Assignment #3: Quantitative Research Focus

Youth Homelessness

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Youth Homelessness

“From early to late adolescence, young people increasingly move toward independence and autonomy with relationships and the relative influence of families, friends, and social institutions as socializing agents shifting over time” (Milburn et al., 2009, p. 763).

Developmentally, adolescence poses significant challenges for youth: when young adults are homeless, their lives become further complicated. The Urban Institute (2000) estimates that 1.4 million children in the United States are homeless; other sources suggest that thirty-eight percent of the total homeless population consists of families and runaway youth (Milburn et al.).

Homelessness is a result of structural and individual factors (MacKenzie & Chamberlain, 2008). As economies continue to struggle and financial resources continue to dwindle, it would appear that continued interventions and a further examination of homelessness are essential. Issues such as a lack of shelter space and funding, family relationships, abuse, and mental health concerns cannot be ignored. When organizations are planning and implementing intervention strategies and support networks for homeless youth, the diversity of their needs along with the complex developmental nature of their circumstance must be considered. The plight of homeless youth then becomes the rationale for this paper. Based on the fifteen studies I researched, my question is: What factors are influential in moving youth both in and out of homelessness?

**Rationale for Examining this Issue**

“Youth who experience homelessness and who are living on their own are among the most marginalized individuals” (Wenzel, Holloway, Golinelli, Ewing, Bowman, & Tucker, 2011, p. 1). Homeless youth are defined as those who are without conventional accommodations - youth who are sharing housing, living in motels, on the streets, in emergency shelters, awaiting placement in foster care, or living in places not ordinarily used for sleeping are homeless. The
identified age range is 12-25 and time without conventional accommodations is outlined as two or more consecutive nights (Miller, 2011; McCay et al., 2010; Noom, de Winter, & Korf, 2008; Mackenzie & Chamberlain, 2008; Tyler & Johnson, 2006).

What happens to young people when they are no longer privy to a consistent home? Various studies have identified negative consequences such as sporadic school attendance, social stigmatization, problems acquiring basic needs, sexual exploitation, substance abuse, and a decreased likelihood of exiting homeless as time passes (Karabanow & Clements, 2011; Miller, 2011; Shillington, Bousman, & Clapp, 2011; Milburn et al., 2009; Tyler & Johnson, 2006). Longitudinal data indicates that after the initial six month period away from home there is a 40% reduction in the likelihood of exiting homelessness with each additional year spent on the street (Milburn et al.). “One of the most consistent findings is that as time on the street increases, risk behaviours likewise increase” (Milburn et al., p. 780). Homeless youth face a myriad of struggles to survive and as such are at a great risk; these teens are in need of appropriate and consistent interventions.

**Literature Review**

**Current Research**

While the fifteen studies researched had altered areas of foci, each offered similar profiles of homeless youth. Adolescents without permanent residences are found to have experienced some or most of the following: dysfunctional family life, single parent home, blended/partner family conflict, neglect, violence, abuse, substance issues, troubled educational history, suspension or expulsions, lack of self-esteem, depression or other mental health issues (Karabanow & Clements, 2011; Miller, 2011; Shillington et al, 2011; Wenzel et al., 2011; MacCay et al, 2010; Liang et al., 2009 ; Milburn et al., 2009; MacKenzie & Chamberlain, 2008;
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Noom et al., 2008; Skott-Myer et al., 2008; Ferguson, Wu, Dyrness & Sprujit-Metz, 2007; Tyler & Johnson, 2006; Pollio, Thompson, Tobias, Reid & Spitznagel, 2005; Hicks-Coolick, Burnside-Eaton, & Peters, 2003).

Because of the vast array of presenting and ongoing issues that homeless youth face, research indicates that providing youth with appropriate and diversified interventions is critical (Skott-Myher, Rabe & Nickolaou, 2008). For example, research by Pollio et al., (2005) indicates that 61% of young people in shelters are females with a mean age of fifteen (mean = 14.7, S.D. = 1.5 years). These findings were supported in other studies (Cleverley & Kidd 2011; Tyler & Johnson, 2006). Thus, interventions focusing on the needs of young females would appear to be an effective strategy when working with this population.

