

Exploring the role of a Community Organization in the lives of Individuals
who are Homeless – a Phenomenological Approach

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore the role of the Good Shepherd in the lives of individuals who access its services as well as those who work and volunteer there. The Good Shepherd is a Catholic charitable organization dedicated to serving those facing homelessness. This phenomenological study examined the experiences of those involved with the organization and the meanings attached to those experiences. Data collection methods consisted of semi-structured interviews and a limited amount of participant observation. A reflexive journal was also kept to help challenge and reflect on the assumptions I had as a researcher and to examine the progression of my changing beliefs from the start of the project to completion.

Three major themes emerged from data analysis: (1) experiencing complex interactions within Good Shepherd, (2) fostering a culture of support, and (3) acknowledging that everyone has a different life story. The first theme described participants' experiences in terms of associating with other individuals involved with the organization. The second theme demonstrates the different types of support that are felt by all associated with the Good Shepherd. The third theme illustrates how those involved in the Good Shepherd learn to appreciate each individual and to value everyone's life story.

As a result of this phenomenological study, I challenged my original assumptions of those facing homelessness and developed a new understanding based on my experiences with all participants at the organization. Specifically, my beliefs changed in three ways. I learned that the problem of homelessness is a complicated phenomenon that involves more than the lack of a house, but a complex array of factors. I learned that those facing homelessness still value their dignity and constantly fight to maintain their sense of self-worth. And finally, I learned that those who are facing homelessness have not given up on life.

Four recommendations for future research emerged from this study: (1) studies comparing the perspectives of staff and clients associated with charitable organizations should be examined in order to identify the discrepancies between the two, (2) the benefits of leisure stress coping should continue to be tested to see its effects on those who are faced with homelessness, (3) studies comparing the differences between leisure usage and leisure opportunities for those facing homelessness should be addressed, and finally, (4) the specific benefits of having a sense of belonging to a community for those who are homeless should be identified.

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DEDICATION

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The phenomenon of homelessness is becoming an increasingly important issue in Western society. While it is difficult to confidently determine the number of homeless individuals, many researchers agree that the prevalence of homelessness is rapidly increasing (Cauce, Ginzler, Embry, Morgan, Lohr, & Theofelis, 2000; Hwang, 2001; The Alliance, 2006; Varney & Vliet, 2008; Frankish, Hwang & Quantz, 2009). In 2006, it was estimated that approximately 157,000 individuals were homeless in this country (Trypuc & Robinson, 2009). However, this estimate only included those who are chronically or temporarily homeless. In Ottawa, the capital city of Canada, 9010 people spent time in a shelter for homeless in 2006, an increase from 8664 people in 2004 (The Alliance, 2006). In Toronto, the Canadian city with the largest prevalence of homelessness, it is estimated that in 2003, 30,000 people used homeless shelters, including more than 6000 children (Porter, 2003). Further, in the United States, it has been reported that approximately 600,000 families and 1.35 million children experience homelessness each year (The Alliance, 2006). This project explores the lives of those associated with the issue of homelessness. In particular, it focuses on the meanings of their experiences with an organization known as the Good Shepherd the relationships created within the organization. The Good Shepherd is an organization created to serve the needs of individuals who are homeless.

As is discussed at length in the literature review, the concept of homelessness is difficult to define. Frankish, Hwang and Quantz (2009) argued that homelessness is viewed along a continuum, from those who have no physical dwelling to sleep in during the night, to those who have no choice but stay temporarily at friends' or relatives' houses. Echenberg and Jensen (2008) add to this definition of homelessness, saying that there are three main types of homeless situations: (1) absolute homelessness, (2) hidden or concealed homelessness, and (3) relative homelessness. Absolute

homelessness refers to those living on the street or in emergency shelters. Hidden or concealed homelessness include people without a place of their own to live in. These people often live in a car, with family and friends, or in charitable organizations that provide temporary accommodations. Finally, relative homelessness generally refers to those who are housed, but perhaps in substandard conditions or are in danger of losing their homes.

In addition, the challenges faced by these individuals have been increasing (Hahn, Kushel, Bangsberg, Riley & Moss, 2006). For example, in an American study, Israel, Toro and Ouelette (2010) reported that individuals experiencing homelessness in the United States today are older, less employable, faced with increased illnesses, have a higher prevalence of schizophrenia, and have fewer social supports and social networks when compared to the beginning of the 1990s. In Varney and Vliet's (2008) report, they find that the numbers of adults, youth and children living without adequate housing has drastically increased since the 1980s. On any given day in the States, Dreier (2004) estimated that in the 1980s, the number of those homeless was around 600,000, but in a separate study conducted in 2000, the estimate increased to approximately 800,000 (The Urban Institute, 2000). Today, the number of individuals experiencing homelessness and the challenges they face continue to increase, making this phenomenon an increasingly important topic for study.

There is a vast array of literature examining the many issues related to homelessness. A significant portion of research deals with preventive efforts, examining the factors predicting homelessness so that appropriate interventions can be made to reduce homelessness (Caton, Dominguez, Schanzer, Hasin, Shrout, Felix, McQuiston, Opler, & Hsu, 2005; Johnson, Whitbeck & Hoyt, 2005; Shiovitz-Ezra & Leitsch, 2010). Another relevant topic that has been widely researched is the role of social support for individuals experiencing homelessness (Letiecq, Anderson & Koblinsky, 1998; Lam & Rosenheck, 1999; Wu & Serper, 1999). Finally, research involving qualitative investigations of issues faced by individuals who are experiencing homelessness are also prevalent

(Bellai, Goering & Boydell, 2000; McCabe, Macnee & Anderson, 2001; Clarke, Febbraro, Hatzipantelis & Nelson, 2005; Ensign, 2006). While these topics are extremely valuable for adding to our understanding of the phenomenon as a whole, research exploring the relationships and experiences created within a charitable organization, from the perspective of individuals experiencing homelessness as well as those who work and volunteer there is scarce. This study aims to help fill this gap.

The purpose of this project is to explore the role(s) of the Good Shepherd in the lives of individuals who access its services as well as those who work and volunteer there. My research question is: What are the meanings and experiences for those involved with the Good Shepherd?

It is important to note that this study does not purposefully attempt to generalize the experiences and behaviours of individuals experiencing homelessness. As a qualitative project, this research aims to recognize the individual diversity of every person, and is grounded in the assumption that each individual's circumstance is unique and is a product of individual dispositions, behaviours and environmental circumstances. Rather, this project attempted to capture the meanings and experiences from the perspective of those involved with the organization, which allows us to understand the function of the organization in the lives of these individuals.

In this first chapter, a broad overview of the issues surrounding homelessness was provided. Additionally, the purpose and scope of the study were laid out, including the research questions, which guided the study. In the second chapter, a literature review is provided, covering four major areas: (1) homelessness, (2) leisure and coping, (3) community, and (4) leisure and homelessness. The link between leisure and community in the lives of homeless individuals is also explored here. In chapter 3, I discuss the methodology used for my study, outlining five major areas: (1) phenomenology, (2) ethical considerations, (3) recruiting participants, (4) procedures, and (5) limitations. In chapter four, I discuss the findings of the study, using quotes from interviews with the

participants to support the major themes that emerged from data analysis. These themes are: (1) experiencing complex interactions within Good Shepherd, (2) developing rapport, and (3) acknowledging that everyone has a different life history. Finally, in chapter five, connections will be made between the findings and the literature, along with my reflections and recommendations. The sections in this chapter are: (1) discussion, (2) reflections, and (3) recommendations.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This section of the literature review explores various topics related to the phenomenon of homelessness. These major topics include: (1) Homelessness, (2) Leisure and Coping, (3) Community, and (4) Leisure and Homelessness.

The concept of homelessness is discussed by addressing the following subtopics: meanings of homelessness, substance abuse, traumatic experiences, families, and risk factors for homelessness. Understanding the general patterns of these issues and where participants are coming from allows us to form a better understanding of the various contexts within which these individuals live. An individual's past plays an important part in the interpretation of their present circumstances. Thus, it is important in this phenomenological study to understand the origins of homelessness so that the broader context shaping the meanings and experiences of participants are better captured and described. In addition, understanding past research on issues dealing with leisure and community are also beneficial as this helps us to develop a whole picture of the phenomenon at hand.

Secondly, relevant literature on leisure and coping is discussed. In particular, I focus on Iwasaki and Mannell's (2000) three types of leisure coping strategies: leisure companionship, leisure palliative coping, and leisure mood enhancement. As is argued below, focusing on these leisure coping strategies allows us to gain a sense of how leisure can help alleviate stressful situations for individuals, and, as is discussed below, stressful situations are likely prevalent in the lives of individuals experiencing homelessness. In the third section, the importance of community will be explored. Specifically, I examine the literature discussing the functions of a community, community integration and the concept of social capital. In addition, I will review studies dealing with issues of community and homelessness. Understanding these aspects of community helps us understand the role of the

organization as a potential place of community for those experiencing homelessness. Finally, a brief section examining the connection between leisure and homelessness is explored.

2.1 HOMELESSNESS

Homelessness is a complicated phenomenon involving multiple dimensions. These different dimensions all play a part in shaping an individual's experience with homelessness. Much research has been done exploring these dimensions, thereby building a comprehensive picture of what it means to be "homeless". In this section of the literature review, the following dimensions of homelessness will be explored: the role of substance abuse, traumatic experiences, families, meanings of homelessness and risk factors for homelessness. In these subsections, it is important to note that the distinction is not clear whether these topics result as a function of homelessness, or whether it is the aspect of homelessness which influences these topics (or perhaps they both influence each other). In the following sections, various sources of literature are examined, making it clear that the concept of "homelessness" does not have a standardized definition. As mentioned in the introduction, Echenberg and Jensen (2008) suggest there are three main types of homeless situations: (1) absolute homelessness, (2) hidden or concealed homelessness, and (3) relative homelessness. Thus, I came to conclude that most researchers refer to homelessness in a way that echoes Echenberg and Jensen's (2008) definition of "absolute homelessness", referring to those living on the street or in emergency shelters.

2.1.1 Meaning of Homelessness

In this section, the meaning of homelessness goes beyond a definitional approach, and considers other factors that individuals associate with being homeless. In fact, various studies have shown that homelessness is a complex experience that reaches beyond the lack of a physical home (Clarke, Febbraro, Hatzipantelis & Nelson, 2005; Rokach, 2005; Biswas-Diener & Diener, 2006).

Instead, a physical home is a symbol representing psychological constructs such as an individual's sense of identity, self-worth, and self-efficacy. When one loses his/her physical home, these psychological constructs often also become lost (Hallebone, 1997; Biswas-Diener & Diener, 2006). In Hodgetts, Stolte, Chamberlain, Radley, Groot, and Nikora's (2010) social psychology study, homeless participants often referred to their situation as a time when they risked losing themselves. Similarly, in Hodgetts, Radley and Cullen's (2006) report, they state that homeless individuals often engage in activities that bring about a sense of escape from the real world in order to keep their sanity.

As mentioned above, research indicates that homeless individuals often struggle to keep their sense of identity, self-worth, and self-efficacy. One important construct that captures these dimensions is that of dignity. Miller and Keys (2001) conducted an extensive study with twenty four homeless men and women to understand their experiences with dignity. The researchers found that these homeless individuals constantly struggle to maintain their dignity. More specifically, they found that the participants felt that their dignity was violated when they received poor service, were "institutionalized" (thus lacking individual identity), had unfair treatment, or did not receive sufficient care or attention. These acts, which violated their dignity, resulted in the participants often feeling a lack of worth, having feelings of anger, and experiencing increased depression (Miller & Keys, 2001).

Liu, Stinson, Hernandez, Shepard and Haag (2009) found in their review of the literature that most research indicates that those who are homeless become devalued by society due to their loss of autonomy and agency. Additionally, Ferguson (2009) states that, for most homeless individuals, the phenomenon represents a tragic life story, or a sequence of unfortunate events leading to their current situation. These unfortunate events often include child abuse, rape, and murder. As is apparent through the research outlined in this section, homelessness goes beyond the loss of a physical home, but also represents various issues such as a loss of identity, loss of dignity, or a tragic life history. As a researcher, understanding what homelessness means to homeless individuals is

crucial in terms of identifying the role of the organization in the lives of the participants. In the next section, I present scholarly work on the meaning of homelessness, thus moving past the physical definition of lacking a home.

2.1.2 Substance Abuse

Research has shown consistently that one major challenge that homeless individuals often face is substance abuse (Baggett & Rigotti, 2010; Kim, Ford, Howard & Bradford, 2010; Grinman, et. al., 2010; North, Eyrich-Garg, Pollio & Thirthalli, 2010). Grinman, et. al. (2010) conducted a study with more than 1000 participants recruited from homeless shelters and meal programs in Toronto. Information regarding issues such as demographic information, patterns of drug use, and health indicators were measured using standardized scales. Overall, the authors found that drug use was prevalent among the homeless population in Toronto, and was also associated with significant negative impacts on their mental health. Furthermore, the authors state that this drug use was also responsible for an earlier onset and longer duration of homelessness. Similarly, North, *et. al.* (2010) estimated that about 50% of the homeless population are involved with illicit drug use and that the majority of them have drug use disorders. Further, the longer one remains homeless, the more likely they are to engage in substance abuse (McMorris, Tyler, Whitbeck, & Hoyt, 2002).

Interestingly, while society often views substance use as negative and harmful behaviour, many homeless young people have often reported many benefits associated with such behaviour (Tyler & Johnson, 2006). These benefits include calming the individual, providing a sense of well-being, connecting socially to other peers, escaping their pasts, dealing with emotional and physical pain, and escaping the present reality (Kidd, 2003; Tyler & Johnson, 2006). Although many of these individuals express positive attitudes toward substance use, many of them also admitted that living without drugs would be beneficial. Participants stated that life without drugs would allow for greater financial stability, more material possessions, more self-respect, more respect from others, better or more

opportunities for education and employment, better physical health, and better relationships (Keys, Mallett, & Rosenthal, 2006; Thompson, Barczyk, Gomez, Dreyer, & Popham, 2010).

2.1.3 Traumatic Experiences

Research has also shown that homelessness is often connected with traumatic experiences, especially in regard to domestic violence (Buhrich, Hodder & Teesson, 2000; Thrane, Hoyt, Whitbeck & Yoder, 2006; Tyler, 2006; Ferguson, 2009). In his review of various studies, Ferguson (2009) found that homeless youth were likely to originate from dysfunctional or abusive families, revealing that 50% to 83% of these youth have experienced physical or sexual abuse, neglect, or parental rejection. In Thrane *et al's.* (2006) report, they found that many studies have linked childhood victimization to delinquency, which often leads to runaway adolescents and eventually homelessness for many of them (see also, Zingraff, Leiter, Myers & Johnson, 1993; Kaufman & Spatz Widom, 1999; Herrera & McCloskey, 2001). Additional studies have also shown that parental substance abuse is also a common experience for youth who become homeless and is highly correlated with both physical and sexual abuse (Ginzer, Cochran, Domenech-Rodriguez, Cauce & Whitbeck, 2003; Tyler, 2006).

These traumatic experiences are prevalent for those experiencing homelessness, and they oftentimes have negative outcomes for their well-being (Ferguson, 2009). These experiences are also oftentimes internalized, which leads to increased chances of interacting with others who are violent or becoming violent (Tyler, 2006). Tyler (2006) also mentions that these experiences, which often occur at young ages, continue to dramatically affect these individuals throughout the rest of their lives. Tyler, Hoyt, Whitbeck and Cauce (2001) found that homeless youth who have experienced sexual trauma are more likely to re-experience sexual victimization on the street through delinquent involvement. Thrane, et. al. (2006) found that traumatic experiences linked with familial abuse increases the risk for deviant subsistence strategies for homeless individuals, which in turn increases the likelihood of street victimization. This subsection explores past traumatic experiences of

individuals who are experiencing homelessness, and seeks to understand on a general level where the individual is coming from. In the next section, I explore the broader topic families.

2.1.4 Families

In the United States, it has been reported that families constitute 40% of homelessness, and that the number of families who are homeless continue to increase (U.S. Conference of Mayors Report, 2006). The majority of these include very young children who are taken care of by a single mother (The National Center on Family Homelessness, 2007). According to Yu, North, LaVesser, Osbourne and Spitznagel (2008), members of families without homes have significantly more psychiatric and behavioural problems compared to families with homes, and mothers are especially likely to have psychiatric disorders, mainly substance use disorders and posttraumatic stress disorder (Yu et al., 2008). In light of these statistics, research on homelessness and families is becoming an increasingly important area of study.

Swick and Williams (2010) conducted a qualitative study examining the voices of single parent mothers who are homeless. In their study, they attempted to find out the major concerns of their lives and the recommendations that these mothers had for early childhood professionals. Interestingly, the authors found that the mothers usually focused on their parenting styles and their child's happiness as a function of their own well-being. Most of the issues identified by these mothers included not having enough financial resources to conduct effective parenting, making efforts to ensure the child's happiness despite living in a shelter or temporary housing and the difficulty of taking care of basic physical needs. The three recommendations that these mothers made to early childhood professionals were: (1) to involve faith based groups more effectively in supporting and empowering homeless families, (2) to find ways to dispel negative and incorrect stereotypes about homeless families, and (3) to increase supportive interaction (such as mentorship or counselling) amongst members of homeless families.

In terms of homeless children's mental health, recent qualitative research specifically exploring the mental health of children of homeless families is scarce. In the 1990s, some studies found that homeless children have significantly higher rates of psychiatric symptoms and disorders, especially anxiety and mood disorders (Bassuk & Gallagher, 1990; Menke & Wagner, 1998). In terms of cognitive ability, Rescorla, Parker and Stolley (1991) found differences between homeless and housed children, whereas researchers such as Rubin, Erickson, Agustin, Cleary, Allen and Cohen (1996) found no differences in cognitive ability. Understanding these issues of homelessness in a family setting was important to designing and conducting this research as it provides a broader picture of homelessness as a whole. In addition, many of the participants who chose to take part in the study may also have been part of a family that is experiencing homelessness. In the next section, the risk factors for homelessness will be explored and discussed.

2.1.5 Risk Factors for Homelessness

When describing the following risk factors for homelessness, it is important to note that the road to homelessness is not linear. That is, we cannot make the assumption that if certain conditions exist, then homelessness is inevitable. Additionally, we cannot state with certainty that certain risk factors are responsible for homelessness, or if these risk factor characteristics are actually brought about by homelessness. Nonetheless, this section explores the broad factors that appear to be correlated with homelessness.

Oftentimes, discourse on the topic of homelessness has treated these homeless individuals as passive, lazy and unmotivated (Cohen & Wagner, 1992), thus implying that they are to blame for their own circumstances. In response to this perspective, researchers have begun to focus on macro-level factors, thus alleviating the blame for the individual and placing it on societal structures. Connell (2004) states that, "homelessness is a prism that refracts the failures of society's key sectors, especially housing, welfare, education, health care and correction" (p. 1251). Similarly, Bellai, Goering

and Boydell (2000) claim that poverty, brought about by inadequate governmental policies such as insufficient welfare wages, lack employment opportunities, or lack of affordable housing, is the main factor leading to homelessness.

While this focus on macro level factors represents a more humanistic perspective, to deny the contribution of individual dispositions would be to act naively (Fischer & Breakey, 1991). Other research has included both individual and macro-level factors as reasons for homelessness. For example, Tessler, Rosenheck and Gamache (2001) postulated that three overlapping pathways to homelessness include social selection, socioeconomic adversity, and traumatic experiences. For example, an individual's physical health, mental health or substance abuse problem (or a combination thereof) often serve as obstacles to successfully negotiating the labour and housing markets, gaining access to welfare systems, or obtaining support from family and friends (Snow & Anderson, 1993).

The risk factors for homelessness has been studied by many researchers (Bellai, Goering & Boydell, 2000; Caton, et. al., 2005; Hyde, 2005; Johnson, Whitbeck & Hoyt, 2005; Mallett, Rosenthal & Keys, 2005; Kim, et. al., 2010;). These researchers generally conclude that when only considering individual dispositional factors there are two major prominent pathways to homelessness. One prevalent theme relating to individual dispositions used to predict homelessness is mental illness. Kim, Ford, Howard and Bradford (2010) suggested that mental instability often leads to social isolation or inability to cope with the pressures of society. In addition, according to these authors, those who have experienced psychological trauma such as post-traumatic stress disorder were also at a higher risk of developing depression and eventually social isolation. Caton, et al. (2005) found similar results, concluding that psychologically well-adjusted individuals experienced shorter durations of homelessness compared to those who had trouble adjusting psychologically. Other researchers have reached similar conclusions, suggesting that mental health issues were a major factor in predicting homelessness (Fisher & Breakey, 1991; Snow & Anderson, 1993; Hyde, 2005).

Various other minor but recurring factors predicting homelessness have also been identified through research. For instance, Fischer and Breakey (1991), Padgett, Hawking, Abrams and Davis (2006), and Kim, Ford, Howard, and Bradford (2010), all mention the significance of substance abuse as being a risk factor for homelessness. Oakes and Davies (2008) suggests that intellectual disability could be a leading risk factor as well. Caton, et. al. (2005) found that deviant behaviour leading to a history of arrest is the key to predicting homelessness. However, despite these studies, the risk factors for homelessness cannot be reduced to a standardized pattern. Rather, each case is unique, and is a combination of individual dispositions and environmental factors.

