

Abstract

Inspired by the goal to end family homelessness by 2020 as proposed by the United States' Interagency Council on Homelessness, this qualitative methods dissertation asked why working poor families are repeatedly homeless in the small post-industrial City of Centerton, New York. This multidimensional problem was studied from micro to macro social perspectives. It was found that city and county homelessness management agencies form a kind of ecology where survival in the system requires compliance with government welfare-to-work mandates. Within this ecology the County Department of Social Services (DSS) contracts and funds *The Ready Haven Agency* which has a 1970s founding mission of "non-judgmental and non-directive" care for the poor and homeless. To maintain fiscal viability, the agency complies with welfare. Thus, *Ready Haven* caregivers experience cognitive dissonance as they are taught the *Ready Haven* founding ethos but have to implement directive welfare mandates instead.

The primary field site was *The Ready Haven Agency's* 30-bed family emergency shelter. Research findings from unstructured interviews with shelter parents showed that they needed time and resources to recover from losing everything in their lives, yet most provided interventions were only temporary. Most of these families were already surviving on low wages subsidized by welfare and are faced with racial and class barriers, precarious employment, lack of education and training, petty legal offense and incarceration records, substance abuse, physical or mental illness, and lack of affordable housing. The 1996 Personal

Responsibility Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (Welfare Reform) requires welfare recipients to “work off their grant.” Yet, the economy of Centerton and Excelsior County has few opportunities for living wage work especially for families with children. With lack of adequate transportation infrastructure, safe childcare, and opportunities for upward mobility, working poor families are but one paycheck away from homelessness.

Additional field study and interviews with administration and managers as well as homelessness management bureaucracies found that homelessness services agencies compete for limited government funding and private donations. They lack coordinated research efforts and shared data and fail to provide social mobility structures that could lead families out of the cycle of homelessness.

FAMILY HOMELESSNESS IN THE SMALL CITY

by

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For the growing number of children living
precariously without the comfort of home.

Preface

I was born in 1950 in Indonesia during the country's fight for independence from Dutch Colonial rule. My family is of mixed European and Indonesian descent but my father changed our citizenship from Indonesian to Dutch because he worked for the Dutch Textile and Trading Company, Jacobson van den Berg NV. When I was seven, the political conflict between the Dutch and Indonesian governments came to a stalemate and all Dutch nationals were asked to leave Indonesia. The Netherlands sought to repatriate many Dutch-Indonesians assisted by Australia and the US. A population of about seventy-five thousand mixed Indonesian and Europeans left Indonesia in 1957.¹ Our ties to family outside of Indonesia and the Dutch textile company gave my father the opportunity to secure a comfortable and safe ship's cabin for our journey to the Netherlands. Others who traveled with us were not so lucky and were relegated to camping on the decks of the ship. My memory of the over-crowded decks remains unforgettable to this day. My father was detained in Indonesia to assist with the Dutch-Indonesian transfer of control of the company. We landed in the Netherlands after a month-long trek halfway around the globe. Subsequently, the Dutch government put us up in a boarding house with other Indonesian-Dutch people. The instability of our situation took an emotional toll on our entire family.

Luckily, four months later, we were reunited with our father and started life anew. Five years later, we left the Netherlands to fulfill "The American Dream" to

¹ Recorded figures are unclear because repatriation of 250,000 Indonesian-Dutch people had been going on since the end of WWII 1945 (Tanasaldy 2012).

take advantage of a temporary increase in Indonesian refugee quota set during the Kennedy presidency (Pastore-Walter Act, 1962). The religious community of the Quakers sponsored and assisted us with our social climb. Their ethos of pacifism was the foundation for the activism I engaged in at age 14 against the Vietnam War. My parents did not agree with me, and would not agree with much of the political agenda I adopted during my lifetime. Nevertheless, my family was fortunate to have a father and a stay-at-home mother, both tirelessly providing for us as we made our way from having no country to the American middle-class. I was living within the protective shell they provided for my brothers and sisters while we were navigating the complexity of foreign state and economic systems.

My parents, five siblings, and I all led successful lives in our new country. The mythological veneer of my family's success story was due to our arrival at an historical moment of the greatest modern social and economic wealth in the US. Much of my family's rise to the middle-class occurred when there were multiple economic pathways to the American Dream. My father's career as a textile chemist coincided with the expansion of Velcro and polyester fabrics derived from plastics and petroleum. After all, as Dustin Hoffman's character in *The Graduate* was advised: the surest way to post-college success was in "plastics."

And yet, the emotional loss of ties to familiar things, people, and places persisted in my memory and led me to examine the experience of family homelessness in Centerton, New York as a dissertation topic. My idealism of families and communities working together to empower people to achieve a lifetime of

success, led me to question the problem of homelessness in the wealthiest nation on earth.

I met the *Ready Haven Agency* Executive Director, Robert Wall, when we co-organized a high school-to-college program at the local Centerton High School. Consequently, when I needed a field site for a Sociology Qualitative Methods course, he suggested that I work with the agency's family homeless shelter. A year later, as I embarked upon my dissertation, the shelter needed someone to teach a once-a-week workshop on "worker readiness." This was a happy opportunity, which allowed me to hear the voices of the people at the emergency shelter first hand while I was volunteering to do what the shelter needed me to do.

This dissertation is the recounting of those workshops and my observations and interactions with the residents. The view on the ground at the shelter is translated by my position as a middle-class, first generation immigrant. However, I often felt deeply conflicted as I realized that I was complicit in doing the "dirty" work of the welfare system to get people to low wage work as fast as possible. I did succeed in teaching shelter residents that there are alternatives to low-wage work. These suggested alternatives turned out to be another series of failed attempts for them, however. The idea of creating a "fix" for a broken system was something I had to leave behind very early on. Consequently, I resolved to understand the problem deeply. Perhaps out of the Weberian idea of *Verstehen* (understanding), answers will emerge. As such, my dissertation should be considered as a time-limited and heavily

bracketed presentation of a case study of cyclical poverty and homelessness in a small city in the Northeastern US.

The dissertation should also be a reminder of the poem inscribed on the base of the Statue of Liberty that welcomed my family to the shores of the United States. The moral compass of Americans, and I now include myself among them, is supposed to be set to this compassionate ideal, and yet, the same forces that bring “the huddled masses” to these shores hypocritically refuse their wellbeing.

The New Colossus

Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame,
With conquering limbs astride from land to land;
Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand
A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame
Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name
Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand
Glowes world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command
The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.
"Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!" cries she
With silent lips. "Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"

Emma Lazarus, 1883

Acknowledgements

An endeavor so wide-ranging as this one is impossible to complete without collaborators. This project involved friends and colleagues I have the good fortune to know.

First, I am most grateful to the many people who shared their stories with me whether they were my associates in a women's mentoring program, a resident in the shelter, a staff member, administrators at the family shelter, or those involved with government services. I was welcomed into their lives, systems, and bureaucracies. I dedicate this dissertation to all those who struggle with the complexity of the problem of homelessness no matter the point of view: from the shelter families to the caregivers and managers of the systems.

The dissertation is fully anonymized but there may be many times when individuals will recognize themselves in quotes and field notes. I attempted to do justice to the difficult conundrum of caregiving and receiving and the many contradictions that come along with these relationships. I know that the daily grind of finding solutions to a family's complex problems is an unfathomably complex task that tests every aspect of what makes us human. I also know that the experience of going through the intense scrutiny and regimentation of the system is often unbearable and made unnecessarily cruel and demeaning. It is the tension between these extremes that is often not understood in all of its complexity by those who write and enforce policy.

I want to thank the chair of my dissertation committee Iddo Tavory for his insight and attention to draw out the details that are most critical to demonstrating a deeper understanding of the macro structures as well as the micro subjective perspectives the dissertation presents; and committee members and faculty Virag Molnar and Paolo Carpignano for putting my ideas to the test.

I thank my partner, Nelsie Aybar-Grau, who was my most steadfast interlocutor and friend through my most difficult moments of self-doubt. She read every inch of the dissertation many times, using her discerning eye for mistakes to make the draft as good as it can possibly be.

I want to thank The New School for allowing me to study this subject for a long time while I continued teaching in a totally different discipline. I was asked many times why, as an artist and designer, I would subject myself to domain of Sociology—a discipline that remains a rich mine of ideas to study for me. Sociology is the study of what C. Wright Mills (1959) calls: “...the vivid awareness of the relationship between experience and the wider society.” As someone who has studied art and design for four decades, the discipline of *close looking* and understanding that we do in the art and design world is not that far away from deep awareness of the human condition that is examined in the discipline of Sociology.

Special thanks to Rachel Sherman for leading the Sociology Ph.D. Students in my final years and making the journey more pleasant.

The people who were the backbone of the dissertation process and acted as my best sounding boards were Rachna Jain, Tamar Roemer, Kevin Swann, and

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

- AFDC-Aid for Families with Dependent Children
- DSS – Department of Social Services
- EITC-Earned Income Tax Credit
- ICPH- Institute for Child Poverty and Homelessness.
- HHAP-Homeless Housing and Assistance Program
- HHS-U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
- HUD-U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
- OTDA-Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance
- PRWORA-Personal Responsibility Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (1996)
- SSI/SSD-Supplemental Security Income/Social Security Disability
- TANF-Temporary Aid for Needy Families (1996)
- USICH-U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness

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SCENE: In the middle of Centerton, New York, the inconspicuous one-story *Ready Haven* transitional shelter for homeless families sits next to a railroad track that winds its way through the city center and neighborhoods.² Long freight trains pass by without stopping, carrying products to and from the Northeastern megalopolis. These days, many of the cars are the black bullet-shaped kind, full of crude oil that come all the way from the Western Oil Fields (Crude by Rail Index – Web page 2015). At night, the train engineer sounds the horn to ward off the deer population and, sometimes, unwary people. About a century ago, the train carried products from the Centerton industries. Now they pass by the empty skeletons of factory buildings that once produced pajamas, brushes, and lace. Only a few people know the innocuous one-story building the freight train passes within a few feet is for homeless families. The engine noise and the steel-on-steel cadence on the tracks interrupt the conversations of shelter parents and case managers. The children of the shelter run to the playroom window to watch the freight trains rumble by....

This scene provides a small glimpse of the family emergency shelter, which served as the primary research site for this dissertation. The stories of the people at the shelter are told through interviews and participant observation. They are the stories of families without shelter, well-meaning caregivers, and the institutions that govern these systems. However, caregiving and receiving create an inherent and

² These “Scenes” or “Snapshots” set up experiences of people confronting homelessness and poverty in their day-to-day lives. Every chapter will have one.

uncomfortable tension between those who manage the aid and those who receive it. This tension reveals the effects that Mimi Abramovitz ([1988] 1996) calls the paradoxical outcome of the welfare state: “that simultaneously enhance[s] and negate[s] human potential (p.20).” It is the central question of this dissertation. “On the one hand, the welfare state intervenes in daily life to reproduce the conditions necessary for the perpetuation of capitalist, social, economic and political motives. On the other hand, “the powers that be also meet common human needs (p.20).”

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Overview - The multidimensional question of family homelessness

The focus of the dissertation is the multi-dimensional question of poverty and family homelessness as it intersects with the socio-economic condition of the small city and the welfare state. I look at this understudied problem in both macro and micro sociological terms. Three fields intersect in the study: 1) the urban sociology of the de-industrialized small city (Garrett-Petts 2005; Bell and Jayne 2006; Ofori-Amoah 2007), 2) the sociology of poverty and 3) the punitive 1996 Welfare Reform that targeted single female heads of households and their children, especially Black and Hispanic families (Abramovitz [1988] 1996; Albelda and Withorn 2002; Hays 2004; Currie 2006; Smith 2007; Collins and Mayer 2010; Gustafson 2011). In addition, the study includes the sociology of institutions and bureaucratic management of homeless families (Vissing 1996; Connelly 2001; Hays 2004; Taylor 2008). The dissertation also adds the subjective “voices on the ground” of families without shelter.

The subject of families without homes is a multi-dimensional problem that undergirded by a “market-first” paradigm, which neglects the social, personal, and emotional impact of being homeless. This paradigm fails to address changing conditions in differently scaled localities, such as small cities or rural areas (Ravenhill 2008; Murphy 2010; Kneebone and Berube 2013; Somerville 2013;).

Figure 1 (below) shows how the case of the small city 30-bed family shelter is nested in ever-widening institutional and bureaucratic control structures.

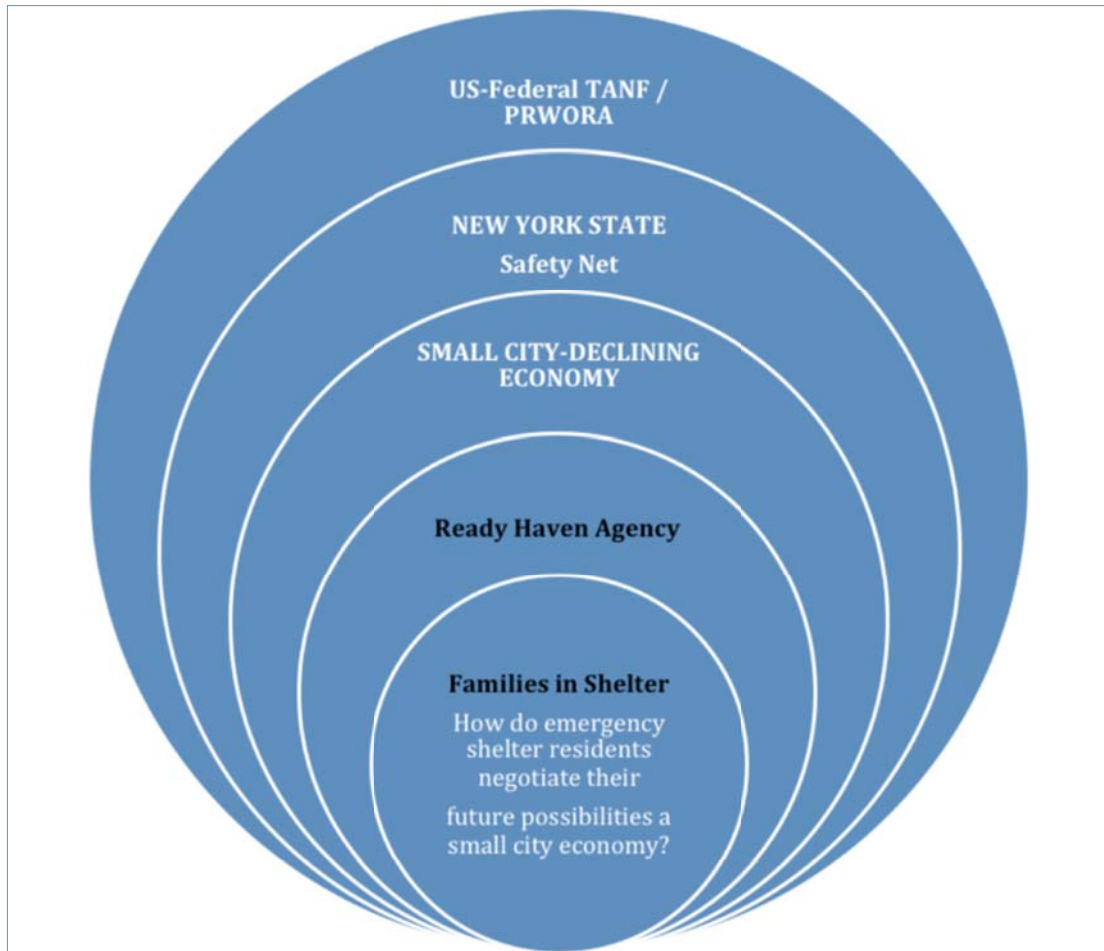


Fig 1. *Micro, Middle, and Macro view of Family Homelessness*

Older, small cities with British Colonial origins like Centerton are on track to deal with greater numbers of homeless people because of their deteriorating infrastructure and economic conditions.³ There are hundreds of “Centertons”

³ Similar studies of the poor in the rings of decaying suburbs of large cities (Alexandra K. Murphy) do not include old North American British Colonial small cities with the problem of infrastructure that is sometimes 400 years old. Studies of the poor and homeless in New

across the Northeastern and “rustbelt” mid-section of the United States. Recent literature on small cities focuses primarily on questions of economic development, but not on the growing problems of poverty and family homelessness.

Against the backdrop of a small city in economic decline, several confluences of events have exacerbated the problem of homelessness in small cities like Centerton. Global economic forces have caused the well documented off shoring of small product manufacturing in the late 20th century. Centerton and other small cities thrived earlier in the century providing American-made products to local and national U.S. markets (Sassen 1990; Harvey 2005: 9-15; Panitch and Gindin 2012: 1-22). With the pressure of competition from cheap international labor markets, employment for the working class declined especially for blue collar manufacturing workers who were not trained for the New Economy (Ehrenreich 2001; Shipler 2004; Sassen 2005; Bell and Jayne 2006; Lorentzen and Van Heur 2012). Small cities were subject to the same urban renewal of larger US cities in the 1960s and 1970s. Affordable housing was wiped out and never replaced. The decline of Centerton was aggravated by the exit of a regional computer manufacturer in the early 1990s creating massive local unemployment. This was at the same time that the national spread of the cheap version of cocaine in the form of “crack” affected already-challenged families in poor neighborhoods (Davis 2012:81-84).

Simultaneously, the 1996 welfare reform or Personal Responsibility Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) limited lifetime benefits to 60 months

York City (Institute for Child Poverty and Homelessness) do not address the problem of semi-rural/semi-urban populations like Centerton.

while forcing all recipients to work.⁴ The work requirement has been the subject of much debate among liberals and conservatives especially at the local level where important decisions are made. Liberals have always been against the work requirement especially for food stamps but Conservatives hailed the requirement as long overdue. The enactment of the law initially supplied welfare offices with funding for families to work toward eliminating welfare subsidies, but the funding wasn't enough to assist with childcare, transportation, or education and training for new technology jobs that would earn workers better wages. Part of the PRWORA is the Temporary Aid to Needy Families, which is funded through a process called Community Development Block Grants. Community organizations have to apply to their state government to qualify for these grants so that the working poor can be assisted based on criteria set at the local level.

The local situation of poverty in Excelsior County is that there is no low-skill living wage work. Without living-wage employment, families do not earn enough to survive without welfare supplementation. Working poor families have no choice but to accept the combination of low-wage, and low-end service work, mostly in retail, and welfare aid. Jobs are often temporary and, thus, precarious in Excelsior County and the possibility of losing home and possessions is just one missed paycheck away.

⁴ When President Obama took office in 2008, one of his first Executive Orders was to eliminate the required employment to receive federal welfare benefits. In the State of New York, the 60-month federal lifetime limit is then replaced by the local county safety net.

The interacting micro to macro layers of the problem revealed that each case of family homelessness could not be seen in isolation. There are many complicating circumstances that affect the wellbeing, stability, and security of a family; there is no single “cause” for families to be un-housed. Repetitive use of emergency shelter is just one indicator that there are many structural macro forces that make the American dream of independent “self-reliance or self-sufficiency” an impossible aim for the working poor.

1.2 Micro, mezzo, macro layers of homelessness management

Figure 1 illustrates the nested layers of control over the people in the family shelter located in the small city of Centerton (pop. 23,000), Excelsior County (pop. 187,000), New York. I use the idea of layers from micro to macro views as an analytical tool to look at the problem of family homelessness. At the micro layer, there are the 1) homeless families using the services of the shelter and 2) the caregivers who manage these services at the shelter. In the mezzo layer of family homelessness are 1) the independent not-for-profit *Ready Haven Agency*, and 2) the city and people of Centerton with a 3) plethora of educational, not-for-profit human services agencies, and volunteers who serve the poor. At the macro level, there are the state and federal government agencies that administer funding for the system. These macro level services also have administrators that manage the local level through the County Department of Social Services (DSS) and the office of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Larger national not-for-profit organizations that

serve the homeless and the poor are also in this layer. Beyond the federal government are the inevitable effects of the rest of global socio-economic sphere that affects the economic conditions of the small city.

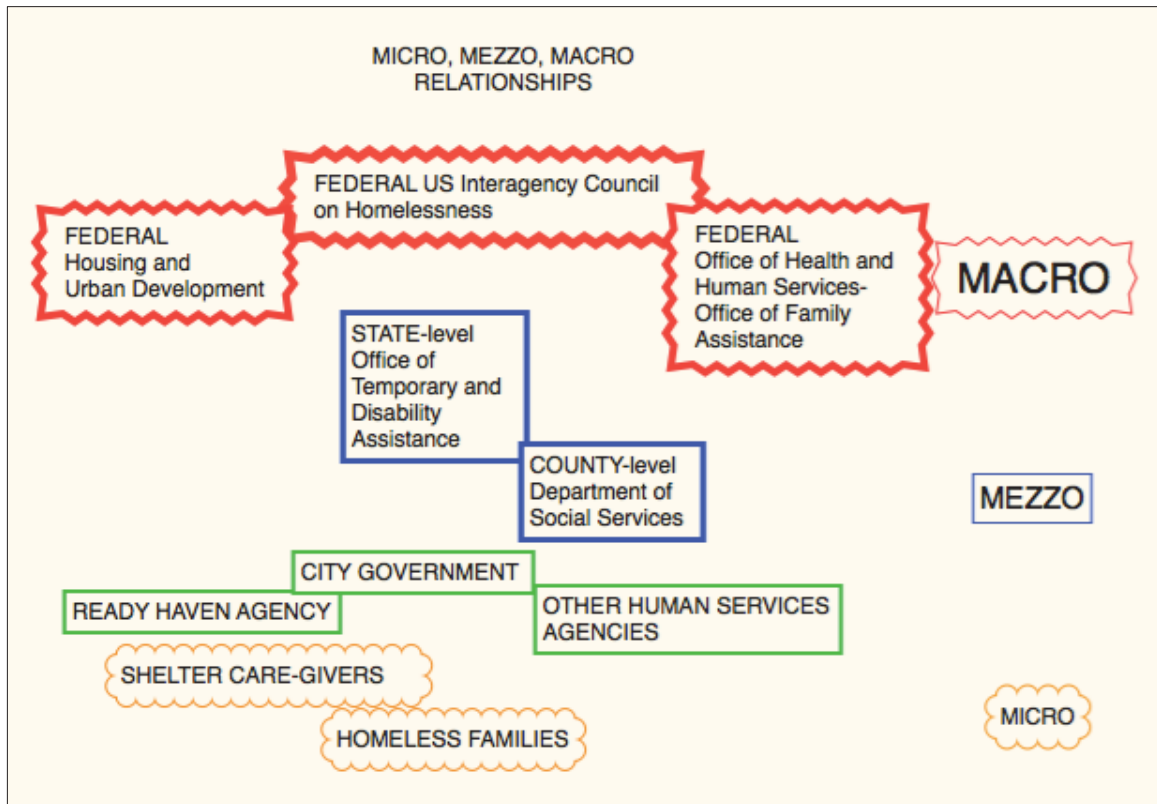


Figure 2-Bureaucracies of homelessness management

Each management layer surrounding the families in the homeless shelter is bounded and distinct, and yet one layer is contingent upon the next accompanied by many repercussions and tensions (See Figure 2). The course of the dissertation’s ethnographic field study included all of these layers that manage the problem of family homelessness in Centerton.⁵

⁵ Access to the county bureaucracy was limited and merits closer study.

At the micro level of the shelter, everything is done to provide a safe haven for children. This is why the shelter is a “dry (no alcohol) shelter.” Children become the central focus of care and parents’ lives are organized around their children’s schedules. Only during the shelter’s many mandated groups and workshops or when residents need to go to an appointment without their child, does the shelter watch over the children in a designated and well-appointed playroom. As we will see in a later chapter, the staff is conflicted about imposing strict rules of behavior on the residents to “keep a calm house.”

On one hand, residents feel grateful for having a roof over their head. On the other hand, strict house rules and a curfew of 9:30 PM, in addition to a breathalyzing ritual upon rising and bedtime, cause resentment. When families are under shelter care, they are also connected to a wide variety of human services organizations that deliver programming such as parenting, legal services, budget and finance, nutrition, and worker readiness. Parents see these services as unnecessary monitoring and imposition of values and parenting styles.

The question of parenting is also about biological reproduction and the control that is exercised over women’s bodies by the state (Smith 2007). Marxist Feminists have argued that reproduction of human beings is a *precondition* for capitalist production (Fortunati 1995; Abramovitz [1988] 1996). The only way capitalism perpetuates the creation of profit is when the worker procreates producing further offspring to continually make and consume products. The factory is the place where the body participates in wage labor, and the home is the place for

uncompensated reproduction of human beings, values, and ideologies. This is often cited by Marxist Feminists as the core problem with the structure of the modern industrial labor market. In pre-industrial times, the home was the site of food production and other cottage industries to create the subsistence-level self-sufficient family. The modern, 19th century industrial family required the stay-at-home mother to socialize children into their roles as productive citizens in the out-of-home economy. Women came to be seen as the creators of “the cult of domesticity (Welter 1966).” These ideas of women as the blissful protectors of the middle-class domestic sphere are in direct conflict with 1996 Welfare State’s concept of working poor women: they must fulfill all aspects of modern womanhood as biological producers of the next generation of workers, providers of sound homes where children are prepared for industry, and as laborers in the low-wage service industries as “breadwinner moms (Hochschild [1989] 2012).”

Single women head up the predominant number of homeless families in Centerton and the argument of preparing women for low-wage work is part of the role that *Ready Haven Agency* plays indirectly in Excelsior County as the agency is contracted by the County Department of Social Services. The agency provides homeless families with emergency services and rapid rehousing into subsidized housing. The agency also provides the low-income and poor with walk-in help centers and food pantries. Roughly 2,000 people per year use the agency’s services. The number served is even larger if the countywide emergency phone hotline is

counted. This hotline service is for anyone needing assistance from emergency housing to suicide and domestic violence.⁶

The government agency that interfaces on a minute-by-minute basis with *Ready Haven* is the Excelsior County-level Department of Social Services (DSS). The rules and regulations of the shelter come from what I call the mezzo layer of the County Department of Social Services (DSS). *The Ready Haven Agency* in turn, interprets these rules when they care for the homeless families at the emergency shelter.⁷ Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and Temporary Aid to Needy Families (TANF) funds are used by the local DSS office to contract the *Ready Haven Agency* to speed the rehousing of homeless families. The boundary line between the agencies is muddled. While TANF individual “grants” cover rental expenses, HUD subsidizes the construction and maintenance of housing subsidies for public housing. In addition, a limited number (per county) of HUD Section 8 housing vouchers subsidize low-income families to help pay for market-rate rental apartments.

At the federal level, the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) is a conglomerate of 19 Federal Cabinet secretaries and agency heads that is tasked to “prevent and end homelessness.” USICH set a goal to eradicate *chronic* homelessness by 2015, and the eradication of *family homelessness* by 2020, which

⁶ A mobile application for suicide prevention was recently added to the services.

⁷ *Ready Haven* is contracted by the county to serve the homeless in five emergency shelters that are each dedicated to different populations such as adults, teens, domestic violence survivors and families.

will require costly and multi-faceted solutions (USICH Opening Doors Proposal and Robert Pulster interview, July 9, 2013). USICH is the federal oversight agency, created when the McKinney Vento Act was folded into the Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing or HEARTH Act (2009). The Act proposed the model of rapid rehousing, especially for homeless families. Under this “supportive housing” model, a family is subjected to continuous scrutiny and intervention from a case manager who comes to the home to provide the services that are now supplied by the *Ready Haven Agency*. It is this kind of scrutiny that invades families and their ways of managing their own and their children's lives. There is no way to escape welfare benefits for the working poor. They are the only way to supplement a working poor family's wages to meet basic living costs.

When investigating the 2015 and 2020 targets set for ending homelessness, the Institute for Child Poverty and Homelessness (ICPH) confirmed that the goal to end family homelessness by 2020 in the US might be met by only 15% of the polled communities. Most communities said that they might reduce the number of homeless families by 51% by that time.⁸

1.3 Family Homelessness definition

⁸ Taken from an email Exchange with Matt Adams at The Institute for Child Poverty and Homelessness. On 6/25/15 USICH amended its goal for chronic adult homelessness to 2017.

There are several “official” definitions of people without housing. However, the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), is the only definition that includes families with children:

- (1) Individuals and families who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence and includes a subset for an individual who is exiting an institution where he or she resided for 90 days or less and who resided in an emergency shelter or a place not meant for human habitation immediately before entering that institution;
- (2) Individuals and families who will imminently lose their primary nighttime residence;
- (3) Unaccompanied youth and families with children and youth who are defined as homeless under other federal statutes who do not otherwise qualify as homeless under this definition; or
- (4) Individuals and families who are fleeing, or are attempting to flee, domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, stalking, or other dangerous or life-threatening conditions that relate to violence against the individual or a family member. (PIH Notice 2013-15-September 2015-a 16 page document)⁹

The New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA) and the Homeless Housing and Assistance Program (HHAP) are the state level offices that manage people without housing who need emergency services. The OTDA has a resources page for the working poor where they can apply for aid. There are many private, religious, and public shelter services throughout the U.S. and the State of New York that all compete for federal funding that is administered on a local level by the Department of Social Services (DSS), OTDA, HHAP, and HUD. The confusing and oftentimes complex navigation through the thicket of acronyms protects and sustains the relevance of these organizations.

1.4 Defining emergency shelters

⁹ Definitions for being “un-housed” or “roof-less” are subtly different from agency to agency.

Motels are the first response where families are placed by the local Department of Social Services. There, food, shelter, and Medicaid services are provided, but no other support programs are available. Motels are considered to be emergency shelters that provide less than 30 days of housing.¹⁰ Unfortunately, the motels are often traps where families sometimes stay for over a year, which will be discussed in more detail later on.

For my dissertation, the focus is on the *temporary* or emergency shelters in Excelsior County, which are run by the *Ready Haven Agency* and the macro apparatus that manages the DSS. In addition to the family shelters, there are *Ready Haven* shelters specifically for domestic violence survivors, adults, and teens without homes that I visited but do not include in this study.

The *Ready Haven* family shelter is a Tier II shelter where there is referral to assistance for mental health, substance abuse, and physical ailments. Tier III shelters have been held out by some advocates as a better solution to people with long term needs because they would provide families 12 – 18 months of community support and residential resource centers (da Costa Nunez 2013). Some organizations such as the Crittendon Women’s Union (Boston, MA) say that recovery from an episode of family homelessness requires approximately a five year period to full independence (Mobility Mentoring Report 2013).

¹⁰ Congregate shelters offer people 24/7 access with a private bedroom (although it may be shared) and common dining, bathing, and laundry services.

There are a few points to keep in mind as I tell the story of the *Ready Haven* emergency family shelter. First, my research and this dissertation is limited to one small shelter in a small city and second, the Excelsior County and Centerton poverty management structures often ignore structural problems and tend to medicalize poverty by defining homeless families' short-comings as psychological deficiencies or lack of coping strategies. Yet, no one theory is the solution to a multidimensional problem. This dissertation's research focused more on the stories of various actors in the poverty management ecology to obtain a deeper understanding of the subjective experience of both sides of the equation: those who give care and those who receive it.

The dissertation's findings provide a confirmation of the neoliberal state's control over the working poor so that they are driven to collect government-based (tax-payer funded) benefits to survive while corporations set ridiculously low-wages that leaves them no other choice but to supplement wages with government benefits. This handshake between government and corporations has always been there but over the last century it has become an almost unbreakable bond stymying any anti-poverty or anti-homelessness efforts.

1.5 Chapter Breakdown

Following this general introduction to the model of the micro to macro layers of control that govern the lives of the homeless, the dissertation chapters will each provide a more granular analysis of the family shelter and the surrounding

bureaucratic structures and debates that frame the practices of these institutions. We begin with an overview of the literature and then focus on the small City of Centerton in Excelsior County to understand the environment that working poor families navigate to make a living and to stay housed. Each of the subsequent chapters illustrates the layers that manage poverty from the macro to the more personal micro-level interactions and the stories of the people being managed.

Chapter 2A- Poverty and Homelessness a literature review

Chapter Two is broken into three subchapters. Given the dissertation's arguments surrounding the many bureaucracies and challenges that govern the precarity of families in Centerton and Excelsior County, this chapter begins with a general overview of the literature of poverty and family homelessness as distinct from adult homelessness.

Chapter 2B The City of Centerton, New York

The small city in the large global neoliberal market-first political climate is discussed in this chapter. Local, small manufacturing left for other shores leaving a vacuum that is filled with a predominance of low-wage retail jobs. A commuting worker population finds living-wage work in the closest metropolis of New York City. The working poor often engage in the informal economy to supplement their wages and government subsidizes the consequences of which are incarceration or long periods of probation for a range of petty to serious crimes.

Since urban renewal destroyed both historic and affordable housing stock in the 60s and 70s in Centerton, lack of political will to provide housing for the poor is

the greatest challenge. An explanation of housing construction and maintenance is used as an analysis of Centerton as a small city in decline. There are also the effects of “buy to rent” absentee landlords who swoop in to buy the housing stock following an economic downturn and thus control the dearth of rental apartments. They use the eviction process liberally if tenants complain about poor maintenance because they know that the housing courts are mostly on their side, and pro-bono legal aid for tenants is often lacking to properly prepare cases in time to prevent eviction.

Subsidized housing to provide relief for the working poor is federally driven by closely aligned agencies that manage housing and human services. The resulting housing and welfare funding come together in Community Development Block Grants. State and local government decision-makers divide the allocation of these grants. Proponents of CDBG grants point to the benefits of consolidating federal funding to create local efficiencies. Opponents of the block granting process see that local political powers often move funding toward projects that do not directly benefit the poor (Dilger and Boyd 2014).

Chapter 2C

Welfare Reform

The 1996 reform of the US Welfare system reinforced and tightened work requirements so that the poor have to work for their grant as they try to live on wages from what are mostly service and retail jobs. The middle-class dream of “stay-at-home” mothers is not possible on the low wages that service and retail work provides and yet, the welfare law predicates its punitive rules on this outdated

middle-class model that no longer works. The ideal of women caring for the children and the home while the husband's work and income sustains the entire family is long past. Moreover, with the permanent shift of women into the workforce after World War II and the shift from manufacturing to service work, the breadwinner role has increasingly been fulfilled by women.¹¹ The 1996 Personal Responsibility Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act did not address or solve what conservatives deemed to be problems of the previous AFDC welfare system (1936), which originated in the Roosevelt Presidency and was dismantled during the Reagan Presidency. Welfare "as we know it" was ultimately redefined during President Clinton's administration. The law succeeded to remove families from the welfare rolls and into working poor precarious lives. The only way working poor families make ends meet is to supplement a meager income with benefits such as food stamps and food banks and government-funded health programs.

1.5.3 Chapter 3-Methodology

Given the 1996 changes and transformations of welfare reform, this chapter sets up the methodology of investigating life in a family shelter "on the ground." The worker readiness group I facilitated was used as an interviewing setting.¹² Qualitative, naturalistic inquiry, and participant observation methods were used to analyze life at a Tier II small city emergency shelter. Relationships between the

¹¹ May 29, 2013 Pew Research Report found that in 4-in-10 households with children, mothers were the sole provider.

¹² I renamed the group *Future Readiness* (See a review of my misguided middle-class instincts to ask the working poor to think of a goal-oriented future in Chapter 8).

residents and administrators of the shelter, the shelter agency, the Continuum of Care group, and administrators from government agencies were explored. The chapter also includes a short overview of the research setting, data collection, interview process, analysis of the data, trustworthiness, and positionality of the data.

The model of the micro to macro layers of control that emerged over the course of the study (2011-15) became increasingly more important as an analytical tool to unpack the bureaucratic power struggles at each level. The methodology of contributing a deeper understanding (*Verstehen*) of life in a small city family shelter is the aim of the research in this dissertation. The dissertation is a time bound snapshot of the problem as it occurred in fieldwork years from 2011-2015.

1.5.4 Chapter 4-Ready Haven in Context

The *Ready Haven Agency* is situated in a broader ecology of not-for-profits and government bureaucracies that manage the homeless population of Excelsior County. By accepting government contracts, *Ready Haven* plays a crucial role to reinforce the employment of low-cost labor in the local retail economy. The argument that Chapter 4 evidences is that despite the agency's 40+ years of intentions to be "non-directive" a conscious paternalism underscores the "programming" the agency provides which includes enforcing welfare reform workfare rules. Paternalism is defined here as a method of caring for the poor that

prescribes how families in the shelter should live by requiring mandated workshops on banking, nutrition, parenting, and work.

The County Continuum of Care Consortium model is meant to create more efficient ways of spending government funding for welfare and housing. Scoping out to the larger county-wide view, participant observation notes of Continuum of Care (CoC) meetings demonstrate how, for the first time in 2013, an information meeting for funding eligibility under the Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing Act (2009) was conducted. It is clear that the ecology in which the *Ready Haven Agency* operates is insular and governed by local politics. At the CoC meeting, over 50 human services agencies reported on the problem of homelessness, mental health, substance abuse, education, and paths to training and work. By participating in the CoC, they insure their own relevance and existence in this ecology.

1.5.5 Chapter 5-Family Shelter Administration

Focusing on the emergency family shelter, this chapter is about the case managers and staff and how they are engaged in a constant conflict between their own caring and empathic emotions and shelter residents' resistance to that care. The shelter is like a stage on which the lives of the homeless families are studied and watched over. The staff attempts to follow the mission of *Ready Haven Agency*, to provide "non-judgmental non-directive care," but this is not always possible because

of the contractual constraints placed on the shelter by the County Department of Social Services.

For the staff, there are few employment alternatives to working in the human services industry. Few local jobs would provide the same comfort of employee pension and health care that *Ready Haven* provides. Thus, there is little pushback from the staff against the system of institutionalized poverty.

Administrators and staff are often from the same socio-economic backgrounds as shelter residents. They are glad not to be on the poverty side of the equation.

While staff are trained and deliver what the U.S. Centers for Disease Control's Adverse Childhood Effects has deemed to be necessary "trauma-informed" care for the emergency shelter residents, the primary purpose of the shelter remains finding shelter residents their own housing so that they can return to (low-wage) work. Trauma-informed care is a problematic practice that activists like Gowan (2010) eschew. Medicalization of trauma is often the go-to solution for human services and caregiving community as the way to "heal" a client, particularly when medication may make the client more docile, thus less disruptive and less empowered.

My research shows that homelessness persists because living wage employment for the poorly educated is not available and the residents will return to emergency shelter the next time they experience another crisis in their lives.

1.5.6 Chapter 6-Moral Careers

As I argue in the previous chapters, the kind of care temporary emergency shelters provide is limited. This chapter discusses the social process of homelessness less as a momentary crisis and more fitting of the word “career.” A career signifies a longer period of time and a series of turning points. I use Goffman’s (1959) concept of the moral career combined with Abbot’s (2001) concept of the turning point to illustrate the condition of *cyclical* and repeated homelessness or “the hamster wheel” of welfare assistance. The *moral* career as Goffman defines it: “refer(s) to any social strand of any person's course through life,” and specifically as “an *institutional* approach to the study of self.”

Two major themes that appeared in 22 of the cases studies that I draw from in this dissertation are the notion of multiple turning points and cyclical homelessness. Where Goffman follows the mental patient’s “institutional self” in terms of hospitalization, the depiction in the study is a family’s institutional career as they enter into Department of Social Services temporary housing such as a motel or an emergency homeless shelter like the dissertation field site.

1.5.7 Chapter 7-The Shelter Churn

Transitioning from the more specific cases of the shelter residents and their moral career, this chapter focuses on the experiences of both shelter staff and residents or the micro view of the structural precarity of the system in which all participants are engaged.

The first day, when families enter the emergency shelter, there is a review and explanation of rules, the routine of breathalyzing, curfew, and the shelter's focus on the protection of children. Life in the shelter demonstrates that despite staff's best efforts to maintain a neutral and objective view of the residents, there are conflicts between the internal power structure of the shelter and the larger system that controls the shelter. While case managers do their best to house families in apartments as fast as possible, this aim is often thwarted because of lack of affordable housing that fall within the financial limitations of welfare subsidies. Meanwhile, families must tolerate the close scrutiny of the staff and the lack of privacy.

1.5.8 Chapter 8-Worker Readiness

Shelter residents are asked to participate in a series of mandated groups to learn how to manage their lives. As part of the entry into the shelter field site, I volunteered as a "worker readiness" group facilitator. Rather than forcing residents into work, I offered them a wider view of education or training opportunities. Unfortunately, the welfare mandate of "working off their grant" would often interfere with residents' ability to balance their educational or training opportunity with childcare. Limited time for education (12 months while on welfare) stalled the futures of some of the residents. For many, the dream of a stable home is most important, and shelter residents often told me that if they could get there, they would eventually want to improve their chances of lifting themselves out of the

punitive safety net. They are aware of the limitations of a life on welfare. Without living wage work, education, and training opportunities, those dreams remained unrealistic.

1.5.9 Chapter 9 -Post-shelter life

This chapter emphasizes the concept of time and the long journey families have ahead as they exit the shelter and then struggle to overcome the lack of skills and resources in a low-wage economy. Moreover, landlords are often unwilling to rent to people funded by subsidized housing even in the worst neighborhood of Centerton. In addition, complications of blatant racism make life difficult when families go back to available poor housing stock. Most often, the only affordable apartments are in dilapidated neighborhoods where absentee landlords maintain their buildings minimally and the housing authority is often unable to keep up with the high number of complaints and inspections.

The threat of the retraction of welfare subsidies is enough to keep people working no matter what the employment. Without welfare subsidies, they would not be able to make ends meet. Following people into the community demonstrated that a bout of homelessness is only one stop in a long string of precarious living. Women who chose to maintain contact with me were often living from low-wage paycheck-to-paycheck. They continued to need their welfare housing subsidy, medical care, and food stamps. They either worked in a string of part-time retail jobs or “off-the-books” informal economy jobs depending on their subsidy status

with the Department of Social Services. When case managers made note of the “risky behavior” of welfare recipients, also calling them “crisis junkies,” they also wrote off the stresses and circumstances that led people to lose everything in their lives, repeatedly. This is what I termed “the hamster wheel” of welfare for most of the people in my study.

1.5 10 Chapter 10-Conclusion

Families in emergency shelter and the ecology of agencies that serve homeless populations in the context of the small post-industrial city is the understudied subject that my dissertation began to address. The field study that was conducted at the 30-bed family shelter uncovered the need for creating a better framework of support for this population that could lead to social mobility instead of maintaining the status quo.

The dissertation provides an extended look at the not-for-profit environment of human services organizations in which the *Ready Haven Agency* functions. The agency is inevitably subject to the larger funding and control schemes of the county, state, and federal governments.

The research showed that there is no panacea for homelessness and that, like poverty, homelessness is multi-dimensional macro (structural) to micro (personal) problem. The agencies that manage the homeless locally are the critical mezzo layer of poverty and homelessness management where the tone of the treatment of the poor is realized. Many families are so destabilized that they need a much longer

period of time than the 45 days at an emergency shelter can provide. In addition, family homelessness in Excelsior County and Centerton has a multitude of complications that have to be addressed at the macro level and the micro level.

On the federal level, the punitive 1996 welfare-to-work policies were part of the problem. Instead of assisting people on the road out of poverty, they assured people a place in the welfare system and in low wage and low skill jobs that required continuous and possibly a lifetime of government welfare support.¹³

If people are allowed access and guidance to further training opportunities, with the right childcare and transportation support, they would also benefit from being in a long-term mentorship program. And yet, the problem is not as simple as pushing every person into a one-on-one mentorship program. Families have to be considered as a unit and as children impose their own needs on parents. However, long-term guidance for both parents and children does work when it is delivered on a voluntary, individual, case-by-case basis.

Further steps are needed toward a different method of research such as participatory action research that more closely involves the people who are transitioning from homelessness to stability or instability. The aims of the participatory action research emerge from the voices of the community and are supported and written by the community. Perhaps the most important aspect of looking at the problem from the subjective experience of poverty and homelessness

¹³ Where I found the most ironic example of people working for minimum wage and learning from a company like Wal-Mart how to apply for benefits such as food stamps and resources to make ends meet on wages that don't meet the costs of living in the county.

is to empower the poor by recognizing their contributions to communities. I look forward to using participatory action in further research so that it doesn't create the same problems of ethnographic research such as the temporary nature of the intervention and the research bias of the researcher (Stacey 1988).

The work of understanding poverty and homelessness at the scale of the small city has only begun for me. I have stepped back from imposing my own middle-class first-generation views on the situation to take the position of listening without any expectations.

Chapter 2

Background

2.1 Overview

The three large debates that intersect the dissertation are discussed here to underscore the core argument that systems maintain the status quo of welfare reform from the subjective perspectives of those who are experiencing these systems on the ground. This chapter serves as background to frame the many sides of the problem of family homelessness from the literature about poverty and homelessness to the provision of affordable housing and the direct effects of the management of family homelessness in the small de-industrialized city.

Chapter 2A- Poverty and Homelessness a literature review

This subchapter is a discussion of current literature and debates about poverty and family homelessness.

Chapter 2B The City of Centerton, New York

Centerton is presented in the dissertation as one of many “Forgotten Cities.” This subchapter will add more detail to that picture. Centerton is a small city urban form that is geographically situated close to the urban center of New York City. This proximity has both helped and hindered Centerton to establish its homelessness problem as not “serious enough.”

Complications of housing markets and lack of affordable housing directly impact the ability for families to stay housed. Lack of living wage work further contributes to lives lived under the scrutiny of punitive welfare subsidies without which families cannot make ends meet.

Chapter 2C This is a review of the historical background and effects of 1996 Welfare reform and its continued punitive effects on the lives of the working poor.

Chapter 2A

The literature of poverty and homelessness

The literature about structural inequality and homelessness provides a wide range of studies and monographs, which are politically and ideologically charged. In the past, the most commonly cited literature begins with the two sides of the debate that largely discusses the “deservingness or un-deservingness of different classes of poor people.” Michael Harrington’s *The Other America* (1962[2012]) shocked the nation into recognizing poverty in the US, and it was persuasive enough for the Johnson Administration to create the *War on Poverty* in 1965. The sweeping nature of the effects of the laws that were enacted with Medicaid and Medicare as well as food stamps are still providing much-needed supports for the poor and elderly today. Conservatives had opposed liberal sentiment toward the poor since Roosevelt’s *New Deal* (1933). The depiction of the problem of “permissiveness” and how we treat the poor was the target of the work by Charles Murray (1984) and Lawrence Mead (1985 and 2011). Opposition by the more liberal work of Charles

Tilly and Douglas Massey points out the lack of social mobility for the poor and the way class stratification continues to be enforced in the US. Where categorical inequality is rooted, Tilly cites analytical mechanisms in the same way that food, time, space, and urban organizations and hierarchies are established: “Much of what observers ordinarily interpret as individual differences that create inequality is actually a result of categorical organization (1998:128).” Douglas Massey’s later work (2007) furthered the idea of “categorical inequality and opportunity hoarding.” His work describes how those in power withhold access to opportunities and protect resources. Matthew Desmond argues that the poor are exploited by many predatory activities in urban neighborhoods such as landlords, and the payday lending industry coupled with low-wage work. He sees poverty “as a kind of robbery” and that not seeing it this way makes adding social services, jobs, and education to poor neighborhoods ineffective (Desmond in Edsall, New York Times 9/16/2012).

Writers who address the impoverishing effects of structural forces, focus on a long list of issues: the plight of the working poor (Currie 2008, Shipler 2004, Russell-Hochschild 2002, Ehrenreich 2001; Gans 1995;); cultural and racial boundaries of poverty (Lin and Harris 2008); class and inequality (Tilly 1998, Massey 2007); racial discrimination in urban centers (Denton and Massey 1993; Wilson 1996; Beale 2003); neo-liberal paternalism and its effects of disciplining the poor as reinforced by “market first” laissez fair economic policies; (Soss, Fording, Schram 2011); criminalization of poverty and “warehousing” the poor (Gustafson

2011, Herivel and Wright 2003); the “double bind” of welfare reform and the creation of the workfare state, the feminization of poverty, and the lack of living wage employment in the service economy (Abramovitz [1988] 1996; Peck 2001; Collins and Mayer 2010); and the oftentimes demeaning conditions of work in the service economy whether local or global (Ehrenreich 2001, Hayes 2003, Shipler 2004).

My dissertation offers a different view of how anti-homelessness policies and government funding actually reinforce the status quo. I claim that this is best understood through personal encounters with those who manage and are served by bureaucratic structures. The previously mentioned critical work on poverty depicts the precarious lives of the working poor and the process of becoming homeless, but not the actual situation or subjective experience of homelessness. The thesis of this dissertation asserts that management of structural poverty and the precarious or constitutive nature of poverty is most evident in the subjective experiences of homeless families.

As my study sets a precedence because it focuses on a family shelter, where the majority of residents are mothers with young children, I consulted a growing literature on the feminization of poverty, mothering, cultural reproduction, and survival on low-wage work and public assistance (Stack 1974; Edin and Lein 1997; Connolly 2000; Hays 2003; Lareau 2003; Polakow, Edin and Kefalas 2005). The work by these scholars is in urban areas. However, Stack’s description of “The Flats” comes the closest to describing how the “bad” part of Centerton looks: this is also

where the shelter is located. Rather than Stack's rural exurb of Chicago, my research site is an old post-industrial city on the edge of New York's Metropolitan Statistical area (MSA).

Excelsior County is rarely included in homelessness research by the larger research institutions of New York City. The Institute for Child Poverty and Homelessness recently compiled family homelessness statistics nationwide, placing Centerton within a larger aggregation of statewide data. None of the small city's nuances are accounted for. When the question was put to the ICPH researchers, the answer was that Excelsior County's homelessness and poverty problems are not dense enough to be significant for their purposes. They called the large, coffee table-sized book, *The American Almanac of Family Homelessness* (2013) as if to institutionalize the measurement of family homelessness in a compendium that will be updated on a regular basis (no new Almanac has appeared so far). The compilation of national statistics on family homelessness is distinct from previous studies that focused on adult chronic homelessness. In 2010, the federal government publicly recognized the problem of homeless families with children for the first time (Stern and da Costa-Nunez 2013:9).

Family homelessness has been placed in a secondary category to the problem of individual chronic homeless by the US Interagency Council on Homelessness (*2010 Opening Doors Plan*); it is rarely addressed in the literature largely because

families tend to seek shelter for their children to avoid the dangers of living on the street. They become invisible (National Alliance to End Homelessness 2006).¹⁴

A large literature about adult homeless people on the street does exist because they are most visible and easier to access for researchers than families. For instance, some scholars tell the story of the poor male and female adult heroes who survive and create informal economic systems. They also create their own culture of life on the street (Duneier 1994; Jenks 1995; Liebow 1995; Bourgois 2003; Wacquant 2009; Gowan 2010). The shelter experience itself has been chronicled in accounts by Desjarlais (1997). Dejarlais' description is about the phenomenology of life within congregate open shelters in 1990s Boston. He attempts to situate his thesis within the "political" and subjective aspects of homelessness, drawing on the work of Foucault and Derrida. A more recent account of drug addiction at a rural detoxification center was the subject of a more Freudian and psychological account by Angela Garcia (2010). *Shelter* by Scott Seider is the account of an adult shelter in Boston where privileged Harvard students contribute time to the homeless shelter in Harvard Square (2010).

Teresa Gowan (2010) chronicles the lives of homeless men on the streets of San Francisco. She also provides an expansive history of the management of the homeless in the US and contextualizes the lives of homeless men and their living conditions within the layers of the "rabble management" system. For Gowan, each

¹⁴ "Families experiencing homelessness are less visible because sleeping on the street with children is an untenable situation for families; most sleep in emergency shelters, transitional housing, or seek other alternatives." (National Alliance to End Homelessness Promising Strategies 2006)

successive layer of the system with its flow of money and power transcends cultural boundaries. This dissertation makes similar arguments. The economic conditions of the lack of affordable housing and the lack of living wage employment are present in both Centerton and San Francisco. Gowan's distinctions of *sin-talk*, *system talk*, and *sick talk* and the historical background of the problem of street homelessness are valuable to my work. She recounts how the rise of visible, or "new" homelessness, that includes parents and their children, became much more prominent during the Reagan years. This was a major turning point in anti-homelessness activism and the start of what is called the *shelter-movement* (Lee, Tyler and Wright 2010: 513). For the first time, the 1987 McKinney-Vento Act provided *transitional* housing. It came to be considered as the answer to housing women who had suffered from domestic violence so that they could rebuild their new lives away from abusive boyfriends and husbands (Olsen, Rollins, and Billhardt 2013: 5). Separate shelters for families were created responding to the growing number of women with children escaping domestic violence. And yet, the literature about family shelters remains sparse. Deborah Connolly (now Youngblood 2001) contributed the account of 8 mothers and the shelter staff at a community center. She worked there as a social worker in the late nineties. Her work, *Homeless Mothers: Face to Face with Women and Poverty (2000)*, remains a valuable precedent for my work.

According to Gowan, the large bureaucratic system built around homelessness and poverty reiterates the long-standing Western moral judgment of the poor's laziness and illness, which are both mental and physical (2010). She

points out that modes of poverty management vacillate between punishment and exclusion that are melded into one by the incarceration system, especially in the US. She calls this the “archipelago of homeless institutions (Gowan 2010: 5).” Similarly, some members of the families at the *Ready Haven* shelter have committed either petty or serious crime. Many of the mothers at the shelter are also on permanent disability welfare support such as Social Security Disability (SSD) for people who have worked, and Social Security Income (SSI) for those who have never been able to work. Special consideration for subsidized housing opportunities and long term adult case management at the shelter favors those who are suffering from substance abuse, or are physically and mentally ill. Gowan’s study is one of recent “critical homeless studies that mediate the experience of [individual] homelessness (2010:5).” This dissertation, on the other hand, adds to the literature about the experience of homeless families.

Data gathering on family homelessness needs to be more rigorously conducted according to Bassuk et al (2014) in a report entitled *Effective Interventions for Homeless Families*. The report reviewed different intervention models of family homelessness such as employment, parental mental health and substance abuse, children’s behavior and academic status, and family reunification.¹⁵ There is a lack of consistent data gathering and reporting by researchers, which is cited in the report (2014). The most promising interventions,

¹⁵ It should be noted here that this analysis was published by the American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, dedicated to the prevention of mental or behavioral disorders associated with childhood development and family life.

such as family reunification programs and subsidized housing (such as Section 8 Housing Vouchers), were cited as most successful, and yet the report still emphasized the need for a better consistency of data collection. Similarly, when I gathered data for this dissertation, problems of consistent data collection stemmed primarily from the transience of the population. People appear and disappear out of tracking and sampling systems. For this dissertation, it is also important to note that psychiatric journals' assessment of homelessness tends to elaborate on trauma-informed care thus pathologizing homelessness (Bassuk et al 2010). Whether this kind of care is effective has yet to be proven.

Perhaps the most comprehensive study of homelessness in the last decade was the result of a HUD and HHS sponsored *Toward Understanding Homelessness 2007 Symposium on Homelessness Research*. Family homelessness was addressed as part of the research. The researchers were from a wide range of disciplines such as sociology (Debra J. Rog, Martha Burt), socio-medical sciences (Carol M. Caton) among others.¹⁶

The practical and theoretical chasm between the human behaviorists (mostly psychologists and psychiatrists) and the social welfare or social environmental point of view remains. The debate centers on the following question to which there are discipline-specific answers: does poverty stem from the way an individual reacts to trauma or does it stem from structural reasons? The psychiatrists and

¹⁶ The study was later expanded to focus on Family Homelessness in the July 2015 interim report called *The Family Options Study*.

psychologists want to focus on the individual's shortcomings and the sociologists want to focus on structural and environmental reasons. This debate has caused a frustrating lack of synthesis between the two views that I also encounter in my own fieldwork. Moreover, there are a lot of untrained people who are interfacing with populations in crisis. This is largely where some of the psychologizing comes from. However, it also comes from the government and large studies such as the CDC *Adverse Childhood Effects Study*.¹⁷

From the sociology side, Lee Rainwater (1967) analyzed several patterns highlighted by sociological studies; one such pattern is that of middle-class people pitying the poor or thinking that all they need is a chance to "make it."¹⁸ His article, *Neutralizing the Disinherited*, raised some classic sociological issues. He proposed five conceptions of poverty: *medicalizing*, or thinking the poor are mentally ill and psychologically unstable; *moralizing*, or thinking of the poor as evil or lacking virtue; *naturalizing* that poverty is a way of life and linked to biology such as cognitive deficiencies; *apotheosizing*, making poor people heroic in their poverty; *normalizing*, "the poor are just like us." Rainwater's work was written many decades ago during a time when poverty and inequality were at their lowest levels in the US, and family homelessness had not yet been defined as a research problem. His critique focused on how psychology and psychiatric establishments don't work on addressing

¹⁷ The Adverse Childhood Experiences Study by the CDC (See Chapter 6) was conducted longitudinally with 17,000 people recruited from 1995-1997 and chronicled long term effects of violence and poverty.

¹⁸ Rainwater contributed to President Johnson's Moynihan Report.

structural reasons for why poverty actually exists. They only treat and measure symptoms, or encourage the poor to be “resilient.” The contribution Rainwater made were his insights on the systems that create poverty policy from the subjective points of view of people assigning “the other” with certain attributes that prejudices the way people interact and construct their world.

The previously mentioned *Effective Interventions* report provided updated information on homeless families in the US. Thirty-six percent of the homeless population is families, which comprises 50% of those in shelters. Most of these families have single female heads of household. Looking to the children of those families, an estimated 1.6 million school-aged children were homeless over the period of 2011-12 (2014:457).

As the Bassuk et al and *Effective Interventions* reports show, there are many quantitative data studies on homelessness, but my dissertation focuses on the qualitative voices of the shelter residents. Through one-on-one interviews with the shelter residents and staff, I not only got to know them more intimately, but I bring these rarely heard voices into the larger discourse. Additionally, some shelter parents allowed me to follow them into their lives after the shelter; I even maintain contact with these former shelter mothers on Facebook and in-person meetings. I listened to their stories, and hope that the framework of my analysis does justice to their condition. Over the first segment of my work at the shelter, I shadowed a resident counselor and a case manager for ten weeks. This gave me a good foundation for the work I did over 2012 and 2013 when I had most consistent

access to the shelter through the *Future Readiness* workshop. The stories were based on their employment histories. Repeated interviews over the course of a shelter stay helped me to get to know the parents. I rarely spoke with children but observed them as they interacted with staff and parents. As I did not focus my attention on children and their interactions on parents, the few instances I describe are meant to be singular snapshots.

In the *Effective Interventions* researchers, for the purpose of my dissertation, the researchers report that employment was not improved by housing placement. Many mothers continued to work in low-wage jobs and needed additional safety net supports. When I followed up with families after they left the emergency shelter, I found this problem as well (and for more on this see Chapter 9). Recently, in a local news article, Hudson Valley and County employment opportunities improved over the past year, primarily in small pockets of high technology and single entrepreneurial efforts. The economy did not improve overall wages, however, which would improve the livelihoods of the less educated working poor (Sveikauskas 2015).

The dissertation field site is distinct from other studies of homelessness in the following ways: 1) the situation is a small Northeastern city instead of a large city like San Francisco like Teresa Gowan's study, or other urban studies on homelessness in New York and Chicago; 2) families are held in a "dry shelter" (where parents are routinely subjected to alcohol breathalyzing); 3) they are *not* managed by a religious organization but by a shelter system that originated its "non-

judgmental” mission during the 1970s; 4) the shelter is for families with children, often newborns, and pregnant women.¹⁹

Chapter 2B

The City of Centerton, New York

As one way to begin to understand the problem of family homelessness at the field site, the following are poverty demographics of the small city of Centerton. According to the most recent American Fact finder Census (2009-2013) of the 23, 893 people who live in Centerton, 4,058 live below the poverty line (or 17.6% of the city’s population). Of the 5,415 of Centerton's children under the age of eighteen, 1,527 live under the poverty line (28.2%). This number has been rising since the 2007-08 recession. Individual imputed poverty in Centerton is currently at 32.3% as opposed to 22.5% in New York City.²⁰ The rate of homelessness families in New York State overall is 21% of the total homeless population or 46,196 people. The rate of families is increasing in the *sheltered* population. The unsheltered population of mostly single adults is declining overall in the US but not in New York State.²¹ Comparatively, the rate of homelessness in Excelsior County is difficult to determine but out of the population of 187,000 about 2,000 people use some or all

¹⁹ The maintenance of a dry shelter is a point of conflict at *Ready Haven* because the surveillance and monitoring through breathalyzing imposes a ritual that is considered oppressive and demeaning by residents.

²⁰ Imputation of poverty levels is based on benefits collection as well as housing, heat and energy subsidies that are different from state to state. Research is currently being done to redefine poverty measures and eligibility for benefits. The Economic Policy Institute’s Family budget calculator finds that grants supplement ½ the actual cost of housing, transportation, childcare, food, and living maintenance.

²¹ 2013 American Homelessness Assessment Report to Congress

of the range *Ready Haven's* services for temporary or transitional shelter over the course of a year. The poverty and homelessness statistics of Centerton reveal that small cities are rarely able to compete for investment and consideration by the large players in the world economy. Instead, Centerton stands in the shadow of the global megalopolis as it supplies New York City with labor (commuters) and critical resources like water, warehousing, high technology industries, back-offices, and local agricultural products. At the same time, cities like Centerton have a difficult time attracting the capital investment dollars that it takes to maintain its aging infrastructure or, more importantly, attract the innovators of the future.

2B.1 Contributing circumstances to small city homelessness

Centerton is one of several Hudson River Cities that suffer from the effects of global finance competition. Fed by the convenient umbilical cord of the river, New York City voraciously consumes the human and natural resources of the Hudson River Valley and its surrounding mountains (Straddling 2007; Evers 2005; Steuding 1995).²² The Hudson River cities share parallel narratives of economic ups and downs with New York City. One industry after another ebbed and flowed as the economics of the large metropolis and the nation demanded it. Uniquely situated in the foothills of the mountains that are the watershed of the Hudson River, Centerton was one of the early US colonial cities where many economic ups and downs have

²² Many of the historical notes in this description of Centerton are based on three works by these authors. I have taken the liberty to combine a lot of facts into a narrative. My membership with the Historical Society has also exposed me to a lot of this information and it has become like second nature to me.

visited the city over the last four centuries. Centerton is Excelsior County's only city and its county seat.

In Weberian (1966) terms, a city is a political-administrative legal entity large enough and cohesive enough to be formed by a city charter. Cities often have their beginnings as a political or market center on a transportation route that attracts people for its unique qualities. This accurately describes the hundreds of small cities like Centerton that dot the vast North American (British Colonial) landscapes. Described in MIT's *Voices of Forgotten Cities* Symposium (Hoyt and Leroux 2007) the report puts their number at about 150. They are cities of varying sizes across the United States Northeast, Mid-Atlantic, and Midwest. These cities were in the "first-wave" of nineteenth century industrialization and have a total population of about 7.4 million people. Populations that earn average wages of less than \$35,000 per year characterize them. The small city's built environment lacks the density of the large metropolis yet it is not as loosely arranged as a small town. Centerton can be defined as being this type of city: a liminal form, neither metropolis nor town. A 2013 snapshot reveals that 17.4% of the Centerton population and 12.9% Excelsior County lives at or below the poverty line; average salary in the County stands at \$33,000 with pockets of extreme poverty of 45% in the rural areas (U.S. Census Bureau: Quickfacts).²³ Anti-poverty funding has

²³ As a point of comparison in New York City, 14.5% of the people live under the poverty line. The National Poverty Center finds that 1.65 million American households are living in "extreme poverty," and these households include 3.55 million children. Using a World Bank definition, the research defines "extreme poverty" as surviving on less than \$2 per day, per

traditionally been focused on urban rather than suburban centers. Since cities like Centerton represent a liminal form. It often gets lost in the competition.

