be without the help that I've received. Oh, okay. I had been renting a room from a person and he was not a great guy. His daughter was really bad, and she would steal a lot from me and from my son. She would steal his baby bottles and would steal his diapers. She was very odd. When I finally made a

complaint about her behavior and he was charging me really high rent when it was just a room. It was way overpriced, but anyways, when I made a complaint, he told me to get out and I didn't know that there was like-I actually had to have like a 30-day notice or anything like that. He pretty much just told me like, get out, so I packed my things and I put in a storage unit and I was in my car within three days.

The housing program served as a bevy of opportunities for Bonnie which could be found in the theme, *It gave me opportunities*:

I don't know where I'd be without it. It gave me opportunities that I know would have taken a lot longer for me to get on my own. It makes me feel safe to be able to depend on something for right now that I don't have to be worried about what's going to happen for my son and I, I am where I need to be and that's a great feeling and I'm really thankful for it. Not only do you guys offer housing assistance, but you guys have a program to help teach and save money. That's a really big benefit. I think that with how long your guys' program is as well, is really helpful too. I'm not sure how it could be any better. I think the way it is honestly, it's ideal. It makes sense. It works. For one, the program itself gave me the time and the space to be able to finish school and that helps with me having a career which makes me financially stable to have a home and to have the things I need to survive. With the savings program, that helps a lot when there's situations where you can't-say, if I had \$100, and I had a program where I was able to save \$500. The problem

that I had, it would be easier to be fixed by being taught the right way to deal with money and having the tools for situations where you get nervous and you're not quite sure on how to do things. That's a great feeling as to be able to prioritize your spending. Oh, yes, definitely. It's given me the-honestly it's helped much because I'm able to-- I didn't have to really worry about what my rent was going to be because or go get a job immediately. I was able to start school right away and I did literally, I got into school within, I believe it was like three or four weeks after getting the apartment. November, December, January, February, march, April. Within a month of getting the apartment, I already was applying to be in school for the GED program. Then I was already getting all my stuff together and it was great. I was really happy with it. I was not stressed about it, it felt amazing.

Additionally, having others to trust and depend on played a role in Bonnie's experiences, as was found in the theme, *Others to trust and depend on, like (Youth Housing Initiative Navigator) Bobby:*

My best friend watches my son, so that's support for me. That helps me a lot. Yes, my best friend, she is very helpful because without her help I wouldn't be able to have gotten the job because of not having childcare and I completely ran out of options so it's very fortunate to have her help. Then, a few, like my mom and another person, those are the only people that I really talk to about my-- sometimes, but for the most part I just want to figure it out on my own. I don't really want to stress people out about the situations that are going on in

my life. When I was feeling scared and not knowing what to do or I was concerned about anything I called Bobby (Youth Housing Initiative Navigator) immediately and we figured it out together, which was really nice because I don't really know a lot of stuff about these things. That was comforting to be able to talk to somebody about it. If it comes to money, I'll ask my birth mom. If it comes to certain types of advice, I go to my stepmom who is basically my mom. When it comes to just other person when I feel I need some guidance in a way, I just go to myself where you think about really what your question is because I overthink really bad. I try to take a step out of my shoes and think what I can do to figure this out on my own. If I really can't figure it out on my own, then I'll go to somebody else.

In terms of the education services she was a part of, being empowered by people and systems played a role in how Bonnie experienced her educational services which could be found in the theme, *Feeling empowered by people and systems*:

For me it was, I was horrible in Math, never could get it, and then being at PCC I got it finally. That was a great feeling. I didn't feel so lost and not being able to understand things. That was a great feeling for myself. With school, I got into Southeast Works, they were the ones who got me into the PCC program. They check in with me a lot. They just gave me some vouchers to take some pre-tests to keep me warmed up for the GED finals, which is awesome. Yes. It is awesome that they did that because the vouchers that I did have, because I have vouchers but it's with PCC. It was from a woman through

PCC and I have no idea how to get in contact with her since it's closed. That was great that they were able to give me that. With PCC, if I graduate through PCC, the GED program, they give you a voucher of a certain amount of money. It was \$800, I believe, an \$800 voucher for whatever you wanted to go to school for, they give that. Once I heard that, I was like, "That's awesome." Then, when I was looking into what kind of schooling I was going to go in for, my partner had told me about the electrician's program and how PCC probably had a program on it. I went in and I spoke with somebody who gives advice at school. I asked them about their electrician's program, and they said yes that they had two different ones. I said, "I want the one where I get the most education and what is the cost for each one." They had a shorter program that was three months. It was just a rough summary on what I needed to know when it came to the program. Then they had one where it's six to eight months depending on how fast of a learner you are and how fast you can understand what you're learning to get all the information that you're going to need. I went for that one, of course. That one was \$1,300. I calculated myself and I was like, "If I graduate from here which I will, that goes \$800 into going for that." Then, that's only a couple hundred dollars left that I'll have to pay myself. I was like, "This is a great idea." I was all for it. With getting your electrician's license at a college, it gives you a higher chance of getting into the union and that's exactly what I wanted.

Also, there was an air of urgency around Bonnie's experience with the education services she was participating in, with the COVID pandemic playing a role in part of that urgency in the theme, *Urgency and COVID*:

Honestly, my biggest thing is I really want a career by the-- I want to get my career started by the time my time is up with you guys so that I can be financially stable to have a nice home for my son and I, I feel like I'm running out of time because of COVID and it's upsetting because I need to be in school to get a good career. What I want to go in, it's not open for me to go into yet. That's a bit nerve wracking for me. Honestly, it would just be more time. Ideally two years is great but I feel because COVID really ruined a lot of things, it made it feel like I have no time, so just more time with your guys' help would pretty much be the only thing that I would want more of, just because I feel like school will be six to eight months and that doesn't even start until January...if I'm even able to finish the GED tests by then. Yes, just more time honestly.

In terms of her overall experiences with the housing programming and educational services as impacting her to thrive, the theme of *Paying it forward and helping others* was important to Bonnie, as the following demonstrated:

Sure. Personally, education is a big deal for me. I like to know everything. Pretty much, I'm nosy. Even about people, I just like knowing. Doesn't mean anything else except for knowing and being able to use that to help other people. I wanted to go to school for being a translator so that I could help

people but that doesn't really make money the way that being an electrician does. I've helped people in the past when it came to knowing things. It felt great to be able to do that. I would love to continue doing that and doing that happens by going to school and learning more.

In terms of Thriving when all was said and done, Bonnie stated:

Well, with my job is just I'm doing a job that I don't really care for, but it's just to make money to basically support my son and I. It's just a job for the time being until I can get into the Union. With school, I really hope to get into it and get it done so that way I can- My goal is to get into college for the program that I'm doing and get the certificate, join the union, work until I make top pay. Then when I have a good amount saved, buy a house, and go back to school for what I see fit for myself and what I want for life and what will make me happy. It's not a job that I want, but who knows, maybe I'll enjoy it, but it's not my calling. It's not what I want to do, but it's what can give me the opportunity to do what I want to do. Happiness, stability, less stressful, safety, just feel relaxed. That's pretty much it.

**Structural (how) description of Bonnie.** The structures which denoted Bonnie's experiences within this study were segmented in terms of the housing program, educational services, and the impact these experiences had on her to thrive. For her experiences with the housing programming, the structures undergirding her experiences consisted of Bonnie's sense of motherhood, sense of need for normalcy, sense of independence, perceptions of what got her into her current living situation, as

well as interaction with her environment and sense of safety. Inclusively, Bonnie's interaction with her environment from places she had previously lived, and other people also affected her sense of trust while in the housing program. With her involvement in the Youth Housing Initiative program, Bonnie's sense of motherhood made it so that she wanted to create a safe place for her three-year-old son when she mentioned the unsafe atmosphere outside of her home. This sense of safety had been informed by her previous interaction with neighbors and a previous landlord who had mistreated her and her son. Moreover, Bonnie's sense of independence was evident in her housing situation when she shared that she was not exactly comfortable about going to anyone for programming needs, as she had mentioned that she was "hard-headed." Bonnie's experiences in the housing dynamic were informed by her ongoing traumatization with homelessness in which she recalled that before her current living situation, she had lived in an auto with her son for an extended period of time, which had been precipitated after being kicked out by a previous landlord who had taken advantage of her and her son in numerous ways. Finally, Bonnie's sense of safety had been affected by her previous mistreatment, her recent homelessness, and the world outside of her apartment where she lived with her son in her current living situation. These experiences further informed Bonnie's sense of trust, as she maintained a small circle of people, limited to housing navigator, Bobby, along with her best friend, mom, and stepmother.

For the education portion of Bonnie's experiences, Bonnie's sense of empowerment, and sense of time in tandem with the COVID pandemic, were



structures informing the experiences of her educational pursuits. The empowerment portion came about as her interaction with instructors at Portland Community College enabled her to understand math as well as her ability to persist within an academic setting, as she had mentioned she would like to become an electrician. Nonetheless, in the educational portion of Bonnie's experiences, her sense of time had influenced her perception, as she emphasized her limited time to succeed in her educational programming because of the real possibility time would run out for her with rental assistance, creating a new sense of stress for her. Also, this sense of time and urgency were more pronounced when she mentioned that the COVID pandemic had thrown her plans into question for thriving beyond the housing program, since the timing of her education had been thrown off by the pandemic, in which her testing for the GED and to get into the electrician apprenticeship program were continuously rescheduled by the college.