In summary, the purpose of this section was to provide a context for the participants I met as I conducted this study. It is to help us understand, on a very basic level, the stories of the homeless. Building on what we know about this issue, this research project is intended to capture the meanings and experiences of those in a homeless situation from their own perspectives. As the research reviewed above has shown, there are many challenges in the lives of homeless individuals and understanding at least some of these challenges helped me to develop a project that is both aware of, and sensitive to, these challenges. In the next section, I connect the field of leisure studies and explore the role that leisure has in coping with stressful situations.

2.2 LEISURE AND COPING

Research has repeatedly shown that the experience of being homeless is associated with high levels of stress and anxiety (Auerswald & Eyre, 2002; Klitzing, 2004; Tyler, Melander & Almazan, 2010). Tyler, Melander and Almazan (2010) state that these homeless individuals often experience numerous stressors, but do not have the resources (such as personal support) needed to buffer these stressful situations. These stressors often include daily survival issues such as finding food to eat or finding a place to sleep. In addition to the stresses of surviving, Auerswald and Eyre (2002) state that

these individuals are also shunned by society, making it hard for them to receive appropriate care or help. Tyler, Melander and Alamazan (2010) state that:

...although the majority of people in the general population adapt to stress, those with unique social circumstances such as homeless individuals may engage in more harmful behaviour compared to those in the general population due to the additional stressors associated with their social situation (Tyler, Melander, & Alamazan, 2010, p. 270).

Examples of harmful behaviour by homeless people as a response to such stressors include self-mutilation, victimization, and/or substance abuse (Gladstone et. al., 2004). These acts are not effective buffers against stress, and are harmful to one's overall well-being. High levels of stress and anxiety are, in turn, responsible for adverse effects on the individual's physical and mental health (Fevre, Kolt & Matheny, 2006).

Furthermore, in Klitzing's (2003) literature review, she uses the term "chronic stress" to describe the general stress trends faced by those who are homeless. She quotes Wheaton (1997) who defines chronic stress as "problems and issues that either are so regular in the enactment of daily roles and activities or are defined by the nature of daily role enactments or activities, and so behave as if they are continuous for the individual" (p. 53). In Klitzing's (2003) study with homeless women living in a shelter and their leisure coping strategies with chronic stress, she finds that the participants were already largely exposed to chronic stress before they moved into the shelter (in addition to present chronic stress). In terms of coping with these stressors, Klitzing (2003) states that the women utilized a variety of methods to alleviate their stress. These strategies include engaging in leisure activities with other people, engaging in activities to distract them from the realities of life, and engaging in pursuits that would improve their mood. However, their main coping strategy was in being with others and talking to family, friends, or others in the shelter. These strategies used by

participants are in-line with existing research on leisure methods for coping with stress. These three strategies will be discussed below.

Leisure researchers have shown that leisure can be an effective buffer against these negative effects. Iwasaki and Mannell (2000) identified three strategies where leisure is used in coping: (1) Leisure Companionship, (2) Leisure Palliative Coping and (3) Leisure Mood. Leisure companionship refers to engaging in leisure that is shared with other people. Leisure palliative coping refers to using leisure as a time-out from the daily hassles of life, thus rejuvenating the individual. Finally, leisure mood enhancement refers to using leisure as a means of increasing positive moods or decreasing negative moods.

In this section, I explored the potential role that these three leisure strategies can play in coping with stressful situations, a far better alternative that can provide many benefits to individuals rather than self-harm. As mentioned in the introduction, the purpose of this project was to explore the role of a community service organization in the lives of individuals who access its services from their own perspectives as well as from the perspectives of those who work and volunteer there. A charitable community is a location where possible leisure coping strategies can take place. Understanding the relationships between leisure and stress coping can help us understand the role that a charitable community can play in coping with stress, and ultimately in the lives of those who use or manage their services.

2.2.1 Leisure Companionship

Leisure companionship has been shown to be beneficial in itself; creating enjoyable settings for participants and strengthening relationships among members (Nimrod, 2007). In Iwasaki, Mackay and Mactavish's (2005) study, they found that "social aspects of leisure and leisure-related social support were found to be key stress-coping methods..." (p. 12). This statement is reflective of leisure companionship and leisure palliative coping (which I will discuss in the next section). In another study,

Iwasaki, Bartlett and O'Neil (2005) found that one common theme for First Nations women with diabetes in coping or healing from stressful situations involved having a sense of interdependence or connectedness. This interdependence and connectedness was important in that it provided participants with an outlet for sharing their feelings and discussing problems. It also gave them a form of social support, and also helped to encourage and give them strength. In other words,

“...interdependence/connectedness is essential to provide an opportunity for openly sharing one's feelings and issues with others, and gaining support, encouragement, and strength. The importance of maintaining proper support systems is emphasized...”

(Iwasaki, Bartlett, & O'Neil, 2005, p. 986).

Other researchers have made similar conclusions. In Klitzing's (2004) research focusing on homeless women, she states that leisure is an important tool for letting individuals connect with others who might be experiencing similar life experiences. This connection to others is important as it offers a sense of belonging and acceptance to the individual. In their study with women experiencing homelessness, Millburn and D'Ercole (1991) concluded that the most important factor in coping with stress was to have a form of social support. Coleman and Iso-Ahola (1993) state that “by participating in most leisure activities, social support is likely to be established and maintained and this support could buffer the impacts of life events” (p. 353). Interestingly, they also state that the benefits of leisure-based social support become increasingly apparent when individuals experience higher levels of life stress.

2.2.2 Leisure Palliative Coping

Leisure palliative coping has three main elements. The first element is the assumption that having occupied leisure time is more beneficial to the individual and society than other harmful activities (Caldwell & Smith, 1995; Weissinger, 1995). Secondly, engaging in leisure allows an

individual to escape from stressful situations or unpleasant experiences, such as work stress or the death of a loved one (Sharp & Mannell, 1996). Finally, this temporary escape from reality is assumed to help rejuvenate individuals, restoring their energy and perhaps changing their perspective to better deal with the situation or situations that they are in (Endler & Parker, 1990). Interestingly, according to Iwasaki's (2001) research, palliative coping was seen to be more effective in dealing with stressful situations where the problem was perceived as uncontrollable or less controllable.

Leisure palliative coping is a common strategy used to deal with stressful situations by providing a temporary escape from reality. In Iwasaki, Bartlett and O'Neil's (2005) study, aboriginal women and men with diabetes were interviewed to examine their strategies in coping with stress. Overall, it was found that leisure played a key role in allowing participants to escape. Types of leisure that participants mentioned as helping them escape reality included reading, going to the movies, listening to music, leaving for a few days, visiting nature sites, exercising, dancing, travelling, and finding humour. In another study, Iwasaki, MacKay and Mactavish (2005) interviewed participants on their stress coping methods and ended up with similar findings. Overall, these studies point to the effectiveness of palliative leisure in coping with negative stress, allowing participants to temporarily escape reality in order to feel refreshed and recharged to better handle stressful situations. As is apparent, leisure palliative coping represents one of many ways that leisure is used in dealing with stress.

2.2.3 Leisure Mood Enhancement

The connection between leisure and mood was noted many decades ago. Bandura (1977) suggested that the positive mood brought about by leisure activities come from people doing what they are, or think they are, good at doing, resulting in increased engagement of that behaviour. As a result, Bandura stated that "there may, therefore, be another common source of positive emotion; the satisfaction resulting from the self-efficacy of those who can perform successfully" (p. 524).

Years later, the connection between leisure and mood continued to be studied. According to Hills and Argyle (1998), leisure activities:

...are major sources of happiness. They are of special interest because their selection is a matter of individual choice and they are more under personal control than many other sources of satisfaction. Leisure activities are voluntarily undertaken, therefore it is to be expected that individuals participate in them for enjoyment, even when the activities are physically punishing like boxing and marathon running, and that underlying this enjoyment are the positive moods or emotions (affect) which the activities generate (p. 523).

Interestingly, Lu and Hu (2005) argued different types of leisure correspond to different levels of mood enhancement. Positive mood changes were present when the leisure pursuit was deemed to be serious. That is, the authors state that individuals enter a more positive mood when their leisure activity is serious, committed, and constructive. Although these individuals describe their leisure as stressful, challenging and absorbing, they also describe it as under control. Further along these lines, Berg, Grant and Johnson (2010) found that individuals who pursue the leisure activities they always wanted to do (but were restrained in the past due to various reasons), have elevated levels of psychological enjoyment and increased meaning in their lives. On the other hand, those who engage in less serious leisure activities (such as television watching) have been found to have fewer positive changes in their mood (Lu & Argyle, 1994).

Coming from a different perspective, Hills and Argyle (1998) gathered data on individuals participating in certain leisure activities. They found that mood was positively enhanced after leisure activities such as sport, music and church, but not so for isolated activities such as television watching. These findings are in-line with the theory of social motivation, which states

that individuals are motivated primarily by social needs, and that activities that satisfy these social needs are the most important (Forgas, Williams, & Laham, 2005). Church attendance is considered to be a major source of social satisfaction because of the cohesive nature of church groups (Beit-Hallahmi & Argyle, 1997). Similarly, these authors noted that sports provided social satisfaction from the sense of belonging to the sport club or team and from personal interaction during the sport competition. In the same way, music was considered a source of social satisfaction because the music was performed by cooperating members (Hills & Argyle, 1998).

Burke, Maton, Mankowski and Anderson (2010) conducted a study with male participants who gathered together in a secluded rural setting where they were free from everyday distraction and daily stresses. This leisure setting was focused on healing emotional pain of the members in a safe environment. Results suggested that such close-knit leisure settings were a valuable opportunity to increase the overall well-being for participants. Understanding the theory of social motivation provides insight into the role of the organization in the lives of participants. In the same way that group membership or belonging to a club is helpful in providing social satisfaction (as seen in the research above), I explored whether the organization is a setting that fosters a sense of belonging.

Leisure companionship, leisure palliative coping, and leisure mood enhancement are three methods that individuals use to cope with stressful situations (Iwasaki & Mannell, 2000). In this project, the notion of community is looked at as a leisure setting for individuals experiencing homelessness to congregate and build relationships. In this research project, most of the questions posed to the participants will focus on the organization as a community, specifically finding out what functions the organization plays in the lives of these homeless individuals. Understanding these three leisure coping mechanisms shaped the questions and the analysis of the data collected in this report.

The next section of this literature review focuses on research related to notions of community. This is important to my project as it helps to explore whether the Good Shepherd provides a setting in which an informal community is created. As this project discovers the role of the organization in the lives of participants, understanding previous research on the functions of community, community integration, and social capital helped me to be aware of, and sensitive to, the extent to which the organization helps to foster community for participants. These subtopics provide a larger understanding as to whether and how this 'community' influences the lives of homeless individuals.

2.3 COMMUNITY

The notion of community has been defined by many scholars. Foster (1990) states that community "implies shared interests, characteristics or association" (p. 334). Bender (1991) defines community as "a network of social relations marked by mutuality and emotional bonds" (p. 334). Nisbet (1969) described community "as a fusion of feeling, tradition, commitment, membership, and psychological strength" (p. 334). Brint (2001) states that the term community suggests "many appealing features of human social relationships – a sense of familiarity and safety, mutual concern and support, continuous loyalties, even the possibility of being appreciated for one's full personality and contribution to group life rather than for narrower aspects of rank and achievement" (p. 2).

2.3.1 *Functions of community*

According to Warren (1978), there are five main functions of a community: (1) meeting supply and demand, (2) socialization, (3) social control, (4) social participation and (5) mutual support. Meeting supply and demand refers to making sure each member has adequate resources to meet his or her basic needs through the production and distribution of necessities. Socialization refers to the exchange of knowledge, social values and behaviour patterns within members of the community.

Social control refers to a certain level of conformity within the group. Social participation refers to the opportunities provided for members to interact with each other. Finally, mutual support refers to the community acting as a bridge between individuals as well as helpful behaviours from other members of the community. These functions are essential in a community, and represent a diverse array of benefits that a community provides for its members (Warren, 1978).

Membership in communities is usually accompanied by many benefits, and when individuals feel isolated, mental and physical health problems often develop (Adler & Towne, 1999). Putnam (2000) found in his study of social engagement in North America that those who were more integrated with their communities were less likely to display health ailments such as colds, heart attacks, strokes, cancer or depression. Shiovitz-Ezra and Leitsch (2010) found that the frequency of contact with social networks was inversely proportional to feelings of loneliness and psychological well-being. Wing and Jeffery (1999) found that participants with social supports were more likely to meet their goals than those attempting to meet their goals without support. Baker and Palmer (2006) concluded that the two strongest predictors of quality of life were community pride and other elements of community. Overall, these researchers agree that community (and the social support inherent in community) are factors that improve the overall life of individuals whether through physical, social, psychological, or other means.

Another important function of community is having a “sense of community” (SOC). Sarason (1974) stated that a SOC is the “perception of similarity to others” (p. 157). Similarly, McMillan (1996) stated that SOC is created when individuals can find others whom think, feel, and behave in similar ways. According to McMillan and Chavis (1986), a SOC includes the following dimensions: membership, influence, integration and fulfillment of needs, and shared emotional connection. Membership refers to the sense of belonging and identification with the group. Influence refers to the power that an individual has in making changes or choices within the group. Integration and

fulfillment of needs focuses on common needs, goals and/or beliefs by the members of the group. Finally, shared emotional connection refers to the bonds developed between group members as a result of shared history and time spent with each other.

As is apparent, a SOC amongst members of a group is largely based upon similarities between individuals. While these similarities contain many benefits inherent in them, Townley, Kloos, Green and Franco (2011) claim that a SOC can also threaten the value of diversity. In line with the research mentioned above, Townley, *et. al's.* (2001) literature review finds that many studies show that ethnic homogeneity is significantly related to community social cohesion, and is the strongest predictor of SOC. (Sampson, 1991; Caughy, O'Campo, & Muntaner, 2003; Farrell, Aubry, & Coulombe, 2004;). Thus, in these communities with a strong SOC, the value of diversity is undermined. Having an understanding of a SOC within members of the Good Shepherd contributes to understanding the potential role of the organization in the lives of homeless individuals. According to the discussion above, evidence shows that individuals that are similar to each other are important in creating a SOC, but this favouritism towards similarity could potentially create a barrier between those who are different. This project aims to seek out the role of the organization in their lives, whether the individual is similar and feels part of the community, or whether the individual is different from the norm and has trouble developing a SOC.

The next section in this literature review looks at general aspects of community involvement and places it in the context of homeless individuals.

2.3.2 Community Integration

While the literature above discusses community within the Good Shepherd, this section explores the issue of the community at large. Researchers have shown that for homeless individuals who experience mental disorders, the need for community integration is magnified (Carling, 1995; Wong & Solomon, 2002). However, this group of people pose an exceptional challenge to the mental

health service system and to the goal of community integration. Many of these challenges arise due to the high prevalence of substance abuse, HIV infection, as well as criminal justice involvement, which further complicates the situation (Yanos, Barrow and Tsemberis, 2004). Two major views in creating community integration have been suggested. These views are the “continuum of care” approach and the “housing first” approach (Yanos, Barrow & Tsemberis, 2004). Both these approaches treat independent housing as a beginning to community integration, as opposed to shared living under surveillance, where individuals may be seen as excluded from society.

The “continuum of care” approach places emphasis on treatment in homeless individuals experiencing mental disorders. Based on this emphasis on treatment, the type of housing program they receive is dependent upon their current condition, and is determined by professionals (Arons & Weiss, 1997). Housing programs can consist of individual apartments for those with less severe symptoms, but can also consist of group settings with tight supervision for those who have more severe symptoms (Yanos, Barrow & Tsemberis, 2004). On the other hand, the “housing first” approach places homeless individuals experiencing mental disorders in independent apartments from the start (Tsemberis & Asmussen, 1999). No assessments of “readiness” or mental states are conducted, and the type of housing does not become a function of the individual’s state. Research comparing the two approaches has found that the “housing first” approach eliminates more barriers to housing access and is preferred by most individuals when compared to the “continuum of care” approach (Gulcure, Stefarcic, Shinn, Tsemberis, & Fischer, 2003). However, while these two approaches emphasize community integration in the physical sense, the next challenge is then to explore the social and psychological aspects of integration, which “reflects the degree to which a person participates in and feels a part of the general community” (Yanos, Barrow & Tsemberis, 2004, p. 135).

Yanos, Barrow and Tesmberis’ (2004) conducted a study in New York City and found that transitioning into housing improves many psychological and social constructs such as their sense of

safety and self-esteem. In return, these improved constructs help them to feel part of the community at large. However, they also found that a minority of participants had difficulty adapting to independent living, and often had trouble coping with loneliness or the added responsibilities of such living arrangements. On the other hand, participants who live under surveillance or staff care were often frustrated at the rules and lack of freedom associated with such housing, often causing participants to leave prematurely. One integral aspect of community that has been often studied, and related strongly to these issues, is “social capital”.

2.3.3 Social Capital

The term “social capital” has been ambiguously defined (Pawar, 2006). As a result of the ambiguity of the term, application of the concept has been challenging (Wakefield & Poland, 2005). Labonte (1999) states that the term is merely a “repackaging” of what those in the health and community sector have already been doing. Hayes and Dunn (1998) states that the building blocks of social capital have not been identified, making it hard to apply. Mohan and Stokke (2000) criticize the concept for being vague and indiscriminate. Even Putnam (1998), a widely cited author in this area, admitted that the understanding of social capital is inadequate and confusing. The reason for this confusion is the fact that social capital has been defined and used differently according to different disciplines such as political science, sociology and economics (Pawar, 2006). Generally speaking, social capital is a multi-dimensional theory involving members gaining access to information or resources that they would not have access to otherwise. These resources include both physical resources (e.g. food, money, shelter) and psychological resources (e.g. companionship, community) (Newton, 1997; Bhandari & Yasunobu, 2009; Xu, Palmer & Perkins, 2011). It is based on elements of social networks, community, generalised trust, norms of reciprocity, and shared beliefs (Bhandari & Yasunobu, 2009). According to Xu, Palmer and Perkins (2011):

...social capital theory assumes that building social networks, trust, and cohesion lead to active participation in local services and voluntary associations, individuals thereby identify and support collective goals that reinforce norms of reciprocity and a more connected and caring community. (p. 91)

Despite the mixed views of the term “social capital”, it has proven useful for capturing specific benefits associated with community integration. Firstly, Berkman, Glass, Brissette and Seeman (2000) find in their literature review that social capital has a largely positive influence on individual health through the provision of caring relationships and meaningful community connections. Secondly, not only has social capital been shown to have beneficial effects on an individual’s health, but it has also shown to preserve health through social cohesion (Reidpath, 2003). Lastly, social capital has been shown to assist in community self-help, “allowing communities to more easily work together to solve collective (health) problems” (Wakefield & Poland, 2005, p. 2822).

In a study by Glover and Parry (2008), the development of friendships and their implications for the health of women coping with stressful situations were examined. The authors found that such friendships were important to the participant’s health because these social ties created social capital, which allowed participants to get by, get ahead, and fall behind in terms of their individual health and well-being. To the participants, getting by involved being continuously reassured that everything would be alright. It gave participants a sense of security to know that they had the support they needed. Getting ahead meant that these ties of social capital allowed the participants to gain information and access to resources that they would not be able to have otherwise. However, although for the most part these were helpful, there were times where participants found this information and access to resources more stressful than helpful. While getting by and getting ahead are both forms of social capital that are beneficial to the participants, having such social capital in

place often caused participants to fall behind. This is seen when participants felt the need to support their friends even when they felt uncomfortable doing so.

Portes (1998) describes the negative consequences of social capital in more detail. He argues that social capital can cause: exclusion of outsiders, excess claims on group members, restrictions on individual freedoms, and downward leveling norms. Exclusion of outsiders refers to the idea that the same beliefs and characteristics that hold a group together can also prevent others from joining such a group. Excess claims on group members refers to the prevention of certain initiatives by individuals in the group due to the favours that such individuals “owe” others in the same group. These favours as pressured by the group members can make it difficult for the individual to run his/her business initiative effectively. Restrictions on individual freedoms refers to the demand for uniformity in order to be a part of the group. Finally, downward leveling norms refers to the undermining of group cohesion through individual success stories.

These components of community and social capital have significant influence on research with individuals experiencing homelessness (Wakefield & Poland, 2005; Schultz, O’Brien, & Tadesse, 2008). For my project, understanding the benefits and challenges of creating healthy communities and social capital will allow me to develop better insight into the role that organization plays in the lives of participants. It will provide me with the knowledge to ask the right questions, and to probe into important matters related to participants’ experiences with such organizations. While the concept of social capital will not directly be addressed in the study, this project seeks to explore the meanings and experiences that participants have with the organization. Having an understanding of social capital and the general role it plays in the lives of individuals will help me in gaining a better understanding of the role of the organization in the lives of those who are homeless. In the next section, I review studies exploring the relationship between community and homeless individuals.