A small city like Centerton resembles a synthesis of the three typologies of Alexandra Murphy's *skeletal*, *symbiotic suburb* and *overshadowed* suburbs rather than a large urban center. In some ways the symbiosis of Excelsior County with New York City works in its favor. After all, only a two-hour ride away is living-wage work. The vitality and energy of this symbiosis has also been the cause for the abandonment of Centerton. Over time, it became more like a *skeletal* suburb where infrastructure is decaying and the means of making a living wage are difficult (Murphy 2010). Pockets of deep poverty dot the Excelsior County landscape and the Mid-Hudson Valley region; these pockets of incorporated suburbs and towns are most like Murphy's *overshadowed* suburbs where there are very poor neighborhoods among extremely affluent parts of cities and suburbs (560). Murphy's typologies also help to understand the difficulties with securing funding for service institutions outside of the relatively wealthy metropolis.

2B.2 Neoliberal effects of the global economy

Scoping back out to a national and global view we need to go back in time to about a century ago, when architect and sociologist Lewis Mumford described the phenomenon of the ebb and flow of regional shifts of fortune and misfortune for cities. According to Mumford's regional patterns, there were a series of four

person, each month. This measure is roughly 13% of the official U.S. poverty threshold. The study utilizes data from the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) between 1996 and 2011.

migrations in the US over the last centuries that brought with them terrible destruction and subsequent rebuilding of the environment and social life.²⁴ The populations associated with industry and commerce shifted with large population migrations like waves: “one wave recedes as the next comes foaming in, the first nevertheless persists and mingles with the second as an undertow (1925:4).” David Harvey confirms these rapid shifts of capital in the later 20th and early 21st century. “Booms in one place (the US South and West in the 1980s) correspond to crashes somewhere else (2012:44).” This effect is the result of neoliberal market-first policies: deregulation of the power of the state, privatization of public services, reduction of shared taxation responsibility by the wealthy, and the dismantling of welfare (Brenner and Theodore 2002).

Since the 1970s the rise of world cities is a more lucrative and engaging topic of research than studies on small cities. It was also a much more positive and uplifting subject. Global cities were celebrating expansion not decline. As Saskia Sassen describes, there was the process of shifting from a manufacturing economy to a service economy in many developed nations that affected the way all kinds of resources were accessed and distributed.

The decline of manufacturing and the shift to services raise questions about changes in the economic base of cities and the impact of these changes on earnings and employment distribution. They also raise the possibility of changes in the urban hierarchy, and a new form of service-based urbanization (1990:466).

²⁴ Fishman argues that a Fifth Migration has taken place reorganizing a lot of abandoned metropolitan center and it is causing the current building boom of many city centers (2005). The poor are then squeezed out of the city center to cities like Centerton.

Sassen confirms that economic shifts have a great influence on cities. The shifts to the service economy and “producer services,” in turn, have affected manufacturing and occupational distribution. Needless to say, they have a direct impact on urban economies and hierarchies. Most affected are the poor and working class because of the relocation of jobs to the suburbs or high-rent sections of the city. Many cities develop an “underclass.” In the US, these are mostly ethnic groups that use their available resources and labor to make their way in the informal economy. Furthermore, in cities the poor are often housed in decaying neighborhoods. When there is an influx of development capital, gentrification makes it impossible for the poor to live in the city. The poor are squeezed out of the metropolis to low-cost housing in small cities like Centerton especially after the two recessions of the early 21st Century (Kneebone and Berube 2013).

Urban theorists such as Sassen, Castells, and Appadurai paid little attention to small cities inequality and lack of opportunity but the global shift to a market-centered neoliberal form of government affected all forms of urbanism from the smallest rural settlements, to towns, small cities, and the largest metropolises. Nick Brenner and Nik Theodore explain how neo-liberalism became *embedded* in the urban fabric:

In this context, neoliberal doctrines were deployed to justify, among other projects, the deregulation of state control over major industries, assaults on organized labor, the reduction of corporate taxes, the shrinking and/or privatization of public services, the dismantling of welfare programs, the enhancement of international capital mobility, the intensification of inter-locality competition, and the criminalization of the urban poor (2002:3).

Keeping in mind this neoliberal doctrine, cities in a global context were redefined based on how space and resources were allocated after World War II (Keil et al 2009). In the last decade, new multi-scalar thinking that includes small cities refer “not to a withering of the nation state but to a redefinition of its place in a tangled set of hierarchies...The destabilization of the nation state’s place in the hierarchy of scales is often seen as a result of neoliberal ‘glocalization.’ Liberalization of financial flows certainly helps to shape new regimes but market mechanisms are reinforced in the global flow of policy ideas” (2009:10-12).²⁵ It is no longer appropriate to think of any single-scale theory when addressing global political economy. Various kinds of economic, regional, policy networks are constantly in play including those of the small city. At the bottom of the global economic scale are the families at my field site who live life in a constant state of crisis and instability.

2B.3 Driving down Division Street

Centerton’s built environment is a curious assemblage of surprising historic beauty mixed with a disorderly and decaying building stock. We now take a drive down Centerton’s main Division Street where evidence of an economy under stress is everywhere. Division Street is like a broad four-lane highway. Streetlight fixtures are at highway height and don’t invite foot traffic. Some of the stores along Division

²⁵ Roland Robertson popularized the term ‘glocalization’ in *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture* (p.186). He described global pressures on local cultures and economies such as the proliferation of the retail food industry and McDonalds.

Street look like they are not open for business even as their shelves are fully stocked. Some stores are just empty shells. We pass well-preserved buildings with nicely designed façades followed by another set of empty buildings. Faceless three story apartment buildings glide by on the sad and desolate strip. The county probation office is across the street from the twenty-foot high neon sign for a Chinese restaurant. An unexpected renovated Media Center, then the Center-ton Diner. Then an open parking lot with a car repair shop and parked utility vehicles is next to a Mexican grocery store. A clinic for the disabled is next door to a grand anomaly: the magnificent Performing Arts Center with its bright hanging flag marquees that advertise world-class performers' names. Unfortunately, low, unkempt or abandoned buildings face the performing arts hall and parking lots between the buildings give this section of Division Street the look of an old, toothless grin. Further down the street is a grandiose City Hall that graces a high knoll opposite the century-old high school and library buildings. Yet, around the City Hall and high school, the people in this middle portion of the city are, unfortunately, the most challenged by absentee landlords, lack of safe and affordable housing, racial (Black and Hispanic) and ethnic discrimination. This is the most impoverished part of the city that is still riddled with the highest crime rate, drug houses, and a brisk informal economy.

At the farthest end of Division Street is the central bus station where commuters take the bus to New York City. Next to this hub is another brand-new big box drugstore. There are five big name combination drug-grocery stores within a

two-mile radius although the population density does not demand it. City officials triumphed over local citizens' objections to tolerate the profiles of the big box stores in exchange for the cleanup of chemical dumps known as brown-fields left from light industry and laundromats. With these chain drugstores came few fast food chains such as a Burger King, and several Dunkin' Donuts restaurants.

Traveling further to the historical uptown district is the Dutch part of the city. The original buildings of the colonial village were kept up and lived in for four centuries. The Centerton Historical Society recently restored some of the buildings that house artifacts, paintings, and historical displays open for regular public view. Eighteenth and nineteenth century first floor stores with apartments and offices upstairs are graced with a European-style covered walkway designed to compete with the newer Centerton Plaza built in the 1960s on the lowland along a creek below. There is an economic tug of war between the historical district boutique shop owners and the low-end shops in the Plaza.

At the core of Centerton is a collection of four to six story contiguous buildings that house shops, restaurants, law, medical, and government offices. Housing here is uniform and tightly packed. The class status and financial wellbeing of the occupants are easily distinguishable by the size, maintenance, and kind of housing. Most noticeable are the large, well-kept roomy mansions with a high-canopy of stately trees, well-manicured bushes, and comfortably large lots. Conversations outside of Centerton often leave out a mention of these stately mansions, and instead describe the city as a hopeless and depressing

conglomeration of problems. Surprisingly, the large houses share a backyard boundary with smaller multi-family homes with two or more entrances. Thus, two economic groups rub against each other without truly having contact.

The farther away the traveler moves from the center of town, the less lavish and standard in appearance the housing construction becomes. A few miles out of the city, the road becomes sparsely populated with a house here and there on large tracts of farmland. Contrary to this more agricultural side of Centerton, the road to the Regional Mall is a three to four-mile corridor of low-rise strip malls.

2B.4 How the city came to look like this

Centerton didn't always look like this. It was originally established as one of Peter Stuyvesant's settlements along the Hudson that included New Amsterdam, which is now New York City. Centerton's fortunes and misfortunes were inextricably tied to New York City from its beginnings. I will not review over 400 years of history of commerce and infrastructure development. Nevertheless, the ancient infrastructure of the city plagues its managers and tax payers. Instead of focusing on this long history, I will focus on the last half of the 20th Century as the fortunes of Centerton and Excelsior County waned and the conditions became more dire.

During World War II, Centerton's favorable location on the river spawned a robust military shipbuilding and nautical repair industry. In the years after the war, National Technology Producers, a large technology firm that made automatic rifles

for the war effort, built a typewriter factory in Centerton. This expanded a decade later into a 2.5 million square foot mainframe computer factory on the outskirts of the city. Then as the age of the office worker dawned, American industry shifted from producing material goods to producing information. Centerton went from a boomtown or a *technoburb* (Fishman 1987) followed by a bust in the early 90s. With the invention of smaller personal computers, the factory became outmoded and the company followed incentives to relocate where labor was cheap. As a result, many of the support businesses also shut down.

Nine thousand jobs disappeared and Centerton and Excelsior County never recovered from this loss. The 2008 Recession worsened employment conditions and lessened new housing construction. People abandoned their homes as conditions deteriorated, leaving them to be ravaged by the weather. Similar to other post-industrial cities, when the industries left behind skeletons of old factories, they also left a collective memory that paralyzed the local community and investment interest in economic development (Beauregard 1993). After the exit of the computer manufacturer, the Regional Mall became the only site for employment especially for the untrained and uneducated.

Despite its difficult economic history, the period between 1960s and 70s when the larger cities were undergoing massive turmoil and race riots, Centerton was spared. Many poor Black families settled in Centerton in homes near the river where the extraction industries once thrived. The area was targeted as a site for urban renewal destroying much of the colonial and early industrial era building

stock. As is common in the story of urban renewal, affordable housing was never rebuilt at the same rate that it was destroyed. Mexican migrant farm workers, poor Whites, and people of color, the unemployed, and refugees from the more dangerous Bronx and New York City neighborhoods, found only slightly safer homes in Centerton. The city became a marginal place without much hope for redevelopment. Outside of Centerton, the Regional Big Box Mall was favorably located near several major highways. The mall drew shopping traffic away from the small shops in Centerton.

After the 1990s demise of computer manufacturing, the poor migrated from the riverside to the middle of town to rent the vacated Victorian row houses. Most of the housing there was bought up as “buy to rent” real estate. Absentee landlords and management companies from New York City and beyond register themselves for Department and Housing Renewal subsidy money yet they do only just enough to maintain their buildings (DHCR Funding Awards 2007).

Robert Fishman’s assessment of the failing *technoburb* is what Centerton now resembles. Centerton became a “social and economic disaster[s] for the poor who have increasingly been relegated to its...decayed zones (Fishman 1987:198; Jargowsky 2014).” More recent scholars are looking at 40 plus years of increasingly concentrated and persistent urban poverty. Since the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s there is an even greater power struggle between landlords, the legal system, and tenants (Desmond 2012; Sharkey 2013).

The poorest populations in Centerton are Black and Hispanic peoples, similar to national urban trends. As yet another contradiction in this dissertation attests, scholars of the 90s noted the separation of classes has more to do with poverty than race (Massey and Denton 1993). This bears out in this poorest Centerton neighborhood which is 59% White and 21% Black. The 25% Hispanic population is growing at the fastest rate predominantly with immigrants from Mexico.²⁶ Often, the cheapest apartments are located in this neighborhood and this is where shelter residents tend to find housing. As a comparison, in 2013, the family shelter population was 46% Caucasian, 28% African-American, 13% Biracial (Caucasian with other race), 9% Hispanic, 4% considered Asian (Inclusive of South Asia and the Middle East). The White population dominates the shelter yet the population of African-Americans is disproportionately over-represented compared to the racial distribution in the surrounding neighborhood.

Most of the low-wage employment is at the big box retail stores and restaurant outlets at the Regional Mall in the town of Inger. Many of the poor walk to their jobs in almost the same amount of time that it takes the bus to complete its route through the city and to catch a connecting county bus. The city buses come only once an hour and are not part of the Excelsior County transportation network. This makes the exchanges between the city and county bus system very lengthy and inconvenient especially for the working poor and homeless family population without their own cars. The Mayor of Centerton is reluctant to make the city bus

^d This is a population that was rarely represented in the family shelter.

part of the county system. It is a matter of pride to have an independent city bus system. The Mayor is also convinced, as are the Centerton shopkeepers and the local chamber of commerce, that the mall stores will “steal” foot traffic from their shops. And yet, the mall is most likely where the poor are able to find work. We will see in the next section how the County Economy shapes the conditions in Centerton.

2B.5 The Excelsior County Economy

Centerton is Excelsior County’s only city and its county seat. Looking at the 2007 Census, employment in Excelsior County is concentrated in 794 retail establishments; these establishments make \$2.2 billion a year (Bureau of Labor Statistics, May 2014).²⁷ Most of these jobs are located in the Regional Mall, which is a strip of big box stores and chain restaurants. People from surrounding suburban and rural counties shop and eat at the familiar Dunkin Donuts, Olive Garden, Red Lobster, Chipotle, McDonalds, Applebee’s, Panera’s. The poor and the homeless in the shelters make do with low-wage retail jobs, and rarely consider that they should be building their skills to achieve a higher wage (See Chapter 8).

One alternative to the retail industry is in the health care and social assistance industry. There are 520 establishments and 1407 non-employer or independent contractor businesses. This industry makes a relatively small sum of \$39 million that is spread over a large number of establishments.

²⁷ All data in this section are from the US Bureau of Labor Statistics: Occupational Employment Statistics May 2014 Metropolitan and Nonmetropolitan Area Occupational Employment and Wage Estimates.

With a growing aging population, Excelsior County employs low-wage workers as Personal Home Care Assistants. Many of these workers are women who are given the opportunity to be trained by Workforce Investment Act moneys as Certified Nursing Assistants. No High School Diploma or its equivalent is necessary, and despite the backbreaking work, it only pays about \$8 to \$10 an hour (with Management jobs that go as high as \$15). Because there are no alternatives for better work, women often endure this emotional and physical toll (Wiener et al 2009). Work in the social services is part of this industry and include the Human Services workers for providing for the needs of the poor and homeless. In line with the diminishing city population, the corporation that owns the city's two hospitals recently consolidated the services to conserve on employment and building maintenance costs, eliminating 300 of its 2,400 jobs.

The next most popular and lucrative industry in the formal economy is wholesale trade with 150 establishments that make \$946 million a year. These industries dot the countryside. Opportunities to make more than minimum wage is available mostly to men: positions include large equipment drivers, warehouse workers, and palette-moving equipment operators. However, these jobs are quickly being automated and several of the fathers in at the field site were the long-term unemployed because of this automation trend. The next, much smaller industry is tourism with 533 establishments that make proportionately much less at \$321million a year. The professional, scientific, and technical industries follow with 460 establishments that make \$271million a year. Some small high tech companies

have hidden complexes in the more rural areas where they were able to build their factories on low-cost open “shovel-ready” land. These sophisticated small technology companies are looking to fill positions with the educated and highly skilled.²⁸

Because of the lack of living-wage employment opportunities in the city and county, there is a large commuter labor force that is employed in New York City. The beautiful natural surroundings of the county attracts second home middle-class city dwellers looking for rest and relaxation. Most of the middle-class and wealthy in the county work in New York City, and they only travel to the county on weekends. Excelsior County currently has a population of 180,000 people with only 57,000 who are employed (2013). Unemployment stands at 9% in the county (US Census and Employment American Fact Finder 2008-2012 ACS 5-year DP03). The surrounding counties and New York City benefit from 21,000 commuting workers who cannot find well-paid work at home (U.S. Census Table 1 Residence County/Workplace County Flows United States and Puerto Rico Sorted Residence Geography: 2006-2010). This relatively large commuter population means that permanent residents of Centerton are the low-wage working poor and the commuter population contributes less physical, mental, and emotional investment into the county.

²⁸ In a recent conversation that I had with the County Economic Development Office it is clear that the county has just begun to think about creative ways to improve its attraction of new industries.

At the very foundation of poverty and homelessness in a small city is the viability of its economy and its ability to provide employment during a post-recession “job-less recovery.” Unemployment in Centerton is at 9% (2008-2012 ACS). The official unemployment rate for the county more than doubled from 1990 to 2000 (BLS 1990-2014) from 3.1% to 8.2%. By the time the 1996 welfare reform was implemented, the problem of homelessness especially for families was already at a crisis point. With the economic demise during the past half a century, poverty was passed on from one generation to another.

When employment opportunities are not available, crime and the informal economy moves in, including gang and drug-related violent crime occurring in the poor neighborhoods of Centerton (Wilson 1996). The 1980s Crack Epidemic affected New York City and surrounding urban centers like Centerton. The proximity to crime on the street often leads to the temptation of “easy money” of the drug world.” Inevitably, young people are not only exposed to the economy of the drug world but also to its intoxication and addiction. Regular “clean sweeps” are made by the police through the neighborhood and net about 110 people who are mostly part of the network of petty users and drug runners. The sweeps rarely yield drugs or kingpins. The most dangerous neighborhood in Centerton is conveniently close to the legal and county jail facilities and also within walking distance of the parole office. This neighborhood is also the home of nationally connected gangs as well as young “copy-cat” gangs. The most notorious *Bloods and the Crips* who entrenched themselves in Los Angeles also infiltrated Centerton and are often part

of the local incarcerated population. Gangs easily connected the guns and drug trade via the bus and train lines between Excelsior County and New York City. This is why crime statistics in the county are similar to New York City. Unfortunately, Centeron's crime rate make for juicy news stories and while confined to a small area, it perpetuates the lack of interest in the neighborhood and gives the city a bad name overall.

Institutional warehousing, like prisons, is part of the management solution to control the idle labor force and the informal economy. There are plenty of beds provided for the prison mill that the local courts provide. Students in the Centeron High School often joke that they have three choices for what they can do after they leave school (usually without completing their degrees): join a gang, go to prison, or die. This not only a local but also a national problem in the US, with the highest prison population in the world because of, as Adam Liptak proclaims, our "highly politicized criminal justice system" (Liptak 2008).²⁹ Parents in the *Ready Haven* family shelter are often recently released from incarceration. The shelter is the first place where they are brought together with their children.

²⁹ On April 23, 2008, Adam Liptak of the *New York Times* wrote, "Americans are locked up for crimes — from writing bad checks to using drugs — that would rarely produce prison sentences in other countries. And in particular they are kept incarcerated far longer than prisoners in other nations...Several specialists here and abroad pointed to a surprising explanation for the high incarceration rate in the United States: democracy. Most state court judges and prosecutors in the United States are elected and are therefore sensitive to a public that is, according to opinion polls, generally in favor of tough crime policies. In the rest of the world, criminal justice professionals tend to be civil servants who are insulated from popular demands for tough sentencing."

Also see, Prisoners in 2013 Anne E. Carson Ph.D, US Bureau of Justice Statistician
<http://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/p13.pdf>

Excelsior County has two maximum and two medium security prisons (New York State Prison Map). Centerton is also home to the Excelsior County Jail (277,000 sq. ft.) with a staff of 158. Double bunking inmates increased capacity to 488 with an average daily population of approximately 350 inmates (2013 ANNUAL REPORT, SHERIFF'S OFFICE) Bail postings amount to close to \$1M. The inmates are often repeat offenders according to the sheriff's annual report in crimes ranging from substance abuse and robbery to violent crimes. In 2013, a total of 1990 people were admitted and then distributed to probation or other county (310), federal (13), and state prisons (150).

Many call the Excelsior economy a prison economy in a "rehab" county. Families are often broken by incarceration of a parent. As a consequence, children are traumatized and destabilized in foster homes. They are often affected by the loss of a parent for a lifetime. This is an additional social and financial tax on local communities. The families who end up in the shelter are often the working poor and from successive generations of poverty. They make ends meet with a variety of informal and formal economy employment, and from regular support from the robust network of 50 pantries and soup kitchens. The working poor are always one paycheck away from losing their housing. Once they do lose their home, and usually everything in it, the long journey to find housing leads the family through "the system" and, eventually, to the *Ready Haven* shelter.

2B.6 The built environment and homelessness

If there were a labor market that rewards workers with living wage work and better overall economic circumstances, many of the families I met at the shelter would be holders of yearlong apartment leases they could afford, or even proud homeowners. Instead, Excelsior County's working poor families are vulnerable to the precarity of the low-wage labor, subsidized housing, and government-sponsored safety nets.

Brendan O'Flaherty's (1996) economics of homelessness points to several intersections that offer a good structure to examine common infrastructure problems that lead to homelessness. I use O'Flaherty's arguments in the next subsections to point out location-specific economics of the built environment in Centerton that explain the increasing occurrence of family homelessness in the area.

2B.6.1 The price-quality schedule

The built environment in a community constantly oscillates between maintaining or destroying building stock. The decision usually depends on which is cheaper or offers the most profit. This oscillation of the construction and maintenance interval is decided economically by using five *price-quality schedule* elements: operating cost, lowest rent, construction cost, construction price, and equal demand conditions. Any building requires constant maintenance and operating cost. When a new building is constructed, the higher quality buildings require less maintenance and are less susceptible to deterioration. In the marketplace for rental apartments, rents are based on the mortgage, insurance, and

maintenance of the building plus profit (O'Flaherty 1996: 100-104). The *price-quality balance* of the housing market system continues to play a significant role in the question of homelessness in cities like Centerton.

Fully understanding housing markets and the built environment leads to a better reading of the landscape of homelessness. The oversimplified reasoning is that people become homeless because there are either 1) too many people and not enough houses or 2) households cannot afford the housing (O'Flaherty 1996:97). O'Flaherty underscores that once there is homelessness, it is difficult to end it: "reducing homelessness is much more difficult than not increasing it" (1996:124). He uses the word "hysteresis," or a lagging effect, to describe this phenomenon. He says that it is like trying to put toothpaste back into the tube (an impossible proposition).

Those who supply housing must continue to invest in a building and to constantly maintain it. For older structures, this may be costly. In Centerton and the surrounding small towns that make up Excelsior County, some building stock is hundreds of years old. Some buildings were built less than 100 years ago thus the price and the quality with the length of time (schedule) differs widely. The city has never experienced enough good fortune to build up high density of building stock. For the last 50 years several short periods of good and bad economies created the current state of slow decay.

Many derelict homes were abandoned during the 2008 recession. Additionally, homes were abandoned more than a decade ago but the city does not

want to take them down if banks are still receiving mortgage payments and the city taxes are paid up to date. This is cause for neighborhood decline because no one wants to settle next to an abandoned or decaying home. Unfortunately, the city has an increasing amount of these homes that are not livable. This is the conflict working poor families experience when they search for a cheap apartment. They often find substandard housing that an absentee landlord does not maintain properly. This is why it is cheap. Because they cannot find other affordable housing, the working poor live in the apartment until something happens (See Anna's cockroach infestation story in Chapter 8) that the health authorities are called for.

Some of the people in my study found themselves taken out of an apartment because the housing authority declared the building unlivable. The family, meanwhile, is evicted from the apartment. The Excelsior County Department of Social Services provides what can be deemed as the next best solution for families: motels. If there are beds at in the *Ready Haven* family shelter, a family can take temporary residence there.

Unfortunately, adding an emergency shelter system, as interim housing to the overall availability of housing choices, blurs the real problem. There is little ability to track and measure whether the emergency shelter system is truly needed or where the tipping point may be for closing down the shelters. Meanwhile, an agency like *Ready Haven* is caught in the balance of maintaining decent emergency shelter when the real problem is lack of affordable housing.

Nevertheless, there have to be enough affordable and safe homes for the working poor to live in. In later chapters, the question is entertained to give money directly to working poor families housing subsidies rather than temporarily housing them in motels or shelters. Some advocates argue that the step of sheltering the homeless should not be an opportunity for programming and managing their lives. As we will see in the next section, the welfare-to-work laws require indoctrination into the rules of preparing children for the world of work, marriage, and proper citizenship in a capitalist economy. In the case of Centerton and Excelsior County, if there were suitable housing stock, emergency shelters would not be necessary. The balance of market forces and the power over the construction of affordable housing is in the hands of many market makers and government bureaucracies that have opaque and difficult-to-navigate structures that we will discuss in the next chapter. Moreover, communities that fight affordable housing projects with their “not-in-my backyard” campaigns are also responsible for the lack of affordable housing.

2B.6.2 Lack of affordable housing

Thus far, we have seen how Centerton came to be a “forgotten” city where the price-quality schedule of the city is out of balance. There is not enough affordable housing stock and absentee landlords are able to rent properties at market rates but often don’t maintain them. The city does not have enough financial and personnel resources to keep up with the failing infrastructure and, most of all, housing. Evictions for non-payment of rent are as common as improper property maintenance citations by the Centerton Housing Authority. Lack of decent public

defenders in Centerton's Housing Court almost always ends in the expulsion of the renter.

As the largest federal agency that supports the housing market in the US, the Housing and Urban Development (HUD) department provides the county and the city with much sought-after Section 8 housing vouchers.

There are rarely enough vouchers for the families that need them. In high-rent counties like Excelsior County, the HUD Section 8 vouchers enable the poor to find their own housing yet the number of vouchers has been greatly curtailed with the Federal Budget Sequester of 2013 (Conversation with local HUD administrator 11/7/14). As with any government benefits program, the experience of having a voucher is stressful because both tenants are scrutinized for any aberrant behavior; and landlords are held to high standards of maintenance and upkeep.

Historically, the 1960s and 70s many of the poor were cast out of affordable housing while urban renewal destroyed livable low-income housing in favor of highway construction and gentrification. The area with the most value in Centerton was the riverfront, where many African-American families found work. Escaping the post-Civil War Jim Crow laws in the South, they worked in the brickyards and made the bricks for the brownstones of New York City in the early 20th century (Lynn Woods Interview: May 14, 2014). City planners and developers saw the opportunity to destroy the neighborhood to favor highway construction to gain easier access to the towns across the creek.

As was true all over the US, once destroyed, low-income housing was never fully replaced largely because it hampers profitmaking for developers. The economic downturn of the late seventies had exacerbated the problem of lack of affordable housing. By 1987, homelessness had become a national problem. Complicating matters was a serious cut in funding for federally subsidized housing. Since the 1980s, much of the money that targets low-income housing is spent on preservation of existing stock with “virtually no new housing built with federally project-based subsidies (Schwartz, 2006: 6).” From the early 1980s to the present, affordable housing construction was subsequently taken over by not-for-profit community groups and the use of Community Development Block Grants and other subsidized mortgage instruments on the state and local level. Block Grants have had varied levels of success and take complex networks of collaboration to come to fruition. In addition, CDBG grants require local expertise and the support of private funding that is often absent in cities like Centerton (Erickson, 2009). Block Grants are also spent at the discretion of the local government and may be spent on other needs that may not directly affect the poor. In the final analysis, the amount of housing that is built does not meet the demand especially in counties like Excelsior County.

Moreover, subsidized affordable housing creates a supply of cheaper housing stock with the consequence of a decrease in rental rates. Without government subsidies corporate developers, and landlords maintain greater control over what is built and not built (Hirsch 2008). The “turn to the right” during the Reagan

Administration eliminated new subsidized affordable housing construction when all safety net supports for families were under attack. The problem of lack of affordable housing construction is often complicated by a “not-in-my-backyard” (NIMBY) stance of local communities³⁰

Lack of affordable housing is one of the most tenacious underlying factors for homelessness in Centerton and Excelsior County. Using the metrics provided by the Census Bureau and the NY State Comptroller’s Office, the sheer lack of rentable or available living space continues to be a challenging issue. Unpacking how the real estate markets and county government deals with the problem requires unraveling the political and historical complexity of land and real estate taxes, building restrictions, and class separations (the Not in My Backyard or NIMBY effect), and demographics. The affordability for 55.1% of the population is above 30% of wages earned. The rate for the lack of affordable rentals is the 3rd highest out of 62 counties in New York State. Working families lost their housing because of growing economic hardships such as underemployment or no employment. In Excelsior County’s 2014 State Comptroller Report, a steep 18.6% rise in rental rates accompanied the drop in income by 7.1% of households in rental units.³¹

In addition, TANF subsidies have not kept pace with the rise in rental rates. For example, a single mother on a housing grant receives \$590 for a studio apartment but a studio apartment costs \$700 to \$900 (depending on the

³⁰ As an example, a recent small housing complex with a mix of affordable housing took ten years of court battles to be approved in Excelsior County.

³¹ NY State Comptroller’s Report 2014--only exceeded by Greene County and The Bronx

neighborhood and condition of the apartment). The rental subsidy has not changed in the four years of my study. As a result, families have a difficult time escaping the shelter, and the alternatives to locate them in more remote and cheaper locations complicate the severe poverty and precariousness of their lives. The cheaper rental locations in Excelsior County are also far from regular transportation thus hindering their commute to classes, trainings, and employment opportunities.

Chapter 2C-

2C.1 Welfare and the management of the poor

Welfare reform and its intersection with family homeless arises primarily out of the precarious economic conditions for low-wage working class families in counties like Excelsior County. The intention of the 1996 welfare law was to push the “able-bodied” and thus undeserving breadwinners into the workforce. It didn’t matter what kind of work or what wages the work provided. What mattered was that one or both parents worked even if that means that the government has to subsidize the family’s wages with supports.

What follows is an abbreviated history of welfare reform to contextualize the conditions in Excelsior County in the larger framework of what amounts to the institutionalization of poverty. To manage the working poor, after the crisis of the Great Depression (1929), the welfare state originated with President Roosevelt’s

Aid to Families with Dependent Children 1936(Gordon and Barlan 2011).³². Public sentiment about the poor depending on the “cultural categories of worthiness” shifts with every economic crisis (Steensland 2006). These cultural categories are deeply embedded in the fabric of society and have several types of influence over policy that affects how we provide for the poor: through collective schemas; through actors and disseminators of cultural resources that shape public discourse; and the reinforcement and institutionalization of both symbolic and programmatic boundaries between categories of the poor (Steensland 2006: 1274).

President Roosevelt’s administration (term: 1933-1945) devised ways to address the crisis of unemployment and poverty after the Great Depression and the visible misery it caused when thousands of “Hoovervilles” were erected across the nation. Branches of government to address the needs of the poor, especially those deemed most “worthy” were created. The problem of the elderly poor was addressed with the creation of the current system of Social Security. For single women and children, Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) was created in 1936 to address the families of unemployed workers. The AFDC served to ameliorate the dire poverty but at the same time confirmed the historical management of the lowest class of the labor pool (Piven and Cloward 1977; see also

³² Roosevelt’s *New Deal* was an answer to the massive poverty that resulted from the Great Depression, and brought with it the first programs that substantially transformed the US into a mixed Keynesian economy of capitalism with entitlements for especially the “deserving poor” or the elderly and families of widows with children. Roosevelt wanted to establish the right to a decent living wage job, education, and health as part of a Second Bill of Rights. Vestiges of this mind-set give us our current welfare system but it is nothing like the system that Roosevelt envisioned.

Polanyi [1944], 2001; Smith 2007). Managing the poor through work and regulation of families and sexuality is a long-standing practice that originated in the English Poor Laws and workhouses.

After the Roosevelt Era waned, in 1965, the crisis of urban and civil rights movements in America laid bare the needs of the urban poor during President Johnson's term (1963-1969). The *War on Poverty* was intended to be full-scale and permanent answer to especially racial inequality in the nation. It was also meant to address the phenomenon of post-industrial poverty. In the 1950s and 60s, labor was redefined in the US from industrial manufacturing to the finance, service industries, and the "New Economy" of intellectual and knowledge labor. Families required more and more education to achieve the wages and consuming power of the American Dream. Both parents needed to bring home a living-wage family income. In families where there was only one parent, and often a single mother, there was no way to make ends meet.

With the *War on Poverty* came the first official poverty thresholds that established the basic needs for housing, caring, and feeding the family, which are still in use today. Mollie Orshansky calculated these standards.³³ The *War on Poverty* also required the first full governmental accounting of the numbers of poor. The

³³ Since the 1965 Orshansky poverty thresholds were calculated, they are used to estimate the number of poor people in the U.S. The Health and Human Services poverty guidelines are used to determine a family's eligibility for services. They are updated annually according to the Consumer Price Index. (Institute for Poverty Research 2014)

have been tracked since then by the US Census Bureau. Johnson's commitment was to eradicate poverty.

Expansion of the 1935 Roosevelt Era AFDC was also sought through a Nixon Presidency unsuccessful attempt at passage of a guaranteed basic income in form of the Family Assistance Plan (or FAP). It was the only historical moment when the American Welfare System did not presume *work status* but *economic need* instead (Steensland 2006:1275). Arguing for a cultural angle on the research for welfare reform, rather than the Marxian (political economy) or Weberian (institutionalization) is what scholars like Amenta (in Steensland) propose will possibly stop reinforcing the status quo in policy development.

The *War on Poverty* faded out in Congressional debates in the seventies under pressure of Viet Nam War and the turn toward neoliberal globalization. The 1965 Moynihan report and a chapter by Oscar Lewis most famously blamed generational poverty on the deterioration of the African-American family and the growth of single women as heads of household. A decade later during the Reagan Administration (term: 1980-1988), the poor were recast as undeserving "welfare queens" who supposedly bought Cadillacs with their entitlement money (Gustafson 2011).³⁴ This biased view of the poor worked to erode the safety net provided by the Johnson *Great Society* programs. Reagan claimed in a pivotal radio address to the nation that women who were receiving AFDC support were deprived of

³⁴ The image of the "welfare queen" was based on a conflation of several welfare fraud cases. Kaaryn Gustafson points out the symbolic recurrence of this image whenever it is politically convenient (2011).

opportunities to work and that welfare would make them increasingly dependent on the system (Radio Address on February 15, 1986 The American Presidency Project); and, in the same vein, conservative authors such as Charles Murray (1984) and Lawrence Mead (1985, 2011) gained popularity in their depiction of the problem of “permissiveness” in our treatment of the poor.³⁵

This point of view was also held by anti-poverty liberals at the time and is recently being rethought by sociologists who are responding to the public sentiment of the refocusing on poverty, since the Occupy Movement in 2011, and the furthering of economic inequality. The redistribution of wealth during the original *War on Poverty* was a strategy waged throughout the Nixon Administration as well. Anti-poverty liberal reformers saw single motherhood as one of the poor’s biggest problems. “While waging a *War on Poverty*, campaigning for a guaranteed income, and designing a full employment policy, the antipoverty coalition remained wedded to a particular model of the family that was already unrealistic by the 1960s: the male-breadwinner, female-homemaker ideal.” (Chappell 2010 Kindle location 147-149) This tension between a middle-class intention to “help the poor” out of moral obligation imposes structures on the poor that are not possible for single female head of a working poor family.

³⁵ Mead maintained his position in 2011 work *From Prophecy to Charity: How to Help the Poor* again basing his newer ideas in the same light of questionable statistics and resources. In contrast to Mead’s claim that Welfare Reform discourages marriage rate, a 2013 Pew Research Center analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau: “A record 40% of all households with children under the age of 18 include mothers who are either the sole or primary source of income for the family. The share was just 11% in 1960.” (May 29, 2013)

Anti-poverty liberals thought that where the AFDC went wrong was to provide aid to single “deserving” mothers without supporting the male breadwinner. Their theory was that Black men would desert their children thus reinforcing the decay of the family especially in inner cities where Black families were concentrated. The liberal strategy to support the model of the two-parent family proved to be a major turning point in the elimination of the model of the Roosevelt Era welfare. By the late 1970s, conservatives used the liberal momentum against the AFDC to abolish cash grants for the poor altogether.

By 1996, President Clinton put his own stamp on “ending welfare as we know it,” there was general agreement from both the right and left political spectrum about who the problem was in poor families: the single female head of the household. Feminists had abandoned the fight for welfare rights. The political will of working-class and middle-class women to destabilize the economy as had been done in the 1960s and 70s through the civil rights, urban riots, and welfare movements, fragmented the feminist coalitions and led to the 1982 defeat of the Equal Rights Amendment. Feminists essentially abandoned their more public agenda and have since then been working to preserve its main tenets in less visible and vocal ways. This left the lower class single women without advocacy. Overt activism was put in “abeyance” and policies were forged that tend to be anti-feminist and exercise paternal control over women’s sexual freedom. Moreover, working-class women have tended to work, since the early nineties, inside

institutions in invisible ways through “unobtrusive mobilization”(Sawyers and Meyer 1999).

The 1996 PRWORA mandated that single female heads of household fulfill what would be a family wage, on their own. They were to work and also come home to do, what Arlie Hochschild calls "the second shift (Hochschild [1989] 2003)." The subset of the larger PRWORA law to address the needs of families with children was entitled Temporary Aid to Needy Families (TANF) and underscores the idea of *temporariness and conditionality* to discourage the poor from thinking about a lifetime of assistance.³⁶ PRWORA was to encourage paternalistic values of marriage and to discourage long-term dependence by setting lifetime limits (60 months in most states).

PRWORA-TANF radically shifted the problem of the poor from the federal government to state and local governments by decentralizing aid to the poor.

“Under TANF, the federal government granted each US State a fixed Community Development Block grant. The total of the welfare program was set at \$16.5 billion each year and requires States to maintain a certain level of spending.” This state-

³⁶ PRWORA SEC. 401. PURPOSE.

(a) IN GENERAL- The purpose of this part is to increase the flexibility of States in operating a program designed to--

- (1) provide assistance to needy families so that children may be cared for in their own homes or in the homes of relatives;
- (2) end the dependence of needy parents on government benefits by promoting job preparation, work, and marriage;
- (3) prevent and reduce the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies and establish annual numerical goals for preventing and reducing the incidence of these pregnancies; and
- (4) encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families.

funding requirement is known as the “maintenance of effort” requirement, or M.O.E. (Schott, Pavetti, and Finch 2012). States essentially have to spend money to get money. However, strict limits were set on TANF funding: the Maintenance of Effort grant was frozen according to the amount of money spent by states at the 1994 State funding.³⁷ Some States such as New York and California provide their citizens safety nets that continue after the 60-month limit (Bloom, Farrell and Fink 2008).

Nevertheless, by 2002, 231,000 people in the US had their welfare cases closed.³⁸ States reported differing levels of diminishing welfare. Welfare rolls were cut in half--in some states more--and policy makers declared success (Bloom et al. 2008). The law put many young mothers into the workforce during a time of one of the greatest expansions of the US economy since the World Wars. Unemployment in the late 1990s fell to 5% (Fang and Keane 2004). However, this economic expansion did not last and poor families did not stop needing assistance (Lichter and Jayakody 2002). According to a report on welfare time limits that has been updated many times, welfare leavers struggle but continue to benefit from a variety of programs such as Food stamps, Food Banks, School lunch programs, Earned Income Tax Credit, Section 8 housing, and local charities (Bloom et. al.2008; Currie 2008). They make ends meet by using a variety of strategies but are living precariously close to the possibility of losing their housing. Unfortunately, The Great

³⁷ Center for Budget and Policy Priorities. *Policy Basics: An Introduction to TANF* (2012)

³⁸ The decline had already begun under AFDC IN 1993 as the economy improved after the 1987 crash and early 1990s Recession. (Fang and Keane 2004:42).

Recession of 2007-08 further cast low-income working families into deeper poverty. In 2013, 14.5% of the US population or 45 million people were living in poverty up from 13.7% in 1996. Of these, TANF helps only 27 out of 100 families in need (Trisi and Pavetti 2012).³⁹ The PRWORA has *simplified* the problem by closing welfare benefits cases but *not solved* the structural reasons for poverty.⁴⁰

The PRWORA-TANF law is predicated on work—no matter what kind of work or wage level. The only cash grant to PRWORA recipients comes in the form of the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC). Janet Currie calls EITC “the carrot” and the PRWORA “the stick” of welfare reform (Currie 2006:32). Work is rewarded while collecting benefits and threats of sanctions that withdraw benefits prevent people from not working. The effectiveness of case management Social Welfare Examiners at the benefits level is often influenced by the political climate of the county and has a “tough love parenting” style to keep welfare recipients off the welfare rolls as much as possible (Taylor Dissertation 2008). If people collect benefits and they not able to find work, they are sent to Community Work Experience Program (CWEP) jobs. These are usually extremely low-skill jobs for the county or city such as

³⁹ “In 1996, for every 100 families with children living in poverty, TANF provided cash aid to 68 families. By 2010, it provided cash assistance to only 27 such families for every 100 in poverty. (We refer to this as the TANF-to-poverty ratio.)”From *TANF Weakening as a Safety Net for Poor Families* (2012 Center for Budget and Policy Priority study).

⁴⁰ It also did not improve the minimum wage for low-wage workers. People come off the welfare rolls and into an existence as the working poor--limited by a minimum wage—empathically described in Barbara Ehrenreich’s *Nickel and Dimed* (2002). People who find employment are not able to make sufficient money to cover the subsistence level expenses. In essence, we have not solved the inequality or the inequity and poverty problems especially for those most at risk: single mothers and their children.

cleaning, yard work, maintenance, garbage collection, or repetitive work in the local vocational rehabilitation factory. On rare occasions, a low-skill clerical job in an office will be available. Even though it is obvious that these jobs don't advance the lot of the people who collect benefits, the DSS prides itself on the demeaning CWEP opportunities for the poor and the homeless.

The PRWORA was reauthorized in 2005 (and 2010) and did not address the civil rights violations reported by the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 2002.⁴¹ In 2012, the number of poor in the US has risen to levels not seen since the late 1960s. The Center for Budget and Policy Priorities (August, 2012) delineates a clear correlation between shrinking TANF funding and State policies that prematurely cast the poor into working poverty even with the growing need for assistance brought on by the 2008 Recession.

The PRWORA rules target female-headed families (Hays 2003:30). In the time of the AFDC, a woman could get assistance to care for her child until the child turned 6 years old. The age for mothers on assistance with TANF dropped from 6 to 3 years old (in some states no allowance is given and mothers have to return to work after the child is six weeks old). The law encourages two-parent families, promotes marriage, and attempts to get young mothers off the welfare rolls and into

⁴¹ "Civil rights enforcement efforts are hampered by the fact that relatively little data have been collected on the distribution of benefits, sanctions, and access to services by race and ethnicity, and there is no uniform national standard for such data collection." (From US Commission on Civil Rights Report 2002). In Chapter 4, there is a discussion of lack of consistent data collection and how the Continuum of Care Consortia will address these inconsistencies. Data collection across agencies began in 2013 in Excelsior County.

the workforce as fast as possible. PRWORA also dictates that single mothers who want to collect benefits must establish the paternity of their children. Once the paternity is established, the family wage would rest on two parents. However, this is not the case for the working poor or who are not paid a living wage, much less a wage that covers a family's expenses (Shiplier 2004:9; Ehrenreich 2001; Hays 2004).⁴² The less educated and often unemployed or criminalized male population that is present in Centerton is deemed to be unworthy for marriage because they cannot support a family (Edin and Kefalas 2005/2013).⁴³

Now that 20 years have passed since welfare reform, women and men who live in poverty are still not likely to marry, in fact, the opposite is true. Between 1994 and 2001, there was a 16% increase in unwed TANF mothers (Graefe and Lichter 2007:5). And as researchers have warned, the government's marriage social experiment has yet to be proven successful (Lichter and Jayakody 2002: 32). One triumph that is celebrated by the Department of Health and Human Services is that the overall teenage mother births between 1991 and 2012 have fallen by as much as 52% in the U.S. and 57% in New York State (Office of Adolescent Health 2012).⁴⁴

⁴² David K. Shiplier in *The Working Poor: Invisible in America* (2008) describes a clinic where almost all the children are malnourished because food comes after housing and childcare costs, which consume most of the working poor family's budget (200-201:2004). Jane Collins and Victoria Mayer's argument for effects of the loss of the family wage and welfare reform is chronicled in *Both Hands Tied: Welfare Reform and the Race to the Bottom of the Low-Wage Labor Market* (2010).

⁴³ Edin and Kefalas did a study, now cited by many except policy makers that "For poor women, marriage is a luxury item that they are unable to consume."

⁴⁴ "New York was ranked 44 out of 51 (50 states + the District of Columbia) on final 2012 teen births rates among females aged 15-19 (with 1 representing the highest rate and 51

However, the problem of teen pregnancies is still disproportionately high among Hispanic and Black teens specifically in low-income families (from The National Campaign to Prevent and End Teen Pregnancy 2010).⁴⁵ Some researchers say that this is because mothers cannot properly supervise their adolescent daughters when they are working and raising a family, as a result, girls in low-income families are more likely to drop out of school because of pregnancy (Hao and Cherlin 2003). Other scholars argue that poor women find their identity and life meaning in their children and some young mothers who are failing in school, think of childbearing as something they are guaranteed to achieve in life (Edin and Kefalas 2005; Hays 2003; Connolly 2000).

Unfortunately, after several recessions, the true results of the PRWORA legislation demonstrate that poverty alleviation has become even more complex and difficult. While a massive protest by scholars and activists persisted over the course of the law's existence, it has never been overturned and its punitive reinforcement of especially female-headed families continues. County and local politics, economic,

representing the lowest rate)" (from New York State Adolescent Reproductive Health Facts 2012).

⁴⁵ The National Campaign to Prevent and End Teen Pregnancy estimates (2010) the cost of teen pregnancy is approximately \$9.4 B mostly because of the associated costs of health care, foster care, incarceration, and lost tax revenue.

The CDC confirms that In 2012, non-Hispanic black and Hispanic teen birth rates were still more than two times higher than the rate for non-Hispanic white teens, and American Indian/Alaska Native teen birth rates remained nearly twice as high as the white teen birth rate.

Non-Hispanic black youth, Hispanic/Latino youth, American Indian/Alaska Native youth, and socioeconomically disadvantaged youth of any race or ethnicity experience the highest rates of teen pregnancy and childbirth.

cultural, social, and political obstacles are in constant turmoil especially because according to budget rules, the U.S. federal government is required to shrink government and shift the responsibility for the poor on the local governments and small cities like Centerton.

The experience at the micro-level of maintaining a family on a low-wage could be considered as living like the “rabble” class described by Marx in *Part I of The German Ideology* (Engels and Marx 1932). Marx described this class of the labor force as the day laborer, the temporary worker much like the people I encountered in the *Ready Haven* family shelter who have long work histories of a few months at-a-time and often as part-time workers or “on call” workers at retail service establishments. The precariousness of this existence is the subject of Guy Standing’s *The Precariat: The Dangerous Class* (2011). Standing describes them as children of globalization (see also Zygmunt Bauman’s *Wasted Lives: Modernity and its Outcasts* 2004), a class that is yet to be formed.

At the level of the Excelsior County Department of Social Welfare Examiners and workforce development offices join in the quick judgment and punishment of single mothers who are “not ready” to take on training because they are likely to fail when they have to combine training and education with caregiving and stable employment (Interview with Workforce Development Director, April 10, 2013). Instead, mothers are relegated to jobs in the lowest wage categories. Thus, the poor never fully escape the poverty cycle completely and are always in danger of slipping back into their previous condition of poverty and repeated homelessness. Loïc

Wacquant (2008) pointed out this slippery slope of no return, and suggests that welfare and human services institutions are only seeing what he calls the “narrow perimeter of wage employment” (2008:7).

The people who manage poverty and the homeless are caught in the same hegemonic poverty trap. Tiffany Taylor’s work (2008) with DSS case managers describes calls the situation accurately: case managers have to do the “dirty work” of welfare reform. People who deliver services to the poor are often from the same backgrounds as the people they serve. They are equally close to relying on safety net provisions. While legislators and policy makers want to assign blame of the lack of cost effective solutions on the poor, the real problems run as deep as class, ethnic, racial, gender, and poverty discrimination often transmitted through embedded discourse of the people who serve the poor and the poor themselves.

Through a discourse study of welfare case managers, Turgeon, Taylor and Niehaus (2014) found that caseworkers “neutralize” their work with welfare policy by contrasting the poor with what they believe are their own middle-class values. The authors contextualize the U.S. poverty discourse in the last several decades as shifting from a sense of need to dependency (Turgeon 2014:657). Day lighting concealed methods of thinking about poverty and homelessness is important because welfare reform has never been repealed or substantially been analyzed to cause change. Control over funding of the welfare law has been put in the local community’s hands with the Community Development Block Grants. This makes the

local conversation about those who use and disburse welfare aid locally the most critical and important to watch. ⁴⁶

People who create and manage emergency shelters are economically tied to the work of caregiving to the poor. While they originally intended to create a “non-judgmental and non-directive” way to serve the poor, they also needed to choose between funding the shelter system and holding on to their original ethics. The choice to accept government grant funding was one of the ways that *Ready Haven* decided to provide services to those in need. However, this meant that a “false choice” or essentially, no better choice that could be made but to accept the constraints that come along with the funding. The welfare system works as it was intended to work when organizations of well meaning people do its bidding. Everyone that works at the agency feels the tension of this cognitive dissonance between understanding the plight of the poor and their own survival. They cannot deny that they need jobs and the benefits that come along with it.

The shelter system does not necessarily help them to escape the talons of poverty and homelessness permanently but families do get rehoused into unaffordable housing with subsidies for a certain period of time. One crisis in a precarious life can offset the dominoes that lead a family to become homeless.

Providing shelter and food as well as a safe place to stay for the night or for the month is something that makes everyone in service provider roles feel good. This “doing good” and “helping” people is implied in some of the ways that Herbert

⁴⁶ This dissertation did not venture into the use of discourse analysis but it would be the next logical step to analyze the gathered data.

Gans (1972) proposed would validate people who call the poor their “clients” or their “customers.” Gans also said that communities benefit from the poor because they come to the free store to get used clothing and items that others have thrown away. The poor will also eat the produce that was gleaned from fields that were already picked by people who sell the vegetables to markets. The poor are also regular users of the robust (50 in Excelsior County) food pantry system. Of course, the poor can also be pitied, making others feel good that they avoided the bad luck of poverty. In this way, in the small city of Centerton, serving the poor provides employment and validation for the middle-class.⁴⁷ Beyond this functionalist analysis, that focuses on the maintenance of the middle-class, are both macro and micro interactions of the people and institutions in the poverty cycle.

In response to times when dire poverty became visible, the lack of political power of anti-poverty advocates and lack of political engagement of the very poor, assures continued and long-term reproduction of poverty from one generation to another. In the end, the poor are on their own to figure out their destinies including their housing and family stability. Ulrich Beck calls this the phenomenon of “tragic individualization: whatever catastrophe happens...you’re on your own! Most institutions “whitewash” their own failures by calling on people’s “responsibility” over their own fate.” (Beck 2006:336).

⁴⁷ A functional analysis must conclude that poverty persists not only because it satisfies a number of functions but also because many of the functional alternatives to poverty would be quite dysfunctional for the more affluent members of society (Gans1972: 287)

2C.2 Labor subordination

The idea of labor subordination and the provision of welfare for laborers, especially those at the bottom of the working class have its foundations in the English Poor House and Work House system. The management of poverty and work has been a problem in industrialized nations since the late 18th Century when the first industrial revolution required more control over labor pools than was previously necessary. Early poverty and housing management in the U.S. was modeled on pre-industrial English Poor Laws. In 1795 the land law was created to provide “outdoor relief” to amend the existing Elizabethan Poor Law. The law pushed the provision of relief on to the local parishes, much as we have seen the Community Development Block Grants are currently pushing the costs of welfare aid to the counties and cities. According to Polanyi (2001-Kindle Edition), the law provided a minimum wage to workers. Polanyi writes of the crisis that developed by giving all workers a guaranteed income whether they worked or not. The effects of the law, he claimed, “were ghastly” because it caused a devaluation of the labor market. The working poor were pauperized because of shrinking subsidy that was tied to the price of grain (Piven and Cloward [1971] 1993: Loc.560 Kindle Edition). Similar effects of the Speenhamland law can be seen with 21st Century shrinking need for low-skill labor so that the labor pool is large and wages are increasingly depressed. Globalization and automation have shrunken the availability of living wage low-skill work. Forcing unskilled and uneducated people into the jobs that are in need of low-cost labor have solved the problem of employment for the unskilled

workforce. In the case of Excelsior County and Centerton, this means forcing people into the growing retail and health services sector. The management of the labor force is controlled by a combination of county and city governments in tandem with the businesses that need labor. The corporations are happily taking advantage of the current government wage subsidies to keep wages low and to force people into low-wage work if they want the subsidy.

Chapter 2C.3 Family Homelessness

Centerton's economic decline over the past 50 years parallels changes in US Safety Net program. It has also become a situation in which there is a marked increase in *family* homelessness. Different forms of homelessness came more prominently into public view in the US in two distinct ways: 1) from the release of institutionalized mental health patients in the 1960s and 70s, and 2) from the decreasing median family income coupled with a lack of affordable housing. Yet, these two very different problems are often conflated.⁴⁸

In the 1970s, the mental health community found state hospitals inadequate and large numbers of mentally ill men and women were released onto the city streets all over the US. The problem of *visible* homeless people in the US grew exponentially. The problem came to a crisis level during the Reagan Administration in the 1980s. In the beginning of the release of patients, local mental health centers were funded for about four-and-a-half years by the federal government. Funds were

⁴⁸ There are four US federally defined categories under which individuals and families may qualify as homeless: 1) literally homeless; 2) imminent risk of homelessness; 3) homeless under other Federal statutes; and 4) fleeing/attempting to flee domestic violence. http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/program_offices/comm_planning/homeless

then thought to be “enough” for local communities to continue managing local mental health clinics on their own (Lyons 1984). The initial reaction to the release of mental health patients provided quick but substandard living quarters for single men and women.

The landmark *Callahan vs. Carey (1979)* case established the right to “legal shelter for all” in New York State.⁴⁹ In response to the visible abuse in these shelters, cities like New York improved their emergency shelter systems. Currently, according to the U.S. 2013 Point In Time (PIT) count of homeless people, a single individual homeless person is still the largest homeless population (64% or 387,845). Individuals in families make up 36% or 221, 197 of the total 610, 042 homeless people in the US. The rate of chronically homeless people, and especially veterans is currently declining while family homelessness has not declined since the 2008 Recession. There is, however, an increase in *sheltered* homeless families. The most important detail for my study is that among homeless individuals in families, 58% or 130, 515 are children nationwide.⁵⁰

To further unpack data of the homeless population, the last Point-In-Time report to the US Congress that included summaries of ethnicity and race of homeless people was in 2009. This racial breakdown is unfortunately not included in the 2013 report. In 2009, of the homeless people in shelters, 63.7% were male and 36.3% were female. Women (mostly under the age of 31), and especially those who are

⁴⁹ *Callahan v. Carey*, No. 79-42582 (Sup. Ct. N.Y. County, Cot. 18, 1979) the right to shelter was eventually extended to women and families in later litigation.

⁵⁰ 2013 Annual Homelessness Assessment Report to Congress or AHAR

single heads of households with children, seek temporary shelter more than men. Of the US *sheltered* population, three-fifths are children and more than half under six. Of the female population, 79.6% were in families. Of the total sheltered population, 38.1% were White/Non-Hispanic, 11.6% were Hispanic, 38.7% were Black, 4.7% were of Other Single Race, and 7% were mixed.

During eight years of the Reagan Administration cutbacks there were, nevertheless, advocacy efforts at the local and national levels in response to the growing problem of homelessness in the US. The category of public “worthiness” for homeless families became a more visible problem with the 1987 McKinney Act (later McKinney-Vento). It was the first significant source of funding targeted at homeless families and specifically children. It was the first and only federal legislative response to homelessness in the US. It was also the reason why children have the right, for example, to continue in the same school district from which they were displaced if they become homeless, and are housed by an emergency shelter like *Ready Haven* that is located in another school district.⁵¹ The US Interagency Council for the Homeless was started in the same year as McKinney-Vento to provide Presidential cabinet-level oversight. The efforts of USICH are contingent upon the repeated reauthorization of the McKinney-Vento Act. The “ending and preventing” homelessness mission was mandated by HEARTH Act in 2009 which now replaces and amended the McKinney-Vento Act (S896 HUD Exchange Document). The act addressed the rights of homeless people to be able to have

⁵¹ *Ready Haven* transports children to their “home” school to maintain consistency in education. Sometimes that means expensive 45-minute taxi rides.

shelter as well as the continuity of education for homeless children. There was also the calling for of adequate health care, food, and adult training and education (especially for Veterans). It infused the new shelter system with \$1 billion targeted at homeless families and specifically children. The law remains only US federal legislative response to homelessness. Reauthorization and strengthening of the law culminated when the Obama Administration transitioned the Homeless Emergency Assistance Rapid Transition to Housing or HEARTH Act (2009).⁵²

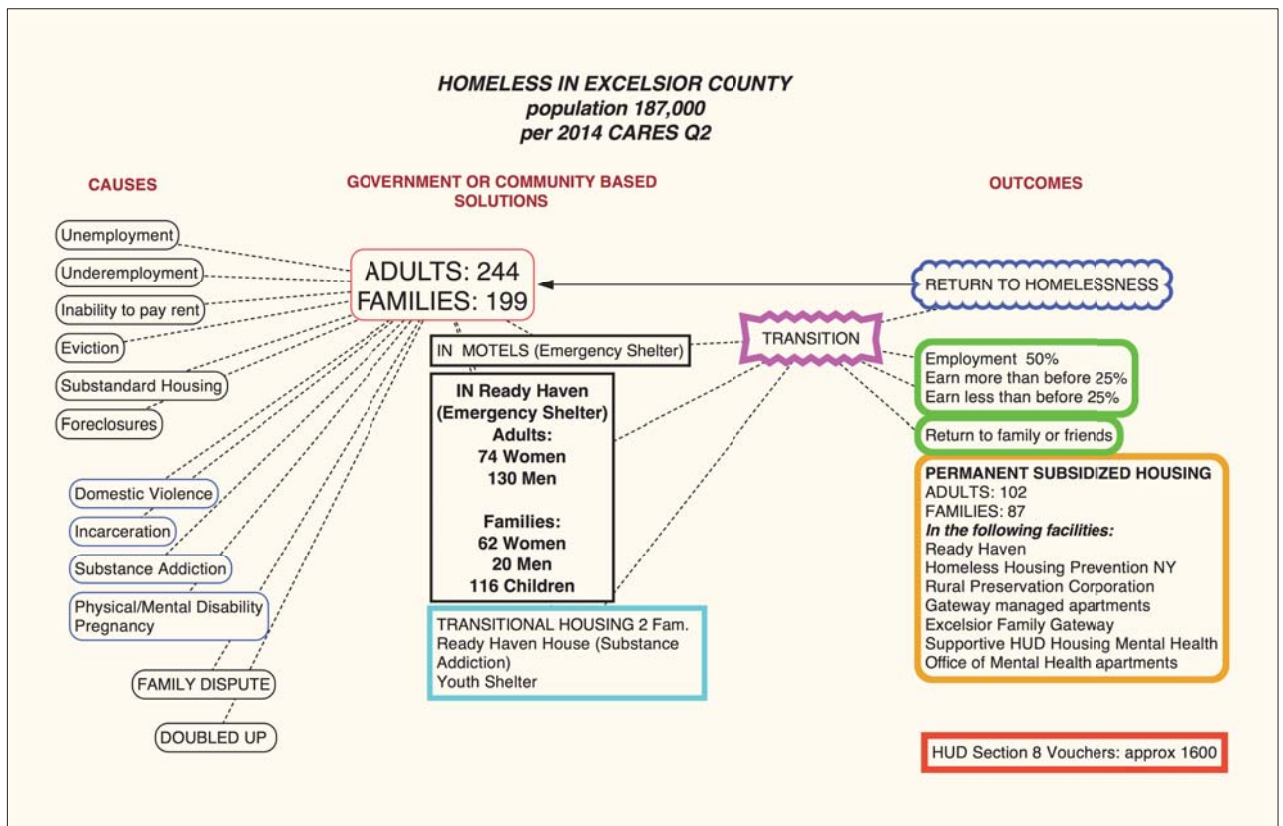


Fig. 3 Homeless in Excelsior County

⁵² The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act As amended by S. 896 The Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing (HEARTH) Act of 2009

Figure 3 depicts the confusing and often difficult-to-navigate network of possible outcomes for homelessness. The causes of homelessness economically are: unemployment, underemployment, and inability to pay rent, eviction, substandard housing, and foreclosures.⁵³ The information in this map comes from the second quarter Excelsior homelessness count. When I was trying to glean this information from various sources, I got conflicting numbers and inaccurate numbers about employment figures.

In general, the problem of counting homeless people and families falls on agencies that do not have the personnel or volunteers to properly count the homeless population. The task is then left to police departments, soup kitchens, temporary safe havens and warming centers to report the number of people they serve. There is one night in the year that the U.S. government demands numbers, and local volunteers at homeless services make an attempt to count the homeless on one of the Northeast's coldest nights, January 31st. Counting the homeless at this time of year diminishes the amount of people who can be found unsheltered. For example, my experience with the Point in Time count in January 2015 was on a snow day when the soup kitchen I was assigned to was closed in accordance with the city school snow day closing rule. As a result, I could not fulfill on my volunteer duties.

⁵³ In January 2014, the Point in Time Count for New York State 80, 590 homeless people (a 4.1% increase in 2014 that has steadily risen since 2007) Family homelessness in Excelsior County is on the rise as it is nation-wide. New York State's homeless population has risen the fastest of all the US States followed by Massachusetts.

As indicated by the local homeless data, during the year, 240 adults and about 199 families are homeless in Centerton and Excelsior County and in need of emergency shelter in the second Quarter of 2014. Tracking families through the system becomes a guessing game of estimates because the Department of Social Services protects the data of each family. Employment, welfare supports, and whether families are stable are data held by many agencies that, until 2013, did not share data. Counts for homeless families are even more inaccurate because most families can depend on some kind of temporary warm shelter especially for young children. This obfuscates the true number of families that need services.

Most homeless families do everything they can to stay out of temporary shelters. Some parents will tolerate living on couches, and doubling up with friends or extended family, so that children can go to school and life can be somewhat stable. Some families do everything to scrape up their own money to stay in a motel. The family has to run out of all options and lose most of their belongings, furniture, and property before they report themselves to the local Department of Social Services (DSS) and request assistance.

The first County Department for Social Services answer for homeless families has been to house them in motels. The *Ready Haven Agency* manages all four standard types of emergency housing, except motels. The government funds the following types of housing for the homeless: emergency shelters, temporary (motels), transitional, supportive, and permanent supportive housing (with case management). Reasons for family homelessness range from domestic violence,

returning from incarceration, substance addiction, mental and physical disability. Family disputes and people living in tight quarters with each other often cause violence that lands people in an emergency shelter.

2C.4 Children

Just as housing is one of the fundamental questions that underlies any kind of homelessness, care and oversight of children is the question that distinguishes family homelessness. Across the U.S., a single mother in her late twenties heads up most homeless families where there are one or more children under six.⁵⁴

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) oversees the welfare of all children. There are two major branches that tie into the Administration on Children, Youth & Families: 1) The Children's Bureau (CB); and 2) The Family Youth Services Bureau (FYSB). Since 1919, Children's Bureau has

⁵⁴ National Center for Homeless Education. *Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program Data Collection Summary*. May 2011

Definition of Child Homelessness:

(2) The term homeless children and youths' — (Section 725 McKinney-Vento Act)

(A) means individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence (within the meaning of section 103(a)(1)); and

(B) includes — (i) children and youths who are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason; are living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to the lack of alternative adequate accommodations; are living in emergency or transitional shelters; are abandoned in hospitals; or are awaiting foster care placement;

(ii) children and youths who have a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings (within the meaning of section 103(a)(2)(C));

(iii) children and youths who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings; and

(iv) migratory children (as such term is defined in section 1309 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965) who qualify as homeless for the purposes of this subtitle because the children are living in circumstances described in clauses (i) through (iii).

overseen 1) the strengthening of families; 2) the well-being of foster children 3) support of youth development and 4) promoting permanent homes for children without families (Joseph Bock's Introduction to History of the Children's Bureau 2012). Management of children without families is the primary goal of the institution but management of children who may be at risk of parental abuse is the purview of local Child Protective Services Units. The more stringent use of government-sponsored agencies for the protection of children occurred in the late 1970s as foster care laws and oversight of child welfare was split into the Children's Bureau and the 10 Regional offices of the Family and Youth Services Bureau (. The aims of the administration of children's services are necessary and noble. The effects of oversight over families living in poverty and families who may become homeless, however, is redoubled through the local Child Protective Services Office (CPS). Homelessness is blamed on parents. Many of the parents in the family shelter field site feared the intervention of CPS or losing the custody of their children.

