

**Youth Experiencing Homelessness: Finding Unmet Needs, Barriers and Facilitators
of the Transition to Stability**

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Abstract

In spite of the growing population of young adults (ages 18 to 24) experiencing homelessness, relatively little research has been done on youths' experiences with transitions out of homelessness. Utilizing remote individual interviews with ten youth participating in a Transitional-Living Program in Hawaii, thematic content analyses were used to investigate the barriers and facilitators of successful transitions out of the street and into stability, as well as factors contributing to homelessness and the unmet needs of homeless youth in this age group. Results of thematic content analyses are presented relative to each research question, including barriers to success, facilitators of success, contributors to youths' experiences with homelessness, and youths' unmet needs. Results are discussed relative to their contributions to increasing understanding of youth homelessness, factors contributing to it, and factors which ease their transitions into independence and stability. Recommendations for policy and practice are discussed.

Keywords: youth homelessness; youth mental health; exiting homelessness; transitional living program

Transition-Age Youth Experiencing Homelessness: Finding Barriers and Facilitators of the Transition to Stability

Introduction

Youth from ages 18 to 24 are considered one of the fastest-growing populations affected by homelessness. Hawaii's January 2018 Point in Time Count showed a total of 189 unaccompanied homeless young adults (ages 18 to 24) ("Hawaii Homelessness," 2018). These older youth experiencing homelessness are often referred to in the literature as transition-age youth (or TAY) (Yuan et al., 2018). Transition-age youth make up the majority of unaccompanied youth in Point in Time Counts nationwide. As TAY are still developing young adults, they often require housing services tailored to their specific needs, which are unique from those of older adults (Yuan et al., 2018). TAY who experience homelessness face a range of risks related to health, including an increased risk of chronic and mental health conditions (Rice et al., 2007). For vulnerable youth, young adulthood can serve as a significant risk for disease, injury, delays in development, impairments in functioning, and other hardships that can affect their lives well into adulthood (DiPietro & Edgington, 2016). Further, in the absence of intervention, unstably housed young adults become highly vulnerable to experiencing chronic homelessness during the rest of their lives (Culhane et al., 2013).

This thesis will focus on transition-age youth (TAY). Research on the effectiveness of interventions for homeless youth are sparse and heterogeneous (Altena et al., 2010). Even less is known about the factors that hinder or facilitate successful youths' transitions out of homelessness and into stable housing. The goal of this study is to illuminate barriers to and

facilitators of successful transitions out of homelessness for young adults in this age group, and the unmet needs of youth during the transition out of homelessness.

For individual transition-age youth, the habits picked up during adolescence and young adulthood can impact the entire life course, providing further motivation for future research to focus on this age group. For example, behaviors such as binge drinking during young adulthood can increase the risk of developing chronic diseases later in life, including substance abuse issues or heart disease. Further, according to the Institute of Medicine and the National Research Council (2013), young adulthood also serves as the peak period for the onset of both mental illnesses and chronic illnesses. For young people to have access to the milestones our culture has designated as signifying adulthood, they need the tools to be meaningfully engaged with other members of their communities, along with productive employment. However, the Institute of Medicine and the National Research Council (2013) argued that young adults are facing more challenges today than in past decades, particularly members of the most vulnerable and marginalized groups of youth.

Ecological Levels and Explanations of Youth Homelessness

Unfortunately, a single satisfactory overall theory that can explain the phenomenon of youth homelessness has not yet materialized (Van der Ploeg, 1997). In the 1970's, researchers began to relate homelessness to stressful socioeconomic factors, including the erosion of welfare benefits, poverty, and the destruction of low-income housing. Now, an adequate explanation of homelessness identifies risk factors at multiple ecological levels, including factors at the individual, group, community, and societal levels. Social science researchers are tasked with tracing the key risk factors presented at each of these levels and identifying how the relationships

between these factors create heightened risks for youth homelessness (Shinn & Weitzman, 1990).

Structural risk factors include the economic and social aspects of Western societies that increase the risk for underprivileged citizens to experience homelessness. This approach is known as the structural deficits model, in which these risk factors are seen as partly responsible for the phenomenon of homelessness. These structural factors include a lack of affordable housing, poverty, unemployment and underemployment, deinstitutionalization, and a lack of accessible, appropriate healthcare for youth.

Other structural factors making life more difficult for homeless youth included a stark lack of employment opportunities, or opportunities to further their education, as they often fall within the fringes of society and become even more alienated when they are no longer considered children (Oliveira & Burke, 2009). Many youth opt for a more transient lifestyle when faced with a lack of stable housing services aimed specifically at youth. They also may be resistant to traditional homeless shelters due to adverse shelter conditions, strict rules, non-accepting attitudes from staff, and a strong desire to differentiate themselves from older adults who are experiencing homelessness (Ha et al., 2015). The transient lifestyles adopted by many homeless youth contribute to difficulties in securing or maintaining government-issued documents such as State ID's and birth certificates. Without official identification, youth have a difficult time accessing medical care, health insurance, temporary income assistance, employment opportunities, emergency housing services, and behavioral health services (Edidin et al., 2012).

Risk factors related to youths' families also play a role. Domestic violence and family conflict are all factors that have been shown to contribute to youth leaving their homes early.

Many youth also come to leave home due to parental neglect, family members' addictions, and/or physical and sexual abuse (Van Wormer, 2003). Homeless young parents in a past study conducted on Oahu expressed an intergenerational instability when it came to the concept of "home", both in terms of a physical space to live and a feeling of having a home to return to (Arapacio et al., 2019). Alarming, the youth in this study all seemed to feel as though they were invisible to their greater community, besides their experiences with being arrested or interacting with child welfare systems. The experience of being homeless was extremely isolating for these youth, who felt motivated as a result to seek freedom, individualism, and self-reliance. For youth experiencing homelessness, support from their communities seemed noticeably absent (Arapacio et al., 2019). Parents' substance use, and instances of child maltreatment are both linked to low self-esteem, depression, and chronic experiences with homelessness among homeless young women (Stein et al., 2002). In another recent study with homeless youth on Oahu, more than 75 percent of youth reported having been verbally, emotionally, physically, or sexually abused during their pasts (Yuan et al., 2018). Adverse childhood experiences have been related to particularly poor mental health outcomes among homeless adults (Barrow et al., 2000; Hwang, 2010). Being exposed to more adverse childhood experiences have been strongly correlated with the development of other health issues, including depression, alcoholism, attempted suicide, and other negative mental health outcomes.

Additionally, individual risk factors are also connected in some ways to homelessness. Considering the stressors which are prominent in the lives of many homeless youth, it may be unsurprising that youth face a range of risks for severe negative consequences relating to their mental health. Youth experiencing homelessness have an estimated twice as high a lifetime prevalence of psychiatric disorders compared to their housed peers (Edidin et al., 2012). In a

recent large-scale study of homeless youth from several large cities in the U.S., nearly one-fourth of respondents met the DSM criteria for PTSD (Bender et al., 2010). Youth who experience homelessness also have a heightened risk of other mental and behavioral health issues, including high rates of anxiety, depression, substance use, and psychosis (Hodgson et al., 2013). They also display a higher number of suicide attempts in comparison to housed youth (Desai et al., 2003; Kamieniecki, 2001). Homeless youth are more likely to be diagnosed with externalizing disorders, such as conduct disorder and ADHD (Busen & Engebretson, 2008; Whitbeck et al., 2004). Externalizing behavior problems present difficulties for this population, as impulsivity and aggression can impact youths' access to shelters, case management, mental health support, and other needed services, making youth who display externalizing behavior problems particularly vulnerable to experiencing chronic homelessness.

Many specific characteristics related to young people (such as externalizing behaviors) are strongly correlated with homelessness. However, jumping from these correlational findings to the conclusion that these factors *cause* youth homelessness would imply a far too simplistic, and likely misleading, model. Shinn (1992) argued that individual level analyses and person-centered approaches are not enough to understand the causes of homelessness, but that the structural determinants, such as poverty or the loss of affordable housing, are the true causes of homelessness. Van der Ploeg and Scholte (1997) agreed with this line of reasoning, arguing that individual correlates with homelessness heighten one's risk, but cannot be causally linked to homelessness, as their effects depend on other factors in the social environment of the young person at risk. Therefore, they concluded that there is not one specific factor - structural, or individual - that causes homelessness. Rather, it is a combination of several structural and

individual circumstances and risk factors that can lead to young people experiencing homelessness.

In line with these arguments, many authors explain the phenomenon of homelessness through multifactorial models, perceiving homelessness to be a multidimensional problem. Van der Ploeg et al. (1991) contributed by interviewing both homeless youth and caretakers and parents. These authors concluded that homelessness is a continuous, escalating process of young people being *pushed out* of the structures traditionally meant to support them, leaving them alienated. Van der Ploeg et al. (1991) viewed the problematic family history as a primary causal factor, because this is where the process of being *pushed out* begins. From there, they argue, the escalation begins to take its course, and the youth lose vital social support and face more threats to their psychological resilience, it becomes more and more difficult for youth to break the cycle of being pushed out from society.

Hier et al. (1990) offered a similar explanation, viewing youth homelessness as the outcome of interacting risk factors influencing the socialization processes of young people in negative ways. Their research began to lend support to the theory of inner social control, meaning youth homelessness was caused by the absence (or near absence) of social support and bonding, resulting in less internalization of social norms and contributing to a greater sense of alienation.

Grigsby et al. (1990) developed an empirically tested social process model to understand youth homelessness. The key processes emphasized by these authors were *disaffiliation* and *reaffiliation* with relation to entrenchment in homelessness, and the development of strategies to help people out of homelessness. Homeless people have been confronted with life events that weaken their social networks and dislodge them from their housing. This process of disaffiliation

can be extremely detrimental to youths' health and well-being, just as much as the loss of food and safe shelter. Youths' social networks shrink, and the loss of material and emotional support leads to detachment from mainstream society, social isolation, and entrenchment in homelessness. At the same time, the process of reaffiliation is occurring. In this process, people choose to affiliate with others who share similar problems in order to minimize fear and anxiety and replace their loss of important bonds. This usually involves affiliating with others facing the hardships that come with experiencing homelessness. Youth then obtain new self-concepts, which are reinforced through identification with other homeless people and social comparison. This may lead to less traditional attitudes, social roles, and behaviors.

Additional research is required to develop a more comprehensive theory covering all of the risk factors, including economic, social, and psychological factors, that put youth at a higher risk of experiencing homelessness. I hope to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the issue of youth homelessness by examining on-going barriers and factors associated with successful transitions out of homelessness. I also hope to contribute by shedding light on the perspectives of a population about which very little is known in the current literature: homeless young adults in Hawaii.