2.3.4 Studies on Community and Organizations

A handful of studies exploring charitable organizations have been conducted in the past. Heslin, Andersen and Gelberg (2003) conducted over 900 interviews across 78 homeless shelters, examining the use of faith-based social service providers among homeless women with and without religious affiliation. In many of these faith-based providers, the authors report that participation in religious activities organized by the provider was required in order to receive services. As the authors hypothesized, homeless women without religious affiliation used such services significantly less than those who were religiously affiliated. The authors also mention that the reason for the difference in usage patterns is due to the religiously-affiliated group being more comfortable in such settings. Keeping this in mind, it seems as if these homeless women find it important to be in a comfortable scenario even in a setting that provides for their basic needs. Thus, we can speculate that these homeless women look for more than just physical food in such settings, but also a type of setting where they can feel comfortable within the community. This idea of such services providing more than just physical needs, but other needs (perhaps emotional or social needs) is what this project aims to explore.

In another study conducted by O'Toole, et al. (2007), 230 homeless individuals in the US took part in face-to-face interviews. The researchers found that the first settings that the majority of participants went to (when first becoming homeless) were soup kitchens (45.7% of respondents indicated that this is their first setting they visit). This percentage is greater than the secondly most frequented site (welfare office - 30.9%) by approximately 15%. Other sites and services mentioned by study participants included homeless outreach service, family members, friends, homeless drop-in centres, etc). Interestingly, it is possible there is some type of desired meaning or experience for those who first become homeless that can only be gained when attending a soup kitchen, something that comes before family or friends. Perhaps the experiences of being in a community with a group of

people who share similar circumstances are especially important. A soup kitchen may be a place that offers more than food, and this project aims to find out what role such an organization can play in the lives of homeless individuals.

Other studies look at the role of a “place” in building community. Glover (2004) looked at a community garden as a social context in which social capital was prevalent among members of community gardeners. He states:

The participants’ willingness to share resources is only enhanced by the social connections they make during their participation in the shared act of gardening and other activities related to the establishment and operation of the project, activities such as grant-seeking, fundraising efforts, and community cookouts, which are connected only peripherally to gardening. In this sense, community gardens are less about gardening than they are about community. (p. 143)

The community garden above is described as more than a physical location, but rather a setting for shared activities and social interactions. Glover (2004) also states that the community garden was “a symbol of collective achievement within the neighbourhood” (p. 159). In the same manner that this community garden contains more meaning than just the physical garden, this project aims to find out whether the organization contains more meaning to its members than simply the food provided.

In another study by Glover and Parry (2009), a social club in Toronto was examined to explore its role in the lives of people living with cancer. Researchers interviewed 26 members of the club, and found that three main themes developed as to their motivation for participating in the club. These themes are that the club provided a home away from home, it allowed the participants to make friends going through similar circumstances, and it was a place of sociability. In their discussion of the

first theme, Glover and Parry (2009) argue that such a club enabled participants to escape from life (often the hospital) into an alternate home. It allowed participants to go into a place where they were welcomed, and free to share about their problems if they wanted to. Under the second theme, participants indicated the importance of making friends who are in similar circumstances, especially since participants feel isolated in the hospital setting. The authors also mentioned that this second theme is important as participants state the need to find others who can understand the challenges that they are going through, who are usually those in similar circumstances. In addition, such a place provided social interaction amongst members, which led to important advantages such as information sharing and various forms of support.

This leads to the third theme coming from their research, that the club is a place of sociability (Glover & Parry, 2009). In regard to this, Glover and Parry found that participants particularly enjoyed Gilda's club as the focus was on fostering sociability. This focus on sociability is contrasted to other services or organizations that these cancer patients attend, which focus on "fixing" a problem or offering treatment. In other words, these patients formed bonds and made friends at the club, something they were not able to do in other treatment centres or organizations. Thus, it is apparent that this place held many meanings for participants, and is important in helping them cope with their unfortunate circumstances. Similarly, in my project, I explore the role of Good Shepherd in the lives of people who are homeless as well as those who work there. In the next section, I review the literature on leisure and homelessness.

2.4 LEISURE AND HOMELESSNESS

Little research has been done examining the connection between leisure and individuals experiencing homelessness. Dawson and Harrington (1997) claimed that leisure's role in the lives of homeless individuals was to provide opportunities for them to be empowered, and to resist against the effects of being a group of marginalized people. On a political scale, Hemingway (1999) made the

claim that public leisure spaces are opportunities for people to congregate and deal with social problems such as homelessness. Dawson and Harrington (1996) claimed that recreation can be used to improve the quality of homeless individuals, help them maintain affiliations with their communities, and to provide forms of encouragement. A year later they expanded on their study and found that leisure opportunities also serve as a form of personal empowerment for homeless individuals (Dawson & Harrington, 1997). Klitzing (2004) found that the coping strategy most used for those experiencing homelessness was to be with others, whether it was other people in a homeless shelter, their friends, family, or staff. As mentioned above, individuals experiencing homelessness are exposed to high levels of life stress. Thus, according to Coleman and Iso-Ahola (1993), leisure based social support would serve as an important tool in coping with stress in their lives.

In a study conducted by Trussell and Mair (2010), semi-structured exploratory interviews were used to search for concepts and themes among individuals who were frequent users of three social service organizations. Their purpose was to explore the “experiences and meanings of leisure for individuals living in poverty and who are homeless or at imminent risk of becoming homeless” (pg. 1). One major overarching theme emerged, which was the participants needed to find “judgement-free spaces”. Findings suggested that participants were in search for organizations that accepted them and helped them, rather than exposed or judged their situations. In addition, social relationships within the community and outside of the community were also important themes for the participants. That is, the participants were eager to feel as a part of the broader community, as opposed to just being part of the local service organizations. Finally, participants also found that the service organizations were able to give them personal time and space, where they could engage in solo activities as a way to temporarily escape from the realities of life. These findings help to broaden my understanding of the phenomenon at hand, which will in turn help me understand the meanings and experiences of the participants in my own study. This study will explore the possibility that the organization I work with is

a type of community. It may be a setting for individuals experiencing homelessness to convene, meeting not only physical needs but also social needs. This project aims to find out, from the perspectives of both homeless individuals and staff members, the role of the organization, and what meanings and experiences are associated with such a place.

In summary, homelessness is a complicated phenomenon. The meaning of homelessness is confusing, often encompassing attitudes associated with the lack of a physical home in addition to the lack of a physical home itself. Many factors also play a role in homelessness, such as substance abuse, traumatic experiences, family issues, and poverty, although it is often uncertain which of these factors are the determinants of homelessness and which ones are outcomes (or which ones are both). Homelessness is also found to be associated with large amounts of stress. Additionally, leisure researchers have found that leisure can be an effective tool to alleviate stress. Finally, this literature review also reveals to us the importance of a community.

Chapter 3: Methodology and methods

The purpose of this project was to explore the role of the organization in the lives of individuals who access its services as well as those who work and volunteer there. This chapter presents a discussion of the methods I used to conduct this project. The topics that I address are: (1) phenomenology, (2) ethical considerations, (3) recruiting participants, (4) procedures, and (5) limitations,

3.1 PHENOMENOLOGY

Phenomenology is the “study of the lifeworld—the world as we immediately experience it pre-reflectively rather than as we conceptualize, categorize, or reflect on it” (van Manen, 1997, p. 5). The focus is on returning back to the ‘concrete’; captured by the slogan “Back to the things themselves!” (Groenewald, 2004, p.43). It is both a research method and a philosophy (Dowling, 2007). Kirby (2008) states that phenomenology:

...addresses the structures of consciousness, both of what we perceive and how we perceive it, and advocates a ‘bracketing’ or suspension of taken-for-granted attitudes about reality in order to reconstruct a more accurate view of the world...

Phenomenology assumes that we all have a prescientific, natural attitude toward the world around us, to the events we experience, and to the culture we have inherited, as these things appear to our consciousness; this natural attitude gives us a framework for interpreting our experience. (p. 23)

Phenomenology assumes that we cannot understand the world objectively, but what we can know are the phenomena that appear in our consciousness, which are all we need to know (Kirby, 2008). As Groenewald (2004) states, a phenomenological approach seeks , “to arrive at a certainty,

anything outside immediate experience must be ignored, and in this way the external world is reduced to the contents of personal consciousness” (p. 43). Ultimately, phenomenology is about describing the meaning and experiences of individuals arising from what they are aware of consciously or their “lived experiences” (van Manen, 1997). It is about finding the “essences” of a phenomenon, describing the raw experiences that individuals have. Its weakness lies in that those working with this approach do not assume any ability to control or predict patterns of the world, but the usefulness of this perspective stems from its ability to help us develop an understanding of the in-depth meanings and experiences of people and the world around them (VanManen, 1997).

For my project, I conducted a phenomenological study as described above. As the purpose of this research was to understand and describe the meanings and experiences of participants, phenomenology was the most appropriate methodological approach. From the beginning of the research to the final report, I aimed to be aware and to make clear my original dispositions (as much as possible), and to capture the lived experiences of those involved with the organization. I sought the essences of the relationship between participants and the organization and what these relationships meant for them. Where possible, I extracted the meanings and experiences as expressed by the participants themselves. This study does not intend to predict, standardize, or generalize behaviour, rather it seeks to explore and understand this particular case. As with all studies, phenomenology carries with it many ethical considerations that must be taken into account. The next section will discuss these considerations.

3.2 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Prior to the collection of data or communication with an individual, group or organization related to this study, ethics approval was obtained from the University of Waterloo’s Office of Research Ethics. As a researcher, I am aware that there are many ethical considerations in play when involving individuals experiencing homelessness. In fact, Ponterotto (2010) stated that research in the

qualitative field is filled with examples of ethical abuse of research participants, mainly people from marginalized groups. Some of the major considerations specific to this study include: power relationships, compensation and sensitive issues.

As a researcher, I am generally perceived to be educated and financially stable (both of which are true). This fact in itself led to some ethical challenges. Many of the participants in my study had a low level of education and lived in poverty. As a result, participants could have had the perspective that I, the researcher, was someone who was trying to “fix” them. A power difference was likely to exist between myself and the participants, perhaps leading to resistance, or pressure to participate since I am a university student. Although during the interviews I saw no obvious signs that demonstrated resistance, it could still have been present, but merely difficult to notice. In addition to these ethical challenges, Alcoff (2009) wrote a chapter titled, “The problem of speaking for others”. In the chapter she challenges researchers to question their lifestyle when compared to their participants, and to examine the “right” they have in representing them. She then mentions that it is a good practice for researchers to talk “with” participants rather than “to” or “for” them. In order to be on the same level with the participants as much as possible, it was important for me to dress casually and to be conscious of my language. However, although my original plan was to have two-way sharing of information with the participants (rather than an extraction of research data), I found that the participants were not receptive or interested in my stories. In the end, participants had many stories to share and I found it unnecessary to involve my own stories or experiences during the interviews.

Secondly, research has also shown that there is a high correlation between individuals experiencing homelessness and a history of childhood violence or other traumatic experiences (Thrane, Hoyt, Whitbeck & Yoder, 2006; Tyler, 2006; Ferguson, 2009). Although data collection about these past experiences of the participants was not the focus of this study, there were instances where participants talked about their past and other sensitive issues. Many of these memories or

experiences were unpleasant for them, and the interview process may have evoked such uncomfortable thoughts. These memories were very sensitive to the participants, and at times likely caused them to experience negative emotions. Similarly, as mentioned in the literature review, homelessness is often associated with high levels of stress and anxiety (Klitzing, 2004). Thus, not only did past memories evoke negative emotions, but present circumstances as well. When these negative emotions were evoked during the interviews, I asked the participant if they wanted to continue answering the question and if they needed a break, to which I responded appropriately.

While I acknowledge that these ethical challenges are not easy to overcome, there are methods I used to ease the dangers of the issues described above. First, in phenomenological research, the aim is to get at the in-depth experiences of the participants with as little interference as possible (keeping in mind it is impossible to completely bracket out my own emotions, beliefs, and views). Thus, in my research I attempted not to speak for participants, but rather to ask them to express their experiences in their own words. According to Fischer (2009), bracketing typically refers to:

...an investigator's identification of vested interests, personal experience, cultural factors, assumptions, and hunches that could influence how he or she views the study's data. For the sake of viewing data freshly, these involvements are placed in 'brackets' and 'shelved' for the time being as much as possible" (p. 1).

However, many researchers argue that it is impossible to completely bracket out the dispositions that a researcher brings with him/her to the study (van Manen, 1990). Instead, Dowling (2007) states that bracketing, in the context of phenomenology, refers to the researcher "examining their prejudices in order to allow them to include the views of the respondents" (p. 136). He goes on

to mention the importance of consciously knowing one's own prejudices in order to be able to bracket them out. In my research project, I followed Hycner's (1985) strategy for bracketing.

Hycner (1985) agrees with Dowling (2007), stating that there is no way that the researcher is "standing in some absolute and totally presuppositionless space" (p. 281). Rather, bracketing is described as laying down as much as possible the beliefs that the researcher enters with, and to enter the eyes of the participant so as to see from his/her perspective. In order to best achieve this, physically writing down all the presuppositions that the researcher has will assist in making these beliefs visible to the researcher. Also, speaking to colleagues or advisors about the researchers' project is a helpful way to practice speaking without presuppositional wordings or phrases. I employed these two techniques in my project, writing down all my presuppositions and speaking to colleagues or other friends in similar academic fields about my project.

Additionally, Fischer (2009) states that bracketing is not a process that occurs once during the study, but rather is an ongoing, critically-reflective process about one's research. Therefore, it was important for me to remain continuously reflective of my research at every major stage of the process. After every significant point in my research, I reviewed the new material and consciously looked for situations where my own presuppositions affected the study. I took note of the locations where I found such presuppositions and did my best to bracket them out in future interviews, transcriptions, and analyses. For example, in my first interview with a client, I asked whether the people that the client met in the food program helped him out with his homelessness. As I reflected on my interview later on, I realized that by asking such a question I made a major assumption that the client wanted/needed help. In future interviews, I made sure to avoid such assumptions. Instead, I asked more open ended questions such as "what is the relationship between you and the others in the meal program". Again, although complete bracketing is unattainable, these techniques helped me to challenge my own beliefs throughout the study. More specific examples can be seen in Appendix A.

Secondly, while I followed up with participants in response to their answers in certain areas, I made sure to stress to them in the beginning of the study that they did not have to answer any questions that they do not wish to without any loss of compensation. In addition, when participants reacted emotionally, I gave them the option of taking a break or withdrawing from the study if they wished. Finally, in order to protect the confidentiality of these individuals, pseudonyms are used when referring to the individuals in this study.

3.3 RECRUITING PARTICIPANTS

For this exploratory study, I focused on the organization known as Good Shepherd. This is a setting where those who are homeless congregate, and many interactions occur on a regular basis between staff members and clients. The sample for my study included individuals living in the City of Hamilton in Ontario and who are using the services of the organization as well as the staff who worked there. According to Creswell (1998) and Boyd (2001), ten participants are more than sufficient to reach information saturation when conducting phenomenology. However, for my study, I conducted thirteen interviews before I felt that I had enough data. Purposive sampling was used to ensure that a similar number of participants that were staff members and clients were represented in the data. Purposive sampling refers to selecting individuals who will best help me answer my research questions, as opposed to randomly selecting participants as is commonly found in quantitative research (Creswell, 2009).

Two main methods were used to recruit participants for the study. The first method was to ask the staff members at the organization to recruit participants for me. When asking the staff members to help choose clients, I specifically requested them to choose clients that they consider a regular member of the organization and who they thought might be willing to talk about their experiences. The second method involved asking the participants directly (of course, I had permission

from the organization to recruit participants in this manner). Through volunteering at the organization for a couple of weeks beforehand, I was able to build up relationships with some of the clients and so felt comfortable asking them to participate in the study. I found this extremely important in ensuring that the study participants reflected a wide range of experiences in regards to the Good Shepherd, instead of talking to only the clients that the staff members wanted me to talk to.

At the beginning of the interviews with staff members, an information consent letter was given to them and explained (see Appendix B). If the participant agreed to the terms, then written consent was collected. As for the interviews with clients, an information letter was given (see Appendix C) and consent was gathered verbally instead of in writing as per the instructions of the University of Waterloo's Office of Research and Ethics. After the interviews were completed, different feedback letters were handed out to the staff (see Appendix D) and clients (see Appendix E). Finally, after the study is successfully defended, a feedback letter to the organization will be sent, thanking them for their participation and explaining what I plan to do with the research (see Appendix F).

3.3.1 About the Good Shepherd

The Good Shepherd is an organization based in Hamilton, Ontario, that was created in 1961 in order to address the needs of the community. Their work is based on a "fundamental belief in protecting and promoting human dignity, equality, progress and potential, which is rooted in [their] values of availability, hospitality, flexibility, adaptability, and dignity of service". The clientele includes troubled youth, abused women and children, people who are dying, mentally and physically challenged, hungry and/or homeless. Their services are free of cost and available to anyone in need. The activities of the Good Shepherd are an expression of their mission, which reflects the beliefs of the Roman Catholic Church and the teachings of Jesus Christ. Their mission statement is as follows:

Energized by charity unlimited... never stop loving. The little brothers of the Good Shepherd, the board of directors, the staff and volunteers of Good Shepherd, Hamilton, Ontario strive to

enhance the quality of life for all who seek assistance and support. Respectful of life, as a Catholic organization, we commit ourselves to respond to our brothers and sisters in need with: availability, flexibility, adaptability, hospitality, and dignity (Good Shepherd, 2007a).

The Good Shepherd offers many services. The main services offered are:

- A warehouse (where donations are gathered and distributed to those in need)
- A food bank
- A community food program (where hot meals are served twice a day to those in need)
- A clothing program
- Women's services
- Youth services
- Temporary housing for those who are homeless or with mental illnesses
- A "steps to health" program which enhances the quality of life for adults with mental health issues (Good Shepherd, 2007b)

The main service I was involved in was the evening community food program. The evening community food program is available Mondays to Saturdays from 3:30 p.m. to 4:45 p.m. During this time, clients are free to simply walk into the centre, grab a tray and eat. No registration is necessary. Most of the clients that attend are those who are homeless or living in poverty. During the program, clients are served a hot meal on a tray, and then proceed to sit with other clients around the tables. At this time, clients often engage in conversation with other clients, or even with the staff members who are around supervising. Before conducting interviews, I spent a couple of weeks volunteering at the meal program. My duty was simply to help clean up the dirty dishes. This allowed me to be integrated a little bit more into the program. Throughout the volunteer experience, I was also able to make friends and establish relationships with some of the clients.

For the sake of clarity, the term "staff member" in the rest of this project includes all individuals who work at the Good Shepherd. While the "case workers" are also staff members, the case workers have regular direct contact with those in the meal program. Although most of the staff I interviewed were case workers, there were two members that held other titles, although a lot of their duties overlapped. In general, staff responsibilities included cleaning, serving, and keeping the meal

program in control during operation hours, assisting clients in using the services of the Good Shepherd, and dealing with extreme situations such as violent behaviour. Additionally, the term “client” is used throughout the thesis to describe those who use and access the services of Good Shepherd.

3.4 PROCEDURES

One major purpose of phenomenological studies is to capture the perspective of the participants (Hiller & DiLuzio, 2004). In this section, I will describe the methods I used for collecting data with these participants, along with relevant considerations for each step. In every step of this research, it was important for me to bracket my dispositions as much as possible. In order to do so, I continuously wrote down the assumptions I had after each significant benchmark in my study in order to make myself more conscious of them. In addition, it was also important for me to constantly speak to my colleagues about my project, which allowed me to be aware of my beliefs through my language. As mentioned above, Fischer (2009) states that bracketing is not a process that occurs once, but rather it is an ongoing, critically-reflexive process that should be ingrained in every step of the project. The interview procedures are listed below.

Step 1: Semi-structured Interviews:

In choosing my methodological approach, I decided that one-to-one, semi-structured interviews would be the best method or tool available for capturing these perspectives (see Appendix G for a list of interview questions). Bryman, Teevan and Bell (2009) emphasize the main benefit of a semi-structured interview. They state that semi-structured interviews allow a set of pre-established questions to act as a guide for the interviewer. However, there is also room for flexibility for the researcher to ask more and to probe deeper beyond the pre-set questions, often in response to

participants' answers. Bell (2007) states that this process allows the participant to state in his/her own perspective how certain phenomena make sense in their minds.

In conducting a semi-structured interview, it was important for me to "enter the world I am studying", as suggested by Charmaz (2004). She states that doing so means:

...being fully present during the interview and deep inside the content afterward. Not only does this focused attention validate your participant's humanity, it also helps you to take a close look at what you are gaining. Entering the phenomenon means that you come to sense, feel, and fathom what having this experience is like, although you enter your participants' lives much less than an ethnographer does. Entering the phenomenon also means that your active involvement with data shapes the analysis. A few descriptive codes and a powerful computer program do not suffice. (p. 981).

However, most importantly, it was crucial that I treated the participants with respect. As Charmaz (2004) states:

... respect means more than meeting institutional regulations. Respecting our research participants means acknowledging and honouring their fundamental humanity. It means treating people with dignity when we do not condone their beliefs and actions. It also means searching for their meanings and understanding their actions as they see them, not according to our philosophical or professional perspectives. It can mean temporarily abandoning our researcher role (pg. 985).

