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# "Kicking Down Doors" and "Turning Over Stones": Front-line Youth Workers Engaging in Policy Analysis as an Active Advocacy Process

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UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

“Kicking Down Doors” and “Turning Over Stones”: Front-line Youth Workers Engaging in  
Policy Analysis as an Active Advocacy Process

by

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A THESIS

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## Abstract

In this research, front-line youth workers analyzed policy pertaining to youth homelessness. This analysis catalyzed further reflections and actions informed by what we learned in the research, such as the establishment of the School of Social Play. The research process was composed of the following phases: the Preparing the Ground phase, the Immersion phase, as well as the Reflection and Action phases. Focus groups and participant observation were some of the methods used to answer research questions during these phases. One participant in this research identified as a co-researcher at a one-year follow up after the research concluded. This person engaged in a reflective dialogue with me about the research, which is included in the discussion chapter.

Workers identified four key principles that would contribute to ending youth homelessness. The first principle concerns the relationship between stigma and homelessness. The second principle emphasizes the importance of relationships, and the third focuses on harms caused by the charity model. The final principle states that services and policies should be directed by youth, as they are the people best able to define what the problem is. In the discussion, I justify my conclusion that youth have much to teach us about challenging authority, critical thinking, and the pursuit of social justice.

*Keywords:* Front-line workers, policy, youth homelessness, Participatory Action Research

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and driftwood. You and I will always do the best that we can to take care of you and to find balance between risk-taking and protection. Thank you for your burning motivation to fight for justice.

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## **Preface: What the Reader Needs to Know Before We Begin**

In this preface, I will provide you, brave reader, with some necessary background context, as well as definitions of the terms and processes used in this research. One general note about my writing style is that I think of the writer and the reader as being together in this process of knowledge translation. Due to this belief, at the conclusion of each chapter I summarize what has been explored and how this information relates to the research. I use the term “we” when I do this, partially to remind myself that I am gifting this story to you. I am giving it in the hope that what you learn will encourage and influence your actions as we work towards our shared goal of social justice for youth experiencing homelessness, and for the front-line workers who are building relationships with them.

### **Participants and One Co-researcher**

The distinction between co-researchers and participants is an ethical issue, because it concerns how much autonomy people had in the research process. Co-researchers together design the research process, make decisions about the various steps, and engage in data collection, analysis, and dissemination (Boog, 2003). In this dissertation, I will share stories about the differing levels of participation in this research; and how the people involved rated the quality of this participation.

In the next chapter, I will explain why equalizing relationships, such as those between researchers and participants, is an important goal in this research. In the methods chapter, I will explain how I designed diverse opportunities for participation as well as how the research design was changed based on suggestions from participants. I will present details about our decision making processes and how we developed reciprocity in the research process (Herr & Anderson, 2005). Over the course of the research, one of the participants moved to identifying as a co-

researcher in this project and worked with me to create the discussion chapter. These diverse levels and qualities of participation will be explained in the dissertation. On the whole, participants did not identify as co-researchers in this project, although this distinction does not reduce the quality of their contributions to this research.

In the text, I use the terms *participant* and *worker* interchangeably to refer to the front-line youth workers who participated in this study. In the discussion chapter, you will hear the story and voice of one of the participants who identified as a co-researcher when follow-up contact was made a year after the final focus group.

### **Youth Workers, Not Practitioners**

I originally used the term *practitioner* rather than *worker* to refer to participants. But during the first phase of this research, someone asked, “Who are you talking about?” I took this as an indicator that they did not self-identify as practitioners and so I asked participants what term they used in referring to themselves. They unanimously identified as youth workers. I was encouraged by this feedback because defining terms collaboratively was one of the ways that I hoped people would participate, as this can lead to increased ownership of the research process and a deepening of relationships (Maiter, Simich, Jacobson, & Wise, 2008; Pyles, 2015). In the past, I had always referred to myself as a youth worker, but my language changed when I was immersed in the literature in preparation for this research. I thought it was interesting that I lost some “cultural capital” with my participants because of how my language shifted during my immersion in the literature. Thankfully, the emergent design in my research supported me in making the language of the research questions more culturally appropriate to the group that I was working with.

It is important to note that front-line workers are a heterogeneous group, and like all communities, “they comprise a frantic mix of people who belong to and/or are excluded from all manner of communities that cut across spatial, class, age, gender, ethnic, sexuality and ideological axes” (Maginn, 2007, p. 28). Such diversity within youth workers is evident in my results chapter, which contains examples when participants disagreed about a variety of topics.

Another variable in the diversity of what can be meant by the term “front-line worker” is the proximity of workers to the people accessing services. The workers who participated in this study have direct-service jobs—meaning they are more front-line than what is typically referred to as such in the literature. For example, case managers who work for provincial child welfare services are often referred to as front-line workers; however, the front-line workers who engaged with this research project provide direct services to youth, including meeting basic needs such as food and providing one-on-one support with tasks such as creating a résumé.

### **Capitalizing “White”**

I capitalize “White” when referring to race for the same reason that Collins (1990) capitalizes “Black”—that is, to draw my attention, and other White people’s attention, to our often unexamined White privilege (DiAngelo, 2011). I do not wish to centre Whiteness in conversations about race. The decision to capitalize is a political one (Perlman, 2015). As evidence of the political nature of this decision, I offer the example of how White supremacist groups often capitalize White but do not capitalize other races (Perlman, 2015; Rush, 2004).

I capitalize White and Black while recognizing the diversity within both of these groups (Anderson & Collins, 2015). For me, capitalizing Black but not White contributes to an othering process whereby Whiteness remains unquestioned and is defined as the norm. Flagg (1993) and Collins (1990) both describe this state of colour-blindness, common amongst White liberals,

which causes harm through blocking White people's race-awareness. Some authors argue that White should not be capitalized because it does not represent an identity (see, for example, Visconti, 2009, cited in Perlman, 2015). I believe that because being White gives me access to unearned benefits, I should push myself to maintain awareness of how this privilege plays out in intersection with my other social identities. One way that I can maintain this awareness and confront the hegemony of assuming White as the norm (Collins, 1990) is to capitalize White when referring to race.

### **Defining Cis/Trans**

Trans and Cis are opposite sides of the same idea. Schilt and Westbrook (2009) defined Trans as “people who live their lives in a social gender that is not the gender they were assigned at birth” (p. 441). On the other side, I am Cis because I identify as the gender assigned to me at birth. Gender is socially constructed, and biological sex is not as binary as mainstream society would have you believe (Schilt & Westbrook, 2009). For example, it is difficult to collect statistics on the number of intersex babies. As the Intersex Society of North America (2016) explains:

Intersex is a socially constructed category that reflects real biological variation. To better explain this, we can liken the sex spectrum to the colour spectrum. There's no question that in nature there are different wavelengths that translate into colours most of us see as red, blue, orange, yellow. But the decision to distinguish, say, between orange and red-orange is made only when we need it—like when we're asking for a particular paint colour. Sometimes social necessity leads us to make colour distinctions that otherwise would seem incorrect or irrational, as, for instance, when we call certain people “black”

or “white” when they’re not especially black or white as we would otherwise use the terms.

I challenge the binary perspective of gender and take the spectrum view outlined above. I will explain further why gender is important in my reflection about my Cis privilege and my theoretical frameworks.