Study Site: Residential Youth Services and Empowerment

Caputo et al. (1996) concluded that access to supportive individuals, appropriate services, and organizations that consider youths' needs are all important factors in promoting the successful transition to inclusion in mainstream society. To work towards an end to youth homelessness, the National Alliance to End Homelessness (2012) suggests that youth should be given stable housing, support and connection to adults, support in terms of education or employment, and access to counseling and other services that will contribute to their long-term

success. Over the past few decades, a set of specialized programs have been created to provide services to homeless youth in need, including initial contact and outreach programs, short-term emergency shelters, Drop-in Centers (or DICs) for youth to receive services to meet their basic needs, and residential facilities for this age group, known as transitional living programs (or TLPs). However, to date, there has been relatively little research focusing on understanding these settings, the effects they have on youth during their transitions into stable housing, and the gaps in youth services that remain.

In this context, RYSE was created in 2018 to help youth experiencing homelessness to achieve independence and find stable housing. Residential Youth Services and Empowerment (RYSE) is a transitional-living program (TLP) created exclusively for transition-age youth experiencing homelessness in Hawaii. The program's purpose is to help youth in this age group leave the street or other unstable living situations, and transition to more stable, often independent, housing. RYSE provides a residential living program, basic necessities, safe storage, counseling and mental health services, case management, educational and vocational training services, transportation, family reunification services, and help with navigating bureaucratic hassles. By providing a comprehensive set of client-centered services for youth in need, the program hoped to make it possible for youth to exit homelessness, find stable living situations, and re-integrate with mainstream society.

Youth are recruited into the program through RYSE's island-wide outreach efforts, and through other organizations serving transition-age youth. In order to be as low-barrier for vulnerable youth as possible, there is no sober requirement in place in order for youth to enter RYSE. No substance use is allowed on the RYSE campus, but outside of residential services, this is loosely monitored. Some youth come in with children of their own, and for these families,

RYSE has expanded its services to accommodate whole families, providing infant care and private rooms for those with children. Youths' stays at RYSE were expected to be about four months long, but their experiences vary greatly. For example, men tend to stay longer on average, while women tend to leave and return more often. This may be due to the difference in street life experiences between men and women. Women are more susceptible to needing to utilize survival sex, and to fall victim to human trafficking. Several young women cycled between arrangements like these and returning to the RYSE Program, illustrating how difficult it is for young women to escape human trafficking and achieve independence. Several women were experiencing domestic violence in their relationships, and struggling to reconcile those experiences with their goals of finding stable housing and achieving independence.

I began volunteering at RYSE in 2018 and went on to complete my graduate practicum there before beginning this thesis. In the spirit of full disclosure, I am a young white woman from the Midwest of the U.S., who travelled to Hawaii where I lived for two years and worked with this shelter. During my experiences working at this shelter, I became interested in exploring the psychological experience of going through and exiting homelessness, particularly for homeless young adults, an understudied group who occupy some of the most vulnerable positions in the United States.

It has been well noted in the last decade that there are few studies examining the effectiveness of programs addressing homelessness among transition-age youth (Dworsky et al., 2012; Scott & Harrison, 2013). It follows that far more research is needed to gain an understanding of homeless TAY needs and preferences for housing interventions and services. Rice et al. (2008) note that this prerogative may be particularly important considering that homeless TAY occupy a unique developmental phase of young adulthood. According to the U.S.

Interagency Council on Homelessness (2010), under the Obama Administration's policy goal of ending youth homelessness by 2020, the number of transition-age youth in housing programs and shelters have increased. However, these programs were largely not designed with young adults' specific developmental needs in mind (Aledort et al., 2011; Munson et al., 2017).

Curry and Abrams (2015) and Munson et al. (2017) found that there have been limited studies investigating TAY's service and housing preferences. Henwood et al. (2018) found evidence to suggest that TAY have preferences that aren't necessarily consistent with those of other, older homeless adults, and that youth may indeed be seeking a more supportive housing option with their peers. Further, Gilmer (2016) concluded that more research will be needed on these preferences as well as the effectiveness of various housing approaches for the diverse population of transition-age youth, especially with the development of more and more programs specifically meant for TAY.

The next imperative for providing TAY with effective support involves a more in-depth description of the breadth of youth homelessness experiences in Hawaii and across the U.S. The aim for this study is to further our understanding by providing the initial steps of such a description. My research questions focused on the process of youth struggling with homelessness. This thesis builds on existing theories of how youth come to experience homelessness, and the process of exiting homelessness, with a local transitional-living program as a venue for understanding and possibly addressing gaps in the support network of marginalized youth. With these goals in mind, my research questions included:

1. What are the factors contributing to youth homelessness?
2. What are the barriers to youth in this age group exiting homelessness?
3. What factors facilitate success in youths' transition out of homelessness?

4. What unmet needs do homeless youth at the participating TLP have?

Method

Based on this study's research goals, I determined qualitative methods to be the most appropriate. In qualitative research, Christa (2003) urged the inclusion of multiple voices, the promotion of social transformation, including the voices of the youth themselves, and keeping the promotion of a healthy and fulfilling life for all youth as a top priority. With these guidelines in mind, and the social distancing necessitated by the COVID-19 outbreak, I chose to utilize remote individual interviews.

Participants and Procedures

I interviewed ten young adults (all between ages 18-24) who were participating in the Residential Youth Services and Empowerment Transitional Living Program near Kailua, Hawaii. Youth were told about the study through case managers and other shelter staff, and given the option to volunteer to be interviewed as a part of this study. Those who wanted to participate then had interview times tailored around their schedules. The consenting process and interviews were conducted over the phone. Youth were explained the purpose of this study and offered the opportunity to ask questions before deciding whether they would like to participate. RYSE youth were ideal participants in this study because they were pursuing stable housing after experiencing homelessness. Because of their engagement with services at the local TLP, youth were also able to provide valuable insight on gaps in available services and barriers and facilitators of success during the transition to stability. Study participants were all transition-age youth seeking resources to make the transition out of homelessness.

I transcribed all interviews verbatim for thematic analyses before the original recordings were destroyed. I analyzed as I went and used the method proposed by Guest et al. (2020) in order to determine when saturation had been reached. Using their definition, saturation is the

point during analysis at which the data from incoming interviews produces little to no new useful information relative to the objectives of this study (Guest et al., 2020). In this approach, saturation is operationalized in three elements, the *run length* (and the relative amount of incoming new data), the *base size*, and the *new information threshold*. The base size is the number of unique themes found in an initial set of interviews. Previous studies have demonstrated that most novel information within qualitative datasets is generated early in the process of data collection, and tends to follow an asymptotic curve, with a relatively sharp decline in new information being produced after just a small number of interviews (Guest et al., 2006; Guest et al., 2017; Morgan et al., 2002). For these reasons, Guest et al. (2020) suggest using a base size of four to six interviews to calculate the total number of unique themes to be used in the denominator of the saturation ratio. I started out with a base of four interviews, in which I found twenty-three unique themes. The *run length* is the number of interviews within which I looked for and calculated the amount of new information (in the form of unique new themes). The number of new themes served as the numerator in the saturation ratio, while the base number served as the denominator. The result is converted into a percentage to reveal the percentage of new information revealed in each run. It should be noted that in the procedures outlined by Guest et al. (2020), successive runs overlap, meaning each set of interviews shifts to the right (or “forward”) by one interview. This procedure is repeated until the point of saturation is reached.

Guest et al. (2020) proposed $\leq 5\%$, or more conservatively, 0% as the amount of new information in a run that is acceptable as evidence that saturation has been reached at a given point in data collection. The new information threshold can be used as a benchmark, similar to the use of a p-value of < 0.05 to determine whether there is enough evidence to reject a null

hypothesis in statistical analysis. While this approach does not guarantee that saturation was in fact reached when meeting this threshold, it does provide a transparent way to present assessments of data saturation that can be interpreted by other researchers. I chose this approach because it allows for transparency and precision and because metrics can be used *prospectively* (during data collection and analysis) and *retrospectively* (after the completion of data collection and analysis) to report on the adequacy of this sample to reach thematic saturation. This calculation is also well-suited to this exploratory study because it does not assume or require prior knowledge of theme prevalence or a random sample (Guest et al., 2020).

The first step in the process of calculating saturation laid out by Guest et al. (2020) was finding the number of unique themes, which would serve as the base size. I used a base of four interviews, and found 23 unique themes within them, making 23 my base. Then, I used a run length of two interviews, and found four new themes. To calculate the saturation ratio, I divided the number of new themes in the run (four) by my base (twenty-three) to reveal 17.39 percent new information. Since this was not below my ≤ 5 percent threshold, I continued onto the next run of two interviews. With this run, I added the four new themes to create a base of twenty-seven. I found zero new theme in this run, giving me a saturation ratio of zero percent, which fell below the ≤ 5 percent threshold. Further, the third, fourth, and fifth runs each revealed zero new themes, reaching the more conservative guideline put forth by Guest et al. (2020). This produced a saturation ratio of zero percent, so I stopped after the tenth interview with a good sense that the amount of new information was diminishing to the extent that I could reasonably conclude that saturation was reached based on both the thresholds of ≤ 5 and 0 percent. At this point, I completed data collection with ten interviews. Unfortunately, with only one coder, I was not able to conduct reliability checks during data collection and analysis.

Measures

Before the interview began, I administered a short survey. The survey included a demographic inventory, an inventory of contributors to youth experiencing homelessness, and an inventory of their unmet service needs. I administered the survey at the beginning of the session, and the answers were recorded along with the rest of the data from interviews. This survey usually took less than five minutes to complete. A copy of this survey can be found in Appendix A.

Within this pre-interview survey, I included a demographic inventory to describe the characteristics of the interview participants. The survey also asked about what factors contributed to the participants experiencing homelessness, what services they had used, and what their unmet needs were. While the original study plan was to utilize this protocol to administer focus group interviews with youth, due to the COVID-19 outbreak, I modified the protocol to accommodate individual remote interviews instead in order to ensure participant safety (See Appendix B). These measures have previously been used in peer-reviewed work focused on identifying and addressing the needs of people who experience homelessness (Barile et al., 2018; Barile et al., 2020) and were used to supplement the findings from the interviews.

The interview protocol was originally based on an interview guide developed and used with youth experiencing homelessness by Karabanow et al. (2016) who shared similar research goals and worked specifically with emerging adults who were transitioning, or had transitioned out of homelessness. Some questions were added to briefly assess points of interest identified by youth in the needs assessment, including health, well-being, and their perceived ability to meet their basic daily needs.

Analytical Procedures

I analyzed the interview transcripts using the case study approach to analysis detailed by Creswell (2007). I began by coding for general themes, and then coded in more detail (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). I began with open coding, which includes deriving codes inductively from the data (Charmaz, 2006). I then utilized template-style coding, an approach that uses predetermined codes in areas of interest, and then organizing and coding transcripts based on these existing codes (Crabtree & Miller, 1999).

I followed Creswell's (2007) steps to qualitative data analysis, including organizing the data, conducting a preliminary read-through of the data, coding and organizing themes, representing the data, and forming an interpretation of the data. The data analysis process consisted of reducing the interview data into themes through a process of coding and condensing codes in order to represent the data in tables and a discussion of the data. The data was analyzed as it was collected, as Creswell (2007) explained that data collection, analysis and report writing are interconnected processes rather than distinct steps.