While community based shelters are a primary service resource for youth, they are often limiting. Shelters frequently have less than twenty beds, have a maximum fourteen day stay, and generally provide the basic necessities. These parameters can impede the broad scope of homeless needs and so many federally funded shelters are now mandated to attempt reunification with teens and families, provide vocational training, employment readiness activities, and living skills (Pollio et al., 2005).

Some teenagers seek to find connections to groups or agencies that promote faith, religion, and spirituality. As such, empirical precedents indicate that Faith Based Organizations (FBO) serve as key protective factors in shielding youth from high-risk behaviours and harmful outcomes (Shillington et al., 2011; Ferguson et al., 2007). Studies also seem to indicate that while shelters and youth drop-in centers are being accessed, many other services are underutilized. A research study conducted with 99 youth participants (Skott-Myher et al., 2008) indicated that only 16% of homeless youth sought help from their school counsellors with the
remaining service possibilities like private counselling, social workers, police, or emergency shelters were used by just fewer than 10% of the youth. While interventions and supports are clearly needed, there appears to be distinct need to create more fluidity and accessibility for at-risk youth living without conventional housing. What then, are some of the other barriers and issues youth face while navigating homelessness?

Issues Facing Homeless Youth

One of the main challenges researchers face when engaging in research is the transient nature of homeless youth (Miller, 2011; Milburn et al., 2009; MacKenzie & Chamberlain, 2008). This transience further complicates the ability of those studying and working with this fragile population in developing bonds and moving forward in developing research that addresses outcome-based services for homeless youth (Pollio et al., 2005). Because homeless adolescents can be quite nomadic, the attachment within adult, parental, and peer relationships that is critical to healthy adolescent development is often missing (Noom et al., 2011).

A lack of healthy attachments manifests itself when youth are exploited by an adult which in turn harbors negativity. These encounters lend themselves towards a development of distrust towards adults and authority figures (Karabanow & Clements, 2011; Miller, 2011; McCay et al., 2010; Liang et al., 2009; Noom et al., 2008; Tyler & Johnson, 2008; Pollio et al., 2005;). Research by Miller reveals that 45% of homeless youth reported experiencing a recent negative event at school. Quantitative and qualitative studies indicate that youth support workers and networking agencies must provide environments wherein youth experience egalitarian relationships. Homeless youth need to participate in some of the decision making regarding rules and the development and implementation of programming; when so much chaos is interwoven in
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the lives of adolescents, a sense of autonomy must be fostered (Karabanow & Clements; MacKenzie & Chamberlain, 2008; Noom et al.).

Another challenge in developing effective interventions for the homeless population is the diversity of this group (Karabanow & Clements, 2011; Milburn, 2009; Skott-Myher et al., 2008; Pollio et al., 2005). The lack of uniformity in this grouping is astounding with diversity found across gender, age, time on the street, ethnic and cultural considerations, and sexual orientation. Shillington and colleagues’ (2011) research and Chi-square results show that youth attending a drop in centre targeting a LGBQ population serviced clients that were older, Caucasian, held more time on the streets, and were more likely to attend religious services than other adolescents utilizing other drop in centers. “Homeless populations can substantially vary between areas depending on the demographic shifts, economic stress, and local transformations in patterns” (Skott-Myher et al., p. 88). There is a definite need to move forward in meeting the needs of this eclectic grouping.

Age discrimination in the housing market can further embed youth into homelessness as they are unable to obtain housing (Wenzel et al., 2011; MacKenzie & Chamberlain, 2008; Noom et al., 2008; Skott-Myher et al., 2008). The domino effect continues as adolescents seeking services and shelter space are regularly turned away due to a shortage of available beds (Skott-Myher et al., 2008; Hicks-Coolick et al., 2003). Quantitative research conducted by Hicks-Coolick and colleagues found that 75% (N=75%) of the shelters were full and had no space with an additional few shelters 10% (N=10%) having only one or two available beds. This study is supported by recent research completed by Karabanow & Clements (2011) which indicates that 75% of the shelters accepting youth were full with an additional 10% having only two beds available.
Homeless youth also find accessing medical care to be challenging. Research suggests that clinics need to be more accessible, flexible in hours, have shorter waiting times, be less formalized (no health care cards needed), confidential, and house on-site laboratories and pharmacies (Karabanow & Clements, 2011; Skott-Myher et al., 2008). Once again, homeless youth are road-blocked in their attempt in gaining access to necessary services.