Through my interview with the *Ready Haven* Executive Director on July 17, 2014, I learned that children are often witnesses to domestic violence in their families. In Excelsior County alone, there were 800 reported cases of domestic violence in 2012-13 (County Executive Press Release, Oct. 2013). In addition to the hotline services that are provided by *Ready Haven* to the county, there is also the Crime Victims Assistance Program with a "victim-oriented" approach to the conflict. There is a separate *Ready Haven* shelter with an undisclosed address where women and their children are housed after a domestic violence incident. More than 80% of

women who are placed in the *Ready Haven* shelter for families are victims of past domestic violence.⁵⁵

Lack of safe and competent childcare in poor neighborhoods is a complicating factor for mothers who are forced into low-wage work with welfare reform. Moreover, where poor children lose their edge in the new economy is from their lack of proper early education. Although the local community action group provides Early Head Start and Head Start seats on a needs basis rather than a “first come first served” basis, the amount of seats, 289 infants and toddlers, is never enough to educate all needy children in that age range.⁵⁶ Roughly 28.2% of 1,813 children under five in Centerton live below the poverty level. This means that there are not enough seats for the children would need Head Start.⁵⁷

The problem of children in homeless families is subject of a series of studies conducted by The Institute for Children, Poverty and Homelessness (ICPH), which focuses all of its work on children who are living in poverty. It provides some of the most comprehensive nationwide data on homeless families. The ICPH also has a specific policy agenda as it studies the many facets of homelessness in New York

⁵⁵ In Excelsior County alone, there were 800 reported cases of domestic violence in 2012-13 (County Executive Release, Oct. 2013). In addition to the hotline services that are provided by *Ready Haven* to the county, there is also the Crime Victims Assistance Program with a “victim-oriented” approach to the conflict. There is a separate *Ready Haven* shelter with an undisclosed address where women and their children are housed after a domestic violence incident. For this reason, the *Ready Haven* agency trains its case managers and support workers to deliver *trauma-informed* care. Empowerment groups are in place for the women to rebuild their lives after they are housed.

⁵⁶ This is often a problem for the most at-risk children in the family shelter.

⁵⁷ The Census bureau does not break down the age of the children under five so this is an estimate.

City. While this is helpful to understand the largest problem of homelessness in the state, the smaller cities like Centerton are not on their radar. The problem is perhaps not as concentrated as it is in New York City but it is proportionately similar. The ICPH findings stand in opposition to the U.S. government's inclination to house homeless families as quickly as possible. The organization provides evidence and a strong critique of these policies. Housing homeless families in their own apartments is not the *only* answer because the causes of homelessness for families are not only lack of affordable housing. The high rate of returning families to temporary shelters occurs when long-term assistance such as family stability and health, education, job training, and opportunity for employment is not provided (findings that DaCosta-Nunez presented at the 2012 Beyond Housing Conference). To cope with the lack of resources families fall into the same conditions that cause repeated use of temporary shelters and a precarious unstable life.

Da Costa Nunez proposed the condition of family homelessness as a multi-dimensional issue but that it is rarely addressed that way (also see Somerville 2013). He calls the condition of family homelessness "modern" (DaCosta-Nunez 2004, 2014 keynote at Beyond Housing Conference). To give a concrete example to an audience of national homelessness advocates, he recounted the Bloomberg Administration one-dimensional *Rapid Rehousing* program as a failed experiment that should not be repeated in other communities. He told the story of how affordable housing development and gentrification collided head-on in New York. Bloomberg proposed to house homeless families quickly with short-term

subsidies.⁵⁸ However, new housing development of the Bloomberg Era needed employed people who could maintain their homes. Instead, the short-term supports attracted working families into the subsidized housing supports. Once subsidies ended, the poor were unable to continue to pay their rents. As in previous waves of gentrification, the poor were displaced out of the housing stock and were pushed back into the shelter system.

The failure of the New York City experiment demonstrates that the problem of family homelessness is much more complex than simply housing a family. If the family is not economically ready or stable enough to assume the responsibility of a rental apartment, they are driven back into the temporary shelter system. The Bloomberg experiment thus proves to be expensive and ineffective (da Costa-Nunez, Anderson and Bazerjian 2013). As an indication, the rate of return to the shelter is now at 56%, the length of shelter stay is over 1 year and costs have increased from \$87M in 2005 to \$218M per year in 2011. While the program is not a complete failure, homelessness in New York City and throughout the U.S., is a long term and expensive problem.

Children are currently the largest poverty group in the U.S. when prior to the provision of Social Security and Medicare; the elderly were the largest group of the poor. The number of children living in poverty and without proper housing has increased over the past several years, especially after the 2007-08 Recession (Reese

⁵⁸ Moreover, the idea of this kind of rehousing policy is being currently tried throughout the US. It will remain to be seen whether other attempts are more successful.

and Taciak 2009). According to the November 2014 *America's Youngest Outcasts Report*, 2.5 million children were homeless 2013. In New York State, 28,437 out of 80,590 (22%) total homeless people are children; or, to look at the breakdown in a different way, 44,284 of that total are homeless family households. New York State's composite ratings in the *Outcasts* report on the effectiveness of child homelessness programs are rated at 35th for the nation (Bassuk, DeCandia, Beach and Berman 2014: 55). The composite is based on the following measures. It reveals the poor quality of life for the state's population of homelessness children:

- 1) The Extent of Child Homelessness – 49th;
- 2) Child Wellbeing – 15th;
- 3) Risk for Child Homelessness 24th;
- 4) State Policy and Planning Efforts 41st.⁵⁹

Looking at the numbers at the (micro) local level, the following homelessness numbers are from The Homelessness Management Information System data (2013-

⁵⁹ To arrive at each of the 50 states measures, these were the ***Variables for Child Homelessness*** and data that were gathered: .

- Number of Emergency Shelter Family Units (HUD).
- Transitional Housing Family Units (HUD).
- Permanent Supportive Housing Family Units (HUD).
- Existence of State Housing Trust Funds (Center for Community Change).

We calculated an estimate of the number of homeless families in the state by dividing the total number of homeless children (using data from the Extent domain) by two because the average homeless family is comprised of two children (Burt & Aron, 2000; HUD, 2010). We then calculated the total capacity as a percentage of need (total number of homeless families/total number of family units). The Housing score was then used to rank the states from 1-50 (1=best, 50=worst). If there were ties between states, the state with the lower percent of homeless children was assigned the better rank (Bassuk et al 2014:111).

14), which show the homelessness breakdown for Excelsior County (current population is 181,000):

	2013	2014
Families	191	216
Adults	240	252
Children	312	349

These figures are based on a singular measurement (or Point in Time measure) taken on one day in January, and represent an increase in family homelessness over one year.⁶⁰ Even though the USICH 2020 goal is to “end to family homelessness,” the problem is actually increasing.

2.2 Summary

In this chapter, I explained the background and frameworks of the problem of homelessness as it was impacted by lack of affordable housing and welfare reform. While the problems of the urban center are more obvious because of their larger size, they are similar and not any less complicated in the small city.

Moreover, poverty is not a *temporary* condition as the U.S. government hoped it would be with 1996 Welfare Reform. Although a more permanent safety net exists in some states such as New York, welfare aid for the working poor has become a lifetime of dependence that feeds the low-wage labor need of the retail

⁶⁰ The overall U.S. Continuum of Care data for the American Homelessness Assessment Report 2014 indicates that the number of families in shelters are increasing.

economy in the county. Government spending on the amelioration of poverty continues to diminish, and much of the growing and invisible population is the families that repeatedly use the *Ready Haven* shelter. We now turn to the shelter and the methodology that was used to gather and analyze data for the dissertation.

SCENE: The family shelter shares a parking lot with the adult shelter. Both buildings were once dedicated to small manufacturing. In 2005, when the population of children and families was increasing in the local motels, the building was expanded to 7 rooms with a total of 30 beds plus common kitchen, living room, bathrooms, and administrative office space. An average of 190 individuals, parents and their children, are housed at the shelter per year. Most stay about 45 days or, sometimes, as long as 7 months. Children under 18 and their parent(s) are the reason why the Department of Social Services office places people at this particular shelter.

Greenery around the edges of both shelters is well maintained year-round. In the wooden picket-fenced yard of the family shelter, there is a round gazebo next to a small children's playground with a swing set and a slide. As a visitor comes into the yard, the residents sit in the gazebo, often with their infants, smoking cigarettes- no matter what the season. The boundary between the outside and inside of the shelter is a locked door with a buzzer and an alarm system. A resident counselor usually opens the door to allow people to enter the building.

Chapter 3

Methodology

3.1 Overview

The method to research life in an emergency shelter for families in a small city (Tier II shelter)⁶¹ was a qualitative and naturalistic inquiry defined by the assumption that all reality is multiple and socially constructed in a situation such as a homeless shelter in a small city.⁶² The *positionality* of the researcher is part of naturalistic inquiry and is considered to influence all gathering and analysis of the data.

The naturalistic paradigm, or naturalism, makes specific claims about epistemology (i.e., how one comes to know), ontology (i.e., the nature of human existence), and axiology (i.e., one's values) that influence naturalistic inquiry (Tullis Owen 2008: 548).

Field knowledge and literature reviews built my familiarity with the problems of cyclical homelessness. From the literature reviews, I found that family homelessness in emergency shelter within the ecology of agencies that serve these populations is understudied. Only recently have researchers turned to the subject because of the USICH *Opening Doors Program (2010)*. The *Ready Haven Agency*

⁶¹ (PART 900-NY State Office of Temporary and Disability Services 2005). *SHELTER FOR FAMILIES* A tier II facility is a facility subject to the provisions of this Part which provides shelter and services to 10 or more homeless families including, at a minimum, private rooms, access to three nutritional meals a day, supervision, assessment services, permanent housing preparation services, recreational services, information and referral services, health services, and child-care services.

benefits from the larger funding and control schemes of the county, state, and federal governments.

The study encompasses life in an emergency shelter for families, focusing on the experiences of the homeless parents and shelter administrators. A close study of each experience of homelessness and, conversely, of each layer of care given to the homeless elicits insights that have been fruitful in order to establish hypotheses, as there has only recently been interaction between each layer of bureaucratic control of the family homelessness Excelsior County and Centerton.⁶³

The theoretical orientation of the study is underpinned by the idea of time whether it is short or long spans that people experience homelessness.

Homelessness is directly tied to structural conditions of low-wage work and lack of affordable housing. The model of Goffman's idea of the (1959) *moral career* is what I found to be the most applicable to frame meanings and perceptions as people struggle through their experience of cyclical homelessness. I also use Andrew Abbott's concept of the *turning point* as an analytic framework to further (see Chapter 6).

Qualitative methods combined with quantitative information from the shelter system serves as the research foundation of my dissertation. The *Ready Haven Agency* provides programming to assist parents to “work off their grant.” The agency is contracted by the Department of Social Services (DSS) to provide this kind of “value added” programming while the residents are in the emergency shelter.

⁶³ Since 2013, a Consortium of Care has begun to meet in order to coordinate efforts that will benefit the homeless population in Excelsior County (See Chapter 4).

Each resident has to fill out job-hunting forms to demonstrate either a job search (20 sources per week) or a demonstration of training (if allowed) or, preferably, paid work.

Instead of focusing solely on “worker readiness,” these sessions were used as part of an unstructured interview process with shelter residents to understand what homeless parents planned for their futures, how they thought about their futures and how they would fulfill them. For example, many residents sought to finish their High School education and I collaborated with the shelter and the tech school to create a regular High School Equivalency workshop in the *Ready Haven* adult shelter across the parking lot from the family shelter.

I explored access to education and training when residents requested it. I also collaborated with local city and county institutions to make paths into education, training, and connection to other opportunities for the residents possible. In many cases, the DSS Social Welfare Examiner did not make obtaining education possible because of time limits of welfare benefits and work was always required alongside training or education. For a mother with several children, even an online college course was stressful and difficult to pursue.

I advocated upgrading clients' skills to escape the limitations of low-wage work. I realized when I led each worker readiness session that I wasn't truly addressing the problem of homelessness. My position as a mandated group leader to prepare the residents for work put me in the conflicted position of assisting clients to fulfill the requirements of the workfare law. Nevertheless, these sessions were

the access to opportunities for interactions in both group discussion settings and one-on-one exchanges. I will describe and examine interviews and group sessions further in Chapter 8.

In this chapter, I discuss: 1) the research setting, 2) aspects of data collection, 3) the research sample, 4) data collection methods 5) data analysis method, 6) issues of trustworthiness, 7) and generalizability of the dissertation findings.

The physical setting of the shelter is a one-floor nondescript building in the middle of Centerton that *Ready Haven* rehabilitated with County and State support in 2005. Previously, homeless families were held in a local motel without overnight supervision. There are seven bedrooms configured according to the number of parents and children. Often, two different families shared a room. The population of residents is constantly shifting, so families move and change rooms to accommodate this constant change. Also, there are times families will not get along with each other and room adjustments have to be made by the staff. The shelter is a “dry” shelter for the protection of children requiring residents to be sober at all times. Upon waking, residents must report to the front desk to be breathalyzed by 9:30 AM. They are breathalyzed every time they re-enter the shelter when they have outside appointments, classes, etc. The nighttime curfew of 9:30 PM is strict (See Chapter 7 for the complete Daily Shelter Routine).

3.2 The selection of the research setting

The Director of the shelter and the Director of the Children's Program were my main informants at the field site throughout this study. The *Ready Haven* Executive Director provided entry into the mezzo and macro structure of the management of homelessness at the *Continuum of Care* meetings. The shelter allowed me to use a closed office space in the first year of my study because it was often empty. Eventually, the office was turned into a much-needed private space for case managers; I was asked to conduct my group in the living room.⁶⁴ The setting was much more public and noisy and children and administrators would often interrupt sessions when they needed to speak to individual residents.

The time frame and interaction with the *Ready Haven* family shelter consisted of an initial ten-week study as part of a Qualitative Methods class (2011) as a low-level resident counselor and children's services assistant. The next year, in 2012, I was invited to run a mandated "worker readiness" group and continued my weekly visits until spring of 2014.⁶⁵ My interviews and advocacy work for shelter residents with the group and my interviews with shelter and agency management are the bulk of the data of my dissertation.

⁶⁴ I contributed a laptop computer to the shelter so that residents could access the Internet on their own time. The keyed access to the computer was only allowed during weekdays and office hours.

⁶⁵ I revised the worker readiness group curriculum with a greater emphasis on understanding the job market and opportunities for training and education. I redubbed the group "Future Readiness" (See Chapter 8).

The family shelter is one of five that the *Ready Haven Agency* manages. The shelter building and facilities are also owned by the agency, as are the other facilities in which *Ready Haven* cares for homeless people. Families come into the shelter based on the eligibility analysis of the Department of Social Services Social Welfare Examiner and the availability of beds at the family shelter. The shelter provides shared rooms, usually two families per room depending on the number of children, with a shared dining, kitchen, and laundry area. Each family is assigned a case manager upon arrival. The primary task of the case manager is to find the parent(s) housing as fast as possible. The shelter also runs other mandated groups, such as the one that I ran that addressed nutrition, budgeting, and parenting.

3.3 The research sample

The total number of people in the shelter according to the 2013 census sheets was 115 people, 69 children, and 46 adults. The average age for women was 25 to 29, and the average age for men 30-40. While the average size of the family was one or two children, there were two families of 5-6 children all under the age of 7. Out of 96 cases, I selected 22 cases because they best represented the types of relationships that I encountered at the shelter over time.⁶⁶ The demographic percentages broke down to the following family configurations:

⁶⁶ The sample of recorded interviews was at first 96 people. Then I pared it down to the families I had seen more than once because many families would just slip through the shelter within weeks and we would not have more than one visit or group session. I did not have access to families who worked or families that were excused from the workshop because they were on permanent disability.

Couples 15.22%
Married 2.17%
Single father 13.04%
Single mother 69.57%

The racial distribution in 2013 was: 47% Caucasian, 28% African-American 13% Bi-Racial 9% Hispanic and 2% Asian.

I selected the 22 cases in my study with this ratio in mind:

Couples: Ramira and Sean, Mitch and Terry, Henry and Lara (6 people in 3 couples) 27%

Single father: Gary (1-African-American) 4% - Single fathers tended to be at work when their children were school aged so I did not have much interaction with them.

Single mothers: Aisha, Gina, Ida, Naomi (although she came back with Peter a year and a half later) Noreen, Dolores, Penelope, Deana, Joshanna, Amana, Sharon, Rebecca, Cary, Nora, Maria and Anna (16) 72%.

The selected cases roughly approximate the distribution of race across the shelter population: 50% Caucasian, 32% African-American, 9% Bi-Racial, 5% Hispanic, 5% Asian. Participants were mostly from Centerton. Four people were born in NY City and one in Ohio. The sample also includes four cases of women who are repeat users of emergency shelter. The education level of the residents was mixed with ten people without high school degrees; six people with GED (General Education Degrees); two with completed HS educations; and two with College degrees. The criteria for selecting cases in Table 1 were families that were at the shelter long enough, about four to six weeks. Some families were at the shelter

longer. Two of the people, Aisha and Anna, have become friends, and I attempt to maintain a mentor relationship with them.

TABLE 1 - CASES the								
	Homeless						Disability	
Case#	2011	FEMALE	MALE	Race	AGE	local?	SSD/SSI	EDUCATION
1	3X	Aisha repeat over lifetime		AA	40		Y	
	2012							
2		Gina		AA	24	NYC	N	HS
3		Ida		BR	37	Y	N	No
4	2X	Naomi repeat 2011		C	22	Y	N	GED
5		Noreen		BR	23	Y	N	No
6		Serena		AA	22	Y	N	HS
7		Penelope		AA	27	Y	N	GED
8		Deana		C	24	Y	N	No
9		Terry		C	45	Y	N	No
9A			Mitch	C	46	Y	N	No
10		Joshanna		AA	25	Y	N	GED in prison
	2013							
11A			Gary	AA	45	Y	N	GED
12		Amana		C	25	Y	N	No
13	2X	Sharon repeat 2013/14		C	24	Y	N	HS
14			Henry	C	34	Y	N	HS
15		Rebecca		AA	38	NYC	N	No
16		Ramira		BR/Asian	34	NYC	N	College
16A			Sean	C	38	Ohio	N	GED Prison
	2014							
17	2X	Carey repeat 2011		AA	24	Y	N	GED
18		Nora		C	29	NYC	N	No
19		Maria		BR	33	Y	Y	No
20	4X	Anna repeat over lifetime		HISP	52	Y	Y	College

Table 1 - Cases in the dissertation

3.3 Data collection methods

I approached the data inductively during the first year of my work at the shelter. All data were anonymized.⁶⁷ I went into the field without much of a preconceived notion. I expected that the data would then be the ground on which I built new theory. My commitment to the dissertation was to allow the data to speak for itself. I wanted new ideas to emerge from the notes, observations, documentation, and interviews. However, "... words are fatter than numbers (LeCompte and Shensul 1999:67)." As I was gathering interviews, I realized the problem with interview data is that it is voluminous.

As part of the daily routine, shelter residents are put through a regimen of "mandated groups." These groups are part of the efforts to resettle families quickly and to get them work, which satisfies the contract *Ready Haven* has with DSS. The curriculum for the workshop had to be approved by DSS as part of "worker" readiness training. I attempted a "future" readiness way of looking at how technology affects the entire sphere of work. Rather than getting residents simply "work-ready," I tried to make them aware of their personal assets and their motivation toward a future they design for themselves.

My group was not the only one out of the resident's daily responsibility for group attendance. If they skipped the session, I would have to report this to shelter management. Case managers would then have to record the transgression. At one

⁶⁷ I anonymized the city, the county, families, case managers and administrators.

point early in my research, I became frustrated with the lack of interest and attendance by the residents. My field notes betray the difficulty of wanting to "help" someone without imposing my values on the situation. I learned to step back and just listen as time progressed. After a brief introduction to my study and my background, I told them: "This session is for you, how can I help you? What would you like to do with this time?" As I assess the success of this kind of shelter programming, I learned that trust is delicate and fleeting. Success is relative as will be recounted in Chapter 9 where I tell the stories of the people I followed after their shelter stay.

Depending on the amount of people who needed information, coaching, and advocacy on employment and education, I was at the shelter once a week from about 8 AM to 9 AM until 12 PM to 1 PM. The sessions were initially held in a closed office. With a change in the allocation of office space and an expansion of the staff, the sessions moved to the much more open living room. Shelter residents signed individual permissions when they chose to avail themselves of my services.⁶⁸ There were only a few residents who did not want to participate. Most residents almost blindly signed the permission form, but I still reviewed the aims of my study with them and how their data would be used.

For the group sessions, I projected Power-Point slides on one of the walls and led a group discussion about the future, work, and money for about 45 minutes.

⁶⁸ My study was also overseen by the New School Institutional Review Board. (2011 and 2012-2015).

One-on-one sessions were about 30-minutes long. An interview guide⁶⁹ elicited some of the stories explaining and describing the condition of family homelessness. I eventually used the census data that the shelter collected as part of the interview so that I would not duplicate the questions that had been asked when the family entered the shelter.

To describe and explain cases, qualitative methods are used to report the subjective understanding of the shelter residents' experiences through the use of interviews and observation in the field. In addition, I interviewed family shelter administrators and some case managers as well as the *Ready Haven Agency* Executive Director. As opposed to positivist replicability of the methods and results, my journey was a "reflexive model of science that takes as its premise the intersubjectivity of the scientist and subject of study" (Burawoy 1998:1). I used this method of participant observation at the field site. I would then research frameworks that could assist me in keeping my objectivity while striving to fully engage in the lives of the people at the shelter.

Some narratives of the shelter families in my study ended when they transitioned out of the shelter. These are families that became stably housed and found work, or another way to sustain themselves. Other stories did not end well. For example, some mothers lost custody over their children.

I also approached the field site through the bureaucracies that govern the situation of homelessness in order to obtain as wide a view as possible. I spent

⁶⁹ See Appendix 3

additional time at the shelter when I was not doing the Future Readiness workshop to examine documents the shelter kept on the families living there. This is when I had the opportunity to look at case files kept by the shelter. Sifting through these hundreds of pages of notes became a task that I would like to reserve for future study. While I was studying case files, I would often come on weekends. In my breaks, I would interact with the residents and staff more freely and do field notes after the visit.

I conducted interviews with case managers and resident counselors; these were held away from the shelter in my own living room. I found that the shelter environment was distracting when talking to staff members. These interviews were about 45 minutes long, and allowed me to ask more personal questions about case managers' backgrounds. There were a number of people I did not interview such as the Assistant Administrator, who I call Margaret, and many of the resident counselors.

I was never allowed to attend house meetings and staff meetings. They remained confidential and were protected by the staff. My schedule as a full-time professor made it difficult to schedule meetings around the shelter staff's availability. After each visit to the shelter, I sent informal emailed notes to staff about plans I made with the clients during our Future Readiness sessions so that shelter staff could follow up during the week.

My interactions with residents after the shelter were very limited but I did retain a few permanent connections, which I will relate in Post-Shelter Chapter 9.

The moment people left the shelter they did not want to look back. There were times I heard from residents after they left when they needed advice and access to education or mentoring possibilities. In one instance, I drove one of the residents to several job possibilities and assisted her with access to the library in her new neighborhood.

I had my most regular conversations once a week, or at least once or twice a month with the Executive Director of the *Ready Haven Agency*. I talked with him and asked questions about my findings at the shelter in open-ended interviews. The chapter on *Ready Haven* in context was largely based on his perspective, history, and position of the agency in the human services world of Excelsior County.

In the community, I met once with the Director of the Workforce Development Group. My visit was only 30 minutes; the main take-away was that she was concerned about overlap between the services I rendered at the shelter and the services of the Workforce Development staff. Several times in the beginning of my study, I brought shelter residents to the Office of Employment to familiarize them with work searches. I also sat in on an interview with an employment counselor.

I met with the Department of Social Services Deputy Commissioner who was accompanied by the Director of TANF. Although they were courteous and answered some of my questions, I was not able to find out how the successes of programs are measured over time. I was referred to general and difficult-to-track data that is available publicly on the state website. In May 2014, an organization that tracks and trends data began publishing it openly. Unfortunately, the data only goes back to

2013. No longitudinal data trends were consistently kept about the homeless population in Excelsior County.

I had several meetings and continued contact with the case manager at the Community College program created for TANF parents. This is where some of the parents succeeded (and some failed) in their educational goals. The Community College program case manager's salary is funded by the DSS. She monitors the success of TANF parents carefully and also works to employ them in the required 20 hours. She emphasized that getting mothers to work as soon as possible was critical for the objective of "self-reliance." If students failed the program, she contributed their failure to the inability to manage a job, kids, and school to their lack of executive functioning skills. Her ultimate critique was about their attraction to engage in "risky behavior." In addition to the community college, I had close contact with the Vocational Technical School to steer people to the Certified Nursing Program and other vocational skills. The technical school also worked with *Ready Haven* to provide GED or High School Equivalency tutoring.

Every other month, an informal group of human services agencies came together to share resources. I attended two meetings. Most of the 50 or so people at the table were from small one-person firms. *Ready Haven* allowed its secondary staff to attend the meeting. The format of the meeting allowed each agency representative to distribute flyers and literature and make introductions and special event announcements. By the time everyone introduced himself or herself, however, the hour would be over and people would leave without networking.

Additionally, I joined the publicly held Continuum of Care (CoC) meeting that is required by the HEARTH Act for agencies serving the homeless population to coordinate efforts to prevent and end homelessness. Both the Housing and Urban Development (HUD) 2009 Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing Act (HEARTH) have to coordinate with the agencies so that they are aware of the meeting. These meetings did not commence until September of 2013 close to the end of my field research. Excelsior County Department of Social Services coordinates with HUD to receive the much-needed Community Development Block Grants that fund the Temporary Aid to Needy Families (TANF) and the programs for the disabled (Social Security Income/Social Security Disability). Some of the same people represented at the human service agency meeting attended the CoC meeting.

I volunteered to be mentor for a local women's organization that puts established volunteers in the community together with women who have been through a crisis in their lives. Often, that crisis was homelessness. This is where I met my associate Anna. Her iconic story begins with life as a foster child and traverses her marriage, her work life, and her incarceration later in life because of credit card fraud. She was homeless four times in her life.

Since the end of my "official" field research at the shelter in May of 2014, I joined a local neighborhood revitalization group started by a church group.⁷⁰ This church is located in the neighborhood with the highest poverty, and consists of the

⁷⁰ My work at the shelter continued until 2015.

most diverse population in Centerton. Many of the shelter residents find housing here. The group meets monthly and empowers citizens to work toward affordable housing and implement social justice projects to counter the high rate of incarceration in the neighborhood.

3.4 Data Analysis Method

The one-on-one interviews and meetings with administrators were transcribed and collected in a corpus of 2293 pages. The corpus consisted of 22 cases of interview transcriptions, administrative personnel of the shelter, and field notes. To analyze the cases that I collected over from 2011 to 2014, I used the basic tenets of case study analysis as described in Sjoberg et.al (1991:27). They see the case study as a supplement to the "natural science model," which is what the social sciences have tried to emulate by testing and validating their hypotheses with evidence. They propose three components of interpretation of social reality: domain assumptions, logical forms, and assessment procedures.⁷¹ The process of analysis for this dissertation was initially done right after transcribing when I made an attempt to "open code" through the use of Atlas.ti. This was to work through what my own assumptions, discoveries, and readings of the material, so I could uncover

⁷¹ They suggest that the research process should ask the following questions: 1) what is the proper unit of analysis? 2) Is the researcher committed to the study of the unique or of the general or some variation thereof? 3) Are human nature and social reality consistent or are they rent by tensions or contradictions? 4) Are appearances to be taken as a given or is there a reality underlying appearances? 5) Are human nature and social reality fixed and well ordered or are they procession--that is, in a state of becoming? 6) What is the nature of rationality 7) what is the relationship between the social researcher and his or her subject matter? (P31-32)

the hypothesis and theory in my data.

To understand the creation of units of analysis I immersed myself in the layers of people and institutions. I created sub-categories for each layer--within each of these general layers. The first layer is that of families. Sub-categories of this layer are men, women, children, and their relationship to one another (i.e. married, unmarried, single, father, mother). All categories are also further divided by age and race.

3.5.1 Problems of coding and qualitative methods analysis

The most difficult aspect of sociological analysis is the process of coding data. The process of coding is more than assigning categories to reveal patterns. It requires a more contemplative and reflexive way of looking at the data and then "defamiliarizing" one's self with it in order to get new perspectives. When a code is assigned to a particular utterance or piece of data, a one word connector or category that covers other instances of the meaning of that utterance is sorted to belong to the code or code family. This presented much confusion and a proliferation of codes. I found it difficult to find my way through the "swamp." When I first learned to open code in Atlas.ti, I created a 533-word coding list. In the program, it is possible to aggregate the data into categories. This allowed me to begin sorting quotes in order to find connections between them. However, the difficulty lies in an attempt at define categories of knowledge without removing the detail of the utterance or observation. I resorted to sorting my data in Excel spreadsheets. Time for organizing

my data was not on my side.⁷²

To further sort my data, I created collections of quotes by thematic categories from the large 2293 page Corpus. I noticed that the main thread running through all my data was time: the routine of the shelter, the curfew times, the grant cycle for the shelter administration and the people in the Continuum of Care meeting. People on assistance are tied to very specific limits of time. This conflict of time is especially problematic when the needs of the shelter residents are resting time, time to deal with trauma, time to deal with substance abuse issues, time to raise children, time to get educated.

As part of my interaction with the residents, I ran a group to prepare them to be ready for work. Finding meaningful work or opportunities for training and education, requires the ability to plan. However, planning is something people do when they control what they do with their time.⁷³ Residents' time is very similar to the management of time in prison where it is forcibly controlled. Families in the shelter were in crisis and they had no control over their time. They were often overwhelmed and unable to project more than one day at a time.

I noticed parents who were planning their future needed to have a sense of security and a sense of stability. Homeless shelter residents experience feelings of

⁷² I am a professor in a time-consuming design program at The New School and the full-time job of teaching and advising students always takes precedence over my research for this dissertation.

⁷³ Cristina Domenech – TEDx Rio de la Plata, Argentine, September 2014 "In prison there are things that can't be done. In prison, you can't dream. In prison, you can't cry. There are words that are virtually forbidden, like the word "time," the word "future," the word "wish."

hopelessness and helplessness because they have lost all material stability. This feeling continues when the family is placed in temporary housing. The model of turning points and decision-making processes discussed by Abbott (2001) is a way that the dissertation studied the turning points in a homeless family's experience. As opposed to Abbott's research with graduate students as they chose their careers, family homelessness seemingly presents choices but they are often thwarted by the rules of the welfare-to-work system. Nevertheless, the dissertation used this model to serve as an overall way to see life events and the points that have certain duration in time. The turning point is a "narrative concept that are short, consequential shifts that redirect a process (Abbott 2001: 258)." Moreover, Abbott's turning point is also linked to the idea of choice models. He proposes that "choice is not an isolated act but rather one made in the context of many other's choosing (253)." In the case of homeless people in Excelsior County, there are no choices to be made about engaging in low-wage work. As a consequence, the possibility of homelessness follows the family around permanently. They feel as if that moment may come again and in the case of several of the cases in the dissertation, it does.

3.6 Issues of trustworthiness

The time I spent in the field and the level of immersion can work for and against the trustworthiness of the data analysis. Because the field site is in the city where I live, I did not have the ability to "defamiliarize" myself fully with the data. Nevertheless, I approached the situation as objectively as possible. In art, the

process of de-familiarization leads to the presentation of everyday objects in a new and strange way as Jeff Koons and Andy Warhol do so effectively. As a media practitioner, I am familiar with the process of de-familiarization in media because it is often used in the presentation of advertising to shock the viewer into rediscovering the merits of a household product, for example, such as a cleanser, in a new way.

In my study, we may see the families at the shelter as ordinary people caught in unfortunate circumstances. By using the strategy of de-familiarization, I would consider being a resident the same way as someone on a career path, justifying accomplishments or lack thereof. Subjects in my study should not be regarded as persons to be pitied but as people trying to make sense of how to manage and resist systems of control. As I cast homelessness into the framework of a "moral career," the condition of "rooflessness" is another step on the ladder of welfare. The welfare machine is not an upward ladder but a wheel that throws the family into constant gyrations. Homeless and working poor families cannot control the machine in which they are caught. And yet, they still dream and hope to escape these effects, and, thankfully, some even do. Social change takes an indefinite amount of time. There are, however, tipping points and small victories in the right direction that keep the advocates and activists on the path to continue to attempt the ideal of what could be considered social justice for all.

As I became more familiar with the situation, I began to see how the system addressing homelessness was contributing to a status quo rather than addressing

the actual problems of homelessness. With this lens, I addressed different micro, mezzo, and macro layers to help me further my understanding. I had the advantage of being in the field for almost four years and have not separated from the field completely because I live in Centerton and continue to be involved in these issues. This is one aspect of the research that may influence its trustworthiness. I checked a lot of my perceptions with the people who were kind enough to grant me second interviews to confirm my findings.

3.7 Generalizability

The findings of the dissertation are part of a critical engagement with the management of poverty and family homelessness. The core contribution of the dissertation is the attempt at a multi-dimensional view of the problem of welfare reform and affordable housing in a small city. The specific urban environment of the small city may not necessarily contribute to its generalizability because the small city does not fit the model of rural settlement nor larger urban forms. However, there were many aspects of Centerton's post-industrial conditions that are similar to other locations in the U.S.

There is, on the other hand, the generalizable pattern of paternalistic management of the poor and homeless when life styles are prescribed and dictated. Families qualify for aid only when they allow their personal actions to be scrutinized. Their behavior could also be pathologized when it does not conform to an opaquely defined standard.

Since the number of cases is too small to give a positivist scientific verification of data, the study is meant to illuminate one small city case of how management of working poor populations and their bouts of homelessness only causes the persistence of poverty in the richest nation on earth, not its elimination.

3.8 Summary

The original research goal was to understand the subjective view of the social process of homelessness and welfare reform that is moored in place for the poor in Excelsior County. As the research progressed through the years, the study of the macro view of institutions became just as important to understand the subjective view of life on-the ground in an emergency shelter for families. As we will see in the next chapter, we take a look at the *Ready Haven Agency*, which grew from informal and very small beginnings into a large, and many-faceted institution. The agency acts as an intermediary between the macro structure of the welfare system and the working poor and homeless families.

SCENE: The first Continuum of Care meeting I attend is being held in a restored historical hotel, one that has won several prestigious prizes for restoration. Over \$4 million was spent on the hotel's restoration, which is an icon of Centerton's uptown area. Money was funneled into the project with little consideration for what it could do for individuals and families in temporary shelters. Ironically, but not so amusingly, the issue of improving the lives of people who are homeless was to be the main topic of the evening.

The hotel's main conference room was ready to seat over 50 people at long tables lined up end to end. People greet each other when the Executive Director of *Ready Haven* called the meeting to order. He is wearing one of his many community leader hats as the co-leader of the Continuum of Care group for Excelsior County. More people continue to enter the back of the room and stand for the bulk of the meeting.

The meeting began with a formal agenda where the official from the State Office Temporary and Disability presents the requests for proposals for the grants that are available. She reviews the purpose of most of the grants and she repeats them several times.

Chapter 4

Ready Haven in Context

4.1 Overview

In this chapter, I show how the *Ready Haven Agency* manages its existence in an ecology of other not-for-profits and bureaucracies that manage homelessness and poverty in Excelsior County. In Chapter 2, O’Flaherty (1996) proposed that emergency shelters obfuscate the need for affordable housing because they take the pressure off the affordable real estate market (See Section 2B.6). Thus, I argue that the bigger the shelter system, the worse the problem of family homelessness will be.

I use the ecological framework to frame the responsive approach to the needs of the poor by the not-for-profit human services agencies actually reinforces the status quo, particularly when deindustrialization and a declining economy affect housing and work opportunities and aid from the government is good supply. This specific ecology of not-for-profits responds in the same manner. Although they compete for funding, all the agencies work together to maintain the status quo of survival for their respective agencies, so that they can continue to “do the business” of helping the poor. This is not done out of malice but out of survival. The alternatives for work in sectors other than human services or health care management are service and retail jobs at the Regional Mall.

The micro, mezzo, and macro framework of poverty management serves to contextualize the agency within the larger Homeless Emergency Assistance Rapid

Transition to Housing Act HEARTH Act (2009). The Act mandated the formation of a Continuum of Care Consortium (CoC), which brings together all the not-for-profit agencies in Excelsior County to provide cost-effective interventions to serve the homeless. This consolidation got underway in Excelsior County in fall of 2013.⁷⁴

The CoC agencies share the same ecological space, relating to each other symbiotically. They compete for funding from corporate, government, and personal contributions but they also serve to maintain each other's existence. The relationships of the agencies to the poor, and also to the people who work at the agencies, are shaped by the lack of alternatives to meaningful and well-paid work in the area. 1/3 of the workforce travels to New York City. Locally, for the educated middle-class, the choice is to go into the higher level of human services and health services agencies that manage poverty, homelessness, and the disabled. (See Chapter 2). For the poor, it means working in low-wage labor in the tourism and local retail economy.

This chapter will demonstrate how the funding environment manages poverty and homelessness through: 1) the ecological model of not-for-profit agencies, including *Ready Haven*, as they grow and become institutions; 2) *Ready Haven Agency's* growth as a not-for-profit service provider and its role to manage the working poor when corporations and government cast the problems of the working poor to "cost effective" human services agencies; 3) A meetings between human services not-for-profit and government agencies, the Consortium of Care

⁷⁴ Previous iterations of the coordination and consolidation existed in less of a publicly transparent way.

(CoC) Meetings, where they relate their frustrations as each agency struggles against one another for limited government funding.

4.2.1 Background on the ecology of not-for-profits

The Chicago School's Ernest Burgess and Robert Park (1925 [1984]) studied the classic the "urban" in America, and how it was governed by social interactions, population flux in density, morphology, and neighborhood succession. Out of this legacy, Amos Hawley proposed the study of human ecology (1950) and, eventually urban ecology, when he used this biological metaphor in urban or regional studies of institutions (1981). The life and death of institutions that depend on competition for resources require organizations to adapt and reinvent themselves to survive (Carroll 1984; Singh 1990). Organizational ecology literature then widened to communities and the sociology of organizations through the theoretical lenses of functional interdependence of community groups and spatial differentiation (cities or regions) that influence how resources are "granted or withheld" (Freeman and Audia 2006). The literature is helpful to the study of the kinds of interactions in Excelsior County's human services organizations. An organizational ecology approach looks at how ad hoc groups turn into not-for-profits that last over time and become increasingly interconnected, forming institutions and systems similar.

From 1992 to 2002, during a period of robust overall economic growth prolific not-for-profit organization formation occurred in the United States. It was

during this period that *Ready Haven* expanded as an institution. Since 1970, *Ready Haven's* services became more needed as the local economy shifted from manufacturing to services and left an ailing local economy in its wake. The history of the agency verifies the organizational ecology model of how not-for-profit organizations "live" and "die," according to the environment in which they live. .

For example, for *Ready Haven*, the sources of federal and state safety net funding forced the use of more formal accounting methods that then led to greater institutionalization. The *Ready Haven Agency* then built a professional organization structure around their funding source and, over time, aligned its mission to serve the parameters of its largest funding source: the government.

Anheir (2005) defines The *Ready Haven Agency* as a *service provider*. In the economic and political ecology of the community, the agency fulfills a functional *service-provider role*.⁷⁵ The agency is contracted to provide services that neither levels of the government nor businesses are willing to provide for the poor. Anheier describes this neoliberal model:

...the US developed a prototype of a liberal model of civil society and state- society relations, where a low level of government spending (social welfare, health, education, culture) is associated with a relatively large nonprofit sector that is engaged in both actual service provision and advocacy (P. 25)

⁷⁵ *"Service-provider role: since government programs are typically large scale and uniform, nonprofits can perform various important functions in the delivery of collective goods and services, particularly for minority preferences. They can also be the primary service providers, where neither government nor business is either willing or able to act. They can provide services that complement the service delivery of other sectors, but differ qualitatively from it. Or they can supplement essentially similar services, where the provision by government or the market is insufficient in scope or not easily Affordable"* (Anheir 2005:174).

As Max Weber (1946) wrote in his seminal essay on bureaucracies, conditions for formation of offices and the knowledge and machine technology they require, is part of a stable society that obeys laws and administrative regulations.

Once it is fully established, bureaucracy is among those social structures, which are the hardest to destroy. Bureaucracy is *the* means of carrying 'community action' over into rationally ordered 'societal action.' (P. 228)

When agencies are small, they need a dynamic "official" executive director who can raise funds from many different sources. As the agencies grow, however, larger sources of funding are needed. Institutional goals must become more developed and concentrated to address specific parameters of large government funds. *Ready Haven* "wins" these grants often (Kim and Bradach 2012). In this way, executive directors of community agencies have to become an expert in the field of quantitative proof of their relevance and function. *Ready Haven* can perform well when grants Requests for Proposals go out. The agency often wins in the competitive funding from the state, county, local governments, corporate, and private donations. High tensions govern this competitive situation. The *Ready Haven* Executive Director, Robert Wall, is the main grant writer for the agency, and he searches to fit parameters of grants to winning funding allocations. He essentially "fits" the purpose of the RFP to *Ready Haven's* funding needs. He provides a well-trained staff to "evidence-based" proof of a successful program.

Helmut Anheier and Paul Dimaggio state why not-for-profits spring up are that their activity is *difficult* to monitor: "known beneficiaries are seen as un-reliable witnesses of quality such as daycare/mental health. Pooled donations cannot be

tracked to specific services.” Certain industry sectors have higher incidences of not-for-profits such as “high-quality services with special attributes that are hard to detect, or serving low-education consumers with insufficient access to product information” (1990:140). What Anheier and Dimaggio say here is similar to the situation in *Ready Haven’s* family shelter because Robert “dodges” the funding that state and federal funds provide by using the 40% for projects that are not constrained by government funding parameters. Robert uses this additional money for programs that he claims suffered direct government funding cuts.

As with most not-for-profit organizations, the current shrinking government funding necessitates a larger unpaid volunteer effort to address the needs of the poor and homeless. For this reason, this sector is also referred to as the “citizen” sector or the sector that handles the concerns of civil society. The number of charitable organizations registered with the U.S. Internal Revenue Service during the late 90s and early 2000s went from 516,554 to 909,574, a 76% increase (Arnsberger 2008). The growth of charitable organizations was due in large part to differently incentivized government funding coupled with a period of robust economic expansion. In the tradition of “a thousand points of light” George H.W. Bush’s (the elder) campaign slogan, there was a robust development of volunteer organizations. Private philanthropy was encouraged through tax laws favoring charitable donation. This was also the time of the largest elimination of critical portions of the safety net that culminated in the Personal Responsibility Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act in 1996. This era of support for the third sector was

greatly challenged when the second George W. Bush eliminated, even more, government support. Anheier calls the “You’re on Your Own” (“YoYo”) years (2006). Following 9/11, there were even greater cuts to government spending and also greater spending on two unfunded wars (Iraq and Afghanistan). This diminished the support of the safety net and, by extension, the organizations that rely on this funding. The Obama administration mandated that not-for-profit agencies work together under Continuum of Care Consortia to become more efficient financially under the scope of the Homeless Emergency and Rapid Transition to Housing Act, or HEARTH Act (2009). Implementing efficiencies are part of the neoliberal shrinking of government and force not-for-profits with a volunteer workforce to take on more of the burden.

Agencies like *Ready Haven* began in the idealistic progressive years of the Johnson Era. The agency’s history parallels the abandonment of progressive assistance for the poor from the 1970s to the present. The agency continued to grow as government and corporations cast off their responsibilities over the working poor.

4.2.2 A Short History of the Ready Haven Agency

The ever-growing breadth of services distinguishes the life span of the *Ready Haven Agency*. This ability to be flexible and constantly expanding is a testament to its changing needs of the community. The 1996 Welfare Reform Law pushed more people off the welfare rolls without a safety net. Once the working poor are off

welfare support, life becomes more precarious and unstable. Instead of becoming “self-sufficient,” as the programming is meant to do, people return to welfare when there is a crisis such as a prolonged illness or even a pregnancy. The moment the poor are unable to work or become unemployed, they are back on welfare and often back in a homeless shelter. However, as mentioned, changes to the welfare law and the resulting diminishing financial resources have limited the agency’s programming. Thus, people often live outside the reach of public services for periods of time.

People directly serving the poor constantly address the problem of limited or no funding. The *Ready Haven* Board, Shelter Directors, and especially its Executive Director, Robert Wall, have some control over delivery of money and services. Robert is the face of the agency and its chief defender. Robert Wall weathered both criticism and praise over the course of the history of the agency.

Recently, Centerton’s City Mayor accused *Ready Haven*’s programming of being “old and tired.” The city’s lawyer pointed out that no organization should be “permanently” funded by federal dollars, which is partially true for the suite of services that *Ready Haven* offers. Robert was quick to defend the successes of the shelter’s programming with statistics; he reported that funding came from more than just the government. It came from a wide assortment of sources that he was able to join over the years.

The tendency for institutions to become large is part of the strategy for survival of not-for-profit agencies like *Ready Haven* with the political swings of

funding from government sources. These agencies are responsive to communities at the behest of government and corporations that cast this “cost effective” responsibility onto agencies like *Ready Haven*, its employees, and volunteers, in the *service provider* function for a significant and growing population of working poor families. As Peter Kim and Jeffrey Bradach confirm:

...nonprofits that grow big concentrate their funding efforts rather than diversify them. In contrast to conventional wisdom, he really big organizations raised the bulk of their money from a single type of funding, such as corporations or the government (P 15).

The *Ready Haven* story began in the middle of the Vietnam War years: a historical moment in U.S. history spawning many civil rights based actions, including rights for African-American, Feminists, LGBTQ people, and also informing “counterculture” activism. Over forty plus years, *Ready Haven Agency* has grown to an \$8.2 million-a-year agency with many facilities, 160 employees and an equal number of volunteers. It emerged during the first groundswell of the creation of not-for-profit human services organizations that addressed problems of homelessness in the 1970s and 80s. This shift was part of what the agency director calls “the shelter movement,” which was part of the feminist effort to create domestic violence shelters (Makers: Esta Soler, The Women Shelter Movement). The *Ready Haven* mission and its continued survival are reflected in the “non-directive” 1970s counterculture mission for residents in the *Ready Haven* emergency shelters.

Today, the agency is supported by a variety of federal, state, and local government grants as well as private donations. Once the organization was established, it continued to *react* to the many crises of the working poor that

developed as safety net policies changed.⁷⁶ While other similar New York State counties chose to house their homeless populations exclusively in motels, the creation of dedicated emergency housing was unique for a semi-rural county. Because of its proximity to New York City, people from the city can return home to Centeron when they lose their employment in New York City. They usually find a place to stay with friends and family. When things don't work out with family, the Centeron and *Ready Haven* facilities are considered by the shelter residents to be better for homeless families.⁷⁷

During the 1970s and 80s, *Ready Haven* grew to be the primary institution to house youth, adults, and families in temporary and transitional emergency shelters in Excelsior County. The clientele the agency served changed by the beginning of the 1980s. African-American and poor White people and domestic violence survivors who were either out of work or working minimum-wage jobs replaced middle-class teenage hippies. While the 1980s were years of prosperity in Excelsior County because it enjoyed the expansion of a large computer manufacturer, the tables turned drastically in the mid-1990 when the manufacturer suddenly chose to close its outdated factory (See Chapter 2).

⁷⁶ A response to homelessness was needed; Gowan called this the "homeless archipelago" or an industry of homelessness facilities and institutions (2010:5).

⁷⁷ This is based on a survey where we asked about the residents' expectations and the reality of the shelter. The *Ready Haven* family shelter was always considered to be much nicer (See Chapter 7). The rights to shelter rules established with Calahan vs. Carey, during the Koch Administration (1981) were challenged repeatedly by the Pataki, Giuliani, and Bloomberg Administrations creating an inhospitable environment for homeless families. (Coalition for the Homeless) Also see Chapter 2.

Ready Haven was the source of support for many people who became destitute. The agency's services broadened to an all-encompassing diversity of anti-poverty services. According to Robert, there are several areas of the agency that grew over the agency's 40+ year history are now indispensable to Excelsior County's homeless population: housing, food, childcare, and transportation for shelter residents. On September 14, 2013, Robert expressed that the agency staff focuses on the needs of the homeless: "We keep people alive, fed, sheltered, clothed, off drugs, back in school, out of jail. We give them whatever they need to get to start reshaping their lives." This is why there are also walk-in centers where the poor can get services, food, and used clothing in the major towns in Excelsior County. There are also special programs for incarcerated people, substance abusers, domestic violence survivors, homeless families, youth, additional programming for high school students to succeed after they graduate, summer programs for youth in the most at-risk neighborhood in Centerton.

Robert tells colorful stories about the personalities and the intricate circumstances of the early years. In 1970, after a large rock concert people lingered in the small idyllic town of Hilltown outside of Centerton. It was a time of young people hitchhiking across the country to "find themselves." Robert Wall tells the story like this:

We weren't giving out emergency food initially. We weren't keeping records on it. There wasn't a huge homeless population and initially the kids that we dealt with were roaming the country. That's why we were involved with homelessness from the beginning. So we were just trying to put people up. That's why we were taking people into our homes...the poorhouses were for the people who were totally destitute. Most people were not totally

destitute [in the county] at that time. Again, survival was not a major issue in the early 70s for most people. Times have changed...and so it was the northern part of the county. Outside of the municipalities, there weren't a lot of minorities that lived outside of Centerton, [or] outside of Sheldon. So, most of the people that we served were still White. It changed when we moved to Centerton. It may have changed before but it wasn't substantially different until we moved to Centerton [in 1985]" (Interview with Robert Wall December 27, 2013).

The initial good will of local people seeded the creation of the first iteration of the organization. It went from a few volunteers to several low-paid employees. Shortly after that, a volunteer-run telephone crisis hotline was started. Simultaneously, a volunteer swat team was created under the organization's banner to help anyone on a bad LSD trip.

"We were coordinating volunteers from the beginning. But the accepting of the government's money was a very big change. Because it meant that we had to keep records. We had to identify what we did with the money. Keep records on the calls. Find a way to be able to report to whoever we needed to, the nature of the calls; so that sort of started us on the path to responding to grants and stuff. That was the first one. And we already had dealt with the business of having two employees" (Interview with Robert Wall December 27, 2013).

Volunteer coordinators were initially paid \$50 a week to run the 24-hour telephone hot-line service. Because of the success of the first hotline in Hilltown, Excelsior county government approached the agency to expand its services and hotline tie lines across the county. The *Ready Haven* hotline was created at a time when the number of crisis intervention hotlines grew from relatively few to 600 across the U.S. (Rosenbaum and Calhoun 1977:326).

Ready Haven became a 501C-3 not-for-profit tax-exempt organization in 1971. A formally structured board of directors was put-together, and Robert Wall

was elected the agency's second Executive Director.⁷⁸ With a formalized accounting practice and bureaucratic structure, the agency became more institutionalized. Additionally, Excelsior County government used the agency's expertise to assist with services for the poor. Because the mission of *Ready Haven* was to target the large category of "helping the poor," it became the "go-to" agency to assist the county with many difficult and changing problems; thus, answering to the *service-provider* role in which it was cast.

The first Centerton *Ready Haven* homeless shelter was located in the basement of a church. The initial agency paid the church with Department of Social Services funds, and the church could use the main hall and other facilities for religious purposes. In the late 1990s, the relationship came to an abrupt end, and the homeless shelter moved to the Centerton Motel in the middle of the poorest, most dangerous, crack-ridden neighborhood in Centerton, which was predominantly Black, Hispanic, and mixed race. *Ready Haven* cleaned the motel up and the police assisted by running around-the-clock patrols. The homeless population was a mixture of single adults and families with children all living together. Robert Wall laments the eventual closing and demolition of the motel as a shelter. Families who are not housed in *Ready Haven* shelters near the location of the old motel are housed in the low-budget motels along the Interstate Highway where there is no public transportation and little access to services.

⁷⁸ Teresa Gowan's history of "modern" homelessness in the U.S. reports a similar surge of progressive organizations to answer to the needs of the homelessness (Gowan 2010:4)

However, life in the Centerton Motel was more freewheeling than its current iteration as a family shelter. The residents helped each other and at night and on the weekends, there were no case managers or supervisors except the police.

Anna was a former resident of the motel, and she put it like this in an interview on September 6, 2014.

The thing that I got out of it...was that that we had more information to help each other. Like the family next to me would give me more information. You can get more food over at such and such a place. There was more of networking amongst us. Like we would say, we don't have that cleaner here but here this will work better against roaches...or something like that. Michelle's father was abusive so when I would lock him out of the room at the time, my son would stay in the room with us, there would be more helping of each other. It wouldn't matter what people thought of us. We kept our areas clean. If there were skeezy people in there, we would make comments. We would watch each other's kids and say: 'Wash your kid—your kid needs a diaper change!' No matter what it looked like. There was always somebody there that was nasty. We were all in the same predicament. "Oh, you got into an apartment (high five). We're next! "

Life in the motels was unstructured and unfettered. *Ready Haven Agency's* more structured management of poverty and homelessness in emergency shelters provides what is deemed to be a more humane but much more restrictive answer. However, if a member of the family has a job closer to a motel or employment than the location of the *Ready Haven* family shelter, DSS will decide to house the family in a nearby motel. DSS does everything in its power for the family not to lose employment even if the job makes a minimum wage. The motel is an unsupervised but subsidized form of housing where families are left without case management or access to transportation and housing advocacy, but at least they can go to work, which is for DSS the more important goal. As a result, the homeless families may languish in the motels without housing advocacy from five months to as long as a

year. If this happens, DSS contracts the emergency shelter to find the family housing and the family are subjected to much closer scrutiny.

The rapid re-housing of 45 days at the *Ready Haven* shelter serves to put families back into housing much faster. The *Ready Haven* administration sees the motels as a place where people can continue to abuse alcohol and drugs and have very minimal supervision over their children. As government funds going to assist and manage people without housing decreases, family homelessness increases. The arguments made by government officials, such as the Director of Social Services are to keep people in motels to save taxpayer dollars. Cost effectiveness of homelessness solutions is critical to the system. Evidence-based solutions are most often also cost-effective solutions. Motels, as is the case in most of the U.S., are the first quick answer to homelessness in many New York counties. Local DSS offices prefer the use of motels to keep the homeless families located close to low-wage employment and transportation routes.

...If you take a homeless family that arrives by coming to the Department of Social Services, normally they present with having been struggling for several weeks or months. Having been displaced and nomadic, staying with friends and families in vehicles, in tents. They have usually by then are reaching the end of their rope. They usually, believe it or not, have a member of the family that is trying to hold down a job. It might be a basic job at a minimum wage that wasn't enough to keep them from getting evicted. They also have children. Sometimes we place those families in hotels so that they're close to where they're employed and they're close to where their children are going to school. And to the degree that there is such a perception that being homeless and getting placed in a hotel is a double negative, again, I have to say we're successful. 100 days, 150 days in a hotel where that family stabilizes. The children are attending the schools that they were in. The individual who might have been working continues to work for the minimum wage job in the retail, restaurant, or supermarket business. They reestablish and get on their feet. 150 days is not a short amount of time but it's also not an unreasonable amount of time. And in a hotel that

might not be ideal but it's safe, there is running water, there's heat. They're getting rest (CoC Meeting September, DSS Director 10, 2014).

As opposed to the relative freedom of the motel, the *Ready Haven* family shelters residents are locked into the facility at nine-thirty in the evening. In emergency shelter, parents must follow a strict set of rules, such as abstention from drugs and alcohol. They must follow the directive programming on work preparation that the shelter provides. The irony is that the working poor know very well how to work, and how to find work, but companies don't pay them a living wage or the work is often only temporary.

4.2.3 Ready Haven's budget and finances

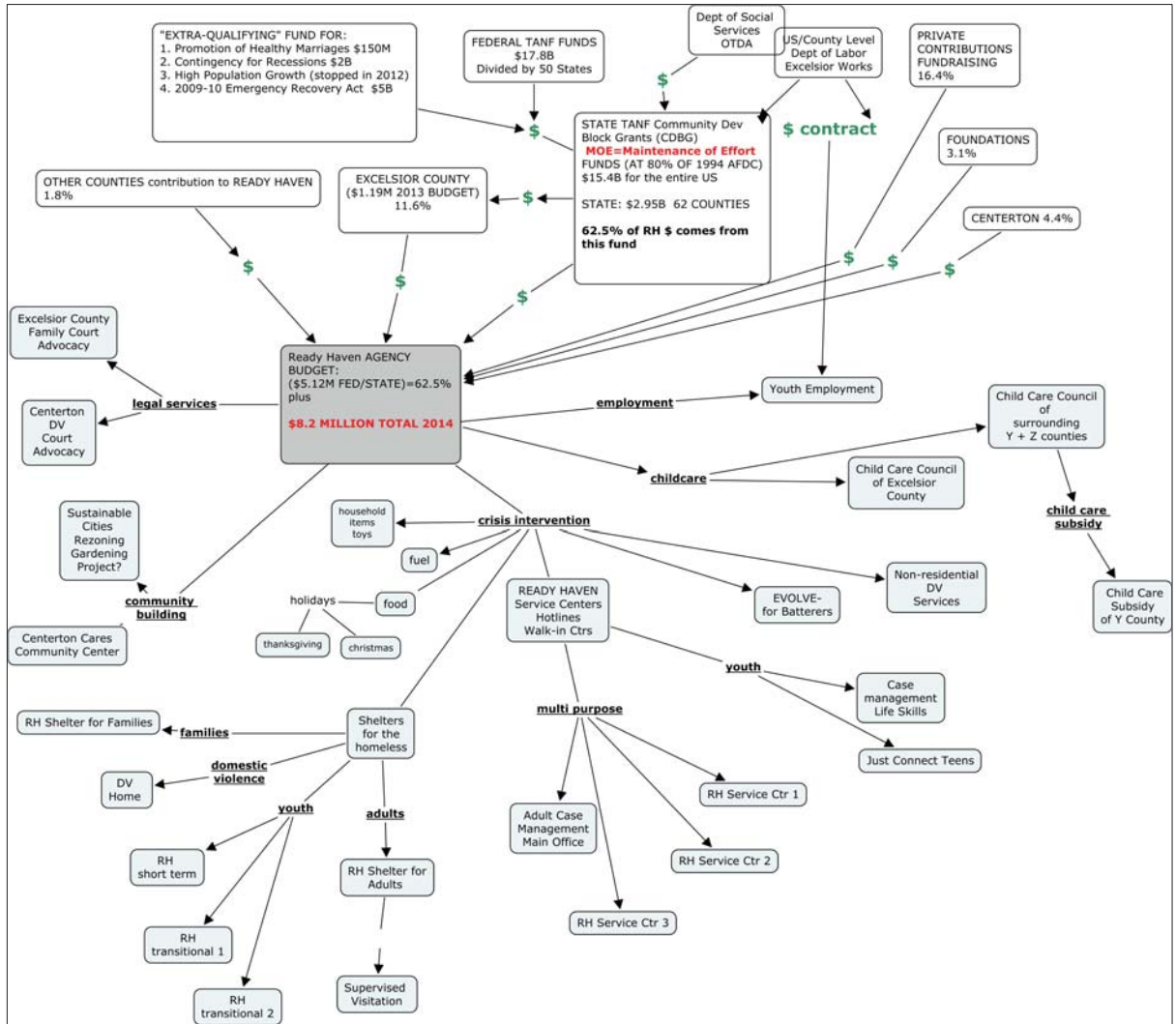


Fig. 4 Funding of the Ready Haven Agency (2014)-Also see Appendix 1

The history of the agency demonstrates that it effectively grew to reflect the not-for-profit local funding ecology. As we saw previously, the ecology of not-for-profits responsively adapted to serve government and retail business interests such as those who want to keep wages low and the housing market artificially high.

At first, funding amounts for the agency were small, but over the decades, these expanded up to \$8.7 million organization in 2015 (which grew from \$8.2

million in 2014).⁷⁹ Above in Figure 4, the sources and expenditures of the agency are laid out and approximated. Currently, the agency services 48 government emergency shelter contracts from the Federal to State to County and local cities and towns. Sixty-two percent of *Ready Haven's* budget comes from the Federal government, which is distributed via the State for \$ 5.12 million from the \$1.19 million via the County. The remaining 37.5% of the budget comes from a mix of private donors, foundations, and Centerton taxpayers. The agency dedicates a little of its finances to paying facility administrators, office staff, case management staff, maintenance workers, and childcare. One hundred and sixty volunteers who work in a widespread range of operations support the paid staff. The rest of the funds disappear in the maintenance of *Agency* properties, mortgage fees, shelter facility rentals, 69 long-term rental apartments, and a small fleet of trucks and vans.

During the last 20-30 years, the agency took on more and more of the problems of the needy. Robert sees the shelter system like a family business for which there will be need for the long-term. Although Robert sits on the board of numerous agencies, the ecology that he operates in works in the same way to maintain the status quo. In an exchange with Wall about calling the shelter residents "consumers," he defended this naming of residents as people who are purchasing the agency's services through welfare funding: "A client means, you know, the word is pejorative. Consumer is not. (Interview with Robert Wall June 6th, 2011)." After this early exchange with Robert, I noticed that many administrators and workers in

⁷⁹ I have, unfortunately, no historical financial data of when the agency became a million dollar organization.

the human services industry have resorted to calling welfare recipients “consumers.” This popularized name for people who receive welfare-funded services underscores the lack of consciousness about the implications of language and slight revision of meaning words like “clients,” or “consumers.” For my interpretation of this wording, a client can choose to receive a service while a consumer purchases a product for which she or he pays money. In fact, welfare recipients purchase the services of the welfare-to-work system by working off the money that they owe to the system in a low-wage job. Perhaps this shift of meaning came along with the shift in welfare to workfare reform where “consumers” pay for their services and have to “work off their grants?” Nevertheless, the word “consumer” in the welfare services world now implies that someone is consuming precious government dollars to be able to afford food, health care, and shelter.⁸⁰

DSS contracts The *Ready Haven* family shelter to assist with the rapid placement of homeless families into housing. The shelter houses homeless families in temporary shelter for about forty-five days to three months. The cost of shelter care with case management, physical and mental health assessments, housing search and advocacy services is \$100 per night per person; this is for an adult or a child. A motel costs \$45-60 per night for an entire family. Because of the rise in family homelessness, in 2014, the County decided to expand facilities for families. This meant putting adults up in motels and boarding rooms, and families were moved into the facility that housed adults. The choice was mainly fiscal. It is

⁸⁰ In a polemic blog rant by Dr. Nora Baldarian, Ph.D, she writes about the word “consumer” as it is used for people with mental disabilities (2013).

cheaper and easier to double up single adults in a motel than to double up families. The adults were often past their 60-month limit and on county-supported safety net. TANF Federal dollars support most of the families in the shelter. Thus, the solution is financially driven versus what would be the best for families.