Equally important, the breadth of the housing and educational experiences having an impact on her thriving, included structures, such as Bonnie's sense of gratitude, along with a sense of determination for the opportunities in front of her. Concerning the mentality of paying it forward, Bonnie readily felt that her educational pursuits as part of her programming were getting her to a place where she could help people. To underscore this, she felt strongly about education being "a big deal" for her, because in turn she could use it to help others along the way. Finally, the sense of determination that Bonnie conveyed within her experiences in the housing and educational portions of her programming, made it so that she was resolute in her sense

of direction, knew what her educational aspirations were, and what she needed to do to accomplish these. These would in turn, help to facilitate her in getting to a place of “happiness, stability, less stressful, safety, just feel relaxed. That’s pretty much it.”

**The essence of Bonnie’s experiences.** Bonnie lived her experiences keenly aware of her surroundings. Some of this awareness was informed by what she saw outside of her home and to a greater extent, this sense of awareness was because of the need to keep a safe environment for herself and son, given her sense of motherhood. From the housing segment of her programming, to the educational piece, and how these combined to impact her perception of thriving, Bonnie seemed to make the necessary connections of her own volition to accomplish her goals. In other words, to guard her and her son’s safety and wellbeing, Bonnie knew that she had to take advantage of the opportunities the housing portion of programming provided, which subsequently included her chosen educational pursuits. More so, with this sense of determination, Bonnie also imagined that in order to overcome the previous bouts of homelessness she had encountered, she would have to utilize her sense of trust and of independence, to rely on the small circle of people she had to accomplish her academic goals. This also meant that to move beyond the housing program and establish her sense of thriving, she would open up her array of opportunities further by utilizing the supports she had at her disposal, which included those people she could trust, the housing program, and her educational opportunities which she felt empowered by to do so.

**Missy**

Missy, 26 years old at the time of her interview. She had 14 months in the Youth Housing Initiative programming and had a 10-month-old daughter. Missy was partaking in Clackamas County's Youth Action Board, which is a program that helps with housing and youth programming policy for programs like the Youth Housing Initiative. This position with the Youth Action Board is a paid educational and advocacy position, which Missy feels strongly about, as she also partakes on various youth advocacy boards throughout the state. Missy had earned her GED before partaking in the Youth Housing Initiative.

**Textural (what) description of Missy.** The importance of feeling safe in her home was important to Missy as was found in the theme, *Beside the outer part I feel safe*:

I've had the opportunity to help one of my neighbors from my previous location with a Pitbull that had experienced a lot of trauma as well. He's a very empathetic puppy and she had a handful, so I ended up taking on a lot of the responsibility and me and her decided that it was best for me to take the dog to my new location because I had more space. He's been a great help for me and my daughter in comforting her when I am busy, like making a bottle or something. It's been really great to be able to have him here for my family.

Also, Missy's independence and figuring things out on her own played a significant role with her experiences in the housing program which could be seen in the theme, *Figure it out on my own*:

I haven't really ever gotten help with employment services. I took myself down to the unemployment office and tried to do all that, and it didn't work out very well because I didn't have the help that I needed, so I ended up just giving up. I feel like maybe if we had more opportunities to have a case worker be present, not necessarily seven days a week on call, but more often, but COVID limited all that, to help build better, I think that I would've been a little bit more successful, but overall, with what COVID's given us such a limit on as much support as I needed to get by.

Like others in the program, being in a habitable place for her and her child was important to Missy as evident in the theme, *I don't know where I'd be...places not meant for human habitation:*

I from my understanding, was kicked off of a Section 8 list, as one of the homeless, pregnant, I think it was 25, right? For 25-year-olds. Staying in a shed at my mom's or the floor, on occasion, at my dad's and not knowing how I was going to build a life for me and my daughter, let alone where we would fit. God got me here to this program and gave me a path to-for a new life and something I didn't think that was possible for me.

The housing program also served as a bevy of opportunities for Missy as reflected in the theme, *It gave me opportunities:*

Sometimes it's sad because depending upon my rental history, I can't get approved, but overall, where my housing program has ended up housing me has been phenomenal. This current location is way more than what I could

have ever asked for, or even thought about being in, which is surreal. It has a lot of amenities and it's a perfect first home for a new kid. Mandatory financial classes. Yes. [chuckles] I want to go to those, but I want to go through those, but I want to go through that and then some because I have a hard time with that aspect.

Additionally, having others to trust and depend on played a role in Missy's experiences as found in the exemplar theme, *Others to trust and depend on, Like Bobby*:

Because I've been on my own for so long, I have a hard time talking to anybody necessarily, unless absolutely needed. Bobby Pence has been a great support in that, with me and him trying to figure out how to get through things. He taught me how to sign up for the portal for my current location to pay rent. There's somebody that this program has led me to that could help me figure out a solution if I had a problem, there's somebody like Mary Ellen, helps me with- she's more of a mothering type of person, so she can understand my qualms, as well as try to help me formulate some kind of guide. She was a really big help when I was younger too. I feel like my support network could definitely be a little bigger, but yes, I do feel like I have one. Between the Youth Action Board, [chuckles] my housing rep (Bobby from the Youth Housing Initiative) who is still with me on a meltdown even when I was about to...when I didn't think I could do it, I was struggling pretty hard. He helped guide me through it and get me through it and get back on track. I have friends that help with that.

They're not as goal-oriented as I am, but they remind me pretty much why I am trying to keep going and do it all together, is because I also want to be able to show the people around me that it's possible. I feel like this program was really new as was I and that it's been nice to feel for once in my life that I've had like the parents that I needed and didn't ever receive, helped guide me to what I needed to and give me the strength and the belief that I needed to be able to do this for myself. I feel like this program was really new as was I and that it's been nice to feel for once in my life that I've had like the parents that I needed and didn't ever receive, helped guide me to what I needed to and give me the strength and the belief that I needed to be able to do this for myself.

Being empowered by people and systems also played a role in how Missy experienced her educational services as found in the theme, *Feeling empowered by people and systems*:

I wish I could do even more honestly, with them. I have loved working at the Youth Action Board because every little bit of trauma I experienced in the homeless realm in Clackamas County has. It hasn't been easy on me. I struggle a lot with depression in that regard and the Youth Action Board has made all those experiences and traumas meaningful, and worth something and has brought out a really strong leader in me and advocate. 120% because school for me means a very quiet, controlled place where I feel comfortable to get in jammies, get with the computer, get the little snacks, the notebooks, any kind of paint marker, whatever I need for notes. A variety of different things to

focus and give all my attention, which is the only way for me personally, to retain what I'm trying to learn to be able to pass the tests, to get through the school, to keep the interest and all of that.

Missy's experiences with the educational services explained of a need for more guidance with educational services which was reflected in the theme, *Needing more guidance on educational services*:

I would love to get more training services. I haven't really had a very-I haven't been told too much about it as much as I want because there there's some things that I missed out on (because of maternity), I guess. I don't even know what I would say that is offered for the educational services to start with. I figured that it's like a person that helps you get FAFSA and things, right? Somebody to hold my hand and show me what to do. For getting back into school and help me brainstorm what I would want to put my focus as because before it was just general studies. I would want to pick a career eventually, which you may not be like set in stone 100%, but I have a hard time with long-term goals and visions.

In terms of her overall experiences with the housing programming and educational services as impacting her to thrive, *Paying it forward and helping others* was important to Missy:

It's given me a vision I guess, and a direction on where I can start giving back to my community, which is something I love to do. My opinion with my experience has been really great because if I didn't have the experience I

couldn't advocate for my friends and people that I've met that don't feel necessarily they had a voice. I speak up for them too.

Considering Thriving when all is said and done, Missy stated:

I would describe the program as a program that helps you figure out the ropes of having a stable home and how to take care of stability I guess, because it's very different for me. For instance, I have never really had to keep a house all by myself and to keep everything I need in the house, or pay the bills and take care of all that, have a savings account and be a normal member [chuckles] of society in that sense. It helped me figure out how to be an adult and to provide for my daughter's needs as well as giving me to further my education and career path. In a couple of months, my daughter will be a year old. At that point, I was planning on getting some assistance, trying to get myself into school as well as a game plan of implementing a-I don't know, a safety plan for after when I graduate the program, I'll learn how to take care of everything. I want to go to school for either what I'm currently working in, which is telecommunication and advocacy or to do psychology, or maybe a little bit of both.