Critical Issues

While it is clear that alternative forms of interventions and services need to be provided, what do the research findings indicate as critical when examining the plight of homeless youth? One of the key factors in navigating youth homelessness is time. Teenagers who have been out of the home for shorter periods of time are more successful at exiting homelessness. These youth also report higher rates of resilience and are more likely to be attending school (Cleverley & Kidd, 2011, Miller, 2011; Shillington et al., 2011; Wenzel et al., 2011; Milburn et al., 2009). “Prolonged periods of time in homelessness affects both protective factors and increases risk – particularly distress” (Cleverley & Kidd, p. 1053). Chi square results in research conducted by Shillington and colleagues coincide with this data as 35 of the 96 youth surveyed who had been on the streets for an average of 124.3 days (SD 178.7) were still in school as compared to only nine of the older youth who had been on the streets for an average of 302.8 days (SD 227.3).

Home life and parental influences have also emerged as critical issues with homeless youth. Parental influences such as ineffective parenting and conflict increase the propensity for teens not to return home (Milburn et al., 2009). There is a need to provide enhanced systems of support for parents to assist them with management skills, disciplining, and communication as these are key factors in the successful reintegration of families. This support could lead to a home that reveals a balance of youth autonomy and parental control wherein the family system
further increases a strong emotional bond (Wenzel et al., 2011; Milburn et al.; Pollio et al., 2005). Researchers have demonstrated that returning home can lead to positive outcomes (Milburn et al.; Ferguson et al., 2007).

**Convergence and Divergence of Issues**

All of the authors agreed that future research regarding program and service development is needed. As my readings progressed, the necessity to differentiate between homeless populations was highlighted (Shillington et al., 2011; Milburn et al., 2009; Skott-Myhre et al., 2008). While many agencies apply a “one size fits all” philosophy, the need for a variety of services and strategies to accommodate the diverse needs of youth is clear.

Another conclusive area was the urgency of time. Nine of the fifteen articles specifically mentioned that the greater the time spent out of the home, the less likely the chances of a successful exit out of homelessness would be.

Other parallels of research included the positive and negative influences of peer socialization, risk factors of the lifestyle, the importance of school attendance, a need for follow up services, the importance of prevention work with family systems, and the power of hopefulness (Shillington et al., 2011; McCay et al., 2010; Milburn et al., 2009; Skott-Myhre et al., 2008; Ferguson et al., 2007; Pollio et al., 2005; Karabanow & Clements, 2004; Hick-Coolick et al., 2003).

Despite the fact that the research agreed on most points, there were some inconsistencies. For example, only two of the fifteen articles suggested that maternal support is consistently associated with stable exiting (Miller, 2011; Milburn et al., 2009). The importance of Faith Based Organizations (FBO) and the suggestion that clients feel more confident using the services of these organizations was fully supported by only one article (Ferguson, 2007). This led me to
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wonder if the variable of faith was the determining factor of success or if the simplistic variable of a more personalized and less bureaucratic process influenced this study.

The most provocative challenge to themes within the articles was the study conducted by MacKenzie & Chamberlain (2003) wherein the rates of Australian homeless youth decreased from 14 cases per 1000 to 11 per 1000. This was the only article to report a decrease rather than increase in homelessness. Clearly, further research is needed to discover the causality of this drop with considerations such as geography, intervention methods, and demographics.

Critical Analysis of Research

Issues concerning Intended Practice

The evidence pertaining to the effect of socializing agents like family, peers, social services, and formal institutions in the success of exiting homeless is overwhelming. If positive, these agents can enable teens to be resilient and move towards successful transitions (Wenzel et al., 2011; Milburn et al., 2009; Karabanow & Clements, 2004). Data reveals that those youth with positive peer relationships in schools showed a stable exiting rate of OR=1.61 (p<.05) and OR=1.93(p<.01) for those peers with enhanced familial relationships (Wenzel et al.). Homeless adolescents who maintain contact with families and receive their support have been shown to have more positive behavioral outcomes and will have greater chances of exiting homelessness (Miller, 2011; Liang et al., 2009; Milburn et al.). This data revealed the need for further research to discover factors and interventions that encourage parental support and the continuation of communication between youth and their families during homelessness.