The pacing of the interview questions loosely followed Charmaz's (2002) three types of questions: (1) initial open-ended questions, (2) intermediate questions, and (3) ending questions. The initial open-ended questions came first. These questions focused on factual information such as demographics. Intermediate questions came next. These questions were the bulk of the interviews

and focused mainly on the issues relating to my research questions. Finally, ending questions were asked to provide closure to the interview. Two sets of interview questions were designed, one specifically for those who use the services of the organization and one for the staff and volunteers at the organization. The questions posed in the two sets of interview questions were similar, but phrased from the particular perspective of each participant (i.e., client and staff). These questions were intended to encourage participants to describe their experiences with the organization as well as the meanings they give to these experiences. Throughout this whole process, I remained flexible in expanding and probing relevant points brought up by participants.

Step 2: Transcription

During the interviews, an audio-recorder was set up to record the conversations between myself and the participants (with their permission). This audio-recording was then electronically transcribed after each interview and saved using NVivo computer software. Notes were also made for any unusual circumstances that could have affected the interpretation of the data (such as sarcasm).

Step 3: Data Analysis

When sufficient data were collected, the transcribed interviews were carefully read and re-read, and then coded. Data collection was considered sufficient when no significant new themes were emerging in subsequent interviews. Coding was done line by line, extracting “units of general meaning”. Hycner (1985) defines a unit of general meaning as “those words, phrases, non-verbal or para-linguistic communications which express a unique and coherent meaning (irrespective of the research question) clearly differentiated from that which precedes and follows” (p. 282). For example, in this client’s statement, “there are no normal experiences I find in any - to me every day is different”, I extracted the unit of general meaning as “every day is different”.

Step 4: Creating Clusters of Meaning

The next step was to group units of general meanings into clusters. Hycner (1985) states that the researcher tries to find, “whether there seems to be some common theme or essence that unites several discrete units of relevant meaning. Such an essence emerges through rigorously examining each individual unit of relevant meaning and trying to elicit what is the essence of that unit of meaning given the context” (p. 287). For example, one unit of meaning in my research was “no normal experiences” and another unit of meaning was “every day is different”. These two units were then grouped under the cluster “never a normal day”.

Step 5: Creating Themes from Clusters of Meaning

The next step taken was to group clusters into central themes. At this stage, I carefully analyzed the clusters of meaning to determine if there were a couple themes which expressed the essences of the clusters. In my study, themes differed from clusters in that themes represented an overarching umbrella term more geared to the meanings of the clusters. On the other hand, clusters represented a group (based on more literal similarities) based upon the raw units of general meanings. For example, three of the clusters of meaning found in my data collection are “change of perspective”, “learning from each other” and “learning skills”. These three clusters were then grouped into a theme called “learning”.

Step 6: Giving back to the Organization

After my thesis has been defended and the final report printed, I will ask the organization if they wish to see a copy of the report. In addition, I will ask them if they wish for me to present my findings to the organization. If so, then I will set up a meeting with those who are interested (including staff and participants) where I can present my findings and provide recommendations.

3.5 LIMITATIONS

This study has three main limitations. First, one of the recruitment strategies used was to select participants identified by the staff in charge at the organization. While these staff members are an essential tool in gaining access to participants, it was possible that these staff members selectively chose participants with whom that they had a good rapport. These participants would be more likely to speak positively about the staff and the organization. In the same way, it was unlikely that the staff would suggest I interview those who have a bad rapport with them as the organization may not want me to hear from participants who would speak negatively about their relationships or experiences. While it is impossible to confirm whether the staff selectively chose participants or not for me to interview, staff members often did suggest the participants I should talk to and those I should avoid. For example, staff members often suggested specific clients because they said that the clients were particularly talkative or friendly. This has potential to bias the results as I would not hear the opinions of those who the staff felt were less talkative or less friendly. In order to tackle this limitation, it was important for me to recruit participants through the other method mentioned earlier as well, (face-to-face recruitment during their operation hours). This allowed me to access to a wide array of meanings and experiences without being filtered by the staff in charge. Out of the eight interviews conducted with the users of the organization, four of them were recruited through staff while four of them were recruited via face-to-face recruitment.

Secondly, as an individual who has never experienced homelessness it was difficult for me to identify with the participants. As mentioned earlier bracketing is an important component to my research. Most of my experiences in interacting with homeless individuals stem from Hong Kong, where the culture is completely different from the western world. As a result of not being able to identify with the participants, it was a little difficult for me to ask the “right questions” to the participants during the interviews, especially for the first few interviews. Nonetheless, as I began

conducting more interviews, I began to become better at asking questions that would lead to participant answers that really captured their experiences at the organization.

Thirdly, the use of a phenomenological methodology places limitations in this research. In such research, the aim is to capture the experiences of the participants through their own perspective. This means that the data that is collected from participants all come from the participants themselves. However, as discussed in the literature review, many of those who are homeless also often have other factors such as mental disorders or substance addictions. These factors may have made it difficult for participants to express themselves during the interviews I conducted, as there were some participants who indeed did appear to have difficulty speaking. Furthermore, the use of a phenomenological approach almost always means that the data is not generalizable. In my study, the purpose is to examine the role of the Good Shepherd in the lives of individuals who access its services as well as those who work there. While it is not practical to interview every individual involved in the organization, it is also difficult to state that the experiences of those that I did interview are representative of everyone's experiences at the organization. However, a phenomenological methodology was chosen specifically because it was the participants' perspectives that I was interested in capturing.

Chapter 4: Results

This chapter presents the findings from the study with participants at the Good Shepherd Centre. Overall, thirteen interviews were conducted, with each interview lasting between 15 to 50 minutes. Six participants were staff members, and the remaining participants were clients at the organization. During the process of my data collection, I sought to explore the role of the Good Shepherd in the lives of individuals who access its services and those who work and volunteer there. It is important to remember that the material presented here are my interpretations of my conversations with participants. While it was my goal to capture the experiences from the participant's perspective as much as possible, I understand that it is impossible to remain completely value-free in presenting these results.

The major themes that emerged from the analysis of the data are: (1) experiencing complex interactions within Good Shepherd, (2) fostering a culture of support, and (3) acknowledging that everyone has a different life history.

4.1 EXPERIENCING COMPLEX INTERACTIONS WITHIN GOOD SHEPHERD

The Good Shepherd is a setting where many complex yet meaningful relationships exist. While some participants described having established fruitful relationships with others during their time at the organization, others talked about negative or even harmful relationships. In addition, some participants described very complex experiences, which involved both positive and negative relationships. Participants described relationships among staff members, among clients, as well as those between staff and clients. Three sub-themes were created as my understanding of these complex relationships deepened: (1) the role of staff members in the organization, (2) developing rapport, and (3) participants engaging in challenging behaviour towards others.

4.1.1 The Role of Staff Members in the Organization

Due to the large difference in social status, it is likely that staff members would not have met many of the clients outside of the Good Shepherd. However, since these interactions between staff and clients occur within the Good Shepherd, staff members need to keep some boundaries between themselves and clients to remain professional. Many of the participants noted the staff members were there to help the clients, and so clear power differences existed between the two groups. Clients needed support; the staff had the resources to provide such support, or at the very least, they had the power to alleviate at least some of the difficulties faced by the clients. As a result, many of the staff placed an emphasis on the need to remain professional. While the staff members were still friendly towards the clients, their main role was first and foremost as workers who were there to help; they were not friends. As Kenny, a staff member, stated:

As far as going with clients, we can't be friends with them because it's just, you have that borderline between the case workers and the client, so we are always friendly with everybody – we are friendly with the clients and everything, we are always good with everybody, but when it comes to being friends with clients that borderline stops us from being friends with them right?

Stephen, another staff member, explained that becoming friends with the clients could cause problems. As the staff members held power over the clients, staff becoming friends with clients could lead to the perception of favouritism. Ultimately, having such friendships could hinder the staff member's ability to do their job fairly. He said:

I don't like to make friends as far as working with clients or guests it's... to me there's a line you don't cross and one is you can't – they're not your friends. You are here to help them and the minute you cross that line or you do become their friend you know... I like

to draw that line between friendship and being professional. It helps to be able to do your job correctly because if it does turn into a friendship then you know, people see that possibly as favouritism and it becomes a role or plays in the role and other people see that. I just think that in order to do your job effectively and efficiently you have to be professional on all levels to be able to help that person.

Gary, another staff member, also has a similar perspective regarding boundaries. He elaborated on the idea:

Well another big thing is boundaries – obviously between clients and myself. I mean I smoke cigarettes and people ask me for cigarettes. I say no because you know so many complications come up with that. They'll expect you to give you more cigarettes next time. And yeah then you can also say 'yeah well I gave you a cigarette now clean your bed or make your room'. So it's like they might think that you are being their buddy by giving them a cigarette too and that's not why we're here. We're here that I'm the professional and you're in need of assistance. Those boundaries are tough sometimes to put up and maintain but they're absolutely important... a lot of people ask me to hang outside of here and I'll just say I can't due to conflict of interest and boundaries.

Thus, Gary focused more on doing favours or going out with clients for leisure activities after work hours. His quotation demonstrates that the staff members have to be very careful even when simply being friendly to clients (without the intention of making friends). He also makes the point that the boundaries can be difficult to maintain as even lending a cigarette to a client could become problematic.

For the most part, the clients did not comment much about the relationships between them and the staff members, apart from saying that they felt the staff are generally friendly. However, one

client did mention that it is understandable that the staff should enforce certain boundaries between them and the clients. Roger stated:

I think it's harder to be friends with the staff here in the kitchen or just like the general staff. They are really nice and professional so they know what their limits are and like being friendly to the clients I guess. They obviously know that people got their problems because obviously it's a shelter you know and they don't want to be too involved. I think there's a difference between getting involved in somebody and getting involved into the community. Like they work here and they obviously see it as a community right – everyone wants to help the community – take the time to make life better for everyone else but I can't see the staff being involved in the social aspect of 'hey let's go grab a drink' or something or you know 'let's go to the Tiger Cats game' or something like that.

Overall, participants, particularly staff, described how it was important for the staff members to fulfill their role by maintaining boundaries between themselves and the clients to remain professional and helpful. Staff members also noted that maintaining such boundaries was difficult, as even little favours can be seen as developing a friendship. Such situations could escalate into possible perceptions of favouritism. In their interviews, the staff members seemed to be very conscious about these facts and worked hard to serve the clients to the best of their ability without developing deeper friendships with them. Despite these limitations on the relationships, the clients seemed to understand that this was the staff's role as well.

As a researcher, it appeared to me that these experiences of having a boundary between staff and clients hold a deeper meaning. As seen in the interviews, some of the clients acknowledge the fact that it is the staff's job to remain professional. In my perspective, it seemed to me that the clients were relieved that the staff did have these boundaries and were professional because it demonstrates

that the clients are in good hands and that the staff are trained to help them with their situations. Furthermore, this relationship also holds meaning to the staff members. Throughout the interviews with the staff members, they often stated that they ended up coming to the Good Shepherd because they wanted to help others through using their education in the field of social work. Being professional includes creating boundaries between themselves and clients, and for the staff, being professional is the best way for them to help these clients.

4.1.2 Developing Rapport

Those involved in the Good Shepherd also talked about the importance of developing rapport with one another. The interviews suggest that the staff developed rapport with one another, the clients developed rapport with one another, and the staff and the clients also developed rapport, though the nature of this relationship is limited as discussed above. In their interviews, staff members often discussed how they were close “buddies” with the other staff members, and how they felt a part of the team. As Jenny, a student on placement at the Good Shepherd, stated:

I think that we [the staff members] have great relationships. Since I first started here they’ve – all of them have welcomed me. Case workers, management, the director, administrative – even the kitchen... I ask a lot of questions as a student and everyone answers them and I haven’t felt like I’ve been dismissed at all. People take the time to show me or tell me or if I ask what was done they’ll explain it to me.

On a similar note, Gary, a staff member, mentions how the staff members are all close with one another. He described how the staff (especially the male members) hang around outside of work on a regular basis. He stated:

“Yeah we’re buddies and maybe we are all a little crazy but we’re all crazy together and I hang out with the boys outside of here all the time”.

Furthermore, many of the staff members indicated that their colleagues were also there for them when needed, and that the staff members are flexible in providing assistance to the others.

Kenny describes what these experiences mean to him:

We got a bunch of good guys and really you feel great working with them. Everybody is really flexible with each other you know what I mean like – we are always there for each other. If you – let’s say somebody needs a time off we can be like OK, you know what we are here to help them out you know what I mean.

While Kenny’s quotation reflected the role co-workers play in helping each other, my conversations with some participants also suggested that these experiences reflect an emotional bond between the staff members, which was reinforced by the idea that they generally go through the same challenges. Additionally some of these staff members credited the Good Shepherd organization for taking care of them from the day they started working there. The following quotation from Gary, a staff member, describes how these experiences made him feel:

I feel like Good Shepherd is always taking care of me. Whether it’s from the first day I got hired to now, I feel very protected and safe with Good Shepherd. You know when you’re dealing with people in crisis here and so you kind of have a nice little bond with your coworkers because you see a lot of shitty shit and you see a lot of good stuff so you kind of share a lot of emotions with your coworkers, male, female, doesn’t really matter.

As the above quotes demonstrate, the staff involved in the Good Shepherd all feel taken care of, expressing how the Good Shepherd and other employees all look out for each other. This finding is particularly interesting as the Good Shepherd is an organization designed to meet the needs of the clients, yet the staff also feel the same warmth and care from such rapport with each other.

For other participants, the relationship among clients resulted in deeper friendships as they also described becoming close friends and looking out for each other, often supporting one another even without personal benefit. Todd, a client, described a time when another client voluntarily offered to split his job fifty-fifty with him just because they were friends:

One guy found me part time work through another... One time there was this guy he had a contract for shoveling and he said come with me I'll give you half of what I make and it'll put some cigarettes in your pocket and some money in your wallet. It worked out pretty good so I felt pretty good.

Similarly, Clarissa, a client, described her observations of the rapport she has with other clients by stating:

My relationship is different with all of them, depends on who they are but – I interact with just about all of them. If you [speaking to me as the interviewer] would be able to stand there [in the dining hall where I recruited her as a participant] for a little longer you'd see I know everybody. Everybody says hi when they come in, everybody I know in some way. It just depends on what point I met them and I guess how we deal with each other. I have a good relationship with everybody... So yeah, I have a good relationship with just about everybody that comes in here.

The notion of developing rapport between clients is further supported by an observation from Gary, a staff member:

There's lots of good too that goes on there I mean we have a couple kids that come through the food line and everyone associates with the kids and the parents. They play little games and stuff or you know, walk a certain female child up and if the parents aren't doing it there's always a friend around that will take the child up and get the tray

going and you know – um... get her milk and it's nice to see people taking care of other people – wheelchair especially – a lot of people are willing to hold the door for any individual using the wheelchair or run up and get him a tray.

Participants also describe the rapport between staff and clients. One staff member, Jenny, described her experiences in dealing with clients. She stated that a level of respect exists between them as long as it is earned.

I find that they [the clients] are very respectful and that I'm respectful to them so I think that's how I work in the shelter. I found that if you give people respect you get respect so... I haven't experienced too many issues. I haven't had any real issues with service users and myself I find that they are pretty happy – they like to engage most of the time. Sometimes people aren't very talkative but some will sit and talk to you for ten minutes.

Interestingly, some of the clients even described how they have helped out the staff on various occasions. One client, Clarissa, appears to pride herself in terms of dealing with conflicts that other clients bring into the organization. She stated:

I mean I help them with the people that are getting out of hand because I know them and I'm just generally good with those people. I find them even with some of them I don't know I'm just good with people like that so... and they [the staff members] are not allowed. They don't have the same leniency that I do and now I would deal with somebody that's drunk sitting beside me they have limits that they can do but in how they deal with it so I help them a lot getting people out of here that were too drunk to be here that they just would've been a confrontation otherwise.

Many of the clients also expressed their appreciation for the staff members for treating them well. While it is the staff's job to help them, clients generally expressed appreciation for being respected by the staff members. They also commonly stated that the staff members are generally good people. This suggests that the rapport between clients and staff members is based on a level of respect and appreciation. One staff member, Jenny, explained her interactions with some of the clients.

I have a lot of clients who will give a lot of compliments and 'thank you's' for being so respectful and I think that's really positive as well. Not just towards me but they'll say thank you for the service or thank you to the kitchen when they're leaving thank you to the volunteers so I think that's really positive when we see things like that.

Similarly, from a client's perspective, Todd discussed how the staff have good personalities and treat everyone well.

They [staff members] joke around with you they – you know they treat you really well and they just have a good sense of personality... they treat everybody fairly well unless they come in drunk and stupid and they have to do something about it because it's their job, right?

Overall, the sub-theme "developing rapport" reflects the extent to which rapport exists between all individuals involved in the organization. Staff members hang out with other staff members and treat them as buddies, clients' relationships range from acquaintanceships to close friendships. Last, the relationship between staff and clients involve respect and appreciation. However, while rapport exists between individuals, many participants also talked about challenging behaviour that they had to deal with within the organization.

These experiences of developing rapport with others in the organization hold meaning for both clients and staff members. For the clients, the fact that they are able to come to a place where rapport exists (ranging from acquaintances to close friendships) shows that the clients are free to interact as they wish. For the more social clients who prefer to make friends with others in the organization they are allowed to do so, and for the clients who prefer to keep the relationship at the acquaintance level they are also free to do so. In a way, these experiences represent the freedom that clients have to be themselves. Similarly, the rapport between staff members and clients are also meaningful to the staff members. In my interactions with the staff members, it appeared that the staff members valued their relationship with their clients. The rapport built between them was enough to demonstrate that the clients were indeed appreciative of the staff's help, and having that rapport made their work a lot more enjoyable.

4.1.3 Participants Engaging in Challenging Behaviour Towards Others

Participants also described a somewhat darker side to the interactions that occur at the Good Shepherd. These challenging behaviours are between clients and other clients, as well as between clients and staff members. However, for the most part, participants said that these challenging behaviours were infrequent. These instances usually involved a level of disrespect between one individual and another. However, these challenging instances often occurred when a client comes into the organization already feeling stressed or unhappy. Cedric, a student on placement at the organization, discussed an encounter he had with one of the clients that was already having a difficult day. In this example, Cedric discussed the relationship he has with the clients, stating that he has to deal with bitter clients on a day-to-day basis:

I deal with some of the residents when they've been really angry. Pretty much they just kind of swear at you and they're not really happy so they can take their anger out on

you verbally. Even though it's not really a bad experience for me like it's... to me it's just human interaction right? Like everyone gets days where they're pissed off so... other than getting sworn at and told off a couple dozen times I mean that's pretty much vile and real bad interactions with the residents here. But yeah... I really don't have too many bad situations.

Gabriel, a staff member, emphasized the fact that life in general is not easy for the clients, and that often they come into the organization with a lot of troubles on their mind. He stated:

"I like it [working at the organization], but just like any other thing it does have its days that it could become overwhelming because we do get people sometimes who are not easy to deal with or having a bad day and sometimes you're the one that ends up getting the, you know, the way they release their stress sometimes they release it on you and you might be the straw that broke the camel's back the day that they're having. So we try to keep that in mind".

One of the clients, Robbie, discusses how he does not get along with some of the staff members. As a result, he tries to cope with the situation without having to consent to higher authority. He discusses the meanings of his experiences by describing how he prefers to find ways where he does not have to consent to higher authority. He states:

There is the odd belligerence of one – a couple staff members. I won't mention any in specific but... you know he just flips out at you for no reason and he gives you a mean stare and sometimes points his pencil at you, so I'm just trying to figure out a way that I can actually deal with this without having to consent to higher authority. I don't want to be rude, but at the same time he can't be treating people with that kind of body language and verbal abuse.

Interestingly, Robbie goes on to say that although there were a couple instances where he felt the staff were disrespectful, he also stated, “I mean the staff members are great you know – I show them respect and they show me respect”. In this situation, the client was unhappy with the way the staff were treating him. However, in other situations the staff member was unhappy with how the clients were treating them. Jenny, a student on placement, described an unpleasant encounter she had with one of the clients:

You’re not supposed to bag hot food – prepared food for health and safety reasons so I was told to go let him [a client] know that he can’t bag food. So I had told that to him and he got very angry at me. He had kind of said like... ‘who are you, go speak to your manager, I’m allowed to do this kind of thing’ and he said ‘ok you take it’ and I responded ‘you can eat it but you just can’t take it with you’. So he just kept kind of trying to argue so I was just like saying the same thing over and over again – ‘I’m sorry you just can’t take it it’s a policy’ and he said ‘I’m allowed, you need to ask’ then I went back to my post and he came over and was more argumentative and he said ‘who told you to say that, I should be allowed to do that’.

These examples demonstrate staff challenges in dealing with clients. Another instance was described by one of the clients, Todd, who witnessed a conflict between a staff member and another client. According to Todd, the conflict erupted due to a client not obeying the rules of the organization. Todd states:

One morning I was here and one of the guys was up doing drugs all night and he didn’t go to sleep until early in the morning. So one of the staff members went to get him out of bed and the staff member kicked him out. And he [the client] got all pissed off and chased him around the dorm downstairs.