As can be seen from the funding and services complexity *Ready Haven* has become over the years, the problems of the poor have also proliferated as neoliberal market-first policies kept a conservative and diminishing hold on welfare policies. The most important role of the agency is to provide shelter for the homeless. In some qualifying cases, where the person or parent is disabled, this can lead to long-term Transitional Housing. *Ready Haven* acts as a conduit for the homeless, assisting in rapid housing placement and acquiring other human services. Additionally, the agency oversees childcare for several counties in addition to Excelsior. Childcare services are often underfunded, and this remains a daily concern of the agency. There was one instance in June 2013 when childcare funding ran out. I asked Robert whether *Ready Haven* was unusual in offering such a wide range of services:

“If by that you mean, are there agencies that do this set of services? Not exactly, I would say in terms of us that we are broader in our scope than most agencies. However, there are homeless agencies that do a big chunk of what we do. There are adolescent and runaway homeless youth agencies that do a big chunk of what we do. There are childcare councils that do what we do. Having it all under one rubric is perhaps more expansive than other agencies have done. But they're not uncharacteristic in the way that they serve, who they serve, or their belief systems that are comparable agencies. Perhaps not as extensive..and perhaps...um...One of the things that's unusual about our agency is that given the alternative nature of where we started...the fact that we have such...we have been able to embed ourselves in the eh...county's established system of service delivery is unusual. You know, when I sit at the runaway and homeless youth advisory board with a lot of the other major agencies, most of them do not have the level of connection into their county that we do.” (Interview with Robert Wall September 14, 2012)

Robert and the agency are part of the ecology of services for the poor. He finds that federal and state dollars are often not directed at programs that would actually make a difference. Government sourced funding covers 60% of the overall agency funding and comes with strict control. The remaining 40% of *Ready Haven* funds are free for Robert to use to focus on the agency's original mission. The agency appeals to individual local community members for this funding. The most common donation amount is \$25. Here Robert says that the agency is really an umbrella organization for many different services and that this diversity contributes to the cost-effectiveness of its wide reach.

"I think there are a number of different organizations that do pieces of what we do. I think that what's unusual about us is the scope of what we're prepared to address and the fact that we're all under one catchment, one umbrella. And that has its real strong points, because at any given time almost every one of our programs is falling into deficit. If it didn't have the rest of the agency to carry it along till it was okay, most of what we do would have died at one point or another. But the fact that we have been able, when the youth shelter had a bad year, to carry it because the DV shelter or the family shelter had a decent year or we were able to fundraise in other areas. So, you know, we sort of carried each other. And the other thing is that, we're cheap.... let me put it in a different way. We have 11 vehicles in our fleet. Nine of them were donated. The newest is 2001" (Interview with Robert Wall June 6, 2011Admin).

"We maintain an attitude, which is non-judgmental and non-directive, so that all individuals are encouraged to resolve problems in a way that honors their own diverse cultural and personal choices. ...to provide confidential and fully accessible crisis intervention, information, prevention, and support services to address the needs of individuals and families. The scope of the agency's vision allows us to bring to bear resources to address a broad spectrum of human problems..." (from agency website).

The timing of my field study coincided with the effects of the most recent economic recession (or, some say, depression). Family homelessness in Excelsior County is at an all-time high because of lack of affordable housing. The county

budget allocates only 1% of its \$19.5 million annual budget to housing issues. Furthermore, the infamous federal sequester of 2013 cut Section 8 housing vouchers to the county from 2,000 to 1,500. The announcement for open Section 8 Housing Voucher applications in November for 2014 yielded 1,800 new eligible families for 118 openings that were available (Informal Interview with Head of County Housing Director for HUD January 13, 2015). These kinds of shifts are constantly at play. Funding for programs are cut, or parameters are changed, affecting large swaths of the working poor. Robert Wall is constantly under pressure to deliver emergency housing on the limited funding budgets.

“The county executive, the deputy county executive have both told me many times, we know we can't do it without *Ready Haven*. But meanwhile he was calling me to tell me how we had to cut extra money. I'm the most cost-effective thing that they have, and so, if what you were saying was true....but you know yourself, I mean, there's a lot of good stuff that's going by the wayside...how could they let it.....they do, because they don't, either they don't know or they can't fix it, or they don't really care. Because what's on them is greater at that moment than the long term. So I don't feel like I can guarantee anything...except by my own ability to put something in place. [Describes confidential financial trouble] Our cushion is gone. So, I can pull this off. I mean, somehow I have done this for 30-some years. I don't know that anybody walking in could.... Yeah, it's a lot, I mean, I don't get scared. I just deal with it. But I don't know that anybody that came right into it new could do that. And it doesn't seem like there's anybody in the agency that can take over my job. There are a lot of skilled people but they're notmy first responsibility is to run the business of *Ready Haven*. It's an 8-1/2 million-dollar business. So you have to have a lot of business. My skill set, if you will, is odd.” (Interview with Robert Wall July 1, 2013)

Robert's exclamation that he is the “most cost effective thing they have,” demonstrates that he does understand that this is a situation where cost-effectiveness is of the utmost importance in the competition for funding. Still, Robert's daily schedule as a not-for-profit, non-political leader is to duck the politics of the financial competition of county, state, and federal structures that fund the agency. Robert's tendency to have a “go it alone” attitude is like an autocratic business owner who does not know how to allow others to take his place.

In increasingly privatized human services, the financial burden falls on people like Robert Wall, who need to fill the holes in the system. Robert explains how his involvement with the politics and attempts at changing policy has been minimized.

R: There was a time when I would go to the state capitol at least once a week, and I was on the childcare council, I was on the DV when OCFS [Office of Child and Family Services], was actually DSS in those days, decided that they were going to create a viable way for the DV shelters to exist. I was on that. I've been on some stuff with housing. But, what happened to me was, I was getting "naches" (proud) from it, but the agency wasn't getting that much from it, and the agency needed me here to run the agency. We grew. Grew tremendously. And I got to a place where I felt like no matter what I did I wasn't going to have an impact on the policy, so I should deal with what I can locally, so that we're keeping the agency alive...

(I) focus my energy on keeping this institution viable, and expanding it into ways that I could. So, I get everything. I'm on all the email lists. I get every ADM from OCFS, I....

N: What's an ADM?

R: Administrative Changes; new laws, changes in regulations. And, I have had some input. I do, I'm on the runaway and homeless supervisory board to the commissioner of social...of OCFS I still do some stuff with childcare...I made a decision that I wouldn't be much (in line) with what I didn't believe I could have a chance of changing. So I function locally and I am unfortunately responding to putty the holes in the system to the best that I can through my own efforts, the agency's efforts, and local people to fix a dysfunctional system. Because, I don't want to waste my time trying to fix a dysfunctional system which can't be fixed right now. (Interview with Robert Wall November 26, 2012).

Robert's position is one of constant compromise because he is attempting to address homelessness in a system that does not work to solve homelessness but ends up actually maintaining it. The economic system has steered human services to a place where a shelter system has become a necessity rather than a temporary measure.

4.3.1 The Continuum of Care Meetings

As *Ready Haven* grew to take on the role of the arbiter of services for the poor, the government mandated more strict control over those applying for funding. Small agencies sprang up all over the U.S. to manage the growing problem of homelessness especially for parents and children more cost-effectively. The 2009 Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing Act directed the creation of consortia to unify the small not-for-profit and for-profit agencies that served different needs of the poor and homeless. The county mandated, through the Continuum of Care (CoC), that not-for-profits must meet on a regular basis in order to go over requests for funding. The following is an account of the very first publicly held CoC meeting in September of 2013.

The Continuum of Care (CoC) meeting is called together to collaborate on solutions to “end and prevent homelessness.” I observed first-hand what it looks like when all these stakeholders are competing for diminishing state and regional funding. The Executive Director, Robert Wall, of the *Ready Haven* was a co-leader of the meeting with the HUD housing programs director as the other co-leader. The stakeholders in the CoC are the people who work for the not-for-profits that serve the homeless and also the hungry (food banks and soup kitchens), the mentally ill, veterans, and people with HIV-AIDS, who are all vulnerable to becoming homeless. I was one of about 50 attendees who sat in the large conference room of a historic hotel, waiting to discuss issues facing these the clients and constituents of these variously represented agencies. Case managers and administrators from different

Ready Haven Agency shelters and programs were also there. Conspicuously absent were any representatives from the homeless population.

The leaders declared in their speeches that this gathering is a “self-directed” group; one that was called together to begin considering newly drafted bylaws, an election for a board of directors, and participation in collaborative work groups. The underlying reason for the excellent attendance was that no agency wants to be left out. They feared losing a chance at funding opportunities.

The meeting followed a formal predetermined agenda, surprisingly not very self-directed. The housing representative leading the meeting explained that the original stakeholders were called together in a more informal economic development group in 2000 in order to apply for funding for four projects: a rehabilitation organization, a disability services organization, the county mental health organization, and *Ready Haven* as the temporary and emergency housing organization. The yearly amount of funding for this core group increased to \$1.4 million dollars annually as part of the Solutions to End Homelessness Program. This program’s aim is to help people remain in permanent housing. They provide eviction prevention, case management, and supportive services during periods of homelessness, and legal support to counter the possibility of eviction or to obtain new housing.⁸¹

⁸¹ “In July 2014, a Request for Proposals (RFP) was released which awarded approximately \$15.3 million annually to not-for-profits, units of local government and local social service districts. Contracts began October 1, 2014 and will end on September 30, 2019. Seventy-two (72) contracts resulted from the RFP.”(Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance 2015)

The State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA) representative, who had traveled from the state capital, presented qualifications and deadlines for grant requests available to groups addressing homelessness. She provided a dizzying list of grants and programs that, while available on the OTDA website, are read for the benefit of those at the table. She informed the stakeholders of 1) requests for proposal deadlines and procedures, 2) outlined contracted periods of time for grants that were being terminated in exchange for new opportunities, 3) the news that a “data warehouse,” a data-sharing platform, was being created over the next few months, and 4) the formalization of an “electronic procurement system” that would streamline pre-qualification paperwork for the application of state grants (this needed to be done before one could “do business” with the New York State). She reassured the group that this is the beginning of a new way of working: better, smoother, and more efficient. The \$1.4 million funding stream coming into the county would be distributed among the local agencies according to their applications and need. This funding allows many organizations to stay afloat.

The floor is then opened up for questions and comments. Complaints are heard. Robert begins this part of the meeting by saying:

It’s remarkable to have all of you here. We would be remiss if we don’t get your input into what’s working and what’s not. Running four or five shelters in the county and some of the longer-term housing programs, I will say that it’s very frustrating that it is so hard for people that are homeless to be able to regain position and to be stable in their housing and to be stable in general. We see a lot of people that are recycled back into the system and they may be stable before but end up being homeless again. The feeling at that time is that we didn’t do what we needed to do (September 25, 2013 CoC Meeting Notes).

Robert opened up to the group about his frustrations on the unstoppable cycle of homelessness in the county. Litanies of complaints were then heard from the stakeholders in the room. These were familiar issues I heard at the family shelter, my field site, and they were good representations of the problems that need addressing in order end and prevent homelessness. The list of complaints included not enough full-time permanent employment opportunities, too many affordable housing units for the elderly and the disabled, not enough units for families, a lack of legal assistance funding, and more. Legal help for eviction prevention is especially lacking. In all of Excelsior County only 1.5 lawyers are assigned to benefits law or family law. The complaints were heard but all needed financial and creative solutions.

My notes continue in the form of a list that I experienced in my own research at the *Ready Haven* family shelter: field case managers try to keep up with families after the housing crisis and staying in contact is difficult. Families only resurface when the problems are too dire and emergency shelter is needed. Workers cannot get childcare until they have a job. Moreover, county childcare subsidies run out before the end of the year. Even when someone is ready to work, she cannot get childcare subsidy. Transportation is also important and most of the poor don't have a car. For the field case managers, there is a critical component of stabilizing individuals and families in their homes, but recently Medicaid redefined case management to become the new *Health Homes* and care coordination. Health Home providers (in-home case managers) have very large caseloads. People have to have a

diagnosed or perceived behavioral health problems to be eligible to receive services. People involved in training and education pointed out that there is only a 12-month window for education and training in the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act and Temporary Aid for Needy Families. Even with the most intensive support after an episode of homelessness, families need at least 3 years to get on their feet and finish training and education.

The meeting ended with the announcement of the creation of a county home for homeless veterans and the call for applicants who are male only for now. The county's veteran population stood at 8, which is small compared to the hundreds of families in the motels and shelters.

4.3.2 Continuum of Care Meetings a year later

Over a year later, I attended the second annual meeting of the Consortium.⁸² The biggest difference a year later was that there were more people at the table, including those who had been homeless at a point in their life. In this meeting, the conversation was much more loose and turned more to the experience of homelessness, and so several people were invited to speak from the perspectives of caregiving and case management. We also heard from those who have been homeless. I made sure that Anna, a woman I worked with through a women's mentoring organization could tell her story of experiencing homelessness four times. One of the pastors of a church spoke up because she is now creating a new

⁸² Taken from a combination of participant observer notes.

shelter for people who have lived most of their lives on the street. The people will be housed in a “wet” shelter where they will be allowed to use alcohol and other substances without judgment but with an eye toward becoming sober (a harm reduction strategy). The shelter is currently under construction and already serves the poor as a soup kitchen and winter warming center.

During a previous, more open discussion about the plight of the homeless, the Director of the Department of Social Services gave an impassioned speech about the county’s handling of the poor through the primary solution of roadside motels. He insisted that rather than temporary shelters, many of the homeless should be housed in these motels/hotels instead: “And these hotels also contribute to the economy and tax base that they’re located at. So I guess I just feel like that I need to clearly emphasize that just the criticism of that component of how we address the homelessness issue, I think sometimes gets overstated here” (September 10, 2014 CoC Meeting).

In his narrative, the problem of homelessness was an economic development problem, which private hotel chains could also benefit from. As he put it in his speech:

There is not enough transition or supportive housing that can house the individuals who ... usually come with mental illness. Substance abuse problems, employment issues, they are just discharged from the corrections system. Just to make the blatant statement that we have somebody in a hotel for 100 days, it goes much deeper than that. This is a human being that has layers and layers of problems that are not going to be addressed or eliminated or resolved by potentially putting them into something that is not a hotel. And the cost involved is going to be something that also has to be analyzed from the perspective of the enormous amount of additional services (we have to provide). Obviously we don’t want anyone homeless. We want people’s basic needs met where they’re somewhere safe. ...So

think we're going to have to have an ability to at least begin to understand housing homeless individuals in hotels who present with all the characteristics that they do is a real part of our overall program.

I mean every municipality is going to exert a lot of due diligence on enforcing their building codes and making it difficult to have boarding homes, and assisted living facilities. It's getting harder and harder.

I'll also say this with regard to safety net. And we're trying to come up with innovative programs where maybe we reach out to all of the employers in the county and we do some kind of incentive. Employ this person; we'll pay for someone to be employed with you, transition to self-sufficiency. So instead of expending money through safety net and housing them, we're going to be expending some county money on getting them employed. But, you know, I say it all the time when speaking with people individually who are at this table right now, I've been involved here, I know the county is involved here, **we** have to recognize that some of these hotels that are housing some of these individuals are a part of the solution (CoC Meeting September 13, 2014).

The focus on employment in his speech underscored the workfare aspect of homelessness. Holding down a job is considered part of a person's "rehabilitation," whether or not the people are actually escaping a poverty-level life or not. The people who benefit from this initiative are those who own and manage retail chains and motels/hotels. They can hire people who collect a benefits check while continuing to underpay them for their work. When I asked him about how the *Ready Haven* shelters provided case management and a conduit to services, and the hotels do not, he replied:

Those are absolutely valid points. The other aspects of this is that DSS administers other than public assistance programs that are basically having an individual's basic needs provided: food, shelter, medical care. The degree to which the benefits we administer go beyond that are truly limited. We're not providing the additional benefits and services that are critically needed to transition someone to self-sufficiency especially if they come with some of the conditions that we have identified.

Then, a community member responded:

You're getting to other issues like what the minimum wage is. So we want to sit here and bring people together: What aren't we doing that could help these people? You're right we

end up getting into conversations that don't pull in some of the other realities. Like, where are we with minimum wage? Where are we with costs of an apartment in this county if you are earning a minimum wage? So I mean, there are elements that contribute to homelessness.

4.3.3 Coordinated Levels of Assessment

During the summer of 2014, I was included in a few CoC sub-committee data sharing meetings to discuss the way homeless people entered into the system of services in the county. By this time, I stopped my weekly visits to the *Ready Haven* family shelter but I still maintained contact through monthly visits and these Continuum of Care meetings.

Data sharing had finally begun and it was the first time that reliable data was being collected across the many service providers for the homeless. During one of the meetings, I helped create a map clarifying the relationship between agencies and to develop intake questions and information in a common format so that repetition would be minimized (See Figure 5 below). A homeless person spends a lot of time answering endless lists of questions when they enter the system; we will see more of this in the following chapters.

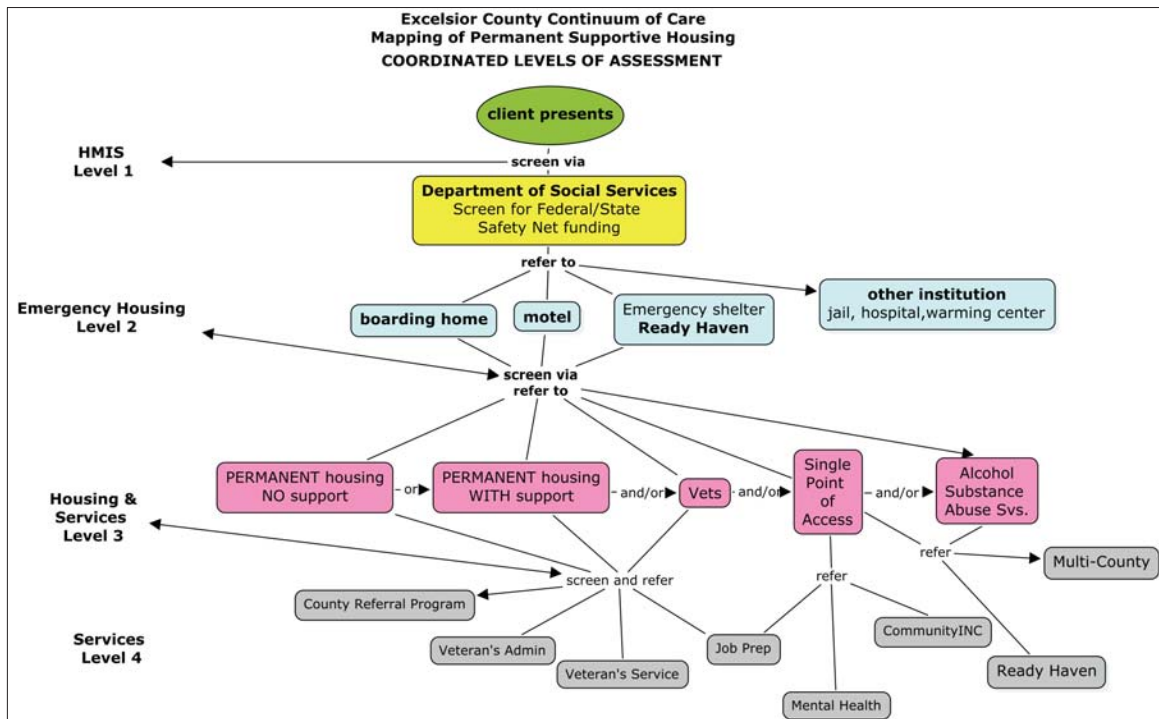


Figure 5: Coordinated Levels of Assessment

The map of "Coordinated Levels of Assessment" shows the abundance and the complexity of human services agencies in Excelsior County (See Figure 5). There are four levels of "filtering" or screening that a family or individual go through in order to achieve shelter. The first level is the Department of Social Services. The second is the various boarding homes, motels, emergency shelter, which also includes jails, hospitals, and warming centers. The third layer is the smaller agencies where shelter residents now become clients of mental health agencies, which focus on different psychiatric or psychological treatments.

Ready Haven is one of the final destinations in the lowest layer. The agency becomes involved with the homeless from the moment funding is available through the DSS. The *Ready Haven Agency* also owns apartments and provides a long-term

care program (18 months) for people with disabilities. In the welfare system, the disabled have more opportunities for assistance and employment than those who are able-bodied and on welfare. However, proving a disability and getting permanent support is considered “a plus.” Some of the poor manage their *precarity* in this way. Proving disability sometimes takes years and requires many visits to medical and legal professionals. Some people think to claim it acts as a way to scam the system (See a CBS *60min* “Disability U.S.A.”, Steve Kroft October 6, 2013)⁸³. However, this demonstrates that welfare has become a medicalized problem. As Sanford Schram points out, the use of welfare, especially according to politicians on the right, turned “from use into abuse.” As a result, the treatment of welfare recipients “legitimizes new forms of power, procedures, and processes in the administration of welfare that deemphasize the allocation of income and emphasize the treatment of poverty in terms of correcting personal problems and monitoring behavior (Schram 2000:82).”

Nevertheless, the meager income of \$700 a month without the requirement for mandatory employment is, again, only enough to sustain someone at the poverty level but not to rise above it. For mothers who want to “stay-at-home,” disability provides a desirable way for them to receive a steady income for their care labor. Others use their pursuit of permanent disability in the form of SSI or SSD to soften the effects of a poor economy. In the larger ecology of the not-for-profits, the

⁸³ The CBS segment was criticized widely for its emphasis on fraudulent lawyers and scammers. Fair.org set the record straight: 60% of disability claims are denied. Moreover, the extreme rise in disability claims is due to an aging boomer workforce. (Fair.org’s website 10/7/13)

funding for seniors and the disabled is much easier to obtain than funding for youth or families headed by single women.

4.4 Making the trip to the DSS

The experience of homelessness has thus far been a discussion at the middle management level and the concerns of agencies that manage homelessness.

However, the contribution that my field study makes is to look at all the perspectives of the problem. At the micro level of the ecology is the experience of the people who are homeless. While keeping the larger framework in mind, this section ties the County Department of Social Services as a manager of the safety net to the experience of the moment that a family decides to declare themselves unhoused or roofless.

The *Ready Haven Agency* cannot offer a family emergency shelter until the family has been deemed eligible for services by the DSS. Thus, before a family can be admitted to the *Ready Haven Shelter*, they start their journey into the system of financial support by reporting to the Department of Social Services. In 2013-14, the shelter worked with other Continuum of Care agencies to standardize the process by which someone who is homeless enters into the system.⁸⁴ This is the first time that the county engaged in coordinating efforts to address homelessness. This should ideally serve as new way to allocate county and local resources to the issue of homelessness.

⁸⁴ See Figure 5 titled “Coordinated Levels of Assessment.”

When the family declares themselves without any housing, they meet at the Department of Social Services (DSS) with a Social Welfare Examiner (SWE) who *means tests* their eligibility to receive federal Temporary Aid for Needy Families (TANF) benefits or New York Safety Net benefits. In New York State, the local county safety net is used to support families who have spent their 60 lifetime months of federal support dollars (Farrell 2008:19). Families who come into the DSS office may be using the services for the first time although many of the people in my study have been to the DSS office before to qualify for Food stamps or other benefits.⁸⁵ The family's eligibility for financial assistance is then assessed, which is called "income maintenance" or income assistance. This can be a variety of support benefits that depends on each individual's ability to work or not work.⁸⁶ As Robert Wall put it,

"One of the things that you have to understand is that particularly the income maintenance portion of public assistance, which is what you're really talking about; we're not really talking about the services division so much as you are income maintenance. And that is a gate system. Go before an examiner. This is not a counselor. This is an examiner. That's their title. And their responsibility is to find out why you're not eligible.

People don't get services when they go to income maintenance; they get eligibility. If they're eligible, then they'll get Medicaid, food stamps, whatever it is, but you have to prove you're eligible. Whereas when you come to *Ready Haven*, we don't have any eligibility. We will tell you what the eligibility is of various things, but you can come to us for anything that you want to come to us from; we may or may not be able to help you, but our motto of "any problem under the sun" is driven by the desire not to limit what people can ask for. Because

⁸⁵ Most families in my study fall within the 60-month lifetime benefits window of the federal Temporary Aid to Needy Families although some of the older residents of the shelter had shifted to the county safety net.

⁸⁶ As can be seen from the quotes that follow, and those before it, the clearest information I gathered during my study came from Robert Wall. The Department of Social Services granted me a visit that is also described here but entry into the DSS office and access to the staff proved more difficult.

it really turns people off when you say hey, you can't ask me for that.... Came to the wrong place" (Interview with Robert Wall on June 6, 2011).

He further explained that the relationship to DSS also requires reporting by *Ready Haven*.

"We provide them (DSS) with a report that's either monthly or quarterly. We give them numbers. Where there are mutual clients, we share information. We report to them on eligibility and the accomplishments of the clients *vis-a-vis* the requirements that DSS has. Work...you know... Hunting for work, going to school, taking care of their children. Kids going to school, you know those kinds of things that the DSS requires of anybody that's gonna be on assistance. We are responsible to report on that" (Interview with Robert Wall June 25, 2014)

For Robert, the welfare-to-work portion of a person's eligibility is the most problematic part of the system. He explains what others, like Prevonost and Youngblood (2009), have called the "cliff effect:"

"Wait a minute. Welfare-to-work...if it is graduated enough with enough steps to keep people really stable. When they did welfare reform they put half the people off of welfare but they weren't really jobs that paid a living wage. Society is not prepared to say, get as far as you can, we'll go the extra mile. If you know what I mean. If it really was a graduated decline in benefits as people were better off, that the people could do better each time than they would have without the graduated, then you'd have something. Meaning that if I increased, let's say that I'm on welfare, and I get a job, and so they decrease my welfare, but they don't decrease it all the way because they give me a little bonus because I'm trying. Then I get a promotion, so they don't take it all away but they give me a little bit less, but I lose less than I gain, so now I'm better off, I'm building equity, I'm building assets, I'm building resources...if it was that kind of system, a supportive system, people could get off welfare, it would be worth their while. But when welfare is such that as soon as you get to a certain point you lose the benefit, you know, there's a strong disincentive because the effort and the potential may not be stable" (Interview with Robert Wall August 20, 2012).

The amount of "grant" money for subsidized housing and expenses are also set by the SWE. It is a calculation that depends on other forms of support, such as child support, whether the family has assets such as support from immediate or extended family, whether the family is a two-parent-heterosexual married or

cohabitating couple. I encountered a complex set of rules about cohabitating couples and how they are counted versus married couples in a 2009 U.S. Health and Human Services Report.⁸⁷ The document analyzes how different states spend their Temporary Aid for Needy Families grant as it applies to cohabitating couples. New York State stands out as a state where localities have the greatest amount of flexibility to determine how married couples with a biological father and married couples with a stepfather are added to the benefits of the mother and children. As is true of all Community Development Block Grants, localities can spend their dollars as they see fit; thus funding is subjected to local politics. Critics have pointed out the increased use of block grants opens up the possibility of “backdoor” spending and reduce government safety net spending. Furthermore, the decentralized control of block grants is more difficult to measure (Dilger and Boyd 2014:9).

Social Welfare Examiners are called “the worker or *my worker*” by the people who use assistance indicating a possessive bond between the worker and the person receiving benefits. The title of “examiner” is indicative of the actual role of the “worker.” He or she examines the eligibility of the people receiving assistance

⁸⁷ The report is specifically about “whether the adults are (or are not) the natural or adoptive parents of the child.” According to the abstract, the research focused primarily on identifying differences in how the eligibility of a family is treated depending on the household adult(s) relationship to the children, and, to the extent it matters, marital status. In TANF rules, as was the case in AFDC, the key distinction between types of families is not made on the basis of marriage, but on whether the adults are (or are not) the natural or adoptive parents of the child. In addition, the research focused particularly on rules governing unrelated cohabiters, which are less well understood. For example, the researchers also investigated how financial contributions from unrelated cohabiters are treated. Finally, researchers also investigated how work rules vary across types of families.

and assures the quick return of the family providers to work. The examiner is there to protect the coffers of the county and they are trained to do this using their own best judgment. No matter what the circumstance, except in the case of physical or mental disability, all people receiving assistance must work. The kind of work and how much the family earns is also monitored. The moment the family earns above the threshold set by the examiner, the assistance is cut. The problem of the eligibility requirements is ultimately up to the examiners who supposedly exercise “tough love” on welfare recipients (Taylor 2008). When I brought up the idea of “tough love” to Robert Wall in a July 20, 2014 Interview and he said:

Well—you know—a little truth in looking. What are they [DSS examiners] doing? They’re trying to sell a system that doesn’t work. The people that know it doesn’t work and saying that if you work a little harder, you can get there cause this is America because American is not ready to own what America is.

And so, you know, they have a tough gig. Talk about a salesman; this is a pretty lousy process. On the one hand, you have all the power because you say: “You’re not eligible,” and you’re done. On the other hand, you have a whole system behind you that you can fall back on and the other person is not going to know near as much you do. Although, if they brought in a legal services lawyer that person might know a lot more than their caseworker and probably wouldn’t be dealing with the case worker.

So, you know, it’s a bad system. Some of the workers are more sympathetic, compassionate. There are people within my own organization that don’t give off that vibe. It’s very hard to have everybody feel OK and not have the time to respond in a positive way. (Robert Wall Interview July 20, 2014)

Then, Robert called an administrator on the speakerphone. She seemed to know more about local eligibility requirements. She (B) helped to answer my question about work requirements and other opportunities for training:

B: Well, at this point, if a person has work requirements – which means applying for 20 jobs a week; if they don't get a job then they have to do what's called CWEP, which is community work, or at the Adult Shelter, any number of places...and that's pretty full time. Unless you can get your training...there are times if you can get training which is specifically career-oriented, that could count as your work...

Robert: But that training career oriented is very limited to what they do with that.

B: The criteria on the DSS end is, if your worker finds it, and you push your worker, the worker will do things for you. Really, literally. (Interview with Robert and Assistant November 26, 2012)

DSS and the Workforce Development One Stop Offices, as well as other Excelsior County-level human service offices, are located on a road that connects the small city of Centerton to the Regional Mall in the next town. The public transportation system will take the poor from Centerton to the DSS but not to the mall. The irony is not lost on any of the people who are receiving benefits. Every person who enters the building must pass through a metal detector. All bags are scrutinized for weapons by several police officers. As a brief introduction to the world of American social services, here are my first impressions upon visiting the DSS.

My bag, computer and me are all scanned for weapons at a desk that says SHERIFF'S OFFICE in bold letters. An older male police officer does the work of literally unzipping all the pockets of my handbag and rifling through them. An older policewoman at the desk answers my question of who I am there to see. She calls a phone number and asks me my name again then turns to me and says: "They'll be right out to get you."

"Wow, I didn't know I was going to get checked so thoroughly!" A man in shorts goes through the checkpoint after me and directs his answer for me to the cops. "You're lucky, they were checking body cavities until last week! (He was clearly joking). Yeah, I would not want to be trapped between four walls in there with a maniac shooting us up."

The woman police officer says under her breath..."Well, we just had Boston..." [referring to the Boston Marathon bombing].⁸⁸ I am guided through the client waiting room that has about 50-100 chairs in it (estimate). The room is sparsely populated with a mix of about 20 children, women, and some men who are slouching and waiting in the neatly lined up

⁸⁸ Brackets are my own notations to clarify the comment made by the policewoman.

chairs. I am then led down a long hallway that looks like a hospital with small rooms open to the hallway. Each room is sparsely furnished with a desk with two chairs facing each other and a door that is open to the hallway. I am told that these are the case managers conference rooms (July 10, 2013 Field note).

Once the Social Welfare Examiner declares that a family can receive assistance, they are added to the roster of people deemed eligible for temporary housing and other services. Also at this moment, the family's public career as homeless persons begins, even though the family may have been struggling for months, or sometimes years, without a proper home. As we know from Georg Simmel and Lewis Coser (1977), "once the poor accept assistance, they are removed from the preconditions of their previous status, they are declassified, and their private trouble now becomes a public issue" (p.182).

4.5 Summary

In this chapter, I reviewed the history and context of *Ready Haven* as the leader in services for the poor of Excelsior County. Under the leadership of Robert Wall, the agency grew to assist every aspect of life for the homeless and the poor. This flexibility obscures several aspects of the problems of homelessness. First, the shelter system obfuscates the need for affordable housing in the county. Second, Robert thinks that an emergency shelter is a business that provides a service that his agency will provide without end. However, the agency is inevitably caught in the struggle for funding so that the agency can continue to grow and operate.

Over the past 50 years in the county, a vast network of not-for-profits, has grown that we see represented in the Continuum of Care meetings, The not-for-

profit and for-profit human services agencies assist families and individuals to combat the permanent state of poverty. Whether it is the administrators of agencies or the case managers who work to find assistance money for the poor, the social process that is embedded in micro, mezzo, and macro layers reinforces the status quo.

The management of homeless families does not work toward ending homelessness. The Chamber of Commerce rewarded Robert Wall for providing excellent emergency shelter and services. However, Robert sits on the board of the Workforce Development Group, and several other important business leadership organizations, which actually serve the interests of the bureaucracy instead of more actively addressing the goal to alleviate poverty through a structural adjustment. In the next Chapter, I demonstrate the existence of daily tension from the perspective of shelter staff that work at the *Ready Haven* family shelter every day. There is a cognitive dissonance for shelter administrators as they provide service to the homeless between the historical agency hippy ideology and the requirements of the welfare system.

SCENE: My first day at the shelter, February 2011

A man with glasses and a woman in a thick winter jacket were chipping at layers of ice around the cars in the small side parking lot. I acknowledged them as I walked past them but they didn't respond. At the front of the yard, an unpainted wooden picket gate was propped open. I passed a gazebo as I approached the front door, which held a handwritten note that says "Wipe Your Feet!" in black sharpie with some creative yellow highlighting. Also, by the front door was a tacked up sign in bold type that said something like "Smoking is only allowed in the gazebo. Please make sure to clean your butts up."

To my left was an office where two black women were in conversation. From the hallway to my left, a well--dressed young woman came walking toward me in black leather high-heeled knee--high boots.

"I'm here to see Arlene Towne." "Your name?"

"Anezka Sebek"

She smiled and said, "I'll be right back."

On the wall was a color photo of a woman with an urn on her head walking towards the lens. The photo was predominantly sienna-colored. It looked like she was in India. It was hand signed and dated 1987. It seemed an unlikely artifact in an emergency shelter.

Chapter 5

Shelter Administration

5.1 Overview

In this chapter, I argue that the administrators, case managers, and staff are engaged in a constant conflict between the ethos of the old *Ready Haven Agency* and their paychecks from the welfare-to-work government mandates. The staff's aim is to follow but often struggles to maintain *Ready Haven Agency* ethos of "non-judgmental non-directive care." And yet, the welfare system's imperatives, which force recipients to "work of their grant," are a constant challenge to uphold. Tension is palpable in the daily grind of the shelter. The rules also serve to keep the shelter as a safe place for children. They include the ritual of breathalyzing in the morning and at night as well as when entering the shelter from a trip into Centerton. The staff is rewarded with excellent health care, wage security, paid vacations, and long-term retirement pensions and their loyalty *Ready Haven* stems from this comforting fact. Jobs with benefits like these are rare in Excelsior County. The staff is all too aware of the precariousness of their job security as they serve homeless families who are struggling to find living wage work. The ecology of employment in Excelsior County and Centerton, as discussed in Chapter 4, reinforces the behavior of both the staff and the residents. Living wage work choices are limited by economic and social conditions.

Nevertheless, for the staff, along with the reward of excellent benefits is the personal satisfaction of doing caregiving work, which helps to dissipate the often-stressful days at the shelter. The dedication of the staff is undoubtedly heartfelt. However, caregivers know that if they do not perform to the best of their ability, their job would be on the line. They know that there are other people who could easily replace them. In fact, the staff have similar socio-economic backgrounds to the people they work with in the shelter, which makes compliance an acceptable option.

I will begin this chapter by discussing 1) the administration, case managers, resident counselors, and house maintenance staff as they answer to demands as service providers; 2) I will review staff training and especially the controversy of “trauma-informed care.” On one hand, this training can medicalize poverty as if homelessness is an illness; case managers are experienced advocates or guides who are trained to empathize. On the other hand, they have to discipline the client toward “self-sufficiency” as prescribed by the Personal Responsibility Act (Soss, Fording and Schram 2011; Schram 2000). The training of the staff, the ideology of the training, and the effects of the training function to keep the status quo of the welfare and poverty management system; and, 3) how the case managers assist shelter residents with housing searches. The search for housing is another example of the conflict between the lack of affordable housing and the almost impossible job case managers have to perform to find homes for people who are often already blacklisted with the local landlords. The staff has to wrestle with landlords who

have the upper hand in eviction courts. The staff must provide the poor with the quickest possible solution to housing. Finding housing does not necessarily mean finding the clients an apartment because the aim is to find residents the fastest route out of emergency shelter. Sometimes the only option is to shelter the clients with family or friends where the reason for the family's homelessness may have originated. Lastly, the chapter will explore; 4) the "on-the-ground" perspectives of the shelter staff to the residents; and, 5) the daily grind and frustrations of the staff, from their perspective, as they deal with the conflicted mandates of the *Ready Haven* ethos and the welfare system.

5.2 The staff of the family shelter

The shelter staff is trained to handle the mandates of the welfare system. They are not required to have any social work or special education to work at *Ready Haven*, which I will discuss a bit later in the chapter.⁸⁹ Administrators and staff maintain all house rules to manage the shelter population. The staff stays vigilant by carefully monitoring, documenting, and reporting the behavior and safety of parents and children. Distinct responsibilities and roles are divided into care, supervision, referrals to other human services, rapid rehousing, legal, mental health, medical services. There is a dedicated staff for parents to track them into mental, physical health referrals and to work with them to find employment and housing. The

⁸⁹ Soss, Fording and Schram discuss this at length in their work entitled *Disciplining the Poor: Neoliberal Paternalism and the Persistent Power of Race* (2011). Their findings are similar to the findings in this dissertation. They write about the neoliberal turn in poverty management that speeds the poor to low-wage work with the threat of sanctions (a.k.a. the elimination of welfare benefits) if the poor do not comply with work or work search rules (See Chapter 8).

dedicated staff for children manages their mental and physical health and assures proper access to public school and Head Start programs.

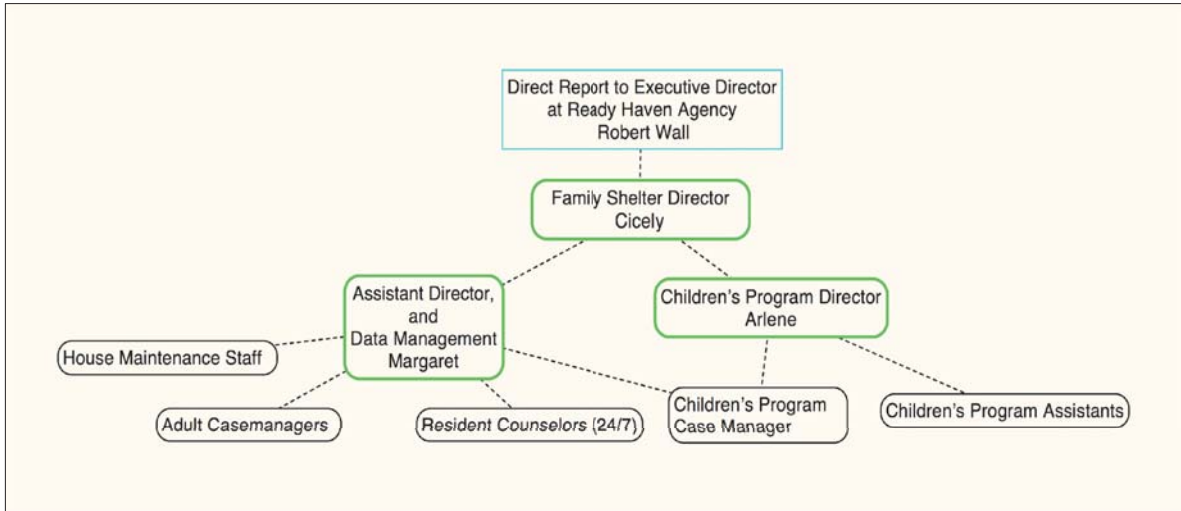


Figure 6– Management Structure of the Family Shelter

Figure 6 shows the hierarchy of the shelter: 3 administrators, 4 case managers, a rotating daytime staff of nursery attendants, a rotating 24/7 staff of 1 resident counselor per 8-hour shift, and house and ground maintenance staff. Most of the management staff that deal directly with the residents are women although the Children's Program also hires young men to work in the nursery, and occasionally, they also fulfill the position of a resident counselor. The race, age and gender demographics of the shelter staff reflect the shelter population; they are a mix of White, Black, Hispanic, and Bi-racial people of a wide range of ages. There is the possibility of upward mobility for case managers at the *Ready Haven Agency*. To do this, they may move to different shelters if jobs open up, particularly if the new post is a higher level of title, salary, and responsibility.

At the top layer of the management structure is the shelter Director, Cicely who works closely with the Assistant Director, Margaret (manager of Homeless Management Information System (HMIS)).⁹⁰ The Children's Program Director, Arlene oversees the programming for the children. She is also very active in working with referrals to other agencies for specialized care for both parents and children.

In the next layer of the hierarchy are the case managers who either work with the children's program or work on the adult (parents) cases. The Children's Program case manager, Emma, works with Arlene, the Children's Program Director, to make sure that children go to school. She manages the appointments with medical and mental services as well as tutors, after school programs, and entertainment. There is also a Children's Program Assistant who manages the rotating staff of 1 to 3 nursery or playroom assistants; they also do some of the low-level tracking of paper work and appointments.⁹¹ On this same level, there are three adult case managers who meet regularly with parents, primarily to look for housing and work opportunities.

There is always a resident counselor on duty (three shifts around the clock). I shadowed this position when I first worked at the shelter one day a week. As a resident counselor, I directly interfaced with the families at the *Ready Haven* family shelter. The requirement to fulfill such a position is that one is able to listen

⁹⁰ HMIS is a CoC required data management system of services provided for homeless people. It has recently become the locus of data sharing among agencies that deal with homelessness.

⁹¹ Nursery (playroom) assistants are often either in college or just out of college.

respectfully, no matter who you are speaking to, and that one is compassionate to shelter residents while simultaneously being able to exert authority when needed.⁹²

The resident counselors are in charge of maintaining the routine of the shelter in coordination with the rest of the staff. These are the staff that maintain very careful notes on anyone entering or exiting the shelter, or, on any disputes that happen between residents, counselors and residents. The counselors also handle transportation requests and other errand assistance. The shelter has a van that every shelter staff member can drive as long as they pass the State-mandated background check. The van carries people to medical, mental health, and legal service appointments in addition to others. The resident counselors also manage the hot meal in the evening. The meal is cooked in the adult shelter located across the parking lot and hand-carried to the family shelter.

The top layer of management, as well as case managers do not work on weekends but they rotate being on call. Note-taking and reporting skills are critical to all the jobs of the shelter. The DSS and shelter management keep in touch throughout 24-hour cycle of changing shifts of personnel through the Green Book. Here is a small snippet that demonstrates the constant vigilant eyes to which the residents are subjected:

THURSDAY

- *Nanette (resident counselor) in at 2 PM*
- *Picked up the new incoming resident Lola from the Big Bubble (a laundromat).*
- *Took Jasmine to pick up her son from his bus stop downtown (Nanette)*
- *Man called//homeless looking for a room. I referred him to hotline & logged in L & R binders (Nanette)*

⁹² These were the instructions given to me when I started my fieldwork.

WEEKEND STAFF:

Lara and her whole family have permission on Saturday for an extended curfew until 1 AM per Cicely.

Observation-no one is watching their children- had to bring children several times back to moms (Ilona and Jasmine mostly). I would strongly suggest lifting "the other parents' kids" rule or at least enforcing that they must let staff know who their child is being watched by. The only residents who keep track of their children are Henry & Lara, and Sharon.

-Brought another high chair up from the basement because Lola was complaining that her child should have one because her son is younger than anyone else's.

Everything from special resident requests, messages for staff, and "write-ups" of transgressions are reported. Separate paperwork is required for serious cases; those are incidents that call for people to be expelled from the shelter. A warning letter is written to the resident before they are expelled. Ultimately, the shelter director decides who comes and goes, even though these decisions are made in collaboration with the DSS. What happens after a resident is dismissed is discussed further in Chapter 9. Often, the resident will be housed by DSS in a motel room.

A key part of my argument is that the security of the job, coupled with the moral satisfaction of working in a charitable profession, is what retains many of the staff at *Ready Haven* since the organization's start in 1970. I agree with Nancy Folbre's assessment of this kind of labor. Folbre is a feminist economist who has written a few seminal monographs on what she calls *caring labor*:

"What is really distinctive about caring labor is that it is usually intrinsically motivated. People do it for reasons other than just money, even though there is often money involved, like you need to get paid to work, or you are exchanging the care of a family member in return for a share of another's family members wage, still we always think of care work of

something which involves a sense of commitment or obligation or passion for the person who is being cared for”(Nancy Folbre 2003 Video Interview by Oliver Ressler).

The resident counselors and case managers at *Ready Haven* family shelter earn \$10 to \$15 an hour, only slightly more to the residents who work in fast food or retail jobs in the regional mall. Consequently, the management of the shelter is part of the category of human services work that is typically underpaid. In a Bureau of Labor Statistics study, Human Services, and those involved with “residential services” earn on average between \$12 and \$15 an hour (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics May 2014: Social and Human Service Assistants).⁹³ The *Ready Haven* workforce is paid in this range of wages with the big distinction that fulltime employees receive vacation and health benefits as well as pensions.

There is also the house and vehicle maintenance staff. The maintenance staff is also responsible for driving and moving families from the shelter to their new homes. Most of the residents have given up their possessions and home furnishings as they became homeless. When they are moved to their new apartments by the shelter’s maintenance staff, *Ready Haven* provides these items from the shelter’s basement storage of donated furniture, appliances, and clothing as well as racks of toys. The maintenance staff keeps the shelter’s vast basement storage areas neatly sorted and categorized so that when a family moves out of the shelter, they can

⁹³ New York State after California has the second highest number of human services workers employed (30, 940 workers out of a national 355, 500 human services workers).

move into their apartments with a minimum of bedding, linens, and dining room furniture. Bric-a-brac and kitchen items are also available.

The maintenance staff is the least educated and yet, they work very closely with the residents and usually work with the residents to return to a sense of home. Rennie, who usually sits at the front desk when I come in, is one such staff member. At the desk, she prepares for her work in the shelter or on its grounds.⁹⁴ Rennie also does routine breathalyzers of the residents if she happens to be in the front office and not working on a maintenance job. Rennie's position is important to my argument because Rennie is from the same socio-economic background as the residents.

Rennie is never very friendly and does not make eye contact. She is a large, strong woman of mixed background. She has very dark eyes and she swaggers around, usually dressed in maintenance work clothes. She swaggers in a matter of fact way as if she owns the place. She is very "street" savvy. She does all the repairs and house improvements with Cesar, the lead maintenance man for the shelter. She also cleans up after the residents and complains about their "slobbiness" without hesitation. She's a very closed person, and it is difficult to read her.

On a different day, I arrive at the shelter and Rennie is at the front desk. She has lately been charged with breathalyzing people in the morning. I sense that she considers this a kind of policing duty.

Rennie opens up the locked front door for me without a hello and continues her conversation with Donna about moving someone's stuff out of the shelter. The long office is a bit of a negotiation as I move around Rennie to the drawer where the sign-out sheet and the keys are. Margaret has taken up the far-most spot near the far wall and bulletin board. The office has several bulletin boards tacked with the shelter census (of every resident, their ages, and DSS information) and other schedules for resident transportation needs. Older notices are buried and rarely moved or discarded. Margaret looks a bit wearily out of her eyes. "We don't have a lot of people here today," she says.

⁹⁴ I never interviewed Rennie because of time constraints (mostly on my side) but I would like to do that as part of the next phase of my research.

"I heard from Emma that many people left the shelter this week." I say. Margaret takes the daily workshop attendance off the wall for me and crosses off the people who were originally on my schedule for one-on-one sessions today. Gary, Sherry, Gwen, and Ken all left. According to Emma's messages to me, they all went to permanent housing. At 10 AM there will be a house meeting and the appointments for the three people, Stella, Antonia, and Marta are scheduled around it. As they talk, Margaret tells me that Roberta will not return to the shelter. She lost her case with DSS. She has not been back to the shelter for two days. Rennie leaves the office. I realize that Rennie is saddled with cleaning up Roberta's room and returning her possessions to her.

"Emma sent me an email about Roberta. She had her birthday and never returned." Rennie says. She adds: "What is up with the milk here? I'm going shopping and I want to know where the six gallons went I got last week. That stuff is walking out of here." (Field Note May 3, 2013)

Sometimes the shelter resident acts entitled and Rennie is in a position that requires her to clean up after residents and maintain the facility. One time a resident specifically wanted a beige toilet cover for her new apartment.

Rennie comes from the back holding a maroon toilet cover and mat.

"You don't have it beige?" Kenna [the resident] asks.
"Beige! Put it in Clorox and it will come out beige!" I say jokingly.
"No, maroon is a better color anyway. It hides the dirt," Rennie says very matter of factly. (Field Note August 6, 2013)

In a way, I interpret Rennie's response to mean: take it or leave it. Rennie does the best she can in her position, and takes her job very seriously. She concerns herself with the orderliness, rules, and cleanliness of the shelter.

As I pack up my [computer] stuff, Rennie comes back to Margaret and Cecily as I stand near the doorway.

"Excuse me, sorry for interrupting. This is from Melanie's room. (I didn't see what she showed them). I just saw the person that picks her up do the same thing."

I don't hear the question from inside the office but Rennie answers: "Melanie's the only one that gets picked up around here. When this guy picks her up, he empties his garbage in our parking lot." (Field Notes February 10, 2014)

In these various instances, Rennie obliges the residents, which is part of her work dealing with the living habits of the people in the shelter. The maintenance people are dedicated and work hard to keep the shelter clean and neat. They also have direct experiences with people who destroy apartments as some of the shelter residents may have done when they are assigned to the subsidized transitional living apartments at one of *Ready Haven's* transitional housing units. Maintenance staff lives in the same neighborhoods as the residents and are from the same working poor class. In some cases, these people have also been homeless. The staff members are happy to be on the more sustainable side of the precarious life that could lead to homelessness.⁹⁵

5.3 Training

The personnel at the *Ready Haven* family shelter are trained by the agency in “trauma-informed” care during a weeklong training. The staff must attend several professional development sessions every year. Trauma-informed care is a recent requirement for all *Ready Haven* staff no matter what their position. *Ready Haven* staff gave the training. They got their training through the Runaway and Homeless Youth Training and Technical Assistance (RHYTAC). It is seen as a way to strengthen the staff's ability to comprehend and have compassion for the people who come into the shelter. At the same time, this kind of training can lead to medicalizing the poor

⁹⁵ *Ready Haven* does hire some residents as staff but this is done with a great deal of discernment and care. The resident has to be out of *Ready Haven's* care for a minimum of a year to be considered for a staff opening

as well as give staff a sense of “doing good” without questioning what their practices are actually doing to the residents (Schram 2000).

The balance of doing good and considering the possible “illness” of the residents is what underscores the how staff feels justified keeping the status quo of the present system. After all, those working in the system think that they are doing the best they can instead of trying out other alternatives. While issues of privacy and personal space are deemed important to healing victims of trauma, the overall system does not respect the need for time. Case managers are instructed to work as fast as possible to get the residents into housing. The primary objective is to have them to rejoin the labor force. I hear often:”... any job is better than no job.”

The problematic acceptance of the condition of trauma in homelessness was promoted in 2010 with the seminal article in the *Open Health Services and Policy Manual* (Hopper, Bassuk, and Olivet). In it, they reference a massive body of quantitative and qualitative research and literature on the traumatic effects of homelessness. The medicalization of poverty is a trend that has taken the world of social work and psychology by storm.⁹⁶ After the training, I understood the value of being able to confront someone who may be under the critical stress of losing everything in their lives with the understanding of their condition.

Empathy is the emotion that is elicited by trauma-informed care training.

This is certainly how I felt as I experienced the shelter and the training. The meaning

⁹⁶ Nevertheless, recent neurological research confirms that childhood poverty and trauma impacts brain development (Babcock 2014). How to confront these issues is the subject of a longitudinal study by the Crittenton Women’s Union in Boston, MA. None of the studies that the CWU has done are short-term. They work in five-year windows to assist homeless families.

of “trauma-informed” care as Hopper, Bassuk and Olivet note is still muddled. Teaching psychological assessment of the homeless to people who are not skilled in the profession of psychology is probably the most problematic aspect of the training at *Ready Haven*. The agency tries to stay in step with the research that is available as it is generated by government-sponsored not-for-profits like Runaway and Homeless Youth through the Family & Youth Services Bureau (part of the Administration for Children, Youth & Families or ACYF).

The market-first, work-first, housing-first neoliberal management of the poor is part of the strategy to train case managers to deal with homelessness on the ground so that they feel as if they “are making a difference” on the ground.

“Trauma-informed care” training was one day of five days of training for case managers for several of the shelters that *Ready Haven* manages. Among other aspects of the training were: rules of the shelters; ways to interact with shelter residents, listening to clients; “non-judgmental and non-directive” care; Child Protective Services Mandated Reporter Training review; a review of the new Psychiatric DSM-5; self-care; and a history of the agency. The most memorable part of the training was the trauma-informed care training.

The account I give here of the experience of the training is from my participant observation notes. The main focus of the “trauma-informed” care training was disseminated as group and individual reflection exercises to understand the kinds of trauma associated with homelessness, especially youth and teen homelessness. Many of the resident adults and parents at the *Ready Haven*

family shelter suffered long-term effects of being runaways, homeless, and abused, which is why the RHYTAC training applies to their experiences as well.

The aim of the training is to “build capacity of agencies to provide trauma-informed care.” Trauma-informed care of homelessness has gained tremendous popularity in services for the homeless since the early 2000s and is defined as:

A framework that is grounded in an understanding of and responsiveness to the impact of trauma, that emphasizes physical, psychological, and emotional safety for both providers and survivors, and that creates opportunities for survivors to rebuild a sense of control and empowerment.” (Consensus based definition from Shelter for the Storm: Trauma Informed Care in Homelessness Services Settings. 2010)

The training covered different kinds of violence and abuse, such as sexual abuse, assault, psychological abuse that then results in drug addiction or “self-medication” with a variety of drugs. People in homeless shelters have often experienced mental health issues. Trauma survivors have four factors in common: 1) the [traumatizing] event was unexpected; 2) the victim was unprepared for the event; 3) there wasn’t anything the person could do to prevent the trauma; 4) the person experienced intense fear, helplessness, and horror. The training does stress that if people have a sense of coherence and motivation to deal with trauma, they can often overcome it. The residents of the shelter have experienced family instability, child abuse, and lack of social supports, previous mood or anxiety disorders, and absence of social support. There are negative after these events such as and feeling helpless about what happened, being passive rather than active, not being able to find meaning in the suffering, and an absence of social support.

Many trauma survivors have Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. They are diagnosed for having the 1) re-experiencing of the event, 2) avoiding or numbing of responsiveness (drugs), 3) and increased arousal or hyper-vigilance (irritability). The visual (MRI) effects of trauma on brain development were shown especially on infants and young children who are neglected. Due to a lack of time, the training session was cut short. The emphasis of the training was to instill a deeper understanding and compassion in caregivers for the homeless population.⁹⁷

New case managers and employees go through a kind of trial by fire in their first weeks on the job. I saw several people adjusting to new responsibilities and information as I was going through my own initiation to understand the shelter. Backgrounds of the case managers varied but many did not have backgrounds in psychology or social services. Case managers usually start as resident counselors. They need to demonstrate excellent interpersonal communication skills in their interactions with the shelter residents. Staff members must be excellent communicators so that they can report back to the team of administrators (both oral and written). These skills are usually assessed by the upper administrators as the staff matures “in the trenches” into their positions. Staff should be able to

⁹⁷ We were, for example, not trained in the Adverse Childhood Experiences Study by the CDC (See Chapter 6). This study was conducted longitudinally with 17,000 people recruited from 1995-1997. This baseline population is being tracked “The prospective phase of the ACE Study is currently underway, and will assess the relationship between adverse childhood experiences, health care use, and causes of death.” (CDC ACE Study website). When I attended conferences on the effects of poverty, the ACE study was quoted in almost every session.

communicate effectively with the bureaucracy of the DSS and other government offices.

In the case manager training session, the introductory session leader underscored that people have their privacy. He reiterated the instruction of “do no harm” and of being “non-judgmental, non-directive” because “we meet them where they are.” For example, people are not forced into counseling to get them off drugs if they don’t want to do so. Caseworkers taking a non-judgmental approach with someone who is using heroin might ask: “How’s that working out for you (without judgment)?” Edicts like “You’ve got to stop that,” or “You need to get clean” will only drive people away from help (March 24, 2014 Case Management Training Notes). In this case, the meaning of “non-judgmental” originates from a concern over the safety of the person being assisted. In trauma-informed care, the use of drugs is associated with trauma and “self-medication.” The word “judgment” for caregivers here is not based on moral decision-making, but a sense of caution because any kind of judgment during an interaction with someone who is traumatized might do them more harm. This could drive a person further into drug abuse. People who go to the “bridge back” harm reduction drug abuse program and the methadone clinic during their stay in the family shelter are allowed to stay at the shelter as long as they keep their appointments. Here, Cicely, the shelter director speaks of her frustrations with programs that have different missions than the *Ready Haven* shelter system. My questions to her were primarily about shelter programming.

A: There’s a whole method with drug addiction with very little invasion... Harm reduction

C: Yeah, harm reduction. You know that is our big f 'in problem with the drug programs. They won't tell us when someone used until they're ready to throw them out because they don't want them thrown out of here because we have clean and sober; they have harm reduction, and it's a totally different bar. You're allowed a few blubbers. They'll watch you, they'll talk to you.

A: I didn't know they had harm reduction. .

C: Yes, they'll fuck up. They will flip, they will use. They will not go to AA, NA meetings. And when the people find out, they don't want the people they're working with who are now clean and sober ending up at a motel, but you know what? We've had this problem for years.... People would sign a release and the old program director, he would say, somebody was dirty and he would say to that person: any time, it is your choice to revoke your release that allows us to speak to anybody else. So that, now he couldn't tell us... (Interview with Cicely: November 17, 2014).

For someone like Cicely, who has been with the agency for decades and has seen the way that DSS controls the residents through the mandates of the welfare system seeing these contradictions is frustrating. As her words reveal, she is very aware that those in control of the population manipulate privacy. For a shelter director, this presents problems of possible safety for the people and children at the shelter.

In addition to the formal weeklong training, the shelter staff must take the NY State-required Mandated Reporter training. The program may be taken online, and no one monitors whether someone has taken the test. If shelter staff observes a parental abuse resulting in injury, they are obligated to report it or suffer the consequences of being charged with a Class A Misdemeanor. This can result in one million dollar fine and a year in jail, or both (Summary Guide for Mandated Reporters in New York State 2015).⁹⁸ The severity of the punishment for case managers seems out of scale but the state argues that a child's life is at stake and the

⁹⁸ NY State Office of Child & Family Services publication

rules have to be strictly enforced. The added pressure of reporting or keeping silent is one that is experienced by residents and staff at the shelter and casts another layer of stress on the overall life of the shelter.

Once child abuse is found, a series of legal steps are taken to remove the child from the family and to be placed into state's foster care system or children's homes. However, as the next conversation with one of the case managers shows, the parents and their children are already in a highly vigilant environment, and the threat of CPS is ever-present and often based on different parenting styles:

E: CPS's function is to prevent extreme abuse and to save the children from extreme abuse...It is not the role of CPS to talk to help the parents talk to their children in a more respectful way. This is way beyond...So I think that CPS is going to be this agency that is going to solve any relationship difficulty between parents and children. It's not. The role of CPS is to make sure that kids don't die at the hands of the parents or are not so damaged, so abused...It's really like a...it would be like a war zone. A child is being sexually abused by a parent or a family member: let's go in and yank the child out. A child is being corporeally punished, burned with cigarette burns, kept out of school locked in a basement. This is what CPS is... We took it to mean, well.... the child hasn't been going to school for a few days, let's call CPS. This is beyond...We have cluttered the machine so much that they finally got it. They branched out with FAR, Family Assessment Response because the flooding of calls...They made it a priority to answer any calls. We [used to] call CPS because the parent was late picking up their child or the parent was not at the bus stop...no, no...this is not what CPS does.... We are we [shelter staff] there? Why do we ask an outside agency to come and help? It doesn't make any sense. A lot of things happen. For example, sometimes someone will ask can DSS pay for childcare? DSS will say...we're paying you a lot of money, you have staff. Why don't you do this?...This is what we do, we are front line. We provide childcare and parenting education.... Why would we call an outside agency to spend an hour with the parents, when this is what we are supposed to do? We don't need to call preventive. They [residents] are being watched 24/7. Preventive won't open a case while they are at the shelter and I think that makes a lot of sense (Interview with Emma August 29, 2014)

This role confusion pervades daily practice of working as a case manager in the shelter. The threat of not reporting a CPS case comes with a serious punishment. It is no surprise that many of the case managers called in incidents instead of not

reporting even the slightest missteps. The creation of Family Assessment Response (2011) lifted a lot of these issues from the shoulders of the shelter staff.⁹⁹ The FAR model works to create partnerships with the parents rather than accusing them of child abuse. First and foremost, the case managers work to maintain the safety of the children. At the same time, the family is engaged to seek a solution rather than dealing with an oppressive system of punishment.

5.3.1 Staff background and education

Caregivers at the family shelter, as has been discussed before, are not necessarily selected for their educational background. There is an advantage to this deskilling of human services jobs. First, it allows people with little training into a job where they can have some upward mobility over time. Second, people with some educational background or longevity in the organization like Cicely, tend to rise to positions of management and supervision. Arlene and Emma in the Children's Program, for example, have more formal educations. Still, in the eyes of *Ready Haven*, there is no need for a Social Work or MSW degree unless there is special funding to cover the higher salary. On the one hand, the staff that works closely with the residents has experienced some of the same housing hardships and poverty. On the other hand, the level of research and innovation that would open possibilities for the advancement of the shelter residents is practically non-existent.

⁹⁹ Family Assessment Response website: "FAR can only be used where caseworkers see that there is no immediate danger to children and where there are no allegations of serious child abuse. Each social services district develops its own specific criteria for using FAR."

Experts are called in to add programming features but reinforcing the shelter population's access to education and training to give them the steps to living-wage work is beyond the daily responsibilities of the staff. Cecily perceives people with education to be of too different a class to be useful to the shelter population. People with degrees use the shelter to advance their own degrees and disappear from the scene leaving the problem of homelessness to be dealt with by people like Cicely. The MSWs don't like to dig in and get their hands too dirty. Cecily discusses the fact that case managers do not provide "therapy." The distinction is case *management*. The best the shelter can do is to assist people to find housing and to refer people to a wide assortment of not-for-profit human services and county-supplied mental and physical health services. The shelter is, after all, a part of the ecology and system that manages poverty in the county. The more difficult task of figuring out how to prevent residents from repeating the homelessness cycle is not possible in the current configuration. The problems for each family are different and each resident would require a different kind of assistance:

(N=Anezka)

C: Yes. However, we don't do therapy. We do case management. So, unless there is a grant the specifically wants and MSW to do or oversee something...when we get MSWs, they're looking for other jobs, it's a bonus...they're hired for \$13.59 an hour! And they have school loans, you know, whenever it is Robert (Wall) doesn't like... I'm not saying that part isn't true. He does not like people who work for *Ready Haven* and start paying their way through school because they're going to leave. No, but I'm just saying, he left out that piece. "I don't need people to go to school! You know, instead of having them to benefit *Ready Haven*, they leave." So I'm just saying...let us just...well you know, you're talking to somebody else who's been around for so long, and seen the pieces and heard the words...

N: Well let me tell you something, I don't understand why you guys look so kindly on me, then, because I'm kind of looking at you guys as like an example of...understudied population. By the way, it is rare that somebody like me actually does the work likeI do.

C: I know that.

N: They don't usually come in...

C: No, just sitting in an office saying, - Band-Aid, - I understand.

N: So I'm already doing something that's weird.