**Structural (how) description of Missy.** The underlying structures of Missy's experiences could be delineated through her experiences with the housing program, experiences with educational services, and how these impacted her sense of thriving. For the housing program, the foundational structures of Missy's experiences included her sense of motherhood, providing a sense of comfort and safety for herself as well as



her daughter, a sense of discouragement with her independence, ongoing trauma and interaction with homelessness, thankfulness for opportunities, and a limited support network. Missy maintained her sense of safety for and her daughter by keeping a pet dog in the home. Although having a sense of independence while in the housing program, Missy also felt a sense of struggle and discouragement because she tried to do certain things on her own, such as employment-seeking which did not work out well. Moreover, Missy's recollection of her homelessness and the current opportunity she had, made her feel thankful for the ability to provide a home for her newborn, along with overcoming rental-history barriers, and being able to pursue financial education courses through the Youth Housing Initiative, which she had yet to take. Nonetheless, in mentioning her limited support network, Missy also added that there were three personal connections which had helped her come along in her housing journey, especially since these people in the housing portion of her journey made her feel like she finally had the parents she needed and "didn't ever receive."

For the educational services of her programming, Missy's experiences were characterized by structures, such as empowerment through participation, and a sense of needing more guidance on what educational services were available to her. In terms of her empowerment towards her education, Missy felt like her educational work experience through the Youth Action board had really brought meaning to her trauma. This meaning was brought about as a result of Missy being able to advocate for other homeless youth throughout the state of Oregon. Moreover, the structure of needing more guidance was made visible in Missy's lack of knowledge on what

educational services and options were available to her as she did not readily know where to start, especially since she admitted that had a hard time with long-term goals and vision. Coupled with a perceived lack of guidance on educational pursuits, and having a hard time with goals, being a new mother precipitated Missy not being able to address many of her educational prospects.

When it came to Missy's experiences of the Youth Housing Initiative housing program along with her educational prospects, and how these impacted her sense of thriving, these were characterized by structures of paying it forward and helping others, while also feeling hopeful about planning for life after the programming including renewal of her interest in school. As for paying it forward, Missy was grateful for her time on the Youth Action Board and felt that she could help others on a similar journey and "speak up for them too." When all was said and done in terms of thriving in her programming, Missy was preparing for an exit plan which included continuing her education in Psychology or another discipline that could augment her advocacy skills.

**The essence of Missy's experiences.** Missy lived her experiences uniquely aware of providing a good first home for her baby daughter which she in turn had not experienced for parts of her life. Her previous bouts with homelessness informed her experiences in the housing program, and made her feel that, although her sense of independence was a struggle, she simultaneously could be a provider as a single mom if she realized some of the opportunities available in the education realm, including financial education classes. Although Missy said her support network was limited, she

did cite that she could count on Bobby from the housing program, the youth action board, and a mentor from the local school district who worked with her in advocacy. These connections, she felt, had given her the parents she had never had in life. Also, the Youth action board seemed to give her a sense of community, but she also felt that she needed individualized support when it came to her ongoing needs within the housing program as well as school matters. With school, although deeply interested in returning, her journey of being a new mother had recently caused her to reprioritize what school meant for her, but she seemed hopeful in restarting the academic portion of her programming, which could help her take care of “everything,” including her daughter.

### **Ivy**

Ivy was 11 months into her participation in the Youth Housing initiative. She had recently begun pursuit of her GED. At the time of the research interview, Ivy had a 6-month-old son, and a 20-month-old daughter. Ivy was a single parenting youth who had escaped domestic violence into the youth housing initiative.

**Textural (what) description of Ivy.** Like the others, in the housing program a sense of safety in her home was important to Ivy through the theme, *Beside the outer part I feel safe*:

I trust them and I know they're not going to tell anybody where I live, because... both of the kids' dads have beat me up multiple times. One of them's in prison, the other one they haven't been able to catch yet, so I'm constantly

worried and scared that he's going to find out where I live. I keep it to a minimum of people knowing where I live, you know?

Ivy too, had a sense of independence and had to figure things out on her own, as she responded in the theme, *Figure it out on my own*:

Well, it's not you guys, but when I first moved in here, I didn't have anything. No furniture, no utensils, no bowls, nothing. I'm trying to fix it. I want to be able to support my kids without anybody's help eventually, you know? Their dads used to pressure me, like, "You can't take care of them by yourself, you need me," blah, blah, blah, and I don't think that's true because I've been doing it just fine for a while.

Also, reflecting on her previous lack of dwelling, and reflecting through the theme, *I don't know where I'd be...places not meant for human habitation* staying, Ivy shared her thoughts about what the housing program had provided in responding, "Oh yeah, my kids and I would have been living in a car if it wasn't for that."

When asked how she would describe the housing programming by the Youth Housing Initiative and how it could help her in the future, participating youth, Ivy, responded that the program gave her an opportunity to pursue employment, get back into school, but also the opportunity to escape violence which were all supported in the theme, *It gave me opportunities*:

I think it's very helpful. I think that it should be expanded, because all the other lists that I had been on, even for domestic violence groups, were at least two years. I think that's crazy. I get that there's costs and everything, but there's so

many people like my own sister, she's going through a domestic violence thing right now and she has no help. They gave her \$1200 or something at DHS, but that was it, to help her move away from where she lived. That's it. That doesn't help her at all. That's not even rent for her. I just think that's crazy I wish there was more places like you guys. Well, I've been looking into getting back to school. I think Bobby probably already told you that. Bobby was giving me tips on how to sign up for Postmates. I got signed up for it, but at the moment, because of what's happened lately I haven't been able to work, but whenever I can, when I'm feeling completely... well, not completely better but enough, I can go do that and also school. Because I have this housing that's helping me out, I'm not having to work and do school at the same time, you know what I mean?

Ivy also responded that she had a limited support network, which she was appreciative of though, underscoring the theme, *Others to trust and depend on, like Bobby*:

My DHS worker, he's so overloaded. Every time I talk to him, he's talking about how he has 49 other people he has to talk to this week. It's like a five-minute conversation. But with Bobby (Youth Housing Initiative Navigator), Bobby actually was like, "Okay, well, we need to figure out what we're going to do to get this better today." He does it. I don't talk to anybody, honestly. My twin and my mom, that's it.

Like some of her colleagues in the housing program, Ivy felt empowered by systems or people when it came to her education. She shared her thoughts accordingly in theme, *Feeling empowered by people and systems*:

Yeah, because I actually have been talking to somebody at CCC (Clackamas Community College), and she's trying to help me get into something that is flexible. Assignments obviously are going to be due at a certain time, but she's trying to make it simplified for me so I can make it work around the kids, because the kids are honestly a full-time job. They're 14 months apart. They're really close in age, just like having two babies. I know everybody calls their kids their babies, but they're both babies. She's not even two yet, and so she's making it work so it's not too much, but I can also do it when they're sleeping or whatever. I don't have to feel like there's going to be a deadline that I'm going to miss and then screw up the whole thing. Yeah, she's kind of a coordinator I guess, but she's also trying to motivate me to do it. Not that I don't want to do it, but I keep telling her, "Oh, I don't have a babysitter, oh, I don't have this." She's got a solution for everything and I don't even know her name, which is terrible.

Regarding her experiences of the housing program and educational services, and the extent to which these impact her to thrive, Ivy also had a sense of *Paying it forward and helping others* in sharing her thoughts, "I did all that myself, and that's something I want to do with school. I want to do something that involves helping addicts and helping single moms that have dealt with domestic violence."

Also related to her experiences of the housing program as well as the educational services, along with the extent to which these impacted her to thrive when all was said and done, Ivy reflected in the theme, *Thriving when all is said and done*:

Okay, so with a babysitter, I would love to do my schooling to at least get my drug and alcohol counseling thing. For jobs, anything that can work around that schedule, because education I feel is most important, but I also have to make a living, obviously, to take care of these kids in the meantime. So yeah.

**Structural (how) description of Ivy.** The structures of Ivy's experiences were delineated in line with the overarching research questions, which consisted of her experiences with the housing program, her experiences with educational services, and the extent to which these impacted her sense of thriving. As such, the structures precipitating the experiences of the housing services for Ivy were a sense of safety, a sense of motherhood, interaction with her independence, previous interaction with homelessness affecting her in the now, as well as her consciousness of opportunities afforded through her housing. Moreover, another structure found in the housing portion of her experiences was the small circle of people Ivy trusted. In terms of safety, Ivy shared that her home was to be a safe place not only for Ivy, but her children, reflecting not only her sense of motherhood, but which was also tied to the fact that Ivy and her children had escaped domestic violence into the Youth Housing Initiative. Moreover, Ivy's sense of independence permeated much of her experience, in which she found herself having to make a home by installing furniture and other necessities along the way, underscoring her inclination to succeed as a single mother.

Additionally, Ivy's perspective was informed by her previous interaction with homelessness and the domestic violence which prompted her fleeing into homelessness. These co-occurring experiences simultaneously informed her motherhood and sense of safety. Yet, Ivy had a sense of the opportunities in front of her, as the housing program helped her to escape violence, homelessness, and assisted her to pursue school and a job with Postmates. Nonetheless, her previous experiences, especially domestic violence, made Ivy weary of who she should trust, as is evident in her sharing that she only trusted her mother, twin sister, and Bobby in the housing Program.

Ivy's educational experiences were upheld by the structure of a sense of empowerment towards figuring out what she wanted to do with her academics. In the educational services she had experienced, Ivy alluded to the responsiveness of an academic coordinator who had an answer for everything, even the fact that Ivy had a six month old, and that she could pursue her academics when her babies slept and at her own pace.