### **Defining Policy Analysis in the Front-line Context**

Workers involved in this study, defined policy work as an active process that includes advocacy for social change at the individual, institutional, and systemic levels. This definition contrasts with the way that the term *policy analysis* is usually interpreted, as an analytical and reflective process rather than an active one. As I will explain in the results chapter, the re-definition of policy analysis as an advocacy process aided me in making visible some of the ways that front-line youth workers act to change policies and how these changes are lost or sustained over time.

### **Androgynous Pronoun Use**

I have used androgynous pronouns and pseudonyms for participants in order to protect their confidentiality. Presenting quotes as gender neutral is an interesting concept in the context of gendered work (Harlow, 2004). This appearance of neutrality could hide areas of identity that are sometimes communicated through our names, but it could also ward off incorrect assumptions made for the same reasons. For example, I felt nervous about imposing “White” names on participants who are First Nations. I am still not sure whether this was an ethical process in the context of colonialism and social work’s role in residential schools. Residential schools were designed to sever children’s connection to their culture, and one tactic was to change the children’s names to White names. On the other hand, I felt that this was the most



appropriate approach based on where I view the world from, a subject that I will explain further in the section about the researcher as an instrument in this inquiry.

Making gender less visible in the quotes from participants protects confidentiality, but it cannot remove assumptions that the reader may have about the pseudonyms or genders of the people speaking. I invite readers to reflect on what this androgyny makes visible and what it obscures. As one participant who identified as a woman stated: “It [having an androgynous pseudonym] makes my balls seem more realistic and my tears more evolved.”

This concludes the preface, where I have described some of the processes and language choices that I made in writing about this research. I will meet up with you next in the introductory chapter, where I situate myself and my perspective in relation to the questions explored in this research. Our story begins with tales about power and policy in relation to youth workers and youth homelessness.

## Chapter One - Introduction: Storytelling about the Power of Policy

What kind of society has people stepping over kids who are passed out on the sidewalk with nowhere to sleep? The social issue of homelessness, especially in as rich a society as Canada's, is extremely important to me, and something that I work on addressing most days. This dissertation is one of the transformations of my own trauma, one answer to the question of what I have done with what happened to me (Huxley, 1933). As Collins (1990) explained, when oppression is a lived experience rather than a theoretical concept, we are more compelled to act. The difference between knowledge and wisdom is vital to understanding this distinction: "knowledge without wisdom is adequate for the powerful, but wisdom is essential to the survival of the subordinate" (Collins, 1990, p. 275). In other words, wisdom is theoretical knowledge that has been validated through lived experience, where life and death are at stake. I relate to the issue of homelessness as one of life-or-death magnitude—felt experience as well as theory.

Change results from human agency and can occur in individual acts of resistance or in collective efforts to change institutions and systems of domination and control (Collins, 1990). My individual acts of resistance need to be complemented by group solidarity, with a diversity of perspectives as a strength, or I will be left *coping* with systems of oppression rather than changing them (Collins, 1990). This is where you come in, dear reader: what will *you* change about your behaviour, based on what you learn here?

I want to begin with a story that usually makes me cry when I tell it in person. I cry because this story contains a spiritual lesson about how we are all connected, and it expresses a despair that I feel deeply, concerning not being heard and not being protected. This story begins with policy work:

I worked on writing a policy book with other people who have experience with homelessness. We shared our reflections about homelessness, then we connected our recommendations with knowledge from the literature. All our stories had in common experiences with compound trauma, and a horror at people's ability to ignore other humans' suffering in favour of their own comfort. It is always a risk to share, in a public forum, stories about stigmatizing encounters and situations. Most of us already had experience with sharing our stories in the hopes of raising awareness and effecting social change. A couple of weeks after the policy book was released, I received a flurry of frustrated emails from several of the co-authors, who were angry that sharing our stories had not resulted in any changes for our friends who were still homeless and dying in the streets.

I cry when I tell this story because it was then that I realized two things. First, the other participants in the project had assumed that if they told their painful stories about their experiences with child abuse, domestic violence, and hard-won recovery from drug use—if people only heard these stories—then they would not be able to go another minute without doing something to address a fifteen-year-old child passed out in the snow. They would not be able to go another minute without asking how anyone could step over that child on their way home. The second thing that I realized was that *I* no longer expected my story-sharing to prevent people with privilege from turning their backs on suffering. I can't decide which of these realizations was more horrible for me. I was still willing to navigate the risks resulting from telling my story, because I did see benefits—for example, how telling it might be met with stigma or judgement, but how such reactions would create space for me to challenge stigma and social exclusion. I felt

best when the sharing of these stories resulted in people with similar experiences being able to share their own stories, which they might not have done before.

At the time of this story about the policy book, I wrote an email about how we can only gift people with a story, and then they decide what to do with it. There dwells in me an angry fifteen-year-old who does not allow me to believe this fully, because she doesn't want to give people the option of turning their backs on kids who are experiencing trauma, and her underlying assumption is that she can force people to look at what they wish to disregard. This part of me wants to know that she has done everything that she possibly can to engage people in facing the roots of the problem of youth homelessness so that we can begin working on solutions.

So, in the form of this dissertation, I gift you with a story, and what you decide to do with this knowledge is up to you. I remain pessimistic about my ability to change the world through sharing my story, but I have the hope and the courage to continue making space for subjugated knowledge and self-definition as resistance (Collins, 1990).

\* \* \*

During the process of this research, four kids whom I had known for more than a decade as a front-line youth worker died. I want to introduce them here because the newspaper articles about their deaths were not written by people who knew and loved them.

One guy was very funny, always mocking the unfair world, and he loved his dog fiercely. I admired the stubbornness of the young woman in the four. She fought through so much abuse to remember her worth, and it was a special gift to hear her let herself laugh. Seeing her summon the courage to go to treatment again was like watching a tornado gathering speed. Another young man loved his grandma, pursued adventure, and was proud of being Irish. The most recent death has been very difficult to heal because the young man's family is getting no answers from a

police force that insists upon investigating itself in the event of alleged misconduct. This young man was very smart and quiet. He was a natural leader and yet was shy when he laughed. These four young people are missed by many; two of them had children of their own.

I had known these kids since they were 13 and 14 years old, when they first came into contact with the children's services, justice, and health systems. I and my colleagues visited them in prison, we congratulated them on accomplishing their goals, we drove them to drug treatment, we woke them up in the morning, we helped them move out of abusive situations, we celebrated their days of sobriety, we made their favorite foods when they broke up with partners, we enrolled them in school, we worked with their parents and grandparents, we tackled Grade 10 math homework together, we were there when their babies were born and when their babies were apprehended by children's services.

During my 12 years as a front-line youth worker, I was tremendously frustrated by witnessing the terrible effects of government policies while having a very limited ability to influence them. I experienced a lot of pain from seeing youth repeatedly hurt by policies, and often from being the person charged with implementing unjust policies at the individual, institutional, and systemic levels. I believe in the difference that youth workers make, not only in the lives of youth, but also in raising awareness of counter-narratives to youth being defined as a social problem. My favorite thing in the world is watching a passionate youth worker derail the pathologizing of trauma in a professional meeting by defending a youth who has been betrayed by most adults. I think we should all be the person we needed when we were younger; this is a powerful way to build a more just world and transform coping into healing.