C: But the reason that you get kudos from me and respect from me is that you have the sleeves up with dirty hands, and I know that and I see that, but it's true. I understand that you come from a completely diff.... I have not read any of that...I was telling people I couldn't watch the Burning Bed when I was in DV...I didn't need to be edified in that way; I lived it. And, there are things...(Interview with Cicely January 23, 2014).

As we see managers like Cicely are suspicious with people who are educated and don't trust that they will "roll up their sleeves and get their hands dirty" to deal with the daily grind of confronting people who are in crisis like homeless families.

Some of the case managers have backgrounds that help them empathize with the residents. In the case of Novisha, for example, she came to work for *Ready Haven* as a resident counselor for the family shelter, where she enjoyed helping out. In interviews with resident counselors and other staff, like Novisha, I found that a few of the shelter's case-managers were homeless during their youth. Thus, past experiences have made them attuned to situations of homelessness and poverty:

A: (Interviewer): You were [originally] hired as a resident counselor? You already had some training?

N: I had some training regarding, doing customer service. I interacted with people but not on the kind of social, like a social worker, no. But as I was working for *Ready Haven* and kind of watching and observing, I started as a resident counselor, started helping the case managers with things and helping clients, and I enjoyed it. I was serving a purpose you know, I was helping people get their lives back together, especially when I, myself, went through some similar things with my mother. So it was...

A: What did you go through with your mom, just very briefly?

K: With my mom, we were in a homeless shelter at one point in time. Because she had a drug habit and we ended up losing our home and ended up in a shelter for a brief moment. So I kind of understood what the parents were going through, and the children. (Interview with Novisha June 25, 2014)

Over time, Novisha worked her way up to become one of the three adult case managers. Novisha is also one of the few case managers who is Black which is an important benefit to the image of the shelter staff vis-à-vis the shelter residents who are often young African-American mothers.

5.4 The search for housing

In Centerton as in the rest of the U.S., families need to return to housing to minimize the trauma of being without shelter. The U.S. Housing and Urban Development Office is increasingly pressuring the organizations that serve the homeless with “housing first” solutions (Hombs 2011:15). Most of these solutions consist of finding apartments for families with a financial allowance to bridge a period of time so that the family can obtain work and become solvent again. While the idea sounds good, this response is only a Band-Aid for much larger problems. . As previously described, a lack of affordable housing is coupled with the lack of living-wage work. To afford a studio apartment in Centerton requires a job that earns at least \$10.85 an hour. Most jobs pay less.

As discussed in Chapter 2, Excelsior County is the third most expensive county to acquire housing out of New York States’ 62 counties (NY State Comptroller’s Report March 2014). Often, residents are pushed out of the shelter, and not into housing, but into the same situation where they first experienced a crisis of housing. For example in Sharon’s case, she returned to her family where she was originally not wanted.

The team of case managers fights to obtain housing for residents, and against the overall lack of affordable housing in the county. But beyond this, there are other complicating factors as well. First, the monetary value of DSS payments and subsidies has not kept up with rising rents. Second, residents might have an outstanding debt with a landlord, or the electric and gas company. Landlords shy away from a potential tenant who shows debt on a credit report, even if the tenant is under the watchful eye of DSS. The prospective tenant may also be returning from incarceration; they may have a public record of behavior or improper maintenance of a previous apartment. This will put the tenant on the landlord blacklist.

Resolving housing issues takes negotiation skill; it is also the primary daily task of the case managers. They use their advocacy strategies to negotiate and cajole landlords into taking on clients. Here is one case manager's account of the daily conflict:

S: ...Interesting training on trauma and the brain and understanding what emotional trauma can do to a person. It changes the way that they think and therefore the way that they act. I find it very useful in understanding where someone's coming from. However, learning how to deal with that is the other part of it. OK, this person is acting like a twelve-year-old. They're reactions to things are very stunted and these are the reasons why. This is what they've gone through. I get that. All right, I'm still supposed to (pause) get them housing get them to, you know, take care of these responsibilities. That's what I don't know how to do necessarily. I understand where they're coming from. That hasn't been the problem. How do I then work with a 26 year-old twelve-year-old? You know, she is rude, she is insulting and she's still my client. She sabotages apartments. I still need to find her a place to live. How do you do that? (Interview with Stella August 1, 2014)

The shelter still works to advocate for even the most difficult clients. This is the dilemma, and part of the daily stress, that case-managers must bear and overcome to be effective. Often, shelter residents have lost their eviction case in

housing court, which may add to the long list of grievances by landlords they may have gathered over time. Misunderstandings of who pays the rent (DSS or the tenant) and when it is to be paid, like the one described in Henry's story are common (See Chapter 6). Matthew Desmond's (2012) work in Chicago also points to this fact, especially as populations are constantly shifting and where the predominant tenants are single women as heads of households. As Desmond reports, high rates of eviction in poor neighborhoods are linked to high rates of incarceration for men, and high rates of eviction for women. Desmond also noted that some landlords pay tenants to vacate their property. Likewise, in Centerton neighborhoods, the housing courts are busy with many absentee landlords and maintenance violations. Tenants often leave their property because they are unlivable and threaten children's health with pests, mold, lead paint, and asbestos. Additionally, landlords may want to raise rent or expel tenants when an apartment is falsely "posted." This is what happened to a young mother and her new baby (Interview with Jasmine June 7, 2013).

My landlord had the house listed as an office, not a residence, so it got "posted" and they [DSS] found out about it. It had a bathroom but the landlord didn't want to change it to a residence listing.

For the family to stay at the *Ready Haven* family shelter, DSS pays \$99 per night, per person. This pays for the family's faster housing placement and case management, which requires staffing not available through the County DSS Office. The residents are made aware of this cost by DSS. Arlene, the Children's Program Director, calls this "a wedge" that is driven between the shelter staff and the

residents. Residents are often disgruntled and angry about the cost and these feelings add to the difficult relationship of staff to shelter residents. Here is one example of a father, Eli, who, after having a handcraft job and a wonderful home with a mortgage had his home burned down to the ground in a massive fire. Eli developed a “theory of the trap.” (N=Anezka)

E: Yeah. I had the [high] unemployment and that was the theory of the trap, which I hope somebody listens to this in the future...but what happens is, because I was getting this New York State unemployment and I was getting almost more than anybody gets, you know, for free, that I was not able to replace my job because I would get more for free than I would get for working, which if that makes sense, it does, I'm getting over \$400 a week to do nothing so it didn't make sense to take a job for less, even unemployment told me that, and social services. But social services made us pay for the motel that we were in...

N: And what was that?

E: And I was paying \$328 out of \$389.

N: Wait a minute – a week?

E: A week. To live in this motel up here, that social services put us in. So now, I could not save the security to move to an apartment because they were making me pay it because I had this high income. See what happened, the unemployment ran out and then social services gave us money at that point, I couldn't save anything anyways, they took over paying for the motel, but I wasn't able to save anything, but they basically made me pay for the motel because, of course, yes, I was making, you know, understanding you're making \$1200 for doing nothing, you know, \$1600 for doing nothing, but was unable to save any of it because they made me pay for the motel room. So that's why it's a trap; that was where the trap was. Believe me I'm writing a book about it someday.

Eli wonders why DSS does not help pay for security deposits and rent so the homeless can get into housing quicker (also the topic of CoC meeting December 3, 2014). He asked: wouldn't that be the quickest and cost-efficient way to deal with people and get them into housing? Robert Wall, the Executive Director of *Ready Haven* said, “You are welcome to try that, I've tried—but you certainly can try again.” The politics of the DSS (TANF) management of the population is apparent in every part of the system especially as it pertains to housing. This also reflects the struggle between the Housing and Urban Development and the provision of housing

based on eligibility of the resident for aid through the Temporary Aid for Needy Families

5.5 Staff relationship to shelter residents

As we will see in Chapter 6, residents arrive at the shelter in a state of crisis and they are traumatized from the events preceding homelessness. Delivering services that are truly meant to address emotional trauma is a complicating factor in the care for people without homes. It is also difficult to deliver services without properly trained staff. While *Ready Haven* invests in professional development to address these issues, as can be seen in the weeklong training with trauma-informed care, the problems of the residents often outweigh the staff's ability to handle them properly.

On the one hand, shelter rules are a method of control over shelter life and safety for children. On the other hand, shelter staff do not like to pressure people into following rules. But the conflict is palpable.

Case managers at the shelter find mothers, or mothers to be, in poverty are difficult to deal with:

Field note: The case manager stops on the stairs and hushes her voice. "These girls have A) No self- esteem B) the only people who like them are the men who want to get into their pants C) These men don't like to wear condoms."

I say: "You told me the other day that their mothers are into this as well?"

Stella: "Think of it. All of their friends around them are teenagers who are pregnant. That's all they know."

In this quote, Stella analyzes and psychologizes the actions and behaviors of shelter residents. I argue that this is not done out of malice but again, to validate the

reason why the emergency shelter and Stella's services are important in the lives of residents. Abramovitz claims that this is one way that anti-government proponents also justify cutting aid to this population. Single mothers fail "to comply with prescribed wife and mother roles; depicted women of color as matriarchal, hyper-sexed, and promiscuous; and blamed single motherhood for most of society's woes" as part of the regulation of women's lives (Abramovitz 1999: 337). Although a case manager like Stella is not thinking of the women in quite these strict terms, the seeds of this kind of thinking are there. Rather than justifying a diminished response to homelessness, she is instead justifying her own participation in the system.

S: I think that those are great concepts (non-judgment)...mum. It's easier to look non-judgmental than to be non-judgmental (interview with Stella, case manager August 1, 2014).

At another *Ready Haven* facility, one case manager said:

P: It's hard; I mean, it's a great model. I think we try. But, you know, people have judgments, people are judgmental. People, you know...we definitely try to be non-directive as far as with the clients. I mean we try to provide the options that they have, and not tell anybody that they have to do this or that...meet them where they are. I'm very firm about that. Because we have to empower the women to make the choices...(Interview Patricia, director of another shelter facility (July 7, 2014).

The *Ready Haven Agency* prides itself on a "non-judgmental, non-directive" attitude toward people who need emergency shelter, and yet, this stance is impossible to maintain. Moreover, the entire ecology of organizations assures the survival of the shelter's existence and the systems that support it without truly lifting people out of poverty. DSS personnel and

all those involved in counseling this population are in constant moral judgment positions to question “risky behaviors” and choices people in crisis make. Becoming “non-judgmental” is often filled with tension because the value-base in client-centered counseling has to be made explicit for the counseling to be effective (Johnston 1999). The lack of training case managers often leads to the kind of “psychologizing” of residents or judgment and imposition of values that was also discussed in Chapter 5 and merits further research. Explaining behavior and justifying erratic behavior helps staff to validate their own reasons for doing the work of helping the homeless. Trauma-informed care training opens the case managers’ awareness of this condition but there is no follow-up or expansion of the training at *Ready Haven*. Moreover, contextualizing the condition of homelessness in the ecology of institutions that serve the homeless is never mentioned in the staff training.

Shelter residents want more freedom while the shelter staff wants to help residents become stably housed. One of the case managers addressed the issue:

E: I think it’s so valuable but it’s really not there. It became. It’s like an echo. “Oh we are non-directive and non-judgmental.” “Oh really?” I think that was a... (she stops short). It might have been at first. It needs to come from the top and trickle down. If it’s not at the top, then people are not by nature non-directive and non-judgmental. So it has to take some effort. You have to keep that going. It has to be permeating in every staff meeting on a weekly basis. Every new employee, even volunteer needs to be reminded on a daily basis. So everybody is extremely judgmental and extremely directive. I mean, we have rules. We’ve written people up for breaking the rules. Where’s the non-directiveness there? It’s a myth. It’s not reality. It’s a beautiful ideology but that’s all it is but it is not there anymore.... It would work if it was applied. I think that it’s the only way to work. That’s what would actually help clients with their trauma. If they didn’t feel judged. I even realized, at first, when I did my case-management I wanted to offer them all the services. I took it personally

if they refused services. I was pushing and pushing it. I wanted to look good on paper that I offered all these services. Until, I was like...if they don't want it, they don't want it. Why am I pushing it? Why am getting into this power struggle with clients because they refuse to have WIC. When WIC is exactly what they need. Who am I to tell them what they need. If I had said: oh I understand that you don't want it, that's OK, what is it that you want? Then I open a door to actually an exchange that is constructive and some trust that I'm actually there to really help them not because I have my own agenda as a case-manager that they need those services. We don't know what they need; let's ask them what they need.
(Interview with Emma August 29, 2014)

This quote illustrates the difference between the constant reminders that staff gets about the way that the “non-judgmental, non-directive mission” and the way that they are interpreted. The case manager in this interview clearly understands the duality of the mission with the reality on the ground.

5.5.1 The Daily Grind

When homeless families arrive at the *Ready Haven* shelter, some are already familiar with each other because they had been in the same motel together before a bed opened up at the family shelter. The safety and stability of children is the primary reason residents are placed at the family shelter. In the previous chapter, I described a bit of the shelter churn as well as the constant rub of authority with the Department of Social Services. Some residents were at the motels for seven months to a year. The DSS grants families the opportunity to stay at *Ready Haven* when they see people are having a difficult time finding housing on their own. The *Ready Haven* family shelter often finds housing in 45 days or less. The burden then falls on the shelter case managers to advocate in the best way they can within a precarious rental housing market.

DSS contracts *Ready Haven* to move clients toward “self-sufficiency” as soon as possible. However, families that filter through the DSS to the shelter are often in need of additional services such as the assessment of children with health and mental needs, the post-traumatic stress syndrome of domestic abuse, the stigma of being recently incarcerated, or being addicted. The process of recovering from homelessness takes time, especially with the new efforts to provide “housing first.”

Cecily, the director of the shelter, is aware of the limitations of shelter life and the interaction with residents:

C: ...we're not about tough love in any way. That's not our thing, we're not a drug, we won't break people down, but we're about reality checks. And that's a good way to put it. The same expectation they have to wake up in the morning, be... breathalyzed. Your boss doesn't want to hear that you're tired. That's a generational thing, you know, that we always talk about....that we can'ton it goes and on it goes and on it goes, and it's the same expectation with not following through on stuff because I think there weren't enough little victories in their lives to be gained from following through, it was just wasn't enough, like, you know, cookies or carrots or something so there's no I wouldn't know how to change that....

Cicely has a colorful way of describing her need for basic respect to communicate with residents. She says “we're not a drug” but they are a reality check:

C: I have no interest or expectation in receiving respect from people who are forced to come to this shelter and live by these really s...t f...k rules. Even if their lives were out of control...and they were leaving their kids alone, and smoking pot in front of their kids, and you know, bringing their boyfriends in one room in a motel and f.....g them with the kid...whenever it is...I can have a judgment about it but I don't have a judgment about people coming and screaming, you suck, this f.....g place sucks, these f.....g rules suck, every day, and that comes from how I started with the way I saw the world, and a million years of working here. And, a personal opinion on, when my friend says I'm your father, you need to respect me, I watch it, and I'm thinking, you have respect if you've earned respect...demanding respect or having some familial connection to something, or your staff in there. It doesn't work for me I don't get it. You love somebody or you don't, you respect them or you don't.

I believe there's a difference between demanding respect and offering reality checks. Because I think without reality checks along the way there's no growth even if you fight it...there can be a little growth which is, I know you're really upset, I know you're upset, but when you're yelling in my face, I can't hear anything you're saying; I can't help you because I can't hear you. Try to walk away, take a breath, come back, and talk to me, so I can hear what you're saying...It's like you want me to hear you...you want me to be your audience...figure out how to reach me. You have to respect me. You don't have to use nice w....I don't care if they yell...people are offended by that....somebody called me a f'n bitch yesterday like eight times.... The clients were like, "she just called you all kinds of bitch" ... I don't care, just go to group! It's different...it's just different. I grew up with the Woody Allen everybody's screaming at each other onto the roller coaster. I don't have that ...but that's me. And I've been there a very long time. And, I came with different politics than other people came with (Interview with Cicely, January 23, 2014).

Arlene, the Children's Program Director often describes the temperature or demeanor of "the house." Here, in a field note, Arlene describes the shelter like a theater.

Allison had let her little child run all over the shelter with a snotty nose. The other mothers were very upset. Arlene described the event: "The house was really upset about that this morning." Arlene calls the shelter "the house." Like it was a theater. Like everyone was embroiled in the drama. She said that it was like an infection had spread. It wasn't a cold. It was an infection of ostracizing someone. (March 13, 2012 Field Notes)

The interactions of people living in close quarters sometimes resemble a bad reality television show. In an informal survey about residents' impressions of the shelter, one woman wrote: ..."it's like a big group home. Most folks gossip like an old folks home."

The case managers must practice patience in their interactions with the residents. I asked one of the case managers, Emma, if she had enough support from the agency in difficult cases. Unlike many of the staff, she went to college and did social work as part of her studies. Her stance was a more militant one about the kinds of services that the agency provides. She fully believes that the DSS needs *Ready Haven* to manage the population of homeless families and that the additional

money that is spent on shelter residents for their stay at the emergency shelter is necessary:

E: That is the whole point of four years of education. We are soldiers, we are supposed to work for our clients so we advocate to DSS for our clients, not the other way around. We don't get (stops short)...of course, DSS still pays us. We have a function so we are the advocates for our clients, so we tell DSS: my client needs that. That's why we're there. We translate for DSS, this is what our clients need. DSS doesn't really care. DSS is almost like a for-profit. This is a business, it needs to work, but we are the agents. We're the ones doing the work. We think that we are depending on DSS for funding but they are depending on us to do the work. So we are not so helpless. We can say, OK, we'll [do the] work but this is how we're going to do it. If the *Ready Haven* family shelter wasn't there, the families would be stuck in the motels for years. They [DSS] need us as much as we need them for our clients (Emma Interview August 29, 2014).

Together with her staff, the director of the shelter manages the staff like a sergeant on the battlefield. Here, Cicely talks about how the shelter staff people are her charges, her clients. She oversees and is accountable for everything that concerns the staff and the shelter:

C: The clients belong to my case managers, my children's people, but staff are my clients. They're the people I – they're my first line, they're in the foxhole, for me they're who I'm trying to work with to do the next line of work. Almost like you know, the concentric circles out. So, it's hard and it's frustrating, and not everybody has the same politics. Really in the old days people pretty much...everybody was a pothead, and everybody stood on the left of things, and now *Ready Haven* is a place that pays no better than Wal-Mart. On the Internet, you know, posting things about boycott Wal-Mart, and my staff falls apart. And so we always didn't have money but times got harder ((Interview with Cicely January 23, 2014)).

In my dealings with the shelter, I noticed the lack of connection to historical framing or analyses of homelessness. I wondered if Cicely was aware of the shift between AFDC regulations and TANF in 1996. I asked her whether she was conflicted about these laws. She is outwardly very kind and has a great sense of

humor, but she also has to run a shelter with rules, specifically rules that come along with the 1996 change in the law.

N: Do you remember that whole shift between AFDC and TANF?

C: Yeah but it didn't affect our clients that much because they continued getting the money. What shifted was sending them to job shop [the slang for Community Work Experience Program] that it became...that's what it became. In the earlier days DSS would more apt to help people in school. Then it went back to ...you had to get them off this program and get them working. It came along where people had to work off their grants and they were, you know, coming to us and we had them, you know, dealing [working] in the pantry and the downstairs...mostly cleaning and helping because we didn't want people we didn't know and often clients' cousins and brothers dealing with any of the paperwork, this was all confidential. So they didn't get any skills from us. (Interview with Cicely January 23, 2014)

Cicely understands the laws and the regulations, and inevitably she had to follow them to maintain the shelter. Here she answers my question about the efficacy of shelter programming and her personal view of what could be an alternative.

A: Do you feel that your programming has an effect? Because you're so intensely managing their day and also offering them a million little bridges to wherever they want to go.

C: I think to sum it up in a very scientific way, you throw shit on the wall and sometimes it sticks. Just saying, you know.

A: (laughter) ...sometimes I feel like that with my Future Readiness program.

C: But it is you and everybody else. If people could do whatever they do to not go [to group] They don't really want to go, they would rather not be doing...that we take the kids and watch them and they wouldn't have to do anything. It's just...people are annoying. Look...I have said to Robert, I know that you are the big advocate for like dry shelters but I'm thinking. I'm thinking about the appeal to me of working in a shelter where it is what it is. We offer stuff and you don't have to do it. You want to just come in, take a shower and get some food and go out. I don't care and I said that I wouldn't be fighting with clients and DSS all the time. Maybe that is the way, you know. Clearly, it doesn't change a lot in the long term...I don't know...There's certainly recidivism. (Interview with Cicely November 17, 2014).

For decades, Cicely has worked in all levels of the *Ready Haven Agency*. There have been many shifts in the welfare system and its management of homelessness

and the poor. The daily grind is to manage the interpersonal relationships between her staff and the residents as best as someone like Cicely can. She attacks each day with a good dose of dark humor and with unending patience, especially for children.

5.6 Summary

While the staff delivers on the promise of welfare-sponsored care for the emergency shelter residents, there is the constant tension of being rule-bound by the old hippy ethos of the *Agency* and the contrasting punitive and sanction-based rules of the welfare system. To maintain a safe space, especially for children, is the very reason the shelter exists. In a conversation with Arlene, she thinks that the children fare better in the shelter than the parents. It stands to reason that the stability the shelter provides is good for children. The parents are all too aware of the structural obstacles that face them in addition to the directive scrutiny and programming in the welfare system and the shelter. However, the managers of the shelter are in a constant state of cognitive dissonance of being enforcers and also having to deliver on the original founding dream of being “non-judgmental and non-directive.” The shelter administrators and the staff maintain their part of the system, and therefore, contribute to the status quo even while they have the best intentions to do “good.”

In the final analysis, the precariousness of availability of living wage labor works to inspire a level of fear of losing employment so that the staff performs their best by following through on requirements of their jobs at *Ready Haven* as

mandated by the welfare system. In the next chapter, we follow families through the decision-making process of engaging with shelter services and to publicly declare the family homeless. We will examine how a family lands at the *Ready Haven* family shelter and the *moral* career of a homeless family.

SCENE: Turning Over

1:50 I see Cesar pulling up with a large blue van. Danny and Cesar carry huge suitcases and bags into the room that Aisha's family vacated last week.

1:55 Charles comes in and is breathalyzed and a few moments later, he comes into the office with a lot of stuff in a laundry bag. He parks the duffle bag in the hallway and sits down at Vincent's desk farthest away from the door, forcefully imposing himself on Vincent.

"How do I sign out of here if I've found a place to live?" he says...a bit out of breath. The phone rings and it is Novisha. "Is Charles there?" She asks on the speakerphone. Vincent picks up the phone and gets some inaudible instructions. He sends Charles back to Novisha. A few minutes later he comes into the front hallway. "Do I have to be breathalyzed on my way out?" He comes into the office and shuffles through the box with the breathalyzer tubes and pockets his. With Charles, 5 adults and 4 children have cleared out of the shelter in one week.

2:00 Julia, Danny's wife, carries in a bunch of groceries in cloth bags into the yard. I watch her struggle with the gate. Before I can get to the door, Danny intercepts my attempt and runs out to meet her. She was not allowed to carry heavy things because of a back injury. Julia is a brunette, Caucasian woman, medium build. She is really friendly to me and Vincent introduces us. Lots of the family's possessions are loaded into the room mostly bedding and clothing that had to be washed before it came into the shelter. Vincent thinks the new family is really great and he especially likes Julia. He thinks that the whole family has a great attitude considering what happened to them. He also noted that Julia "presented" as if she was drugged although Vincent did not think she was—slurred speech—weaving side to side. He thinks that it is due to some medication that she takes.

2:25 Suddenly, I hear someone come in. It is the exterminator. He has a medium-sized non-descript black dog with him. The dog has a shirt on that says that it sniffs for bedbugs. The dog is very excited. He hops on his hind legs and is raring to do a great job. Vincent helps the exterminator get into everyone's rooms. As the dog and exterminator walk through the facility, I hear someone raise their voice at Vincent. A few minutes later, Vincent comes back into the office with an all-clear report. He picks up the phone and reports in to Cicely. I overhear Vincent's story about when he entered Sam and Sheila's room to have the dog do its job and she had given Vincent a piece of her mind. "I'm doin' something. If I was takin' a shit, would you make me get off the pot for this dog to sniff my room?" The episode makes Vincent furious. During the remaining afternoon, he must have repeated it to different people at least 4 times. A few moments later, Eddie and Vincent take a smoke break outside. I remember that Arlene was trying to make this a no-smoking facility a few weeks back but it's difficult to do that with staff smoking outside with the residents. In the past few weeks, Eddie has been bumming cigarettes more and more from people like Vincent who still smoke.

I see on the office TV monitors that Cicely and Arlene go into the nursery to meet. They were in the meeting for the next hour and a half. I know that Fridays are the days when Cicely and Arlene catch up with each other.

Chapter 6

Moral Careers

6.1 Overview

In Chapter 5, I showed how the shelter staff functions within the ecology of homelessness. The staff lives in a constant state of tension between a non-directive ethos and welfare system mandates. We also saw in Chapter 4, how the welfare system and the local ecology of human services manage the problem of poverty through coordinated efforts that assure the relevance and existence of the agencies. In this chapter, we see how poverty works when managed through a mandated and directive welfare system in tandem with the need for a low-wage labor pool that makes the conditions of cyclical homelessness inevitable. The working poor are unable to fund their own financial safety net because they earn below poverty level wages. The journey to homelessness is often triggered by the loss of a job. The welfare system is then put under pressure to provide emergency shelter when a family fails to make rent payments. Within the ecology of poverty management in Centerton and Excelsior County, the possibility of a career of cyclical homelessness is thus a part of the lives of the working- poor.

Erving Goffman's (1959) concept of the *moral* career and Andrew Abbot's (2001) concept of *the turning point* frame homelessness as an ultimate consequence of a string of events or a trajectory that can be interpreted as a career of sorts.

Goffman follows the mental patient's "institutional self" through hospitalization. I look instead at the homeless family's institutional career as they travel through a motel or an emergency shelter provided by the welfare system. In essence, the largest contributing factors to cyclical homelessness in Centerton are a lack of living-wage employment and a lack of safe and affordable housing. Even as the shelter system seems to be a safe haven for homeless families, it is still a part of the hamster wheel of welfare with a trajectory of turning points that add up to a long career of repeated homelessness. There is no escaping the cycles that the wheel of welfare spins; families who get housing assistance continue to get jobs in the low-wage precarious labor pool. Even though they work, they are one lost paycheck away from returning to shelter.

The moment of declaration of the homeless condition varies from family to family. The social process of homelessness is less a momentary crisis and more fitting of the word "career" as it signifies a longer period of time and includes a series of turning points. Although many see homelessness as a temporary condition or a momentary crisis, it is actually a much longer event. For some families in my study, it is a repetitive event. When the family unit becomes homeless it is stripped of everything to be eligible for subsidized shelter. They may have a few possessions and even a working vehicle, but their stable home and life is gone.

Keeping the previous chapters of the larger structures of the federal, state, county, and agency structures in mind, homelessness is a multi-dimensional

condition that converges on the lives of families as they find themselves in a financial crisis without housing.

What follows is a brief overview of the contents of this chapter.

1) Goffman uses the model of the moral career in his work with mental patients. While people who are placed at the shelter are often in a state of crisis, they are not mentally disabled. However, the system currently treats the condition of homelessness as a traumatic event, similar to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. The PTSD condition could be seen as the medicalization of poverty. The *Ready Haven* shelter controls and programs this population so that they can become “work ready.”

2) Before a family is homeless, there is the condition of “pre-homelessness.”

3) To illustrate the diversity of turning points, I draw on three stories of pre-homelessness to illustrate entrenched homelessness problems. The stages of the moral career for homeless parents and their children are triggered by a series of events. I use Abbott’s model of turning points to show how instances of decision-making throw a family into a new set of circumstances, and often a series of more complex problems that eventually brings them to the emergency shelter.

6.2 Moral Careers

The Department of Social Services determines the category and eligibility of “homeless family” so that the family can be placed at the *Ready Haven* family shelter. I use the term “homeless family” in the same way Goffman identified his mental

patient as both a social category and a social process. As we will see in the lived experiences of homelessness that follows, there is a way to do homelessness and to do the low-wage work as required by welfare reform. At every turn of events in the career of homelessness, the family makes choices contingent upon their financial, physical, and mental wellbeing. All these choices are played out together and bring forth larger questions. Does the family want to be dependent on assistance? Or is the family resistant to the possible scrutiny and demands implemented by the system?

Although the analogy of a career describes homelessness as a planned course of life, I use it to describe and analyze how homelessness is unavoidable for the permanently working poor. The moral career as Goffman defines it: “refer(s) to any social strand of any person's course through life,” and specifically as “an institutional approach to the study of self.” The main concern here is with the *moral* aspects of career—that is, the regular sequence of changes that career entails in the person’s self and in Goffman’s framework for *judging* him [her]self and others.”(p.123).¹⁰⁰ For the definition of decisions, I am drawing on the frame of a moral career, which is further elaborated by Rom Harré. The moral career is “the stages of acquisition or loss of honor and the respect due from other people as one passes through various systems of hazard characteristic of different social worlds” (1985: 147). Harré emphasizes the problem of character as a moral attribute that becomes a fateful event (or a decision that does not turn out well). According to Goffman, people who engage in these fateful events participate in behavior that is

¹⁰⁰ my italics

then evaluated by society (1959:137). Similarly, accounts or stories of deviance or veering from the normative path can be applied to the homeless family when there is a “*process, which involves other the responses of other people to the behavior*” (Becker 1963:16).” The system judges social events, or in this case, fateful events, as turning points that are labeled as bad choices. “Most important for the study of behavior ordinarily labeled deviant, [are that] the perspectives of the people who engage in the behavior are likely to be quite different from those of the people who condemn it. (Becker 1963:16).”

While Goffman used the idea of a “moral career” to describe the life of mental patients and the journey in and out of institutions, the career of a homeless family is not a trajectory on a straight line (1959). Instead, I propose that a moral career of homelessness is a series of circular hamster wheels strung together along a timeline (See Figure 6 below). The hamster wheel is a metaphor for a life lived on welfare or so-called workfare. The point of the metaphor is that people are cycled and recycled into one low-wage job after another; this will never stop a family’s possible loss of income and their home.¹⁰¹ The welfare system is mainly constructed to favor businesses and their need for low-wage labor. In the lives of the people I met at the *Ready Haven* shelter, this means a lifetime of resorting to government assistance every time a life crisis occurs, often the consequences of the crises result in homelessness.

¹⁰¹ According to a recent conversation with a Centerton planning consultant, after a house to house interviewing process, 700 families in the poorest census blocks 9518 to 9521 (totaling 10,909 people) are one paycheck away from being homeless.

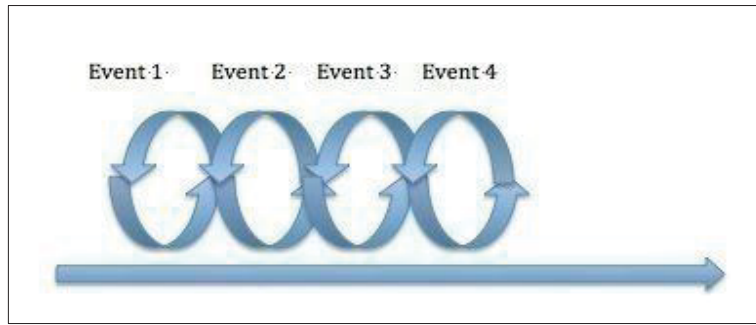


Figure 7-The “Hamster Wheel” of Welfare Assistance

The structural situation of cyclical homelessness is an expensive proposition for communities like Centerton because it requires a robust safety net to support the working poor. The state closely monitors and controls markets, which include the cost of labor, combined with the cost of the safety net. Middle-class taxpayers pay for the cost of welfare to make up for the lack of wages that should be covered by corporations (Cooper 2014; Soss Fording and Schram 2011; Collins and Mayer 2010). State control and collaboration with corporations extend to all who participate in the confusing and diverse governance methods that manage poverty.

The series of hamster wheel of welfare revolutions produces a cyclical rhythm. The first wheel begins its spin with a low-wage job and life on partial welfare support of food stamps and Medicaid. Next, job hours are cut, or a job ends because of an economic downturn, illness, or pregnancy. Then, the family runs out of resources to pay the bills and becomes homeless for the first time. This is one full turn of the wheel. The case managers and DSS workers force the homeless parent back to work at a low-wage job and

subsidized apartment at least for a few months. There is a short-lived moment of stability, and everything seems to be turning out for the better. Just as the family is stabilizing, welfare assistance—such as subsidies for housing, food stamps, and childcare—is cut off when wages increase even the smallest amount to a limit set by the welfare system. This condition is known as “the cliff effect” As a result of the cliff effect women report that when they were earning more money, they were worse off (Prenovost and Youngblood 2009:2). All supports are yanked away without easing the family into the new financial condition. Working parents on welfare assistance, who have experienced homelessness, find themselves living in constant fear of becoming homeless again because of the cyclical hamster wheel of welfare assistance and low-wage labor.

The careers of people on government assistance consist of a long and complex process of going from being privately poor to publicly cared for. In Abbott’s example of the career trajectory of graduate students, a successful career develops over time and increases in rewards. The career of a homeless family, in direct opposition to a middle-class graduate student, represents a downward spiral of moral decisions and lack of resources. Families are forced into a bind to accept assistance from institutions, both government and private. Most of these systems are associated with the federal safety net that demands a “work-first” solution. Along with the assistance come the directive programming, monitoring and management of the family’s life but not necessarily the way out of poverty. The idea

that “any job is better than no job,” pushed by people leading the economy and the political structures of Excelsior County and Centerton, works to assure that low-wage jobs are filled. In turn, this keeps emergency shelters open to take care of the poor. Additionally, as Soss, Fording, and Schram propose in their assessment of neoliberal poverty management systems, those accepting welfare benefits are thought of as if being on welfare support is an illness or addiction (2011: Schram 2000). “Through the lens of the recovery model, welfare recipients are cast as disordered subjects who require a transformative program to cure their pathologies and help them gain control over their lives” (2011: Kindle Loc. 4998).

Receiving welfare aid is also associated with fraudulent behavior. It is a way to criminalize the practice of receiving benefits. The systems to track the poor such as fingerprinting, drug testing, and the use of punitive sanctions are closely aligned with the criminal justice system and their practices (Gustafson 2011:51-70).

PRWORA/TANF recipients are required to report changes of address, household composition, and income to continually show that families are still eligible for assistance. This reapplication is called “recertification.” On the recertification form, the word “self-sufficiency” is repeated three times.¹⁰²

¹⁰² RECERTIFICATION FORM FOR: TEMPORARY ASSISTANCE (TA) - MEDICAL ASSISTANCE (MA) – MEDICARE SAVINGS PROGRAM (MSP) - FOOD STAMP BENEFITS (FS)

We are committed to assisting and supporting you in a professional and respectful manner with your goal of achieving **self-sufficiency**. You, in turn, must be committed to becoming **self-sufficient** and must be responsible for participating in activities to reach **self-sufficiency** including work activities for Temporary Assistance and Food Stamp Benefits where required. Whenever you see “Temporary Assistance” or “TA” on the recertification form, it means “Family Assistance” and “Safety Net Assistance”. We call both Public

When the parent reapplies for shelter, it is no small thing to say the words: “We are homeless.” There is a stigma attached both the condition and the action of asking for assistance.¹⁰³ Also, there are many dimensions to the meaning of homelessness (Somerville 2013).

The unstable patterns of homeless families have been noted by many researchers who investigate the lives of the working poor and those without homes across the U.S. (Ehrenreich 2001; Shipler 2004; Gustafson 2011; Wacquant 2009). Much of this literature describes the effects of the 1996 Welfare Reform mandates for work that keeps the poor in the same endless mill of low-wage work. People are shoved into low-wage work. If they cannot find work on their own, they are pushed into Community Work Experience Programs (CWEP).¹⁰⁴ In this example, Amana was pregnant and had to work at the town dump.

Amana: I had to work at a dump just to get my assistance. I was pregnant; they had me working five days a week at the dump, the transfer station...

N=Anezka: To do?

A: dirty work

N: Like?

A: I was shoveling garbage, sludge. I was doing recycling. I was actually having to work for nothing.

Assistance Programs “Temporary Assistance”. These TA Programs are meant to assist you only until you can fully support yourself and your family

¹⁰³ Such as the case of Anna where she pretended to not be homeless while going to high school

In reality, Amana was not working for nothing but instead she was “working off her grant.” Her DSS worker did not counsel her about why she had been sent to the Community Work Experience Program.

The success of these welfare-to-work programs is varied.¹⁰⁵ Homelessness, as one type of a moral career, is not only the condition of being without housing, but the family’s emotional stability is also affected. Between 1995 and 1997, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control enlisted 17,000 people as a baseline cohort to study the long-term effects of childhood trauma (Centers for Disease Control Adverse Childhood Effects Study). These evidence-based studies demonstrated long-term effects of dislocation and violence of every type (from verbal to sexual) on children over their lifetime. As we saw in Chapter 5, the language of trauma is promoted government-sponsored programs and by psychiatry and psychology as a way to encourage empathy and understanding for this population. The danger of assigning any medical term such as trauma to this population is that the condition will be further stigmatized and medicalized instead of addressing the structural conditions of homelessness. Most of the programs at homeless shelters still want the women to become good middle-class wage earners and to be “self-sufficient.”

¹⁰⁵ See Bloom et al. “Linking Program Implementation and Effectiveness” (2003). This is a study of placement of welfare-to-work clients in office settings that proves that “one size does not fit all” and that placement offices need enough staffing so that personal contact and monitoring with clients is made possible. Unfortunately, the report is limited in scope and does not compare areas with high and low unemployment and the effect of programs on welfare-to-work clients.

6.3 Turning Points

In the “moral career of homelessness,” the family experiences a turning point such as the step of accepting public help from the welfare system although many people in the shelter are already used to accepting food stamps and medical care from the system. As a consequence, the last step toward accepting help for housing is not such a large one. It is still a big step to take that puts the family’s decision-making ability in the hands of others.

The concept of Everett Hughes’ turning point was rekindled in the work of Andrew Abbott’s *Time Matters* (2001).¹⁰⁶ Abbott argues for pattern-based approaches to analyze data especially as it applies to the life course and the decisions made at each turning point. Between two turning points in a life process, there is some kind of shock that is “causally incomprehensible” that sends the life process into a new “steady trajectory” (Abbott 2001:247). In this way, life becomes a series of turning points that, in the case of a homeless family, looks more like a hamster wheel that does not progress toward any goal or end.

The key here is that homeless families go through causes that are structural (no jobs, unaffordable housing). Thus, it can be argued that the turning points in the lives of shelter residents happen when they are thrown

¹⁰⁶ Abbott references Everett C. Hughes’ *Men at Work* (1958): “In the course of a career the person finds his place within these forms, carries on his active life with reference to other people, and interprets the meaning of the one life he has to live.”

into shock by structural forces such as housing and employment. They are essentially in a bind, and there is really no choice in the matter. Will they be on the street with children or the safety of a motel or emergency shelter? Families are also confused about who is financing the shelter. They do not have the proper understanding of how the safety net systems work in tandem with the emergency shelter. Once they are at the shelter, time-limited government assistance does not look beyond the family's needs to work and become truly financially self-sufficient.¹⁰⁷ Instead, the family is forced to accept whatever job they can get so that they can continue to receive assistance.

Abbott used the concept of turning points as a way to understand careers as they pertain to career decisions made by college students. It is used here to look at how these turning point “shocks” pervaded the stories of homeless parents. In the case of Jasmine, for example, is how she a young woman who chose to work instead of staying in high school when she turned sixteen. She told me she just wanted to go to work. Going to school was a bother so she didn't do well. Her mother worked as an aid in a nursing home, and she thought she would like to do that as well without an education.

(Jasmine Interview June 7, 2013).

¹⁰⁷ Chronic homelessness is only connected to single adults. HUD does not have a category for chronically homeless families; see report by the Office of Planning and Community Development (September 2007), “Defining Chronic Homelessness: A Technical Guide for HUD Programs.”

However, she felt very different about education when I met her at the shelter when she was already a mother of a two-year-old. She was now subject to the ecology of homeless institutions, and she didn't like being scrutinized. She immediately asked me for information on a TANF program that sponsors parents to a free community college education. She enrolled immediately. I maintained contact with her through her college supervisor after she left the shelter. Jasmine will be graduating in December of 2015. However, life was much more difficult for her as she tried to navigate school and mandatory work to get welfare support while raising a child. According to her college supervisor, she is a serious and diligent student.

A family becomes homeless after experiencing a series of events that could be considered turning points. The focus here is on the family unit as it undergoes the process of being without a home and the likelihood of repeating homelessness. First, there is the consideration of the children and the possibility of more children in a time of relatively easy access to birth control. There were no women in my study who had pregnancies that were not "wanted."¹⁰⁸ From the face of it, they all loved and valued their children. There was a lot of pride and discussion about children during my interviews. In 2013, four women who returned to the shelter had more children. Some women told me that they could not do another abortion because they

¹⁰⁸ In someone like Naomi's case (which appears later in this chapter), she planned her first baby with her boyfriend.

repeatedly used abortion as a method of birth control (Noreen) or they cannot have abortions because of religious reasons (Aisha, Ida). Also, some women say they got pregnant on the Depo-Provera shot.¹⁰⁹

In 2013, there were 32 total mothers and 4 who used the shelter system as a safe harbor for the last month of their pregnancy, or they entered the shelter with a newborn right from the hospital.

I discussed the idea of birth control with a Centerton School District health teacher. I first addressed the problem with the sexual education and health teacher at the Centerton High School. I discussed with her that many women who are homeless have been mothers since they were about 15. In return, she told me that, in her experience, many women who were teen mothers also have daughters who are teen mothers.¹¹⁰ In the poor neighborhoods of Centerton, the high school graduation rate (2012) is only 68% and often less for people of color. According to her perspective, as seen in the excerpt below, she points to a lack of funding and staffing for the health program in the school district. (Health Teacher Interview May 30, 2014).¹¹¹

HT: Chances are they dropped out of high school and never got that information [sex education].

¹⁰⁹ Access to transportation, or extenuating circumstances, may inhibit a woman's ability to get the 12-week dose on time.

¹¹⁰ A 2008 study by Meade, Kershaw, and Ickovics found that "daughters of teenage mothers were 66% more likely to become teenage mothers, after accounting for other risks. Individual (school performance), family (maternal education, marital status, number of children), peer (dating history), and environmental (race, enrichment) factors predicted teenage childbearing (Meade, Kershaw and Ickovics 2008)

Anezka: Most of them dropped out at ninth grade.

HT: Unfortunately, here at Centerton HS there are only two full-time health teachers and we have close to 2500 students, and we have to get through to about 800 students per year. The one difficult thing that we have trouble with in this district is that they may be 18 and a senior before they get into a health class. It doesn't mean that if they were here until 9th grade that they got health. That is a weakness. It gets in their schedule whenever it's convenient for scheduling, or they're able to fit it in (Health Teacher Interview May 30, 2014).

The Health Teacher is more pointing to a much bigger problem of a lack of resources for this population rather than the lack of information or religious reasons. Women, who are not doing well in school, are often held back a grade and miss the correct age-appropriate sex education. As a result, they are older than their cohort and by the time they get to the seventh grade, they may already be sexually active.

When I pressed further on the issue with the Community Center and whether it could do more to educate younger teens on the subject, I got this response:

"Unfortunately, we have not been able to successfully include "sex ed" into our programming at the Community Center. The issue is twofold. First, the majority of children who frequent our programs are much younger than what most agencies that offer sex education would serve, and the [sex education] curriculum available is also for youth older than our typical demographic. The second issue is that many of our parents/guardians put a great emphasis on religion in their families and have been resistant to discussions on sexuality, safe sex and other topics that are relevant. This has presented a major barrier. In general, I do a lot of one-on-one with youth on healthy relationships, communication, and developing respect for yourself and body. As of right now, I don't believe we can push much further on this topic" (Email exchange May 4, 2014)

When mothers choose to bear and raise children, this constitutes another turning point and "shock" no matter what age they may be. They add responsibility to their life journey through the precarious world of poverty and instability. A qualitative study by Katherine Edin and Maria Kefalas (2005) is reflected in some of

the stories in my study. They found that the working poor may delay marriage, but the middle-class option of putting career and education first, is rarely considered in a working poor mother's life. Mothering is not tied to having a relationship with a man but rather "being there" for the children is of primal importance that defines a woman's life.

Giving their child up for adoption is one of the options open to mothers who have children they are not prepared to have. In a very intimate conversation with a woman, named Ida, who had already given her first child up for adoption, she expressed how she found herself in a conflicted situation of having been raised to think that abortion is not a possibility. She was using birth control, but said it didn't work. Perhaps, this is another case of improper education and information or misinformation. I asked Ida:

(N=Anezka)

N: But why did you keep the baby, first of all, because there's abortion, there's birth control, how come you didn't do birth control?

A: I've been on birth control my whole life. I got pregnant with the ...yeah, I guess, apparently I'm the 2% that birth control doesn't work. Listen do you know that on the Depo-Vera shot I got pregnant with my daughter? On the Depo-Vera shot, yeah. And then the Norvo ring, that was my son. Well, the first one was....

N: ... And then you didn't want to abort the baby.

A: I never will. That's not...

N: So once a baby is in you, you will not abort a baby.

A: Never, ever, no, that's against everything...

N: ...but then you will not also give that baby up for adoption?

A: I will not, no I won't, no. You know what, that I thank God that I've had people in my life that my mother has taken care of my son, and their father has taken care of my daughter. It's not that I don't want them, I do want them. It's just my lifestyle...I can't have a baby around drugs (Ida Interview, October 11, 2012).

I also spoke to another woman who thought that the father of the child would care for her and the baby. Unfortunately, the baby's father died, and she was left alone to care for the infant and her other child.

I was living with my grandmother... and I found out I was pregnant ...and she (grandmother) wanted me to have an abortion and me and the child's father were talking about getting married, the whole nine yards. We were looking for a place together. And it ended up me and my grandmother getting into a really big argument because I refused to have an abortion, like I wanted to spend the rest of my life with [the baby's] father.... she wound up becoming very, very verbally abusive and it was getting really stressful to the point where like my blood pressure was through the roof and it wasn't really a safe predicament for me, so I ended up being put in a hotel by DSS and then they moved me here (Sharon Interview July 19, 2013).

The presence of a child does not necessarily mean a shift in a parent's pattern of decision-making as they face adversities in their life. Children often represent a point of conflict, or a transition in a life trajectory, and play into the cycle of homelessness. Their presence does not inhibit parents from possible "risky" behavior. Children provide the comfort of a family in a larger structural ecology that does not assure a woman any security or stability. As Edin and Kefalas found, the logic is "odd." One woman in my study said when she was comparing herself to someone who bragged about having a job rather than being on welfare. This is the kind of "odd" logic that does not square with the fact that the welfare system is taking care of the children:

You make a lousy paycheck. Who cares? That doesn't make you better than me because you've got money in your pocket, oh, because you've got cash and bills that makes you better? No. As a parent, I will always be a better person than her, because my children come first, not me. My children always will come first, and I will always make sure that my kids are taken care of (Amana Interview June 27, 2013).

The logic of defining personhood and identity with children was confirmed in my interviews. The quest for mothers to seek training and education was always secondary to housing and caring for the children even if that meant living a precarious life one welfare check to another with a low-wage job.

6.4 Pre-homelessness

For every family the turning points that lead to homelessness, the choices and circumstances vary greatly. Once a family finds themselves with no other alternative and no resources, they turn to the government for assistance. In Goffman's description of the pre-patient's career as a mental patient, the psychiatrist is the "gateway" person who commits the person to the hospital. In the case of the pre-homeless family, the Social Welfare Examiner (SWE) at the Department of Social Services (DSS) determines where families will be housed: in the local motels or in an emergency shelter like the *Ready Haven* family shelter. Families sheltered in the motels, are not "locked away" as people are in the locked wards of a psychiatric facility. They are homeless and in need of temporary shelter; they are like Goffman's description of mental patients who are part of the off-ward paroled group; they are seen as less "crazy" than the people inside the wards. In the case of the homeless family, the Social Welfare Examiner determines what is best for the family in a paternalistic manner. The emergency shelter then cares for

the family. Control is taken away, and mandated structures are put in place.

Within the system, the family loses its autonomy and privacy completely.

6.5 Stories of Pre-homelessness

There are many turning points that lead to the state of homelessness, but an overwhelming amount of cases in my study were due to employment issues and family disputes. As I described in the methodology chapter, I selected a range of families that were close to the demographic characteristics of Centerton's poorest neighborhood. The data in Table 2 (see below) was created from interviews and sorted according to the causes of homelessness. I selected 22 cases from the total of 96 people I saw during Future Readiness sessions (2012-2014). Twelve of the homelessness episodes began with family or roommate disputes.¹¹² I include Domestic Violence (DV) as a family dispute—usually domestic violence disputes are between parents. Two women lost their jobs because they were pregnant and had complications. Out of the 22 cases, there were 8 cases of petty and serious crime for which there was a probation or incarceration.¹¹³

The cases I discuss merit a deeper and more robust qualitative study than what I was able to do because of my limited access at the shelter. As the average length of time at the shelter is 45 days for residents and my once-a-week sessions

¹¹² The most intensive years of the group were between 2012 and 2014; although, as of this writing, I still go to the shelter once a month to do a more abbreviated version of the group.

¹¹³ The police were often called in for domestic disputes that would then result in a house search and a discovery of drugs.

lasted only a few hours, I could not uncover answers to more intimate questions. One-on-one sessions were on average 20 minutes and never longer than 1 hour. While interviews concentrated on future planning, inevitably, stories of the past would emerge.

Case	Name	Race	Age	Cause	
Case 1	Aisha	AA	42	DV	
Case 18	Maria	BR	34	DV	
Case 6	Deana	C	27	DV	
Case 15	Rebecca	AA	39	family dispute	
Case 16	Ramira	H	34	family dispute	
Case 7	Gina	AA	26	family dispute	
Case 8	Penelope	AA	29	family dispute	
Case 12	Amana	C	26	family dispute	
Case 14	Sharon	C	24	family dispute/pregnancy	
Case 17	Nora	C	29	family dispute	
Case 3	Naomi	C	24	family dispute/misdemeanor	
Case 5	Serena	AA	23	Roommate dispute/ Misdemeanor	
Case 13a	Gary	AA	43	Unemployment/misdemeanor	
Case 13a	Gary	AA	43	Unemployment/misdemeanor	
Case 2	Ida	BR	39	Unemployment/incarceration	
Case 9	Joshanna	AA	27	Incarceration	
Case 17	Sean	C	34	Incarceration	
Case 19	Anna	H	51	Incarceration	
Case 15a	Henry	C	34	Unemployment	
Case 16	Carey	AA	25	Pregnancy	
Case 5	Noreen	BR	25	Pregnancy	
Case 10	Terry	C	45	Fire	
Case 10a	Mitch	C	46	Fire	

Table 2 –Possible causes for homelessness

Similar to Goffman’s mental patient, a family shifts from being private citizens to being housed in a public institution, where life becomes managed and controlled. Thus, a family no longer fits the norm of self-sufficiency of private housing. Aisha, an African-American woman close forty, describes the problems

that lead to her homelessness as a moment that happens not by choice but by, what

Aisha calls, circumstance:

Aisha: It's not a decision that we come to; it's a *circumstance* that we're going through. You have no, in my situation, I don't have and I didn't have nobody that's gonna take my burdens on with me. And those that are going to give that listening ear or give that should to cry on, didn't have the space for me and two kids. It's definitely not a choice. It's a step up from a park bench being at the shelter...being able to come somewhere out of the cold. It's definitely not a choice. I don't believe anybody, then again there are a few...but then I can't imagine anybody that just chooses to be homeless unless the lifestyle that they've chosen to live just lands them there, you know what I'm saying? (4:08) And to me I don't believe it's a choice even then, it's a circumstance (Interview with Aisha October 24, 2014).

Aisha's interpretation of the circumstance of homelessness represents a turning point to ask the government for aid: "I didn't have nobody that's gonna take on my burdens with me." Her story refers to the contentious relationship she had with her mother since she was fifteen and pregnant with her first child. As Aisha tells it, her mother decided to take the child into her own home and to favor this eldest grandson while Aisha moved away and created her own family with her other two sons.¹¹⁴ This favoritism drove Aisha away from her mother as a reliable resource when she entered into the states of crisis like one in which she found herself in the three episodes of homelessness she experienced in her life (Aisha Interview February 23, 2012). Although Aisha claims that she is close to her father, she does not mention him as a resource in times of crisis while her mother remains a resource of sorts. Aisha has to swallow her pride to resort to her mother's help, however.

¹¹⁴ I did not interview Aisha's mother during my study, but I am interested in doing a future study on mothers and daughters within the ecology of homelessness.

In the following episodes of homelessness, I take Naomi and Peter, Gary, and Henry and Lara's cases as a few narratives showing events that led to homelessness.¹¹⁵ All cases mention the lack of employment and running out of resources, as reasons for finally coming to the Department of Social Services (DSS) to declare themselves homeless.¹¹⁶

6.5.1 Naomi Episode 1

Naomi is 22-year-old Caucasian woman. She is from a small town near Centeron. Peter is the father of both of her children, a 3-year-old and a 7-month-old baby. Naomi hopes to marry Peter someday. She has experienced two events of homelessness over the past three years. The circumstances surrounding these occurrences were related to what she characterizes as "bad decisions" she made about her relationship with Peter. She said she knew these were decisions where she had to "live and learn."

Honestly, I tell him, I have told him. I have never felt this way about anybody in my entire life. That's why I had two kids with him. That's why stuck by his side through everything that happened, and it was really rocky, like you know, the last few months it's been very, very rocky, but I'm trying still, to just like, keep pushing it. (Naomi Interview April 16, 2012).

¹¹⁵ I saw Naomi in the shelter at two different times about 1.5 years apart during the course of my study.

¹¹⁶ Families can have \$2,000 in the bank when they declare themselves as homeless, and in need of housing subsidy.

Turning point 1: *family dispute*

When Naomi and Peter started seeing each other, her family disapproved of Peter. Consequently, they decided to settle in with Peter's mother, but the situation soon became untenable.

Naomi: We were renting from his mother, and like it was, like they had a weird relationship. Like if they got into a fight she would threaten to kick us out. And after a while they just got into so many fights that we kind of stopped pay her rent, just 'cause, I don't know....cause of the drugs and everything, too. It was like \$600 a month. But, with him not working and me not working, and like the drugs, you know, nobody had money and we were lucky that she let us stay there as long as she did. So eventually she did evict us.

Anezka: So, is there anything else about how you ended up homeless that you wish that you had never done?

Naomi: Well, everything that I have told you, I wish like never happened. I wish I would never rented from his mother, I wish that the drugs never entered our lives (Naomi Interview April 16, 2012).

Turning point 2: *drugs*

Naomi shared her trouble with drugs, specifically with prescription pills (which she called "pills") and marijuana. The trouble was enough to drive them out of an apartment although she was not specific. She and Peter moved the entire family to another apartment.

Turning point 3: *training for a better paying job*

DSS was always in Naomi's life as she went from one low-wage job after another after she dropped out of high school. The Office of Employment and Training has certification programs with health care institutions that fund the education of Certified Nurse's Assistants at the local technical school. Naomi qualified through DSS to take the training and completed the certification.

Turning point 4: *petty crime and drugs*

One night, Naomi and Peter were fighting. Naomi called a friend who called the police because Peter wouldn't allow Naomi to leave. The police searched the apartment, and found a marijuana plant.¹¹⁷ As a result, Naomi could not continue in her job as a C.N.A. She was put on probation without jail for a year.

Turning point 5: *homeless*

There was a time when Peter squandered the couple's money, landing them in the family shelter. Peter was at the shelter with her, but he was soon dismissed because he refused to participate in the shelter's mandated programming.

Yeah, because you know he would get sick and not want to go to work and then he'd lose a job, so there'd be no money. And, I was like, either I was pregnant at the time or I was raising Pamela, so it like it was hard for me to go out and get a job. And really, I didn't want to get a job at that time because I knew that if I did, my money would just be going towards junk, so....I mean I guess it was good that it happened to us in a way....(Interview with Naomi April 16, 2012)

Turning point 6: *getting off welfare*

After her first episode with homelessness, Naomi got help from a long-term adult case management program at *Ready Haven*. She was placed as a secretary in an office to "work off her grant." Her two young children qualified for, Head Start and Naomi's life stabilized without Peter. She left behind her dependence on welfare for 1.5 years.

¹¹⁷ The police were often called in for domestic disputes that would then result in a house search and the discovery of drugs.

6.5.2 Episode 2 - Naomi a year and a half later

Turning point 7: taking a lesser job to get recertified

Naomi was working in a job as a Personal Care Assistant that was twice as lucrative, but it did not qualify for her C.N.A. certification. Rather than letting the certification lapse, Naomi took a job at a hospital, which was a devastating financial decision because the cost of childcare took most of her check.

Turning point 8: leaving Peter and stability

As a way to make ends meet, and as a way to leave Peter who was becoming more and more unreliable and also drug addicted, Naomi decided to live with a friend in the next county. This meant leaving her stable apartment.

Naomi: I felt I was sick and tired of the way he was acting. He sat with the kids all day. He didn't do anything. I had just had it at that point. A girlfriend at work said: "You can move in with me." I took her up on her offer. I kind just up and left him one day. It was a stupid move I didn't really think it through. You know, you live you learn. I needed a break, "me" time. You learn from your mistakes. I ended up moving in with her. She lived in the next county. It's 40 min. away. We both worked in Centerton. We used her car. It took us an hour to get to work every day. When I was living with her I had to find day care. And that pretty much took away my whole check every week.

It was hard. I earned \$330.00 a week. I pretty much had enough for rent and a little bit of groceries. I was going to the pantries. (Childcare) was \$300 a week, for two children for 8 hours a day. It was my whole check. (Naomi Interview October 6, 2014)

Turning point 9: getting back with Peter

The stress of caring for two children with a longer commute to work drove Naomi back to Peter. She was also dedicated to the idea of having Peter around as a partner and father. As a partner, Peter could at least help care for the children, and they could work together providing childcare and raising the children. This way, all

of Naomi's check would not be spent on childcare. At this time, Peter was unemployed. He called his brother in Massachusetts thinking that there would be better work opportunities there. Besides, moving up north would provide Peter's family to fall back on, which seemed like a perfect plan.

Turning point 10: *Naomi quits before she's ahead*

With a plan to move, Naomi decided to leave her job and put in her notice. They packed up the family to travel to the next state. Peter's brother never came the day he was supposed to pick them up and Naomi could not return to her job. The family spent several months living in a tent in a friend's backyard.

Turning point 11: *homeless again*

Neither Naomi nor Peter could find work. They eventually had to declare themselves homeless again.

When I spoke to Naomi and Peter the second time they were homeless, some strands of the story became clearer. Peter had been evading child support for many years. Anyone who evades child support payments in New York State loses their driver's license. The state's reason to deny driver's licenses to people who don't pay child support is so that evaders do not have a way to get proper identification. The state has full control over their whereabouts if they choose to work and garner their wages to pay for child support. As one of the successes of the 1996 PRWORA welfare reform, this is another tax to control the poor. This form of punishment is unproductive, however. In Excelsior County, the ability to drive is critical for getting and maintaining a job. As a result, Peter is unable to pay the thousands of dollars he

owes in child support and he is additionally handicapped by the lack of a driver's license.

Summary of Naomi and Peter's Turning Points

The circumstances that drove Naomi and Peter, repeatedly, to the shelter and welfare system are instances of turning points. I interpret the events that drove the couple to make their decisions as circumstances, which were moments that they were faced with lack of affordable childcare and resources that drove them to make unwise decisions. These are the same circumstances that Aisha talks about in the beginning of the chapter. Circumstances may not seem like clearly defined turning points because they are interwoven into small decision-making points. These seem like small decisions, but the consequences are big. On Naomi's part, the decision to take Peter back threw her into a tailspin. On Peter's part, his decision to do drugs, not follow the rules of child support, and make shallow deals with untrustworthy brothers, were all decision-making points that led to the homelessness of his family. Naomi's case represents a variety of turning points that all inevitably spiraled out of control and landed her back with Peter, and in the shelter.

6.5.3 Gary and Johnny

The first time I met Gary, an African-American man, he was 45 years old and the first time he was homeless. He called shelter life a "total culture shock." His son Johnny was 4 and already enrolled in Universal Pre-K. Gary was handsome and well over 6 feet tall. He was intelligent and soft spoken. His use of language was sophisticated. He regularly went into soliloquies about the welfare system and the

importance of education for all. He was proud of his little son. Gary had been in the motel for a year without work because his job as a forklift operator at a large warehouse was replaced by automation. He and Johnny were eventually transferred to the *Ready Haven* emergency shelter so that they could be placed in housing faster. However, the additional time he spent in the emergency shelter wore Gary out. Every week he would look aggressively for work and we would work together on his plans for post-shelter life but he would become more depressed and hopeless.

Turning Point 1-*fatherhood*

Bringing a child into the world is a major turning point in a parent's life that redefines a life trajectory. Gary's girlfriend had Johnny when Gary was almost forty, at an older age. He had no other children.

Turning Point 2-*A misdemeanor* whether his or his girlfriend's fault, lands Gary on probation for 6 months, with a permanent (petty and not-violent) drug possession mark on his record and make it difficult for him to find work.

I was having a fight with my girlfriend and she always threatened to leave me. She always wanted the car keys but it was my car, I paid for it. We were fighting and then she suddenly dialed 911 and hung up. The police arrived and she says that all she wants is the car keys so that she can get away and as they are looking, they find an empty pipe and a bag with no weed in it. Instead of having the police put handcuffs on her in front of her kids, I told them the pipe was mine when it was really hers. He wrote me a ticket for cannabis under 20 grams and I had to do probation for 6 months (Gary – Field Notes March 26, 2013)

Turning Point 3-*work*

Gary is resourceful and manages to find work as a warehouse forklift driver and he was lucky, they rarely do background checks. He picks up extra jobs as a

nightclub bouncer, a second job he had been doing for 15 years because of his imposing height.

Turning Point 4-*Johnny's mother leaves Gary*

Gary assumed the care of Johnny from the start. His girlfriend was unreliable and would disappear from time to time. Here is his account of his relationship with Johnny's mother:

...Mother's Day she called, I hadn't heard from her since March, and then on Mother's Day she calls out of the blue, can I pick him up for the weekend? Part of me is like, well, you haven't been around, now you want to play Mommy for a day, you know what I mean? Now all of a sudden you want to play mommy? But I knew he wanted to see her, so I let her take him. She brought him back that Monday after then and just disappeared for like four months. Her phone was turned off, no communication with him, or her other two kids, because, I was picking up his sisters from their dad. She had put the other two girls with their dad. And I would have all three of them at my house, just so that they weren't split up; you know what I mean, so that they would see each other. And I did that for a while.

The unreliability of the mother is a surprising switch from the more common scenario where fathers leave the mother for unexplained lengths of time.

Turning Point 5-*Gary decides to care for his child and not work*

For a time, Johnny's mother and Gary manage to parent the child together. She would take the child during the night when Gary would work.

.... But when she dropped him off [permanently], I could no longer do the club work because...usually I would do it when she had him. So when she took them for a weekend or whatever, then I would go work at the club. Well, when she dropped him off and disappeared I couldn't do that because there is no nighttime daycare. Obviously, that ball snowballed, and it went into me not being able to pay the rent in our apartment. Ended up getting evicted,

Turning Point 6-*father and son are homeless*

Gary lands in "the system" after his unemployment runs out and all his savings and resources are depleted. Gary's petty drug crime prevents him from

getting low-wage retail jobs. He cannot manage taking good care of his child and work at clubs because, according to Gary, safe and reliable nighttime childcare was difficult to find.

Summary of Gary's Turning Points

The cases of Gary and Naomi have similarity in the causes of their homelessness: petty drug crime and the consequence of loss of employment. The unnecessarily heavy arm of the law hangs over the poor ready to destabilize even people who have been stable all their lives like Gary. It will take some time before Johnny can be left at home at night by himself. I lost touch with Gary so I don't know what happened to him.