In the above example, the participant describes how the clients' behaviour was troublesome for the staff member. In another example from a staff perspective, Gary mentions a rather extreme situation where the client was unwilling to obey the rules of the organization. These examples also demonstrate the challenges that all participants have in terms of dealing with these challenging behaviors. Gary further discusses the importance of being desensitized to such situations and learning to deal with them. He says:

First day I was here actually, I caught a guy smoking crack in the washroom so I walked in and I said – hey you, you're not allowed to do that here. And he took a big drag and said 'why?'. And he didn't really understand that he wasn't allowed to do that in there and he actually threatened my life saying he was going to hurt me for asking him to leave the facility for breaking one of the rules. So that was a nice eye opener... definitely when your life gets threatened you know you take it very seriously and deal with it accordingly. It happens more and more as you keep working and not that anyone is less important than the first one but you learn to live with it and almost get desensitized as terrible as that sounds.

In the above examples, emphasis is placed on how staff members have to deal with challenging client behaviour and how other clients are aware of these challenges. However, oftentimes clients also have to deal with challenging behaviour from other clients. In this example, Clarissa, a client, mentioned how she was unappreciative of some of the comments that were made towards her. She discussed her experiences saying:

I mean there's a guy called the preacher, he was two dogs and he has a long free beard and he thinks he knows everything in the world about everything. And we've had conversations. He sat down beside me one day next to my abusive boyfriend – God love

him! And he looked at me and said 'I would love to spend the day reading your body art'. Wow... yeah that was great. Such a smart guy maybe the shiner tells you that you probably shouldn't say that to me in front of my boyfriend dummy.

Some of the staff members described clients who had been confronted with challenging behaviour from other clients such as theft or looking through other clients' personal possessions. Gary, a staff member, stated how many problems can arise when you "stick" so many clients in a shelter together. He stated:

Unfortunately some people don't care as much as others and will parade through people's room's looking for money or looking for stuff that they can take and sell or maybe they just want underwear or who knows. As far as client to client, that's a lot of problems when you stick 54 guys in a house and say 'get along'. There's constant conflict and hierarchy between the guys unfortunately... I know this one gentleman, apparently ripped off, like, an 80 year-old man for his, like, [he] sold him something - I don't even know what the story was. But he was coming into the food line and four other gentleman that knew he was coming to the food line were looking for him and they came in and pretty much dragged him out being under the impression that he did this [ripped him off] to this older gentleman. I don't even, I didn't even hear the end of that story but I haven't seen that guy since.

As a researcher in the Good Shepherd, I found that these challenging behaviours described above are methods for clients to relieve the everyday frustrations of being homeless. In one of my personal experiences filling in for the secretary while volunteering at the organization, it was my job to ask for the names of people who were entering the building to ensure that they were registered into the system. When I asked for the name of one client who was coming in, he became angry and

vented his frustrations at me, expressing that I should have been able to recognize his name by now. After some time passed he cooled down and then apologized to me, saying that he had a really bad day. These challenging behaviours often occur because of the unfortunate circumstances that many of the clients are in. Additionally, other meanings for challenging behaviour often result as the clients oftentimes demonstrate resistance to the rules and regulations, often trying to find ways so they do not have to “consent to higher authority”. These challenging behaviours often seem to mean that the clients are trying to maintain their individuality and freedom, without being caged in by the rules of an organization.

Overall, this major theme discussed the complex set of interactions that occur within Good Shepherd. The first sub-theme outlined the barriers that exist between the staff and the clients, suggesting that staff members have a need to maintain a “helping the clients” mentality instead of befriending them. The second sub-theme highlighted the importance of developing rapport. In this sub-theme, I provided examples of clients and staff members helping each other out and acting in support of one another. Finally, in the third sub-theme, I describe the challenging behaviour that occurred within Good Shepherd. These behaviours often result as a lack of respect or an unwillingness to concede to authority.

4.2 FOSTERING A CULTURE OF SUPPORT

The Good Shepherd is an organization dedicated to serving those in need, and as was made clear in the interviews, plays a very important role in terms of supporting those who travel through its doors. Indeed, the services that the Good Shepherd offers help the clients in many ways. These include very concrete acts of service such as providing necessary resources, providing a place to sleep, offering free food, etc. While the Good Shepherd assists clients in meeting their physical needs, many of the study participants stated that the organization also helps them with many “softer” needs. For instance, clients described the Good Shepherd as a place that can be used as an outlet or where they

can anchor themselves to “get a hold on things”. Overall, the clients and staff members spoke positively about the help and support provided by Good Shepherd. However, not only do staff members give support to the clients, but oftentimes clients are sensitive to the needs of other clients as well and support them voluntarily. The three sub-themes in this section help to capture the various types of support that are fostered at the Good Shepherd. These themes are: (1) physical support, (2) emotional support, and (3) a sense of community.

4.2.1 Physical Support

The Good Shepherd was established to serve those in need, and it does its duty. The organization offers many services designed to meet physical needs by housing a food bank, a clothing program, a shelter, a community food line, and other services. In the interviews, clients repeatedly identified how these services have been a significant factor in alleviating the hardships that they face. In many interviews, the clients describe how they would be in a worse position without the organization’s help. Some of the clients referred to the Good Shepherd as a “lifesaver”. To begin with, one client, Clarissa, described how her life and others lives’ might look if the organization did not exist. She stated:

I’d be starving to death anyways, it would’ve been – honest to God without this here people would be out there doing more crime. They would have to be doing it – they would be stealing food, they would be – you know if they didn’t have this here. Look at Billy [another client], in the condition he’s in right now, he’d get arrested while staggering out in the street or into a grocery store trying to find something to eat. He couldn’t do that because he’s in that state instead he came in here and he got to get a nice hot meal and they found him a bed even... You know it’s so obvious that at some point in my own drug use it’s helped me because there were times when I needed to

eat, and if they hadn't let me in here in the condition that I was in I would have been – where I don't know, I could've ended up in jail for doing something. Stealing something, robbing somebody, you never know what you're going to do when you're hungry and desperate, right?

This type of practical help is extremely important as many of the clients who are living in or near poverty do not have access to various resources. For the participant above, these experiences of being physically supported means that she is able to remain clean and survive. Without it, she predicts that she or other clients would be in situations where they would have to act out of desperation. While these resources include help meeting physical needs such as food, shelter and clothing, clients also mentioned accessing information about other centres where they can receive additional help. Jenny, a staff member, reinforced this idea when we discussed how the centre acts as an information sharing locale for the clients. She discusses that these experiences meant that the Good Shepherd was a place where they could find answers to a lot of their problems.

There was one lady who said she was in crisis – her husband, she left an abusive relationship and I think she was pregnant, but she was asking for a phone number for an agency and I was able to give her an agency that was associated with Good Shepherd. It's a crisis centre known as the Barrett centre. So she was able to call them – she didn't have a phone so she was going to use our phone so – I think a lot of people come here as well because they can get answers for some people who don't have phones or anything like that. They need somewhere to go even when I'm working reception and I'm at the front desk. People will just call and say I need this and we'll tell them where they can get it or who they can call so I think that's positive all within the program.

While Jenny's story illustrates the importance of the meal program for the clients, other stories shared by the participants focus on the importance of the organization giving them a place to sleep. Karl described his experiences with receiving help from Good Shepherd:

This would be the best place if you're homeless. Because you know – you shower, wear pajamas, they give you a robe – and you get a clean bed. I mean I don't know where but in my life, let me see – I slept in the backyard, I mean I got a nice bed now, I slept on a foam rubber cushion. Let me see where else – I slept in the back of a car one time. But I would guess – you know if you've got to use this place to have somewhere to sleep I guess that would be great!

Participants also commonly described Good Shepherd as an organization that helped them work through the Ontario social services system. One client, Roger, described how the organization acted as an anchor point to help him navigate the system and eventually helped him to find a place of his own. He states that his experiences with the Good Shepherd meant that he was able to find a place to support him and to get his bearing, especially as he was new to the city.

The Good Shepherd. It was the place that I had to first come to in order to get my bearing because I've never been to a city this big before. I didn't have a car or any sort of transportation. I didn't really have a lot of money so I figured ok well, I'm going to try to get out into the Ontario Works system. Because when I first came here – this is just what they do right so they house you and they feed you, you know. If you don't have a lot of clothing they can provide clothing. The staff is very helpful and yeah – it just seemed like a very helpful environment. I used these services to go where I needed, then I finally got a place of my own.

Further, I also heard that the physical support is so meaningful that some clients become anxious when they finally have the means to become independent again. Cedric, a student on placement at the organization, recounted a conversation he had with a client that demonstrates this. He stated:

So the one guy who I was originally talking to as I was mentioning he was getting out of here and it's a process for him because he's going from here [the Good Shepherd] where he's got people that he talks to and he's got us who he's familiar with and he knows that it's a steady and safe place – the meals are always here right? And he's worried about moving out and moving back in on his own because he's not going to have a lot of people around he's going to have to face different hardships as here we look after most of the stuff like laundry and bedding and cooking and everything like that, right?

However, while the organization does exist to physically support the clients, I heard from some participants that in extreme cases some clients can remain trapped in their situations and perhaps even become dependent on the organization for meeting their physical needs. Gary, a staff member, described this unfortunate phenomenon:

Don't get me wrong, a lot of guys come through here and they do find housing and some we see again and some we don't. We see a lot of people again and again. Guys who have been living this lifestyle for twenty, thirty years bouncing from shelter to shelter – whether it's mission services or salvation army or here – people pass away, others just weren't ready to uh... I guess stop the partying and drugs and alcohol and prescription medication especially are almost taken over them. I mean we deal with a lot of that and sometimes they get help and get better and sometimes they don't and

they're stuck in this cycle unfortunately because they might not know any other lifestyle really. And sometimes the system helps them and sometimes the system hurts them... With a lot of people on Ontario assistance, Ontario works, Ontario disability, they are just unfortunately not using the money to the best of their ability but we'll still put them up for free and house them, clothe them, feed them and it's almost like we took the accountability somewhere along the line away from them.

Overall, according to the participants, the Good Shepherd provides clients with the physical help needed to overcome, at least temporarily, many of the obstacles they are facing. Information, food, clothing and a place to sleep are all very important resources, which clients have described as helping them in terms of physical assistance. Without this help, many of the clients stated that their lives would be much more difficult. Unfortunately as described by staff members, some clients become overly dependent on the services and are unable to escape the cycle of poverty. Nevertheless, while physical support is viewed as extremely important in improving the lives of the clients, the Good Shepherd also acts as a place where clients can gain emotional support.

To these clients, always having the Good Shepherd supporting them physically is a means of letting them know that they will always be alright. As many of these clients often come into troubling situations, it means a lot to them that at the end of the day they can always depend on Good Shepherd to provide for their most basic needs. Having such physical support assures them that they can always have a place to fall back to if they run out of money, food, clothing, or shelter. For the staff members, being able to help these clients means that they are doing their job. However, it also means, for many of them, that they are doing what they wanted to do with their life in terms of helping those who are less fortunate. Supporting them physically is one way that staff members find meaning in their work.

4.2.2 Emotional Support

While it might be argued that the services offered by Good Shepherd aim mainly to meet physical needs, the organization is also a place where many emotional needs are met. Although at first this sub-theme may seem to overlap with the sub-theme “developing rapport” as discussed in the theme “experiencing complex interactions within Good Shepherd”, this sub-theme goes beyond the “rapport” stage and focuses on the deeper emotional relationships within the organization. Participants described feeling that each time they walk into the organization they are in a place that supports them emotionally. One client, Clarissa, described how she found emotional support at the organization while she was going through a tough time in her life. She also describes the meanings attached to these experiences:

I remember one day he, it was near Christmas and my boyfriend, the one I was talking about, the bad one – he went to jail two weeks before Christmas. I was really upset. But he [a staff member] brought me into the office and it was like really late at night and I was sitting out front and I had nowhere to really go and he- he brought me in and he gave me a candy cane and he let me hang and warm up in the office. He found me a pair of gloves – those are just things they don’t have to do you know and he was breaking rules. That’s why I asked is anyone going to see [this interview] because I’m not supposed to be sitting in an office downstairs eating candy canes with my feet kicked up watching the monitors you know? But he let me come in and I had a big cry and a box of Kleenex.

In this excerpt, Clarissa described how the staff members went out of their way to help her and to cheer her up emotionally, even at the risk of getting in trouble with the organization. Interestingly, a tension seems to be present between the staff members wanting to provide a

professional distance but at the same time wanting to support the clients emotionally. Clarissa's quote above demonstrates such a struggle between wanting to help and wanting to remain professional. For the staff, being professional is the best way to address the needs of a person, yet in Clarissa's case, we see that the staff members temporarily abandon their professional behaviour for the sake of a client. This behaviour of supporting one emotionally is reflective of the spirit of Good Shepherd's mission – "charity unlimited, never stop loving". Gabriel, a staff member at the organization, described the organization's approach to emotionally supporting the clients.

Sometimes they [the clients] don't see it right away – sometimes it takes a long time you know because it's a way of thinking – it's a cycle for them. Sometimes they can't tell right away but that's where the charity unlimited comes into play because they see that you know. Every time they come here there's an open door regardless of what happens, regardless of what they're going through there's an open door and there's someone here to listen to them and to try to help them get back on track. And I think it sinks in... I think that people that come, and you know they have their problems and they've been abused and beat up in the world. And maybe they expect that when they come here in the beginning – maybe they expect this to be part of the system that doesn't care about them. But when they keep coming back or when they come for the first time and they realize that this is for real these people really care.

As Gabriel noted, although the organization's programs mainly cater to physical needs, there is an underlying philosophy of emotional support that is imbued in the staff members' work ethics. For Gabriel, such experiences mean opportunities for serving and loving the clients. Convincing the clients that staff members really care about them is a significant part of what the organization stands

for. Gabriel further described this philosophy and the meaning of his experiences in an analogous story he shared:

I went on a mission to Nicaragua with my church – and I went to an orphanage, it was my first mission. When I got there, there was a little kid, and the little kid used to throw rocks at me while I was working. It was the beginning of the day and my first day in the mission. And you know I kind of ignored it but it escalated into coming up to me and he would spit at me. He actually spat – he was a little two or three year old kid – and he would spit at me – throw rocks. At one point he said, bend down I have something to tell you, and I did, and he smacked me. When he did that I went to one of the sisters that ran the orphanage and I told her – you know this kid has been doing this all day and she goes – you need to understand something, these kids come from the streets of Nicaragua. The treatment that they are giving you, the mistrust that they have for you is the same treatment and mistrust that the people here in this country have shown them. They've lived in the streets, they've been kicked at, they've been spat at, and they've been cast aside or even pushed aside. They haven't been loved. And when she told me that I said, wow, you know, let me understand him, let me. For the rest of the day he kept doing the same thing to me and I kind of put up with it. Around 4:00 that afternoon on that day that I was there, this kid starts walking towards me – and I was sitting down waiting for the bus that was going to pick us up. He was touching his eyes and you could tell he was tired. He came up to me, sat on my lap and fell asleep without saying a word. And I realized that all the spitting that he gave me, all the smacking and all the rock throwing was worth it at that very moment – because he fell asleep in my arms. He trusted me, because he knew that there was nothing he could do to me to make me get angry at him or hit him or anything. And that's what it takes when our clients come

here. Sometimes it takes putting up with the spitting, the pushing, with the 'I hate you' so that they could finally see. 'Wow, these people, there's nothing I can do to these people to make them hate me'. And then they get the message of Christ, the love of Christ.

In this story, Gabriel mentioned that in the same way that it took a long time for the kid to warm up to him, sometimes it may take a long time for the clients to warm up to the people in the organization. However, when explaining the story he focused on the aspect that the job of the organization is to put up with the difficulties that the clients cause and to continue to provide all forms of support for the clients. From a client's perspective, Roger stated:

I believe that this supports all kinds of categories. You know you got the mental support or moral support. You know, social support and you know you get the people who are just financially in a rough spot so maybe they need food and things like that. I think it helps them [the clients] always physically, mentally, and psychologically.

Cedric, a staff member, shares how other clients look to him as an outlet as they deal with negative life experiences or anxieties. He describes his interaction as such:

I get to talk around and talk with the guys and see what their day is like – figure out what's going on in their life. One guy I've been talking to has been talking about getting out of here – he's moving out onto his own and he's talking about the anxieties and stuff like that to me.

One of the clients, Clarissa, shared a story about how sometimes she is the one who gives others emotional support to other clients. She says:

There were these little bags that had toothpaste and Kleenex and gloves and some granola bars and it was like a project from some kids from school it looks like – and they had a little heart cut out that said Jesus loves you and you know it was like some Christ help project for the kids and they were out passing it all there and I brought mine here [to the Good Shepherd] and there's this little old lady that comes here and she's just tiny and she'll eat like ten trays of food – it kills me it's so cute because she's like 80 pounds and about 100 years old. I wanted to give her – she had no gloves, and she was telling me so I gave her the gloves out of my little pack and she started to cry – and she was so cute and I started to like try and give her all this stuff but she had no teeth right – and I'm trying to like give her my toothbrush and my toothpaste out of there and she starts to laugh you know but I gave her everything she could use out of my little pack. She cried and it wasn't a big deal to me and I can get toothbrushes and crap like that at the Wesley centre and I can get gloves there I know where to get all the other stuff and I'm mobile enough to get them all, she's not. It made such a big difference to her.

For Clarissa, it seemed as if this experience meant more to her than just providing support for someone else. Rather, as a researcher it seems that this experience was an opportunity for Clarissa to give back to society in a way. With a life where she is usually the one depending on help, for her to give help instead seems to be a method of her reaffirming her dignity and self-worth. Overall, participants described how the Good Shepherd is an organization that provides emotional support in many forms and in the case above, the organization provides an opportunity for the clients to provide support as well. Other participants described how they can always share their lives with other people who are involved in the organization. Similarly to physical support, this emotional support means a lot to the clients since the Good Shepherd centre is always open. In the lives of those who are homeless, few things are consistent, and the emotional support offered by Good Shepherd are one of those few

consistent things. Similarly, the fact that staff members are able to provide such support to the clients means that they are able to help those who are less fortunate, which is something important to them as many of the staff members have expressed in their interviews. In the next sub theme, I discuss how the participants share a sense of community, which further reinforces the support given to them by the Good Shepherd.

4.2.3 A Sense of Community

In this section, I describe the ways in which participants considered the Good Shepherd “a community”. They often compared it to a large “family”, or a “mini community”. These are mainly positive descriptions and participants shared the feelings of familiarity, which indicated a level of comfort with the organization. One of the staff members, Stephen, discussed how the clients not only come to eat, but also to meet and greet.

They’re [clients] all alike to me they’re just like observing that most of the people know each other. It’s like their own little community that they have. And it’s – this is where they come to meet and greet and this is where they eat you know. Some come through families with their kids and some come with friends and some come just by themselves on a regular basis.

In this mini community (as described by a participant), clients begin to build relationships and help one another out. For the participants, the term mini community means that the Good Shepherd is a setting where they are comfortable and supported. It is a place where they create friendships and look out for each other. However, sometimes clients also helped each other out in terms of gaining access to illegal substances. Stephen offered the following observation about the clients:

Oh I think they like it [the community food line] you know, it's there for them to get out and build relationships with new people or you know, continue their relationships with existing people that they know. And amongst them they have their own resources so you know they become resourceful among each other and hopefully in a good way not in a bad way as far as drugs and that notion, but it does happen unfortunately – with this group we work with.

Jenny, a student on placement, described how the clients hang out with each other during the community food line, sometimes a bit longer than encouraged. She also mentioned how the Good Shepherd is a consistent factor in their life, which provides comfort to the clients.

I do see a lot of clients that know each other as well – so they'll engage. Sometimes they hang out a bit longer than they really should but they're talking with somebody and it's kind of a meeting ground as well. A lot of times with the homeless population they're very transient – so they're kind of all over the place – so seeing the same people you know at certain different locations [different services provided by Good Shepherd], I think that's a feeling of comfort, a feeling of home to them as well as seeing your friends and your peers. They'll see people who they haven't seen in a long time, so I think... that aspect about it and I do think they do appreciate the case workers that are there being right out on the floor.

Todd, a client, stated that everybody knows everybody in the community food line.

“Just everybody knows everybody here for some reason. Because it's a group thing I guess”.

Robbie was more explicit when he mentioned how the organization feels like family. The following is an excerpt from our conversation:

Joses: So what does your relationship with this organization mean to you?

Robbie: Pretty good actually. I like it [the organization] it feels more like family you know – even though this is only a temporary accommodation you just feel like you’re coming back to a bigger family it’s weird. Even though there’s not much you know – like tight connections with some guys here you just – it’s weird it just feels like a family.

Joses: Could you explain a little more?

Robbie: I just feel more comfortable in terms of... like coming back to a group of people with different stories. You can relate that way you know – the staff are pretty nice generally and you know like Ralph and all of them they’re nice guys – you just feel like you’re coming into this fancy hotel you know.

Many clients described how the organization is a place that feels like a “community”. They stated that they felt comfortable and secure in Good Shepherd, and how they were familiar with most of the people around them. They also talked about how they were treated warmly and they felt like they have been taken care of. Additionally, clients described building relationships and sharing resources with one another.