As for the housing programming as well as her educational services, and how these impacted Ivy, she responded that a sense of giving back and paying it forward were important for her. In reflecting that she got herself and children to this point all by herself, Ivy not only reflected her sense of independence, but her willingness to help people through her education route, by mentioning that she wanted to help addicts and single moms who had experienced violence like herself. Accordingly, the structure of having a sense of direction was relayed when Ivy shared the thought that



she wanted to be a drug and alcohol counselor to bolster her chances of success in the long run, as she said that she would do “anything” because her education was important to her, even though some previous legal trouble had provided a setback to her in her recent past.

**The essence of Ivy’s experiences.** Ivy’s previous encounters with homelessness and domestic violence informed the whole of her experiences. Yet, these also allowed her to reflect on her strong sense of independence and to provide a good home for her children. Providing a good home and safety meant that Ivy would have to be weary of who to let into her sphere of influence and to also be careful of who she would trust, especially with motherhood simultaneously being at the forefront of these thoughts. Nonetheless, Ivy’s overall experiences were also bound by the structural context of having a sense of guidance by family, housing programming, and her educational services, which she thought could all help her to overcome her past. In turn, because of the aforesaid supports, she felt grateful and compelled to help others along a similar path, which she felt she could do by becoming a drug and alcohol counselor.

### **Composite Textural-Structural Description: The Essence**

As a whole, the experiences of the parenting youth confronting homelessness in this study could be characterized by three distinct parts of their journey which were also the overarching research questions for this research. First, were their experiences with the housing portion of programming. Secondly, their educational prospects while in the program were integral. Finally, there was the question of how these

programming components impacted the youth toward thriving. Within these questions lied the themes, which produced part of the explanation, and to add more context, the structures of what these youth experienced, the *how*. Taking the themes and structures from each of the youth, along with the overarching questions of this research, the overall essence and thereby phenomenological text was solidified.

### **Experiences with the Housing Program**

In essence, five core themes characterized the experiences of the youth participants with housing. First, *Besides the outer part I feel safe* illuminated the need for safety of these youth which was layered with structures such as their sense of motherhood, previous encounters with homelessness, and interactions with others from outside of their homes, whether it was family or neighbors, or even a pet dog providing warmth. In turn these experiences informed whether the research participants could trust certain people or systems. Secondly, *Figure it out on my own* described the sense of independence the youth felt based on their current situation, which meant possibly because they felt they had no help at times, they would have to fend for themselves to figure things out in the world, such as sourcing employment at the local work source office or creating a home for their children. Third, *I don't know where I'd be...places not meant for habitation* signaled that homelessness ran deep as a contextual structure and still not only affected the youth, but informed the whole of their experiences, including trusting people, having a sense of motherhood and providing better for their children, as well as independence, and a sense of safety. Fourth, *It gave me opportunities* relayed that the youth were grateful for their current

living situation, which yet again, was informed by previous encounters with homelessness in which the youth had stayed in places not meant for habitation, such as an auto, a shed, or fleeing domestic violence situations. Nonetheless, a sense of gratitude was bound by certain structures such as motherhood, which meant being able to have a home for a newborn, or pursuing a job, overcoming previous rental history, or keeping a safe space from the world outside. Finally, *Others to depend on, like Bobby* relayed the experiences of being able to trust others, such as Bobby who worked in the youth housing program. This sense of trust, an important structure, meant trusting some systems and not others. Additionally, trust also meant that these parenting youth could be free to pursue schooling because they had a babysitter to trust in, attend their job as an advocate, or simply have someone to talk to about challenges, essentially providing a parent that some of these youth may have never had.

### **Experiences with the Education Services**

The essence of the parenting youth participants' experiences with the education services in Clackamas County consisted of three main themes. First, *Feeling empowered by people and systems*, contained structural contexts of feeling empowered by either people or a system. Depending on the youth and their pursuit, each felt empowered to make sense of their journey at times, with a semblance of progress towards their goals. One youth felt empowered by her understanding of subject matter at a community college, which in turn motivated to finish her GED academic course load and go straight into an apprenticeship. Another youth felt

empowered to make meaning of her trauma with her ongoing work-education experience on the local youth advocacy board, while another youth felt empowered by an academic coordinator to return to her local community college and start the process of becoming an addiction counselor to help her make meaning of her own journey of abuse. Yet, in one instance, in *Needing more guidance on educational services* a participating youth felt she needed someone to hold her hand to explore the intricacies of academic life, whether it was financial aid, or needing assistance on how to weather the bevy of course options. This youth, in particular, also voiced having difficulty making inroads with goals, representing a structural context of needing guidance. Finally, two of the youth did not seem too concerned with the time limited nature of Youth Housing Initiative programming (two years) as having an effect on their sense of time, nor urgency. Simultaneously, one youth was consumed by the urgency of getting her academics out of the way to start her apprenticeship and begin her career, as she had mentioned that COVID had provided a barrier towards these life goals, which were bound by a sense of accomplishment, sense of motherhood, and sense of time.

### **Views of These Services as Impacting Them to Thrive**

Finally, two core themes underscored the questions as to how these services (housing and education) impacted the youth research participants to thrive. First, *Paying it forward and helping others* found that each of these youth felt a sense of gratitude to want to, in turn, help others flourish around them. Whether it was to advocate for youth across the state of Oregon, counsel victims of abuse and addiction,

or through their education provide information to others, these youth had a previous sense of trust, and wanted to be trusted and depended on, just as they had done with others in the past. Moreover, the structural contexts related to this overall theme were a sense of direction, sense of accomplishment, motherhood, and sense of safety.

Finally, in *Thriving when all is said and done* consisted of the youth having their own sense of thriving beyond the programming. Given their distinct academic pursuits and the varying degrees of these paths, the youth research participants' structural contexts for thriving included a sense of opportunity, needing some guidance, a sense of accomplishment, a sense of less stress, and overcoming homelessness because of these trajectories.

### **Summary of Findings**

The participants' experiences of the housing program, educational services, and how these impacted their sense of thriving, showed various contextual structures underscoring their lived realities, as the solidified descriptive essence demonstrates. Though participants shared collective themes (what) and their structural contexts (how), the transcendental methodology also revealed where these parenting youth were in their respective journeys. These journeys were underscored in how each participant saw their sense of safety, sense of independence, previous interaction with homelessness, sense of opportunities, sense of trust and who they could depend on. Moreover, their journeys were further delineated in the way each participant felt empowered by people and systems, their need for guidance, as well as sense of time, the way they felt a sense of paying things forward, and sense of thriving.

Through semi-structured interviews, participants of this study were asked about their experiences in the housing programming of the Youth Housing Initiative as well as their educational prospects while in the programming, along with how these impacted their sense of thriving moving forward. The youth had all but two themes in common. Those two themes being, *Needing more guidance on educational services*, and *Urgency and COVID-19*. Nonetheless, the verbatim examples in the themes helped to distinguish even further, the unique path of each youth in the research study. These unique paths as well as the collective essence are elaborated on in the discussion chapter.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the experiences of homeless parenting youth regarding rapid rehousing programs and educational services in Clackamas County, Oregon. Within the research, the experiences of these homeless and parenting youth were extrapolated through semi-structured phenomenological interviews which involved experiences with the rehousing program and the youths' educational prospects throughout the duration of their engagement in the program. Also, the common phenomenon between all the participants of being a parenting youth while homeless informed this study. Equally important, it was crucial to keep in mind that this study was predicated upon the understanding that the phenomenon of homelessness does not dissipate once the youth are in housing, because the ongoing prospect of a return to this reality and the cloud of homelessness that looms over these youth, persists throughout the programming. Through discernment of the experiences the youth had in the Youth Housing Initiative's first programming year, findings revealed the youths' own perceived experiences of the housing services offered, along with their perception of experiences with educational prospects while in the program.

Data were collected and analyzed consistent with the Husserlian approach, in which I used Moustakas' (1994) modification of transcendental phenomenological methods by Stevick (1971), Colaizzi (1973), and Keen (1975). As such, the usage of a transcendental phenomenological methodology in my research study provided a means to understand the essence of the phenomenon of parenting and homelessness affected-

youth, making every effort to remove the subjective experiences, assumptions, and ideals of the researcher to focus purely on the experiences of those experiencing the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). To do this, I had to strive to transcend my biases and assumptions to see the phenomenon “freshly, as for the first time” and be open to its totality (Moustakas, 1994). From a pragmatic standpoint though, it was impossible to transcend my biases. Nonetheless, my ultimate task was to illuminate these experiences in their purest form possible (Husserl, 1970).