## **Justification for the Research**

The frustrations that I experienced through witnessing the negative effects of policy while having a limited ability to change it are common for front-line workers (Durose, 2009; Reutter & Duncan, 2002; Weiss-Gal & Peled, 2009). The literature also identifies multiple benefits to engaging front-line workers in policy analysis, including reduced feelings of helplessness (Weiss-Gal & Peled, 2009). Learning more about the process of front-line workers engaging in policy work can assist us in improving the policies (Barkham & Mellor-Clark, 2003) and practices that affect youth experiencing homelessness (Heinze, 2013). Listening to what front-line workers have learned through problem solving with youth can help us to improve services, organizations, and policies that impact young peoples' lives (Newbury, 2011; Ruff & Baron, 2012). For me, these learning goals are tied to my ethics and my belief in pursuing solutions when I identify problems.

## **Approach to the Research**

This research was shaped by the theoretical frameworks of participatory intersectional critical feminism. As emancipatory research, it aims to create knowledge for social change and to catalyze individual awareness and action. In the next chapter, I will explain in detail these theoretical approaches and will introduce sources of knowledge that influence my perspective. I will also share how I applied these theories when making power more visible and equalizing relationships in the research.

## **An Outline of the Four Phases of the Research**

This research was comprised of four interrelated phases developed by the emergent research theory briefly described above. Originally, there were three phases, but one of the participants invited me to an exciting opportunity to witness front-line workers implementing a

policy. This emergent development fit with one of the research goals, which was to provide diverse opportunities for participation, including opportunities for research participants to make decisions about changes to the research design. Here I provide a brief summary of the four phases and how data were gathered in each one, more detail about these research processes will be provided in the methods chapter.

**Preparing the ground phase.** The first phase of this research aimed to contribute to a deeper understanding of the barriers and facilitating factors for engaging homeless-serving sector front-line youth workers in policy analysis. I used the focus-group method to explore front-line youth workers' experiences with engaging in policy development, implementation, and analysis. In this phase, seven front-line youth workers provided written informed consent and participated in one of two focus groups. Detailed notes were taken during the focus groups, which were subsequently transcribed and analyzed to identify barriers to and facilitators of policy engagement.

**Immersion in context phase.** The Immersion phase was added to the research design when a participant from the Preparing the Ground phase invited me to observe ongoing weekly policy meetings between front-line youth workers and funders. I eagerly accepted the invitation and took detailed notes for nine weeks. The Immersion phase offered another data source for exploring the research questions from the Preparing the Ground phase, and it provided opportunities to observe workers as they implemented a policy. Immersion in community is a stage of Participatory Action Research (PAR) and ensures that research is rooted in the context and concerns of the community engaging in the research (Blackburn, 2000). The results from this phase deepened the understanding gained in the Preparing the Ground phase and contributed to the themes that developed out of the discussions in the subsequent Reflection and Action phases,

as the new themes developed in the Immersion phase were used to begin discussions in the next ones.

**Reflection and action phases.** The Reflection and Action phases in this research sought to engage front-line youth workers and analyze a specific policy that had been developed in the context of Calgary with the goal of ending youth homelessness (Calgary Homeless Foundation [CHF], 2011). The goals in these phases were to learn more about front-line youth workers' perspectives on this specific homelessness policy and to develop a course of action based on what we learned from the research. I conducted eight focus group sessions with 13 homeless-serving sector front-line youth workers to explore the issue of youth homelessness and to analyze the policy.

#### **Reflection on “Researcher as Instrument”**

I refer to myself, the researcher, as the instrument of research “in the sense that the researcher is seen as the instrument of decision making throughout the research process, becoming an integral part of both the process and the knowledge” (Merchant & Dupuy, 1996, p. 540). It is vital that the reader be given some information about how the researcher sees the world (White, 2007), as this social positionality influences how any researcher will interpret results. Explanations of how the instrument of interpretation is calibrated allow me and readers to evaluate how the meaning-making or interpretation of results would change if the work had been done by a different researcher. My positionality may make me more likely to miss or to detect certain themes emerging from the research data. To identify my perspective (Kanuha, 2000), I will outline some of my life experiences that have shaped how I see the world, the strengths that I bring to the research, and my pre-conceived notions about the research topic.



The narrative that I am sharing here is one way to bridge gaps between action and reflection, research and practice, tacit and theoretical knowledge (Fook, 2007; Scourfield & Pithouse, 2006; Taylor, 2012). Social work is a practical profession, and as such, it is not enough to understand what I know, I should also explain what I do, or the implications of my knowledge (Scourfield & Pithouse, 2006). Reflective awareness becomes particularly important in order to understand how I interpret meaning from my observations as I engage in the role of being a participant observer in this research (Kennedy-Lewis, 2012). This kind of writing helps to clarify roles, and makes visible decisions, values, and ethical dilemmas in the research (Kennedy-Lewis, 2012).

The forms of reflexive memo writing that I employed during the research process, including my research journal, were chosen by me in order to “improve methodological rigor by helping the researcher make intentional and transparent decisions” (Kennedy-Lewis, 2012, p. 109). This reflective writing is part of developing and sharing my professional identity as a social work practitioner and as a researcher (Taylor, 2006). I begin this dissertation with a detailed autoethnographic (Scourfield & Pithouse, 2006) introduction of myself as it relates to this research. I did this so that you can understand my experiences with oppression and privilege, and how these experiences influence my interpretations in this research. Due to my epistemological approach, this disclosure is not optional, rather it is vital to understanding this research (Taylor, 2006).

**Life experiences.** I am very passionate about the issue of youth homelessness. Herr and Anderson (2005) identified having passion about an issue as a strength for researchers engaging with front-line workers. This strength is due to the motivating power of shared goals, and the recognition of a group’s potential to contribute diverse skills and perspectives towards achieving

these goals. Charmaz (2010) identified passion as contributing to sustainability and to research that goes beyond professional or academic goals. In my case, this passion originated in my own experiences of trauma, abuse, poverty, and homelessness as a young woman. The pursuit of social justice in the area of youth homelessness has been one way to transform my trauma into knowledge and the motivation to advocate. This pursuit has been reinforced through my experiences of success when advocating for social change, despite concurrent experiences with helplessness and frustration. As Aldous Huxley (1933) stated, “experience is not what happens to a [woman]; it is what a [woman] does with what happens to [her]” (p. 5). What I am doing with what has happened to me takes many different forms, including this dissertation. In the discussion chapter, I will return to the question of what I have done with what has happened to me.

For 12 years prior to beginning my doctoral studies, I delivered services as a front-line youth worker, primarily with homeless youth. I gained experience with facilitating PAR processes through my graduate thesis, my research practicum, and my paid work. I have conducted qualitative interviews and surveys, analyzed qualitative and quantitative data, organized a community conference about PAR, recruited participants through street outreach, facilitated World Café discussions (Brown & Isaac, 2001), and written literature reviews. My interconnected perspectives on the issue of youth homelessness (as a person of lived experience, a service provider, and a researcher) are a strength that I bring to this research.