Gary's son was the brightest aspect of his life but at the same time his child was a source of stress. His life completely changed with the responsibility of the care of the boy and he mistrusted overnight childcare so much that it impeded his ability to work at the clubs. As a single father, he faced the challenge of caregiving combined with work, a same predicament that women have to confront when they have children to care for.

6.5.4 Henry and Lara

Henry and Lara (Caucasian): he is in his mid-30s and she is in her 20s. The couple had been together for four years when I met them. They are raising three boys, who each have a different father. The last child is Henry's, but he cares for all three and they consider him their father. Henry worked as a cook most of his life while Lara was a "stay-at-home" mother. She believes the family would do better on

assistance than if she found low-wage work and daycare for her 3 children. Reliable childcare is expensive. She was only 15 when she had her first child, and yet she managed to obtain a GED.

Turning Point 1 – *the family is evicted*

Henry and Lara lost a comfortable apartment when there was confusion with DSS over who was paying rent. Henry was earning money as a cook and Lara was unemployed. In this case, DSS picked up half the rent mostly to cover the cost of shelter for the three children. The communication between DSS and the family broke down. This is where things got unclear in my communication with Henry. The couple didn't know that DSS was not paying the landlord. The time frame of the story seems unlikely. It sounds unusually cruel and illogical and there may be story pieces missing. Nevertheless, this was his experience with landlords and the lack of true assistance from the DSS. (All excerpts are from the Henry Interview July 19, 2013):

But you're telling me in March that they haven't given you money since January and now we owe all this money, so we got, she got taxes back for the other two and she gave the landlord a money order saying full rent, \$1700 or \$1600 or \$1700 for rent up until June, so we were supposed to be paid up to June. It said it right on there. He cashed it and everything was fine. So after he got the money order, the day after he got the money order, we got a letter saying we had to go to court because he was evicting us, we got evicted 3 days later. 3 days later, with 3 kids...we didn't get a letter or nothing. Like they stopped paying it for 3 months and the landlord didn't even tell us until we were 3 months in the hole on rent, until it's March, and he's like you know DSS hasn't given us no money in the last 3 months. I'm like you couldn't tell me, I would have worked extra, I would have talked to them, I would have worked extra hours and paid it myself instead of, you know, getting the kids new sneakers or getting them a bike because I had the actual money because I was working and everything was good. I had a car. I was working. I had a great job. I was working. We had a great place, a great neighborhood, right down the street from their school. We went to DSS and we were both working. We went there and they were like, oh you guys make too much money, we can't help you. All we needed was to give this landlord \$800 to pay our rent, to get out of the hole and get back on a pay schedule to work with him because he was going to

work with us, we just had to come up with \$800.

Although it seems inconceivable, the DSS had the chance to help an able-bodied family keep their apartment but they thought that the family was making “too much money.” It seems, again, like an implausible situation but this is the story Henry told me.

Turning Point 2 –*the family plans a move*

Henry was a kitchen shift manager. After they were evicted, Henry said he lost his job because of the eviction. His boss made a promise that there was a job in Florida for him with the same restaurant chain. Henry’s grandmother lived in Florida and he was also partially raised there so it seemed like a great opportunity. Henry, Lara, and their children moved to take advantage of this opportunity, but the promise turned out to have complications. These are heartbreaking stories and it seemed as if Henry couldn’t stop talking when I would ask him a question. His story is full of injustices and opportunity hoarding:

Now when I went down there, I left my, I had my ID but I left my social security card and everything in New York, because my other copy was at my mom’s, and I lost my other one, so I get down there and they’re like all you have to do is have you copy sent, faxed from the other job, but the restaurant there, they lost the copy of my social security card, so I had the job lined up, ready to start the next day, whoa, had a place, an apartment, actually like a 3 bedroom trailer for like \$200, it was like, it was \$99 to move in and then it was like the first 2 weeks were free and then it was \$120, it was like \$120 every other week. So I had that set up but I had to have work, I couldn’t just get into the place without no work... so I had them fax everything, they faxed everything but my social security card information. And so I went to work that next day. I hustled enough money to get black pants and black shoes, I used the last bit of money that I had to get work stuff so I could start work to make money...and then I got there, and then I had no social security card, so they wouldn’t let me work. So I’m like, now what, what else, what else, what else, you know, seriously, what else can go wrong right now?

Henry put his family up in a motel while he looked for work on his own.

I could not find nothing (employment). I was like literally in the 95 to 100 degrees walking 10 to 15 miles a day looking for work, or 10 to 15 miles a day just to get enough money so the kids would have some place to sleep at night. There was one night where I had enough money but like you had to pay a certain amount extra for another person and we had 5 people, and we had to pay like \$10 to \$15 extra to have all of us, so they all slept in the motel and I slept at the park. I let them all, you know, I made sure they had a roof over their head, they all slept in the motel, and I went and slept in the park for the night because I needed them to have a roof over their, they're my kids, like I need them to have a roof over their head, so I did whatever, I did anything I possibly could so they had some place to stay every single night, there was not one night where they did not have a place to stay. It hurt. I like busted my ass like bad, I did a lot of stuff that I, you know, I didn't want to do for nothing, pennies on the dollar, 15 to 20 hours for that day and our peace of mind was they had a library there so we could get out of the heat, what we did was we would go to the library. They'd read books, it was air conditioned, and we would get them out of the heat for a while so they would go there for a couple of hours, you know, and while they were at the library doing this, I was walking around trying to find work, working.

The level of responsibility over his family is also Henry's biggest obstacle. He said about his decision to come to the emergency shelter together as a family: "If I'm going to struggle, I'm going to struggle together." Similar to Gary's case, Henry's allegiance was to Lara and the boys.

I had the baby and the other 2, they're not technically biologically mine, but they've been, I've been raising them for 4 years now. Neither one of their dads are in the picture at all, they don't see them ever. The one, Kevin's father, signed his rights over and Billy's father does see him, 90% of Billy's life, his dad has been locked up, so he is just out now but he doesn't see him at all and I don't care, I only want him to see him for him, like I want him to see his dad because he wants to see his dad, he loves his dad, he wants to see him because Billy has that mentality, like just yesterday, yesterday was a real bad day for Billy. He cried and cried: "I want to see my dad, my dad doesn't love me because he doesn't want to see me."

Turning Point 3-the family moves back to Centerton

In the end, Henry's father paid for the family to move back to Centerton. The turning point to return to Centerton was based on the shock and failure of the Florida experience. At least in Centerton, Henry and Lara both had family that could support them at least with bus tickets back home.

Turning Point 4-the family declares homelessness

Upon their return, without any economic stability and with all their resources depleted, Henry and Lara decided it was best to go to the Department of Social Services, and declare themselves homeless. The declaration of homelessness relinquishes the family's self-control to the state and is the final turning point before the family has to endure the programming and breathalyzing of the emergency shelter and begin their moral career as an institutionalized family.

Summary of Henry and Lara's Turning Points

The family was living on partial subsidies from DSS because Lara was not working. The support was withdrawn without notifying the family. All that stood in the way of Henry and Lara's family was an \$800 payment to the landlord. The family could not raise that amount of money on their own and they were evicted from the comfort and stability of a home. An opportunity opened up in Florida where Henry grew up part of his life. The family made the move only to be even worse off than before. Luckily, Henry's father rescued them and they came home to Centerton. Without income and after staying in temporary shelter, they declare themselves homeless. Each of the choices and decisions seem to have been made after careful consideration. The shocks that threw the family off every time were all related to work and housing, the very bedrock of a family's wellbeing.

6.6 Summary

In this chapter, I showed that there are turning points, events, decisions, or circumstances that move people into homelessness; particularly people engaged in low-wage work. The three stories I selected, elaborate on the experiences of economic hardship and the troubling lack of affordable and trustworthy childcare. In the case of Naomi and Peter as well as Henry and Lara, there was a promise of employment and better times in another state that did not work out. All three cases were people who wanted to and were able to work. This was true in the first case with Naomi and her attempts at improving herself through certification and training. Her job history demonstrated that she is a good worker. This is not necessarily true for her boyfriend Peter who suffers from drug addiction. In the case of Gary, he was conflicted about how to negotiate the care of his son and a job. In the case of Henry, the promise of a job in another state was an unfortunate decision that ended badly. The circumstances surrounding these events were told to me as if there were no other choices than the one made at the time of the turning point that threw the family into a state of instability and crisis.

The limited choices for the working poor because of the threat of becoming homeless is often only one failed rent payment away. If the family experiences a crisis or a shock such as illness or unemployment, the option to draw on the welfare system for support and housing becomes one of the possible next steps in a trajectory. It is unfortunately not a step on a career ladder. The family is seen in

terms of their condition of homelessness and thus their moral career as an institutionalized family begins.

The moment homelessness is declared, it is a critical turning point because control over the family is relinquished to the welfare system or the emergency shelter. Multiple turning points and repeat use of emergency shelter becomes chronic homelessness for families and is further exacerbated by the economic constraints of the county and small city. In the next chapter, we will enter the shelter and see how life in the shelter contributes to the larger picture of homelessness management in Excelsior County.

SCENE: Churning

On my walk through the long U-shaped building, I encounter children running in the hall, often still in their pajamas. There is a constant noise level of babies crying, children running, and parents' yelling that comes and goes depending on the time of day. The older kids are usually at school by 8AM so that leaves all the children under three in the shelter. When children toddle down the hall and into the front office, the children are given affection in the form of hugs on an "as needed" basis, but only when allowed by parents. Sometimes strollers with babies are parked near the door to the front yard. Mothers ask staff to watch their babies so they can get a quick smoke in the round wooden gazebo next to the building. The way that babies are often prevented from running around in an uncontrolled way is by confining them to a stroller. Going out for a smoke and watching a child who is confined to a stroller is one of the many "unofficial" favors staff grants to the shelter residents.

Chapter 7

The Shelter Churn

7.1 Overview

The shelter “churn” is created by the emergency shelter space and its compartmentalization as well as the hierarchical power relationships between the residents, the staff, and the staff’s interaction with residents. As we saw in Chapter 5, the *Ready Haven Agency* has a longstanding hippy-influenced moral code of being “non-directive”; however, when the shelter staff enforces what they believe are necessary rules and programming they go against their own ethics. This programming is done “for the residents’ own good.” The staff quickly abandons non-judgmental and non-directiveness when a crisis and commitments imposed by welfare funding, and welfare-to-work programs, overrule hippy ethics of the staff. This chapter will demonstrate these moments of contradiction.

The shelter is similar to a Goffmanian *total institution*, and yet it is distinct because the *Ready Haven* family shelter, first and foremost, is not a locked down shelter during the day. It is a place where people come and go with a certain degree of freedom. For example, some residents have a car, which allows them even greater freedom. Erving Goffman defines a total institution as “a place of residence and work where a number of like-situated individuals, cut off from wider society for an appreciable amount of time, together lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life” (1961:xiii). First, life is very prescribed and controlled in the shelter once

people are inside and when curfew is imposed. Second, the shelter director is the final arbiter of who comes and goes as a resident, and who is allowed to grant requests for breaking the shelter's curfew or other rules. The director uses her own judgment to make these decisions. I say this here not to cast aspersions on the director but because the power structure of the shelter ultimately depends on the director's decision-making process. Nothing in the world of the shelter is, therefore, a hard and fast rule because the director decides how to manage every crisis and every request for leniency. Leadership in the shelter is hierarchical and power eventually goes up the hierarchical ladder beyond the shelter and to the Executive Director of the agency: Robert Wall.

Drawing on Foucault's concept of "heterotopic space" (1967) opens up the definition of Goffman's total institution by allowing for a much wider inclusion of actors and actions. A heterotopic space is a *non-place* or an away space. Among the six principles, ¹¹⁸Foucault uses several ideas that show how heterotopias are places

¹¹⁸ Principle 1: A space where someone is in a crisis that is part of the life cycle such as pregnancy, adolescence, elderly, menstruating women or the deflowering of women.

Principle 2: A place that serve a function to remove people from the population. Among them, he counts cemeteries.

Principle 3: A juxtaposition in a single space several incompatible spaces like a theater or the cinema or a garden or a zoo with different compartments.

Principle 4: A place where time is accumulated like an archive or a museum. Foucault calls this a heterochronic space. This especially applies to collections in Western modernity. The opposite heterochronic space is the space of the temporary festival or the fair/circus that comes to town. His example of the Polynesian village that calls back an ancient time is at once a heterochronic space of accumulation of tradition and an immediate rediscovery of time.

Principle 5: A space that is closed off and where there can be illicit activity like a motel where a man can have illicit sex with a woman and it is hidden.

that have a function in society but are separate nevertheless. Foucault is interested in spaces that “have the curious property of being in relation with all the other sites, but in such a way as to suspect, neutralize, or invent the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror, or reflect (1984:3).” His classification of heterotopic spaces as an ancestrally defined heterotopic *nowhere spaces* ranges widely from the honeymoon suite to the cemetery: the honeymoon suite because it is a space where a woman is deflowered, and the cemetery because it is where bodies and memories of a person are functionally separated from society. Another example of a Foucauldian heterotopic space is the heterotopia of deviation, such as a prison, where people are kept, who do not comply with the norms of society. Among other examples, he classifies old age homes as a combination of a space of deviance (idleness) and a space of crisis (old age).

I classify the family shelter as a space that is similar to Foucault’s old age home. It is a combination of deviance (idleness or waiting) and crisis (homelessness). Both Goffman’s total institution and Foucault’s heterotopia involve the distinction of a space that is subject to control. Similarly, the shelter is a space that is defined by the control over a population and “a cluster of relations.” In this way, the emergency shelter falls into several of the categories of heterotopic space—the opposite of an idealized utopic space:

In general, the heterotopic site is not freely accessible like a public place. Either the entry is compulsory, as in the case of entering a barracks or a prison, or else the

Principle 6: A heterotopic space that functions between extremes of rigidity and sloppiness. Foucault also classifies colonies that were “perfect” Puritanical places and Jesuit regulated spaces. He also cites ships as floating spaces that fall into this category.

individual has to submit to rites and purifications. To get in one must have certain permission and make certain gestures (P.7).

When we enter the family emergency shelter as a total institution or a heterotopic space, the front door is locked at the curfew time of 9:30 PM and opened again in the morning when many people head out to work, or take their children to the bus stop or to school. Within the walls of the shelter, there are spaces much like Foucault's garden or zoo classification where there is compartmentalization with keyed access. There are also storage spaces that contain necessary items such as food and soap that are locked and only staff has access. Also, only people who are known to the resident counselors and shelter staff are allowed into the shelter. Family, boyfriends and service personnel have to be approved by the shelter director before they are allowed to enter.

One of the most important purposes the family shelter serves is the protection of children. The care of children distinguishes the family shelter as well as the domestic violence shelter from the other *Ready Haven* shelters. As was discussed earlier, the most important aim of the shelter is to get people back to work. While the aims of the shelter are to rehouse families quickly, an average stay is approximately 45 days or longer depending on the availability of housing. A full shelter contains as many as 10 adults and approximately 20 children. There were times when there were even more children and fewer adults. The number of people fluctuates frequently. This is considered to be an emergency shelter *only*. Therefore,

it is not a place where people are made to feel too comfortable. There is an element of urgency to everything the shelter does that adds to the feeling of the churn.

As was elaborated upon in Chapter 2, HUD and TANF fund housing for the homeless. The eligibility for this funding allows a family to stay at the shelter is determined by the local DSS office. The grants from TANF are based on the number of children in the family. Some of the families come in with “child only” TANF funding.¹¹⁹ Other support funds for families in crisis are often already in use by the cyclically poor and homeless population. The safety net consists of many other entitlement programs, like Earned Income Tax, housing vouchers, Medicaid, and Food stamps, and some training and college programs. These supports work in tandem with TANF and HUD to create subsistence-level life for working poor families (Currie 2006:3-10). ¹²⁰Eligibility for these programs is, once again, determined by the DSS. Many families don’t take full advantage of opportunities, however. They often don’t ask or do enough research on their own, and the DSS does not necessarily open the door to opportunities like training and college programs that may detract from work. When I asked one of the DSS directors about this, she said that DSS caseworkers were too overwhelmed and short-staffed to do this kind of coaching. Some parents did not know, for example, whether they were

¹¹⁹ Parents can be taken off the grant of a child if they have reached the federal 60 month limit, they are immigrants, or if they have committed welfare fraud or other offenses that are subject to TANF sanctions. The DSS still provides enough food stamps and medical care for the children as well as housing subsidy. DSS staff monitors the wellbeing of the children. Referral services are provided if the family is deemed to need them.

¹²⁰ For example, food stamps and Medicaid are in common use by the population that lands in the shelter.

eligible for Earned Income Tax Credit but one year, the shelter was able to provide a one-time workshop to make them aware of this important benefit.

In this chapter, I focus on the effects of the welfare-to-work system on those living in the shelter. Emergency shelters act as holding sites, or places of monitoring and intervention; the rules of the shelter function to invade a family's privacy and intervene on their life style. There is pressure on the shelter system to deliver on the contract mandated by the DSS, which produces the constant tension that I touched on in previous chapters. The chapter is outlined as follows: 1) the "churn" or the way people interact with each other and the view from several different people who work directly with this population; 2) how much "nicer" *Ready Haven* shelter is as compared to shelter systems elsewhere; 3) the shelter rules; 4) the daily routine; 5) parenting is public in the shelter adding more stress on the families.

7.2 The "churn"

My hours in the shelter for the 2012-2014 years ran from 9 AM to 12-1 PM.

When I enter the building and stop in the front office where the staff is getting ready for the day and reading the green book notes.

When I come into the dining room, there are often children having breakfast. The rules about dress in the public areas are strictly enforced. No adults are allowed in their pajamas or shorts in the public areas such as the dining or living room. If a child has no shoes on, the staff asks the mother to see to it that their children are properly dressed (Field Notes April 4, 2012).

Another example when residents are required to adhere to a proper dress code was when I assisted a parent with a letter in the living room. He was still in his pajama

shorts. He was called into Cicely's office and told to change into more appropriate dress. Working with outsiders like me is considered as professional work, for which proper attire is required.

Mondays are the busiest time of the week. The long list of resident and staff tasks and responsibilities begins, and so does the day of oversight and monitoring: getting the shelter residents to work, getting the kids to school, getting everyone up and breathalyzed, making sure that everyone has a ride to their medical, mental health, or legal appointments away from the shelter, creating intake case notes for new residents, switching family's rooms if there are disputes among roommates, coordinating staff, making sure reports are submitted to DSS.¹²¹ At 8 AM, the overnight resident counselor, who has been on duty for almost 10 hours, relays the news of his or her shift to the morning staff before leaving at 8:30 AM. When the morning staff enters around 8 AM, a ritual reading of handwritten staff notes takes place. New arrivals are announced. The morning routine is fairly relaxed. People have coffee and snacks and talk about their personal lives. Often the maintenance staff does a routine morning check-in at this time while gossiping about and commenting on the residents. These remarks are tolerated and are usually not discouraged, depending on who is in the front office.

Case managers are primarily there to help shelter residents find housing and connect to agencies. The residents are required to actively participate in these

¹²¹ Per the McKinney-Vento Act, children are allowed to stay in their same school district even when they are homeless. This presents a challenge for managers of the homeless population because the county is geographically fairly large. Sometimes, the home to school time to destination is 45 minutes or more in a private car or taxi.

processes. Some residents are already working or are undergoing training in addition to looking for a place to live. Even with these responsibilities, they have to adhere to the rules of the shelter: breathalyzing, signing in and out, adhering to the strict curfew of 9:30 PM. If a resident doesn't follow the basic shelter rules, then the entire family will be dismissed from the shelter. Tasks such as rising on time to go to work or take children to school, finding housing on their own, breathalyzing must be done by 9:30 AM.

A long list of shelter parents' responsibilities are: taking good care of their children, feeding them and themselves within kitchen hours, making sure their room is picked up and neat, contributing to the shelter chores of sweeping and cleaning every night, making sure mandates from their DSS worker are followed. Added to these responsibilities are mandated groups and the myriad of appointments with doctors, "healthy baby" care nurses, drug rehabilitation, and cleaning up your legal record, maintaining your visits with your probation officer, and custody court. This is the litany of activities for the day. Needless to say, there has to be time for babies and children to have time to do homework, play games, take walks, and have family time. Parenting is very public in the shelter. The stress of always being seen gets to many people. This is why people rarely hang in the more public spaces of the shelter. They mostly retreat to their rooms, and each room is equipped with a television.

Residents are asked to breathalyze upon waking. Breathalyzing happens in the morning, before bed, and any time the client goes off the shelter premises.

Testing positive is grounds for an immediate dismissal from the shelter although a recent change in the DSS rules may change that (this is, as of yet, unconfirmed).

Residents are allowed to hang out in the shelter's gazebo to smoke and watch their children play but if they go into town—even if it is for a short while—they are breathalyzed upon re-entry into the building. Here is a field note describing the ritual:

The front door opens and a very tall white man with jet black hair in an NYPD cap fills the frame of the office door. He is accompanied by an equally tall Caucasian teen with a head full of curly black hair. Milagros has taken the seat at the desk closest to the door. The residents take out a small plastic tube in a plastic bag that is in a small file box with other bags like it. They are sorted in order of their names. They attach the plastic tube to the breathalyzer and suck air through it. There is a digital read-out attached to the small box. They sign off in a logbook. "Nice cap," Milagros says commenting on the man's police cap. The teen boy tells a rather complex story of the cap and how he has one too.

"Nobody bothers me when I have it on," the tall man laughs. After the young man leaves, I ask Milagros about her experience with the breathalyzer. She says that all residents are breathalyzed after any trip outside, in the morning and before they go to bed at night. I ask what happens when they test positive. Milagros says that it's really sad and that several of them have happened on her shift. She calls the hotline and asks what to do. She usually tells the person to go outside and take a seat to be retested in a few minutes. If they test positive again, that is the last chance that they have. DSS takes away all their money and also puts their children with Child Protective Services. She then has to call the police to remove the resident. They usually go to FEMA temporary housing (a motel) for the night and then they are on their own.

In my conversations with resident counselors, breathalyzing came up as a point of conflict several times. I personally experienced this tension when I became one of the people doing the breathalyzing; a distance was created between residents and me. When I returned to the shelter next year, I did not have to participate in this requirement, and so I felt like I became less like "one of the staff." I became more of a free agent.

In the following interview, Cicely qualified a variety of different points of view that all create the “churn” mostly in the form of *judgment*. Different levels of dependence on the welfare system divide the shelter residents. For some families, homelessness is a repeated emergency situation. For others, homelessness is a one-time crisis that may never happen again. These two populations co-exist in the shelter in a tense and uncomfortable mix that in turn interfaces with the shelter staff. This is how Cicely sees it:

C: “I’m not like these people,” I cannot tell you how often I hear that...This is a major, major line. (Or, in the case of a family, we’re not like these other people. I’ve actually had a house meeting or group where I say: For those of you...really...you’re all here. You have enough of a common bond, you’re all here. Whatever took you on that trip, down this path, here you are. So whatever you believe not to be true, here is the thing that is true: you have the same goals. You need affordable housing and get your life together. Whatever it is. And usually those people, sometimes, they’re a little harder to work with.

A: Don’t they have a common bond is that they have nothing because you cannot have anything when you arrive at that shelter.

C: Not necessarily, some people have more than others...Some people get an SSI check and we don’t know about it. ...They spend \$500 at the beginning of the month before DSS even bothered to tell us that they had SSI. But also, other people get help from outside people. Their mom helps them, their cousin, their boyfriend. You know, buys them cigarettes, picks them up and gives them rides. Some people have some resources and some don’t.

A: I’ve seen that, throughout the years of my study, some people had a car.

C: Absolutely. So, just as an example, years ago...don’t quote me on this but years ago...We would allow people to stay out certain nights of the year. . DSS is... so tight on this that we don’t even do it anymore. But we would say: pick either Christmas Eve day or Christmas Day/Night. We don’t care. Pick one and take it. New Year’s Eve...it didn’t matter whatever it was. It would give them an opportunity to get out and be with their family. There would be people who did not leave because there was absolutely no one for them to go to. But they’re saying, we’ll be here because there’s no place for us to go. Other people will run out of here faster than you can imagine. I mean we have people that have nothing and they have nowhere. But, everybody comes here judging everybody else... I always say...You’re making it so hard on yourselves and each other. I always say...You’re ...it’s like you’re all acting like everybody in “Mean Girls.” Get over yourselves! You’re making it so much harder on each other. We [staff] go home at night. Things are horrible... There is a pecking order but there’s a pecking order everywhere. It also changes because the population changes and once the popular one who led a little revolt or coup with three other families, those people move out and they have no power at all. It’s like there’s a new gang in town. (Cicely Interview November 16, 2014)

In this quote, the residents are obviously on the “controlled population” end of this arrangement. The staff watches the dynamics and public power struggle in the shelter because nothing is private: everyone sees everything. As the shelter population turns over, the power equation is readjusted among the residents and the struggle begins all over again.

Whether resident or staff, few actors in the shelter, look beyond life in the shelter and people’s individual reactions, to the structural problems influencing their minute-to-minute routines of caring for homeless families. They choose not to do so; we saw this with Cicely in Chapter 5 when she mentioned, she couldn’t watch a TV movie about domestic violence because she “lives it.” Cicely lives the drama of taking care of people who are in crisis. The shelter is enough of an emotional battleground without also doing social activism work that would likely be without reward. The personal recompense of helping “one person at a time” was not just her framework, but also that of all the staff at the shelter.

There is a subtle love-hate relationship between the staff and the residents. There were times when Cicely entertained children in her office and let them braid or coif her hair. She also bestowed admiration onto newborns, or she shares laughter even on the most intense days. The staff also jokes a lot among each other. Long days of going through crises together created a camaraderie that is a survival strategy but nevertheless genuine. As we saw in Chapter 5, the staff and the shelter residents are all wrapped up in the larger ecology of poverty and homelessness. There is no real way out; some positions in the ecology’s hierarchy are easier to live

out than others. The most miserable position is that of a shelter resident, who doesn't have any resources or networks that help a family recover. Arlene told me once: "There is an isolation that is very profound." Homeless families opted for a publicly run shelter as a last resort, and now must obey the rules of their temporary home.

Shelter residents are pressured to manage their own lives, even as case managers work with them to find housing, arrange transportation, and set engagements for everything from probation to custody court to substance abuse control and medical appointments. The central office of the *Ready Haven Agency* handles their cases after residents have made the transition into their own housing.

If they qualify, residents could be selected for transitional housing in *Ready Haven's* 18-month long-term care program. They must have a demonstrated disability, or they are in a recovery program for substance abuse.¹²² The 18-month program is for people who opt into subsidized "shelter plus care." If selected, the parent meets every week with a central office *Ready Haven* case manager who helps them work toward their goals. Training and education are part of this program, but those options are most often a path to DSS mandated work, which provides a childcare subsidy and a transportation subsidy. At the main *Ready Haven* office, the director of the 18-month program is very aware of the limitations of his job and his relationship to DSS. I asked him (A:) about the success of his program:

A: [Say] You are on social services. You decide to go to school. Unless you were in a very

¹²² There are some similar programs that *Ready Haven* administers for survivors of domestic violence.

[dedicated] limited program... there is no way. You tell your worker at DSS you want to go to school. They say: are you out of your mind? You have to work otherwise you'll be sanctioned.

N: Right, it's the workfare program.

A: Right.

N: 1996.

A: Yeah. So, for somebody to transition, as you say, from and come into this "new economy" as you put it, the computerized economy, that person would need to go at night to take some classes and self-pay because DSS is not going to pay for any schooling. Well, if you're receiving a grant you have to pay for your grant first.

N: Okay, yeah, through work.

A: So what kind of jobs they are going to send them to, you know, a job that is going to pay minimum wage so they pretty much going to have to work 20-30 hours a week to pay the welfare. It is, you know...whatever.

He does emphasize that he doesn't think the system is meant to help anyone.

It is only meant to keep people in their place:

A: That's the system. The system is designed to keep them there.

N: To keep them....?

A: The system is not designed to assist somebody to go from low to up.

N: You mean mobility? Mobility is not planned in?

A: They don't want mobility. Of course not, they don't want it that way...

(Interview with Alex on March 29, 2013)

After years of working closely with this population, the long-term case management director's assessments come from his experience and frustration with the system in which he is embedded.

7.3 The Ready Haven Shelter is a nice shelter

The shelter has 7 bedrooms, and common areas, such as a kitchen, a dining room with long 8-foot tables, a playroom, and a living room. There is a panel of surveillance TVs in the front office as well as the Children's Program Office. The cameras are trained on public spaces such as the dining room, the hallways, and the

Play Room. Offices for the staff are located at the front and the back of the U-Shaped building. In the middle of the building, there is the Children's Program staff office and the case manager's office. Other, less public areas, such as bathrooms, a laundry, and walk-in supply closets are off the main hallway, which snakes through the building.

Before I continue on the story of the shelter, I should note that several shelter residents find the *Ready Haven* family shelter to be better than other shelters in the region. The *Ready Haven* staff pride themselves on the cleanliness and visual appeal of their shelters. There is artwork on all the walls even in the bedrooms. The shelter walls and the furniture are pleasantly arranged in the public areas. I visited several of the other *Ready Haven* shelters including two group homes for teens, and these locations met a standard of creating a sense of being "at home." Comfortable furnishings and good lighting give the shelters an open feeling. The maintenance staff takes care of plantings and areas outside the shelters. In the case of the long-term youth shelter the people who live in the shelter do the maintenance. The shelter residents told me stories about how most shelters across the US are only meant to serve as a place to stay for a night. Mothers and their children at shelters in Schenectady, and Boston, for example, spend their days on the street or in a park with their small children. At these shelters, mothers must bring their children along on job searches. Comparatively, the *Ready Haven Shelter* for families is a space where residents can be in their rooms all day, and yet the "jail-like" feeling for residents is caused by the shelter curfew and security measures. Here is a

comparison that I heard from one of the shelter residents I called Benny:

Benny: when I was in upstate (a shelter) you know...um...It was like this. It was a lot smaller. Everybody had their own room, which I don't know if you know but me and Kyla share a room. We're the only ones that share a room. Everybody had their own room. You could lock on the door. You had a key.

Anezka: Your key not the case manager's key so you had a lot more privacy?

Benny: (whispers) Right, right. But they only fed you, not like here. They only fed you one meal. They didn't provide anything else, like here. They kicked you out every day except for the weekends

Anezka: what? They kicked you out on the street?)

Benny: (whispers...) oh yes...oh yes... In Mass., I was there for the summer. They would send you out 7:00 in the morning and not let you back in until 4:30 in the afternoon. We spent, me and the other girls in the shelter, we spent the whole summer at the park with our kids...no...

Anezka: ...with little infants?

Benny: I mean just a group full of kids and a couple of adults and we sat there, all day, every day, just us and our kids. Like are you serious? This is ridiculous.

Anezka: What about getting a job?

Benny: No...you went out on your own and you were responsible for a job search and that was it. They didn't help you find an apartment. They didn't help youThey didn't even let you have your phone. Like when you left for the day, they would hand you your phone.

When you come back in at 4:30 they would say "thank you" [for the phone]

Anezka: So breathalyzing is nothing compared to that?

Benny: They didn't do any of this—they didn't breathalyze...I mean this is one of the nicest places I've been but it's like jail. Be home at 9:30? (Benny Interview October 25, 2013)

Benny's life of being cyclically homeless was punctuated by work at retail coffee shops and burger joints. At times, she would be stable for a year, but then when she had her child, there was a long gap in her work history. Because of her long string of low-wage jobs, she never left welfare support completely. Her stay at the family shelter ended very abruptly when she decided to return to her father's house upstate. I walked her to the parking lot as she was heaving all her stuff in large garbage bags into the back of an open pick-up truck. She said that she was "just getting out of here." When I asked staff why Benny left, I heard that there was a shake-up over the weekend because a room check had uncovered drugs in

someone's room. To complicate matters, classmates bullied Benny's eight-year-old daughter, and she had to stay away from school during the day under Benny's full-time watch.

Benny's case is important to understand experiences with shelters across a wide geographical area. In every location, she was eventually able to find a retail food job and continue to work at minimum wage jobs. She held 16 low-wage jobs in food service by the time I worked with her on her resume.

For Benny's nomadic sampling of shelters in the region, every shelter system was different. This is the direct result of the Community Development Block Grants that are meted out to each locality. In Excelsior County, *Ready Haven* successfully applies for these funds but in competition with other not-for-profits. *Ready Haven* is, as a result, well maintained, robust, and growing as we saw in Chapter 4. As a result, the shelters are nice compared to facilities in the region. However, the presence of any shelter system presents an excellent excuse for policy makers not to build affordable housing for the working poor (See Chapter 2).

What is key here is that there is no privacy in the shelter. At other shelters residents are given a key to their room so that case managers cannot monitor their individual spaces. In the case of *Ready Haven*, the rooms are regularly monitored for cleanliness. Case managers and resident counselors can get into anyone's room. I witnessed several impromptu searches for drugs and weapons. The general cleanliness of the shelter is maintained through evening chores, which are assigned and shared. The broader argument here is how the shelter rules are prescriptive for

people who may have led differently structured lives that are direct conflict with the rules that are spelled out for them. The feeling of captivity and powerlessness is inevitable. In the *Ready Haven* family shelter residents are under temporal and spatial restrictions as well as constant surveillance.

7.4 Shelter Rules

Rules are in place to maintain order, safety, and cleanliness on behalf of the children present, and to follow rules dictated, in part, by the Department of Social Services and Child Protective Services. . Cicely recently informed me that the security and rules of the shelter were mandated primarily to keep people and children safe. The movement to shelter people began as a way to deal with domestic, a place was provided for women away from angry husbands and boyfriends. These were called ‘safe houses.’ The way the shelter institutionalized rules over time was to give the staff full control over shelter bedrooms. This is in line with the paternalistic attitude “I know what’s best for you. I’ll put everything under lock and key and also keep you under lock and key.” From their rather informal roots, the *Ready Haven* shelters became more and more formally organized institutions; this included the security and lock down of the shelter. I experienced a situation, which highlighted the importance of these procedures. There was an incident when an angry boyfriend was allowed to enter the unlocked (at the time) front door, and he screamed and yelled about her infidelity on his way into the front entry, where he spilled out a bag of sex toys all over the floor. Luckily, he turned around and left

rapidly. The incident rattled the staff (including me) that security was tightened up. Locks were installed on all the doors and windows of the shelter. Not only are window locks meant to keep people with bad intentions out, but they also helped to keep people in after hours when a few women had previously snuck out for a night out on the town. Security is so tight that everyone who wants to go out for a 3-minute smoke has to be let out and back into the shelter through a locked front door.

The director told me that the family shelter was different then when families were held in local motels, prior to 2005. In the motels, each resident could lock their own door. This is also true in the current shelter system, but all staff carries a master key, and they can enter shelter residents' rooms if they don't get an answer to a knock. The shelter residents do not have a key to their own room. This is one of the many small interruptions for which residents need to get staff assistance when they want to get back into their own room.

As was shown in Chapter 5, the hierarchy of the shelter staff is fairly flat and everyone has direct contact with shelter residents. However, as I reported earlier, Cicely has the final word on all decisions. The shelter runs a bit like a large home where staff and service personnel arrive in the morning and leave in the evening as if they are guests of the home. These "guests" come in to control everyone's wellbeing "for their own good." At night, the guests [staff] go home and show back up the next day for a daily routine of creating the supposed wellbeing.

To illustrate this one of the case managers answered my question about residential case management this way:

Stella: I feel that residential is more draining and there is more burnout. Because you're in someone's home....Living with them in a sense, there is more burnout [for staff] than non-residential. (Interview with Stella August 1, 2014).

The administration, the maintenance, and programming staff are not at the shelter on weekends. The resident counselors are in charge and they can call whoever is "on call" for the weekend in case there is a crisis. As a result, the shelter feels a lot more relaxed and quiet on weekends. Residents are allowed to visit their family and friends as long as they return by 9:30PM.

Briefly, I will layout the shelter's rules, which all residents must follow. These rules developed over time, as the family shelter became more and more formally managed. First, mothers are responsible for their children throughout their time at the shelter. The shelter does not provide day care. The shelter is also not equipped to handle addicted clients or violent cases. These cases are referred to other facilities. Second, residents are breathalyzed when they wake up (8AM-9:30 AM), before they go to bed (Curfew is 9:30 PM), and when they come into the shelter. Third, there is only one official entry and exit point to the facility. Rooms are locked when residents leave the facility. Staff allows the residents in and out of their rooms with keyed entry. Lanyards for keys are in a drawer at the front office. Resident counselors pick up a lanyard with a key upon starting their shift. Fourth, all supplies including diapers, dishwasher soap, kid snacks, "Hot Pockets," juice boxes, diapers and formula for babies are kept under lock and key. This further separates

the residents from the staff because it puts the residents in a position of absolute dependence on the staff. This is equally as stressful for the shelter staff. They simultaneously juggle their position of authority and opening and closing supply closets and the position of “helping” someone through a crisis. This is a quote that describes the frustration well:

C: Sometimes, you’re having a conversation with a client and it really...there are constant distractions. Especially when it is an emotional one. They are...They’re upset about something. They are letting down a wall and they’re expressing their feelings to you. And then you have: their kids knocking on the door. Other people’s children: “I need a hot pocket.” I need to take my medication. And....I want to respect these needs. I find it very easy for staff to resent those needs. I’m in the middle of doing something. “You’re going to have to wait for your...whatever.” I also try to keep in check that how it must feel to have to come and ask someone for something...constantly. “I need sugar” “I need these things. I used to have my own house or apartment or whatever I could grab whatever I needed. I didn’t need to ask anyone.” So I try to respect those feelings. But when they are interrupting something that is...where you’re feeling like you’re getting a breakthrough, I find it easy for myself to resent that interruption. There’s other staff for this...

Anezka: there’s the resident counselors, go and bug them!

C: Now this person is getting passed on to everyone else. That’s not taking care of things. But I don’t know. I’m not...My office is there. That’s one of the reasons they can come and talk to me and share their feelings about something if that’s what they need. I had a mother the other day, who was very upset and needed to talk about things. As soon as someone knew that she was upset, there were ten people at the door needing things. Wanting to come for her, some of them. Some of them just wanted to figure out what’s going on. Her kids wanting to be involved. Then, at the same time, it’s me...It’s my time to leave and I’m not and I don’t even know if I’ve made anything better for her. But then again, that’s not necessarily what my job is.

(Stella Interview August 1, 2014).

Fifth, during the week, dinnertime is the only meal that is prepared and made in the adult shelter kitchen next door. Most times, residents appreciate the dinner menu; and at other times they don’t. I witnessed an evening where the same vegetables and meat were served for dinner two days in a row, and the entire shelter mutinied and ordered pizza. Somehow, money was collected from the shelter residents, and the pizza was paid for when it came. This demonstrated to me that everyone can to

keep some money stashed away for these kinds of occasions. On the weekends, the residents make dinner together, and work with the shelter hierarchy to have the right groceries picked up by one of the maintenance staff. I witnessed several Saturday barbecue dinners on my visits to the shelter when the rules are less strict, and everyone is more relaxed. Sixth, residents are not allowed to leave the shelter between 9:30 PM and 8:00 AM unless permission is sought from the shelter director. Some residents work at night and are given special permission to do so.

7.5 The Routine

During the first week a family is in the shelter, an intake interview is completed with the head(s) of the family. A *Ready Haven* case manager is then assigned to the case. In Chapter 5, I showed that there are 3 adult case managers, who work closely with residents to find housing and work opportunities. There is one case manager dedicated to children, making sure the children are in school. Additionally, there is the Children's Program with its assistants and playroom staff. Family shelter case managers and shelter administrators report weekly to the DSS about health (physical/mental) and employment activities.

The following is a description of an intake interview that I experienced in the early days of my research.¹²³ Anne, a resident counselor, interviewed Sunny. Sunny had been to the shelter before. She showed up again a few years later during my research. Because she was employed, she did not have to come to my workshops. I

¹²³ The intake is similar to the relinquishing of control when someone is incarcerated.

only interviewed her once and found that she had a very violent childhood with sexual abuse by family members. She is now in her forties and has five children, some grown. Her familiarity with the shelter's routine is apparent. Throughout the years, the family shelter intake process has gotten shorter to lessen the stress created by a barrage of questions that residents must endure.

The very first day, the family is not allowed to settle in until they have been through a thorough cleaning process. All of their clothing and belongings are cleaned at a local laundromat.

"We'll have someone watch your baby while we do the intake" Ann (resident counselor) says. Eddie (child care counselor) happens to be walking by and takes the friendly, smiling, blonde baby from Sunny. We make Sunny comfortable in the guest chair at the desk farthest away from the door and Ann begins the intake. I sit in the chair closes to the door and Ann asks the series of intake questions. Sunny has been in this shelter before and her baby's father is in jail.

Sunny is familiar with the intake procedure. She answers the questions confidently almost as if she is enjoying the process. She often compares her present intake experience and injects statements like:

"Yeah, I know that. That's just the way it was before."

I observe and listen as I help make copies on the copy machine of Sunny's Benefits Card, and her own birth certificate. The baby's birth certificate, Social Security Cards and other necessary identification were apparently left in a place that Sunny cannot go back to. We will have to work with her to retrieve it. All the copies of the documents go into the binder. The intake takes about an hour.

Sunny turns over her medication vial. Sunny counts the pills in the vial and the number is recorded in a log and the medication is put under lock and key. Sunny says she takes the medication when she needs it for pain. She was a roofer and also did other odd jobs in construction and was injured. Sunny also has other older children. She has half-time custody over these children and Ann says that they can come and stay over with her if it is arranged through her case manager. Sunny injects: "Really? They can stay with me? That was not the way it was before." (Field note April 1, 2011)

This field note demonstrates the relinquishing of everything that shelter residents have control over. The rules of the system constantly change. Even medications shelter residents have taken on their own for years are counted out

carefully and administered by the staff. This control is part of the management of poverty; it is enforced by the shelter but mandated by the Department of Social Services. I never experienced another intake after this one because I became the *Future Readiness* group leader, which prevented me from this kind of contact. The residents are also required to actively look for housing and work; they must conduct at least 20 job searches per week. Some of the residents already have jobs and work while they are waiting for a place to live.

The handling of files has also become more protected. Binders for each resident used to sit in a small bookcase in the middle of the office; they are now under lock and key. Case managers keep their own private notes of progress that the residents make throughout their stay. Case management binders are created upon the residents' arrival. This is called an 'intake.' A resident counselor or case manager sits down with a new resident for about an hour and fills out a set of prescribed forms. All medications are turned over to the shelter and kept in the front office in a locked cabinet. The resident is then settled into their room. Bedding, toiletries, necessities for the children, are located in a locked room in the shelter's repository of donated clothing and toys.

For the first week that a family is in the shelter, a family shelter intake interview is completed with the head(s) of the family. One of the three *Ready Haven* adult case managers is then assigned to the case. The children's cases are overseen by the Children's Program. Family shelter case managers and shelter administrators report weekly to the DSS about health (physical/mental) and employment activities.

Here is a description of one of the few intake interviews that I experienced in the early days of my research. Anne, a resident counselor, is interviewing Sunny. Sunny has been at the shelter many times before. Throughout the years, the intake process has gotten shorter to lessen the stress of a barrage of questions that the residents have to endure. The handling of files has also become more protected. While the binders for each resident used to sit in a small bookcase in the middle of the office, they are now under lock and key.

In addition to housing and work, there are a number of referral services available for example: transportation to and from medical, mental health, substance abuse recovery and other special appointments (such as mediation for utility bills), and probation visits. Case managers work every day with residents to make them viable in the world of assistance and work, assisting them with getting identification cards, social security, copies of birth certificates for children, custody agreements and other legal documents. Many of the families were unstable for a long time, and their access to documents has become impossible because they may have been destroyed or misplaced.

The days are routinized and broken up with meals, groups, workshops, meetings, medical appointments, counseling appointments, and the most important task of finding housing. One day as I was working in the office adjacent to the dining room, one of the new residents complained loudly: "What do I do all day? There is group, there's this appointment, there's that appointment, feed the kids, clean my room. When do people get to relax around here?" Other services and groups are

Housing Location Services, Health and Mental Health Services, Family Issues, Legal Services, Entitlement Advocacy Issues, Education/Employment Services, Food/Financial Services, Life Skills Workshops, Story-telling for Children, and (occasionally) Yoga.

Every experience of the shelter is different for each resident. For Aisha, the shelter was an opportunity to start over. As someone who had been in the system since her teen years, she used the shelter to (in her terms) to “get ahead.”

I know when I was at the shelter and I know that a lot of people do not think like this and definitely the women that I stayed at the shelter with did not think like this...but me? I didn't want to be in the shelter, number one. My circumstances brought me to the shelter...fine. I had to suck it up and deal with it and swallow the lonely nights and the crazy nights and the “should-a-could-a-would-have...and Oh My God... I just wished for my children. It was Derek's' last year in High School. Richie was just who he was. I too put my best foot forward and what I had to do was make it work for the three of us. So I used my stay in the shelter to get ahead. So, God forbid! I can have something to fall back on to prevent this from happening. And what I mean by that is...every month I got food stamps, I got my food stamps for me and two kids. I got my food stamps every month. Every month I was at the shelter and I was at the shelter for about four months. And, my thing was every day the shelter was feeding me breakfast, lunch, and dinner. You understand what I'm saying? They were giving my kids a snack twice a day, every day. So why should I, because they're giving me bottled water and Juicy-Juice, why should I not be grateful for that water and that Juicy-Juice and go take my food stamps and go spend it on Pepsi when I know I'm going to need that Pepsi when I get into my own place. You understand what I'm saying? So when I left the shelter, I had three months' worth of food stamps and I had my cash put aside for the things for my apartment that didn't give me. Yeah they gave me a bed for each one of my kids. They gave me a bed for myself. They gave me a dresser. The shelter helped me with those things. But you know, what happened to dish liquid? What happened with toiletries? I like to use body-wash they're giving me bar soap. You know, its things like that, you know what I'm saying? (Aisha Interview October 24, 2014)

This exchange is an account of Aisha's view on how some of the poor make use of their time in the shelter. For example, Christmas and holidays are opportunities for all the children of the families to get presents that are donated to the shelter. Some organizations provide individual Christmas presents for children.

Arlene shows me what she is up to: Fundraising and tabulation of all the money she has raised in contributions. She has raised over \$27,000 in gifts and toys for Christmas this year. I am reminded of the line of people that stood outside of the *Ready Haven* Main Office standing in line all day for Christmas presents for their kids. Staff at *Ready Haven* don't always have kind things to say about the people that come to get their presents there (January 4, 2014).

The poor acquire a lot of knowledge from being in "the system." They know how it works and how to follow the rules in order to take advantage of it when they can. One of the caseworkers called this skill as "learned helplessness."¹²⁴ While they relinquish control, they also receive the benefits of a system that is paternalistic and kind in small ways.

7.6 Children

According to my own records of the census forms I was able to collect every week, (2013) there were a total of 69 children, 45 were under six. There were 46 parents, 32 were single mothers. Six mothers came to the shelter with their newborns or had their children while they were at the shelter over the course of 2013.

¹²⁴ There is a danger to dismissing these kinds of actions as opportunism as was done with the work of Oscar Lewis *The Culture of Poverty*. The concept of *Learned Helplessness* was defined by Martin E.P. Seligman in his famous experiments with dogs that were subjected to a series electric shocks in different timing configurations. Eventually, the dogs learned that there was no escape possible from the pain, so they would tolerate the shocks and do nothing. Seligman and other researchers furthered these studies over the next several decades. One such study on insurance salesmen (1986) tested the success and failure of sales when "bad events" were experienced. The most important aspect of learned helplessness, for this dissertation, is that staff drew on this idea incorrectly and sees it as opportunism rather than an indication that someone has "given up" after trying to circumvent a painful event.

The staff for the Children's Program tries to monitor the health and wellbeing of the children while they are at the shelter. The children are left in the nursery with staff when mothers are in case management appointments or mandated groups.

7.6.1 The Play Room or Nursery

The nursery is a rectangular room about 25 feet long and 20 feet wide with one big window and a door that exits out to a yard where is a full swing and slide set that was barely recognizable under the recent foot of snow that had fallen on Centerton. At the entrance of the room is a rug where everyone is supposed to take off their shoes (something that I discovered only when I was the only one with shoes on). Next to the shoe area along the inside wall is a small couch. The room is divided in half by a low shelf unit that stores multiple toys for kids from toddlers to kindergarten. In front of the wall shelves is a child-sized round table with tiny chairs and on the other side of the low shelf unit is a multi-colored (bright yellow, pink, green) rubber tile play area. On the wall with the entry door is an imposing television unit [which was later moved to the living room]. It was never turned on while I was there. To one side of the TV was a small bookcase with books for older children. In several other places were bins of books for toddlers. On the far wall and the wall facing out to the yard were more shelves stuffed with bins of toys. In the middle of the far wall is the entry to the bathroom. On the opposite inside wall is the blackboard and in front of it, a long table with chairs where coloring activities and pretend tea party take place. (Field Note January 28, 2011):

The playroom is a happy place for most of the children although the care of the children is completely left up to the mothers most of the time at the shelter.¹²⁵

According to one of the case managers, the playroom is used by shelter parents as a reward for the children's' good behavior. Parents most often, push their babies around in strollers. In my notes, I marked down 10 incidents when I saw babies in strollers. This seems to be a part of the typical culture of the shelter. Newborns are also put into smaller newborn inserts as mothers and fathers port the baby through the shelter. Depending on the age of the child population, the shelter is sometimes full of strollers.

¹²⁵ For a discussion about Child Protective Services and the case managers see Chapter 5

Next, I turn to how Child Protective Services are brought into the lives of shelter residents. In the field note below, I show how parents can be very distant from their children. After several incidents of leaving the child alone while drinking a bottle, and even leaving a bottle propped up on the side of the crib, a CPS report was written up on Allen and Bronwyn. Soon, thereafter, a visiting nurse came to teach the parents how to properly care for their child while also keeping the baby constantly and closely monitored. In fact, the parents were already under a CPS watch because a previous child had been taken away from them. I took some notes as they were moving out of the shelter,

October 25, 2013, Allen and Bronwyn are moving out. Cesar throws their stuff onto dollies and begins to load up the van. This will be the last time that I may see little Danny. Last week, Arlene thought that they might lose the child to CPS [they eventually did]. Bronwyn had been leaving the baby alone in their room. This was the problem with Allen as well.

Because parenting is public in the shelter, these skills are often put under a magnifying glass. Here is an example of a very public moment in the dining room where there were many interventions (including mine) that subjected the mother to scrutiny.

Field note February 4, 2011: Then, I heard Aaron crying quite loudly. I decided to grab one of the toy trains to see if I could help Grace, [his mother] calm him down.

She was busy preparing some food. She had strapped Aaron into a high chair while she walked by him from the kitchen to the open cafeteria area. She brushed by and said: "Psycho!" to Aaron as she walked back into the kitchen and came up with a bag of tomatoes. I showed the wailing Aaron the toy train and pretended to drive it on the table of his high chair. It quieted him for a moment. Then Grace came up with a squeeze packet of cold banana mush that Aaron really liked. He sucked all the mush out really fast and when he came to the end of it, Grace took it away from him. Aaron set up such an alarming cry that he couldn't catch his breath. He turned beet red. Grace was calm and blew in his face. "I can see that you're experienced at this," I said.

"Yeah, he's just tired." She said as Aaron continued to wail at a high pitch.

I tried to retrieve the packet from the table so that Aaron could have it but it was empty, and it frustrated him. Emma [one of the case managers] came in and asked Grace if she could try

putting Aaron to sleep, but Grace calmly refused the offer. She released Aaron out of the high chair, and he instantly stopped crying and had a rather victorious expression on his face. I left Grace and walked back into the other part of the *Ready Haven* family shelter where I had been last fall to interview a few residents about their interest in job training and access to job opportunities. When I rounded the corner to go back, Eddie [the nursery assistant] was holding Aaron in a little sleeping blanket and rocking him. The baby was wide-awake.

There were three people who came to Grace's aid with her baby's crying tantrum. This scene was a good example of a style of parenting that seemed abusive. Grace called her son a "psycho." But my intervention and then Emma's on top of that, accomplished nothing except to prove that there is no privacy in the public areas of the shelter. Here is another observation I made when I was at the shelter on a Saturday when there is much less supervision.

Field note January 4, 2014: After I come out to clean up files on my old computer, one new child and her mother play on the floor and the sofa in the living room. The child lines up a row of baby dolls on the sofa. I introduce myself and tell her that I will be seeing them on Monday. The child says: "My doll's eyes are dirty." The mother explains: "That's because you go everywhere with them." Constance (8 years old) has a baby doll of her own and Benny, her mother, demands to hold it. Constance and Benny mock fight a bit over the baby doll. Before I knew it, Sean uses his bandana to slap Constance. She instantly set up a wail and I intervened which made her cry more. Her arm was red from the hit. Her mother called her over to look at it. Sean immediately apologized and said that he didn't mean to hit her arm. I had turned away from the scene and I hear Constance laugh. Benny was nonplussed by Sean's abuse of her daughter. The female resident counselor named Terra comes into the living room and greets me and does not intervene in the incident.

Another example of the monitoring and intervention in the parenting that happens at the shelter was when a young mother with a small infant stayed out all night. CPS made an accusation that she was putting her child in danger. However, DSS has recently been more lenient in exercising its prerogative not to reject residents who are breaking rules at the shelter. The next day, it looked like Daria

would have to move out anyway, and Child Protective Services was looking for a way to possibly cite her for not caring properly for her child. And, I did not hear where her baby was during the night that she stayed away.

Daria comes into the lobby with her mother who looks as if she's been crying. Her eyes are bloodshot. They seem to be having a long goodbye and Daria's mother gives her grandson a lot of kisses. While we have the door half closed, Stella says: "Her mother really can't handle her. Somewhere in there she had too much freedom as a child and now feels entitled." (Field Notes: April 22, 2011)

Ready Haven case managers are trained to find people housing and to help them find work. I know from Stella's background that she did not study psychology for her position nor was she trained to offer quasi-psychoanalytical comments to about Daria.

7.7 Summary

Control and management of the working poor population that invades and scrutinizes shelter parents' lives in a heterotopic non-place. The family shelter is part of a system that is embedded in the countywide network of not-for-profit human services institutions that find a ready population in the working poor for their services.¹²⁶ DSS funds the shelter system to push people into housing with the aim to get them employed as fast as possible: wages are not considered in the

¹²⁶ In a study entitled: *Marginalized Mothers: Parenting without a Home*, a qualitative study on 17 homeless women in an emergency shelter, the authors reported: "Participants felt very positively about the shelter staff, they reported feeling genuinely respected and supported. However, some women expressed concerns that their behavior, particularly their parenting behavior, was being judged. Specifically, 60% (9) women stated that they were on guard or concerned about how others might perceive their behavior (Cosgrove 2005:134)."

equation. Assisting residents with ways out of poverty with opportunities such as training and education is secondary to these tasks.

During their time at the emergency shelter, residents were under scrutiny and careful watch except when they were able to withdraw to their rooms for a bit of privacy or when they left the confines of the building. Any time that residents needed something or their kids wanted something, a staff member had to open a supply closet or pantry to get it. Thus, the residents were completely reliant on the staff for even the smallest things. Disempowerment is the message that is sent as an undercurrent. After all, the shelter knows best how to handle difficult situations and residents don't. While children benefited somewhat from the stability of the shelter, parents often languished while the search for housing drags on in a county that has a shortage of affordable housing.

In the next chapter, I review the worker readiness workshops of my ongoing volunteer work with the *Ready Haven* family shelter.

SCENE: Dragging people to group

"I do the group every week," I inform her.

"Anezka does group ever week...on Mondays," Novisha says.

"Fridays now...," I say.

"Oh yes, Fridays. She has a group that meets every week," Novisha reiterates.

Mickey whines, "I don't have anything together for Christmas. I just want to get ready. It's gonna be a miserable Christmas anyway. With the way that we have to be here, I don't want to be here. I have to breathalyze in and report in. That is a nuisance. I can't visit my aunt who is in the hospital."

"You have to be back by 9:30," Novisha says.

"I don't mean that. I just don't like how I have to sign in and out.

Breathalyzing. They told me I can't drink so why breathalyze? If I would drink that would be stupid. I been back and forth to my apartment..."

"Did you get evicted?" I said.

"No...that landlord has not repaired anything since we moved there in March of 2010. There is black mold from Hurricane Irene. He has not fixed nothing. With five kids it's really hard to be here."

"You have all five with you?" I ask.

"What else am I supposed to do?"

"Can you call your ...husband back and tell him to pick you back up?" Novisha asks.

"He's no husband, he's my boyfriend."

(Field Notes December 21, 2012)

Chapter 8

Worker Readiness

8.1 Overview

After I was a resident counselor for one semester to learn basic qualitative methods, the shelter director included me in the hired volunteer workforce to run a mandated worker readiness group. This chapter draws on my experience as a *Future Readiness* group leader. The idea of being ready for “the future” stemmed from my personal middle-class intentions to avoid the word “worker” in the title of my group. I optimistically thought that rising out of poverty should be a matter of undertaking more education and creating more awareness about work opportunities at the upper level of the income scale. After all, I teach in an elite graduate design school; these are the strategies my students use to work toward their futures. I discovered that *Future Readiness* was hard to accomplish for the shelter residents because they prioritized their job and housing search over any conversation about future or long-term goals. Work opportunities for shelter parents were almost always low-wage and low skilled. Thus, the idea of having them focus on “the future” was flawed on my part.

Nevertheless, as I worked with residents on their resumes and talked with them about money management and long-term goals, personal stories about their lives inevitably came out. As I developed and conducted the workshop over the years, I became more knowledgeable about the complex local government

structures and the ecology of institutions that manage poverty (See Chapter 4). I was looking at how homeless shelter parents negotiated the requirement of work, or searching for work, and the barriers they encountered when seeking living wage opportunities. I found that in the exchange of work for welfare aid, there were absolute rules. The system decided how things were going to be and not the individual.

The contract *Ready Haven* has with DSS is first and foremost that residents find housing. Secondary to the housing mandate is programming that the Arlene, the director of workshops and the Children's Program, makes possible with volunteers and service providers. Mandated workshops or "groups" range from budgeting to legal services, parenting, nutrition, and the worker, or future, readiness workshop. Perhaps the most important aspect of my work as a researcher teaching this group is that I experienced the same ambivalent tension that the staff of the shelter experiences (See Chapter 5). My intentions to help residents plan for a future, without being continually lodged in a cycle of homelessness, was often thwarted by DSS rules, education barriers such as a GED or High School Diploma, and lack of opportunities for living-wage work in Excelsior County. I would become discouraged, for example, when someone could not continue their GED or training because of the requirement work so that they could collect aid instead.

The idea of a future is very different for people who are living in a world without opportunity. Human beings create and find meaning in narratives and the way we tell stories about the past and the future. Georg Simmel suggests that

poverty is a social definition that is ascribed to a person labeled as “poor” because the poor are not “in touch with the sensibilities of the upper strata; who determine the conscience and consciousness of society” (Coser 1965: 141). Simmel’s work helped me to find the conflict embedded in my *Future Readiness* concept. I attributed middle-class sensibilities to the problems of the people I met at the shelter. While I felt deep respect for the people in the shelter and their plight, my intentions to get them into the same middle-class degree programs as my graduate students, was met with big structural obstacles like the condition of precarious low-wage work in the county.

The reality was that residents who worked were mostly employed in temporary or low-wage jobs. I had very little contact with them because they were excused from my group. Instead, I coached the parents who were *out of work*. These were people had often spent their federal life time limit of 60 months of TANF funds to raise their infants. DSS assigned these mothers to Community Work Experience (CWEP) or “Job Shop.”

Job Shop is a part of the rehabilitative programming imposed on the shelter residents. The residents are thought of as needing the structures that would give them “the consciousness and sensibilities” of the upper strata as Simmel taught us. However, policies and institutions that manage poverty are *not* designed to assist people to be upwardly mobile as we saw in previous chapters. The condition of homelessness is considered by policy makers to be a temporary emergency when it is a condition resulting from largely structural forces such as lack of living wage jobs

and housing. When policy makers implement temporary solutions to structural, long-term problems, the problem is not solved. It continues to persist. And, when policy makers don't ensure that those on the lower strata have the same opportunities as those in the upper strata, there is no "rehabilitation" possible. There is no way that the poor would be able to "rise" out of their impoverished station in life.

On the part of the shelter residents, limited opportunities, family crises, and lack of choices landed them in a homeless shelter. As we saw in Chapter 6, their life choices were meant to solve the crisis of the next moment, certainly not the challenges of some distant future.

Education and training are important in the shelter's programming, but not its primary goal. Instead, worker readiness is the most important outcome. The intentions of the staff or my work, for that matter, are not nefarious. It does, however, underscore the cognitive dissonance of having to understand the welfare system's requirements along with the perceived middle-class need for social mobility opportunities. These two ideas do not go together. In fact, they fight each other. Unfortunately, the structure gives someone who wants to do "good," little choice but to comply with the welfare rules and regulations. The only way the poor can make ends meet are to follow the rules. The *Ready Haven* system, in general, maintains the status quo rather than breaking the cycle of poverty and homelessness.

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first section focuses on the situation of poverty, which includes the low-wage work in the county and the punitive effects of the workfare system in mandated worker readiness programs such as CWEP. The second section looks at the planning of shelter parents' strategies and opportunities to escape poverty. The ultimate aim should be to assist shelter residents in achieving a life without safety net assistance. However, the welfare systems that manage poverty in the county reinforce low-wage work.

8.2. Welfare and poverty in Excelsior County

The 1996 Personal Responsibility Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act and Temporary Aid to Needy Families shifted the responsibility of parenting to a redefined and mostly non-existent traditional model of a two-parent family bound by marriage. Conversely, single mothers headed most of the families at the shelter and most are “breadwinner” moms who work and receive partial assistance to make ends meet.

Capitalism and poverty management structures do not give the working poor opportunities for full participation. For example, in Centerton, the high school is located in an area with 40% poverty with 18% of the student population dealing with disabilities. Local taxes support schools in the U.S., and Centerton's tax-base contributes to the poor quality of the schools. The high school has a low graduation rate especially among Black and Hispanic students. Faculty and Staff have attempted to address the problematic graduation rate over the past few years by aggressively

encouraging college and career readiness, but, instead, graduation rates have dropped 2% between 2012-2014 (According to the NY State Education Graduation Rate Dataset).

As we saw in Chapter 2, the PRWORA was passed in 1996 during a time of unprecedented wealth and opportunity for middle and upper-class people. Work was plentiful although the conditions in the Excelsior County economy were different. The promoters of the PRWORA were not experiencing the shrinking wages and the lack of training and education opportunities for the low-wage workers. Moreover, the county and the city were still dealing with the aftermath of the exit of a computer manufacturer and the Crack Epidemic. Work in the county had shifted to largely low-wage retail and health care. Since then, the national economy suffered several large downturns. The recent recession especially worsened the already precarious employment situation in Excelsior County. According to the May 2014 U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics for the area, out of close to 57,000 workers, there were 6030 food service jobs and 4710 cashier and retail service job that all pay under \$10.00 an hour or a yearly income of \$17,500 a year.¹²⁷ These figures represent 19% of the workforce of people living at or below the poverty line. According to the Economic Policy Institute family budget calculator, a single parent and a single child, would require a salary of \$61,659 per year in Centerton.¹²⁸ Between \$17,500 and \$61,659 is the wide gulf that represents the reality of a low-

¹²⁷ This is based on 35 hours a week for 50 weeks.

¹²⁸ According to a CNN Money online calculator, in the Northeastern US, a low-income family would need approximately \$208,500, to raise a child from birth to the child's 19th birthday in the Northeastern US.

wage job with safety net benefits and a job that would comfortably support a family without the safety net.