The case study approach by Creswell (2007). involves creating and organizing data files from my interview data, reading through the text several times and writing notes, reading through the notes and forming initial codes, writing descriptions of each case and its context, and using categorical aggregation to establish themes and patterns in the data. I wrote detailed descriptions of the experiences youth discussed within each theme and made naturalistic generalizations from the contents of discussions within each theme, generalizations that can be learned from the cases themselves. Following the instructions of Creswell (2007), I created descriptions of each case to include a detailed view of aspects about the case and develop initial themes.

In order to answer my research questions, I began by coding using broad codes related to each question (e.g., factors, barriers, success facilitators, and unmet needs). Then, I narrowed down the concepts that came up in each interview, coding for specific types of barriers, factors contributing to homelessness, facilitators of success, and unmet needs youth had. I began by reading through each interview until I was familiar enough with each one to identify a “representative” interview, which included several of the themes that seemed to arise in multiple interviews. I then concentrated on this representative interview to identify more detailed codes and begin building a coding structure. I continued to take notes as I coded each interview in order to inform the coding structure (Appendix D). After identifying some initial codes, I coded each interview using NVivo software, making detailed notes of anything I noticed as I went. Coding once again in a final layer allowed me to draw connections between codes and develop larger themes about the contents of the interviews.

The survey administered at the beginning of the interview described and characterized youths’ demographics information, service utilization and unmet service needs. This survey included the inventory of factors contributing to homelessness in order to gather this important information on risk factors contributing to youth homelessness, and the inventory of unmet needs illuminated important gaps in services aimed at this population from the perspectives of the youth themselves.

The first two questions were subject to thematic analyses to provide an idea about the factors that contributed to transition-age youth experiencing homelessness and coming to utilize RYSE services. Thematic analyses were also conducted on participants’ answers to Questions 3 through 8, 11, and 14 in order to reveal barriers and facilitators of success during the transition. Points of interests that were probed for in these questions include individual factors, stress,

coping, and daily routines; the role of social support in the transition, and existing barriers to receiving formal services and informal supports (see Appendix A for the full Interview Protocol). For example, Question 3 asks about youths' daily routines and the factors that made it more difficult for them to do what they need to each day in the hopes of illuminating the sources of stress and barriers to a successful transition out of homelessness. Questions 9, 12-13, and 15 investigated youths' unmet needs, and question 10 probed for any possible effects of the COVID-19 crisis, as this crisis began to affect youth just before the beginning of data collection, and served as an important context to consider when working with any vulnerable population.

I thematically analyzed the interviews in order to determine youths' experiences with the types of services they most utilized, the factors within service organizations that served to facilitate the transition to stability, youth priorities and concerns regarding services available to them, and any unmet needs which can be used in future efforts to improve services meant for homeless transition-age youth. A goal of this analysis was to provide insight on the factors that may perpetuate youth homelessness, as well as unmet needs they had which could be better addressed within these institutions. By analyzing transcripts as I went, I was able to provide a more detailed description of youths' journeys to stable housing, existing gaps in available services, and other unmet needs.

Results

I conducted interviews with ten (N=10) youth participating in the Residential Youth Services and Empowerment (RYSE) Program. The interviews ranged from twenty minutes to an hour and two minutes in length. Youth ranged from 18 to 24 years old, and the average age of youth in the sample was 21.2 years old. Some youth had been coming back and forth to the shelter, while others had been staying at RYSE for months. The sample consisted of four females

and six males. Two of the female youth interviewed were parents. Four youth had parents or guardians who had served in the military. Below is a breakdown of the sample by racial/ethnic identification (Table 1), and then by educational attainment (Table 2). It should be noted that youth had the option to identify with more than one racial or ethnic group and to self-identify, and seven youth in the sample identified with more than one category.

Table 1.
Racial/Ethnic Identification

Racial/Ethnic Identity	N	%
Latinx	1	10
White	2	20
Multiethnic ^a	3	30
Multiethnic, Native Hawaiian ^b	4	40

Note. ^aDoes not include participants who identified as Native Hawaiian. ^bIncludes participants who identified as Native Hawaiian and at least one other race/ethnicity.

Table 2.
Educational Attainment

Level of Education	N	%
GED	1	10
Graduated High School	5	50
12 th Grade	3	30
Trade School	1	10

Table 3 presents the percentage of youth who indicated each of these factors contributed directly to their experiences with homelessness. Nine youth said that an argument with family or friends contributed to their experiences with homelessness. Following arguments with family and friends, the factors which contributed to the most youths' experiences with homelessness were problems resulting from the COVID-19 outbreak (affecting five youth), loss of money or lack of funds (affecting for youth), and moving from one state to another (affecting four youth).

Table 3.

Factors Contributing to Homelessness

Factor	<i>N</i>	%
Argument with family or friends	9	90
Being Disabled	2	20
Being released from Juvenile Detention with nowhere to go	1	10
Being released from the hospital with nowhere to go	1	10
Being unable to pay rent or mortgage	1	10
Death in the family or of a loved one	3	30
Domestic Violence	1	10
Losing a job	1	10
Loss of money or lack of funds	4	40
Mental illness	2	20
Moving from one state to another	4	40
Problems related to substance use	2	20
Problems resulting from the COVID-19 outbreak	5	50

Table 4. displays youths' responses to questions about what kind of housing they were working towards.

Table 4.

Housing Goals

Type of Housing	<i>N</i>	%
Apartment with Partner or Family Member	3	30
Group Housing or Community Housing Setting	2	20
Independent Apartment	5	50

Participants were also asked what services would still be helpful for them during their transitions into stable housing. Youth were given the option to name any services that would be helpful in addition to the options given when the question was asked. The results are displayed in Table 5.

Table 5.

Services That Youth Indicated Would Be Helpful

Service	<i>N</i>	%
Assistance getting identification	1	10
Case management	1	10
Disability services	1	10
Financial assistance to visit family members	1	10
Help finding and securing housing	6	60
Help getting SSI	1	10
Legal services	8	80
Long-term help with rent	9	90

Mental health services	2	20
Money management services	8	80
Ongoing case management	8	80
Short-term help with rent	10	100
Substance abuse treatment	1	10

Table 6. presents the services that participants said they *had used* during the past month.

Table 6.

Services Utilized in the Past Month

Service	<i>N</i>	%
Assistance Getting Identification	5	50
Case Management	5	50
Clothes Closet	4	40
Disability Services	4	40
Job Readiness, Job Search, or Employment Help	5	50
Legal Services	3	30
Medical Services	6	60
Mental Health Services	4	40
Soup Kitchen or Food Pantry	8	80
Substance Abuse Treatment	2	20
Transitional Housing	10	100
Transportation or Rides	7	70

Thematic Coding

Next, I present an explanation of the themes that unfolded during the coding process. I spent two months developing codes using an inductive approach to the interview data (Creswell, 2007). Going through each interview, I identified recurring patterns and then organized them into categories. I then conducted an initial round of in vivo coding and developed a codebook (Appendix C) and a coding hierarchy (Appendix D). Using this codebook, I conducted an additional round of coding in Nvivo software using the codes I'd identified.

My initial layer of coding was organized according to my research questions. This meant that I started with four broad categories to code for: barriers to success, facilitators of success, factors contributing to homelessness, and unmet needs. Discussions of contributors to homelessness often included descriptions of youths' experiences with homelessness, so I renamed the Contributors category as "Homelessness". I then defined each code that came up within my four categories, writing detailed memos about the contents of discussions within each code. For example, Within the category of *Barriers to Success*, I coded for barriers relating to *Family* and *Structural Risk Factors*. Within *Facilitators of Success*, I coded for supports relating to *Family*, supports relating to *The Shelter* (RYSE, the participating TLP), and supports related to *ambitions for the future*. I then coded again with the clearly defined codebook (the full list of codes and codebook can be seen in Appendix C). Using the content in each code, I compiled detailed descriptions of the experiences described within each theme in order to ensure I was accounting for the wide variation in the experiences of youth in this sample. The "Homelessness" category included the themes of *Experiences with Homelessness*, *Contributors to Initial Experiences*, *Meaning of "Homeless"*, *Contributors to continuous experiences*, and *Identity relative to homelessness* (A full definition for each code is given in Appendix C). When

appropriate, I wrote down relevant quotations from interviews as they arose with each theme, and these quotations are included in my analysis. I assembled the concepts into a coding tree using my four main categories and the themes within each (Appendix D). I utilized tools within the NVivo program, such as hierarchy charts, to visualize the data while creating descriptions of the contents of each theme.

Next, detailed descriptions are provided about the results of thematic content analyses on interview data. For the purpose of this discussion, I aggregated the data into discussions related to structural factors, factors related to family and friends, and individual factors. I begin by discussing structural factors that came up during interviews, and then explore familial factors and individual factors. Within structural factors, I examine some risk factors found during childhood, bureaucratic hassles and their effects, youths' suggestions for structural changes, and the context created by COVID-19. After exploring factors related to family and friends, I discuss individual factors, including youths' health, ambitions for the future, and transitions to adulthood. Finally, I discuss the process of leaving homelessness and the impact RYSE had on that process.

Structural Factors

Participants were aware of the many systemic issues involved with the difficulties of exiting homelessness and the systemic factors that contributed to their ending up on the streets. When responding to questions about what they would change if they could implement change at the county level, participants suggested a broad change in priorities. One participant described the current situation by first suggesting that, at a systemic level, people "stop pretending like nobody's homeless." She went on to elaborate:

We do things like --- and I'm not saying that stuff like the railway's a waste of money, but we've spent money on stuff like that, and you know, that's millions of dollars! You know,

that's not just five, ten, fifteen bucks, and it's for something we don't fully need right now. But then you see a whole bunch of families - entire families with five, six kids, and a single mother lining up on the beach looking for their next tent, and hoping that they can patch their tent up, you know? Like, and they see that. But yet they want to spend money to do things that we don't immediately need right now, when what we need is to make sure all these people are okay.

Spending time in foster care also contributed to two youth experiencing homelessness for several reasons. Aging out of foster care involved finding one's things on the side of the road and being put on the street without any further guidance or other options. Experiences with foster care did not come with consistent access to computers or the other materials needed to complete vital educational milestones, and youth did not have opportunities to look into the future, work stable jobs or get help navigating the college system. Youth in foster care also did not have many, or any, financial resources available to them upon graduation on their 18th birthdays. As a result, youth aged out of foster care feeling lost and unprepared for adulthood. Experience with foster care also carried "rough" and often traumatizing situations. Regardless of the state of the foster homes they transferred in and out of, the constant state of moving around, disruptions to one's life, and uncertainty about what the future would look like, carried stressors that still seemed to weigh on youth in their young adulthood. Trauma from the situations they had left, including the death of loved ones or neglect from parents, largely went unaddressed in these systems. Siblings were separated between Hawaii and the contiguous U.S., with no way of seeing each other or staying in consistent contact, hurting their relationships and cutting youth off from any familial support. Moving around frequently during childhood made it difficult to keep stable social support networks, get long-term work experience, or complete important

educational milestones. Each of these difficulties contributed in some ways to youth eventually experiencing homelessness.