Being involved in policy work and thereby intentionally affecting change at the macro or systemic level—informed by my learning at the micro or individual level—has helped me mitigate frustration with these systems by allowing me to work on prevention, which complements my intervention work. Having a balance between prevention and intervention work

allows me to feel that I am addressing root causes as well as symptoms. When I was only intervening, I felt very overwhelmed and useless, because I was not preventing future interventions. This seemed like the difference between treading water and swimming to a destination. I witnessed youth being discharged from drug detox before crystal methamphetamine had fully left their systems, knowing how this put them at increased risk for relapse and overdose. This is one example of a systemic problem that contributed to my feelings of helplessness and burnout when I was a front-line youth worker.

My involvement with macro-level advocacy work helped me to explore my effectiveness in advocating for policy change. These opportunities to influence policy included sitting on the provincial advisory committee about crystal methamphetamine, writing letters to politicians, as well as creating harm-reduction-based education materials about drugs and presenting them to youth. I worked to create these kinds of opportunities to advocate at the macro level because doing this fit with my personal and professional values, which made me feel more accountable to youth and less helpless. Working towards social change prevents me from focusing solely on supporting people as they cope with oppression (Jordan, 2004).

When I engage in practice informed by theory and create theory informed by practice, I refer to this as praxis, the knowledge resulting from cycles of reflection and action (Lather, 1986; White, 2007). Freire (1970) included values as part of action-oriented praxis, and White (2007) illustrated how praxis manifests in the context of *being* or how our actions and reflections are connected to our identity. Taking these actions contributed to my sense of positive identity and belonging with a group of workers who were also advocating for systemic social change.

**Researcher strengths.** Baumbusch and colleagues (2008) identified the value of a researcher who is “able to speak the languages of research and practice” (p. 135) to foster an

atmosphere of respect and understanding in the knowledge co-construction process. My familiarity with the culture of front-line youth workers in Calgary and my connections within this community increased my capacity to engage meaningfully in this research. This cultural knowledge assisted me when I was interacting with participants, because I demonstrated an understanding of what was culturally appropriate for them.

The culture of front-line youth workers is by no means homogeneous; however, there are some shared customs, language, and knowledge. During a discussion in the course of this research, I nodded with understanding when youth workers said, “I couldn’t work for [an agency that does not fit with their values],” or, “we all know what she’s like,” referring to a manager that we had all worked for. I had previous and ongoing reciprocity with workers in terms of buying each other coffee, and in empathy for night shifts. We shared a language of front-line practice, using swear words as often as phrases such as “bridge burning” and “aging out.” My experience as a front-line worker resulted in me acquiring this contextual knowledge, which helped me to participate and communicate in the context of front-line work.

In some cases, front-line workers could have declined to participate based on our past relationships as co-workers, or my reputation as conveyed by agencies with which I have been associated, possibly because of a mismatch between my values and the values of the other workers. For example, it is well known in the youth work community that I advocate a harm-reduction perspective, and not all workers agree with this approach. Some front-line workers have only encountered me in my capacity as their instructor for various training programs and may consider me an authority figure rather than a colleague, which means they might see me as an outsider with respect to youth work (Maiter et al., 2008). In the methods chapter, I will describe some of the ways I tried to address the possibility of participants saying what they

thought I wanted to hear, as well as ways that I strived to nurture reciprocity in the knowledge-creation process. These efforts included contrasting different data sources, examining disagreements between participants, and reflecting my interpretations of the data back to participants in different forms, such as visual figures.

Throughout this research, I maintained transparency about my multiple perspectives and the power dynamics involved, through reflections in my research journal and discussions with participants. These discussions enabled my individual reflections to become reflexive, through the sharing and intersection of our ideas (Giddens, 1991; Herr & Anderson, 2005). Reflexivity is directly linked to choices we make and how our actions contribute to our identity, especially who we are in relation to other people (Green, 2007). As White (2007) noted, action informed by theory requires self-awareness and dialogue about power dynamics in order to create ethical, responsive, and accountable outcomes.

As someone who has accessed services, and as a participatory feminist, I recognize that youth accessing services are knowledgeable about how policies affect them. As someone who has experienced the trauma of violence and of not having basic needs met, I feel a sense of urgency for agencies serving people experiencing homelessness, so that they can implement trauma-informed care policies and address the high levels of trauma in the population of people experiencing homelessness. In the creation process for the policy examined in this research, youth voices were included (CHF, 2011); however, front-line workers did not have opportunities to shape the development of the policy. Learning more about how youth workers advocate at a macro level could provide another avenue for youth and worker voices to be included in shaping policies.

**Guiding beliefs.** Some of my preconceived notions are that front-line workers are well-positioned to contribute to policy with their practice knowledge, that the perspectives of front-line workers are missing in policy development and analysis, and that these perspectives would be valuable in improving services and policy while also contributing to the well-being of front-line workers (Durose, 2009; Kothari et al., 2012; Schieffer, Isaacs, & Gyllenpalm, 2004).

Front-line workers witness the effects of policies on the people with whom they work, and they are responsible for implementing many policy changes; yet workers have very little input into the formation of these policies. I believe that this dynamic between the worker and the system contributes to experiences of burnout and staff turnover. I recognize that this may not be true for all front-line workers; however, it makes me curious to explore the barriers and facilitating factors when it comes to engaging front-line workers in policy work. I see important implications for this knowledge in terms of how opportunities for policy input are related to worker turnover and job satisfaction. The literature supports my anecdotal evidence, showing a link between burnout and being excluded from the policy process (Durose, 2009).

I think research should be useful, in that when we gain knowledge from research, this new knowledge should change the ways that we act. I see the need for action to be a component of research in order to develop praxis: social action informed by theory or by knowing, doing, and being in context (Lather, 1986; White, 2007). My experience with PAR has been that this methodology helps to heal gaps caused by dichotomous thinking (Reason, 2006), through processes of praxis. For example, the dissemination of research results is included in the PAR process and does not have to be added after the research; it is part of the research to act together and reflect on these actions. PAR is about the co-construction of knowledge and aims to include diverse ways of knowing that are complementary and necessarily broad enough to enable

practice (White, 2007); it does not place ways of knowing in a hierarchy and limit the researcher to a single truth, such as in positivist methodologies. I see PAR as a tool to reunite practice and theory (or research), providing a model for reciprocal knowledge translation. Rather than arranging practice-based evidence and evidence-based practice in a hierarchy, the epistemology of PAR frames ways of knowing as interdependent and equally valuable (Barkham & Mellor-Clark, 2003).

As a feminist, I recognize gender as one macro factor that is sometimes made invisible in research and praxis conducted within the larger context of patriarchy. I have witnessed the erasure of oppression that can result from the erasure of gender. Research about heart attacks provides an excellent example of the risks that can result in a patriarchal society where men are seen as defining what is normal. Researchers assumed that research done exclusively with men would apply to people of other genders, however when gender was included as a variable in research about heart attacks it was found that women delay seeking treatment and dismiss their symptoms (Harvard Medical School, 2016). According to Harvard Medical School (2016): “one study that measured how long people waited before seeking treatment for a heart attack found a median delay time of about 54 hours for women, compared with about 16 hours for men.” The way that research is presented can also erase oppression—for example, when government policy refers to single parents without specifying that the vast majority of those single parents share one gender.