A second issue surrounds the influences that service providers hold in assisting families. When services only focus on meeting the subsistence needs of homeless youth rather than integrating these teens back into their families and the community, programming will not meet
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its intended goals. Research conducted by the Risk Amplification and Abatement Model (RAAM) shows that homeless adolescents accessing services that reduce family conflict and which provide educational assistance give youth greater odds of exiting homelessness than that of their counterparts (Milburn et al., 2009). RAAM has been empirically supported with cross-sectional data in numerous studies (Miller, 2011). Professionals working with this population must explore ways to further navigate this process.

Painfully evident are the struggles that youth face in schools. Issues such as low levels of academic achievement, higher rates of disability identification, higher drop-out rates, and violent behaviors have been identified (Miller, 2011; Shillington et al., 2011; Hicks-Coolick et al., 2003). A study conducted by Obradovic and colleagues (as cited in Miller, 2011) exposed data wherein homeless adolescents displayed lower academic resilience on test scores falling within one standard deviation of the national grade cohort averages of those students who were not homeless. Without a doubt, there is an ongoing need to link homeless teens to support networks that can help in eradicating these statistics.

Service providers need to assist homeless adolescents in remaining connected to school as this experience will normalize their lives and keep them grounded and connected to pro-social peers: further to this school permits exposure to consistent adults who can become role models and mentors. As attachment and bonding are critical components of health development, research indicates that having a positive adult in teen’s lives increases their chances of success (Karabanow & Clements, 2011; Milburn et al., 2009; Noom et al., 2008; Ferguson et al., 2007). Clearly, counsellors working in schools must work with staff members to promote and advocate for opportunities that will assist in matching supportive adults to students in crisis.
In order to promote success for homeless teens, services need to be inclusive, comprehensive, and caring. Numerous studies recognize that the heterogeneous nature of clients must be supported and that individualized assistance must be provided in order to meet the specific needs of youth (Karabanow & Clements, 2011; Wenzel et al., 2011; Noom et al., 2008; Skott-Myher et al., 2008). Data collected from homeless youth speaks to the need for more flexibility, less paperwork, easier access to services, and more diversified transitional housing specific to culture and needs (Karabanow & Clements; Wenzel et al.). Further research and support is required in order to develop services that will meet the needs of this marginalized culture.

Once discharged from various service agencies, youth often feel overwhelmed and benefit from the support of ongoing services (Skott-Myher et al, 2008; Pollio et al., 2005). A study by the Transitions Committee found that recommendations for additional services suggested by youth included a 24 hour hotline for housing issues as well as transitional housing and centers that provided services like: medical help, life skills coaching, personal counselling, internet access, resume help, skills based programming and community employment opportunities (Skott-Myher et al.). The data also indicated the need for flexibility and hours that went beyond the traditional work hours. Additionally, homeless youth spoke to wanting relationships with workers that were reciprocal, prolonged, ongoing, and egalitarian; the ultimate theme was for the youth to move to a place of competence and resiliency (Cleverly & Kidd, 2011; Karabanow & Clements, 2011; Miller, 2011; Shillington et al., 2011; McCay et al., 2010; Noom et al., 2008; Skott-Myher et al.; Hicks-Coolick et al., 2003). This is an area that demands advocacy by professionals who will fight to move funding forward to support youth who are living such complicated lives.
The importance of hope was another prominent theme. “Understanding the propensity of young people to experience overwhelming despair and at the same time hope for a better future is a critical vantage point from which to build programs and interventions” (McCay et al., 2010, p. 44). Hope is an essential component in assisting youth in building upon their strengths as they move to overcome the obstacles and chaos of their lives (McCay et al.; Skott-Myher et al., 2008; Ferguson et al., 2007; Karabanow & Clements, 2004). Helping professionals must strive to continue to deliver services that will provide a beacon of light for their homeless clients.