Another risk factor that became apparent was experience with the juvenile justice system. Being incarcerated at a young age cut off one participant from any social support they'd had, disrupted youths' education, and sometimes involved youth being moved from Hawaii to the continental U.S. and back during their time in the system.

Bureaucratic Hassles

Another structural factor which seemed to contribute to four youths' continuous experiences with homelessness was a variety of issues stemming from bureaucratic hassles. One youth was anxiously awaiting her housing while cycling through a frustrating round of bureaucratic delays:

I was supposed to move in [3 months prior] but then it just kept getting delayed and delayed... They didn't have the keys. And then they didn't have the lease. And then there was all these things, and now they're just waiting for the proper insurance... It's difficult for me to plan when I don't even know what's going on half the time, and why I'm not able to move into some place or not able to move in, you know, at a certain day.

Youth also encountered barriers to receiving services even within the systems meant to help them. For example, when one youth's other housing options became unstable and they turned to the IHS shelter on-island, they found that it was already full, leaving them on the streets until a bed opened up. Three youth had left programs such as Job Corps and suddenly found themselves with no further opportunities and nowhere to go.

Getting into housing involved several roadblocks, and the process of getting keys, signing leases, and getting insurance sometimes involved waiting for several months before they could begin to move into the new housing they had secured. These delays caused a sense of constant uncertainty about the future which left some participants feeling paralyzed and unable to move forward. While working with people at the county level to seek out housing, participants expressed frustration over a lack of clear communication about what was going to happen to them, and when. During this process, there was a sense, as one participant put it, that “no one knows exactly what’s going on.” The process of applying, waiting for and receiving housing vouchers and other financial resources unfortunately included similar bureaucratic hassles that left youth unsure of what to do next.

Youths’ frequent movements from one place to another also came with its own bureaucratic hassles. For example, accessing one’s own bank account was difficult or impossible without identification with a current address and other contact information. Receiving paychecks or financial aid was extremely difficult without a working bank account. Bureaucratic hassles like difficulties opening a bank account quickly snowballed into a series of other barriers which made the transition out of homelessness much harder. Youth who tried to apply for financial aid encountered several bureaucratic hurdles which were extremely difficult to work through. One participant described their experiences trying to get aid for their disability below:

“I try to see if I can, but I just don’t know how because for the social security, when I applied for the social security disability... Every time I apply, it keeps asking me, do I have a lawyer? Do I have a lawyer? For me, I don’t even know how to get a lawyer if I need one... It’s hard for me because I don’t have any, like, what’s it called, the people that help? Services, like, people that will come help me. I tried calling the social security office, and

they told me I have to like, go online and apply, and they wanted me to have documents that I never had in my life.”

Youth, who had often been disconnected from their parents did not often have access to the documents they needed to get ID, such as birth certificates and social security cards. It was difficult for youth to know where to begin in securing these documents, and several bureaucratic hassles caused difficulties and delays for them when they tried to get them. The nature of experiencing homelessness necessitated frequently moving around, making it even more difficult for youth to hold onto the paperwork and documents they needed. This sometimes meant having to start the process of securing basic documents all over again, resulting in further delays. Without identification cards, moving forward in any area of life, such as beginning a new job, came with more difficulties. The processes youth would have to go through to get needed documents felt hard to understand and overwhelming. Additionally, several participants were not sure what, if any, financial aid was available to them, or where they could find that information.

Suggestions for Structural Change

While discussing their situations, youth also gave several suggestions about systemic improvements that could be made to help other young adults transitioning out of homelessness. These suggestions included communicating often with youth and letting them know what was going on at the county level, and getting things done in a timely manner. Having housing options available to everyone who needed them was a suggestion from nine youth. Seven youth suggested making sure all young people had the resources available to meet their basic needs, such as food, water, and essential supplies such as medication. Other suggestions included making clothing and furniture available for young adults who needed them. Four youth suggested opening more

programs like RYSE, the participating TLP, emphasizing the need to widely implement similar programs for young adults experiencing homelessness.

When responding to questions about their unmet needs, youth emphasized their concern over having a stable way to continually meet all of their basic needs, such as food, water, showers, clothing, a place to wash clothing, furniture, and a safe shelter. Having *stable* and *continuous* access to these basic resources, participants said, was a necessary foundation for them to begin to exit homelessness.

The need for safe housing and long-term housing options was emphasized by nine participants, with youth specifically expressing a need for housing vouchers and available, affordable housing. Others described their need for “support for my life, a solid place to get started.” Two youth said that all of their needs were met, and that they did not need anything else in order to move forward. Youth also felt they had unmet needs when it came to the skills they needed in order to find stability and successfully navigate adulthood. Youth expressed the need to learn how to drive, cook, open a bank account, keep an apartment clean, save money, or balance a budget.

Participants also had several suggestions for potential points of intervention for homeless transition-age youth based on their unmet needs. Common suggestions to intervene and help youth included helping them find and apply for jobs, giving them formal support and guidance in the form of a case manager or social worker, finding them housing and making housing vouchers available to all who need them, teaching them the skills needed for household management (such as cooking, cleaning, budgeting, and driving), making work available that paid above the minimum wage, and making sure the neighborhoods which house youth are safe. Six participants emphasized

the need for safe, stable places which were inclusive of everyone, and the need for more places where young adults without familial support could gain social support. One participant also suggested helping youth get into and navigate school systems in order to get through high school and college.

Three participants suggested putting out more outreach workers to provide initial connections and emergency support to youth on the street for those who wouldn't otherwise know that support was available. For young adults who feel comfortable on the street and intimidated by the prospect of getting on their feet, these initial points of contact could help them see more attractive options than staying street-entrenched. Three participants also argued the need for more buildings and shelter programs to house unattended youth, and making more donated clothes and essential supplies available.

Youth who had past experiences with the foster care system cautioned the need for support for children in foster care, both during and after their time with that system. Suggestions included making food stamps and other forms of aid available to foster youth, providing formal guidance and financial assistance to youth for at least six months after their 18th birthday, and guidance on finding jobs or help navigating the college system. To help youth get through high school, another suggestion included making sure youth have consistent access to phones and computers, both for educational purposes and in order to stay connected with family. Participants noted that it would also be helpful to give each young adult access to some form of transportation, including bikes or bus passes.

The COVID-19 Outbreak

The second biggest contributor to homelessness, affecting five youth, was the COVID-19 Outbreak. The pandemic has been particularly hard on the most vulnerable populations, and homeless youth are no exception. COVID-19 contributed by exacerbating existing structural and family issues that already affected vulnerable youth, resulting in more youth falling through the cracks. Seven youth elaborated on the fact that the outbreak had exacerbated the existing issues they faced to the extent that they lost jobs, had to exit programs, and lost support and housing stability they had previously had access to. The COVID-19 outbreak also contributed to youths' experiences with homelessness by causing youth to lose jobs and access to needed services, stalling their progress towards meeting their goals, and making it difficult to find new jobs. It is important to note that the pandemic itself was not responsible for the phenomenon of youth homelessness, but it contributed by exacerbating existing circumstances around youth to the point that they lost jobs, were forced to exit programs, and ultimately lost housing stability.

The COVID-19 pandemic also caused disruptions in many areas of youths' lives which contributed to their initial and continuous experiences with homelessness. The existence of COVID-19 also made searching for and secure new employment much harder. Some of the programs youth had depended on for work or ways to meet their basic needs, such as the Job Corps, were blindsided by the pandemic and unable to keep up with social distancing protocols, and youth found themselves suddenly dismissed from these programs with nowhere else to go.

The COVID-19 outbreak made additional challenges and interrupted seven youths' progress in meeting their goals. Youth could no longer safely learn how to drive and work towards getting their driver's licenses. They were no longer able to view apartments, and the process of finding housing was slower and more difficult. The outbreak caused four participants

to lose their jobs, and searching for new work was nearly impossible. Because of the need for quarantining and social distancing, one youth had been forced back into an unstable home situation. The strain of being forced home with parents with whom they had problems directly contributed to some youth being kicked out and experiencing homelessness, as this participant explains: “I think because I was home more, me and my family got into more arguments to where we couldn’t handle each other. And I think that’s how I got kicked out.”

Youth with mental health problems also felt the additional strain of needing to stay home all the time and drastically alter their existing routines to fit social distancing measures. Participants' normal ways of coping, such as going to the movies, were unavailable as youth experienced this stress. Socializing was also more difficult, and some participants struggled to stay connected to friends and family.

Many of the programs that served youth experiencing homelessness were forced to shut down. When those programs included housing elements, three youth were forced back onto the street during the onset of the pandemic. Bus schedules suddenly changed, making it more difficult for youth to time their work shifts around the hours-long process of waiting for and travelling on the bus. Young parents found that daycare centers had to suddenly close, and that they could not go to work because they were unable to access normal forms of childcare that they relied on. One participant was interrupted in the middle of moving from one place to another and had to drop their housing plans and job opportunities completely. These changes took place within one to two weeks, and each of the sudden new stressors took an emotional toll on participants. This emotional toll and resulting feelings of uncertainty about the future weighed on participants as they attempted to transition out of homelessness.

Family and Friends

When it came to contributors to their *initial* experiences with homelessness, several common risk factors relating to families or origin emerged. Eight youth had histories of negative experiences with family members. Four youth been kicked out by family, and six had been driven out in part by experiences with abuse or neglect. As a result, they bounced between friends' homes, cars, and eventually places not meant for human habitation, such as beaches and parks, as their options for stable housing diminished.

Two participants brought up childhood experiences with CPS when asked about contributors to their homeless experiences. Deaths of caretakers also contributed to a lack of resources for four youth, leaving them to fend for not only themselves but their younger siblings, disrupting normal milestones such as graduating high school, and leaving them with unresolved feelings from the trauma of losing their caretakers and the stability they provided. Each of these factors they described as contributing to their eventual experiences with homelessness. Six youth felt weighed down by issues connected to their families even as adults, including worries about incarcerated family members during the pandemic, being separated from family in the contiguous U.S., families splitting up after parents' deaths or divorces, and general worries about younger siblings and family members who were also left without the support or resources they needed.

Arguments with parents were a common contributor to youth having left home and experienced homelessness at a young age, affecting five participants. Two youth recalled never getting along with family members or feeling like the 'black sheep' of the family, while one recalled constant arguing and a lack of appreciation or love. Youth who mentioned identifying with a less accepted sexuality felt alienated and left out of their families.