These examples provide evidence for my belief that we can learn a lot when we consciously make gender visible. As a result, I support the assumptions of feminist research:

That women in society are subordinated and oppressed in relation to men; that changes need to be made in the social/economic/political position of women; that gender and

gender divisions are important in social science and educational research; that women and their experience should be made *visible*; that feminist research need not necessarily be about, but should be *for* women; and that feminist research should be concerned with improving [the daily lives of girls and women]. (p. 47, presented by Deem, 1987 unpublished as cited in Weiner, 1989)

I believe that there are many kinds of feminism, each with their own history, values, and tactics. I define this diversity as valuable and indeed vital to learning to change the world together. From my intersectional feminist perspective (Crenshaw, 1989), I believe that feminist research should improve daily life and access to systemic justice for people of all genders. Men are oppressed by patriarchy, even though they have privilege or unearned advantages under this system (Dowd, 2010). People who challenge the gender binary, or the idea of gender being assigned at birth, face consequences and oppression, which are similar, but not identical, to the oppression faced by women in a patriarchal society (Schilt & Westbrook, 2009).

Challenging the gender binary challenges heteronormativity or the assumptions reinforced by culture, policies, and laws: (1) that there are only two genders, (2) that gender reflects biological sex, and (3) that the only “natural” sexual attraction is between these “opposite” genders (Schilt & Westbrook, 2009). In examining the intersection between patriarchy and heteronormativity, queer (Butler, 1989; Seidman, 1995) and feminist (Rich, 1980) theorists seek to make these intersectional oppressions more visible and to understand how to disrupt them. The positionalities of race, ability, age, class, and so on contribute to differences between women. These differences need to be acknowledged as other forms of oppression and privilege, both affecting and being affected by gender.



As a social worker and a human being, I believe that research should be emancipatory and pursuant of knowledge that can contribute to social justice (Brydon-Miller, Greenwood, & Maguire, 2003). I have a participatory worldview (Skolimowski, 1994), which means that I have faith in every person's ability to solve problems, gather information, and theorize about forces affecting their lives. I see the need for ongoing application of critical theory, and opportunities for experiential learning in uncovering assumptions, flattening unequal power structures, and revealing how our social locations influence our perceptions and opportunities.

My experience with PAR has been personally transformative in terms of the confidence I have gained through learning and acting collectively. My experiences with shared knowledge construction felt good and whole to my brain, heart, and body (Horton, Kohl & Kohl, 1997; Reason, 2005). The importance of living as part of the whole is outlined by Reason (2005) as vital to healing divides, such as those between rationality and feelings or between reflection and action (Freire, 1970). These divides and the concomitant loss of connections (Besthorn & McMillen, 2002) are part of the Cartesian worldview in which I have been raised, and healing these divides is a spiritual process that renews my sense of belonging (Reason, 2005). In fact, I agree with Reason (2005) when he declares, "the purpose of education and inquiry becomes to heal the wounds brought about by the dualism in which we have been marinated" (p. 39).

Living as part of the whole enables me to learn and inquire *with* other people and as my entire self (Reason, 2005). It was liberating for me to break down the knowledge construction process into cycles of reflection and action; this made me feel as if we could do anything together. I felt belonging by finding other people who shared my epistemology through various PAR projects that I engaged in. My thinking expanded through being challenged by other thinkers, different ways of knowing, and diverse perspectives. PAR encourages curiosity and

practical solutions, which are vital to my spirit (Reason, 2005), practice, and learning. I view PAR as a way of life (Lindsey & McGuinness, 1998) and a standard of ethics.

My social location grants me some privileges and exposes me to some oppression. I have privilege because I am White in a society where this means facing only prejudice, never racism (DiAngelo, 2011). I have some hidden disabilities and chronic illnesses, including some mental illness, which people stigmatize; however, on the whole, I am privileged in terms of my health and abilities. I was raised middle-class, which contributed to me attending university, but for more than 15 years I have been living in poverty, in neighbourhoods experiencing the process of gentrification, and in sub-standard shared housing. I face oppression as a Cis woman living in a patriarchal society; however, I can use a bathroom or take a flight without having my gender questioned, because I identify with the gender that was assigned to me at birth. Feminism and feminist praxis are ways that I take action against this oppression—for example, by learning, creating, and applying feminist theories, and by raising awareness, identifying allies, and engaging in dialogue and actions with other people.

**Why I wanted to be a social worker.** It is important to share why I wanted to be a social worker, because my approach to social work shapes, and is shaped by, my theoretical and practice orientations. I am sharing these stories to provide you, brave reader, with some context concerning how I interpret my profession. My journey to becoming a social worker begins with a story of helplessness, followed by a story about loss, then one about resentment, followed by a tale about transforming trauma into knowledge, and concluding with a story about reducing the distance.

I originally wanted to be a social worker because I felt helpless in the face of social injustice. This first story was when I was 17 years old and my friend disclosed to me that she was

being sexually abused by a family member. I couldn't understand how their family continued to live together after she disclosed the abuse to one of her parents. I was really angry because it seemed as if the abuser faced no consequences, yet I was witnessing the horrible ways that this abuse had affected my friend. At the time, I was reading a lot about restorative justice in northern Indigenous communities, which provided a relational frame for how I understood justice and reconciliation. I felt that if I could understand restorative justice in the family system, then I could apply what I learned to the macro or community level of change. I looked for resources to help me understand sexual abuse, and to better understand and support my friend. This led me to volunteering on the rape crisis phoneline for a local non-profit.

I met one of my mentors at the non-profit, and she let me take the training program for the crisis-line volunteers, even though I was underage. She found ways for me to contribute and taught me a lot about how to fight racism through reflective awareness and actions. I witnessed this agency addressing a social problem at the community and systemic levels—for example, by organizing community rallies to draw attention to issues of violence and systemic causes such as patriarchy. This agency worked from a feminist perspective, and it was very comforting to engage with other feminists and experience the application of feminist theory at an agency level. In practice, this included participating in consensus-based decision making in staff meetings, and 360-degree evaluations of supervisors—where assessment was mutual between management and staff. My sense of helplessness was partially alleviated by participating in these social-justice endeavours and meeting other people who were passionate about advocacy.

About 10 years after this story, when I was finishing my master's degree, I encountered my mentor at the university and we discussed examples of racism in our social-work education. About 15 years later, she sent me an email telling me that she was proud of me after I had shared

with the local media my experiences of abuse and homelessness. I think she understood that I faced the stigma resulting from speaking about abuse and homelessness as part of advocating to reduce the stigma and judgement directed at people who have experienced homelessness. This mentor was the first social worker I admired and learned from. I became a social worker in part because I respected her pursuit of social justice at community and systemic levels.

The next story is about the theme of loss and when I first felt that I had something to lose, which was actually a very hopeful development. This was an impactful moment for me because previously, I was still operating as someone who had nothing to lose, an identity that I embraced as enabling me to act. As Bob Dylan (1965) said, “[W]hen you ain’t got nothing, you got nothing to lose.” I always interpreted this lyric as a strength-based reframe on a situation where resources are scarce. I used to joke that my theft-prevention strategy was to have stuff of such low quality that no one would steal it. I interpreted this concept of having nothing to lose as freeing a person to be able to take risks—for example, as a renter, I was freer to move than if I owned my home. Another example of the concept of having nothing to lose is if you have a criminal record and therefore face the consequences in terms of barriers to jobs, so you’re less reluctant to engage in further crimes. Having nothing to lose is also related to an acceptance of situations outside of your control, such as when you are homeless in Vancouver and you finally relax because you accept that you have reached a point of saturation, where it is impossible for you to get any more wet in the rain.