A final research implication supports programming that enhances and builds self esteem (Cleverley & Kidd, 2011; McCay et al., 2010; Ferguson et al., 2007; Karabanow & Clements, 2004). A study of self-esteem conducted by Pollio and colleagues (2005) noted that when self-esteem was measured relative to a baseline in a six week follow-up after supportive programming, there was a significant increase in self-esteem (t=3.95, p,.0001). However, the study revealed that if support was not continued levels of self-esteem decreased (Pollio, et al., 2005). Clearly, self-esteem is a key factor in moving homeless teens towards a successful future. Programs need to encourage strong connections between teens and workers, be explicit in their focus on building self-esteem; in other words, homeless teens need services that will explicitly concentrate on their successes and achievements (Cleverley & Kidd; Karabanow & Clements; McCay et al.).

**Synthesis of Literature**

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<th>Relevant Issues Pertaining to Youth Homelessness</th>
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| **Socializing Agents** | • Families, peers, social services, schools are all crucial factors in exiting homelessness.  
• Continued communication with families and the support of families are integral components in moving homeless youth towards successfully navigating their exits and transitioning back into a stable living environment (Wenzel, et al., 2011; Milburn et al., 2009; Karabanow & Clements, 2004). |
| **Holistic Services** | • Homeless youth are in need of services that go beyond the basics. Studies conducted such as the one by RAAM have validated the need in encouraging homeless teens in exiting homelessness by providing them with supports that assist with educational and family |


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<th>Struggles in School</th>
<th>• Youth face a plethora of struggles in schools: low levels of academic achievement, lower academic resiliency on tests, higher rates of disability identification, more drop-outs, and violent behaviours are prevalent (Miller; Shillington et al., 2011; Hicks-Coolick, 2003).</th>
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| Benefits of Staying in School | • When services assist homeless adolescents in remaining connected to school the benefits reveal: teens that are grounded, connected to pro-social peers and exposed to a consistent adults who are role models and mentors (Karabanow & Clements, 2011; Milburn et al., 2009; Noom et al., 2008; Ferguson et al., 2007).  
  • Attachment and bonding are critical components of healthy development and research indicates that having a positive adult in teen’s lives increases their chances of success (Karabanow & Clements, 2011; Milburn et al., 2009; Noom et al., 2008; Ferguson et al., 2007). |
| Diversified Services | • Numerous studies support the fact that the heterogeneous nature of homeless youth must be supported; individualized assistance should be provided and is critical in the development of appropriate interventions (Karabanow & Clements, 2011; Wenzel et al., 2011; Noom et al., 2008; Skott-Myher et al., 2008). |
| Ongoing Services | • Study by the Transitions Committee found that recommendations for additional services suggested by youth included a 24 hour hotlines for housing issues, transitional housing and centers that had services like: medical help, life skills, personal counselling, internet access, resume help, skills based programming and community employment opportunities (Skott-Myher et al., 2008).  
  • The data also indicated the need for consistent relationships with workers, and flexibility in services. (Cleverly & Kidd 2011; Karabanow & Clements, 2011; Miller, 2011; Shillington et al., 2011; McCay et al., 2010; Noom et al., 2008; Skott-Myher et al., 2008; Hicks-Coolick, 2003). |
| Hope | • Hope is an essential component in strength building as homeless teens overcome the obstacles and chaos of their lives (McCay et al., 2010; Skoot-Myher et al., 2008; Ferguson et al., 2007; Karabanow & Clements. 2004). All programming needs to include this component in the services provided. |
| Self-Esteem | • A study of self-esteem conducted by Pollio and colleagues (2005) illuminate the impact of self-esteem on building a successful future for homeless youth (Cleverley & Kidd, 2011; Karabanow & Clement, 2011; McCay et al., 2010). |