While three youth left home early out of the desire to pursue their own goals and diverge from what family members wanted, four participants had been explicitly kicked out by family members on or before their 18th birthday, beginning their experiences with homelessness. One youth had been stolen from by family members as they were kicked out, robbing them of the only resources they had available while beginning to experience homelessness. These experiences were often traumatic, leaving youth with emotional difficulties and difficulties forming or sustaining supportive relationships with others as a result. Emotional issues after being kicked out also included suicidal thoughts and tendencies, which lead one youth to eventually graduate from the hospital directly back into homelessness. The association between having family issues and experiencing the long-term effects of trauma during the transition rang especially true for youth who had been kicked out by family members. One participant who had a military parent said their parent's military status contributed to the fact that they did not talk to each other much and did not rely on their parents for support. Although they came from a variety of situations, two participants reported they no longer talked to their families of origin or relied on them for support.

For six participants, family was a source of stress during their transitions. One participant said that *family* was too complicated a concept to worry about during the transition out of homelessness. Five youth were also dealing with the effects of past traumatic experiences, including being kicked out of their homes and being abused by loved ones. These experiences also made it more difficult for youth to trust new people and form new relationships that would support their transitions out of homelessness. Youth who did have some support from their families talked about how their families had their own busy lives and could only help them so much.

When participants were asked about what made the people in their support system *family*, there were several themes in common across the interviews. Family, participants decided, is made up of the people who supported youth during the “tough times”, when things got really difficult to manage. Family were those youth had come to rely on for support because they genuinely cared about them. Family were those who watched out for youth, who they watched out for in return, whose loyalty didn’t falter. Youth who had family support in their day-to-day lives said it greatly supported their abilities to go through day-to-day routines and stay on track with their goals.

Participants who were parents felt motivated to transition out of homelessness in order to give their children a better life. Youth who were estranged from their families or origin felt motivated to achieve stability to prove to their families that they could. When asked about where they went for the support they needed during the transition, youth also talked about leaning on their friends, who served as an essential form of support in the absence of supportive families of origin. Friends provided much needed advice, company, and encouragement while youth navigated tough challenges. Friends offered vital emotional support to seven of the youth who had become estranged from their families. However, there were limits to the help that friends could provide. Friends who could allow youth to stay with them during the crisis stage could not continue to offer long-term housing, and youth eventually found themselves back on the streets.

For youth who were transitioning out of homelessness with their children, there were additional barriers and sources of stress. On top of the stressful and complicated process of transitioning out of homelessness, they were constantly concerned about childcare, and often cared for their children on their own without their partners or outside support available. It was often extremely difficult to find affordable childcare while they tried to get back on their feet.

Single parents endured the constant pressure stemming from the knowledge that they were the only source of stability and emotional and financial support their children had.

Romantic partners also held a variety of both barriers and facilitators for youth. One youth had been separated from their incarcerated partner, leaving her without any social support to fend for herself. Constantly worrying about her incarcerated partner made it more difficult to move forward and transition successfully out of homelessness. Another youth was going through the challenges of separating from an abusive spouse, which was a significant source of stress. The participant worried about how they would manage the financial cost and emotional strain of getting divorced and escaping abuse while trying to re-start their lives and find stable housing. With an uncooperative spouse, it became more difficult to navigate bureaucracy and secure financial aid and other needed resources.

Individual Factors

Ambitions for the Future

Participants drew a great amount of hope from their ambitions for the future. Youth were excited by the prospect of moving into their own apartments or group homes, and to look for suitable housing options when those plans had not yet materialized. Young parents were excited to begin the “next step” with their children. They looked forward to securing jobs, having consistent work, and building up stable lives. Two participants excitedly discussed learning how to clean and maintain a household. Three looked forward to taking on the challenges of college education. Two participants were hopeful that their relationships with family and friends would improve. Once housed, youth were excited to accomplish other milestones, like getting a driver’s license and their own cars. One youth wanted to start their own businesses, while others looked

forward to having a safe place to complete creative pursuits, such as one participant who was writing a novel. Another participant, when asked about his hopes for the future, said they hoped that “I can benefit my education and learn more things that hopefully will be useful in life, and to my community.” Another simply said “I just really want to be a happy person.” Overall, participants largely felt that their futures began with securing stable housing, which would become a base on which they could make positive changes in other areas of their lives.

Health

For disabled youth, health issues were especially prevalent. Youth with health problems were in and out of the hospital during their experiences with homelessness, meaning they experienced regular disruptions to any progress they made on moving into stable housing. Homelessness came with irregular access to needed medications for youth with disabilities, and the lack of consistent routines and frequent movement made necessary by homelessness caused youth to frequently forget to take medication. Youth on the streets had no guarantee of support while they were unstable or weak due to illness or chronic health problems. In this way, youths’ lack of housing stability and health issues fed into each other.

Eight participants struggled with a host of problems related to mental health, including depression, anxiety, anger issues, post-traumatic stress, and suicidal ideation. Youth felt overwhelmed by the stress of their situations, and unsure how to deal with the mental health issues that they experienced as a result. One participant explained, “With my depression going on, like, it’s hard trying to put things together.”

Transition to Adulthood

Some youth graduated from high school into a period of uncertainty with no immediate direction and no available resources, as this participant describes:

My main worry when I was getting out of high school was ‘ok, now I’m done; where am I going to live?’ or ‘How am I going to do this when I have no place, no money, no food, no nothing?’ And my family had just kicked me out. You know, a lot of young adults in Hawaii are stressing out in the same ways... They don’t know what to do. They don’t even know how to make money by doing jobs.

In five participants’ discussions of their transitions to adulthood, they described a sense of having “figured it out on my own.” One participant explained:

“I have to do everything on my own. Like how they say, ‘you can talk the talk, you can walk the walk? That’s what I did... I did everything and anything on my own. I got my own stuff, I got my own money, I work for my own stuff. And I didn’t need my family for help... I have to struggle to do things on my own.”

Participants emphasized how they responded to a perceived lack of social support by working hard to support themselves. Two participants expressed the desire to prove to their families that they were capable of doing everything on their own, even if that involved housing instability, constant uncertainty, and near constant work. Another participant elaborated on their transition to adulthood, marked by a sense of independence:

“I ended up pushing myself to work. You know, nobody’s not going to help me; nobody’s not going to make money for me; nobody’s going to help me pay for my phone, so I push

the motivation of like, my money; I work hard, I push my brain to do better... I only got myself in the end.”

The Process of Leaving Homelessness

Youth used a variety of strategies to help themselves move towards independence. They looked online on their own for housing options, put in numerous applications for jobs and housing, and called to attempt to get viewings of apartments. They learned how to create resumes and compared their options to try to find affordable housing on the island. They filled out paperwork for housing vouchers, applied to colleges, studied for exams to further their education, worked towards GED's, worked long shifts, and tried to save money to begin their lives. Youth coped with the stress of the transition by listening to music, playing video games, playing pool, watching TV, cooking, taking walks, talking to counselors, asking for help from staff, talking to partners and friends, or writing about their experiences.

Youth who were employed sometimes described working back-to-back shifts and long hours before walking back to the shelter. They often worked at minimum-wage jobs, and hoped that as they achieved independence, they could get work that paid more. In the meantime, participants stressed about finding a safe way to get to and from work, and parents worried about getting childcare while they were working.

Participants also discussed the process of exiting homelessness as involving changes in mindset. These changes included feeling more responsibility for one's self and ownership over one's transition into adulthood, refocusing on one's individual goals, relying on and enhancing one's existing capabilities, and moving away from behavioral aspects of living on the streets that weren't conducive to their individual goals. One participant described their new mindset: “My

new mindset is to push myself to do better and to just make sure my future is bright, and stable, and going in the right direction.”

Participants’ relationships with time and money also changed during their transition, as another participant describes:

“It’s a good learning experience for me, because for me, when I was younger, at the time, I didn’t think that I would get my own place and live on my own, like, ‘what am I going to do next week?’ I didn’t think I was going to do that. Because when I was younger, I used to spend money, and I never saved. Now, I’m getting the hang of it, like in order to get things that I need in the future, I’m starting saving.”

This change in mindset seemed to begin with the decision that it would be better to separate oneself from the street, as another participant explained when asked about homelessness: “At the end of the day, it’s just the mindset of thinking through whether changing would benefit them better, or whether it would be better for them to stay in that position.” This change in mindset was in part facilitated by the trusting relationships youth were able to form with staff and other adults while in the RYSE program. One participant describes this support:

“Well, at the beginning of RYSE, it was just my mindset. Like, ‘nobody will understand how I am just towards life,’ and then me opening up, and them showing me family, and showing me that there can be people who believe in you when no one else believes in you, in a way.”

The Impact of RYSE

Youths' discussions about their pasts shared themes of instability, uncertainty and impermanence. Their past experiences sometimes also contributed to trepidation about engaging with programs aimed at them, as compliance with these programs represented *another* set of life changes with new stressors. After a lifetime of moving around and continuously encountering new and difficult circumstances, one youth described her anxiety about engaging with shelter services: "I think I just got scared that this time, it wasn't going to work. Because I'm so used to it not working. I'm so used to everything not being stable, and always a question."

Being at a shelter specifically for transition-aged youth unfortunately carried its own barriers for some participants. Three youth were stressed out by the existence of arguments between other youth or between youth and staff. One participant recalled: "Whenever there's an argument, that's probably the biggest thing that makes things harder." Two youth were also anxious over the fact that the program did not have a sober requirement and said that they were stressed out over other youth coming into the shelter intoxicated. Arguments between youth sometimes had extremely detrimental effects on youths' sense of wellbeing within the shelter. One participant elaborated on these experiences:

It puts more pressure on me when I like, I see somebody and they're either fighting, or they're just not listening and just disrespecting other people, disrespecting the staff, like... That's what traumatizes me. Like, I couldn't sleep at all... I don't feel safe here with that kind of stuff.

Bearing in mind that the program contained barriers for some youth, participation in the RYSE transitional living program carried a variety of supports and facilitators of young adults'

successes during the transition out of homelessness. Participants had been connected to RYSE by old case managers from other programs, friends, outreach workers, or hospital staff. None of the participants had trouble getting into the program once they expressed interest. Once at the shelter, case managers, program coordinators, and therapists offered needed support for youths' mental health issues or simply offered the comfort of always having someone to talk to. Having older adults there in supporting roles also gave youth the opportunity for mentorship and explicit guidance on how to work towards meeting their goals and transitioning out of homelessness. Shelter staff helped participants to find and secure appropriate housing, navigate bureaucracy, fill out paperwork, secure needed documents, and apply for food stamps and other benefits. With individualized help from counselors, coordinators and case managers, youth felt that many of the barriers to exiting homelessness that they had previously faced had been removed, and as one participant put it, "I have the help and support I need" to begin transitioning into stability.

When discussing the supportive aspects of the shelter, eight participants discussed the importance of having a safe environment in which their basic needs could be met. Youth also placed importance on the ability to learn life skills needed to achieve independence. Case managers and shelter staff helped young adults look for jobs, write resumes, and fill out job applications. Having the resources available to learn vital tasks helped youth feel that they had genuine opportunities to turn their lives around.