To return to the story about having something to lose, I was 18 years old and had just been pulled over by the police in a small town in British Columbia. They had found my newly purchased bag of marijuana. One of the cops looked at my identification, which indicated that I was enrolled at the local college. She asked what I was studying, and I hung my head when I said

social work, because I was thinking that my mentor (introduced in the first story) would not be proud of me. The cop said, “Pot is still illegal. You need to remember that fact when you make choices. You shouldn’t throw it all away over pot.” I remember actually being confused about what she thought I had that I shouldn’t throw away.

The message that I took from this experience was that the cop saw something valuable in my pursuit of a social work degree; she reminded me that I had something to lose. Recalling this message later really helped me after I had been sexually assaulted and was battling homelessness and poverty. It helped me to remember my worth and to search for the value in terrible experiences. I think of this story when I am trying to recall the first times that I realized the value of transforming my trauma into helping other people. I began to see my life experiences as irreplaceable and useful knowledge that I could apply in solving social problems.

Upon later analysis of this incident, I saw that a big part of what I would be throwing away by choosing to do illegal drugs was the class privilege that my university attendance indicated. However, I also learned that I had a choice about how to interpret loss in my life. As a result, after this experience I started to reframe my survival as a strength. I started to see myself as resilient and to tell myself that I had not come this far to be stopped by the next obstacle. I became a social worker because I identified social work as a place where my knowledge gained from experiences with trauma would be valued, and of value, in terms of solving social problems.

The third story concerns an experience where I engaged in a resentful life-or-death relationship with social work. This story is about the social worker on the other side of the Plexiglas who judges whether or not you are worthy of food. I was still 18 years old, but this was after I’d had to choose between paying rent and paying tuition; I chose to pay rent. I had applied

for welfare after job searching for three months and facing eviction due to my poverty. I walked 40 blocks to the welfare office because I didn't have bus fare. The social worker sat on the other side of the Plexiglas, which had a little hole for us to speak through. This artificial separation felt to me like a great symbol for the socio-economic distance between us, as though we were starting this relationship from a place of mistrust and uneven power. It was as though this Plexiglas conveyed that I was someone to be feared. It made me wonder how often people physically attacked the social workers. I thought, "This is very high stakes."

The social worker seemed annoyed at my presence and communicated this through brisk actions, exaggerated sighing, and rapid-fire questions about my finances. She raised her eyebrows at my \$400 rent and asked whether I couldn't find a cheaper place. I said that I was living with five other people, and that renting an entire house for \$2000 was an excellent deal. When she looked at me through the glass, I was struck by how much she mistrusted me and how similar this was to the way that people looked at each other on the streets.

I also observed similarities between the lack of trust displayed by this social worker and the lack of trust among traumatized people. I understood that she was justified in having no trust, because I knew the stories that my roommates had made up to get more money to live on. I appealed to the middle-class judgement about welfare as I told the social worker that I would find a job soon, that I would not need more than one or two months of support. In my head, I was thinking, "What if I don't find a job? Why am I being judged for accessing a government support that my taxes have contributed to? What if her mistrust makes me homeless?"

She cut me a cheque that included only \$300 for my rent, so the remainder of the rent had to come from food. I hated her. I had to smile until she slid the cheque out from behind the Plexiglas. I smiled as I asked for a bus ticket so that I could job search. The social worker

sneered and started muttering about how people just take and take. She did not give me a bus ticket.

After my bank charged me a fee for cashing the cheque, and I started the long walk home, I began to think what it would have been like if I had stayed in school and become the social worker behind that counter. I remember that it actually made me physically shudder to think about this. I still frame this as a problem at the systemic level. I realized then that it didn't matter who was in the job, they would eventually become bitter because of the set-up that required people to lie in order to have their most basic needs met. At 18, I was already tired of having to prove that I was worthy of having my basic needs met. Later, I would decide to be homeless instead of returning to that office to try and get another not-enough-support-cheque. Unfortunately, this was equivalent to fighting a tiger instead of a bear, and did nothing to resolve the systemic barriers to filling my basic needs.

On the walk home, I thought about the government jobs that only social workers were qualified for and asked myself whether I could ever do those jobs. Could I work in the rigid hierarchy of the health system? Could I apprehend kids experiencing abuse in their families? Could I sit behind the Plexiglas and judge who deserved food? Why did I want to be a social worker, when their jobs were all about surveillance and punishment? I tried to identify ways that I could use the professional power of social work to build justice and non-judgmental values into these oppressive systems.

I saw this as a set-up that would always lead to bitterness and power struggles, on both sides of the Plexiglas. I didn't spend any time thinking about whether I could be this social worker's boss or teacher to address the bitterness problem, because I framed the burnout as a symptom of an oppressive system that forced the social worker to judge who "deserved" the very

basics. I searched for a way out of this situation, where bitterness results even if you do everything right. I became a social worker because I resented the power that social workers held over other people and I wanted to infiltrate their education system in order to use their own weapons against them, in a coup designed to equalize relationships. I believed that the mistrust expressed by that social worker was symptomatic of the unequal relationship between the social worker and the person accessing services. I still feel that without equalizing relationships, social workers and people accessing services will continue to become more embittered and less able to trust.

The fourth story is about how the peer model helped me to transform my trauma into learning and motivation for pursuing social change. I was turning 21, had quit crystal methamphetamine a year earlier, and had returned to university. On a poster attached to a telephone pole downtown, I saw a job for a youth peer support worker. I remember thinking, when I read the description, “Now *here* is a job for me.” I felt a sense of recognition in the description of the program values for the youth group home, which were based on “*mutual* responsibility, accountability and respect.” The poster described the role of peer support as a vital link between youth in the program and front-line youth workers. I felt that this poster reflected my valuing of experiential knowledge in helping others. I identified this job as a way to break down the Plexiglas. I thought that here I would be able to bring my entire self to work and not feel pressure to hide my personal experiences that paralleled the youth.

I felt that the best thing about this job was that no one would think I was the social worker behind the Plexiglas, because that fake division would not be present. This offered me an opportunity where I could help people because of what I had been through. By helping each other, we could both be reminded of our inherent worth as human problem solvers. I’m glad that



my first introduction to youth work was at an agency that valued mutual accountability and flattened organizational structures, while encouraging decision making based on values rather than rule-following. This experience helped me develop my relational and decision making skills through developing confidence by practicing. Working here as my first experience with youth work normalized flattened structures and radical alliances between youth accessing services and front-line youth workers.

It was only later, when I worked for hierarchical positivist agencies, that I learned how uncommon and radical these ways of practicing were. I realized how much I would have to fight to make space for equality in the relationships between the people accessing services and the people providing services. This realization seemed in direct contrast to what social work claimed to do. Working for this agency first taught me that we are all people who access services and people who provide them. Being both all the time helps us empathize with the other's position and challenge dichotomies that value one over the other. I became a social worker because I identified that this profession might offer ideas for establishing and nurturing institutions that reflect social justice values.