For the staff members, these experiences allowed the staff members to create special bonds with other staff members. Through my experiences volunteering at the organization, I noticed the distinct connection that the staff members had with each other. Staff members would constantly joke with one another, complain about the same things, and celebrate the same things. Staff members often shared how the clients were doing, and would update one another about the challenges or successes of the day’s work. Even Gary explicitly mentioned that him and his coworkers see a lot of “sh*tty sh*t”, and as a result a lot of emotions are shared between co-workers. Also, a special bond is

created between the coworkers as most of them come from a similar educational background (social work). These similarities strengthen the bonds within such colleagues, allowing them to relate to one another and think with a similar perspective. Furthermore, these relationships seem to mean more to them outside of work as well, as the staff members described being “crazy together” with their colleagues all the time. These relationships are not limited to the Good Shepherd, but also spread out into their lives outside of the organization. The complex interactions that occur within the Good Shepherd provide meaningful opportunities for staff members to connect with others who share similar attitudes and perspectives.

For clients, involvement in the Good Shepherd means that they are able to connect with a community. In the literature review I discussed the importance of being involved in a healthy community along with the benefits of being involved. To those who are faced with homelessness, such an organization is a setting that allows them to harness the benefits of a community, and in this case, to be able to connect with others in a similar situation as them. In the participant interviews, I found that many of the clients appreciated Good Shepherd because of the fact that it is consistent, and that it is always there. In my experiences as a volunteer there, and through the conversations that I had with clients, I found that many of the clients do not have a place to return to. I found that many of their family members have passed away or live in another country, and that apart from the relationships at Good Shepherd, many of them do not have friends. For them, this community represents an organization that is always there and is always dependable. It gives them a place to go to during the day, and to feel that they are a part of a larger community. The relationships that are created at this organization likely represent the main source of interaction they have with other people. As the meal program is available six days a week, they are able to connect with other each other on a regular basis. As many of the clients express, the organization is like family to them. In the

next theme, I describe how participants see the Good Shepherd as an organization where individuals, all with different life stories, can come together.

4.3 ACKNOWLEDGING THAT EVERYONE HAS A DIFFERENT LIFE HISTORY

The Good Shepherd is an organization where a variety of people, all with different life stories, come together. The paths that each individual took led them to the organization, and part of knowing these stories is learning to respect these individuals for who they are and for the challenges that they have faced. Some participants describe these stories as unfortunate, often noting the many problems that pervade their lives. These problems include drugs and alcohol addictions, abusive relationships, disabilities, and poverty. Participants also described the importance of recognizing that each person is unique with their own story, and the aspect of dignity is important, and that everyone, no matter what their current circumstance, has endured things in their lives that makes them who they are. Two sub-themes are presented to help add depth to our understanding of this theme: (1) learning to be aware of peoples' situations and (2) refraining from judging,

4.3.1 Learning to be Aware of Peoples' Situations

This sub-theme helps to make apparent the point that many different individuals congregate at the Good Shepherd, and their stories often contain unfortunate and challenging life circumstances. The people involved in this organization described becoming increasingly aware of how factors such as drugs and alcohol addictions, abusive relationships, disabilities, and poverty have played a significant role in bringing them to where they are today. Clarissa, one of the more outgoing clients, shares her perspective:

If you take five minutes to talk to anybody in here they all have stories – all of them.

There's – I know a lot of people's stories – I wouldn't even know where to start with

interactions with people – I know just about everybody here. I know where they come from and I know because I've taken the five or ten minutes to talk to just about everybody, so I know a lot of their stories – they all have one. Not all of them started out here, it was never in any of their plans to end up here for sure – they've all been something else in their lives.

Clarissa also shared what she knew of these participants' histories:

I don't know if I have the energy, I don't even know if I can think of really what to tell you – there's a thousand of them but I don't know what to tell you about it. Like Billy, he's from the States. He was a soldier, he was in the army, his daughter is in the military, and she's like well trained. She's 26 now and she has like honours in the military. She could snipe me from 800 feet or some shit. I don't remember what he said but, you see it by the way he moves when he straightens that he's not lying this is where he's from and I mean like... I don't know... like "Tajheet", he's the guy that was just leaving – he's not a bad guy. He used to be married, he had a daughter but his daughter died when she was seven and he lost his marbles. Now he's coming around, he's doing ok, he's gone back to school... Another guy, Joseph that used to come here, they called him Rambo, he's not around here anymore. He was short with long hair and he looked like Sylvester Stallone and he used to wear a bandana on his head so they called him Rambo. He broke his neck. He caught his wife cheating and that the guy that she was cheating with beat him up and broke his neck and he was in bed for two years. And when he did finally leave and was able to get up out of bed he would have to hold his own head up by his hair, and this guy is in the best physical condition I have ever seen someone in in my life now. And he went from them thinking he was going to be dead

because they had him medicated and comatose for a year and a half of those two years because his nerves – neurology was so messed up when he woke up he said his head spun for 18 months or something.

From a staff perspective, Gary suggested that he is never sure what to expect with people who are new to the organization.

Well it's all over the place pretty much when people come in here. The food line... you don't really know a lot about them, you don't know what their mental health issues might be or addiction issues might be. Whether they can go from 0 to 100 and just explode or even have a weapon on them you don't – you don't have all that information unless you know the person well which in some cases it's true but we see new faces everyday... people are in all different states and all different minds, just different situations. Everyone's in for different reasons and just certain things arise that you may have never experienced before and you kind of take them on each day.

Similarly, Roger, a client, pointed out that many of the clients have endured numerous unfortunate life circumstances.

All I would say in honesty is – I see people in general [in the Good Shepherd] and then I see a whole bunch of sub-categories like alcoholics, people who use drugs, people who've been in jail, people who have been neglected by their families, people who are in financial crisis – that's how I see the general population of this system that's going on right now that's trying to help people get back on their feet.

One common difficulty that many clients have faced is abusive relationships. Robbie, a client at the organization discussed how he was abused by his mother.

Joses: And then how did you end up here at Good Shepherd?

Robbie: Uh... just troubles at home with my mother. I just had enough and I said, I'll just go somewhere else.

Joses: Are you OK to expand a little bit on that?

Robbie: Sure yeah it's just... verbally, emotionally abusive you know. Not so much physical. Used to be physical but uh... her boyfriend's an alcoholic and the whole family around there was negative and you know – I just didn't get along so I said I'll get myself out of the environment. So in a way we didn't really change the whole situation.

Pablos, a client, discussed how he chooses his friends at the organization carefully. He chooses to stay away from those that he knows are addicted to drugs or have other difficulties such as mental disabilities. He said:

Oh there's some screw ups. Like I said, there's some – there's uh... you can tell who the drug addicts are. You can tell who the junks are. You can tell the people who are just... have mental difficulties and you just, you know, you can tell. I don't really hang out with the ones that are too screwed up.

Clarissa, a client, mentioned how drug abuse was the cause of her downfall. She stated:

I don't need to be in this situation I'm in. I have been in school for six years and I have a degree in computer programming and business programming, and I have no reason to be in this situation I'm in right now other than the drug abuse and all the problems I had. But now that I'm not – I'll get back to being where I was before. It just took me awhile to get there that's all.

Another factor that pervades the life of many of the clients is homelessness. While some of the clients do have homes and visit the organization to save money or to get access to resources, the

majority of clients have no location of their own to stay in. Karl, an older client, described how homelessness and disability are two main issues that have affected him. He stated:

When I was twenty three Mom kicked me out of the house, and I don't recall the reason. And it was no fun and eventually I did get housing again. And then about 11 years ago the... where was I... well the... sheriff came to the house and that was the second time. So... I haven't been homeless since 11 years and I am on disability. I'm on disability because one, I'm unemployed. If you're unemployed for a certain period of time they send you to a psychiatrist, or psychologist. And you sit in there for two and a half hours and they – it was a woman. She asked you questions and she gives you a bunch of papers and then they look at it and so I ended up on disability and that's how it happened.

While the above quotations illustrate a sense of learning to be aware of people's situations, Jenny, a student on placement, broadly summed up the changes in her as a result of being in Good Shepherd. She describes the meanings of her experiences by describing the way such experiences have shaped her life and made her grow:

I think its [being at Good Shepherd] all made me grow as a professional and as a person. And I think definitely seeing the things that I've seen and learning what's actually real in Hamilton where I wasn't really exposed to that before other than maybe what I've learned in school or what I've seen but actually being able to experience front line of the issues that take place in Hamilton and then learning about the agencies around and what is available and the stories and the barriers the clients faced has made me uh... grow definitely as a professional and as a person and being a lot more aware of what's

going on and more driven to pursue my professional career in this field and to be helpful much.

As a researcher, I find that these experiences, both for the clients and for the staff members, means a lot more than just the stories themselves or understanding that others have difficult situations. Rather, it appears that these experiences are a learning process for those involved in the Good Shepherd, helping them to open their eyes to those around them and learning to be sensitive in their interactions to the diverse needs towards those faced with homelessness. These accounts of participant's experiences with the organization and with their own lives serve to demonstrate that those involved in Good Shepherd have become aware of the many difficult circumstances that pervade the lives of the clients. These stories are filled with unfortunate conditions such as alcohol, drugs, or disabilities, and yet each individual has their own unique experience. Having an open mind and trying to see the person behind the shell of problems is a starting point for the next sub-theme, "refraining from judging".

4.3.2 Refraining from Judging

Recognizing individual life circumstances is to realize that everyone has had their own situations and life histories that have led them to where they are today. Refraining from judging is paramount to the philosophies of Good Shepherd. As one staff member, Gabriel put it:

To find their [the clients] innermost – that person that's there – that we know is there – but because of their experiences in life and because of situations that we cannot judge – they are where they are. To see past that and to see that everybody deserves a chance and as much chance as they need – they deserve it. Because I believe that personally, Jesus gives us unlimited chances and we also must do the same for the clients that come here.

In Gabriel's quotation, the meanings of his experiences are seen. For him, such experiences from working at the Good Shepherd allows him to demonstrate the values that the organization stands for, which in turn reflects his values as a Catholic minister. From a client's perspective, Todd further elaborated on the idea that all the clients have their own stories. However, he also emphasized the point that although some of the clients may be "dressed like bums", they do indeed "have hearts".

Like I said, everybody comes here for a reason. People are here at night for different reasons. Because they have no place – sometimes people at lunch have a place, but they just have no groceries. So they are more respectable since they have something to eat. And I don't know why it's just that people – they might look like bums but they actually have a heart too. They don't cause problems here – as far as it's – like I'm not here all the time. I was gone for like five months and I was working and had money, so I didn't want to take food away from somebody else that could use it you know what I mean?

In this example, Todd not only discussed how other clients have hearts, but he also demonstrated his own sacrificial act of not choosing to eat at the food line so that others could have more food. In other words, he talks about how the clients are often dehumanised by society, and by only by taking a closer look can we understand that they aren't that different from anyone else. In another interview, Cedric, a student on placement at the organization, mentioned his approach in talking to the clients. When he describes his experiences, he exemplifies the aspect of dignity and recognizing the individuality of the clients by encouraging them to make whatever choices they want to make, instead of making their choices for them. He stated:

Some of me just doesn't really care – you know it sounds bad. But I'm – I really don't care in the sense that you know what? It's your life, it's your choice. It's great that

you're talking to me and you want a little bit of input but it's not my choice to make right, so I don't really care what the outcome is – I'm just going to give you someone to talk to about it, someone to you know – trying to work through what you need to work through. But in the long run I really don't care what you choose as long as you make a choice so... because the workers themselves [the senior staff members], they really try to work towards getting them towards what THEY are aiming for right. Just because it's how I talk to people I don't really concern myself with you know... right or wrong or you know – that type of deal.

Jenny, a student on placement, discussed the meanings of her experiences by describing how she has learned the aspect of respect and the importance of refraining from judging. She discussed how she learns every day to the point where it has been engrained in her.

I'm learning every day and I think it has just become engrained in me. For example, like respecting everybody or when you meet somebody there's a lot more to them that you don't know and I've learned that in the shelter too. The men that come in – you actually hear their story and you may not have been expecting it and that could be anywhere so I think that's something that I kind of opened my eyes to that just because someone comes up to you and says this or looks this way or walking down the street or is eating at the food line doesn't mean that they don't have this behind them or these problems or these successes in their lives. So I think that's something that I've taken with me, I think I've grown huge as a professional being so front line and working with men and working in crisis situations. And working with any problem that comes up because in the shelter it's not just addiction it's not just – it's anything that comes to you. You have to be prepared.

In a similar manner, another staff member, Stephen, discussed how his philosophy is to look at clients as equals.

They're [the clients] looked at as equal you know to – the workers or people helping them. We don't, we don't put ourselves above them you know, we treat them just as we treat anybody else or how we want to be treated so it's a very normalized environment and that's the way we like to keep it. You know it's no different than if we went to a function or a legion or Alliance club.

As a result of their actions, many of the participants described that these experiences made them feel like a person. Part of this may be because the staff are interested in their stories and care for their individual needs as much as they can. Clarissa, a client, describes her meanings with these experiences:

They [the staff] go right out of their way to make sure – and it's got to be hard to spend that much time trying to care about this many people and the kinds of situations you are in because that's heartbreaking, I know it is. But they do it anyway instead of distancing themselves so that they're not uncomfortable they get right in there and they help everybody – they're really good, they're doing exactly what they should be doing I think, because they make a really big difference here... It's feeling that you're actually a person when you're in here and not everybody makes you feel like that you know.

As mentioned earlier, another important part of respecting individuality is helping the clients maintain dignity. For some clients, being in a position where they depend on the Good Shepherd affects their sense of self-worth. Robbie, a client, hesitatingly shared some of his thoughts:

Joses: What is the nature of your relationship with other clients?

Robbie: Just small talk at the table. Whatever, you know, just trying to maintain good rapport but at the same time you don't really, you know, want to get too involved – because you don't know their stories or their situations or why they ended up there you know. And it kind of feels awkward running into them downtown when you're with your other friends or whatever, it's like I know this guy from the food program – you don't want your friends knowing that because, you know what I mean?

Joses: Can you explain that a little bit?

Robbie: Explain what?

Joses: Not wanting your friends to know.

Robbie: Well, I don't need them to know my situation about why I'm here. Even though, OK, I'll admit it it's a little bit of an ego issue – you know not like pride but it's just embarrassing for them to find out because they're probably going to go back to their Ancaster homes or wherever it's like wow... I've got to end up back here again you know what I mean?

Finally, one student on placement, Cedric, discusses his experiences with the issue of respect and dignity in the organization. He mentions how the Good Shepherd is special in that it thanks the clients for using its' services:

This is – this might be the only place that says thank you to them [the clients]. I've been told that twice already when I've been doing the food line. They, to them, seeing a smiling face and for someone to say thank you to them makes such a difference. It – it lets them at least have some dignity back right?

As the participants discuss, refraining from judging others can go a long way towards meeting the organization's goals. The staff members state that it is important for them to not make the clients

feel inferior as people. And for the clients, they remain appreciative of the efforts that the staff members are making.

Based on my inferences as a researcher, I found that this acknowledgement of different life stories represents more to the participants than just recognizing individual diversity. Rather, the meanings behind these experiences go deeper. For the staff, these experiences represent an ongoing learning process to understand on a broader scale the population that they are dealing with. For the clients, the experiences represent a place where they can be themselves and not feel ashamed.

Many of the staff members at Good Shepherd have devoted their lives to helping those in need. Many of them have studied social work with the hopes of making the world a better place. For them, these experiences help them to learn and understand the complexity of the phenomenon with which they are dealing. It teaches them to be flexible and adaptable in dealing with every client's unique circumstances. But what seems to be the most important is that these experiences help the staff members appreciate and respect those regardless of their external circumstances. A common theme among the staff participants is having their eyes opened to the situation of homelessness. As a result, these experiences teach staff members to not think of themselves as "higher" or "better" than the clients they serve. Furthermore, by doing so, these experiences allow the staff members to validate the dignity of the clients through their words, actions, and support.

For the clients, these experiences represent a place where they are not judged. It represents a place where they can go and be with others who are facing similar situations. In the quotations provided above, clients often mention that one of the reasons they enjoy going to the Good Shepherd is because they feel that they are treated with dignity and respect. They mention how the staff constantly thank them for coming to the organization and they also mention how they are able to share and talk with other clients about their situations. These experiences demonstrate the importance of keeping and maintaining their dignity and self-worth even though they are often

labelled in a group that many look down upon. In the Good Shepherd these clients are able to find relief and shelter from having their self-worth threatened. Although the shelter is temporary, clients often leave the organization with a renewed sense of dignity. These experiences of being treated so well at the Good Shepherd definitely means more to them than just individual diversity. Instead, it means that they are respected, and this respect is something of considerable importance to them.

4.4 OVERVIEW

Three main themes were found as a result of my analysis. The first theme was that many complex interactions exist within the Good Shepherd. In this theme, I found that it was important for staff members to keep certain boundaries between themselves and those who access and use the services (the clients), as they felt it was important for them to remain professional. Clients were clearly aware of this fact and understood that the staff were mainly there to help them, if not necessarily to be their friend. I also found that participants within Good Shepherd developed rapport with each other. The staff members became friends with other staff members, and as mentioned above certain boundaries existed between staff and clients. However, a general sense of mutual appreciation and respect existed between the staff and the clients. While these boundaries existed, the staff would still care about the clients and would often ask them to let them know how they were doing.

Between clients and other clients, there was a mix of interactions. Some clients had friends that they created and maintained within the Good Shepherd while other clients preferred to keep to themselves and did not prefer to socialize with others. However, this theme also highlights how many of the participants often exhibited challenging behaviour towards others. Although uncommon, some clients described being unhappy with the way they were treated by the staff members, and in the same way, some staff members shared many stories about how it can be challenging to deal with

clients at other times. No significant behavioural issues between staff members were described, but some challenging behaviour (again, although rarely), was found between clients at times.

The second theme in my analysis of the interviews was that there existed a culture of support within Good Shepherd. In this theme, I draw attention to the point that physical support was extremely important to the clients, and that without the Good Shepherd, it would be even more difficult for many of the clients to meet their basic needs such as food, shelter, and clothing. In addition to physical support, participants also described the significance of emotional support at the Good Shepherd. Some of the clients described how they felt supported by the staff members, and others gave accounts of when they acted as support for other clients. Staff members also expressed receiving and giving support from other staff members. Finally, I found in this theme that the Good Shepherd was overall a sense of community. Both clients and staff members often use the specific words “community” or “family” in describing the organization. While there are some more challenging aspects to this community (such as the clients helping each other out to gain access to illegal substances), for the most part clients and staff members stated that the Good Shepherd was a very comfortable community where everyone was welcoming and helpful.

The third theme that I found was that the participants involved with the Good Shepherd learned that everyone has a different life history. In this theme, I found that those in the organization all learned to be aware of one another’s situations. While some do this by immediately talking to others and hearing their stories, others are simply cautious when meeting new people and take longer to form friendships. This theme also draws attention to the point that part of acknowledging that everyone has a different life history means learning to refrain from judging. Staff members elaborated on the importance of finding the “innermost” being beyond the situational context of a person while clients mentioned how despite the situation, they have hearts as well and deserve to be treated with respect.

Overall, these three themes describing participants' experiences mean more than just the experiences themselves. For the first theme, the experiences represent an opportunity for the staff members to create special bonds with other staff members, and for the clients it represents an opportunity to connect to a community. In the second theme, the culture of support inherent in the organization represents an opportunity for the staff members to serve a greater cause, and it also represents the care and support that is often missing in the lives of the clients. Finally, for the third theme, the experiences of the staff members represent their constant learning of how to appreciate people regardless of their external circumstances, and for clients it represents a place where they can go and be themselves without being judged. In the next chapter, I explore how the results relate and can speak to the relevant literature.

Chapter 5: Discussions, Reflections and Recommendations

In this chapter, I focus on the discussion, reflections and recommendations stemming from this research. In the discussion section, I examine the results of my study and its connections to relevant literature, which was reviewed in Chapter Two. Next, I reflect upon my role as a researcher, explaining the effect that I had on the research and also the effect that the research has had on me. Third, I propose specific recommendations for the Good Shepherd and for areas of future research.

5.1 DISCUSSION

As was apparent from the results section of this project, homelessness is indeed a complicated phenomenon involving multiple dimensions. Many factors found in the literature reviewed in Chapter Two can be supported as a result of my interviews with participants. For instance, some researchers have described factors such as substance abuse (Grinman, et. al., 2010), family issues (Yu, et. al., 2008) and traumatic experiences (Ferguson, 2009), many of the participants often reported similar factors in their own lives. Participants mentioned being drunk when talking to family members, running away from abusive families or partners, and shared stories of others who went through traumatic experiences. This provides us with a background to understand the context of the participants that are involved in Good Shepherd. Further, two specific concepts significant to the field of Leisure Studies were also evident in the analysis: (1) leisure and coping, and (2) role of a community.