**Explored Research Methodologies**

The research base for this literature review was eclectic. Of the fifteen articles, five employed mixed-method research studies, four were qualitative in nature, four quantitative and outcome based, while two were reflective of extensive literature reviews. I was unable to uncover 15 peer reviewed and empirically supported articles within the 2005 to current year range and therefore included two articles that were authored between 2003 and 2004. A significant limitation of my research is that only three of the studies included Canadian content. With that being said, the research revealed the following significant data.
Ferguson et al., (2007) engaged in mixed method research that used outcomes measurements through the observation of measurable changes. Hicks-Coolick et al., (2003) also conducted mixed method research; part of this research included a survey sent out to over 600 directors of service agencies. Interestingly, only 203 completed the survey which indicated a 34% return rate. Conversely, in a similar mixed-method study wherein a census was given to 2025 schools, 2017 completed the census. McCay and colleagues (2010) incorporated a mixed methods study to assess the challenges and strengths of homeless youth. This study utilized a variety of assessment tools like the Resilience Scale (RS) and the Beck Hopelessness Scale (BHS) to assist in quantitative data collection. In order to discover more about the typology of homeless youth, Liang et al., (2009) engaged teens in surveys, face to face interviews, and included assessments to determine influencing variables. A final mixed method study used snowball sampling to recruit 183 youth in discovering more about the narratives leading up to and of their experiences on the streets. This study used paper and pencil surveys, interviews, and engaged participant in surveys in follow-up surveys (Milburn et al., 2009).

All four qualitative research articles utilized interviews. Issues such as the diversity of homelessness, lack of shelter space, and survival methods were discussed. Peer conducted interviews by Noom and colleagues (2008) revealed the need for more housing (26%), immediate support (25%), less wait time for financial resources (16%) and more organized and individual attention (20%). Other qualitative interviews revealed that 1/3 (n=13) of homeless youth had engaged in some form of trading sex to obtain deemed necessities like food, shelter, money or drugs (Tyler & Johnson, 2006). Individual, structured interviews conducted by Wenzel et al., (2011) uncovered a strong need for homeless youth to re-connect to schools as only 7.08% identified school as a resource.
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The quantitative research articles were outcome based. A study by Shillington and colleagues (2011), incorporated laptops, headphones, and audio-computer assisted survey instruments to improve reporting accuracy. The dependent variable in this study was homelessness. The independent variables were factors like demographics, educations, and ecological variables like peer-risk behavior. In all quantitative studies, researchers felt that surveys allowed them to remove biases caused by interviewer-respondent reactions.

The final two articles were literature reviews that examined prior research studies. Karabanow & Clements (2004) summarized findings from 23 studies that looked at various interventions for homeless youth. Miller (2011) conducted a literature review on the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (1987): Miller sought to review empirical studies, policy analyses, and research-based conceptual articles. Of the 151 articles included, 40 were quantitative and 19 were mixed method.

Summary

As I engaged in the readings, it became increasingly clear that more research is needed to discover how homelessness impacts youth development, familial relationships, social supports, schooling, and services. Furthermore, the research revealed complications associated with researching homeless youth like the transient nature of their lives as well as a deeply embedded mistrust for most adults and organizations. What resonated with me is the stark reality that quantitative research reveals regarding the challenges homeless teens encounter. Moreover, quantitative research permits researchers to shed light on a topic using data collected from a large number of participants hailing from a vast geographic and demographic population base. Having always contained a fear of numbers and statistics, I was pleasantly surprised by what this methodology revealed. I have come to acknowledge the merit of engaging this form of research
as an effective strategy in reducing biases. This literature review allowed me the opportunity to examine the wide array of issues facing youth in a concrete and factual matter.

**Conclusion**

With evidence clearly pointing in the direction of a need for change in terms of support networks for homeless youth, counsellors need to examine how they can adjust their practices to advocate for and meet the needs of homeless youth. Miller (2011) suggests that wider networks of practice need to be implemented whereby structural webs of communications are created. It becomes clear that positive social agents need to be mobilized to abate the negative experiences of homeless youth. “The loss in faith in the adult community could have dire, long term consequences. Further, it is unacceptable to leave young people in these dangerous and unstable situations” (Skott-Myher, 2008, p.100). Homeless adolescents have identified the need for services that are safe, diverse, respectful, and all encompassing. Additional research is needed to address the need to alter services provided to the homeless population.

“Hundreds of thousands of students leave school each day without a home to which they can return” (Miller, 2011, p. 329). Future research is vital towards improving and extending service provisions. Research is crucial if helpers are going to be prepared to better comprehend utilization patterns of services accessed. In the meantime, workers might find it advantageous to provide their consumers, the homeless youth, the opportunity to experience service delivery that is individualized, flexible, respectful, and cognizant of the skills needed to successfully transition back into society.
References


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