This was despite the fact that no registered social workers were involved with the organization whose flattened structure I respected. Actually, the influx of registered social workers, required by child welfare accreditation policies, ushered in the beginning-of-the-end of the equalized relationships that I respected. The pain of watching youth lose their equality and return to an oppressed position hurt me so much that it impelled me to found an agency based on similar principles and to sustain it for years, despite very poor odds of survival. It was more than me witnessing their return to oppression; I was actually part of oppressing youth because I worked in the agency under two sets of management after they merged with a larger agency. I

made money from making youth homeless for behavioural issues that were symptomatic of not being respected as equals and of being denied self-determination. I denied youth self-determination because the agency policies instructed me to.

I felt a strong sense of belonging with the values of restorative justice and harm reduction that influenced how the group made decisions in the peer-model program. Two of the people that participated in this research I first met as my co-workers in this program. We know each other pretty well after navigating value decisions together! We have a bond that is difficult to describe, because we share experiences of being part of a unique institutional structure that provided a place to practice according to our values. We have been marginalized together and fought to maintain values. We had more legitimacy with the youth we worked with and less legitimacy with the other professionals that we worked with.

The final story is about how I returned to critically acting to reducing the distance between myself as a professional and the people accessing services. This is a more recent story where I was disappointed in social work; however, I also found unexpected allies within social work. I attended the Academic Congress and Annual General Meeting of the Canadian Association of Social Work Education/Association Canadienne pour la Formation en Travail Social (CASWE-ACFTS) in 2015. I enjoyed engaging with the student caucus because I wasn't outted as a doctoral student specifically, and so I enjoyed working with undergraduate students as colleagues rather than having distance created between us by hierarchy. As we know, dear reader, I feel better without Plexiglas between us. We created and presented the following motion at the annual general meeting:

It is moved that faculty and student members critically examine the use of potentially oppressive language such as “patient,” “client,” “case manager” and possessive language

such as “my client.” We further encourage the use of terminology that is reflective and reflexive of the existing power imbalance between service providers and the individuals they work with, thus adhering to social work values of inherent dignity and worth of persons. We further move that the Board of Directors form a working group. This group will be tasked with the purpose of exploring the impact of oppressive language and to develop and provide recommendations and requirements that promote anti-oppressive and inclusive language in accredited CASWE-ACFTS schools.

After I read the motion, one of the tenured professors approached the other microphone. I did assume that he was approaching in order to argue against our motion. Even within the student group there were many members who identified a benefit in retaining distance between professionals and “client.” When the professor approached the microphone, I’m told that my face and body language demonstrated that I was preparing for a fight; however, it turned out that he supported us and felt validated to have his perspective shared by the students. This taught me that sometimes my values are supported by other social workers, so we can approach each other as possible allies rather than adversaries. I felt good about this validation for about five minutes, until another social worker approached me outside of the meeting to inform me that “when you get out there and start practicing you will see this issue differently.”

Now here was the dismissive condescension that I expected from social workers! I coldly informed her that I had been practicing for 12 years and that every year of practice made me more convinced of the need to equalize the therapeutic relationship. If I had responded to her in writing, I would have used this quote from Freire (1970):

Authentic help means that all who are involved help each other mutually, growing together in the common effort to understand the reality which they seek to transform.

Only through such praxis, in which those who help and those who are being helped help each other simultaneously, can the act of helping become free from the distortion in which the helper dominates the helped. (p. 8)

In person, I asked her what context she worked in, and when she replied that she worked in a hospital setting, I flashed back to the story about the Plexiglas. I imagined that she would be happier if I was on the other side of the Plexiglas instead of on the professional side with her.

At this time, it has been more than a year since the motion was put forward, and although a committee has been formed to examine the issue, I have very little hope that anything will be changed because of this. Through the process of creating and sharing the motion, I was able to identify some allies who have also been struggling their entire career with similar goals about equalizing relationships. I'm proud that my name is on that motion, because it was a way to publically advocate for social workers to examine how they may be contributing to stigmatization.

The last social worker's comment solidified my resolve to never work on the other side of the Plexiglas and to experiment with institutional structures that reflect the participatory values that drive me to equalize relationships. This story increased my hope that other social workers identified unequal relationships as oppressive, particularly in light of the social work profession's stated values.

In summary, I became a social worker because:

- I respected social workers who started with themselves in the pursuit of social justice and who pursued social justice at community and systemic levels.
- I identified social work as a place where my knowledge gained from experiences with trauma could be valued, and of value, in terms of solving social problems.

- I resented the power that social workers held over other people, and I wanted to infiltrate their education system in order to use their own weapons against them in a coup designed to equalize relationships.
- I identified that this profession might offer ideas for establishing and nurturing institutions that reflect social justice values.

In these reasons, there is a balance between fighting against and working within the context of social work as a profession. The coup I refer to is not a matter of changing who is on top of the triangle; it is about flattening the triangle. I want to do this because I believe that hierarchy causes damage in many areas. I use the metaphor of fighting because I do not feel a sense of belonging with the mainstream approach to social work that I have been exposed to. This fighting can take the form of negotiation if both parties are equal, but it often begins with a confrontation between values, such as the final story that I shared. I believe that it is essential for us to problematize our profession and to have this critical reflection inform our actions.

I have had many of my assumptions about social work proven wrong during my 17-year relationship with the profession. Particularly in the past 10 years, I have witnessed social work moving towards individual counselling while neglecting the community and systemic levels of advocacy (Specht & Courtney, 1995). A lot of social workers say that they are working themselves out of a job, but when I ask them *how* they are working towards this goal, they have no answers. I use this question to evaluate my focus on solving social problems rather than teaching people to better cope with oppression. To illustrate, this is the difference between giving someone a sandwich every day or finding out why they need a sandwich in the first place and then working to address those root causes. We need sandwiches in the now, but addressing the

systemic causes of social problems gives me more hope than just treating the symptoms of social problems or teaching people to better cope with oppression.

My assumption that my knowledge gained from experiences with trauma would be valued in social work has been the most painful one to be wrong about. It is painful because social work values indicate that this kind of knowledge should be valued in social work; however, my experience has been mostly comprised of judgement and lateral violence when professional social workers are confronted with peer models. Sometimes this appears as staff resenting peer support workers because they do the same job, without having to pay for an education, or staff hiding information from a peer support worker while sharing the same information with other colleagues. I believe that this violence results because of how the valuing of experiential knowledge threatens our professional power. My lived experience usually gives me more credibility with the students and youth I work with, while at the same time giving me less credibility with my employers and professional association. This pain motivates me to fight for the valuing of lived experience in practice, policy, research, and education.

In my list of reasons for wanting to be a social worker, the statement that I wished to stage “a coup designed to equalize relationships” is the most adversarial, and I feel that it reflects my current relationship with social work. I don’t want to be part of maintaining an oppressive status quo, and hegemony does not change easily. I feel that if we are not actively challenging oppressive hierarchies and systems then we are reinforcing oppression or being oppressive, while profiting off this oppression. The organization that I respected in the story had very few, if any, social workers employed at that agency. In fact, as soon as social workers arrived on the scene, the peer model part of the program was stopped because social work managers identified this kind of program as too risky. Managers identified fear of litigation as a risk when navigating

issues such as under-age drinking and smoking. The agency at which I initially found belonging now requires that workers have social work degrees in order to work there; professional knowledge is valued over experiential knowledge, and they maintain a rigid hierarchy in the staff team. At this time, I would not choose to work there, as it would be difficult for me to function in this context while honoring my values.