5.1.1 Leisure and Coping

As mentioned in the literature review, research has shown that being homeless is associated with high levels of stress and anxiety (Tyler, Melander & Alamazan, 2010). In addition, the staff also stated that they are often stressed out working at the Good Shepherd. However, research has also

shown that leisure can play a significant role in alleviating these levels of stress and anxiety through leisure companionship, leisure palliative coping and leisure mood enhancement (Iwasaki & Mannell, 2000). These three leisure coping methods are explored in relation to my findings. The theme of leisure companionship in particular was prevalent in the findings, while leisure palliative coping and leisure mood enhancement were not as obvious. However, it is also important to remember that the research questions were not meant to specifically address the issue of leisure coping methods. While the leisure settings described in this study are not the typical leisure settings, aspects of these three leisure coping methods can be seen throughout the interviews in order to deal with chronic stress.

Firstly, leisure companionship focuses on interdependence and connectedness with other members, which in turn becomes a type of social support for people (Iwasaki, Barlett, & O'Neil, 2005; Millburn & D'Ercole, 1991). Staff members commonly mentioned how they were connected to other staff members and Kenny stated in particular a sense that colleagues were there when needed, representing a type of social support. Similarly, although a boundary exists between clients and staff members, clients also stated that they feel supported by staff members, often stating that the staff members "treat [them] very well" (Todd). Clients also stated feeling connected as a family, and how "everybody knows everybody here for some reason" (Todd). Finally, clients even supported each other at times, as seen when Todd, a client, found another job through the help of another client in the meal program. These relationships between staff, clients, and between staff and clients all demonstrate aspects of leisure companionship, especially in regards to the support they gain through their participation in the meal program. These benefits of leisure companionships can definitely help alleviate stress with those involved in Good Shepherd.

Secondly, palliative coping through leisure helps to alleviate stress by focusing on using leisure situations to provide a temporary escape from reality (Iwasaki, Barlett, & O'Neil, 2005). While the connections of leisure palliative coping to the findings in chapter four are weak, aspects of such

coping methods are present. The Good Shepherd provides opportunities for leisure with other individuals that could fit the category of leisure palliative coping. For example, leisure pursuits between staff members are apparent. Gary, a staff member says, “yeah we’re buddies and maybe we are all a little crazy but we’re all crazy together and I hang out with the boys outside of here [Good Shepherd] all the time”. Similarly, during my experience volunteering at the organization, I noticed a lot of individuals would often engage in watching television as a leisure activity. This also represents an escape from reality that fits in with the definition of leisure palliative coping. Although the specific leisure activities that the clients engage in are unknown, the Good Shepherd is a place where such relationships can be formed, and thus leisure palliative coping can be engaged in with these friends. Similarly, some of the clients mentioned developing close relationships with others in the meal program. These relationships may also lead to leisure palliative coping together. For example, in my conversations with some of the clients, they often discuss how they like to get out of the Good Shepherd and go for a beer with some of their buddies. This “escaping” from the organization and indulging in alcohol could represent an escape from their present lives. This would be in line with Tyler and Johnson’s (2006) study as mentioned in the literature review. However, these are just assumptions at best as no clients explicitly mentioned anything to do with escaping from reality with the friends they made at Good Shepherd.

Thirdly, leisure mood enhancement suggests that people gain satisfaction from doing what they are, or think they are, good at doing (Bandura, 1977). More specifically, Lu and Hu (2005) state that individuals enter a more positive mood when their leisure activity is serious, committed, and constructive. Again, while the connection of leisure mood enhancement to the results in chapter four is weak, aspects of leisure mood enhancement can indeed be seen between clients. For example, in Clarissa’s interview she mentions that she is extroverted and often connects to people, saying that she has “a good relationship with just about everybody that comes in here [Good Shepherd]”. One of the

ways that she has used her personality was to support another homeless lady through giving her care packages which she received from another source (as described in chapter four). This action of care increased Clarissa's mood to the point where she wanted to give the other homeless lady everything she had, as it "made such a big difference to [the homeless lady]". As is evident, such actions contain essences of leisure mood enhancement for Clarissa, and a sense of leisure companionship for the homeless lady. However, the connection is not yet strong enough.

These findings on leisure coping, especially those on leisure companionship, are in line with multiple studies as discussed in the literature review (Klitzing, 2003; Klitzing, 2004; Dawson & Harrington, 1996; Dawson & Harrington, 1997) studies. In Klitzing's (2003) study, the author mentions that the main strategy for homeless women to cope with chronic stress is to be with others and talk with their family, friends, or others in the same shelter as them. Similarly, in Klitzing's (2004) study, she concludes that leisure is an important tool for letting individuals who are in similar life experiences connect with each other. This connection is important as it offers a sense of belonging and acceptance to the individual. In her studies, having a setting where individuals could talk and converse with each other was included as a type of leisure. This type of setting is similar to the Good Shepherd's food line. Similarly, in Dawson and Harrington's (1996) and Dawson and Harrington's (1997) studies, the authors conclude that participation in recreational activities serve to empower participants living in homeless shelters by restoring their morale and in helping them connect to the wider community.

While the benefits of leisure companionship, leisure palliative coping and leisure mood enhancement mentioned above have been identified in other settings, more studies need to focus on the connection between these coping strategies and the homeless, a unique population that often places emphasis on survival. To address this, specific recommendations for future studies will be made in order to address the link between leisure and those who are facing homelessness.

5.1.2 Community

Another area of literature, which has an even stronger connection to the results of this study is the aspect of community. In the literature review, I presented Warren's (1978) five functions of a community: (1) meeting supply and demand, (2) socialization, (3) social control, (4) social participation and (5) mutual support. While these functions of community may seem outdated, they are still extremely useful in conceptualizing community today. Furthermore, as mentioned in the literature review, the concept of community has been defined by many scholars, making it difficult for scholars to agree on a single definition. Hence, I chose to use Warren's (1978) work on functions of community as it represents the most basic definitions of community, and has also been widely received by many other scholars in a similar area of study. In this section, we explore how the findings in chapter four relate to these aspects of community.

Warren's first function of a community, meeting supply and demand, refers to making sure that each member has the adequate resources to meet his or her basic needs through the production and distribution of necessities. This function of community has an obvious connection to the meal program in Good Shepherd, as the meal program was created with the goal of providing nutritious meals to those who needed food. However, more than just food, the Good Shepherd also serves to provide resources such as clothing and shelter (a full list of the services provided can be seen in chapter three). Without the Good Shepherd, clients would be "starving to death" (Clarissa).

The second function of a community, socialization, refers to the exchange of knowledge, social values and behaviour patterns within members of the community. Within the Good Shepherd, socialization is seen most prominently through the beliefs that Good Shepherd adheres to, especially that of dignity and acknowledging the different life stories. The beliefs and behaviours of the organization trickle down and affect the clients. For example, as discussed in chapter four, many clients stand up for the dignity of others, saying that "they all have stories... not all of them started out

here [the Good Shepherd], it was never in any of their plans to end up here for sure – they’ve all been something else in their lives” (Clarissa). Clients also expressed a belief in the dignity of others, “it’s just that people – they might look like bums but they actually have a heart too” (Todd). Similarly, the values of the organization also influence the values of staff members, “I’m learning every day and I think it has just become engrained in me. For example, like respecting everybody or when you meet somebody there’s a lot more to them that you don’t know and I’ve learned that in the shelter too” (Jenny). This finding is similar to Trussel and Mair’s (2010) research as described in the literature review. In their research, Trussel and Mair (2010) discuss how participants search for “judgement-free spaces”, where they are accepted and helped, rather than have their situations judged and exposed. Along the same lines, the Good Shepherd is a community that for the most part fulfills the participants’ desire for these judgement-free spaces. This judgement-free space is created through the socialization process and reflects the values and behaviours of those within the community. Through these examples, we see how the Good Shepherd functions as a community.

The third function of community, social control, refers to a certain level of conformity within the group. Many rules exist at Good Shepherd and staff are there to ensure that these rules are kept so that the community can function according to its purposes. For example, I discussed in chapter four how all the staff members intentionally created a boundary between themselves and the clients, so as to maintain a professional relationship. In another example, Jenny shared how she had to be the authoritative voice when not letting a client bag hot food. The staff member’s role is to ensure that rules are kept and that a certain level of conformity within the group exists. Similarly, most clients also conform to the rules of the group, and appreciate the role that the staff plays in keeping order – “I mean the staff members are great you know – I show them respect and they show me respect” (Robbie). Unfortunately, not all clients were willing to conform to the rules of the group. In the findings, some situations were seen where clients were caught smoking crack in the bathroom or

causing a ruckus, even when they knew it was challenging behaviour. For example, Robbie states that he tries to “deal with this [behaviour of staff members that he doesn’t appreciate] without having to consent to higher authority”. These examples all demonstrate the degree of social control that is embedded in the Good Shepherd.

The fourth function, social participation, refers to the opportunities provided for members to interact with each other. This function of community is apparent in the findings from chapter four. The Good Shepherd is a setting where many complex yet meaningful relationships exist. Interactions occur between staff members, between clients, and between staff members and clients. As stated in the findings, staff members become “buddies” with each other, staff members develop friendly rapport with clients, and clients also oftentimes become acquaintances or good friends with other clients. Either way, the nature of the Good Shepherd, specifically the meal program, creates opportunities for those involved in Good Shepherd to interact with one another. Whether they choose to interact with others or not is up to the individuals themselves, but the opportunity is there. For example, Cedric mentioned how a lot of the clients often interact with him, saying that he gets to “talk around and talk with the guys and see what their day is like – figure out what’s going on in their life”. And for others such as Clarissa, her relationship with everyone is different, but she “interacts with just about all of them”. These examples demonstrate the opportunities that those in the Good Shepherd have for social participation.

The fifth function, mutual support, refers to the community acting as a bridge between individuals so that these individuals can help and assist each other in various ways. Again, just as with the functions of meeting supply and demand and social participation, the function of mutual support is prominent in the findings. The very mission of Good Shepherd is based on serving those in need. While the aspect of sharing resources falls under meeting supply and demand, the role of other helpful behaviours can be categorized into the function of mutual support. From this study, it is

apparent that the Good Shepherd is an organization that helps them with many “softer needs” as well, often supporting its members emotionally. Participants described feeling that each time they walked into the organization they were supported emotionally. Some participants even mentioned how staff members often go out of their way to help them and care for them. Even in Gabriel’s excerpt from his interview, he shares his example of the need to never stop loving and caring despite how hard it may be at times. Overall, participants use the terms a “community”, a “mini-community”, or a large “family” to describe their relationship with the Good Shepherd. All these examples demonstrate how the Good Shepherd is a community of mutual support where members of the community help each other emotionally.

Overall, the five functions of a community, meeting supply and demand, socialization, social control, social participation and mutual support are present in the Good Shepherd. Warren (1978) states that these functions are essential in a healthy community and that they represent a diverse array of benefits that a community can provide for its members. As mentioned in the literature review, participation in healthy communities is proportionately related to physical and mental health benefits (Putnam, 2000; Shivotiz-Ezra & Leitsch, 2010). Throughout the literature review, we discussed that such benefits include decreased health ailments such as colds, heart attacks, strokes, cancer, or depression, less feelings of loneliness and higher psychological well-being and a greater likelihood to meet one’s goals (Wing & Jeffrey, 1999; Putnam, 2000; Shiovitz-Ezra & Leitsch, 2010).

Furthermore, the aspect of social capital is also discussed in the results. As mentioned in the literature review, Glover and Parry (2008) find that social capital is often created from friendships in a community such as Good Shepherd. As a result of social capital, individuals facing stressful situations often get by, get ahead, or fall behind. The findings from the present study are mostly in line with the findings from Glover and Parry’s (2008) study. In the present study, the theme of getting by and getting ahead are both apparent in the discussion on leisure companionship and in the theme

“fostering a culture of support” as discussed above. The Good Shepherd is a community where friendships are formed. Such friendships lead to the benefits of social capital, letting participants find assurance through their friendships and having access to resources or other jobs through such social capital. “Falling behind” is also seen in the interviews with participants, especially in the theme “participants engaging in challenging behaviour”. For many of the clients, the Good Shepherd is a setting where they can be rejuvenated, receiving physical, social, and emotional support. However, some of the clients often get into arguments with the staff members and do not like the way that they are treated. Additionally, clients often use the Good Shepherd in a manner that helps them relieve their frustrations. Instead, sometimes these interactions with staff members (or other clients) can cause further frustrations, causing them to “fall behind”.

As for the four negative consequences of social capital as described by Portes (1998), little overlap was found between Portes (1998) study and the present study. While exclusion of outsiders was not specifically addressed in the present study, during my time volunteering at the Good Shepherd, I observed that there were individuals who always sat alone and left as soon as their meal was done. However, it is uncertain as to whether they chose to sit alone or whether they were excluded from sitting with others. In my casual conversations with the participants, many of them often stated that they prefer not to associate with others in the organization, and prefer to leave as soon as they are done eating. However, there were also a couple instances where clients expressed dislike for other specific clients because of their behaviour. This could be a form of excluding outsiders. As for the other negative consequences as described by Portes (1998), little overlap was found. In chapter five, specific recommendations for future research in this area will be addressed.

5.2 REFLECTIONS

A major, personal reason for conducting this study in the first place was to learn about and understand the complex phenomenon of homelessness. In this section, I discuss how my beliefs about

homelessness have changed throughout the course of the study, making use of the reflexive journal that I kept throughout the project. It is important to remember that these beliefs are personal and that although my dispositions have been reconstructed to a certain extent, (hopefully to better reflect the reality of homelessness), I am still learning and continuing to reconstruct my beliefs every day. During the course of volunteering at Good Shepherd and conducting interviews with those involved in the organization, I found, based on the progression of my reflexive journaling that my perspective of the phenomenon of homelessness changed in three major ways. These three ways revolve around (1) the problem of homelessness, (2) the importance of dignity, and (3) the productivity of those facing homelessness.

5.2.1 The Problem of Homelessness

In my very first journal entry describing my thoughts about the phenomenon of homelessness, I failed to realize the complexity of homelessness and instead oversimplified the issue. I wrote in my journal that the “main cause of their homelessness is that they are unable to afford a physical place to live”. While the literature review has proved to some extent that poverty is a major contributor towards homelessness, many other factors contribute to homelessness as well. Through conducting a literature review, volunteering at the Good Shepherd, and doing interviews with participants, I began to see that the problem was a lot more complicated than just poverty. Other factors involved family abuse, broken relationships, death of a loved one, substance abuse, cognitive disabilities, and physical injuries/impairments. As a result of these myriad relationships, I began to see homelessness as more of a symptom than a condition.

In my original beliefs, the solution to homelessness was simple, to raise enough money to build homes for those who do not have homes. However, the issues of homelessness go much deeper. For example, in one interview a client shared a story about another client who was financially stable until his seven year old daughter passed away in an unfortunate accident. From that point on, the

client “lost it” and sunk into despair, becoming homeless and losing all financial stability. In another story, a client shares how he was abused at home by his single mom, and ran away to Hamilton, ON where he ended up connecting with the Good Shepherd. Yet in another example, another client shares about a story where a friend of hers caught his wife cheating with another man, and was then physically beaten by the man who was cheating and put into a coma for two years. When he woke up two years later he was unable to get back onto his feet and ended up connecting with the Good Shepherd. These stories only represent a fraction of the difficulties that often accompany the phenomenon of homelessness.

While I agree with a ‘housing first’ approach in dealing with homelessness, I now believe that it doesn’t stop there. Interventions such as rehabilitation, counselling, or the teaching of different life skills are just as important as providing housing. However, as all individuals facing homelessness are unique, it is impossible to have a “one solution fits all” approach. Rather, it is important to assess each person struggling with homelessness individually, and to see what methods will be most beneficial for them. In summary, what I learned is that the problem of homelessness is not the fact that these individuals don’t have a home, but the problem of homelessness is the intricate myriad factors that are pervasive for those who face homelessness.

5.2.2 The Importance of Dignity

Another area in which my perspective was completely changed related to the dignity of those who are homeless. In my first journal entry I wrote a story depicting my perspective of those dealing with homelessness. I wrote, “... a middle-aged rugged man sitting on the side of the street in an old but busy intersection. He is holding a sign with barely legible letters requesting money”. While this description of a homeless man comes from personal experience, it was extremely foolish and naïve of me to categorize all those struggling with homelessness to be like that man in my story. In fact, through my project I came to realize that the man in my story represents a minority rather than a

majority. However, the point of the story is that I believed that those who were homeless had no shame. That parading in a busy intersection asking for money did not affect his dignity at all. In reality, this is completely opposite to what I have learned through this project. Instead, I learned that dignity remains a fundamental necessity for those facing homelessness and that keeping one's dignity is important in keeping one's feeling of self-worth.

The main factor in changing my perspective of the issue of dignity within those facing homelessness was volunteering at Good Shepherd and interviewing the clients. First, as a volunteer, I was able to engage in casual conversations with many of the clients. These clients often talked to me about the things they had done or about the things that they had accomplished. A lot of the subject of their conversations would be about many of the great things that they had done in their lives. From my perspective, this was one way in which clients could reaffirm their self-worth and maintain their dignity. On another note, in one specific episode that I witnessed while volunteering, one client remained still eating when there were ten minutes left until the official closing time of the meal program. At this time, a flood of volunteers started cleaning up all around her area. As a result, the client became angry and stated that she felt rushed and disrespected, and that if she were in a restaurant she would never receive such bad service. Again, this to me is a reflection of the importance of maintaining self-worth and dignity. Secondly, as seen in the findings of this study, many of the clients talked directly about the aspect of dignity in their lives. Some clients talked about not wanting to be seen going to a "soup kitchen" while others spoke of the importance of being treated as a human. As shared in the findings section, one of the clients was embarrassed to make friends with those in the meal program just in case he bumped into the other clients while he was with his friends, saying it would be embarrassing for him.

These examples demonstrate the importance of dignity in the lives of those who are homeless. These interactions also changed my perspective, making me realize that there is much

more to a person than what meets the eye. In my later journal entries, I acknowledged my need to broaden my perspective in response to one man's situation in the meal program, saying "it is so easy to focus on what is at present, and to neglect the past, or any future for the man". I was able to expand my mind and to think instead of the circumstances surrounding those who are homeless instead of focusing on the fact that they are faced with such a phenomenon. In this excerpt, I wrote:

"Today as I was helping with the plates and dishes I noticed an older-middle aged man walk into the community food line. The man was of Chinese descent – his body was thin and his appearance was frail. Trailing behind him – was a little boy – barely the height of the man's knees. The boy was undoubtedly the son of the man. I observed them throughout the meal. None of them spoke to each other – and both of them seemed accustomed to lining up – grabbing the tray – and eating – far away from the others. They sat across each other – and ate in silence. Few words were exchanged between the two. Every once in a while – the father would speak – only to tell his son to finish his food or to ensure he ate all the fruits and vegetables on his tray. Other than that – they acted as if this was routine for them – and maybe it was – maybe it wasn't. As far as I knew – this was the first time I had seen them there. This made me wonder. Why were they there? Were they homeless? Where was the mom? Where was the family of the father? How often were they there? What was their background? Expanding these thoughts to a broader perspective – I began to realize that each individual in that room – whether staff or client – had a unique story to share – a story that only they themselves had gone through. While there are characteristics that can broadly define a group of people going through common circumstances – there is never an absolute. Every person is shaped by their history – and each history is unique to each person".

5.2.3 The Productivity of those Facing Homelessness

Another area in which my perspective greatly changed was my view of the productivity of those facing homelessness. In my original reflexive journal, I wrote,

“Pedestrians pass him [fictional homeless man] avoiding eye contact in fear of feeling guilt and dread. He sits there all day, surrounded with empty bottles of beer, vodka, or even sanitizer – whatever alcohol he can get his hands on. His sense of time is distorted, and he travels to the beer store every morning before it even opens...”

In this excerpt of my journal, one huge assumption that I have made is that those facing homelessness do nothing productive with their time. Rather they just sit there waiting for time to go by, as if they have given up on life. This is an incorrect assumption on my part, which reflects my naivety prior to the beginning of this project. Throughout the course of the project, I have found that most of those faced with homelessness are constantly fighting and struggling to find ways to get back on their feet. Instead, participants in the interviews mention how they are constantly accessing different resources to help them with their situations. Staff members speak about success stories of participants, and how many of the participants return to Good Shepherd after successfully reintegrating into society. Gabriel describes one example:

“I went to a – I don’t know how to say it – It’s was a type of dinner activity at a centre and there were speakers and this dinner activity and someone got to speak and said that fifteen years ago they came through the Good Shepherd Centre because of a situation that they were in and they were able to change their lives around... now that person didn’t know that I was from the Good Shepherd Centre”.

Stories such as the one above made me realize that those who are facing homelessness do everything in their power to improve their situations. However, as mentioned above, the complexities

and challenges of homelessness are immense, and although those who are homeless desperately try to gain a better life for themselves through earnest hard work, it is indeed difficult. The final words of my journal represent my respect and acknowledgement for those who are still trying hard to free themselves from homelessness.

“Today, I talked with some clients who told me that they had recently found a job. Their faces beamed with pride as they figured they would go from no income to a modest wage. Perhaps their joy was not a result of the money that would come in, but rather from the overcoming of a major hurdle – this was something I would never have expected. I didn’t expect these clients to think much about their future – in fact, I thought that they thought that their lives were going to be the same from then on. Sometimes the phenomenon of homelessness seems so overwhelming and complicated that it makes us want to give up. But in reality – the majority of those who are faced with homelessness are still fighting hard – we must not give up, but fight with them instead.”