Data were collected and analyzed from semi-structured interviews with three parenting youth who were eligible under HUD definitions for homelessness. The youth participants were selected on the delimitation set by the researcher which was that participants were to be parenting young mothers who had participated in the program in its first year, 2019-2020, in Clackamas County, ages 18-25, and fell under HUD’s definition of homelessness in terms of eligibility for programming. In addition to being eligible participants within the first year of programming, the youth must have been in pursuit of an education track, educational courses, vocation, or technical training to be eligible for the study. Subsequently, the youth were provided a consent form outlining their eligibility, ability to withdraw at any time, and reminder that their protection and confidentiality was paramount in the scope of this study. For such reasons of confidentiality, the youth were given the discretion to assign themselves pseudonyms to protect their identities. The letter of consent is found in Appendix B.

The respective data were collected through a series of semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions, with follow-up questioning and interviewing as



needed for confirmation of experiences. The interviews lasted approximately one hour. Integrated into the interview timeframe, the researcher guided the participants with information about the study, as well as clarifying terms used in the interview. The interviews of all three participants took place over the month of December 2020. Additionally, a standard set of interview questions was used with all participants, including probing questions to extract more substantive responses from participants as needed. Individual interviews were conducted through the cellular phone application, Rev. The interviews were transcribed through the Rev platform, and input into the qualitative data analysis software, NVIVO. The qualitative software was mostly used for disaggregation of the data in which pertinent questions, statements, and themes would all have their respective nodes to sit in. Simultaneously, memos were written mostly for logistical purposes. Additionally, the explicit practice of journaling for bracketing of biases did not take place, since the guidance in transcendental phenomenological methods deemed that highlighting biases and making them explicit during the study was counterintuitive to completely illuminating all of the experiences of the participants (Peoples, 2021). However, journaling did take place to keep logistical operations, such as remembering when a participant's interview took place, or to set reminders to confirm certain points about the interview as well as for planning or to account for impressions of the data, including documentation of any subsequent interaction with the participants. In this respect, although my journaling was meant for me as the researcher to focus more on the operations of the study, my biases did arise. Mainly, my biases arose because in addition to working on this

research on a daily basis, I also worked in the programming for the research subjects on a daily basis as well, which entered my thought stream intermittently and throughout the research study.

Subsequently, the findings indicated that these participating youth had a majority of pertinent themes in common except for two. Further, distinctions between youth could be made from within the thematic examples (what) and their structural contexts (how), which are found below in the respective overarching research questions. Equally important, this research study filled a necessitated gap in the literature on parenting homeless youth and their experiences in rehousing and educational programs through Continuum of Care-HUD programs, of which no pertinent related research was found. This final chapter denotes an overview and discussion of the findings, the findings' connection to the literature, implications for practice, suggestions for future research, and a conclusion. The overview of the findings and accompanying discussion as well as their connection to the literature are situated in line with the major findings for each overarching research question.

### **Research Question A: How Youth Experienced the Housing Program**

The study of the first research question sought to ascertain the experiences of youth participants and what themes were present in their participation with the housing portion of programming. Many of the themes present for the first research question can be found throughout the literature review and are elaborated upon, respectively. The themes were previously illuminated through verbatim examples of each relevant participant.

**Besides the outer part I feel safe.** In the literature review, Holtschneider's (2016) study relayed a particular theme having to do with participants' recognized need for safety and survival. This theme also arose in the study of the experiences of parenting and homeless youth participating in the Youth Housing Initiative. These youths' experiences consisted of seeing their homes as a place of safety. It seemed that much of this need for safety was predicted on a substantial number of structural factors (*how*) undergirding the lived experiences of each youth. For instance, all the participants had a sense of motherhood, a sense of trust, a previous lived interaction with homelessness, as well as mistreatment and abuse by other people in their lives. Bonnie had been threatened and wrongly evicted by a previous landlord which caused her to live with her son in an auto, Missy had been neglected by her parents as she recalled the program gave her the parents she never had, and Ivy experienced a multitude of domestic abuse from successive partners. It appeared likely that because of *how* each of the youth experienced these structural factors, that the theme of *Besides the outer part I feel safe* reflected how each of them sought refuge and normalcy in the warmth of their homes. Similarly, in the literature, Aparicio et al. (2018) found the theme *They never raised me up* in which a loss of sense of safety and fending for oneself were experiences lived by parenting youth in Hawaii. This theme overlapped with the study of the Youth Housing initiative, as not only did Bonnie, Missy, and Ivy grapple with their own sense of safety, but also had to come to terms with being on their own.

**Figure it out on my own.** Being in their own homes as young adults, the participants had a sense of independence and exercised it with varying degrees. Nonetheless, their experiences underscored that in being young adults, the participants were trying to figure things out on their own. In the literature review, a need for a safe space where youth would be able to discuss and learn from choices with a caring adult was a theme in Pk's (2018) assessment of a program. Some of the newfound independence that participants in the Youth Housing Initiative attained, stemmed from not having a resource at their disposal or someone to guide them through choices. Bonnie's own sense of independence had more to do with her being "hard-headed," and figuring things out on her own, while Missy felt at a loss not having someone to guide her through employment searches or having more individualized support, and Ivy asserted that she wanted demonstrate that she could do things without the fathers of her children in creating a home for her children. Essentially the participants' sense of independence was also complimented by a sense of motherhood, but also the need for a semblance of normalcy.

**I do not know where I'd be. Places not meant for human habitation.** Part of the definition of homelessness that Housing and Urban Development (HUD, 2020) utilizes for its eligibility for services is that homeless persons are regularly staying in places not meant for human habitation. The participants in the Clackamas County Youth Housing Initiative were no different at certain points in their lives and came into the programming with the recent memory of staying in places not meant for human habitation. In recalling doing so, these youth were also reminded of the trauma

of homelessness and the ongoing effect it had on them. In the literature, Wong et al. (2016) and Narendorf et al. (2016) examined the specific and complex adversities of youth. In this study of the Youth Housing Initiative the participating youth all mentioned that the rehousing program had helped pull them away from such complex and specific trauma when they each mentioned the alternative to being in the rehousing program, which were places not meant for human habitation. This theme came about specifically when the youth were asked about how they had ended up in the housing program and whether it met their needs. The youth each shared that living in an auto, a shed, and escaping from violence were the structural contexts informing their journeys constantly, even in this housing program. Although, it appeared the essential need for dwelling was fulfilled, it was likely that the ongoing and lasting interaction with homelessness was a profound lived experience for all the youth.

**It gave me opportunities.** A subsequent theme arising from the findings was the idea that the Youth Housing Initiative provided a springboard for opportunities that the parenting youth might want to pursue or to escape certain situations having to do with their ongoing experiences with homelessness. This theme was also in line with the study by Jennings et al. (2015) in which youth desire for alternatives to joblessness through financial education were an identified theme. Also, the theme of the housing program being used for opportunities fell in line with Holtschneider's (2016) theme of personal development. Some of the experiences provided by the Youth Housing Initiative consisted of having the opportunity to pursue an education, provide a dwelling for their own children or newborn, the opportunity to pursue

personal financial education, escape violence, overcome rental history, and accomplish the pursuit of a job. In line with alternatives to joblessness and personal development, the youth seemed to want to improve their lot in life and were keenly aware of the opportunities available to them.

**Others to trust and depend on, like Bobby.** The experiences of the rehousing program and the ongoing threat of homelessness made it so that the participating youth in the Youth Housing Initiative had certain folks or systems they could trust. In the literature review, Pk's (2018) study on youth participatory research identified the theme that youth had a need for less formal mentorship along with people as well as systems they could depend on and trust in order to obtain help. Such a need and theme is predicated upon the idea that homeless youth in Pk's study cited a need to be able to trust folks not only in programming, but outside of it. This study of the Youth Housing Initiative aligned with Pk's theme in that youth identified less formal relationships, inside and outside of programming, in which they had a person they could trust as well as receive guidance. Inextricably, when the youth were asked if they had a person in their respective programming they felt they could go to for help, or what sort of support networks they needed, each mentioned Bobby from the housing program as trustworthy. In addition to Bobby, the youth mentioned being able to trust and depend on certain friends for babysitting, mothers, stepmothers, a twin sister, the local youth advocacy board, and even a local school-homeless liaison. It appeared part of the youths' sense of thriving came from these sorts of relationships, which they all agreed were limited in nature and bound by their own sense of trust.

**Research Question B: How Youth Experienced the Education Services**

The Youth Housing Initiative provided a springboard of sorts, to pursue certain opportunities, or provide an alternative to the previous bout of literal homelessness they had experienced. One of the opportunities the youth seemed to have in mind to varying degrees was utilizing education services in Clackamas County to which they were referred or that exist in the Youth Housing Initiative. As conveyed in the literature review, Pierce et al. (2018) examined the impact of housing interventions and educational programming on youth in which they identified three important metrics serving as indicators of program success, including educational attainment, employment, and wages. Although the research study of the Youth Housing Initiative in Clackamas County, Oregon did not study metrics in this respect, it did extrapolate themes related to the experiences of certain pursuits the youth had regarding combinations of education, employment, and wages.