Participants' descriptions suggested staff also focused on strategies that would empower youth, as participants largely viewed the process of receiving services there as youth meeting staff halfway. Participants appreciated the fact that program participation was driven by youths' own personal goals, and they played a central and active role in all of the progress they made and services they received. Participants valued having the opportunities to be taught the skills

necessary to transition to independence and having an active say in what their transitions out of homelessness looked like. One youth described the program as “about the individual, independent person.”

Another supportive aspect of this as opposed to similar programs for older adults was that it included both indoor and outdoor components, allowing youth to have a variety of opportunities to pursue and skills to learn. These included working outdoors, planting and maintaining an extensive garden, and activities such as group hikes. The TLP’s balance between having some structure and expectations of youth and leaving them the freedom to determine their own goals made it easier for young adults to get into productive routines with work or school. Participants also appreciated the acknowledgement throughout the program that they were young *adults*, not to be infantilized or talked over. They saw themselves not as clients being *helped* or *served* by staff, but as collaborators working *with* staff to achieve their goals of leaving homelessness.

Other helpful aspects of the shelter included the simple knowledge that youth had a safe place to go and relax, with people who would listen and genuinely empathize with them. One participant described staff as people who had similar life experiences and been through what youth themselves were going through while they transitioned out of homelessness. This notion contributed to the feeling of non-judgement in the shelter’s atmosphere and made participants feel more comfortable seeing staff as a trustworthy source of social support, as one youth explained below.

...Most of the staff understand exactly what we’re going through, because they’ve been through it themselves. That is helpful beyond any words I could give to it. Like, it sucks to

work with people when they're only doing their job... It's better to work with someone who's actually passionate about their job and understands their job and knows exactly who they're helping because they've been through it also.

This helped youth to feel empowered to follow through with their transitions off the street. Having trusting relationships with staff also contributed to a sense of community for youth within the program, as the participant went on to explain:

Here, there's more of a connection... It's more like a community. We all help each other out. If somebody's hungry and they don't have anything to eat, we all share. Like, don't know how to cook? We'll share. Don't know how to do laundry? I'll teach you. Everything is... We just help each other out.

Five of the participants described the atmosphere at RYSE as like a family. One youth explains in more detail how the support they found at RYSE helps in the absence of familial support:

It's that all the workers over here - they help us. They hear us. They listen to us. They're here when we need someone to talk to. And that's what us adults that never had family or never felt like, loved. We have it here. They're here to understand us. They're here to even listen to us. They're here when we need motivation to like, talk to us, or just, you know, somebody to be loved from.

It was also vital that the shelter had the resources to meet their individual basic needs. Young parents who came to the shelter were relieved to finally have some option where their children would be safe and cared for. Youth with health problems and disabilities were relieved

to find they could have regular access to needed medication and social support such as reminders to take medication which helped them adhere to treatment routines. Youth with mental health issues felt comforted knowing that if they began to display problems, such as being withdrawn from others or losing motivation, staff would come check on them and provide support. One participant described the importance of having their basic needs met in relation to their mental health: “I know that like, each and every one of us in this place, we want to give up. But at the same time, it’s like we’re also thinking, ‘we have a roof over our head. We have what we need here.’”

The atmosphere of the shelter made it possible to think of it as *home*, beginning with youth getting their own beds, and progressing with the opportunity to get their own rooms as they prepared to transition to independent housing. Having one’s own space was an important component of feeling like the shelter was home, as was the existence of social support and the knowledge that they were surrounded by people their age in similar situations. One participant described their experience:

I was kind of very happy that I really like being in a youth shelter. It makes me happy because when I get to visit, I get to know people, and like, this is my home right here! I feel so much love and care!... There is always joy here, at the RYSE shelter.

For youth who had come from crisis situations, the most comforting aspect of the program was “being able to hang out and not worry too much about what’s going to happen next.”

It also seemed important that the shelter staff met youth where they were in a non-judgmental way. One participant described this approach as “No matter what the situation you’re

at, they'll do everything in their power to come help you out." Outreach workers served as more than an initial point of contact, but slowly created and sustained positive, supportive relationships with street-entrenched youth, which resulted in a climate in which youth felt comfortable enough to reach out for help when they needed it *even while on the street*. This relationship was continued by other staff at RYSE when youth became more comfortable returning to the shelter, as staff made it clear that youth could return to the shelter whenever they needed to. One youth describes her experiences with the outreach and shelter staff:

...All the staff was always awesome, always helpful, always there if I need to talk, or anything like that. Even when I wasn't here, after I graduated the first time, any time I needed to get food, and I didn't have the money to buy anything, or I needed to go somewhere in the middle of the night, and I had nobody to come and get me, they came and got me. They were always helpful.

As previously discussed, youth face a myriad of barriers as they attempt to move into stable housing, and these factors take a serious psychological toll. However, the supports offered in shelters and programs specific to youth, like RYSE, offer an environment with sufficient support that youth can gain the hope and motivation they need to move forward.

Discussion

My goal in this study was to generate data that improves our understanding of the factors which contribute to youth homelessness in Hawaii, the unmet needs of youth transitioning out of homelessness, and the factors act as barriers or facilitators for youth attempting to transition off the streets and into stable housing. This is a worthwhile endeavor, as not addressing these issues

may affect the ability of youth to connect with and utilize transitional living programs and other services necessary to transition out of homelessness.

Five youth said that arguments with family members contributed to their experiences with homelessness. Further, five said that arguments with family members contributed to their experiences with homelessness, and two participants brought up experiences with Child Protective Services (CPS) when discussing their paths to homelessness. This suggests the need for intervention for youth who have recently experienced trauma, such as when a loved one dies. When children have experiences with CPS, this may be an ideal point to further assess children for signs of trauma, and to intervene so that youth have sufficient support so as not to disrupt important aspects of their lives, such as educational milestones or housing stability. Eight of the transition-age youth in this study were experiencing homelessness because they did not have sufficient support during times of crisis, suggesting a need for easily accessible crisis services tailored for this population through case management, or perhaps through peer support. The need for social support for homeless TAY is evident. Youth wanted badly to be engaged with their communities, and simply needed access to the resources that would allow them to do so.

Four of the youth in this sample had parents in the military, and some youth connected their parents' military engagements with their lack of communication or support. This suggests that intervention, such as mentorship or other forms of social support, would be helpful for children and young adults coming from military families in order to give them the support that may be lacking. Future research with this population within Hawaii could investigate how military children's experiences may differ. Less is known about the implications of having a family member in the military, which could be related to differences in places of origin, socio-economic status and experiences with social support. These will be important avenues for future

studies to explore. Only five of the participants had completed High School, and three had dropped out during 12th grade, suggesting that schools, particularly high schools, are an important point of potential intervention when it comes to preventing homelessness in teenagers and transition-age youth.

To examine another sub-population, four of the youth in this study identified as part-Native Hawaiian, which corresponds with RYSE's first-year evaluation suggesting that Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders (NHPI) are over-represented in the population being served as RYSE (Webb et al., 2020). This data clearly suggests the need for more affordable housing, and for more easily accessible housing interventions to be made specifically available for NHPI individuals. Regarding future research in this area, further studies could investigate the role of the extended family for Native Hawaiian youth, and the factors that contribute to some youth experiencing homelessness rather than leaning on extended family members.

Five youth said that they became homeless in part due to either loss of money, lack of funds, or an inability to pay rent or mortgage payments. This suggests the need for a more robust social safety net to prevent those already in poverty from falling through the cracks and experiencing homelessness. Further, all ten participants said that they would be helped by short-term help with rent, and nine said that long-term help with rent would be helpful after they had achieved stability.

Eight of participants indicated that both money management and ongoing case management would be helpful for them as they transitioned out of homelessness. This finding indicates that youth experiencing homelessness would greatly benefit from intervention and support that would help them navigate the many bureaucratic hassles they encountered while trying to leave homelessness. Resources such as life skills classes could fill in the unmet needs

for opportunities to learn important life skills, such as maintaining a household and managing money. Youth in the RYSE Program seemed to benefit the most from help securing identification and other needed documents, the availability of transportation, the food pantry, medical services, case management, employment help, and transitional housing. This indicates the importance of having services available which can meet youths' immediate and basic needs and help youth to empower themselves and learn the skills necessary to be independent.

Within the RYSE transitional living program, youth also had suggestions for improvements that could be made to services aimed at TAY. These suggestions are important to examine considering the lack of previous data on the effects of TLP's. Five participants emphasized how helpful outreach workers had been to them both before and during their transitions out of homelessness, and two explicitly suggested adding even more outreach workers, considering their importance in convincing youth that there were safer, more attractive options than staying on the street. Other suggestions from youth included a sobriety requirement to enter the shelter, more accountability for youth who started arguments, more strict enforcement of rules, making caveats to curfews in order to help youth who worked late, However, it should be noted that shelters and transitional-living programs meant for transition-age youth are always dealing with the challenges of maintaining a balance between creating a safe environment for all youth and offering accessible, low-barrier services in order to effectively reach the most vulnerable youth.

Some youth said that all of their needs were met, and that they did not need anything else in order to move forward. This highlights an inherent weakness in this study, as taking a sample only from youth participating in the transitional living program only allows for an investigation of *their* unmet needs and neglects those who have not entered or had access to this program. One

goal of future studies could be to investigate in more detail the unmet needs of *all* youth experiencing homelessness in Hawai'i, as such an investigation would be more illuminating of youths' unmet needs *during* their experiences with homelessness, particularly for youth who were not engaged with services like those at the participating TLP.

Limitations

There are several other limitations to this study which need to be considered. Although experiences related to sub-populations are mentioned peripherally, For example, one participant discussed feeling ostracized by family members due to their sexuality, but more studies are needed with larger, more representative samples and more in-depth explanations of the specific experiences of sub-populations, such as LGBTQ+ youth experiencing homelessness.

One notable weakness of this study is that the participants are all being recruited from one particular Transitional Living Program near Kailua, HI. This makes it impossible to ensure a representative sample beforehand, limiting the potential of these findings to an extent as generalizable knowledge. While the primary goal of qualitative research may not always be to ensure representative findings, the understudied population of participants is also one of this study's strengths: it will highlight the views of youth on experiences with homelessness, especially youth whose perspectives are missing from the existing research.