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

5.3.1 *Future Studies*

As discussed in the literature review, studies focusing on the relation between homeless individuals and charitable communities have often focused on the perspective of the homeless individual (Heslin, Andersen, and Gelberg, 2003; O’toole, et. al., 2007). However, few studies have looked at the perspective of the staff workers in these organisations. For future studies, quantitative methodologies may be useful in exploring the broader scope of the phenomenon. For example, a survey-style study comparing the perspectives of individuals experiencing homelessness and staff workers at charitable organizations would provide very valuable information for future studies. Such a

study could highlight discrepancies between what staff think they are offering compared to what participants believe they are receiving.

Another important area that demands more research is the role of leisure in charitable organizations such as Good Shepherd. Such research could drastically change the functionality of such organizations. As mentioned in the literature review, those who are facing homelessness deal with an enormous amount of stress, and subsequently, leisure is a powerful tool, which can help individuals deal positively with such stress. First, the leisure options of those who are homeless should be identified. Second, experimental studies investigating whether or not certain leisure activities have positive health effects on those facing homelessness could be undertaken. It is important to keep in mind that leisure pursuits can range from recreational activities such as playing guitar or singing to serious leisure pursuits such as volunteering or going to church. Finally, the three types of leisure coping strategies should be individually assessed to see which strategies are effective buffers against stress and which ones are not. As a result of these studies, charitable organizations can create programs or opportunities for leisure companionship, leisure palliative coping and leisure mood enhancement within their organization.

Along the lines of leisure, another study that would be extremely useful to both leisure and social work practitioners would be to expand upon the research examining the leisure lifestyles of those who face homelessness. Anonymous surveys should be used to gain a broad sense of the leisure engaged in for such participants. Data on the leisure opportunities that are available to such participants should also be collected. Available leisure can be identified based on criteria such as low cost and close physical proximity. Their leisure usages should then be compared with the available leisure opportunities. The discrepancies between leisure usages and available leisure opportunities can then be examined to see why such discrepancies exist. As a result, appropriate action can be taken such as leisure education opportunities or funding for such leisure opportunities.

More research also needs to be conducted examining the specific benefits of building community in charitable organizations such as Good Shepherd, where the majority of members face homelessness. These organizations are in a unique situation as the large majority of the members there are hoping to eventually move beyond their dependence on its programs and support. Factors examining how to strengthen Warren's (1978) five functions of the community need to be addressed, so that efforts can be made to tighten the ties that individuals have with such charitable organizations. These ties to the community can increase the physical and mental health of those involved in the community.

5.3.2 Specific Recommendations for the Good Shepherd

Based on the finding that the Good Shepherd is a "mini community" where various and complex relationships exist, it is difficult to make specific changes to the whole organization for the benefit of all. However, because of this diverse mini community, it is essential for staff members and administration to know and understand that each client wants and needs something different. For some clients they may just want to eat, and would prefer to be left alone. Others would prefer to make friends at the organization who can help them out with their situations. And yet still for others they enjoy being at the Good Shepherd simply because it is like "family" to them. As a result, it is important for the staff and administration to be flexible to the needs of the clients and to create the opportunities for what the clients want or need. My recommendation specifically pertains to the clients who feel and wish to be more connected with the Good Shepherd.

For those who feel like family in the Good Shepherd, I would recommend that the Good Shepherd give them the opportunity to serve within the organization. These roles can be simple, such as helping the staff to clean up after a meal service. Allowing the clients to serve in the organization will further reinforce their familial feeling with the Good Shepherd, and will help to instill a sense of dignity in their lives. Furthermore, it will help reduce the power difference between those accessing

the services of Good Shepherd and the staff members. It is important however, that these service positions are in no way forced upon the clients. Rather, it is important for the clients to take the initiative to want to serve.

My second recommendation relates to the aspect of dignity. As seen in the interviews, some of the clients often feel embarrassed going to a “soup kitchen”, as they do not want to be judged by others. While the food program at Good Shepherd serves the same function as a soup kitchen, there are methods that can be used to help alleviate the feeling of being judged. This could be done by transforming the food program into a restaurant as much as possible. First, I agree and acknowledge the changes that Good Shepherd has already made and plan to make soon. The organization has done well by calling the program a “meal program” instead of a soup kitchen, which staff believes has fewer negative connotations regarding the need for help. I also agree with the organization’s plans to change the procedure so that the clients will eat from plates instead of trays, which helps one feel more as if eating in a restaurant. However, two more steps could be taken. The first step is to allow the clients to wait inside the building for their food. Currently, the clients wait outside for the doors to open. Oftentimes this involves waiting in the rain or in the cold. My recommendation is to instill a “doors open” time and a “meal served” time, where clients can come in earlier and wait indoors until the food is ready to be served. The second step in ensuring the meal program functions more as a restaurant relates to the volunteers. During my experiences volunteering there I have seen some of the volunteers begin to wash up the dining room once most of the clients have left (although it is still ten minutes before closing time). As a result some of the clients had gotten upset, verbally stating feelings of being rushed and in the way of people cleaning all around them while they were still eating. My specific recommendation for them is that the staff or volunteers do not start the cleaning up process of the dining area until the very last client has left.

5.3.3 A final word for those studying the phenomenon of Homelessness

As mentioned through the study, the phenomenon of homelessness is an extremely difficult area of study. Many ethical considerations must be taken into account, subjects can be difficult to recruit, and many barriers exist between the researcher and the participants. Entering a world where many are in chronic despair is difficult and time consuming work. Frustrations are bound to be present and flexibility will be essential in ensuring the purpose of the research is fulfilled. My recommendation is simple. It is important to persevere and to never give up on the participants in your studies. While many of those facing homelessness have given up in achieving a better life for themselves, many of those facing homelessness are still working hard and persevering to find that piece of independence and self-sufficiency in their lives. For many of them, such research can change their lives. Therefore, do not give up, as many of those who are homeless haven't given up either.

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APPENDIX A - Bracketing

In this section, I present the problems and assumptions that that I found after each individual interview. It is important to note that these assumptions are not necessarily incorrect or correct. Regardless of whether they are incorrect/correct, I had no right to make such assumptions. Also, this process here represents my efforts to understand my own thought processes of those faced with homelessness. In no way does this list represent a “completion of bracketing”, as I am still learning every day and striving to improve my understanding of those faced with such a phenomenon.

Interview Number: 1

Problem: asked “what do you think it means for those people who are homeless that you offer such services, or those in poverty?”

Assumption: assumed that the clients viewed the services with more meaning than just the services itself.

Interview Number: 1

Problem: stated the following “so there’s a separation between work and life”

Assumption: assumed that what I said was clarifying his previous statement. Instead, it could have led him to answer a certain way.

Interview Number: 1

Problem: asked “do you have any stories of people who used to come to the meal program and then they were able to stand on their own two feet again and they came back to thank you?”

Assumption: (1) Assumed that such stories existed. (2) Assumed that it was the Good Shepherd that helped them stand on their own two feet.

Interview Number: 2

Problem: asked “so what do you think are some of the main things that your program has been successful at towards the clients – or what do you think the meal program has done to impact the clients?”

Assumption: (1) Assumed that there was more meaning than just the services offered to the clients. (2) Assumed that the organization impacted them in some way besides the services offered.

Interview Number: 3

Problem: asked “so why do you think the boundaries [between staff and clients] are important?”

Assumption: Assumed that the interviewee thought that the boundaries were important.

Interview Number: 3

Problem: asked “what are the benefits of the meal program?”

Assumption: assumed that there were benefits to the clients other than the physical services offered.

Interview Number: 3

Problem: asked, “what do you think would be different in the lives of the clients if the meal program did not exist?”

Assumption: Assumed that the Good Shepherd plays a major role in “helping” those who are faced with homelessness.

Interview Number: 4

Problem: asked whether the people a client met help him out with his homelessness

Assumption: assumed that the client wanted/needed help.

Interview Number: 4

Problem: asked if the feelings that the client had from the organization affected him even when he was not physically there.

Assumption: assumed that there were special feelings attached to the organization.

Interview Number: 5

Problem: asked “and right now you said you finally have a place of your own?” The participant actually did not make any reference to the word “finally” in the preceding conversations.

Assumption: assumed that it took a long time for the client to find housing.

Interview Number: 6

Problem: asked “what is it you think that drives the volunteers to contribute their time and money?”

Assumption: assumed that there was a different reason than just “helping” for the volunteers to donate their resources.

Interview Number: 7

Problem: asked what barriers were visible in the lives of the clients during the meal program hours

Assumption: assumed that there were many barriers in the lives of the clients.

Interview Number: 8

Problem: asked “do they [staff members] usually provide any support?”

Assumption: assumed that the client wanted/needed such support.

Interview Number: 8

Problem: asked “so what are the reasons that people usually come?”

Assumption: assumed that the clients were coming to the Good Shepherd for reasons other than the physical services provided.

Interview Number: 10

Problem: asked “so what kind of feelings or emotions go through your head when you’re here?”

Assumption: assumed that there were special feelings associated with the Good Shepherd

Interview Number: 11

Problem: a client stated “I even took some college over last year actually – at Everest college for computer tech” and I responded “Oh wow, and then how did you end up here at Good Shepherd?”

Assumption: (1) I assumed that those who were facing homelessness would not have education in a professional field such as computer tech. (2) I assumed that those with education would not end up facing homelessness

APPENDIX B – Staff Information and Consent Letter

February 8, 2012

This letter is an invitation to consider participating in a study I am conducting as part of my Master's degree in the Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies at the University of Waterloo under the supervision of Professor Heather Mair. I would like to provide you with more information about this project and what your involvement would entail if you decide to take part.

Over the years, the prevalence of homelessness has been increasing, especially in the Western society. However, not only has the prevalence been increasing, but the challenges faced by those who are homeless have also been increasing. Community organizations such as Good Shepherd have played an important role in assisting those who are homeless by offering various services such as food banks, clothes donations, and rehabilitation programs. While studies have explored the role of such organizations in the lives of those experiencing homelessness, few studies have examined the role of such an organization from both the perspective of those who are homeless and those who work/volunteer there. Therefore, the purpose of this project is to explore the meanings and experiences of homelessness and the role that community-based organizations play in the lives of people who are homeless. I am also hoping to explore, with those who work and volunteer in community organizations, their experiences working and volunteering with Good Shepherd and for them to share what this means to them personally.

Participation in this study is voluntary. It will involve an interview of approximately 60 minutes in length to take place in a mutually agreed upon location. You may decline to answer any of the interview questions if you so wish. Further, you may decide to withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences by advising the researcher. With your permission, the interview will be audio recorded to facilitate collection of information, and later transcribed for analysis. Shortly after the interview has been completed, if you agree, I will send you a copy of the transcript to give you an opportunity to confirm the accuracy of our conversation and to add or clarify any points that you wish. In addition, if you agree I will also send you a feedback letter of the results after the end of the whole study. All information you provide is considered completely confidential. Your name will not appear in any thesis or report resulting from this study, however, with your permission anonymous quotations and the Organization name may be used. Data collected during this study will be retained for two years in a locked drawer in my home. My supervisor and I will be the only individuals who will have access to the information.

Although there are no known or anticipated risks associated with taking part in this study, there is the possibility that some questions could trigger emotions or memories that you did not expect. This is expected to be temporary, but if at any point you wish to decline to answer a question or to withdraw from this study, you may do so without penalty and without having to explain yourself.

This study is expected to be completed by December 31st, 2012. If you have any questions regarding this study, or would like additional information to assist you in reaching a decision about participation, please contact me at (519) 729-9316 or by email at jsywong@uwaterloo.ca. You can also contact my supervisor, Professor Heather Mair at 519-888-4567 ext. 35917 or email hmair@uwaterloo.ca.

I would like to assure you that this study has been reviewed and has received ethics clearance through the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Waterloo. However, the final decision about participation is yours. If you have any comments or concerns resulting from your participation in this study, please contact Dr. Susan Sykes of this office at 519-888-4567 Ext. 36005 or ssykes@uwaterloo.ca.

I hope that the results of my study will be of benefit to your organizations and other community-based organizations not directly involved in the study, as well as to the broader research community.

I very much look forward to speaking with you and thank you in advance for your assistance in this project.

Yours Sincerely,

Joses Wong

Statement of Consent

I have read the information presented in the information letter above about a study being conducted by Joses Wong and Heather Mair of the University of Waterloo. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about my involvement in this study and to receive additional details I requested. I understand that if I agree to participate in this study, I may withdraw from the study at any time. I have been given a copy of this form. I agree to participate in the study.

X _____

Signature of Participant

Name (printed)

Date

Signature of Person who Obtained

Name (printed)

Date

Consent (Interviewer)

APPENDIX C – Client Information Consent Letter

February 8, 2012

My name is Joses Wong. I am a student at the University of Waterloo. I am working towards my Master's degree in the Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies. My supervisor is Professor Heather Mair. This letter tells you about a project I am conducting. I would like to invite you to take part if you wish. Research has shown that:

- The challenges faced by those who are homeless are increasing
- Community organizations such as [organization] have played an important role in helping those who are homeless

The purpose of this study is to explore the meanings and experiences of homelessness and the role that community-based organizations play in the lives of people who are homeless. I am also hoping to explore, with those who work and volunteer in community organizations, their experiences working and volunteering with Good Shepherd and for them to share what this means to them personally. I would like to you to consider taking part in the study by allowing me to interview you.

Key points about this study include:

- Participation is voluntary and I will take no more than 1 hour
- The interview will take place here at [organization]
- You may say you no longer want to take part in the interview by telling me you wish to stop.
- If I ask you questions that you do not want to answer, just tell me you do not want to answer them,
- With your permission, I would like to audio record the interview. The things you say and any information I write about you will not have your name on it. I will change your name, so no one will know what you said or how you feel about some of the things that we will talk about. The only time I might have to break this promise is if I think you or someone else might be at risk of being hurt. If so, I will talk to you first about the best thing to do.
- No one will get angry or upset with you if you don't want to be part of this study. Just tell me if you don't want to be interviewed. If you decide to be in the study but later you change your mind, then you can tell me you do not want to be in the study anymore.
- I will not let anyone listen to your recordings. Only my supervisor and I will hear them
- If you wish, you can request to meet with me again after today to make sure I have interpreted what you have said during the interview correctly.
- You can ask questions at any time. You can ask now or you can ask later. You can talk to me or you can talk to the staff or volunteers at Good Shepherd any time during the study.
- There are no right or wrong answers; it is what you think that matters.

Some people may feel upset or uncomfortable when talking about their lives, and if they want to stop, I stop. I can put them in touch with someone to help them, if they wish. You do not need to explain yourself or your decision to stop.

I plan to finish this study by the end of next year. If you have any questions or would like additional information about this study you can reach me through Good Shepherd by talking to the Front Desk and asking for Joses Wong. They will contact me or my supervisor on your behalf and help us connect by phone or in-person.

This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Waterloo. However, the final decision about being involved is yours. If you have any comments or concerns about being involved in this study, you are encouraged to speak with Dr. Susan Sykes of this office at 519-888-4567 Ext. 36005 or ssykes@uwaterloo.ca. The front desk can assist you in reaching Dr. Sykes if needed.

I hope that the results of my study will be of benefit to Good Shepherd and other community organizations not directly involved in the study, as well as to the broader research community.

I very much look forward to speaking with you and thank you in advance for your assistance in this project.

Yours Sincerely,

Joses Wong

Verbal Consent Script

JOSES: Today is (date) and the time is now (time). My name is Joses Wong and I will ask you some questions now in order to obtain verbal consent for my study.

Have you read the information presented above in the information letter regarding the study being conducted by Joses Wong and Heather Mair, or has the information been verbally explained to you?

Participant Response

Have you had the opportunity to ask questions about your involvement in the study and to receive any further requested information?

Participant Response

Do you understand that if you agree to participate in this study, you may withdraw from the study at any time?

Participant Response

Do you agree to take part in this study?

Participant Response (If no, then thank them for their time and let them know that I will not proceed with the study)

APPENDIX D – Staff Feedback Letter

February 8, 2012

Dear Participant,

I would like to thank you for your participation in this study. As a reminder, the purpose of this project is to explore the meanings and experiences of homelessness and the role that community-based organizations play in the lives of people who are homeless. I was also looking to explore, with those who work and volunteer in community organizations, their experiences working and volunteering with Good Shepherd and for them to share what this means to them personally.

The data collected during interviews will contribute to a better understanding of the meanings and experiences that participants have with community organizations, which can potentially help shape similar organizations. This involves possible suggestions for the services and programs provided by Good Shepherd based on the voices of those who are involved in Good Shepherd.

I plan on sharing this information with the research community through seminars, conferences, presentations, and journal articles. If you are interested in receiving more information regarding the results of this study, or if you have any questions or concerns, please contact me at either the phone number or email address listed at the bottom of the page. If you would like a summary of the results, please let me know by providing me with your email address, or another means to contact you.

If you have any question, concerns, or comments in regards to the study findings or results, please contact me at jsywong@uwaterloo.ca or my supervisor Heather Mair at hmair@uwaterloo.ca.

As with all University of Waterloo projects involving human participants, this project was reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Waterloo. Should you have any comments or concerns resulting from your participation in this study, please contact Dr. Susan Sykes in the Office of Research Ethics at 519-888-4567, Ext., 36005.

Joses Wong

University of Waterloo
Recreation and Leisure Studies

Ph: (519) 729-9316
Email: jsywong@uwaterloo.ca

APPENDIX E – Client Feedback Letter

February 8, 2012

Dear Participant,

I would like to thank you for your participation in this study. As a reminder, the purpose of this project is to explore the meanings and experiences of homelessness and the role that community-based organizations play in the lives of people who are homeless. I was also looking to explore, with those who work and volunteer in community organizations, their experiences working and volunteering with Good Shepherd and for them to share what this means to them personally.

The data collected during interviews will contribute to a better understanding of the meanings and experiences that participants have with community organizations, which can potentially help shape similar organizations. This involves possible suggestions for the services and programs provided by Good Shepherd based on the voices of those who are involved in Good Shepherd.

I plan on sharing this information with the research community through seminars, conferences, presentations, and journal articles. If you are interested in receiving more information regarding the results of this study, you can reach me through Good Shepherd by talking to the Front Desk. They will contact me or my supervisor on your behalf and help us connect by phone or in-person.

As with all University of Waterloo projects involving human participants, this project was reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Waterloo. Should you have any comments or concerns resulting from your participation in this study, please contact Dr. Susan Sykes in the Office of Research Ethics at 519-888-4567, Ext., 36005.

Joses Wong

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Recreation and Leisure Studies

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APPENDIX F – Organization Feedback Letter

February 8, 2012

Dear Brother Sean,

I would like to thank you for the Good Shepherd's participation in this study. As a reminder, the purpose of this project is to explore the meanings and experiences of homelessness and the role that community-based organizations play in the lives of people who are homeless. I was also looking to explore, with those who work and volunteer in community organizations, their experiences working and volunteering with Good Shepherd and for them to share what this means to them personally.

The data collected during interviews will contribute to a better understanding of the meanings and experiences that participants have with community organizations, which can potentially help shape similar organizations. This involves possible suggestions for the services and programs provided by Good Shepherd based on the voices of those who are involved in Good Shepherd.

I plan on sharing this information with the research community through seminars, conferences, presentations, and journal articles. If you are interested in receiving more information regarding the results of this study, or if you have any questions or concerns, please contact me at either the phone number or email address listed at the bottom of the page. If you would like a summary of the results, please let me know by providing me with your email address, or another means to contact you. Additionally, enclosed with this letter are five copies of posters representing the general findings as a result of this study. If you are interested, you may hang them up on your walls around the organization for those in the facility to take note of.

If you have any question, concerns, or comments in regards to the study findings or results, please contact me at jsywong@uwaterloo.ca or my supervisor Heather Mair at hmair@uwaterloo.ca.

As with all University of Waterloo projects involving human participants, this project was reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Waterloo. Should you have any comments or concerns resulting from your participation in this study, please contact Dr. Susan Sykes in the Office of Research Ethics at 519-888-4567, Ext., 36005.

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APPENDIX G – Interview Questions

It is important to remember that these questions only serve as a guideline for the questions asked. Questions may have been added or removed during the actual interview depending on the flow of the conversation.

1. Where are you from? (initial open-ended question)
 - a. Warm up question
 - b. Probe for general demographics
2. Can you describe your experiences on a normal day here? (initial open-ended question)
 - a. Listen for key elements that I could further probe in
 - b. Probe to see how involved participant is in organization
3. What experiences have you had that led you to where you are today? (intermediate question)
4. What emotions do you attach to this place? (intermediate question)
5. What relationships have you built with others in the organization? (intermediate question)
 - a. Probe for good and bad ones
 - b. Probe for description of relationships
6. How has the organization impacted you outside of the organization? (intermediate question)
7. What are some key experiences you have had with the organization? (intermediate question)
 - a. Probe for good or bad experiences
8. What does your relationship with this organization mean to you? (intermediate question)
9. How would your life experience be different if this organization did not exist? (ending question)
10. Is there anything else on your mind that you wish to tell us? (ending question)