**Feeling empowered by people and systems.** In the course of their pursuits of educational prospects the parenting youth participants in the Youth Housing Initiative identified their educational pursuits as being more tangible and realistic as a result of being empowered by people and systems. Hallet's (2012) study of youth living doubled up with other families in the literature review emphasized the importance of having a presence who encourages educational pursuits, thus empowering youth to pursue education even further. When asked to describe the educational pursuits they were interested in, the youth relayed feeling a sense of empowerment by certain people or systems in their descriptions. Bonnie felt empowered in subject matter

courses for her GED and was subsequently inspired to pursue an electrician apprenticeship, all while accessing a scholarship that would help her with apprenticeship costs. Missy, through her ongoing work-educational experience with the local youth advocacy board, felt an inclination to pursue schooling that would help her with future advocacy in the state of Oregon. Simultaneously, Ivy was inspired by an academic coordinator who encouraged her and would help her in working around her schedule as a fulltime mother. Overall, it appeared that the youth had a sense of empowerment from their educational prospects and were at various points in their respective journeys when it came to feeling empowered by these people or systems.

**Needing more guidance on educational services.** Two of the three parenting youth seemed to know about the educational services offered to them and seemed ready to take full account of these by either already pursuing them or getting ready to pursue. Nonetheless, the unique theme applying to Missy was that of needing more guidance in terms of the education services offered to her. In the review of the literature, Henwood et al (2018) identified the theme of ongoing individualized support as being crucial for obtaining the right life skills and job prospects for homeless youth. Missy was an outlier in this respect, as she often felt lost and did not readily know which educational options and referrals were available to her, while she also admitted that she had a difficult time with long-term goals and vision. In this regard, it seemed likely that Missy could use ongoing individualized support for her attainment of life skills and education.



**Urgency and COVID-19.** In the literature, Narendorf et al. (2016) identified the specific and complex needs for parenting or pregnant homeless youth. Within Bonnie's experience, there was a sense of urgency to transition to the next phase of her educational and occupational pursuits. Much of this relates to the fact that in the study by Narendorf et al., the parenting or pregnant youth group being studied seemed to be resourceful and quite resilient in comparison to their non-parenting or non-pregnant youth colleagues (2016). Bonnie's perceived sense of time and urgency revolved around her time left in the housing program, while she also lamented that the COVID pandemic altered the timeframe for her educational and career pursuits, since testing and schooling had constantly been postponed. Nonetheless, the contextual structures of time and COVID were likely related to her sense of motherhood and sense accomplishment moving forward.

### **Research Question C: How Youth Viewed These Services as Impacting Them to Thrive**

As the parenting youth participants progressed in the Youth Housing Initiative, this study sought to ascertain, through their own identified experiences, what the impact was of housing and educational services on their re-entry into mainstream daily life in order to thrive. Much of the literature touched on how youth homelessness programming gave rise to themes regarding personal development, and giving back, (Holtschneider, 2016), while Kidd et al. (2019) found that inroads with life goals created a sense of hope. These themes from the literature are found in the study of the

Youth Housing Initiative to varying degrees, depending on the youth experiences being delineated.

**Paying it forward and helping others.** Holtschneider's (2016) study in the literature explicated the theme of giving back in which former participants of a housing and educational program wanted to "pay it forward" by helping others in similar predicaments or who were experiencing homelessness. The youth participants in the study of the Youth Housing Initiative in Clackamas County, Oregon also had their own way of giving back. Bonnie wanted to help others through her education and emphasized the great importance of education being able to help her with such a pursuit. Similarly, Missy through her work-educational experience as an advocate for youth, wanted to continue her education at some point to be able to give back to her community through advocacy work. Ivy, having lived her experiences with criminal mischief and domestic abuse, wanted to be an addictions counselor to help other single mothers like herself, as she had mentioned that she even got her sister into recovery. In summary it seemed that at times, gratitude and paying it forward created inroads and a sense of hope and direction in the youths' journeys.

**Thriving when all is said and done.** The youth in the study had their distinct experiences, but many of the experiences alluded to some degree of thriving beyond their current living arrangement and educational pursuits while in the Youth Housing Initiative. In the review of the literature, themes and markers signaling thriving included quality of life and community integration (Kidd et al., 2019), while other themes and markers of thriving consisted of youth participating in policy formation

(Pk, 2018), or level of personal development such as education attained, employment as well as wages. When asked about their current educational and job aspirations each of the youth signaled their own sense of thriving beyond the Youth Housing Initiative. Bonnie was well on her way to her apprenticeship and integrating a sense of normalcy into her life. Missy, in having provided a home for her newborn, was looking at continuing her education and advocacy work, while seeking to obtaining individualized support for her overall journey, and creating a safety plan for when the program was over for her in less than a year. Finally, Ivy, knowing that she could source a babysitter for her two children, was resolute in overcoming her past, continuing her current job with Postmates, while utilizing her academic coordinator's assistance to pursue an addictions counselor certification. Consequently, it appeared the housing and educational components being studied through the Youth Housing Initiative had impacted the youth to varying degrees of thriving, as each had experienced distinct path, themes, and contextual structures which informed their journeys moving forward.

### **Implications for Professional Practice**

In utilizing the qualitative experiences of homeless youth in Los Angeles, Henwood et al. (2018) voiced that individualized support was an apparent theme. Youth involved in the study said that ongoing therapy and support were critical, and that job training and life skills were integral to the process. The overall theme of individual support was also underscored in this study on the Youth Housing Initiative. When one considers structural contexts that existed in the experiences of youth

participants, such as the impact of previous homelessness, abuse, and lack of knowledge on educational options available to a youth, the need for ongoing, individualized support in the Youth Housing Initiative was made apparent. Such support may consist of mental health therapy, or other supportive services which are self-identified in the experience of a youth.

Equally, McPherson's (2018) phenomenological study examined how homelessness informed the life course of two young, single mothers, especially their employment trajectories, and educational attainment trajectories. The young mothers in McPherson's study had experienced premature and truncated transitions, including motherhood, running away, and dropping out of compulsory education. Eventually, the participants of the study completed compulsory education requirements, as well as attained a post-compulsory education degree (medical and criminal justice respectively). In the case of this study on the Youth Housing Initiative, it is critical to recognize that parenting youth experiencing homelessness have very specific needs, trajectories, and that they may be empowered towards their own efficacy. These experiences require not only ongoing support, but an array of supports. Considering the results of the Youth Housing Initiative study and McPherson's literature, it is pertinent to suggest that current Continuum of Care (CoC) Programming, of which the Youth Housing Initiative is a part of, enact more holistic programming representative of these youth experiences and needs. Such action can be implemented through already existing programs, such as Youth Housing Demonstration Programs (YHDPs), which are scaled up versions of traditional CoC programs, like the Youth Housing

Initiative. As Schoenfeld et al. (2019) asserted, youth participants in YHDP programs are heavily involved at all levels of the planning process, from the building of youth-centric housing options, designing educational avenues, to programmatic redesign efforts to ensure that youth do not leave the foster care or juvenile justice systems to homelessness. Also, these YHDP programs are scaled to provide an array of services in-house, such as mental and behavioral health access, designated employment and educational specialists to work exclusively with these youth, a variety of housing options; including rapid rehousing, transitional housing, shared housing, as well as diversion to include peer support and permanent connections. Understanding that HUD has already established these YHDP programs, it is crucial to re-envision Youth Housing Initiative programming-like models and provide programming models that can empower youth in a myriad of ways as well as holistically.

Considering the previous suggestions the Youth Housing Initiative would do well to consider the breadth of its service provisions. This includes many items but can start with how often youth are followed up on, how often their experiences are heard and validated, and what specific needs they may have. Moreover, their educational and employment prospects can be evaluated regularly to consider evolving experiences and needs. Missy described part of her experience with the educational process as needing someone to “hold my hand.” Accordingly, the described experience elicits a call for a specific tailored and youth-centric approach to empower these youth in their experiences. As such, an on-call mental health professional may aid in upending the narrative of homelessness these youth have described in their

experiences. Moreover, regular work with a life skills specialist, ongoing peer support with people who have lived experience, and an onsite employment-education specialist can help to empower these and future youth participants in the Youth Housing Initiative. As the youth described their experiences, the trauma they carry with them from homelessness, neglect as well as abuse runs deep and is variable. This trauma may affect their educational prospects moving forward. It is important to advocate for the acute and ongoing experiences these youth have, to bring meaning and shed light on the need for holistic models of support.

Finally, Positive Youth Development, having its structural groundings in adolescent development, may help to describe experiences and narratives which may help frame trajectories of homeless parenting youth in programs like that of the Youth Housing Initiative. The ongoing practice, education, and professional development of Positive Youth Development is likely critical in awareness and common language for programming, such as that of the Youth Housing Initiative. As such, it is important to underscore the significance of PYD for practice in these sorts of programs and advocate for its usage as much as possible, especially since in this study, the only framework with which to view this *laboratory* was a transcendental phenomenological framework.

### **Positive Youth Development**

Herein lies the opportunity to situate and suggest the practice of Positive Youth Development (PYD) for the Youth Housing Initiative. In their study of reframing of adolescence and youth, Bonnie et al. (2019) conveyed that the insights brought about

by Positive Youth Development (PYD) can render the understanding that examining the life-course of youth with developmental neuroscience (adolescent development), reinforces the critical role of childhood and adolescence in shaping developmental trajectories through a human's lifespan. More so, this brings about the understanding and need to reframe adolescence and youth as an opportunity which can be used to shape a positive trajectory, even with youth who have experienced childhood adversity, toxic stress, child maltreatment, food insecurity, and limited access to high-quality education. In turn, this can help to offset the general fixation with vulnerability and risk, allowing the research to set Positive Youth Development as a way to adapt the way youth are thought of and interacted with, which utilizes strengths-based language, and also helps to remove stigma from the subjects, homeless youth.