This study also included only ten interviews. This small number of interviews limited my ability to ensure that I reached saturation. While I utilized the approach proposed by Guest et al. (2020) to determine when I had reached saturation, the new information threshold was subjective and does not guarantee that saturation has indeed been reached. While the final four runs of newer interviews produced zero percent new information, further studies with larger sample sizes are still needed to confirm that important themes were not missed during the process of data

collection. Further, with only one person conducting coding and analyses, there were no reliability checks conducted during this study. However, I caution that future studies in this area would benefit from reliability checks and the input of multiple researchers during analyses. Additionally, while a variety of issues came up in these interviews, having only one or two interviews detailing the experiences of TAY sub-populations (such as young parents, or youth with disabilities) does not provide a sufficient in-depth explanation about the experiences of youth in those sub-populations. Future studies would benefit from larger sample sizes, which would further enhance our understanding of TAY experiencing homelessness and help to confirm if the themes that came up in these interviews generalize to the wider population of TAY experiencing homelessness. Additionally, further studies could include samples comprised entirely of the various sub-populations whose experiences came up during this study. For example, future studies could explore the experiences of disabled TAY experiencing homelessness, TAY from military families, or TAY with disabilities experiencing homelessness.

It is also important to consider the ways in which the youth who voluntarily participated in this study, and the youth who attend RYSE, may be systematically different from other youth experiencing homelessness. For example, preliminary program evaluation efforts have revealed that LGBTQ+ youth are underrepresented in the RYSE system when compared to youth experiencing homelessness across the country (Webb et al., 2020). In the specific context of Hawaii, this may be because there are other avenues which LGBTQ+ youth can pursue when trying to meet their basic needs and find housing options. For example, the island of Oahu, where RYSE is located, has several other housing programs aimed specifically at LGBTQ+ youth in need. There are more private safe houses in Hawaii that are specifically meant to aid

transgender and LGBTQ+ youth. There also exists a homeless subculture of male gay youth and survival sex.

It is important to note that this study is being conducted in a different context than that of the original interview. The protocol was designed for transition-age youth in Toronto, ON and Halifax, N.S. (Karabanow et al., 2016). While information has been provided about the specific context of youth homelessness in Hawai'i, future research would benefit from more culturally tailored interview protocols with direct input from Hawaii's homeless youth to adequately account for this cultural context. During future studies, it will be important to consider potential cultural adaptations, knowing that some of the questions in the interview protocol used in this study may not be the best fit for this context.

The COVID-19 Outbreak occurred during the beginning of data collection, resulting in methodological changes made necessary to promote the health and safety of both youth and staff at the study site. Originally, I planned the study planned around a focus group method, and the questions from the original protocol were modified in order to accommodate individual interviews conducted over the phone (See Appendix B). This did not allow for the foresight one would normally have when designing interview questions, which may have been designed differently if the originally proposed study was centered around individual remote interviews. Future research could still benefit from utilizing the focus group method in order to generate more data about youths' experiences.

Recommendations for Policy and Practice

Several potential points for intervention to prevent youth homelessness emerged from the data. Participants' experiences highlighted the need for low-barrier mental health services aimed at TAY, as well as financial and formal social support. Intervention was seemingly needed in

order to ameliorate the problems that stemmed from COVID-19 which exacerbated existing difficulties and contributed to youths' further experiences with homelessness. This might include providing low-cost housing and accessible jobs and building on existing programs serving TAY to increase their existing capacities. The challenges posed by the COVID-19 outbreak, and its apparent effects on the homeless youth population, make clear the need for intervention to help young adults and their families, particularly those who are homeless or at-risk of becoming homeless, to weather the physical, mental, and financial effects of the pandemic. Specifically, a robust system of services is needed to continue to meet all of youths' basic needs and teach them the skills necessary to make successful transitions out of homelessness. Support will also be needed to help youth coping with difficult or dangerous home situations in order to keep them safe and prevent more instances of youth homelessness.

In RYSE's first year of operation, 48% of the incoming clients identified as Native Hawaiian (Webb et al., 2020). This highlights the need for affordable housing and housing interventions aimed at NHPI youth. Some potential opportunities for intervention seem to lie in early high school, hospitals, and CPS. Formal support could include mentorship and life skills classes, along with guidance to help youth navigate bureaucratic hassles. The number of youth who had become homeless in part due to loss of funds or the inability to pay rents or mortgages suggests that a more robust social safety net is needed in order to prevent further youth homelessness. Youth also advocated for a change in priorities at the policy level in order to allocate more resources for those in poverty who may be vulnerable to experiencing homelessness.

Within contributing factors, nine participants said that arguments with family or friends contributed directly to them becoming homeless. This matched well with the existing literature,

which suggests that problems with family members are often a precursor to youth leaving home early and subsequently experiencing homelessness. The prevalence of these issues within this sample supports the idea that intervening while youth are still under 18 years old and living with their parents may reduce instances of youth experiencing homelessness and contribute to more positive outcomes overall. Eight youth discussed dealing with the effects of negative experiences with family members during childhood, while four participants described dealing with traumatic experiences of being kicked out of their homes. For these youth, there seems to be a need for low-barrier mental health services that could help them cope with the effects of these traumatic experiences. Some LGBTQ+ youth stated that they felt ostracized from their families specifically because of their sexualities, highlighting the need for LGBTQ+ services that can reach at-risk teenagers and transition-age youth.

Other sub-populations that would benefit from increased social support included children from military families, young parents, disabled and chronically ill youth, those experiencing domestic violence, and youth in the juvenile justice system. Disabled youth needed to have access to services to get the medication and financial help they needed to stay healthy and stably housed. Homeless youth displaying health problems should get similar aid in order to help them maintain stability. When youth visited the hospital, this could be an ideal potential time for intervention to help prevent further experiences with homelessness.

Participants' unique and varied experiences also highlighted the need for structural interventions to help homeless and at-risk youth. For example, their comments suggest that more resources need to be given to children in foster care, such as food stamps and consistent access to laptops and phones, so that their experiences with the foster care system do not cause further disruptions to their lives, delay important milestones, cut them off from needed support, and

contribute to a heightened risk of experiencing homelessness. Youth within the foster care system would also benefit from more resources geared towards caring for their mental health and addressing past traumas. It also became clear that resources were needed to help foster children who aged out of the system at age 18, including explicit guidance navigating college, financial resources to help them transition into independence, and help finding housing.

Based on participants' accounts of their experiences, youth involved with the juvenile justice system would benefit from similar supports. Young parents expressed a strong need for consistent, affordable childcare. Youth with abusive partners needed support both financially and emotionally in order to achieve independence. In this vein, more safe housing needs to be available particularly to young women experiencing homelessness so that they do not need to rely on abusive partners or survival sex to meet their basic daily needs.

Although the program did have some barriers for some participants, there were also several positive and supportive aspects of the shelter which seemed to facilitate youths' successful transitions out of homelessness. It is important to take note of this program because of its novelty within Hawaii, and because these supports can be generalized for similar programs to follow. Having older adults with similar life experiences to youth offered opportunities to form trusting relationships with supportive mentors. The variety of activities, including both indoor and outdoor components, and the fact that youth were surrounded by others in their age group, contributed to a sense of community and mutual support in the program. Staff took a non-judgmental approach to helping youth and focused on offering the kind of social support that promoted empowerment. As a result, youths' journeys through the transitional-living program felt *collaborative* with staff and youths' independent goals drove their participation in the program. They were taught skills that would help them to make the transition out of

homelessness and given their own spaces in preparation for the move to independent housing. Each of these factors can be emulated by transitional living programs and other programs aimed at vulnerable TAY.

Conclusion

The data from this study enhances our understanding of youth experiencing homelessness in Hawaii, the process of exiting homelessness, and potential points for both prevention and intervention to address the issue of youth homelessness. This study builds upon our understanding of how to promote health and stability for youth experiencing homelessness as well as youth at risk, and can contribute to the creation of future interventions and practices that will improve health outcomes for youth experiencing homelessness and ease their transitions off the street.

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Consent to Participate in an Interview for a Research Project

John P. Barile, Principal Investigator

Transition-Age Youth: Finding Unmet Needs, Barriers and Facilitators of the Transition to Stability

I am a research assistant at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa in the Department of Psychology. The purpose of my project is to investigate what it is like for young adults to move into stable housing. I am asking you to participate because you were involved in receiving services through RYSE.

What am I being asked to do?

If you participate in this project, interviews will be conducted over the phone or through video conferencing and recorded for the purpose of transcribing the conversation. All recordings will be destroyed after they are transcribed.

Taking part in this study is your choice.

Your participation in this interview is completely voluntary. You may stop participating at any time. If you would like to stop, there will be no penalty or loss to you. Choosing to participate in this interview or not will have no impact on your RYSE services.

Why is this study being done?

The purpose of this project is to uncover what needs young adults have, what helps and what makes it more difficult for youth to move into stable housing.

What will happen if I decide to take part in this study?

The interview will consist of 17 open-ended questions. It will take up to 1 hour. The interview questions will include questions like, “Is there anything about your current situation that could be better?” and “What do you need right now to move forward?”

Only you and the interviewer will be present during the phone or video interview. With your permission, the interviewer will audio-record the interview so that the interview can be later transcribed. Up to 20 people may be interviewed for this study.

What are the risks and benefits of taking part in this study?

We believe there is little risk to you for participating in this research project. You may become stressed or uncomfortable answering any of the interview questions or discussing topics with the interviewer during the interview. If you do become stressed or uncomfortable, you can skip the question or take a break. You can also stop the interview or you can withdraw from the project altogether.

There will be no direct benefit to you for participating in this interview. The results of this project may be delivered to RYSE funders and/or policy makers proposing further investment in RYSE, which would be an indirect benefit to you.

Privacy and Confidentiality:

All study data will be kept secure in a locked filing cabinet in a locked office/encrypted on a password-protected computer. Only Dr. Barile, myself, and other authorized research assistants will have access to the information. Other agencies that have legal permission have the right to review research records.

After writing a copy of the interviews, the audio-recordings will be erased or destroyed. When the results of the research project are reported, your name will not be used nor will any other personal identifying information that can identify you. If necessary, pseudonyms (fake names) will be used to report findings in a way that protects your privacy and confidentiality to the extent allowed by law.

Compensation:

You will not receive compensation from the researcher for your participation in this project.

Questions:

If you have any questions about this study, please call or email John (Jack) P. Barile at [808.956.6271 & barile@hawaii.edu]. You may also contact Cassidy Webb, the student investigator, at [cbwebb@hawaii.edu].

You may contact the UH Human Studies Program at 808.956.5007 or uhirb@hawaii.edu to discuss problems, concerns and questions; obtain information; or offer input with an informed individual who is unaffiliated with the specific research protocol. Please visit <http://go.hawaii.edu/jRd> for more information on your rights as a research participant.

Oral Consent:

This interview will be recorded but your identity will not be disclosed.

Do you agree to participate in the research project entitled,

“Transition-Age Youth Experiencing Homelessness: Finding Unmet Needs, Barriers and Facilitators of the Transition to Stability”?

[If YES, proceed with the interview; if NO, thank them for their time and end the meeting]

Revised Interview Protocol

Introduction:

REVISED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Today we're going to talk about what it is like to try to find a safe, stable place to live right now. I know everyone's idea of a "safe and stable place to live" probably looks very different. For the purposes of our conversation today, when we say a "safe and stable place to live," we mean somewhere that is comfortable, free from harm, and where you could consistently live for a month or longer. Some people are currently trying to find this kind of place. Others may have a safe and stable place, and others are struggling to find it. I want to hear from you about your experiences trying to find this place.