Single mothers in the U.S. and locally must balance raising their children with their work schedule; these women are caught in what Arlie Hochschild calls the “time bind” (1989) and “second shift” (1997). Much like middle-class parents, working class parents feel with the financial stresses of childcare and transportation. Their plight is much worse, however. Childcare costs are approximately \$1,070¹²⁹ per month for one child. To keep a car on the road costs approximately \$459 per month. A worker in a low-wage retail job makes approximately \$10.00 an hour (optimistically) or \$350.00 for a 35-hour work week (about \$300 with taxes taken out) or \$1,200 a month. All costs for childcare, health care, housing, and food need to be subsidized by the safety net for someone who works at this wage. The cost of a car is always a handicap for the people at the shelter. As mentioned in Chapter 7, a car means freedom and, if the car is reliable, a way to get to a job location. Transportation networks in the county are poor, and the welfare system rarely subsidizes cars.

The status quo in Excelsior County is that there is no living wage work other than small pockets of high technology industries. Positions in technology jobs require a college degree, possibly a graduate level education, and highly specialized training. People in Excelsior County also commute to other counties and mostly New York City to find living wage work.

¹²⁹ See the Economic Policy Institute interactive Budget Calculator for the Hudson Valley area: <http://www.epi.org/resources/budget>

8.3 Worker Readiness as designed by DSS

To prepare my shelter program, I was given a Worker Readiness Training slide show from the Office of Employment to help guide my workshop, which was originally tailored to people with a high school education. The first workshop session covered job searches on the Internet, finding employer websites, and networking. The second session focused on how to complete a job application, identifying one's skill set, and building a resume. The third session was dedicated to soft or social skills: making a good first impression; having a good attitude at work; developing good habits and manners (like don't chew gum, don't smoke, don't bring anyone with you to the interview, etc.)¹³⁰; discussing the interview process (like what to wear to the interview and role playing the interview). These were the topics the shelter wanted me to emphasize in the first year of the workshop.

My assessment of the curriculum was that it lacked respect for people who had already been in the job market for many years. The original Worker Readiness workshop curriculum did not address the kinds of jobs that earn living wages or where such jobs are available. Moreover, stressing that people "behave properly" in a job interview seemed excessively patronizing. The previous curriculum assumed that shelter parents were not attentive to employers' needs, and they needed to be schooled or rehabilitated. Since welfare requires recipients to work, the parents who landed in the shelter had already worked in many capacities. The biggest obstacle for these parents was that they did not finish high school. They had

¹³⁰ This was a list of about 20 transgressions that were mostly patronizing.

resumes that were long strings of retail food and mall jobs. Several parents had more than one part-time job, or a job with flexible hours. This flexibility is an obstacle for parents who have regular times to schedule with childcare and their children's education. This reason was also why some parents left their low-wage jobs (See Chapter 9). If the job did not provide enough hours to satisfy DSS "work off your grant" rules, the parent would have to search for another job with better hours. However, as we discussed in previous chapters, flexible hours can be an abusive practice that takes advantage of the worker's willingness to work at any cost; even if it adversely affects their family. Conversely, if the worker is not able to be flexible enough, as is the case with single mothers, the employer will dismiss the worker.

James Chamberlain pointed out that in a neoliberal labor market "flexibility [scheduling hours] has heightened insecurity and precariousness while access to employee-friendly flexibility is uneven and is implicated in the contemporary class structure" (2014:101). Thus, flexible employment may support the individualistic, entrepreneurial spirit of the 21st Century, but it is a "double-edged sword" because it allows for greater control over workers while also expecting the worker to obey and follow the needs of the market, and requiring a constant need for more education and skills.

For example, Ida, while working at a low-wage, flexible hour job at a retail coffee shop, took on the challenge of required GED classes if she wanted to obtain a Culinary Certificate at the local tech school. However, her work hours were not enough to satisfy the requirements set by DSS. At the same time, the bus network of

the county was unreliable. It took Ida too long to make it to work on time. In the end, she dropped the schooling to stay in work compliance so that she could continue to receive aid. Similarly, parents cited dependable transportation as one of the greatest barriers to finding and keeping a job. The public transportation infrastructure in Excelsior County does not run frequently enough, and connections from local busses to the countywide system timed synchronously: a car is a necessity for work.

The Worker Readiness participants came from different backgrounds and had a range of abilities. For example, I worked recently with a group of five women” two who had learning disabilities, one was an Associate of Arts graduate, another who never made it past seventh grade, and one who comfortably supported her three children until she lost her job. Some of the people attending the groups were on disability, receiving a \$700 check every month. In fact, some had been living on disability since their childhood. For the most part, people who were on disability aid were not interested in understanding how to find work. Although one of them, Aisha, is currently working a part-time job to supplement her disability check without having money taken away from her check.

Other group participants complained of the “cliff effect,” where they were dropped from welfare the moment their wages were raised a dollar over the eligibility limit. Instead of a graded pay scale that allowed parents to continue to be stable, just when they attain stability, the system yanks assistance away.

In addition to transportation, education, and training, another obstacle for parents is safe and dependable childcare. A 2014 Pew Research Center report cited

New York State as one of the most expensive states for childcare in the US. Fulltime care of an infant at a legally operated facility is \$14, 939 a year (Desilver 2014). As a result, many mothers opt to stay out of the labor poor to raise their children until they can be enrolled in the Head Start (which has a limited number of spots) or Kindergarten. Working poor single mothers are especially affected by the cost of childcare. A mother could spend as much as 39.6% of her wages toward childcare.¹³¹ Even with access to early childhood education, juggling a work schedule, a long-term career, and raising children become an almost impossible task.¹³²

8.3.1 Worker Readiness as designed by DSS

Long-term welfare aid recipients, who have not worked for more than a year, are sent to the Community Work Experience Program and Job Shop (CWEP-Job Shop) for rehabilitation. If they do not comply, according to a trainer DSS Contracted CWEP site, the worker is reported to DSS and a caseworker sets sanctions for a period of time by denying the parent aid. ¹³³

¹³¹ Childcare costs affect families at different income levels differently, according to the census data (<http://www.census.gov/prod/2013pubs/p70-135.pdf>). In 2011, for instance, families with employed mothers whose monthly income was \$4,500 or more paid an average of \$163 a week for childcare, representing 6.7% of their family income. Families with monthly incomes of less than \$1,500 paid much less –\$97 a week on average — but that represented 39.6% of their family income (Desilver 2014).

¹³² The poor do get subsidies from DSS for childcare if they have a job, but these don't always cover the full expense.

¹³³ It would take a whole different study to follow people into their lives if they are sanctioned and thrown off welfare.

I found out that no form of worker readiness training was “taught” in CWEP-Job Shop. “We’re not here to teach,” the DSS contracted CWEP worker remarked several times. People must work, and they should come to the facility as if they are employed there. Three days a week, they are assigned to food service, housekeeping, or the production floor (where people sorted and packed office supplies and stationery). The remaining two days are spent searching for jobs online and going to appointments. The trainer said that she assists each person; she doesn’t teach them any computer skills. If a person finds a job opening but they don’t have access to any transportation for the interview, they are taken to the appointment.

After three months of attending the CWEP-Job Shop, if the candidate has not found work, a written report goes to DSS with an analysis of the outcome. Some people choose not to attend this mandated program, even though they know that they might lose aid. They are then “written up” by the CWEP site and sanctioned by DSS, releasing them from their assistance for a period of time. The trainer reported, “Many of the people who go through this program do not get jobs.” For example, she listed several of the obstacles that seem to be insurmountable: not having a GED, not having a permanent address, having long gaps in job history. She reiterated that participants in the three-month CWEP-Job Shop program had the choice to attend the program and comply, to keep their welfare aid and to try to find work. She also told me that in the last month, DSS had referred one hundred participants to this program, but she never had more than eight people in her Monday orientations. Not “calling in” (to report a reason for absence) was cited as a primary reason for

dismissal and sanctions.¹³⁴ She does not understand this high degree of absenteeism, but overall she uses the same language as the justice system: “Three strikes and you’re out.”¹³⁵ If the participant still needs to be in the welfare system, they are sent back to DSS where she or he must conduct further job searches, which are supervised (Job Shop Interview July 6, 2015).

Failing to make it to Job Shop and CWEP combined with the other obstacles mentioned, make the candidate less desirable in the world of work. One of the parents, Anna, told me she never misses reporting to DSS or complying with mandates. She knows what the consequences are if she doesn’t comply; she has watched her friends be sanctioned. Sanctions mean the family would receive a smaller cash grant and fewer food stamps. DSS can also take housing away (jeopardizing placement in subsidized housing, a motel, or the shelter). She also told me of a recent example when one of her children’s fathers didn’t report to the DSS office, when he moved to another county. Because he did not report in, he was sanctioned for 90 days. The DSS will issue a letter of denial. The main message was that “DSS doesn’t care if it is \$5 an hour job. You had better take that job. It’s still a job (Interview with Anna July 9, 2015).”

¹³⁴ I am interested in further investigation to understand why people are not showing up and what the effects are of their absence

¹³⁵ This was a Clinton-era law. In a recent interview, Clinton regretted mostly that the law did not leave enough funding to train or educate people when they came out of incarceration. He ultimately thinks that these laws should be changed (Amanpour 2015). These “three strikes” laws were enacted on a State-by-State level to implement lifetime prison sentences for repeat offenders.

8.3.2 “Doing good”

What is a future? Whose future and by whose standards? These were the questions that I asked as I was doing these workshops. The director of the long-term care program, an 18-month post shelter program for drug-addicted or disabled parents put it this way:

Alex: I think there are two things; one is, I don't know if they feel that they cannot do it, I don't know if they feel that they deserve it, but I know that they cannot see it. When during the day, today is what matters: not tomorrow, not a year from now, not five years from now. It's how am I making it today? So, if you are in today, you're not looking at tomorrow, you don't look at consequences, you don't look what's going to happen, you need whatever you think you need for that day, and you're going to get it. No matter how you get it. (Interview with Alex March 29, 2013).¹³⁶

My initial intentions “to do good” and to find ways to advocate for education and training opportunities for shelter residents did not line up with what I found in the field. First, the working poor don't have the same concept of goal setting and planning as people who receive regular paychecks that cover all living expenses. Instead, in Excelsior County, the working poor have to contend with flexible and precarious work schedules while earning wages that don't match the cost of living. Moreover, shocks like the destabilization of households when a family becomes homeless often take a long time to overcome.

“Helping the poor” achieve “self-sufficiency and social mobility” has re-energized areas of research in sociology, psychology, and the science of the brain

¹³⁶ What Alex points to is similar to the research of defining goal setting and planning by neurobiologists and psychologists called *episodic future thinking*. This is an emerging concept of the last few decades, which combines neurological and psychological research (Szpunar 2010). Schachter et al wrote an article updating this research to address the idea of *counterfactual thinking*, which simulates a story that happened in someone's past to understand the relationship between memory and decision-making processes(2013).

(See ASA 2014 Conference, Continuing Adverse Childhood Effects study by the CDC). Crittenton Women's Union researchers came up with a "Bridge to Self-sufficiency" model that includes five primary domains that are critical to a family's ability to attain social mobility: family stability, wellbeing, financial management, education, and career management. The study spanned five years because it this is the length of time it takes an average single female head of a family to recuperate from an episode of homelessness and to rise to a level of economic stability. The study culminated in 2014 report with a registered trademark for [socio-economic] "mobility mentoring."¹³⁷ Although the success rate of the "mobility mentoring" program has been determined to measure many different scales of success, it should be noted that all candidates in the program are pre-screened for success. I argue that a broader and inclusive approach to the problem is needed to address the many different types of women who use homeless shelters. Some call this "creaming" the pool of candidates to assure a flow of continued corporate and government funding needed for evidence-based research. The premise of the Crittenton study is long-term individual mentoring toward the goal of leaving welfare aid. Levels of self-sufficiency such as "getting banked," housing, education and career development are some of the measures of success. The main finding of the study is that the long term effects of poverty on the brain cause "reactive" coping mechanisms that prevent achievement of long-term goals. The additional claim is that present poverty is different from the poverty of the past. Work and employment conditions have

¹³⁷ Crittenton Women's Union FY 2013 Mobility Mentoring Impact Report

changed, creating a need for training and higher levels of education to obtain living-wage work. To address these findings, the theory outlined by the Crittenton study, I find, emphasizes an old standard of American self-sufficiency and individual achievement through individual coaching. Considering the undertaking of managing approximately 160 candidates through five years of personal and career advancement, the Crittenton model is extremely successful in achieving measures of higher levels of wellbeing and stability that included educational, family, employment with living wage incomes, and housing. However, the report has not reviewed the candidates who were unable to meet standards of “self-sufficiency,” or candidates who may take much more time than five years to achieve financial and housing stability. The important take-away from this initial study is that the idea of mentoring is critical to the wellbeing and abilities of the women to achieve their goals.

The most successful program in my Excelsior County field site that simulates some of the achievements of the Crittenton study is the one-on-one women’s mentoring program I joined in the latter half of my years of research. The overarching claim of the dissertation is that the institutions that manage the poor in the small city of Centerton and Excelsior County do not fully understand the critical importance of person-to-person mentoring. Nevertheless, the Excelsior County women’s mentoring program is a rousing success, and the mentors fully respect the experience of poverty to provide a system of support that includes both empowerment, financial aid, and reward. As Sharon Hays contends: families are

“treated as if they are solely the result of personal choices and individual pathologies” (Hays 2003:30) rather than examining the need for empathy and community support. There is an all-too-easy laying of the blame on the poor for allowing their lives to become “reactive” to crises. What I found during my fieldwork with the shelter and the other organizations in Centerton is that people with good intentions attempt to advocate for and help those who are at the bottom of the income scale by drawing on middle-class ethics and standards. Structural reasons for poverty are much larger and more difficult to address with one-on-one relationships, and this is where there is a complete lack of understanding what is needed to empower the working poor to achieve productive lives. I believe that personal relationships, and community building are the most effective strategies combined with empowering the working poor to propose their solutions to make lives they feel are productive.

Not-for-profit agencies, as we saw in Chapter 4, focus on solutions that fit their agendas, not necessarily the solutions the families may want. The financial problems of the poor are not the only problems that they face. The many different versions of the stories of people who are homeless pointed to each case as a combination of unique problems. Again, as Ralph DaCosta-Nunez said: a “one size fits all” solution isn’t viable. Each experience shared by the people in my group sessions was unique. They are stories of people struggling to make sense of their lives in a cauldron of obstacles and lack of possibilities, which lead them to a life of precarity and uncertainty. Whether they did that in a way that was “acceptable” or

by the norms of the system or whether they got caught in the net of deviance that sent them to prison. In each case, the repertoire of circumstances was unique.

As the ecology of poverty management mandates, when people collect money from the system, they inevitably live under scrutiny by the system, as Michelle Alexander ([2010] 2012), pointed to the conflation of crime and welfare. The more the working poor collect welfare subsidies, the more the system examines them. They cannot fly under the radar if they use a benefits card. Any fraud is punished severely; this could be four or more years in prison (as it was in Anna's case). The only "safe way" is to live away from the law and to avoid the benefits office. Every penny must be earned legally instead of engaging in the even more precarious informal economy. However, a person earning low-wages has to depend in some way on the welfare system, as they still need health care or food stamps. Any crisis in life, whether emotional or physical can cause a quick and lethal fall into more scrutiny. One transgression with a manager at a place of work can lead to cut hours. One illness of a child, when a mother needs to stay home from work, and the manager judges her to be unreliable so that he makes sure she is on the list to be dropped from the job if he needs to slim down his staff. One crisis with a boyfriend and he may empty her bank account (if she even has a bank account). One human services provider calls this the "crisis junkie" syndrome. Crisis junkies seem always to have a dramatic story that makes work or following rules that are set by DSS impossible. The stories are dramatic and most often land the person in a truly compromised and precarious place.

Shelter residents do take advantage of the following opportunities such as: 1) the Office of Employment and Training, which offers government-subsidized programs such as Certified Nursing Assistants, Security Guards, and even offers certification for Food Handling; and 2) a fully funded community college program for TANF recipients that has to be approved by DSS. However, the kinds of Associates of Arts degrees at the community college were most commonly in Human Services, Criminal Justice (Police Training), Business Accounting, Veterinary Assistants, Network Administrators, and Business/Entrepreneurial Studies. The community college does not teach any creative, technology, or artistic courses which could be useful in the New Economy. I was told that since local businesses did not cite creative arts and music courses as something that was needed, these courses were not available to the TANF community. Creative and artistic courses were only available to middle-class people who could pay their way through school.

What follows are notes from end-of-the-year emails from me to the staff of the shelter about my *Future Readiness* program.

2012

(Starting in February) Of the 48 residents who sat in my Future Readiness group for at least one session: 16 "graduated." This means that they completed the 5 requirements for the session (See curriculum in Appendix 2). The GED graduation numbers of people *before*

they came to the shelter, were maintained by the shelter in 2012.¹³⁸ There were 22 people who had received their GED, and 22 who did not. There were also 12 people who graduated from high school.

I have only been able to stay in touch with 5 people. The people who have stayed in touch: 3 were in touch with me for about 4 months. During that time I was able to help them with a variety of small tasks like studying for their GED (1) and getting a job (1) and/or getting them to apply for college (Gina). The fourth person is an SSI recipient (Aisha) who I befriended in the first time I worked at Family Inn in 2011.

The rest have all changed their phone numbers or disconnected the ones they gave me.

There are 4 people out of the 16 who started the community college program. 1 person has completed being re-certified for her CNA. I'm still waiting to hear from a few people but this is the initial report card.

In 2013

I saw 45 people in the program, but only 12 graduated from my group in 2013. In general, the shelter stays for people were shorter and more people were working as the economy rebounded. I also did not follow the 2013 residents as closely as I did the 2012 people because of lack of my time. My commitment of time to the women's mentorship program was great, and it gave me access to a broader view of poverty and homelessness in Centerton with the case of Anna (See Chapter 9 for Anna's story).

The breakdown for educational level of the 45 people in my Future Readiness Group in 2013, before they came to the shelter was: 1 who graduated from high school with an Individual Education Plan (because of, a learning

¹³⁸ The counts were given to me by the person who maintains this resident data, although my request for the data was an unusual one. Of the 172 people in the shelter, most were children. The data for adults who only may have attained a 7th grade level were not separated from the data for children.

disability), There were 6 with high school diplomas, 5 with GEDs, 17 without GEDs, 3 who has some college or were currently enrolled, 2 were college graduates, and 1 had completed an advanced degree. There were also ten people who did not give me this information because I did not see them one-on-one sessions.

During both years, there were few high school graduates in the shelter. In 2013, five people were either in college or had graduated from college. One person had an advanced degree. The low level of graduation from my *Future Readiness* Group in the second year may have been because that shelter residents were finding housing quicker, so they were not able to complete the whole cycle of four sessions. Nevertheless, the rapid rehousing of the families did not stem the tide of families in need because the 2014 homeless family numbers in the county were higher than 2013.¹³⁹

The broader cycle of the Excelsior economy called more people back into low-wage work and thus, they continued in the precarious low-wage market. Consequently, I adjusted my program and changed the sessions into a structure that was more one-on-one sessions. I found out that many of the residents had gone through similar worker readiness programs and were not interested in finding out how the landscape of employment changed in the last decade.

Shelter residents received a certificate after they attended four sessions of the workshop. The accomplishment of speaking with me about their ideas and getting it written on a piece of paper meant a lot to the residents. If I would be at the

¹³⁹ 191 in 2013 vs. 216 families in 2014 (caresny.org HMIS)

shelter and someone who had “graduated” or fulfilled the required four sessions, they would ask me when they would get their printed certificate. Some of the residents used the certificate as part of the qualification for housing and for the *Ready Haven* program of long-term case-management if they had a disability. If they had been through the four sessions of the workshop, this would serve as proof of their ability to complete a course of study. The long-term care program comes with subsidized housing and the agency case managers advocate that clients further their education and find employment. The only requirement for long-term care candidates was that they had to have a disability.

The biggest obstacle in my communication with residents was their state of mind, and whether they were ready to listen to possibilities for future steps. For example, during her second time in the shelter, Sharon told me that she was “shunned” by her family because she was pregnant (and Caucasian) with a child by an African-American man. Sharon was initially willing to work to get into higher education because she already had her high school diploma. And yet, she was unable to look beyond the immediate care of her children. She could not plan ahead. She listed the ailments of her children and saw them as obstacles to figuring out her future:

S: I can't look that far ahead. Like Dana's aggression is quickly increasing, quickly, and I'm going to get her re--evaluated soon because I think there's something, like she's starting to hit me and kick me and try to hurt me and she told me the other day, she said she wanted to hurt the baby inside me. Like, she's got some hard-core aggression problems. I don't know what I'm going to be doing with her in three months, I don't know what I'm going to be doing with her in three weeks because she's quickly changing. The little boy, he just started walking. He's still not talking at almost three years old. He doesn't make eye contact. He's self---abusive. If I get him back, I can't, I don't know where I'm going to be with him. And

then the baby, she might have spina bifida. Like I don't know where I'm going to be, I don't know what I'm going to be doing. I can't look that far ahead. Like, you know, and what if this baby comes out with problems? (Interview with Sharon February 17, 2014).

The illnesses of Sharon's children help explain the crisis that landed her in the shelter. Her presence at the shelter was due to her pregnancy and her relationship with her family. Therefore, the *Future Readiness* program, she was mandated to take, was not only "non-directive" but far from "non-judgmental." The program assumed she didn't know how to find or hold a job when that wasn't the issue that led her to homelessness. For Sharon, these sessions were a waste of time. They blocked her ability to deal the perceived crises of the health of her children. The programming that the shelter residents endure was often part of the conversation during the group. Nancy, a mother of three, felt that the scrutiny and directiveness of the shelter were invasive. "People are in your business:"

The more people that help you, the more people are in your business. I'm not into having people in my business. That's why I'm trying to get out of [welfare] so I don't have to have people in my business...Direction is OK, but what I don't like is when I'm given direction without the option. You're not asking me, you're telling me. There's a difference between telling me and you getting a response out of me...no I don't really want that, this is not what I want to do. The difference is...since you asked me, this is what you're gonna do (Group Conversation Nancy July 10, 2015).¹⁴⁰

These groups are held in the living room and public. Many staff members pass through on their way to the back offices and sometimes pick up the

¹⁴⁰ Peter Blau in *Exchange and Power in Social Life* (1964) notes that "By supplying services in demand to others, a person establishes power over them. If he regularly renders needed services they cannot readily obtain elsewhere, others become dependent on and obligated to him for these services, and unless they can furnish other benefits to him that produce interdependence by making him equally dependent on them, their unilateral dependence obligates them to comply with his requests lest he ceases to continue to meet their needs" (118).

“temperature” of the group. A staff member asked me when I finished a session whether people were complaining too much. She had overheard the exchange when Nancy was very vocal about her unhappiness with the system. The rather heated debates that were often exchanged in the group were a chance for people to vent but also a time when they could be heard by the shelter staff. However, none of the staff administrators of the shelter asked about the content of the discussions I had with the residents. For the most part, the shelter resident would choose her or his actions to take, or not. I was warned from the beginning that the most important task for the resident was to find a job and a home, in that order. Any education or training would be at the bottom of the list of “things to do.”

When I ran the groups, I took notes on how the poor manage their lives. For one, rarely did I meet a person who admitted to having a banking or savings account.¹⁴¹

None of the women had bank accounts. I asked if they felt like they managed their money well. Gina chimed in that she likes to buy things too much. She likes to get her nails and hair done. She never has money left to save. She said that her mother manages her money. She said that she was young when she left home but her mother had taught her how to keep track of money. When she had money to save, she would send it down to her mother in North Carolina, and she would know it would be safe. “Me and banks don’t get along.” She said. When I ventured why not? She said that whatever money she had would always get spent (Group February 28, 2012)

From the “likes buying things too much” comment this might agree with the view of some researchers that Gina is practicing “compensatory consumption” as a way to make up for social status that she doesn’t have. Others interpret this as the poor

¹⁴¹ This is an area that is worthy of deeper research. I was not able to really expand on this very much.

seeking the same wealth as the rest of society making the poor not so different from the middle-class. They just cannot actualize what they want to buy as easily (Hill 2002: 212). Most of the people in the shelter preferred to keep their money in cash and close, in their wallets. Their assistance, mostly food stamps, comes on a benefits card and they rarely have money to spend on the card.

Many residents have aspirations toward bettering themselves. I often listened to their dreams about a possible future.

Gina is an experienced EMT technician. She wants to be in sports medicine. She has a very nice resume and would probably be hired in a good economy. She has a lot of experience but her child came into the picture (February 28, 2012 Group).

I was able to track Gina through her schooling at the community college. She was on the way to completing an Associates Degree. She has fallen completely out of touch with me but I was able to get this information from one of the college counselors.

In another group session, the subject of vulnerability of single mothers came up and a woman I call Nancy could not stop talking about how difficult life was as a single mother.

Nancy: Let me tell you something, single moms? We suffer. I was working 50 hours a week up until two months ago. I never saw my kids for two years. My kids were raising themselves. So basically, it's a double-edged sword. If don't go to work 40 hours a week, I'm lazy. If I do go to work 40 hours a week, I'm neglectful. So it's like, there is no in-between...So...I know all these people because I live in Centerton. It makes it a little more like home. I'm not so down about being here but like...it's constantly still with my children...I don't want to be here, they don't want to be here. I went from having a fulltime job, my rent was all paid, my bills were paid, my kids were good, and I was OK. I was really doing well. Last year, my income was a lot more than it is right this second...now I'm back here homeless and I'm no better than anybody else. I was here for about a month six years ago.... We've been through it. It was false security...within a month and a half time, we were right back to that (homelessness) So no matter how hard you work and you think you got it all together, and you're better than anybody else, this is a reality check. It's a hard pill to swallow. (Nancy Group July 10, 2015).

8.3.3 Are they ready?

As I worked with the residents in my group, I connected them with resources at the local technical school and the local community college. Both institutions coordinated their work with the Department of Social Services. The success of the work I did in the shelter was difficult to quantify because human services systems are siloed and covered by the privacy and confidentiality protection of Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (at the community college) and Health Insurance Portability Accountability Act (at the shelter).

My conversation with DSS (TANF) manager last week begins to illuminate why homeless women in Ready Haven shelter don't get to know about the programs that are available to them. She sounded very dark and ominous to me and said: "You know that most of these women are not ready to take on school or any other kind of education. That is just too stressful on top of having them start up in a new home and getting their life under control." Some of the same sentiment came from the Director of Workforce Development. The women from Ready Haven are "just not ready" to take on the challenge of a new job. Let them get settled into a new home first. OK—but then what?

I also met with the director of Workforce Development. Unfortunately, the woman at Workforce Development discouraged me from referring people who are homeless. She looks for work-ready people who are willing, ready, and able to work. The homeless with their many problems of childcare and lack of education are not ready to take on any job. (Field Note April 5, 2013)

The workforce development people are not willing to make people work-ready for jobs that earn a living wage. If we study the opportunities of the Office of Employment and Training (OET), the jobs train people for low-level security guards (for the mall), food service certification (for retail food establishments) and Certified Nurse's Assistants (for the growing number of people who need elder care.) The OET must contend with the fact that there are no living wage jobs in the county. In a recent conversation with the director of the OET, she explained a pilot program for

Safety Net candidates that will be recommended by the DSS Social Welfare Examiners. She made it clear that there is no room for failure for any candidates because, in her words, “they are the chosen ones,” indicating that there is high-level interest for all the candidates in the program to succeed (OET Phone Interview June 24, 2015). All the candidates will be put through three weeks of worker readiness training. They will have on-the-job training for 3 months. A team of people will be working with each candidate mentoring and monitoring them through what is called “job shadowing.” If they miss one day of training, they will be dismissed from the program. The county is funding this new program; it costs \$500,000 (at \$20K for 25 candidates) and matches each candidate with entry-level job openings primarily in health care (specifically with a regional health corporation that is privatizing all health care in the county) and jobs as drivers in transportation (through the Regional Bus Company). People with drug or incarceration records will not be eligible for this round of the program; thus, this program will miss one of the populations that need help the most.

I did have the opportunity to follow one of the shelter parents to a job search interview at the Workforce Development office. The caveat for being referred to any employment through the office requires a person to go through a series of workshops. If the applicant did well in the workshops and never missed a session, they would be considered for recommendation to several programs mentioned previously: security guard, C.N.A., or culinary assistant. About six months later I was at a family court hearing for another shelter parent, and the woman came running

up to me to give me a big hug. She was employed and still doing the C.N.A. training, and she was very excited about the possibilities it would open up for her.

During the time I was conducting this study, fewer people were sent to these OET workshops because the Certified Nurse's Assistants opportunities were overloaded with applicants. As I am writing up my findings, there new and different grants amounting to a total of \$48,000 to train twelve applicants who will complete a training program and then be employed in a small, local automated technology plant. However, the program has not yet been fully completed.

I kept up with a few women who went through the community college program meant for people covered under the Temporary Aid for Needy Families subsidy. The county funds the community college program in conjunction with the Department of Social Services. Residents must qualify for the program through the Social Welfare Examiner at DSS. If the resident was in the TANF system for close to 60 months, the community college option was closed to them. Residents also must have a High School Diploma or equivalent (GED) to attend. During the time of my study, the GED requirements were changed and the qualification to graduate from High School became more stringent, and the testing became computer-based.

The director of the community college program found that not everyone in succeeds in getting a job even when the candidate has a college degree. She says that the program is well supported with access to tutors and regular meetings with the director. She tells the story of someone who graduated from the community college

program as an example of one student that did not do well even with an Associates Degree.

More and more [she means more recently] they have serious underlying issues that prevent them from being work-ready. I can tell which of the students who are going to be successful because they take every suggestion to heart, they meet participation; they take things seriously. I've had students. I have a student graduating in December, she had like a 3.45 average, and she could not break that cycle of the people she was hanging out with like domestic violence between family members. I don't think she's ever going to find a job even with that degree because there are these underlying issues that she just can't let go of. She's capable but she's just, there's something about her that she can't get beyond. I have a student who graduated a year ago, a Criminal Justice major, good student; her professor said she had a real future in the field. I encouraged her to send resume's, I worked with her...I lost touch with her. I was in a meeting last fall and the head of the jail was there and he said: "Oh, we have a Civil Service test coming up in the spring for corrections officers, we need especially we're in encouraging women who are bi-lingual" and this was a female Hispanic...and he had had her, he's a professor at Ulster. And I said, oh how about so and so and he said, "Oh...have you talked to her lately?"

And I said no...and he said "I saw her at the jail visiting the father of her unborn child. Then I saw her uptown waiting for a bus and I said, How are you? What are you doing? Waiting for a bus? And she said, "I'm having another baby," I said: "Who's the dad?" And she said, "Well, I kind of didn't know him too well when we got together. He's in jail."

You know...so again, it's not just the [college] degree, it's so many other factors, very low self-esteem, very difficult family background, she was abused when she was a child, physical abuse in relationships, lack of trusting, lack of any kind of support in terms of family or friends, so those things...you know. (Interview with Lana Bennington March 8, 2013).

The crises the woman had to confront have to be taken into account but the director unconsciously cast judgment on the woman that she will "never" find a job even with a degree. She is psychologizing the candidate like so many of the staff that interacts with the working poor in an attempt to contextualize the candidate's actions in a rational frame of decision-making. However, people make bad decisions every day. The poor just have a more difficult time dealing with the consequences because they lack financial resources to help them recover from bad decision-making. Moreover, the working poor not only face their own life's difficulties but are also under pressure to take low-level retail jobs at corporate big box retail

establishments like Target and Wal-Mart that easily hire welfare aid recipients who are forced into low-wage work.¹⁴²

While seeking opportunities for residents, I was made aware of a women's mentoring group. I joined the group and became a mentor to one of the people in my case study, Anna. This gathering became a resource for women in the shelter, who took the opportunity of being mentored for a year while being exposed to a community of women in Centerton. The one-on-one mentorships open up the opportunity to network and find out about childcare, education, creative, entrepreneurial, and employment possibilities. In my experience, these mentorship and associate relationships strengthen the community one person at a time. The organization has been in existence since 2007 and has already sponsored 120 mentorships. The mentorships are managed for one year and are allowed to continue afterward. The monthly meetings of the group and the associates continue to inform the community about available opportunities. In fact, these further broaden the network of associations and resources to count on in difficult times.

The mentorship group is not a panacea for lives lived in poverty. Several of the women in my study were part of a mentorship relationship but eventually dropped out. They cited personal and relationship crises or the lack of available transportation. These are the lived complications of shelter residents and the working poor.

¹⁴² The Earned Income Tax credit does offer people who work all year some relief when they file their taxes; however, I see this as a way to let corporations off the hook.

Perhaps the most disheartening part of a *Future Readiness* group was a discussion about voting and voting rights. It showed me that the shelter residents had become completely uninterested in the system that controls their lives. They can barely keep up with raising their kids and keeping them clothed, fed, and housed. Why would they want to bother with the complexity of politics?

The voter registration card became such a big issue because Susan had apparently applied for one numerous times. She'd never gotten the card back after she registered to vote. For Naomi, it was a whole different matter. She said that being able to vote didn't matter to her. She said it was because she doesn't know the difference between being a Republican or Democrat. She also wasn't interested in the news. She and several of the other girls chimed in and said: "Yeah, what do you hear about anyway? That somebody died in Iraq?" I responded by saying...well, there is no war in Iraq anymore. The troops came home in December. Again, a silent chasm opened up between us. They stared at me like I had said something unusual. I said: "the war in Iraq is over." They were utterly uninterested. I shifted the conversation. Allison said that she was not interested in hearing about complex things. It was why she didn't watch the news. (Field Note February 27, 2012)

Ralph DaCosta-Nunez said it took him decades to arrive at the conclusion that 40% of "recidivism"¹⁴³ is because people are not ready to take on the challenges of life that he claims are due to generational poverty (ICPH 2012:1). According to DaCosta-Nunez people who return to shelter have not had the time to be prepared in many ways, and are even infantile in how they approach life. They are not able to find their way through the maze of life's options. He suggested the concept of long-term shelter that he called Tier III shelters that would protect families for a much longer time than the 45 days of Tier II emergency shelter. Shelter residents would have the needed time to process the many obstacles they are experiencing. Some of this thinking applies middle-class standards to the working poor. Have they been

¹⁴³ This is DaCosta-Nunez's word for return to shelter. The people who provide shelter often use the terminology of the incarceration system rather than calling it "return to shelter."

asked whether or not they want a middle-class life? This is where I believe much more work needs to be done, and I will address this in Chapter 10.

In the *Future Readiness* workshops, the residents of the shelter and I would always talk about an “imagined” future. They were interested in the concept, but I often found that they would shy away from a challenge. They were already stressed enough within the confines of a homeless shelter to consider a future. As Renata Saleci (TED Talk 2013) says, there is an embedded ideology of choice in an “idealized” future. In the case of the residents, there is great anxiety about making the right individual choice. Saleci says: “In today's times of post-industrial capitalism, choice, together with individual freedom and the idea of self-making, has been elevated to an ideal. Now, together with this, we also have a belief in endless progress.” She feels that the “ideology of choice” leads to the feelings of failure in the ability to make “the right” choices and taking risks, and she points to the obsession of self-making and the void of social critique it has created. External and internal constraints impact choices and this is the bind that I found myself in as well. My intentions were to “do good” with the future readiness program, but the structures of poverty management did not allow me to be successful. Risk and choice are closely tied together. Anxieties linked to the uncertainties of the future are also debilitating for the people in my study. Saleci asks:

Why do we think that we are really such masters of our lives that we can rationally make the best ideal choices that we don't accept losses and risks? And for me, it's very shocking to see sometimes very poor people, for example, not supporting the idea of the rich being taxed more. Quite often here they still identify with a certain kind of a lottery mentality.

Whether the *Future Readiness* workshop truly addressed and assisted in the reframing of possibilities for someone in a homeless shelter remains questionable. The themes that came up in my reflections and analyses of my notes point back to many of the Catch 22 situations I introduced in the introduction to this dissertation. What became evident is that there are success stories of those making their way out of the shelter and poverty, and also stories of families returning again and again to the shelter. My work uncovered such return to emergency shelter as part of the hamster wheel of welfare. The wheel spins cyclically the moment someone loses employment because low-wage work persists as the norm and welfare aid is part of the way to survive on subpar wages. Unfortunately, the threat of homelessness is not far behind. As Robert Wall, the director of *Ready Haven* agency, said in the inaugural 2013 Continuum of Care meeting, “We see a lot of people that are recycled back into the system, and they may be stable before but end up being homeless again. The feeling at that time is that we didn’t do what we needed to do.”

A workshop like *Future Readiness* was not intended to meet the multi-dimensional problems that parents who are repeatedly homeless may have. The workshop was only meant to “ready people for their future.” To address these multi-dimensional needs, the institutions that address the needs of people without housing have to be less involved with their survival and envision and implement what it would take to diminish homelessness and the need for emergency shelter altogether.

8.4 Summary

In this chapter, I discussed the challenges and welfare system requirements that faced the shelter residents, which I uncovered as I spoke to shelter residents about the idea of being ready for a future. In groups, I discussed possible opportunities for life after the shelter and I saw that most successes from some of the members of the group would soon be erased because many they were not able to complete the goals set while at the shelter. There was just not enough time. Furthermore, the precarity of their lives after the shelter will only increase. They eventually would have to work several jobs to make ends meet if they want to be free from the constraints and scrutiny of the welfare system.

The good intentions of the people who run these kinds of groups and workshops make no difference because of the structural constraints the workfare system impose on the homeless and welfare population. In turn, the working poor have no choice but to accept the first available job they find so that they can continue to receive aid.

In the next chapter, I follow some of the residents into the neighborhood surrounding the shelter. There, the precariousness of their lives and their children's lives increases when they cannot find work that is not considerate of women who are also raising a family. There is no sympathy for the responsibilities of motherhood. There are rarely happy endings because poverty in Centerton has become deeply embedded in the lives and lifestyles of families who repetitively experience homelessness.

SCENE: *A Visit to Noreen*

It is sunny and I walk down Division. I notice the ragged face of street. It's open cavities grin widely. The black top parking lots are holes in the string of buildings. I wonder what was there before urban renewal took the teeth away. Most of the buildings hail from late nineteenth through early twentieth century. I find the street and turn down. I pass an innocuous house and then the Community Center before I see that I've gone too far down the street. I already reached #36 and I need #13. I turn back and poke my head into the Community Center to ask anyone if they know where number 13 might be. The man at the desk looked at me with a bit of mistrust until I ask for a friend who I know works there. He then realizes that I'm not a stranger and is a bit more forthcoming. I realize that the innocuous house I passed is the one I need. I climb the gray porch steps of an early 1920s Victorian. Across the street is the Baptist Church parking lot and the Sunoco Station with a mini-mart. I ring the top buzzer. A young man cautiously opens the door.

"Is Noreen here?"

"Yeah, she's upstairs"

"Tell her it's Anezka."

Noreen comes bounding to the top of the stairs. "I was asleep...I can sleep in now...Hello!" I say: "I was passing by and I thought I would congratulate you on your new house."

"I thought you were the furniture people. We've been waiting for the shelter to deliver furniture."

I introduce myself to the young man, Jared, who I find out is the "Baby Daddy" of Noreen's first kid. I say congratulations.

I walk upstairs with Noreen when the baby cries. It turns out that he has a poopy diaper. She goes to the closet and pulls out several sets of diapers. She hands Jared one and says: "For the other one. I'll do the baby's poop diaper." She takes the smiling Albert and puts him on the airbed. There is no furniture in the room save for a refrigerator and a sink. Albert is a happy baby and smiles a giant toothless smile at me while his mother liberates him from a giant, messy, and stinky diaper. A few moments later, Noreen orders Jared to take the smelly diaper outside.

Chapter 9

Post-shelter life

9.1 Overview

In this chapter, I will revisit the hamster wheel of welfare, illustrating how the recurrence of poverty continues to be present in some of the people's post-shelter lives. The most challenging aspect of studying this population is that they are tired of the interference from the system and because they met me at the emergency shelter, most people are wary of contact with me. After the shelter, the women are free from breathalyzing, monitoring, mandated workshops, and heavily scheduled days. Instead of the emergency shelter case managers, their lives are nevertheless still monitored by a DSS "worker" because they are usually still on some welfare support. Therefore, part of my study was purely based on the willingness of the participants to invite me into their homes. The visits that I was able to make to the homes of the participants were often sporadic because they only called when they needed my assistance with something. My university teaching schedule did not allow me to be available on a regular basis. Also, the participants were not interested in adding me to their lives as a friend except for two women, Aisha and Anna. I am still in communication with Aisha. She moved to another city, but we contact each other via Facebook and on the phone every once in a while. Anna is in my life because she is my associate in a women's mentoring group. This is the

beginning of the third year of mentoring with Anna and I want to bring the work that I am doing with her for a future study.

In this chapter, I demonstrate further how labor subordination and structural impediments limit opportunities for some of the women. All the women in my study were familiar with being low-wage workers in retail establishments or part-time health care workers for Excelsior County. These were the way Aisha, Ida, and Anna supplemented their welfare checks.

While some of the participants in post-shelter life succeed in training and education programs, women with young children have a difficult time committing to training that must accompany paid work, which is required by DSS. In fact, the PRWORA reform continues the English Poor Law tradition of poverty and labor management. The English poor laws kept the poor in workhouses to earn their keep or to be let out as low-wage workers. Similarly, the modern system holds the working poor in homeless shelters where they are forced to get any job to work off their grant. The point of welfare-to-work programs is for welfare recipients to literally “work off their grant.” Thus, this population is doubly vulnerable to the instability of low-wage retail work and the need to hold onto those jobs. With the federal minimum wage still set at \$7.25 and even New York State’s minimum wage climbs to \$9.00 (starting December 31, 2015), these wages are still not close to what a living wage needs to be for Excelsior County (June 2015).¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁴ National Conference of State Legislatures Table of State Minimum Wages

The five women whose stories I partially tell in this chapter are Noreen, 23 (Mixed-more than two races); Serena, 22 (African-American); Ida, 37 (Mixed Race-more than two races); Aisha, 39 (African-American); and Anna, 52 (Hispanic). These women headed up families who suffered through an episode of homelessness. All five had goals that were actionable, and all had plans in place to fulfill those goals. When I asked what she wanted to do for a career, Noreen immediately answered that she wanted to be a registered nurse. Serena wanted to be a PINS (Person in Need of Supervision) officer for the courts. Ida wanted to be a French Cuisine Chef. Aisha wanted to work with children with disabilities. Anna wanted to be a Human Services advocate. They confronted the following common barriers blocking their access to opportunities to reach their goals: a lack of affordable childcare, lack of a living-wage job, a need for reliable transportation (Serena, Ida, Anna), and a lack of proper training (Noreen, Ida). A constant fear of custody battles for Noreen and Anna complicated their day-to-day struggle. Also, Anna tried to avoid having her grandchildren placed in foster care because she had been in a negative experience with foster care as a child. For Serena and Anna, college opportunities were like walking through a minefield of college loans and debt that become obstacles rather than opportunities.

The chapter examines 1) the common obstacles of homeless families transitioning into independent shelter; 2) the different stories of women who left the shelter, which continue to show how they are living in poverty and could return to shelter again; 3) the “success” stories. I use success in quotation marks to

highlight how residents may have left the shelter, with some training, and a job. They are still dealing with structural circumstances that limit their choices and possibilities. Escape from poverty is impossible in a structurally hostile environment dedicated to a punitive status quo not meant to create social mobility. Small steps are being taken to train a few of the shelter residents in my study for limited opportunities such as Human Service, Certified Nurse's Assistants, and Criminal Justice (police) work funded by the government; however, the overall Excelsior County economy still rests on retail and low-end health care and thus low-wage work.

9.2 Common characteristics of cases

The five cases of single mothers' struggle have shared characteristics. While in drawing on the resources provided by the DSS, the women were pressured to return to the workforce as soon they could to "work off their grant." Overall, the problems that caused the family to be homeless were not adequately addressed during their time at the shelter. Preventive measures for possible repeat use of shelter were also not part of their post-shelter recovery. These conditions set up the possibility that the family will return to the shelter when the next crisis develops.

All five women were set up in subsidized housing, which is a practice that the welfare system grants to assist people to return to self-sufficiency.

However, living with the burden of being publicly scrutinized in a shelter or being on long term safety net support, is not conducive to empowering the poor to choose

their own way to live their lives with the complex choices and crises that life inevitably brings. The poor come to be defined in society by what is done to them rather than what they do for themselves as Simmel and Coser emphasize (1997:181-182). This paternalistic solution is the current protocol in emergency shelter programming, rather than giving the poor their own agency in their own housing. The system also decides that it is good that the poor take “any job.” Again, this is “good” for the poor because their low-wage work is considered to be “better than [doing] nothing.” This directive aid demeans and disempowers recipients.

All five women were born in Centerton. Two of the women, Serena, and Anna grew up mostly in foster care. They were never fully adopted. Ida, Noreen, and Aisha had contentious relationships with single mothers. Noreen had a father. He was around only sporadically because he was a drug addicted. With only their single mothers to raise them, their childhoods were full of instability and uncertainty.

The women had obtained various levels of education and training. Aisha had a GED and a few certifications. Anna graduated high school, and spent time in and out of college, taking one course, one semester at a time. Serena graduated high school and is having a similar experience with her college education. Both Anna and Serena do not consistently take courses but do one or two in a year when they can. Noreen and Ida did not finish high school although Noreen was almost through her senior year before she quit school. Ida demonstrated to me that she could barely read or use a computer; she didn’t make it through her first year in high school, and this would need to be addressed by possibly screening her for a learning disability.

When Ida was in prison, she said that she was not allowed to pursue education because she had committed a violent crime. I am unsure whether this is true or not.

The women all had employment backgrounds; most had numerous jobs that did not last longer than a few months to a year. As I demonstrated when discussing my *Future Readiness* workshops, everyone knows how to work; everyone knew how to get work and keep work. Aisha was a teacher's aide for physically and mentally challenged children. Anna was a personal care assistant. Serena and Noreen worked numerous retail service jobs. And, Ida was a head cook for several years at a restaurant that unfortunately went out of business.

Despite these abilities, none of the women were trained to do anything more low-wage retail and food service jobs. There was no opportunity to grow their careers. Anna and Aisha are now stable in their lives. They both have the benefit of a regular \$700 monthly check because they are disabled and in Section 8 housing. Anna has a physical disability, and Aisha suffers from severe anxiety and depression. If they make any additional money, as in the case of Aisha, 30% of those wages are garnered for housing. Her HUD voucher pays for the difference in market-rate rent on the apartment. Anna doesn't have a job and she can go to school fulltime. She did attempt to get a job, but she was unsuccessful because of her incarceration record. Ida was also having difficulty finding work because she was incarcerated for a violent crime. Serena works hard as a low-wage worker, holding several part-time jobs. She relies on welfare subsidies to help fund childcare and food stamps. They all receive Medicaid. Serena has tried to go to school, but she is unable to stick to her

plans. Her life is one crisis after another because of conflict-laden relationships with her biological mother and the father of her child. Noreen doesn't have a high school diploma or a GED, and this is a handicap, as she looks for decent paying work. Her attempt at going to the local tech school in Phlebotomy was obstructed because of its \$2,000 cost. Noreen did not want to go to the CNA training offered by the Office of Employment and Training (OET) because of the time commitment and the care needed for her very young (under 4) children. The OET provides training when funds are available for specific jobs, but not Phlebotomy. CNAs are the backbone of the local health care industry although the work is physically and emotionally taxing (Wiener, Squillace, Andersen, and Khatutsky 2009). Because of the high turnover, the OET is always willing to train more low-income women for these jobs. According to Noreen, because she has four young children under five, the DSS looked at her case and concluded that it is more cost efficient to have Noreen stay at home with the kids than forcing her to work.¹⁴⁵

The 2015 Harvard Civil Rights-Civil Liberties Law Review focused on stabilization of low-wage work. This report focuses on worker's rights as protected by unions. The reason for the focus on the retail industries is because of its use of nonstandard scheduling and lack of employee input on their schedules. They also mark the retail sector as a growth industry. Additionally, these employers hire part-timers so that employees will not work over 40 hours; thus, no one is paid overtime. The new Affordable Care Act requires employers to provide health care for workers

¹⁴⁵ This is what Noreen expressed to me when we talked, but I did not verify her claim.

over 30 hours so that employers don't have to pay their share of health care. Poor and working class parents are particularly vulnerable to non-standard scheduling practices. They have to take the precarious employment to receive their benefits.

Again, this is part of the structural mill of low-wage work in which these women are trapped. They were often only able to see the short-term crisis of having lost everything and having to build their lives anew. They had no idea whether any of the career-setting goals were meaningful in the crisis they were trying to overcome. Nevertheless, they all had dreams of being independent and trained so that they could be in a job or career that would make them enough money to live comfortably. Anna had led her life as what she told me was a "middle-class" mother. The kids could have anything they wanted. Of course, in Anna's case, this was a disastrous goal that she achieved by running up a shared credit card with a person who she worked for as a Personal Care Assistant.

What I found in my study on homelessness in a small city similar conditions that Deborah Connolly (2000) and Sharon Hays (2003) also found in their work with homeless families and people on welfare benefits, which are childhood instability, lack of education, engagement in low-wage work. These often decide the turning points for this population that also stem from cyclical and generational poverty Connolly describes the precarious lives (Chapter 2) as a list of four ways of understanding the lives of the mothers. She uses them as different levels of impact and importance. They are drugs, violence, mothering, and childhood. I saw these four themes within my work. As was described in Chapter 2, many of the families in

the poorest neighborhoods in Centerton and often suffered as children or adults through the Crack Epidemic of the 80s and 90s. Concurrent with the Crack epidemic was the decline in employment when the manufacturing and computer industries left the area. Thus, sites and the management of poverty were ingrained into Centerton, its economy, and its infrastructure impacting the lives of the women in my study.

The stereotypical poor mother is often a woman who has never been assessed properly by the systems that purport to help her, which can be seen in the case of Ida, and possibly Noreen. Addressing issues affecting people in stressful conditions as well as providing them proper care and assistance requires time and personal attention. This kind of time is rarely available because welfare law priorities rush clients into “work first” (Taylor 2008:76). Overcoming years of immobility due to poverty requires the kind of time and close attention considered too luxurious for the systems of care currently available in the U.S. Often, women like the five I describe here, as heads of families, are stereotyped as “social problems” by the middle and upper class. There is no compassion or understanding for women who have children out of wedlock at a young age, lack education, and are dependent on the Safety Net (Hays 2003:190).

The five women are close to or have exceeded the federal lifetime limit of welfare aid of 60 months. Because they live in New York State, where welfare benefits are extended beyond federal limits, their subsidies now come out of the Excelsior County budget. Additionally, there are county and municipal Community

Development Block Grants that assist in housing and caring for the poor (these have been discussed previously). These grants are limited in scope and often do not only go to help the poor. They are used for other broader problems such as infrastructure updates like road maintenance (See Dilger and Boyd 2014).¹⁴⁶

The five women represent the “new homeless” population that are families of women and their children rather than single adults and the elderly. A similar conceptualization of homelessness by Barrett Lee, Kimberly Tyler and James Wright (2010) and the renewed interest in the persistent and growing problem of family homelessness especially since the 2008 mortgage and banking crisis (Lee 2010:505). They also note that modern U.S. homelessness while still predominantly affecting single men now affects children more so than the elderly. The aim of their article was to strengthen policy as it pertains to prevention and to point out how homelessness are both macro and micro issues such as housing and health problems found in this population. The most valuable observation they make, which I see reflected in the observations I made during my study, is that structural macro forces such as precarious work conditions put great pressure on the working poor, who are already vulnerable and living in personally stressful conditions. In Chapter 2, I

¹⁴⁶ Dilger and Boyd of the Congressional Research Service wrote on Description of Article/Report, “Block Grants Perspectives and Controversies.” “Congress has also increased programmatic flexibilities for some categorical grants, making them look increasingly like block grants. This blurring of characteristics can present challenges when analyzing the federal grants-in-aid system, as agencies and researchers may disagree over definitions and, as a result, reach different conclusions about block grants and their impact on American federalism and program performance. This blurring of characteristics should be kept in mind whenever generalizations are presented concerning the impact various grant types have on American federalism and program performance (2014:4).

showed how the housing crisis is one of the main reasons for family homelessness in Excelsior County. As Lee et al. (2010) caution, the failure to look at macro structural dislocation data of families, challenges how homelessness is ameliorated by a community's generosity that "help" the poor. Is the fact that there are 50 Food Pantries in the county an object of pride? Are the "nice" emergency shelters truly a sign of compassion?

Also, pathways to homelessness consistently point to long-term effects of childhood abuse or instability as the very small sample of my data show as well (Lee 2010:509). Other personal or micro-level shocks such as domestic violence, mental or physical instability add to the already dire situation of parents who must face unemployment and unaffordable housing. The authors agree that there is a great need for less restrictive assessments of homeless families. They quote "the homeless are broken and must be repaired before they can be trusted to succeed in permanent housing." Instead, they recognize that housing should be a fundamental right of citizenship (p.512).

9.3 Biographies

I met Noreen, Serena, Ida, and Aisha at the shelter, and then Anna through a woman-to-woman mentorship program. Some were new to homelessness like Noreen, Ida, and Serena. Anna and Aisha experienced a life of cyclical homelessness. I condensed many notes to tell the stories of these women's lives as succinctly as possible.

Noreen told the story of her father's dependence on drugs and alcohol, and how she cared for him and sometimes enabled him. Her childhood was one memory after another of his substance abuse. She watched her father deteriorate in a silent kind of violence against himself. Noreen's life took a turn after her father's death before she finished high school. She never regained the momentum to finish or take advantage of training before she aged out of public school opportunities at 21. Her mother did not manage the loss of her husband well and from this interview, she missed the mother she had known throughout her childhood:

(A=Anezka)

N: Because my dad died and she went, she did a complete 360.

A: What do you mean?

N: Like, I've been like, when he died, she started just everything, from being a mom who cooked, cleaned, cared for her children, you know, was a great role model. I wanted to be just like her. You know what I mean, and now it's like she gets drunk, comes home drunk, 2-3 in the morning, parties every night, hangs out with girls that are my age. Yeah, I can't deal with all that (Interview with Noreen March 19, 2012)

Noreen didn't see any new possibility for herself other than working in one low-wage retail job after another. Noreen had her first child at 18. By the time I met her at the shelter, she had three children. She had been living with her mother, but she disagreed with her mother's selection of boyfriends. Noreen took it upon herself to report to DSS with her children. After a stay at the shelter, she moved to a subsidized apartment only a few blocks away in a ramshackle house on the edge of Centerton's worst neighborhood. I visited Noreen for a period of three months, and it was very clear that she was overwhelmed with the care of her three small children who were all under three. I also witnessed her struggle through several crises of not

having enough food or diapers.¹⁴⁷ At one point, she asked her mother to get groceries lending her the family's food stamps to do so. Her mother did not bring anything back in time. She showed me the bare refrigerator and said that she only had one more day of food left for the kids. Inside the refrigerator, all I saw were a couple of bottles of orange soda.

Noreen became a participant in a custody battle between a couple she had met at the shelter before she left. The couple had the same amount of children as Noreen, and they took advantage of her generosity. She also did not keep her apartment clean and her friends were constantly in and out. Some would bring their children. The friends would leave sinks full of dishes and garbage cans that were overflowing with trash.

Another time-consuming task was that Noreen was also in a constant and distracting custody battle with the father of two of her children. In addition, her mother wanted to have custody of the children. Noreen had to attend child custody hearings. There were a few times during the time when we met that nursing and health care service nurses came to teach Noreen parenting skills. She complained about how heavily she was scheduled with daily visits from one or another agency:

(A=Anezka)

N: I have a stupid worker coming every day at 1, it used to be 1:30, but now she's up to 1, and it's stupid that...

A: What is that? Wait, wait, wait, what is the stupid thing you do?

¹⁴⁷ Because there is no cash payment from TANF, diapers are a commodity that every young mother must somehow seek out from charities, friends, or family. This is a serious and understudied problem among poor mothers (Smith, Kruse, Weir and Goldblum 2013 and Cambria 2014)

N: She just talks, like,
A: Like, what is it?
N: I don't know, she just talks about like, well she just....
A: Is she a nurse?
N: No. The nurse – that's another thing, the nurse comes, too.
A: How often does the nurse come?
N: Every other Wednesday. I have ...this freakin' thing is full [referring to her calendar]. I'm always....
A: So, they've got you covered.
N: Yeah, because, like, I swear, I was just like, I'm pretty sure there's a crime out here of children getting beat...I'm so sarcastic when it comes to them [the children's father's family] because they don't, they don't get it, they [DSS] don't. And I'm like, so I'm thinking it's the baby's mom, his [father's] sister and her two kids, his brother and his child and his wife. There's the little brother, and him, and they're all living in a one-bedroom apartment. That's perfectly fine, you know?
(referring to the CPS custody case the father of her child was pressing) (Interview with Noreen May 12, 2012).

The situation seemed very tenuous to me as well. Noreen would only call me to come over sporadically, so I never knew the whole story. In a conversation with one of the case managers, she told a similar story with a different client. The system thinks that there is a need for a high degree of scrutiny with the care of these children.

L: There were home visits by caseworkers every day of the week for her, and special programs. And...there was family therapy and then there were individual programs for all of her kids because they were special needs. And nothing was working. The resources that were spent on this woman alone and they're still spending, and they will be forever. Because for some people, there's no solution. And for some people, they don't want the solution, or they're incapable of taking the solution. Sometimes, I think, like in a situation like hers. It's how much? You throw enough at the wall that's gonna stick...none of these programs were working for her. They're, I can't even remember the names...there's a myriad. Every day caseworkers were at her house. Every day, every night. (Interview with Lana March 8, 2013)

In a case like this, the main objective seems to be that the system thinks that the children need a better situation than a single mother with too many needy children. The judgment was made that the mothers in both cases were endangering their children. Noreen's lack of food in the refrigerator is a lack of planning on her part.

There did not seem to be that kind of planning and executive management support for her, however. She was on her own and often just seemed overwhelmed.

In the first month of my visits, Noreen appreciated my encouragement and assistance as she worked to finish her GED. The GED program was right next door to her apartment. Eventually, she told me that she just wanted to take the test, because she had taken it before and she felt that she could pass. We got her an appointment to take the test, but she ended up not taking the exam.

We discussed what was needed for her to become a registered nurse. She bragged about taking care of her grandfather who needed care when he was in a nursing home, and Noreen was visiting. Noreen bragged that she was better than the people who were trained to take care of him. She then asked me if she could do training in phlebotomy because she had experience putting needles into veins. When we investigated the nursing program at the tech school, we found out the cost of getting a Phlebotomy Certificate was \$2,000, and it is one of the courses DSS does not subsidize (Field Note May 22, 2012)

We worked on her resume together, but she often called the process a useless exercise. She was blasé about remembering her employment past, and it took me a while to jog her memory to get the sequence of jobs and transitions. She began work at a string of different retail shops in the Regional Mall area when she was 16. She was a cashier, a stock clerk, and a sales associate but she would often leave jobs because of disputes with her bosses.

(A=Anezka)

A: So for all of these jobs [there were about seven on her resume], what did you do, you just walked in and said I'm a cashier; I'd like to work?

N: No, I filled out applications, they called me back, and I had an interview. And then, they like. They hired me. Actually, before Hallmark, I actually did just walk in, and they're like, you're hired.

A: Okay, so they were desperate. So, what was the job before Hallmark? We need to go back at least five years so, just 2006.

N: Um, McDonald's but we're not going to count that one because it was just for a day. But I worked at Burger King.

A: Where's that, which one?

N: The one.... I don't know if it was Wal-Mart or Dollar Tree, and then it was Burger King. Like I'm going back...I think we should put Wal-Mart first. Cause we're just going to go down until (pause)

A: And that was, again (interrupts)

N: Yeah.

A: And what did you do for Wal-Mart?

N: Stocking.

A: Oh, stock clerk.

N: I was called sales associate there.

A: Why did you leave?

N: (very low voice) Because the manager got in my face. And I was like, I didn't know, like how to handle that situation at the time. So I...I just, I thought, I felt like I just give him a job! (She sits up and laughs a bit triumphantly.)

A: At the time (before the 2008 recession) jobs were plenty.

N: Yeah and I wish I would have just made some right decisions about some of these jobs. (Interview with Noreen March 19, 2012)

On one of my last visits with Noreen, I met her new boyfriend who seemed not to mind helping her care for the children. Because the children were young, the DSS worker did not force Noreen to work right away. I later heard from Noreen when she wanted a good lawyer because her mother had won custody of the children again, and she wanted legal help getting her kids back. I happened to drive by her house a few months later and saw Noreen and her boyfriend exiting their apartment. I stopped the car to greet her, and she seemed happy to see me. When I asked, "How are you," she pointed to her belly in response. She was highly pregnant, and she announced it to me triumphantly. Noreen was classified as one of the

“typical” mothers who make “bad” decisions even when she was at the shelter. The assessments that had been made about her behavior cast her into a never-ending, distracting, and time-consuming battle for her children.

Serena’s mother was a drug addict, and the State took Serena and her siblings away from her when they were young. Serena spent her most of her childhood going in and out of foster care. Her dream job is to become a Person in Need of Supervision (PINS) officer. She told me that a PINS officer helped her when she was a child, negotiating the court system. This experience had a major impact on Serena’s life, and so she wanted to help children in the system the same way she had been helped,

She always hoped that her mother would reestablish their family and take her children back. When I met her, she had just gotten in touch with her mother who unfortunately continued to be a negative force in her life.

(A=Anezka)

A: Is she still on drugs now?

S: She's in a domestic violence shelter, but she is clean right now.

A: Oh you say right now because it's temporary.

S: No, I'm praying and hoping that it's permanent because she really needs to get herself together, not for us, but for herself, you know, but in the past she has been into rehab and stuff, and then relapsed. So I hope this time she's serious....I just chose to have a relationship with her.

A: Why was that?

S: Cause she's my mom, like I always wanted a relationship with my mom, and it's been hard in foster homes because you don't always fit in, you feel out of place because they already have a family...(Interview with Serena September 29, 2012)

While in foster care, Serena was able to work very hard during her high school years and graduated a year early. *Serena* was very close to the people in her church when she lived with a foster family. They encouraged her to go to college.

S: At first it was fine. I only had 2 classes and it was like college, like a readiness class, and then psychology, and it was fine, and then it got to the point where I wasn't having any...I didn't have no transportation to get there, especially with I think the psychology one was on a Saturday, so it was kind of difficult for me to get a ride.

She made the unfortunate decision to drop out of the semester without telling anyone, and this is when she started to accrue debt.

S: I didn't know nothing about college. All I know is, people were telling me that's the right thing to do and that it would better fit me, it's better than high school.

After leaving school, she reconnected with her biological mother, who ended up encouraging her to get into a relationship with a much older man.

S: And that was my transportation there [to college] and then it stopped. And then I would have to quickly find another way, I would take a taxi to go there, whatever, so it wasn't really guaranteed transportation, and then it was a bad relationship, it was kind of abusive, and I got into the relationship through my mom, and I was only 17 and this guy was like, late 40s, going on 50; it's embarrassing, but yeah, and then it wasn't a good thing, and I felt like that kind of distracted me too, away from school.

I asked if there was anyone who tried to tell her to stay in school.

S: My brother, that's it. But, um besides that, nobody really sat down...like if I knew how...not that I'm saying I didn't know that school was serious, but if I would have knew how serious and what was going on, how it would affect me in the future...I didn't know, nobody sat down and told me. The caseworker sure didn't, it was just, like, okay, now we have to move you to another place, and they just moved me. Nobody really talked about the school part or anything...If I would have known and somebody sat me down and told me, I probably wouldn't like even went to college. Like I said, it was a lot of people just pushing me.

After working in retail jobs, she made another attempt at getting a college education. Then she fell in love with a man from Africa through her church. Soon,

they were married. At first, she was still in school, but when she gave birth to a little boy, Serena stopped going to classes. Her husband became abusive, and she suspected that he had married her only to obtain a green card. After leaving him, Serena was living with a roommate DSS has recommended to her. She had a dispute with her roommate, and she landed in the shelter where I met her.