As Lerner, Phelps, Foreman, and Bowers (2009) conveyed, the theoretical underpinnings of PYD come from Developmental Systems theory. In this respect, PYD looks past the negative, deficits-based view of youth that has previously permeated the domains of developmental science, psychology, sociology, education, public health, and other disciplines during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. These have steadily moved towards a vantagepoint focusing on the strengths and positive qualities of youth which are meant to be developed.

Moreover, Lerner et al. (2009) posited that this positioning towards youth was predicated upon the interest of developmental scientists in utilizing dynamic models of human behavior and development in primarily understanding the plasticity (the

adaptability of an organism to evolve in its environment) of human development. Secondly, the strengths-based view of youth arose from scientists wanting to understand the significance of relations between individuals and their real-world ecological contexts as the fundamental basis of variation in the course of human development. For instance, the parenting youth participants involved with the opportunities in the Youth Housing Initiative are all experiencing homelessness but are overwhelmingly developing distinct perspectives towards the rehousing and educational services, which serves as a *laboratory* for Positive Youth Development.

Considering the theoretical underpinnings of PYD, Lerner et al. (2009) postulated that research in adolescent development intensified through the 1970s and 1980s. As this research continuously examined the plasticity of adolescents and their development, developmental scientists examining adolescence began to process the implications of such work in comparative psychology and biology for originating a new theoretical frame for the study of adolescence. Successively, developmental scientists studying other areas of the life span, such as adulthood and aging, were attracted to methods studying adolescence primarily because of its use as an ontogenetic laboratory, wherein the origin and development of an organism is studied. As such, the scientific interest of adolescence by developmental scientists who were focused on developmental systems theory, resulted in the origin of the PYD perspective.

Accordingly, stemming from adolescent development and by extension from developmental systems theory, Masten (2010) promulgated a Positive Youth



Development framework, which can serve as a lens for this research study through the understanding that:

1. Development is shaped by many interacting systems across multiple levels of function that mutually influence each other. This would consider the study of the Youth Housing Initiative and interaction of youth with the domains of housing and education, as well as how each of these was influencing the youth, to include how the youth influenced these systems. These actors, the youth and the systems they are a part of, mutually influence each other.
2. Development is probabilistic in that outcomes for youth are forged by an array of circumstances. Positive Youth Development may allow me as the researcher to highlight youth strengths and opportunities in the development of self, and holds that distinct outcomes are inherent. As a result, up to this point of the research, each youth had their own lived experience to tell about in relation to outcomes.
3. Individuals follow unique pathways; yet there also are commonly occurring patterns among individual pathways in development that are viewed as normative or atypical: In this regard the research gauged that the youth were all experiencing the phenomenon of homelessness, albeit in their distinct manner, but also that there were pertinent themes to be elaborated within a research setting.

4. Pathways can diverge or converge as a result of a myriad of influences. This item points to the probability of outcomes in the youths' experiences concerning rehousing and educational dynamics and posits that the youth had some themes in common, but also may have had themes solely relating to themselves, such as Missy needing more guidance on academic opportunities.
5. Systems reorganize spontaneously as a result of development or perturbations in the system or context; highlights the mutual influence of individual and system within the context of the rehousing and educational prospects being studied for this research.
6. Both positive and negative adaptations in individual development involve contributions from other systems, including the social and physical context; such a component acknowledges cultural norms, processes, interactions, and their influence on the development taking place within the context of the Youth Housing Initiative. This component demonstrates the places each was at in their journey with the phenomenon.
7. Individual function always reflects the history of many interacting systems as well as the current situation: This understanding underscores the developing situation and elaboration of the youths' perspectives in their current situation.

8. Human adaptation depends on the plasticity of adaptive systems, including neural plasticity, which extends over the life span; reflects the biological function of each individual taking part in the study, as well as the current reality they are situated in, postulating that the youth have a propensity to adapt in their experience of the phenomenon of homelessness (Masten, 2010).

Also, taking the eight points above, Masten (2010) iterated that the primary feature of Positive Youth Development was its focus on positive aspects of relations between development, function, resources, and strengths, both in the individual and context, and that:

It is in the linkage between the ideas of plasticity and diversity that a basis exists for the extension of developmental systems thinking to the field of adolescence and for the field of adolescence to serve as a "testing ground" for ideas associated with developmental systems theory. This synergy has had at least one key outcome, i.e., the forging of a new, strength-based vision of and vocabulary for the nature of adolescent development. In short, the plasticity–diversity linkage within developmental systems theory and method provided the basis for the formulation of the PYD perspective. (p.542)

Equally important, because of adolescent development, and by extension, Positive Youth Development (PYD), it was important to consider the resourcefulness and thriving of the youth partaking in the various literature offered in this research study. Often times, it is too easy to steep oneself in the narrative and language of

deficits and risks. Bonnie, Backes, Alegria, Diaz, and Brindis (2019) postulated the need for reframing adolescence and youth when they iterated that people tend to think of adolescence and youth as overwhelmingly being times of vulnerability and risk, wherein there is a mismatch between impulse and self-regulation. Moreover, Bonnie et al. (2019) upheld that such a preoccupation with vulnerability and risk “not only ignores the benefits of curiosity and exploration but also overlooks society’s responsibility to provide a safe environment where young people can experiment and protect and support them as they venture beyond the home into the social world” (441).

These ideas about plasticity and diversity are tied to the individualized possibilities and experiences for each individual involved with the programming. As such, the primary usage of Positive Youth Development in programming for the Youth Housing Initiative would be for any researcher or practitioner to linguistically comprehend and interpret the experiences of the youth participants with their ecological system. In the case of my research on the Youth Housing Initiative, the ecological system would be the youths’ experiences with the housing process, in tandem with their educational pursuits in the Youth Housing Initiative. By extrapolating the experiences of parenting youth in my study, Positive Youth Development allowed me to view the youth in terms of their strengths and assets, as opposed to any perceived deficits and risks. Equally important, it is important to note the youth in this program were thriving, they found their way to such a resource, and are utilizing their own capacity to upend the previous trajectory they had been on,

among other positive attributes. Through the use of PYD, these strengths, personal assets, and constant development of such assets, inform the experiences of youth in the housing portion of program, educational services, and with homelessness, which they shared in this study.

Essentially, when considering the eight-point list above, the usage of PYD allows me as the researcher to draw out meaningful conclusions, themes, and quantifiable experiences in this regard. Moreover, the usage of PYD helps to substantiate replies to the research questions, adding to the experiential backdrop in the programming at the Youth Housing Initiative. Solidifying Youth Development helps to richly illuminate the lived and evolved individual/context reality, in which the youth affect and are affected by relations including community, self, and systems. Consequently, PYD also allows for the designation of a *laboratory* to examine the ongoing experiences of these youth with the Youth Housing Initiative in their second year of programming. Additionally, Positive Youth Development will enable me as the researcher and programmer to consider the existent environment of parenthood these youth have been a part of in their first year of programming. The lived experience of parenthood was another layer of adversity that required additional consideration, as the youth had to constantly think about how to thrive within the experience of having to feed another human being, arrange for childcare while working and attending school, along with the time management of all of these. As such, PYD could help me as the researcher to discern the environment of extra

responsibility and additional adversity that comes with being a parenting youth living with homelessness.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The research study of parenting homeless youth in the Youth Housing Initiative contained specific challenges and limitations. First, time may have proven to be a limiting factor, as the participating youth had their own obligations to attend to which provided time constraints to sit down and execute an interview. As a result, their responses may have been abbreviated. Related to time, it was important to emphasize that this program had just completed its first year in existence, so only the experiences of youth while participating in the first year were able to be illuminated. Accordingly, a second year may have provided this phenomenological study with more substantive experiences, depending on the youth. Moreover, the COVID pandemic proved to be an element of limitation. Since I would have regularly interviewed these youth in-person, limited access to the youth, through the Rev platform, deprived me as the researcher of gesturing and queues which could have allowed me to describe their experiences in a holistic manner. As such, because of COVID I was not able to regularly immerse myself in the *laboratory*. Additionally, the homogeneity of the youth participants only allowed me to describe the experiences of three parenting, Caucasian youth living with homelessness in a housing program in Clackamas County, OR. No youth existed in the program from another demographic who were also parenting, so the findings overlook that there may be eligible non-white youth for this programming, which also presents a limitation for generalizability.