Introductory Questions:

1. How long have you been working with people at RYSE?
2. *Factors contributing to homelessness* - What led you to come to RYSE?

General Questions:

3. *Barriers and Facilitators: Daily routines* - What makes it easier to do what you need to get done each day?
4. *Barriers*: What makes it more difficult?
4. *Barriers* - What has been stressing you out while you are finding a more stable place?
5. *Barriers and Facilitators* - When you are looking for a safe and stable place to live, where did you turn for support?
 - a. Who do you turn to?
 - b. How have you tried to find a safe and stable place to live?
 - c. What helped you?
 - d. What made it harder?
6. *Barriers and Facilitators (social support)* - How have the people you consider family impacted your ability to find a safe and stable place to live? For our purpose today, family can include biological family, or friends or other loved ones that you're closest to.
 - a. How have they helped your situation?
 - b. How have they hurt your situation?
 - C. What makes them your family?

Transition: Next, I'd like to learn more about the kinds of services or supports you received while looking for a safe and stable place to live.

7. *Barriers to Receiving Services* - Think back to when you were looking for a safe and stable place to live. Imagine you saw an organization that said they offer "homeless youth services." Would you think those services would be intended for you?
 - a. What comes to mind when you hear "homeless?"
 - b. How do you identify with that term?
 - c. Can you talk more about why that is?
8. *Facilitators of Receiving Services* - What other terms could an agency use to make it clear that they offer support for young people who do not have a safe and stable place to live?
9. *Unmet needs* - Next, I'd like you to think back on your experiences of trying to find a safe and stable place to live. Imagine you could decide how the county supports other young people looking for safe and stable places to live. What kinds of things would you want the county to do?

a. Think back to the strategies you used to find housing. How could the county have supported or strengthened the places where you turned?

b. How can the county support the things that are already working well?

10. Has the COVID-19 crisis affected you and your transition to stable housing? If so, how?

11. *Facilitators* - What is something that you do that helps you when you're having a hard time?

Closing Reflection Questions

12. *Unmet needs* - Is there anything about your current situation that could be better?

13. *Unmet needs* - What do you need right now to move forward?

14. *Identifying Barriers and Facilitators* - How do you see things evolving for you in the future?

- a. With your jobs/work?
- b. With school?
- c. Your relationships with family and friends?
- d. With your housing situation?

15. *Unmet needs* - These are all of the questions I have for you today. Are there any closing thoughts or comments about our discussion, or anything else you think we should know?

Debrief Worksheet for Interviewer

Youth Exiting Homelessness

Interview Summary

1. What key themes or ideas emerged during the interview?
2. What new ideas or concepts emerged during the interview?
3. Do any of the questions need to be changed? If so, how should they be changed?

Pre-Interview Survey

Administered via Qualtrics

Start of Block

Q1 First, I'd like to ask about the kind of housing you would like to work towards, and the services you've used. If you could choose, where would you like to live?

- Outside (including the street, car, camper/RV, or park) (1)
- Emergency Shelter (2)
- Temporary or Transitional Shelter (3)
- Supervised Group Home (4)
- Shared Apartment or Home (5)
- Single Occupancy Apartment (6)
- Other location (7) _____

Q2 For the next set of services, please tell me whether or not each service will be helpful to you as you are finding a stable place to live.

- Short-Term Help with Rent (Rapid Rehousing) (1)
- Long-Term Help with Rent (Permanent Housing Voucher) (2)
- Help Finding and Securing Housing (3)
- Money Management (4)
- Case Management (On-going) (5)
- Legal Help (6)
- None of these (7)

Q3 As I go through this next list of services, please let me know each service that you HAVE USED in the last month.

- Soup kitchen or Food pantry (1)
 - Clothes closet (2)
 - ID assistance (3)
 - Job readiness, job search, or employment assistance (4)
 - Transportation or Rides (5)
 - Day center with phones, mail or restrooms (6)
 - Case Management (7)
 - Legal Services (8)
 - Disability services, including SSI and SSDI (9)
 - Medical services (10)
 - Mental health services (11)
 - Permanent Housing (12)
 - Transitional Housing (13)
 - Emergency shelter or Temporary Housing (14)
 - Substance abuse treatment (15)
-

Q4 Which of the following services do you feel like you still NEED?

- Soup kitchen or food pantry (1)
- Clothes Closet (2)
- ID Assistance (3)
- Job readiness, job search, or employment assistance (4)
- Transportation assistance (5)
- Day center with phones, mail, or restrooms (6)
- Case management (7)
- Legal services (8)
- Disability services, including SSI and SSDI (9)
- Medical services (10)
- Mental health services (11)
- Permanent housing (12)
- Transitional Housing (13)
- Emergency shelter or Temporary Housing (14)
- Substance abuse treatment (15)

Q5 Are there any other services you need?

Q6 Are there any other services you've used that have been helpful?

Q7

The next few questions will ask about some background information about you.

Are you a veteran?

Yes (1)

No (2)

Q8 What is your age, in years?

▼ 18 (1) ... 24 (7)

Q9 What is your gender?

Male (1)

Female (2)

Transgender Male (3)

Transgender Female (4)

Gender Non-conforming (5)

Self-Identify (6) _____

Q10 What is the highest grade or year of school you completed?

▼ 8th grade or less (1) ... Completed college (6)

Q11 Do you have any kids?

Yes (1)

No (2)

Q12 What is your ethnic background? Please mark all that apply.

- African-American (1)
- Chinese (2)
- Japanese (3)
- Asian Indian (4)
- Unknown (5)
- Alaskan Native (6)
- Filipino (7)
- Korean (8)
- Puerto Rican (9)
- American Indian (10)
- Hawaiian (11)
- Middle Eastern (12)
- Pacific Islander, other (13) _____
- Self-Identified (14) _____

Q13 Did one or more of your parents serve in the military?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q14 Lastly, I have a list of situations that can cause people to become unstably housed. Please let me know whether any of these situations have contributed to you experiencing homelessness.

- Alcohol or drug use (1)
- Left a substance abuse treatment program and had nowhere to go (2)
- Lost job (3)
- Unable to pay rent or mortgage (4)
- Loss of money or lack of funds (5)
- SSI or SSD cut off or benefits cancelled (6)
- Argument with family or friends (7)
- Death in the family or loved one (8)
- Illness or medical problem (9)
- Mental illness (10)
- Released from a hospital with nowhere to go (11)
- Disabled (12)
- Evicted from a foreclosed rental property (13)
- Loss of housing due to non-economic reasons (house fire, lease violation, etc.) (14)
- Relocation or transition from another state (15)
- Released from jail or prison and had nowhere to go (16)
- Other reasons: (17) _____
- Problems Resulting from the COVID-19 Outbreak (18)

End of Block

Appendix B

Description of Changes Made to Method

Originally, I planned to investigate my research questions by conducting focus group interviews and administering surveys with items about youths' health and well-being during the transition. Unfortunately, as data collection was about to begin, the world began to experience the far-reaching effects of the COVID-19 crisis, including the rapidly increasing need for social distancing and other precautions related to protecting the United States' more vulnerable populations. These social distancing protocols called for no in-person gatherings, meaning that focus group interviews (as they were planned, with up to ten youth in a group) were no longer a viable method. Considering these circumstances, the proposal was modified in order to accommodate remote individual interviews over the phone, which were audio-recorded and transcribed before recordings were destroyed. The survey was also edited, as the new method also called for a smaller sample size, meaning some of the originally planned items related to health would have produced less meaningful results. Rather than leading focus group discussions, I administered the survey items that were still applicable during the interview and recorded participants' answers using Qualtrics. I then modified the interview protocol to remove any writing activities and items that were no longer applicable. Finally, an item was added in order to assess how the wider context of the COVID-19 crisis had affected youths' journeys to stable housing. The new interview protocol includes 15 questions in addition to the revised pre-interview survey, and I interviewed ten transition-age youth at RYSE.

Appendix C

Codebook

Node	Definition
Barriers	Factors that make it more difficult for youth to transition into stable housing
Bureaucratic Hassles	Descriptions of bureaucratic hassles resulting in delays or other issues that act as barriers to successful transitions out of homelessness
Family	Descriptions of how and why family members have served as barriers to successful transitions out of homelessness; answers to question about if family members have made the transition harder
Friends	Descriptions of how and why friends have acted as barriers to successful transitions out of homelessness
Health	Descriptions of barriers relating to health
Disabilities	Descriptions of experiences with disabilities and barriers resulting/stemming from disabilities
Mental Health	Descriptions of mental health issues or barriers stemming from mental health issues

Jobs	Barriers relating to jobs, barriers relating to achieving goals related to jobs
Parenting	Barriers relating to parenting; experiences with parenting
Partners	Barriers relating to romantic/sexual partners
Shelter	Experiences at shelter which present barriers to successful transitions, including difficult experiences with staff and other clients
Transition to Adulthood	Experiences with transition to adulthood
Transportation	Barriers relating to transportation
Facilitators	Factors which make it easier for youth to transition off the streets
Ambitions	Youths' goals, ambitions for, and views of/feelings about the future
Coping	Individual methods of coping during the transition off the streets
Family	Descriptions of how and why family members served as facilitators of successful transitions out of homelessness, answers to questions about how family has helped during the transition and what makes their family members <i>family</i>
Friends	Descriptions of how and why friends have served as facilitators of successful transitions out of homelessness

Mindset	Descriptions of the process of changes in mindset during the transition out of homelessness, and the catalysts for change in that process
Other Organizations	Descriptions of how and why other organizations acted as supports or facilitators of successful transitions out of homelessness
Shelter	Experiences with shelter which have supported successful transitions out of homelessness, including experiences with shelter staff and other clients
Strategies Finding Housing	Descriptions of the things youth have been doing in order to transition out of homelessness, including finding housing and achieving other goals which support successful transitions out of homelessness (getting a new job, going back to school, etc.)
Homelessness	Discussions of homelessness experiences, youth definitions of homelessness, homeless identities, and factors which contributed to these experiences
Contributors to Continuous Homelessness	Factors which contributed to youths' continuous experiences with homelessness
Contributors to Initial Homelessness	Factors which contributed to youths' initial experiences with homelessness, including risk factors found during childhood

Experiences	Experiences with homelessness; descriptions of experiencing life on the streets
Identity relative to Homelessness	Descriptions of how youth related to the word <i>Homelessness</i> and the factors that affected whether they identified with the word <i>Homeless</i>
Meaning	Answers to questions about <i>what homelessness means to you, do you identify with that term, and why or why not?</i>
Needs	Unmet needs which youth have during their experiences with homelessness and transitions out of homelessness
Basic Needs	Abilities (or lack thereof) to meet basic daily needs
County-Level Suggestions	Answers to questions about suggestions they had to intervene at the county-level to support transition-age youth

Appendix D

Coding Tree