Serena and I spent hours figuring out the confusion of her college education which was a few years worth of half-started semesters for which she owed a substantial sum of money. However, Serena ended up leaving the shelter very abruptly, interrupting our discussion of her education and training. She disregarded the shelter's 9:30 PM curfew several times because of pressure from her birth mother.

Field Note 10/13/12: Unfortunately, in a classic flaw of decision-making, Serena missed curfew three times. Both Cecile and Milagros spoke to her about it. They told her not to even bother going to DSS for help because Serena "caused her own homelessness." She was supposed to find a place to live on her own or to just crash on someone's floor. Serena went to DSS because she had nowhere to turn. DSS placed her in the motel. She has to check in very two weeks as they reassess the situation.

I arrive at the motel in the afternoon at about 2:30. Serena answers my 2nd knock. She had not answered my text messages or several phone calls. The baby is not with her but with the father. Serena looks deeply depressed. She looks like she's been crying. She says: "I'm sad...I'm sad because me and my baby are in a motel."
"What was it that made you make that decision to be late? You knew the consequences of breaking curfew."
"I don't know..."
"I would love to know how you made that decision. I always say: chocolate/vanilla choose!"
Serena smiles at me wanly. "I don't know...I don't know why I did it."

We talk about plans.

We talk about school. We talk about the police academy. We talked about what is ahead-- what must be done. But Serena looks really depressed throughout the conversation. I wondered how much is sinking in.

She's still working at the mall. She's on the 4:30 AM to 8 AM shift She gets back and forth to work by taking a \$10 cab. A woman, who is paid by DSS for her services, picks her baby up the night before. This woman also helped her move out of the shelter. Some of Serena's stuff is still in the woman's van.

We discuss options. How is she going to get out of here? Share a room with someone? She needs to ask everyone she knows. She needs to use the fragile network of people she has. She was happy to hear from me, and she wants me to keep checking in with her. I will pursue the Section 8 connection to see what we can do there. Apparently, all the affordable housing in the county is taken. There are no openings.

I ask if she needs anything--I'm there for maybe all of 20-30 minutes. No--she doesn't need anything. She doesn't need a ride anywhere. Besides, she doesn't have her Food stamps card...her foster mother is using it. I warn her that is fraud. She should not do things like that. She will jeopardize her ability to get Food stamps.

I see this sharing of food stamps with others as well...like Noreen...sharing her food stamps with her mother. I give Serena a big hug. She looks really sad and hopeless.

Noreen and Serena would be considered irresponsible and bad decision-makers. They both had some guidance: from the system's nurses in Noreen's case and the church in Serena's case. However, as Sharon Hays points out, no "work first" as in the case of Serena's working a night job or "rehabilitation" policies as in the case of Noreen's over-management of her life, are successful in what they claim a "good" life would be:

All these theoretical frames, most of them devised by scholars who have never spent time with welfare recipients in their lives, do not provide answers to why so many American women and children end up on welfare (Hays 2003:177).

The consideration that many young mothers end up on welfare is also tied to their race and gender. Both Noreen (mixed race) and Serena (African-American) were from families with cyclically poor mothers who were both not capable of guiding their daughters. Whether Noreen and Serena would benefit from a supportive dose

of one-on-one mentorship remains a question that may be answered by further research.

Ida's childhood was filled with anger. Ida thinks her mother didn't like her because she was her mother's only child. Her father abandoned them when Ida was a baby. Growing up, Ida was surrounded by strong women, aunts, grandmothers and her mother. They were all very religious, hardworking, and upstanding individuals. When Ida began to rebel and deal drugs as a young teen, her mother disowned her. She was an outcast from the time that she was fifteen. Ida took to a life of sleeping on couches and floors of friends and family homes. Ida experienced profound disdain for her drug dealing profession, which shamed her family.

Ida: Well and you know what it is? I scarred, you know, basically, you know I scarred the name of the family, and I don't think that they'll ever, ever get over that, and then the second thing was that I didn't become exactly like them, like the church, and they're very into the church, and their Bible, and choir, and I didn't turn out that way, I turned out to be the drug dealer, and I don't think they're ever, ever, going to, you know, get over that I guess.... like I could have a thousand dollars every day in my pocket and diamonds and horses and a million cars and they will always look at me like I'm the drug dealer and controlling everybody, that's what they used to tell me. You're killing innocent people, and I don't want your drugs money, and yeah, they used to say this to me every day. That I'm killing little kids, and I'm killing people, and it's hard, you know.... (Interview with Ida September 24, 2012).

Ida had three children from different fathers. Her mother raised her oldest because Ida was caught and imprisoned for four years.¹⁴⁸ She was arrested for drug dealing and violent theft. After prison, she had a second child who lives with the father. Ida's youngest child is almost five. After her last child's birth, Ida gave up drug dealing although she said it was the easiest way to make money for the least

¹⁴⁸ Grandmothers raising their first-born happened in the cases of Ida, Aisha, and Anna.

amount of effort. However, if she were caught again, she would spend a much longer time in prison.

Before coming to the *Ready Haven* family shelter Ida and her child were in a motel for six months. Ida and I got along from the moment we met, and when she left the shelter, she wanted to stay in touch with me. The summer after Ida left the shelter, we met about eight times. We went to the library to use a computer; we worked on her resume; we applied for online jobs. She often could not read the screens so I read them to her. I asked if she had been tested for dyslexia because she could not even spell the shortest words without reversing the order of letters. She said that she had never been assessed for that by anyone.

Ida's troubles could be like Rainwater's classification of the poor as a moral category or as a stereotype of deviance and the "disinherited." (Rainwater 1967:8). She was a violent criminal, and she had "scarred" the family name. However, the educational system and the criminal justice structures eventually caught and imprisoned a "bad" person like Ida. For Ida, it increased her mistrust of everyone, including all the emergency shelter staff. To the staff's great surprise, Ida got along with me. In our conversations, she shared with me that she just needed another break to get a job as a cook heading up a kitchen. She had been really good in her work as a line-cook and had good recommendations from the places she worked. Ida was persistent in her search for work. However, she eventually succumbed to the pressure of the DSS office and took a coffee shop counter job rather than going to the technical culinary school and getting her GED.

Ida has been on welfare the since the birth of her youngest. She has worked in retail shops as a clerk and as a cook, having to lie about her incarceration record to get work. While she was living in the DSS subsidized motel, we discussed how she lost her last job and her chance at an education.

(A=Anezka)

A: Were you trying to get work the entire time?

I: Oh, I worked. I worked. I worked at the hotel!

A: Oh that's right.

I: Yeah, I worked when I was there.

A: But that didn't last long.

I: It didn't, it didn't, I was only working there a couple of months-less than a couple of months-but before I went to the shelter, then they rehired me back; I was still on the payroll and I only worked for a month, and then that was it.

A: Did they ever tell you why they didn't..

I: Because I called out one day, I called out on a Saturday, because I was sick, and I had documentation, plus I had my medication, and I had something that's called bronchitis or bronchial something, and that's why they never called me back. And I showed them documentation, which is a state law, they cannot fire me, or whatever it is, and I also bring in my medications, my payment of my medications, yep, and then they told that to my family, so that again, that put a damper on my family because my family went in and said, "Well, how come you won't hire my daughter back." "Oh because she called out. She called out and she didn't come in to work." And then that was it, after that... I think that's another reason why they are not as friendly as they should be to m...you know, because they think that I don't want to work and now they think that I've been...I've been out of work almost six months now. And they think, you know, and I already went to my SSI appointment for both of us, and they think that's what I'm waiting for so I don't have to work ever again.

A: What is that, what is that for?

I: Um, for her loss of hearing in one ear, and also, you know, because I believe that I do have some issues, and that's maybe why I can't get another job, you know, my dyslexia, you know, I also have anxieties, there's a lot of things that are going on....

A: Have you been to mental health for that? Have they evaluated you?

I: No, I don't think I've ever been to mental health.

A: Because you know that that is actually the steps you have to take, right?

I: No, I wasn't aware of that.

A: For SSI for adults....

I: Well, no, they said I couldn't get SSI. I couldn't get SSD or something else, but I'm trying to get something SSI...something like that, I'm trying to get...so my family thinks that I'm doing that so I can get a monthly check so I don't have to work anymore. And I think that's another reason what's putting, you know, the cloud over some issues with us, and why they don't want to...but that's not true, I'd rather work, I'm just trying something kind of going in case I don't...its been a half a year already. So I have to, I can't just rely on....

A: And also the fact that you're going to get some schooling, which is great, and that's....

I: Can't wait, yea, you have no idea,
A: And that's like less than a month away.
I: Oh my God, you have no idea how I...
A: That's going to be cool.
I: Oh my God. I cannot...
A: Did you get them [DSS] to okay that?
I: Only culinary. They wouldn't okay the GED course during the day. So, I have to go from 5 to 8[at night], but I'm not going to go from 5 to 8 there. I'm going to go to the Business Resource Center [where she can get her GED at different hours].
A: Are you going to be ok with all this? Like a transport?
I: I don't have a choice. I'm going to try to do the best I can. Eleven-thirty to two-thirty, that's going to be by main, boom, boom, boom, that's my main [job], as long as I can get there and I can get back, and I have bus card. When I get out there to get the little trolley, I have the card to get back and forth from Centerton to Grissom, I got all that. (Child: No you don't. You don't have a car.) Not a car, I said I have a card. I have the transportation [referring to her subsidized transportation card]. (Interview with Ida September 24, 2012).

This conversation demonstrates the many small steps that a person has to take to qualify for aid and to qualify for getting an education. The conversation also looks ahead at Ida's pending case for long-term disability not only for herself but also for her child who has a hearing disability. Anna and Aisha's lives turned around when they got their disability checks because it serves as a baseline of income but it takes about two years of legal battles with doctors and lawyers to qualify.¹⁴⁹ This interview also chronicles how a few months after Ida left the shelter; we succeeded to get her into a technical training program for culinary arts. At the same time, she would complete her GED. It took me weeks to get her into that program because it was only meant for high school-aged kids; I had to speak to the head of the tech

¹⁴⁹ Social Security Supplemental income applies to people with disabilities including children who are under financial duress. The disabilities have to be a long-term problem (eyesight/ hearing/ physical and mental disabilities). From my experience, many people in Centerton are on permanent disability. The Social Security Disability insurance program pays benefits to you and certain family members if you worked long enough and paid Social Security taxes.

school to make an exception. Ida wanted to complete her high school degree and then apply for a Culinary Arts College program in order to fulfill her dream of becoming a French cuisine chef. For Ida, the main obstacle was transportation. She had to transfer to several different bus systems to get to her job and her schooling.

After she left the shelter, Ida applied to every retail shop in the area of her subsidized apartment from sit-down restaurants to fast food chains to knick-knack stores within walking distance from her home. Her driver's license was revoked because she owes her child support to her mother because she has custody of her oldest son. Because she is not able to drive, the employment opportunities in the county shrink to what is within walking distance, or what can be reached via the circuitous bus system.

She was desperate to find work so that she could maintain her subsidized housing and food stamps while going to school. Here is the story of how she landed a part-time job at a coffee shop.

She would often start our visits by saying earnestly: "But you know I'm trying. I'm trying everything!"

In line at the coffee shop chain and I pay for our coffees (I got Ida one as well). Ida suddenly pipes up confidently and says: "Are there any openings here? I don't want to apply if there are no openings."

The first [counter] girl didn't really know how to answer that. A second girl comes along. She has a headset on. Ida asks again: "I'm willing to work nights and weekends..." "Nights? Oh yes! That's great! Go to the other to the shop uptown and ask for an application form and write NIGHTS at the top of your application." When we exit, Ida says: "I don't know what happened to me but with you standing next to me, I got really confident and opened up my mouth." As we drive through town, Ida points to all the places where she applied for a job. She said that she went on foot and knocked on every door. She points to a tobacconist: "Even there, I would have had to work under the table."

We drive back to the north side of town. We get the application and sit in the car to fill it out. Ida copies all the information on her resume (that we crafted at the shelter) onto the application form.

"I don't want to give them my resume. I think that may be why I don't get called back at the restaurants. I've got way too much experience and then they're scared that I'll cost too much." Over her shoulder, I see her jotting down what she was paid at her previous jobs and I see that none of the jobs paid more than \$9.00 an hour. She shows me the application. I remind her to write "NIGHTS" at the top. Then I point to the question: Have you ever been arrested for a felony? Please Explain:

Ida says: "I never tell them about my felonies. I just hope they don't check up on me." We then drive back and drop off the application. When she pops back into the car Ida says: "I'm feeling really anxious...you know...about getting a job."

"No need to feel anxious..." "Yeah...I really want to get a job here is at least not as bad as MacDonalds or Burger King. I'm too old for those jobs...I'm almost 40! My mother says I should swallow my pride and just get any job. My aunt said that I should try Wendy's. I just don't want to settle for things. I was told that I would not be able to get DSS to pay my rent if I worked too much. I can only work about 15 hours. But maybe it's the universe or Karma or whatever that's keeping me from getting a job until I'm done with school."

A few weeks later...I drive to Grissom to visit Ida at her job at the coffee shop to drop off the gift for Sophie's fourth birthday. I park in front of the store. It is hot outside. I walk into the coffee shop and at first don't see her. She melts right into the other staff at the shop. She is dressed in a sharp coffee shop uniform and cap. She smiles at me and says:

"Hello!"

"Wow, I didn't recognize you!"

"Yup! It's me!" she says cheerfully. (Field Notes September 1, 2012).

Unfortunately, this opportunity didn't last. Ida started missing too much time at school because her job required her hours to be flexible, which interfered with her ability to attend and prepare for class. I eventually lost touch with Ida. I heard that she had lost her job because of a crisis with the father of her child, and during this time, she disconnected her phone and never contacted me again.

Aisha was born in Centerton into a family that was in a state of constant crisis because of her mother's illnesses. Her oldest brother was adopted out. After a

short stay in a foster home, Aisha went back to living with her mother and one other sister. She didn't do so well in school and often skipped class: "I was a troubled child--because of everything at home. I skipped class. I fought. I roamed the hallways" (Interview with Aisha April 11, 2011). She got pregnant at fifteen, and at sixteen, got herself to be an emancipated minor because she "couldn't take it no more" at her mother's house.

Aisha's children were from different fathers. After she was violently abused by the father of her second child, she had her first experience with homelessness in the *Ready Haven* Domestic Violence shelter. This bout of domestic violence led to her receiving lifetime disability support. Her mother took responsibility for Aisha's oldest child because Aisha chose to leave Centerton for another town where she led a relationship that led to a more stable life. She started a business in her home to care for other people's children. Her third child was a surprise because she thought that she had passed her childbearing years.

After her relationship in another city had fallen apart, Aisha returned to Centerton. She was living in a basement apartment that she obtained through her church when the woman didn't want her living there anymore. From one day to the next, she was homeless with her two children. It was during this episode that we met at the shelter and established our long-term relationship, and eventual friendship.

After Aisha had left the shelter, her life became less dramatic; she continued to stay in touch with me. She is very involved with her church, which she always

mentions when we talk. She is also living with her new partner, Monty. They seem to be very happy together, and Monty has been a great father figure for Richie, her youngest son.

“Richie is upstairs with Monty.”

When we come to the top of the stairs, a whole bunch of slippers and shoes are lined up outside, and it says: “Shoes Off”

“Oh, I do that at my house, too.” And I pull off my boots.

“Hey Richie, look who’s here to see you!” Aisha yells. Richie comes into the living room. A very handsome middle-aged black man is watching football TV in the living room.

Everything is neat as a pin. A little kitten scampers out.

“That’s Derek’s new cat,” Aisha says.

“I’m so glad to finally meet you.” I extend my hand to Monty.

“How do you do.” (Field Notes: January 25, 2014.)

I visited Aisha about six times over the course of the dissertation. She also came to see me, and our friendship grew. Aisha knows that she has a disability check coming in. She can choose to work at a part-time job but she can afford to make less money, and she knows that she can always count on the steady check. She may make the minimum wage but the wages are hers. Her wages are not subtracted from her \$780 total SSI income because she still makes less than the \$1090 minimum in New York State.

Aisha fills me in about her and Derek’s work at United Cerebral Palsy. Aisha works 32 hours a week in addition to receiving SSI. She works as a TA at \$7.25 an hour.

“Aren’t they taking advantage of you?”

“Yes, they are.”

She tells me a bit of her story about her kids and their cerebral palsy and how much care they need her. Both Derek and Aisha work with the cerebral palsy patients. Derek does the overnight and Aisha is a TA during the day. Derek and Aisha swap the car between the shifts.

Aisha tells me that Derek is going into the recording studio. Derek assures me as he withdraws into his room: “I’m not letting it [his voice and musical talent] go to waste!” I confirm with him that he’d better not!

Monty comes in to put something in the oven. He’s cooking dinner.

"So what is it that you do, Monty? Aisha told me you are a chef."

"Yes...that's right. But you know, I'm getting old. You gotta maintain. It's difficult to hold on to a job these days."

"I go to see the Lord in his house whenever I can." (Although he didn't go to church with Aisha today but I didn't say anything). "I got enough to do with looking after these people (he points to Aisha and Richie). I got five grand kids too." Monty goes back to the living room. (Field Note: January 5, 2014.)

This happy home scene was repeated several times when I would visit.

Aisha kept her apartment very clean, almost to the point of being compulsive; however, the buildings public areas were badly maintained. During a recent visit, I made note of the following:

I went to Aisha's after missing her birthday last week. I brought a present for her of two Indian bells with wooden sounders inside. They give a beautiful sound.

I arrive at her apartment complex. It has been brutally cold out. Icicles hang from the facades of the two story buildings. I find the door to the front locked and chanced ringing one of the eight doorbells. Someone with a friendly voice asked: "Who is it?" "Anezka." I was buzzed in.

I was struck by how filthy the front hallway was. A heavy odor of old cigarette smoke overwhelmed me. The brown wall-to-wall carpet looked dirty, rumped and uncared for. I climbed the stairs to the apartment where Aisha, Richie, and Derek have been living here for almost two years now.

A neighbor watched me as I was admitted. "Sorry, I'm here to visit Aisha and Richie. Thanks for letting me in."

"No problem," she said as she closed the door.

I rang Aisha's apartment. I hear the television blaring with a cartoon. As soon as I open the door, a disheveled Aisha stands in front of me. She gives me a beautiful warm smile and a hug. Richie continues playing in the living room--he glances over but ignores me. He plays a game all by himself. As I take off my coat, he dances over (literally) and says: "My cat ate all the fish."

"Yeah," Aisha says..."The cat ate all the fish."

I give the small present to Aisha with a birthday card that says something about being a dreamer...that all dreams come true. She treasures the bells and says. "Oh, this one's for

Derek..."

I tell Aisha that I don't want to take her time and that I will catch up with her when she is settled in Lancaster.

She explains the complex move to Lancaster. They will live in Monty's apartment first and then look for a two bedroom together. She describes the easy move at first--just her and Richie and their clothes. Monty's got a full apartment all set up. But his apartment is a railroad arrangement. She says it won't work for the three of them. She says that she and Monty worked out a lot of their differences. They've been together for six years already. She has worked through a lot of issues in therapy. She also thinks Monty is really important for Richie. They [Monty and Richie] have a really special bond. She wants to raise Richie with someone. She's forty-two now. It's time that she settles down with someone.

She regrets ever having left Lancaster. She is ready for it now. She wants to get away from her mother and her first-born son. She wants to get away from "the noise." She says she regrets that she should have faced her problems head-on in Lancaster. Instead, she came down here.

"Yes, I got up on my own two feet here, things worked out, but it would have been better for me to have dealt with everything in Lancaster."

I don't make the visit very long (only about ½ hour). I tell her that we'll connect over the phone and online.

As I put my coat on, I ask about her son, Robert.

"His grandmother picked him up from jail. I tried to get him a job where I work, but he never followed up. I have a little girl in my class who is in a wheel chair, and she has the same birthday as him. I told him to come over and say hello to the little girl on her birthday, which is only a few days before mine. He came over and I introduced him to my boss. They said they would talk to him, but he never followed up. It's all I can do for him."

We talk about the waste of incarceration of young Black men.(Field Notes February 8, 2014).

Aisha continues to keep in contact with me over Facebook. From the Field Note, it is apparent that Aisha's life is stable, but like so many of the families I met during this study, someone in the family is in prison.

Anna tells her story; it is one of generational poverty. Her childhood was very rough. She grew up in children's homes and with foster families. As a teen, she

left her foster family and lived with other homeless people under an overpass on the outskirts of Centerton. Her friends allowed her to use their showers. She did continue to go to Catholic High School every day. She wanted to finish school no matter what, and she did. She then started college, but her plans were interrupted when she got married and had her first child. Of the five women, Anna is the only one who married. She eventually had three children, but childcare was too expensive for three young kids. She stopped going to school and worked to take care of her three young children. She and her husband were together for ten years. A violent breakup ended their relationship and she landed in the *Ready Haven* domestic violence shelter. Nevertheless, Anna is still a friend to her husband, and they help each other out from time to time.

After she left her husband, Anna began to abuse alcohol and live wildly. She still maintained her employment and supported herself and the kids. She needed welfare assistance because her husband's child support and her own paycheck were never enough. After a few years of alcohol abuse, she joined Alcoholics Anonymous. She has been sober for almost twenty years. A few years after she started her new sober life, she had another child out of wedlock. At the same time, her daughter had a child at age fifteen. Anna chose to foster her daughter's first child to help her daughter complete her education and stabilize her life.

Life was stable for a time; Anna worked as a caregiver to the elderly. One client allowed her use their credit card to get gifts and clothes for Anna's children. However, the client's family found out that their mother was allowing the use of a

credit card that was in Anna's and the woman's name. They accused Anna of impersonation and fraud. Instead of allowing Anna to continue to work so that she could pay back the money she owed, the court sentenced her to three-and-a-half years in prison. After she came out of prison, she had nowhere to go, no one to rely on, and was homeless again. She lived out of her van because she could not find an apartment. Finally, her luck turned and she got a Section 8 Housing Voucher through a program that reunites recently imprisoned people with their families. Anna's youngest daughter was only nine so she qualified to go to the top of the waiting list. I met Anna through the women's mentoring organization at this juncture in her life.

When I met Anna, she had big dreams. She wanted to go to community college and finish her Associates of Arts degree. I helped her manage her college debt, similar to Serena's situation. She finally matriculated and she took on her educational journey. While she was getting her education, Anna qualified for SSD because of several medical conditions that make it difficult for her to walk. She struggled through her classes graduated with an Associates degree in Human Services. She is continuing on to a four-year school to study social work because she wants to contribute to her community and become an advocate for the poor.

One of the biggest disruptions to the stability of Anna's life is her relationship with her children and grandchildren. One of her daughters and her son are coming out of incarceration. Meanwhile, she tried to take on the care of her grandchildren. However, DSS and the court system did not deem Anna a fit caregiver for her grandchildren, and the children landed in foster care. Her incarceration and

alcoholism when she was raising her children were held against her, even though Anna had been in recovery and “clean” for twenty years.

9.4 Barriers to contact

These five women, who I met at the emergency family shelter and at the woman to woman mentoring program, continued to seek me out in order to help get training, education, or a job. At times, the pressure from a DSS worker that they must find work would prompt them to make a phone call to me instead. They thought that I would be able to help them get a job or at least some training that would qualify instead of work. My contact with all these women, except for Aisha and Anna, was sporadic over the three months after they left the shelter. As was demonstrated in this chapter, the women would most often run into a big challenge and disconnect their phone as in the case of Noreen with her pregnancy and Ida with the loss of her job and training opportunities.

During my training at *Ready Haven*, the case managers told me not to make eye contact with anyone I would see on the street that had been at the shelter. Of course, if someone wanted to make contact, I could acknowledge them. In my personal experience, people greeted me enthusiastically. Contrary to the shelter’s training, some residents are doing well and want to let you know that they are. Upon seeing one of the mothers who was in the shelter a few years after I started my fieldwork, she was so excited to tell me how she and others in her cohort were doing. Although the plans we made during our time together in the shelter’s Future

Readiness program were not yet complete, they were in progress, and she wanted to share her small successes.

One of the people I met at the shelter was in contact with others with whom I lost touch; she visited the shelter to say hello to the shelter staff. This woman later joined the women's long-term mentoring organization and was able to get training as a CNA. Below is a conversation I had with Sandra (S), who does not want to be labeled in the same category as others from the shelter. As a result, their personal networks opportunities and resources were limited.

N: "There have been others who have been through the [future readiness] program although I don't know where they are right now," I said.

S: "You mean the girls I was with at the shelter at the beginning?"

N: "Wow--you know what happened to them?"

S: "Yeah--one ended up dropping out [of college]because she needed counseling. She tried to take her own life because her boyfriend made her feel so bad. She missed so much school."

"What about Dana?"

S: "She's doing fine..."

N: "Is she still living in HUD housing?"

S: "Yeah."

N: "Tell them I said hello when you see them."

S: "Me? Hell no...I'm going on! I'm done with them. I don't want to be put in the same category as them. People are going to put us together anyway but I don't want to be associated with them anymore. I'm a loner." (N= Anezka Field Note: November 3, 2012.)

9.5 "Success" stories?

If there were any success stories to be told, I would have to define success as a much lower bar than the one set by the Crittenton Women's Union. The CWU defines someone who has succeeded in her journey from the shelter to self-sufficiency. They define self-sufficiency as complete independence from welfare subsidies. None of the women I met achieved that goal. The best that people from the shelter have been able

to do is recover from the episode of homelessness and remain stable in subsidized housing. Besides the women whose stories I draw on in this dissertation, there are a few others who have intermittently stayed in touch with me. Most often, they need a connection to a legal service or want to begin a new venture.

Serena also joined the same mentoring organization Anna joined, but her life's circumstances got in the way, so she dropped out. In December of 2014, I received a surprise telephone call from her. She told me she returned to live with her husband, and she was taking tests to join the Armed Services. She sent me beautiful pictures of herself and her son. I have not heard from her since then.

Anna and Aisha are on a more stable life course because they are living on HUD Section 8 housing vouchers, and they are receiving SSI (Aisha) or SSD (Anna). Anna takes SSD payments because she "paid into" it; she worked for it. SSI, she explained, is a long-term, lifetime disability, which she considers being a burden on the taxpayer. Anna said she was proud to have been a contributing, tax-paying member of society. She also looks forward to the day when she will not have to depend on government benefits.

Anna still gets funding for her education as well as the mentoring support from the mentoring organization and me. As we have seen from both Anna and Serena's stories, getting to college is not the problem. Staying in college and succeeding is. Court cases, transportation troubles, and childcare are the main difficulties. From my conversation with DSS about these problems, the client administrator admitted to the following:

The TANF Community College program was a DSS program that came out of their contact with the college. (She wants to make sure DSS gets credit for the program.)

Each of the candidates in the program needs case management. DSS provides case management. The administrator was hired by DSS. They (the students) need mentors because they have no support system of their own. She says that each mother has to have "Air and a spare"--have a babysitter and a spare babysitter--casual daycare is very unreliable. What if it snows and the car dies? They have to really want it and be motivated and determined to be in school.

"It's all dollars" in the end, she says.

The case manager works very closely with the TANF candidates and their professors. DSS has to know that the person is in the program because they are on a combination of local, state, federal financial aid. This is a win-win for the college. They get more candidates who are on scholarships.

DSS has to allow and fast track the student's ability to do the program. The case manager calls and DSS uses "seamless approaches" to reach students in the TANF program so that they don't fall into debt in the program by leaving the program early.

What makes the program so successful in the end is the One-on-One Mentoring.

She said she was around when welfare was a give-away (her exact words for AFDC). They used to say that women used to wait until their child was five years old and then have another one. Then reform came around with PRWORA with the work and employment restrictions. They pushed the age of the youngest child from six down to three. They now have twelve months of training limit in a lifetime of (60 months of Federal) benefits.

They also decided that degree of employability or unemployability--is determined through DSS assessment. The new PRWORA law said: everybody can do something. Everyone has some ability to work (Field Notes: July 10, 2013).

The community college program has been in existence for over thirty years and combines federal Community Development Block Grants with local and state financial aid. It continues to be an open door for TANF parents to get their Associate of Arts degree. However, just like the OET programs, the TANF programs are predicated on need fulfillment. As has been explained in the previous chapter, no creative arts or New Economy courses of study are allowed for a subsidy.

As a contrast to the limitations of the TANF community college program, the women's mentoring program is set up for special circumstances when money is an obstacle. For example, Anna needed a car so that she could get to school and work; therefore, an application for the funds was submitted and accepted. Although the car she got was very flimsy, it relieved a lot of transportation stress from Anna's life. Recently, the mentoring program helped her get into a four-year Social Work program at a local college, which initially rejected her application because of her credit card fraud case. The mentorship organization's advocate went to the college administration to support Anna to verify that the crime was non-violent. She started school the next semester. We continue our relationship in the mentoring program, and I hope to continue to listen and contribute to understanding ways of empowering people like Anna to achieve their goals.

9.6 Summary

The five women's stories show that their situations were more than "risky behaviors;" and they were not "crisis junkies," as case managers described them. What these women faced were a series of "bad" choices and circumstances, which led them to lose everything, even repeatedly on the hamster wheel of welfare. Most often the reasons for homelessness were structural: either a lack of living wage employment or the lack of affordable housing or in Anna's case a roach-infested or badly maintained apartments. A personal and individual assessment of each case to determine the micro or personal complications and obstacles evaluated without

judgment and addressed with networks of support. The few examples I have from the work with Anna and Aisha were productive. All the cases in my sample would have benefited from long-term support whether or not they were disabled. Welfare is currently set up is that it assumes that people who seek help are “undeserving” from the start. The DSS SWE begins with that premise. From there, the experience on the benefit recipient’s side is one of demeaning scrutiny and constraining rules and stipulations.

With this small sample of study subjects, I argue that cyclical homelessness and poverty need to be addressed on a case-by-case basis, and through a model of compassion and empathy. A basic level of trust and respect for the person who is asking for help is necessary. In compendium entitled *Reconsidering Culture and Poverty*, the authors encourage researchers to develop the values, frames, repertoires, narratives, symbolic boundaries, cultural capital, and institutions for understanding poverty (Kaniss, Lamont, Harding, and Small 2010:14). What became apparent during my study is that families in the *Ready Haven* shelter had diverse ethnic, racial, religious, and cultural backgrounds that were unavoidably affected by macro-social structures like the unavailability of living wage work and the alternative management of poor population through incarceration and punishing welfare rules. These stories, while they may sound familiar and “typical,” were personal and unique. What was often needed most were mentorship, compassion, and advocacy and not a system that lacks basic respect for people in crisis.

Chapter 10

Conclusion

10.1 Overview

The U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness goal of ending family homelessness by 2020 inspired my dissertation. The dissertation field research spanned over four years, from 2011 to 2015. It began a few years after the last recession and collapse of the mortgage and finance markets. As the recession's effects softened, the working poor continued to live precariously relying for employment on the low-wage retail service and health industries, and lacking access to affordable housing.

Family homelessness increased during the time of this study while individual and adult male homelessness lessened. However, the story of homelessness in the U.S. is constantly changing, and it is different according to local conditions. Many studies and interventions are underway to address the long-term problems of homelessness. This dissertation focused on family homelessness in a small city located on the edge of the New York City Metropolitan Statistical Area.

My initial research began inside the *Ready Haven* family emergency shelter. I spent my time at the shelter leading a worker readiness group with families mostly headed up by single women. My role allowed me to gain insight into the workings of

the shelter and the lives of the shelter parents.¹⁵⁰ Eventually, out of the need to understand what was driving the conditions inside the shelter, my research expanded to incorporate the wider ecology of the institutional management of poverty and housing.

My findings show that the dynamics driving poverty and housing management in the county are due to a system of labor subordination. The 1996 welfare reform dictates the rules of the system, but the local economic conditions in Centerton and Excelsior County reinforce it. The declining economic conditions that partially answer this question are not only due to the last fifty years of increased globalization and liberalization of market-first corporate and government alliances, but they were also already present in small cities like Centerton after the Post World War II expansion of suburbs. New construction and suburbanization were favored, and historic cities with decaying infrastructure like Centerton were demolished and overlooked for capital investment. This transition was hastened with the eradication of and elimination of passenger rail and the construction of the Regional Mall served by the New York State Thruway. Thus, the City of Centerton's small businesses died, and a car culture emerged without the replacement of public transportation networks. At the same time, Centerton and Excelsior County lost its manufacturing and shipping industry, which was temporarily replaced with computer technology manufacturing. In the nineties, even these factories moved to less expensive labor markets leaving the county and the city in decline. Currently,

¹⁵⁰ I limited the study to parents only, thus excluding children and youth's insights although I hope to bring their voices into future research.

the only jobs available locally are in the fast food, retail, and health services economies that need low-wage labor. The county has been unable to attract other industries.

Thus, the dissertation looked at the macro, mezzo, and micro-layers that manage the working poor and those without housing. The dissertation began in Chapter Two by reviewing the local historical background, which revealed the area's macro structures. Then in Chapter Three, there was a review of the interviewing methodology undertaken at the emergency family shelter as well as with the city and county institutional structures. Chapter Four gave an overview of the ecology of poverty and homelessness management in Excelsior County. As the dissertation "sinks" through the macro levels to the middle management and shelter agency level, Chapter Five looked into the tension that exists between the shelter management and the residents. The macro structure of the welfare system controls the power structures of the shelter as much as it does the economic structures that decide the fate of the working poor. In Chapter Six, the personal moral careers and trajectories of the people stuck in the public welfare system are revealed. Chapter Seven takes a closer look at the rules, regulations, and levels of scrutiny of the shelter. In Chapter Eight, the dissertation demonstrates how the worker readiness group I facilitated fed the system of labor subordination in the low-wage job market of the county. Chapter 9 followed the residents into their lives after the shelter.

The dissertation illustrated how the small city and the surrounding county are vulnerable to the shifting of economic pressures such as technological

innovation, which required an educated and well-trained workforce. Small cities and suburban counties like Excelsior County suffer from the centripetal force of the megalopolis only 90 miles away. Regional investment is needed to counter these effects of the megalopolis that naturally draw the attention of investors. However, regional investment in the area has been difficult to attract because local counties are competing instead of collaborating for growth. Loss of large projects, like the recent state casino project awarded to the county next to Excelsior, are lamented by the county's economic development office. The casino was seen as an opportunity to fund the repair of decaying infrastructure of the county. With this same lack of insight and foresight about the long-term effects of casino investment, in the late 20th Century, the county opted to build two maximum and two medium security prison facilities. A new county jail facility, brought \$1.7 million in 2013 to house both local prisoners and prisoners from overcrowded facilities closer to New York City. The county claims it will use the profits to stimulate the lagging local economy. Much of prison and casino development is uncreative, shortsighted, and not conducive to attracting technologically innovative investments that would create long-term appeal to the savvy and technology-centric "creative class." Some efforts are underway to attract new "techpreneurs," and it remains to be seen whether New York City talent will exchange the buzz of the big city for the tranquil mountains and the small city charm of Centerton.

In July of 2015, as the dissertation came to a close, the US Department of Housing and Urban Development revealed its findings in a study entitled *The Family*

Options Study. This study was the first of its kind to focus on interventions in family homelessness. Completed in the same time frame as this dissertation *The Opening Doors* program of the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness revealed its findings of the first 18 months of *The Family Options Study*. The study centered on over 2000 families in 12 different US cities from 2010 to 2012. It showed the most basic finding: the most successful interventions were the Section 8 housing vouchers to assist the working poor with paying market-rate rents. The test population was of families that were cyclically homeless similar to the homeless population of this dissertation. The *Family Options Study* was only an interim report; nevertheless, it was a hypothesis that needed to be proven through lived experience of many families in many localities. It will be further analyzed and confirmed over the next phase of the program due in 2016:

“This study provides further support to the theory that providing people who are experiencing homelessness with a stable home can have positive, radiating impacts on family preservation, adult well-being, and school stability,” said Mary Joel Holin, Vice President of Social and Economic Policy at Abt Associates, a policy research firm and one of the lead investigators of the study (web Press Release July 7, 2015).

Cost effective solutions were at the heart of the investigation. The “usual care” of emergency shelter for families such as the *Ready Haven* shelter of my field site, turned out to be the most expensive and the least effective. The study proves that the working poor already know how to work and how to manage their lives. No emergency shelter programming is needed to teach them how to be contributing citizens. What is needed are living wage jobs and affordable housing.

Emergency shelter providers are of the opinion that more programming is needed to assist the working poor with their climb on the social ladder. The question remains, however, whose standards are being used to judge people faced with poverty because of generations of economic decline? The structural forces that drove the working poor to accept a life reliant on a welfare subsidy were a lack of living wage work and a lack of affordable housing, and this condition needs to be examined and transformed. At the same time, we should consider the individual needs of struggling families. Giving families the control and agency over their lives while guiding and assisting them with housing vouchers is only the beginning of a solution to a multi-dimensional problem.

I distinguish my dissertation from many quantitative studies on the effects of homelessness on individuals and families. I used qualitative one-on-one interviews with the shelter residents, staff, as well as the many private and government bureaucracies that control the homeless population. I began and now end the exploration of all the layers of the structure of homelessness in Excelsior County with the caveat that I don't consider my dissertation a complete study.

Homeless families are not visible in the community, mostly because they choose to be silent about their condition, but their perspectives need to be heard. I am working to bring these rarely heard voices into the larger discourse. Additionally, some shelter parents allowed me to follow them into their lives after the shelter, by visiting them, by phone, and by social media. I listened to their stories and hoped that the framework of my analysis did justice to their conditions. Over

the first segment of my work at the shelter, I shadowed a resident counselor and a case manager for ten weeks in 2011. I built a strong foundation for the work I did over 2012 and 2013 when I had most consistent access to the shelter through the *Future Readiness* workshop. The shelter parents' stories were based mostly on their employment histories. Repeated interviews over the course of my shelter stay helped me to know them better. I rarely spoke with children but observed them as they interacted with staff and parents.

In this chapter the findings of the dissertation are organized as follows: 1) the local condition of labor subordination and the 1996 welfare system; 2) the situation of poverty in Centerton; 3) management of poverty in Excelsior County and Centerton; and 4) future steps with other research methodologies.

10.2 Labor subordination

For anyone to receive welfare aid in Excelsior County, DSS called for only one solution: work first, followed by housing. The field study showed that welfare reform works well in Excelsior County. People who receive aid must work and most do everything to avoid sanctions (or temporary withdrawal of aid). The aim to completely remove people from the welfare rolls in Excelsior County, however, is not possible. The working poor cannot live without a subsidy, whether federally or locally funded, to pay for food and medical care. Even shelter staff and government workers may need to supplement their wages with food stamps.

New mothers are asked to go back to work as early as 6 to 8 weeks after the birth of their infants. If there are provisions for maternal leave or if a child is in need of medical attention, DSS will allow the mother more time at home. DSS subsidizes the cost of the childcare, so the effect on the mother is minimal (\$5.00 a week). The mother's subsidy is in danger if she does not find a job, and the family is sanctioned. However, the children's subsidies continue. The decisions of subsidies are made by a Social Welfare Examiner (SWE) and are different for each case. The law allows flexibility, and it is up to the SWE to wield power and control over the family's wellbeing.

Similar to the early 19th Century industrial age, to create a market, people making up the labor force had to be subjugated and controlled. Just as this occurred in the early 1800s, it is still true 200 years later. The working poor become subjugated labor, which was necessary for today's "just-in-time" economy where automation and technology took over human positions so that retail, service and limited part-time contract work is often the only kind of work available (as was discussed in Chapter Nine).

The 1996 PRWORA increased pressure on the working poor, and especially for women heading up households (or "breadwinner moms"). Welfare provides poverty managers a path to the most private parts of the aid recipient's life. Thus, working poor parents are in an inescapable bind. They must provide for their children, and yet, there is no way that they can accomplish this without welfare aid and the scrutiny that comes along with it. Similar to the distinctions that Arlie

Hochschild ([1989] 2012; 1997) proposed, where work becomes a more lucrative place to be than home, the poor are in a bind because work is not a place they want to be. As any parent would, those who are poor want to be home to raise their children. However, work at home, caring for a family and a house, is not rewarded financially, and work outside the home is the only way that the family can survive. While there were stories of women caught in the drama of crisis and “bad choices,” I argue that the problem is in the way that the existence and behavior of the working-poor is analyzed. A large gap exists between moralistic or normative ways of looking at homelessness and psychologizing or medicalizing homelessness. This gap can only be closed by fully understanding the subjective experience of homelessness. Additionally, the people who manage government funds related to homelessness need to be fully empowered to look at the system critically to transform it rather than allow the status quo to continue.

10.3 The situation of poverty in the small city of Centerton

Historically, Centerton has always served the New York megalopolis, and it will probably continue to do so in the future. The current post-recession lackluster economy growth is largely made up of retail and service jobs where low-wage workers are necessary, setting the stage for perfect conditions for labor exploitation, and in turn, the broader argument of labor subordination and homelessness.

In Centerton, the location of the shelter is also the site of concentrated poverty. Middle to upper-class homes surrounds this neighborhood. It was turned

into a poverty-ridden place when small manufacturing jobs left the city, and low-cost housing was demolished during urban renewal. On the outskirts of the city, on “shovel-ready land,” a strip of stores and a Regional Mall further competed with and degraded the amount of business inside the city perimeter. Getting to work on foot was no longer an option, and transportation became a necessity for employment. The necessary transportation infrastructure was never considered as the site of jobs changed location. When the jobs disappeared, crime and gangs moved in. This cycle is similar to larger cities. The corporatist alliances of business with the government did not provide training for this population and could be seen as a convenient way to depress skills and wages of the local labor force. Shortsighted labor management strategy backfired when the county was overlooked for investment because of the low-skill labor force.

National, state, and local budgets lack proper funding allocation for adult (parent) education, early childhood education, and childcare. In the developed world, one would expect children to be guaranteed a decent education. However, if a locality does not have the tax base to support good schools and early childhood education, then low-income neighborhoods won't be able to fund a good education. Students need to be educated to transition to a new and different economic reality of computers and technology. Many people in my study did not even graduate from high school. They were not encouraged to do so by their parents, and there is little peer pressure for students to complete their education. As a result, many of the poor in Centerton are forced to take the only available jobs in the growing retail food and

mall jobs at sub-poverty level wages.

Absentee “buy to rent” investors bought up neighborhood properties where most of the poor in Centerton find housing after the homeless shelter. These owners often don’t maintain their properties and are still able to charge market rents because of the extremely low vacancy rates in the city and county. The landlords had proper representation in housing courts while the tenants did not thus stacking the odds unevenly in favor of rental property owners. Meanwhile, the neighborhoods deteriorated further. They became the site of street and gang violence, and an informal economy of drugs and weapons. Young men were attracted to gang life. They became the incarcerated “baby daddies,” and some of the mothers and children landed in the family shelter. Incarceration from the late eighties on created the robust prison industry of the county. The local county jail is a brand-new facility that has beds for the overflow population of prisoners from surrounding counties.

The story of Centerton is similar to what happened in many larger and smaller cities in the US. The outcomes for people in small cities worsen with the local politics that often lacks expertise, education, and vision. They are full of “staunch localism, conservatism, risk aversion, traditionalism, and lack of ambition”(Bell and Jayne 2006:2). Additionally, the disinvestment in older and small cities often begins with infrastructure problems. The lack of investment into services such as decent public transportation plagues the employability of the low-wage population. Where the nearby New York City metropolis has capital investment in infrastructure and new construction, the small and de-industrialized

city, on the other hand, is the site of poverty and lack of affordable housing.

As compared to the megalopolis, investment in the small city of Centerton is much more difficult to attract. Maintenance of Centerton's infrastructure is slow in being completed. Similarly, the problem of the economy and jobs in Excelsior County are addressed piecemeal with limited thought to include citizens of all classes in the newly arrived entrepreneurial ventures. The mainstay of the economy is still retail and health services that pay only pennies above NY State's minimum wage. Lack of affordable housing and diminishing funding for housing vouchers puts the responsibility and expense of housing the homeless in expensive emergency shelters in the hands of city and county administrations. What became clearer as I spent time in the field is that managers of poverty and people receiving aid do not exist on opposing sides of a coin. On the contrary, they were often from the same background and neighborhoods. Those with living wage jobs are not that much different from those working at sub-poverty level wages.

The case of the small city and county represents a total ecology that reproduces and generates poverty and homelessness for the most vulnerable population: mothers and their children.¹⁵¹ As a consequence, children are raised with poverty and hunger; a lot of damage follows them throughout their education and work life. Thus, poverty becomes entrenched, and all of its effects become indelibly etched into people's lives. Although the problem was most visible in

¹⁵¹ The work of Frederick M. Thrasher called the study of all aspects of a community a "total situation." My work was limited in scope compared to what a total situation study would entail.

female-headed households, single men also found themselves out of work and in a homeless shelter because the post-industrial, post-manufacturing economy has eliminated the classic American blue-collar workingman. Labor conditions in the U.S. need a profound redefinition particularly as more training and education is required to keep up with the rapidly changing needs of automation and global industry. In small cities and counties like Excelsior, very little bridging of this gap between old and new technologies is being addressed.

While the PRWORA eliminated many people from the welfare rolls, it did not solve the problems of poverty. Instead, several downturns later, life for working-poor families is more precarious. Most have to make ends meet by combining part-time work with food stamps and Medicaid. With a subsidy comes control and management. The PRWORA and TANF are the funding source for the population of homeless families. The law is punitive and sanction-based. It continues to be a method to reinforce standards such as marriage and the identification of the biological fathers, even if the fathers can only pay \$25.00 a month for child support.

I can offer several main findings of my work at the shelter field site that all support the thesis of labor subordination and a punitive welfare system that forces people into work:

1. Families come from many different backgrounds and have unique needs. Causes of homelessness are often due to the lack of a network or family support that affects the available resources needed to maintain employment.
2. In the shelter, families are subjected to a litany of rules and regimentation such

- as mandated breathalyzing and programming. The aims of the shelter system are to push the family out into work and subsidized housing as fast as possible, which is not always possible because of the lack of affordable housing. DSS housing subsidies have not kept pace with the market rents in Excelsior County.
3. The ecology that manages poverty continues to be relevant to qualify for funding and although the intentions are to do “good,” the system of not-for-profits essentially create what Teresa Gowan calls an “archipelago of warehousing institutions” (2010:6). The system is not meant to make itself irrelevant; it is meant to continue to support a network of employment in poverty management bureaucracies.
 4. The aim of the system is not to educate or train people so that they can get ahead in the competitive market for living wage work. It is to punish people into work. Avenues to living wage work are relatively rare and difficult to pursue for a mother with children. The big box retail corporations need low-wage workers so it is not in the business or the government’s interest to train workers so that they can demand better wages.
 5. The welfare law requires all those receiving benefits to have a job so that they can “work off their grant.”
 6. There was a consistent lack of proper education and training that could have opened the door to living wage work. Lack of a high school degree has now become a hurdle that is often the biggest barrier to better wages and career opportunities.

7. The unaffordability of housing as well as a housing court system that favors landlords, and thus, favors displacing the family and forcing them into emergency shelter.

10.4 The management of poverty

The people who create and manage emergency shelters do the work of caregiving for the poor. While they originally intended to create a “non-judgmental and non-directive” way to serve the poor, they also needed to choose between funding the shelter system and holding on to their original ethics. Some of the tensions of caregiving are apparent in the interactions presented and analyzed in Chapter Four and Five. The choice to accept government grant funding was one of the ways that *Ready Haven* decided to provide services to those in need. However, this meant that a “false choice,” or essentially no better choice is possible but to accept the constraints that come along with the funding. The welfare system works as it was intended when organizations of well-meaning people do its bidding. Everyone that works at the agency feels the tension of this cognitive dissonance between understanding the plight of the poor and their own survival. They cannot deny that they need jobs and the benefits that come along with it.

The shelter system does not necessarily help the homeless to escape the talons of poverty permanently but families do get rehoused into unaffordable housing with subsidies for a certain period of time. One crisis in a precarious life, however, can destabilize the dominoes that lead a family back to homelessness.

The dissertation tells personal stories of the paradox of the welfare system where human potential is both enhanced and negated (Abramovitz 1999). Mimi Abramovitz clearly delineates how the market-first neoliberal corporatists have attacked the state thus limiting its role. Furthermore, Abramovitz offers a strong reminder that class, race, and gender play their parts in any consideration of poverty and homelessness. In my work, the racial and gender considerations of the larger ecology of poverty management became increasingly important. Overturning the 1996 Welfare Law is only possible if the entire system is transformed to be more productive instead of punitive.

The interviews with the small city institutions that provide services for the poor put the blame of homelessness and poverty squarely on the shoulders of the single mothers who were unable to negotiate parenting with work and the fathers of the children who were not able to support them. Other case managers and service providers had a more compassionate view. I found, however, that government-funded trauma-informed programming is used to train caregivers.

Government-funded psychologists and psychiatrists put Trauma-informed (TIC) models in place. It has become the solution of the day for the homeless and the poor. The 1995 CDC study about Adverse Childhood Effects study was the preliminary study that furthered the study of trauma on people in homeless shelters and on children being raised in unstable conditions. To be fair, the intentions were to validate the work of case managers and shelter providers. However, with a trauma-informed care diagnosis the poor are thought of as incapable of making

productive decisions for their lives that fit the norms of society. After all, they are traumatized by poverty. Their executive function is diminished, and they are in need of aid.¹⁵² However, trauma, depression, and anxiety can be treated with pharmaceuticals that quiet the person in need. This is classic and blatant medicalization of poverty. When a family loses everything, they are in a state of temporary shock, and they should be supported for the time that it takes to recover stability. Medicalizing the problem is not an answer.

To stabilize a family the DSS most often places them in a motel room. Some families are in motels for extended period of time. And yet, this is the way that most communities in the U.S. deal with homelessness. The longer the period of homelessness, the longer the effect of the homelessness episode persists.

In Excelsior County, the *Ready Haven* shelter system is a much more sophisticated answer to the problem, but it also has a cost. For those who are sent to the shelter instead of the motels, the programming and breathalyzing plus the rushed schedule to find housing and work is demeaning and constraining.

The alternative of temporary shelters like those of *Ready Haven* need further research. The shelter system, in its struggle to remain funded by the government, has to honor the current parameters of the welfare law. Housing advocacy extended

¹⁵² The recent neurological impact studies of trauma and poverty find that Executive Functioning skills are compromised (Babcock 2014). However, Babcock proposes that undoing these effects by providing "opportunities to practice Executive Functioning skills ...the brain physically develops increasingly rich networks of neural connections in the areas of the prefrontal cortex that support these functions" (2014:5). She advocates for a combination of anti-poverty policy changes, and a need for more research and application of recent brain-functioning studies. The 5-year Mobility Mentoring project was completed this year. This dissertation does not include these findings.

to the residents of the shelter does honor the original ethos of “non-judgmental and non-directive” caregiving because the shelter staff works hard to negotiate the lack of affordable housing in the county. Children also benefit from the respite that stabilizes the family while in the shelter. In the final analysis, however, the residents are sent into the low-wage labor pool to receive their benefits and *Ready Haven* does not want to lose its position as a resource for the poor in the county. This is a Catch 22 situation that is difficult to unravel.

Models of shelter systems that offer long-term housing and long-term mentorship are currently being tested in many parts of the United States. For the people who manage the poor through the *Ready Haven* agency, a closer study needs to be done to see the shelter residents through to long-term success instead of low-wage work and cyclical homelessness.

10.5 Future Work

There is a gap of understanding between the subjective experience of homelessness and those who work to ameliorate the problem. As a result, the dissertation does not offer changes to any policy-based approaches. Policy approaches would only feed the structural problems at hand. Instead, I offer that the interpretation of poverty and homelessness needs a shift to address family homelessness that takes a different view. The concerns of a family without housing are different from the “work first” concerns of the people who manage welfare aid. Because the lives of poor are entrenched over several generations, the solutions put

into place must come from a non-directive aim that recognizes the uniqueness of each family. Every family's needs a different solution. Blanket approaches, punishments, and labeling those seeking aid are not a long-term solution to generational and cyclical poverty.

If problems are persistent, there have to be reasons for their permanence. It stands to reason that institutions and people must be profiting from the status quo. A current affordable housing project, for example, is being considered for the poor neighborhood where most of the homeless usually find cheap, run-down apartments when they exit the shelter. Financial and governmental support for a large and visible project is politically much easier than raising money for the rehabilitation of one old Victorian era home that could be owned by a homesteading family. There are no funds to give a family the opportunity to live or homestead in such properties so that they can become property owners in the city. Often, the city has properties on its books that no one wants to rehabilitate. These are properties that the community would like to see rehabilitated rather than demolished. The poor have become used to watching millions of dollars spent on restoration of historical buildings while affordable housing often becomes an opportunity for gentrification in Centerton's most at risk neighborhoods. Pressure from higher rents in New York City's boroughs is already beginning a migration to Centerton and the Hudson Valley.

Small cities like Centerton offer a miniaturized view of similar problems that exist in large cities. Instead of a complex and opaque city government, a diligent

Centerton citizen can sit in on every city government committee meeting. Politics, partisanship, networks of connections are in plain sight, although a serious undercurrent of corruption in the police department is currently undergoing scrutiny. Small city newspapers only appear once a week but a daily newspaper that covers a wider regional area than Centerton reports on important issues of the day and citizens can weigh in on matters of governance if they feel empowered to do so.

Because the mayor and the common council can be seen on the street and in shopping centers, they are accessible to the public. Whether they are the kind of politician that welcomes the input from citizens or not, people have the power to be much more closely involved in a small city than in a megalopolis like New York City.

Different methods of research such as participatory action research could more closely involve people who are transitioning from homelessness to housing. Perhaps the most important aspect of looking at the problem from the subjective experience of poverty and homelessness is to empower them by recognizing the possibility of their contributions to communities. In this way, I look forward to using participatory action research in future research to confront issues that come up in research like the temporary interventions and investigator bias (Stacey 1988). The aims of the participatory action research emerge from the voices of the community and findings are written and verified by the community.

As a contrast to qualifying family homelessness through a medical lens by case managers of a different race and class, a subjective viewpoint may reveal and unravel the structural systems that maintain the status quo. More empowering ways

forward would be to allow neighborhood self-governance and leadership to emerge. Instead of studying the problem through a government research or academic lens, the communities of the poor should be given support to create the lives they envision for themselves if they are also given the right resources to do so. Housing and a comfortable home should be self-evident as one of the Second Bill of Rights President Franklin D. Roosevelt proposed in his 1944 Address to Congress:

In our day these economic truths have become accepted as self-evident. We have accepted, so to speak, a second Bill of Rights under which a new basis of security and prosperity can be established for all—regardless of station, race, or creed.

Among these are:

- The right to a useful and remunerative job in the industries or shops or farms or mines of the nation;
- The right to earn enough to provide adequate food and clothing and recreation;
- The right of every farmer to raise and sell his products at a return which will give him and his family a decent living;
- The right of every businessman, large and small, to trade in an atmosphere of freedom from unfair competition and domination by monopolies at home or abroad;
- The right of every family to a decent home;
- The right to adequate medical care and the opportunity to achieve and enjoy good health;
- The right to adequate protection from the economic fears of old age, sickness, accident, and unemployment;
- The right to a good education.

All of these rights spell security. And after this war is won we must be prepared to move forward, in the implementation of these rights, to new goals of human happiness and wellbeing.

Seventy years have passed since Roosevelt's last address to Congress. The Second Bill of Rights should be self-evident, but they are not. The current political climate provides greater evidence that these basic human rights in the US are still far from available for much of the population. It could be argued that they are even

less available than in Post-World War II America. In Centerton, most of the poor have been to one of the *Ready Haven* shelters at some point in their lives, whether it was as a runaway youth, a domestic violence survivor, or a young mother with a newborn infant. The dissertation uncovered aspects of the problems of forced low-wage employment and lack of affordable housing but a more nuanced and accurate account on the ground account would require further work and resources.

The social sciences disciplines of sociology, psychology, economy, and policy need an integrated application to gain a full understanding of the situation. The functionalist account of the situation as suggested by Gans is limited and needs to be combined with other social science analyses to reveal the full picture. As such, this dissertation is by no means a complete picture of the many sides of family homelessness in the county and the small city.

The regeneration of small cities that protects the rights of all of its citizens to lead a creative and productive life requires a multi-dimensional view and approach. Of all the methods I encountered in my investigation of poverty and homelessness management, the model of mentorship was most empowering and truly supported the betterment of families headed up by women. Men should adopt a similar model. The mentorship model puts people from different backgrounds together in one-on-one relationships for community building and empowerment, and provision of both encouragement and financial assistance. Change happens slowly, one family at a time. On a small city scale, small changes could inspire a community to come together to diminish the problems of poverty and homelessness.

APPENDIX 1 – Ready Haven Funds as they are translated into services

FUNDING Ready Haven

1. FEDERAL TEMPORARY AID TO NEEDY FAMILIES FUNDS of \$17.8B to 50 states
2. STATE funding is overseen by OTDA: \$2.95B divided for 62 COUNTIES (STATE)
3. TANF Maintenance of Effort FUNDS (AT 80% OF 1994 AFDC) **62.5% of Ready Haven's BUDGET** comes from this fund.

Total budget is \$8.2M

The Remainder of funds comes from Dept. of Labor (for *Ready Haven's* Youth Employment contract), Community Contributions and Fundraising, Private Foundations, Centerton City and County Community Development Block Grants.

CLIENT SERVICES

Crisis Intervention is the primary goal

1. Material- food on holidays: Christmas, Thanksgiving

Fuel, Household Items, furniture, appliances, toys

2. Service Centers, Walk-in Centers, Hotlines.

a. EVOLVE- group for Batterers, Non-residential DV Services, *Just Connect* Teens, Case management Life Skills, Supervised Visitation

b. (18 month) **Adult Case Management:** in three Excelsior County's major towns

3. Shelters for the homeless

a. Youth- Family House, Transitional House, *Ready Haven* House short-term stays

b. Single Adults shelter

c. Women- Domestic Violence Shelter

d. Families- *Ready Haven* Shelter for Families, Centerton

4. Legal services Domestic Violence Court Advocacy, Excelsior County Family Court Advocacy

5. Ready Haven Childcare Council hub also for Neighboring Counties Childcare Council

COMMUNITY SERVICES

- a. Centerton Cares Community Center (Summer camp, youth services, computer lab).
- b. High School Success Program for training and college.
- c. Robert Wall Board Membership: County level leader of Continuum of Care Agency, Workforce Development, and Transportation Board.

APPENDIX 2 – FUTURE READINESS CURRICULUM

Future Readiness Group Course Description

Ready Haven Agency

The Future Readiness Group (FRG) meets once a week for 1-1/2 hours for four consecutive weeks. Anezka Sebek is the instructor for the group (see short bio below) working in close collaboration with the case managers for the residents at Family Inn. The goal of the FRG is to build a combination of successful 21st Century life and career skills. Three of the sessions are group sessions and one session is a personal resume building session. During the course of the four weeks, the residents acquire the following skills:

Session 1- Time Management, Opportunity Costs of Decision Making, Future Planning, Building Successful Life Habits; ¹⁵³ collecting and organizing all necessary legal, financial, consumer, and career documents in one place; creating realistic goals and taking stock of skills and training; basic financial literacy (shelter case managers work closely with residents to monitor managing budgets and finances).

Session 2- Understanding the New Economy, Building networks of support for schooling, training, and jobs. Looking at different career options. Where should you live with your family? Searching for information both on line (ulsterworks.com, nycareerzone.org) and in person.

Session 3- Creating an email account, building a resume **on line** this is a half-hour initial session that is followed up every week until the resident has a working and viable resume. The goals for each resident are different. Some residents need to find employment as soon as possible. Some residents need skills and training. Some need to complete their GED.

Session 4- Effective Time Management; Review of job application and interviewing skills.

After the 4th session, residents meet personally with the FRG instructor and case managers to complete the goals listed on the FRG Certificate. Residents receive a certificate and organize their required materials in one folder.

Each resident receives a wire-bound notebook to keep notes and also to record their lives, keep budgets, and calendars. Handouts include: resume formats, interview formats, time-management, budget management, child care, mentorship opportunities, lists of on line job and worker readiness sites, effective life skills, education and training opportunities.

¹⁵³ Based upon Steven Covey's *Seven Habits of Highly Successful People*

APPENDIX 3

Study with Anezka Sebek, The New School for Social Research

INFORMED CONSENT FORM (Residents)

I, _____, agree to work with Anezka Sebek, an PhD Student with The New School for Social Research and Associate Professor of Media Design at The School for Art, Media and Technology: Parsons The New School for Design at and the shelter and beyond, if I choose to provide her with my contact information.

I understand that **Ms. Sebek is an independent agent not affiliated with Ready Haven, and that she will not affect my status in the DSS or Ready Haven Program in any way.** I know that Ms. Sebek is undertaking an advanced degree in her field and in exchange for her efforts, statistical, questionnaire, interview information, or observational data she collects from our working together may be documented in her PhD Dissertation.

There is no payment for the use of the interview.

No identifying information about me will be used at any part of the study. Contact information for Ms. Sebek is below as well as the office of The New School that is responsible for oversight of this study.

Ms. Sebek may also contact my case managers at the shelter in regard to the work that we are undertaking, to insure that the my goals of the this study do not conflict with the goals that I agreed upon when I secured emergency shelter at Family Inn.

NOTE: AFTER I leave the Ready Haven’s services, Ms. Sebek may work directly with me if I contact her and assure strictest confidence with any and all information involving my case.

Resident Signature _____ Date: _____

Phone Number _____ Alternate: _____

Address:

DO YOU HAVE A SMART PHONE WITH A DATA PLAN? _____

PLEASE CHECK HERE IF YOU HAVE YOUR OWN COMPUTER: _____

ARE YOU INTERESTED IN GETTING YOUR OWN COMPUTER? _____

ARE YOU PLANNING ON SPENDING THE MONEY ON BROADBAND CONNECTION? _____

For further information, please contact:

Anezka Sebek

Institutional Review Board-Human Subjects Committee coordinator

The New School for Social Research

(212) 229-5727 ext. 3102.

QUESTIONNAIRE: PLEASE FILL THIS OUT AT THE ONE ON ONE SESSION WITH ME.

YOUR BIRTH DATE: _____ BIRTH PLACE _____

ETHNICITY (check any that apply): WHITE _____ AFRICAN-AMERICAN _____

NATIVE

AMERICAN _____ ASIAN _____ HISPANIC _____

What countries did your ancestors come from? _____

YOUR CHILDREN'S BIRTH DATES (first names are optional) in order:

1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____ 4. _____
5. _____ 6. _____

Where do you plan to find housing?

HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN HOMELESS? _____ MONTHS

_____ YEARS

HAVE YOU BEEN HOMELESS BEFORE? (IF YES, WHEN AND HOW LONG) _____

HOTEL/MOTEL FOR EXTENDED PERIODS?(HOW LONG) _____ MONTHS _____

HAVE YOU EVER HAD TO DO CWEP? _____

How do you get from place to place? (TRANSPORTATION) _____

*own car *walk *bus * taxi *friend's car *family car

-
1. Are you the sole provider for your children? Yes / No
 2. If no, who is the other provider and legal custody holder of your child(ren)?

 3. Are your children doing well in school?

 4. What are your childcare needs?

5. What is the highest grade you achieved in High School? _____ or

6. HS DIPLOMA (check here)

7. College _____ semesters

8. College Degree _____ Major

9. TRADE Certification (BOCES OR OTHER) _____

10. Additional training or skill _____

11. Computer Skill level (rate yourself on a scale from 1 – 10 –10 being best) _____

12. If there is a skill you could sell right now, what would it be?

EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE:

WHAT IS YOUR DREAM JOB?

WHAT IS YOUR FUTURE PLAN?

1. SSD/SSI _____
2. Get a job as _____

3. Get a College degree in: _____
4. Training in _____
5. Planning _____
6. Financial Knowledge/ budgeting/banking/saving/ _____

Do you have outstanding credit anywhere that you would like to clean up? _____

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