Finally, the methodology itself proved to be a substantial undertaking. Essences of any experience are never totally exhausted (Moustakas, 1994), as Husserl (1970) mentioned that no one is omniscient. Moerrer-Urdahl and Creswell (2004) suggested the essence statement and phenomenological text only reflected a certain place and time for the experiences of the individuals interviewed. Also, it seemed that the *essence* could be difficult to ascertain in the event that I as a researcher selected a substantially heterogeneous group of participants who had experienced homelessness, since their experiences would be quite different because of their cultural or historical backgrounds. Moreover, the process of epoche was challenging to achieve in order to experience everything in a fresh way (Moustakas, 1994). It did not seem completely achievable to set aside all biases and assumptions to focus entirely on the participants' experiences. Finally, transcendental phenomenology requires a specific language of research and to understand the philosophical posits promulgated by Husserl. The accompanying language of this phenomenological method, words such as epoche, textural and structural descriptions, among others, call for an understanding of these terms to be applicable in a study, which is a substantial learning curve.

### **Future Research**

Considering the findings and discussion, further research is recommended to advance the body of literature in the future. Given the time constraints of this study, including time and place, future research may include a wider range of parenting youth, not only Caucasian parenting youth from Clackamas, County, OR. Since other CoC, HUD-funded programs like the Youth Housing Initiative exist throughout the

country, future studies describing the experiences of these youth could include other locales where other parenting youth may exist, or simply use a mix of parenting and non-parenting youth. Such a research study could help to examine whether experiences are unique to certain locales or whether broader underlying contextual structures exist for all these HUD funded youth programs.

Another item to be studied are the experiences for parenting homeless youth and how the youth are impacted by their journey with parenting. A sense of motherhood was a contextual structure underpinning the experiences of the youth in my study. Bonnie had a three-year-old son, Missy had a 10-month-old, while Ivy had a 7-month-old and an 18-month-old. These differences may partially explain why Bonnie seemed to be further in thriving towards her education and overall housing arrangement, since her three-year-old son did not require the same level of childcare as the other three children. The research on the Youth Housing Initiative only illuminated experiences having to do with the housing and educational programming, not parenting experiences specifically.

Subsequently, future studies of Youth Housing Demonstration Programs (YHDP) could help to inform programs like the Youth Housing Initiative. As mentioned previously, YHDPs cast a more holistic net of care for youth experiencing homelessness. These YHDP programs are a scaled-up version of the Youth Housing Initiative. YHDPs generally have in-house employment and education opportunities, in-house mental-behavioral health, and an array of housing options as well as supportive services to go along with all of these, such as food security, childcare, and



transportation, among others. The Youth Housing Initiative only refers out for most major services. As such, future research could examine the efficacy of YHDPs and lesser programs like the Youth Housing Initiative for comparison.

Finally, after a second year, a subsequent study of the Youth Housing Initiative could extract evolved experiences of these youth with the housing and education services. Moreover, subsequent studies of this program could or could not include non-parenting youth, as well as parenting youth. Moreover, a second-year study of the Youth Housing Initiative could possibly illuminate themes, contextual structures, or experiences not found previously.

## **Conclusion**

As mentioned from the onset of this research study, the implications for youth homelessness have far reaching effects beyond the youth themselves. Morton, Dworsky and Samuels (2017) asserted that the prevalence of youth homelessness is a significant challenge to the socioeconomic and educational norms of the United States. Also, Henwood et al. (2018) maintained that without appropriate housing interventions, homeless youth in the U.S. would compose the latest generation of chronically homeless adults. Intermittently, the literature iterated that youth encountered a multitude of unique and complex diversities, had their own experiences with homelessness and educational programming, and were invariably impacted by interventions. Equally, this transcendental phenomenological study sought to illuminate the experiences of youth in the Youth Housing Initiative when it came to their housing services, educational prospects, and how these services impacted them to

thrive towards a sense of normalcy. Similar to the overall literature, the youth in the Youth Housing Initiative had their distinct complex adversities, their own perspectives, and had been impacted by certain interventions.

In the course of this study, the transcendental phenomenology brought to light themes, structures, and the essence of these lived experiences to synthesize a phenomenological text (Moustakas, 1994). After the findings, through the overarching research questions, I discussed implications for practice, acknowledged limitations of the study, and made recommendations for future research. Taken together, these constituted my study of the Youth Housing Initiative. The outlying recommendations I made were the need for holistic care through YHDPs and the ongoing practice of Positive Youth Development in the Youth Housing Initiative. As such, it was important to conclude this study with the thought that described themes (what), structural undertows (how), and their essences all reflected youth who were thriving in the face of immense and profound struggle. In the literature review, Wright (2018) spoke of truly valuing the identified experiences of parenting youth through poetry which described youth participants' experiences with parenting and being homelessness. Wright went on to explain:

Likewise, given their marginalization and the stress and energy required to navigate their lives, individuals experiencing homelessness are rarely allowed to represent themselves in broader discourses about the experience. I have found this to be particularly true for women raising young children in the context of homelessness, who are often maligned and misunderstood—and

frequently invisible in dominant stereotypes and cultural representations of homelessness. (p.462)

As systems and practitioners, we cannot absolve ourselves of the moral duty to empower parenting homeless youth, the next generation, to create meaning from their experiences and find their own voice in their life's journey.

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### **Appendix A: Interview Protocol**

Hello there, \_\_\_\_\_. As you and I previously talked about, I am doing a research study for my doctorate degree called a dissertation. The reason I am doing this study is because I would like to learn more about the housing and educational experiences of participants, such as yourself, in our program. During this personal audio recorded interview, the questions I will ask are going to make you think about the housing program, your education pursuits, and employment pursuits. To answer the questions, you can think about your current housing situation with the program, your educational pursuits, or employment tied to education, such as licensing, vocational, certification, or technical. After answering many of these questions you may hear me prompt you with smaller questions, such as “how did that make you feel?” “tell me more about that,” or “what do you mean when you say...”, as well as other small prompts like these. This is because I want to know more about how your experiences have shaped the way you think about the housing programming and any education and employment opportunities you have in mind. If you are confused about a question please ask me to “say more” and I will provide some more information to help you understand. Let’s start with some warm-up questions:

Warm-up Questions: Can you tell me a little bit about yourself? What are your interests? Given the pandemic, how have things been for you these past few months? Where did you grow up?

- **Primary Q1: What is it like in your current living situation?**
- How would you describe your current living situation?

- What do you like about the housing program?
- How would you describe the programming?
- What do you think could be better about the housing program?
- Do you feel like the housing program meets your needs?
- How do you think the housing program will help you in the future?
- Is there someone in a particular education and housing programming that you feel close to, who you can talk to? If so, how did you develop that relationship?
- Walk me through a typical day if there is such a thing ?
- How did you end up in this type of housing situation? How long have you lived in this housing program?
- Does your housing status impact your ability to be successful in school? If so, how?
- Do you have a support network?
- If you could change just one thing about your housing situation and programming, what would it be?
- What is your own experience with education? How far did you go into school?
- If you have a problem in current housing, schooling, or your job, do you feel comfortable going to these programs for support?
- If you could change just one thing about your education, what would it be?
- **Primary Q2: Where do you go when you need help?**
- What are your thoughts about seeking housing services?
- What are your thoughts about seeking education or training services?

- In the past, how have you gotten information on available shelter and/or housing services?
- In the past, how have you gotten information on available education and employment services?
- Do you know about the education services?
- Are they meeting your needs?
- What would you like to see offered in terms of education services?
- How will the education services help you in the future?
- **Primary Q3: What are your current educational and job aspirations?**
- **Primary Q4: What is your greatest strength?**
- **Primary Q5: What would you like people to know about you?**
- **Primary Q6: In thinking about your future, what do you see for yourself?**
- **Primary Q7: How was it talking to me today?**
- **Primary Q8 : Is there anything you would like to add that we have not discussed today?**

## **Appendix B: Letter of Consent**

Dear Prospective Participant,

My name is Francisco Garcia and I am a doctoral student in Educational Leadership at University of Portland, in Oregon. I am conducting research on youth participants in rehousing programs. My goal is to speak with some young adults who have experienced the first year of programming in the Youth Housing Initiative. I believe those who have lived the experience of the rehousing program are best suited to speak about it. I am interested in learning about your experiences and especially in your thoughts for how this type of programming can be improved. You are invited to participate in a 60-90-minute personal audio recorded interview to share your experience and your thoughts about rehousing and educational services programming. The interview questions relate to how you view your experiences while participating in the programming. Much of the interview time will be spent on open-ended questions in order to provide the opportunity for you to share what you believe is significant to your own situation and whatever ways you believe it could have been improved if you had the opportunity to do so. The risks are minimal, and your participation is completely voluntary. You may decline to answer any questions you do not wish to answer or terminate your participation at any time during the interview. The results of this study will be presented in the dissertation required for the completion of my program. My hope is that this research will also contribute to improving programming for current and future youth. Any personal information,

including the location, will be kept strictly confidential, so that your identity will remain anonymous. All data collected will be kept safe and in my personal possession until it is no longer needed, at which point I will personally destroy it. Please note, that no one else will have access to the information.

Thank you for considering your participation in this study. If you have any questions regarding

the research, please do not hesitate to contact me at 971-808-7298.

If you understand the use of this research and agree to participate, please sign below.

Participant signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date

\_\_\_\_\_

Researcher signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date

\_\_\_\_\_