**How I do social work.** There are many ways that we social workers can start with ourselves in the pursuit of social justice. Whether social workers are engaging in research, front-line practice, management, education, or policy work, I believe that our first job should be to equalize the working relationship. When I do research, I follow emancipatory methodologies such as PAR or community-based research and I construct structures of accountability such as community-based research ethics boards. When I do front-line practice, I construct programs based on the peer model and implement evaluations led by the people accessing services. When I am in leadership positions, I hire staff and practicum students who have experiences that parallel the experiences of the people accessing services.

I flatten structures of accountability by implementing 360-degree evaluations or reciprocal opportunities to provide feedback and participate in a community of practice. When I teach, I ask the students to form a circle of chairs and come out from behind the tables, rather than me standing at the front of the classroom. I shift the focus from the empty-vessel style of teaching to facilitating space for mutual sharing; I believe that everyone knows something, and that reflection and critical dialogue are powerful. I reflect on whether I am being oppressive by thinking that one form of teaching is “better” than others.

These are some actions that I have taken in pursuit of the goal of equalizing relationships. Of course, I regularly make mistakes that reinforce the oppressive status quo. In all of these

roles, though, my methods are to share stories from my experience and protect opportunities for diverse participation and ways of knowing. I think that this creates a space to begin and prepares the ground for the pursuit of social justice.

I don't feel a sense of belonging with individualized clinical social work. Over the past decade of my social work education, I have witnessed social work shifting to roles with greater surveillance, and with punitive and individualistic focuses. It is important to note that I believe these negative roles have always been a part of social work. I rarely say "we" about social work, because I feel like a minority in terms of my beliefs about social justice beginning with the way we treat each other in relationships and the kinds of institutions that we create and maintain. I feel that it would be a lie for me to say "we," because I see evidence that many social workers may support ideas about equality and equity in theory, but these values are not reflected in their professional practice or in how they live.

**Why I wanted to pursue a doctoral education.** I decided to pursue a doctoral education in social work because I wanted to gain more power in, and understanding about, the process of knowledge creation. I identify social work as a profession that has the potential to reclaim its roots in the communal pursuit of social justice and to reject its role in blaming individuals for problems with systemic origins. I'm interested in policy, how social issues are caused and solved. However, I also think about how these issues affect people as individuals living in communities and navigating processes of belonging, interdependence, relational healing, and identity. Critical social work offers me models for praxis that focus on the intersections between the micro, meso, and macro levels (Fook, 2002; Rossiter, 1997).

I chose social work for this degree, despite my disappointments with the realities of the profession, because:



- I appreciate the emphasis in our professional Code of Ethics (CASW, 2005) concerning the necessity of pursuing social justice at community and systemic levels.
- I identify social work as a place where my knowledge gained from experiences with trauma is of value in terms of solving social problems and creating knowledge.
- I want to challenge the power that social workers hold over other people and to instead use this power in the pursuit of social justice.
- I identify that this profession might offer me legitimacy and credibility for establishing and nurturing institutions that reflect social justice values.
- I see social work as a place where I can model the participatory idea of starting with ourselves in the pursuit of social justice.
- I took a doctoral degree because I see myself as a creator of knowledge. I want more power to have a voice, to advocate, and to act. I want to amplify voices that are silenced. I want to learn from the confrontation between experiences and theory.

This concludes my introduction of myself and my relationship to the research, dear reader.

Thank you for listening to my stories. There is one more section in this chapter where I want to share a tool that I used for transparency and to maintain the visibility of power in this research.

**Research journal.** It is my practice to keep a research journal of my thoughts and feelings during the research. This practice responds to my ethical responsibility in PAR to critically reflect, both individually and in a group, and to document the process of the research (Boog, 2003; Nelson, Ochocka, Griffin, & Lord, 1998). The research journal then becomes evidence of the process of the research, including how my preconceived notions and social location may have affected research outcomes, and any decision making points in the emergent research design (Reason, 2006).

Having a record of the context during decision making contributes to trustworthiness, as readers of the research have more information to determine the extent to which the process of decision making was participatory, how options were weighted, and what ethical reasoning was used in decisions. The action of keeping a reflective journal enables me to practice reflection as a skill, to reflect deeply on the research process, and to examine how my subjectivity affects this process (Herr & Anderson, 2005). In the methods chapter, reflections from this research journal will be presented from each phase of the research process.

I will present the results and recommendations for each of these research phases after a thorough description of the theory and processes utilized in this research. In this introduction, I hope you gained a better understanding of my connections to the research topic and the way that I approach practice, including research. In the next chapter, we will learn about the theoretical frameworks that underlie the research design.

## **Chapter Two - Theoretical Approaches to Methodology**

In this chapter, I will present the critical participatory feminist theories that informed this research, how I interpreted the methodology of Participatory Action Research [PAR] and how I applied critical methods in the process of being a participatory feminist.

### **Critical Intersectional Feminism**

My theoretical frameworks began with feminism, which I was first taught about as a teenager (as I shared in the previous chapter's story about volunteering in a feminist organization). I agreed with the criticisms that I read about the risks of essentializing some women's experience as the experiences of all women (Walby, Armstrong, & Strid, 2012). This concern about the limitations of White feminism led me to intersectional, Black, and Indigenous feminisms, as well as writings with advice about navigating these kinds of theoretical frameworks as a White person (Iphis, 2014; Uwujaren & Utt, 2015; Zeilinger, 2015).

When I began to read about critical theory, I saw a real neglect of oppression based on race and gender (Crenshaw, 1989; Walby, Armstrong, & Strid, 2012); however, I was excited to see class included in the analysis, something that I identified as missing from some feminist analyses. I support the generalist approach to critical theory because oppression based on ableism, age-based oppression, and systems of White supremacy need to be made visible as well. The gendered nature of care work (Harlow, 2004), which I will discuss in detail in the subsequent chapters, is a good fit with my feminist perspective and the goal of examining how gender-based oppression shapes and is shaped by the context of front-line youth work. Intersectional feminism strives to examine how layered oppressions and privilege shape individual experiences and systems. I will present some of the strengths and critiques of this

approach in this section, as well as potential risks for neglecting some areas of oppression, even with intersectional analysis.

Intersectionality represents a paradigm shift in how we think about oppression (Collins, 1990; Crenshaw, 1989). The term and concept of “intersectionality” first came into use in the early 1980s as a critique of White middle-class feminism (see, for example, Crenshaw, 1989; Fischer & Tepe, 2011; Hancock, 2004; McCall, 2005; Walby, Armstrong, & Strid, 2012). Crenshaw (1991) demonstrated how the privileging of one axis of inequality neglects the other, and the importance of examining the compound effects of the experience of multiple oppressions.

Examples of gender-based violence that occur at the intersection between gender inequality, nation, ethnicity, and religion include forced marriage, trafficking, “honour” crimes, and female circumcision (Walby, Armstrong, & Strid, 2012). The origins of intersectionality arose with a rejection of: (i) exclusively focusing on gender, and (ii) generalizations from some women to all women (Walby, Armstrong, & Strid, 2012; Weiler, 1991). After all, gender is only part of a woman’s identity, so acknowledgement of these multiple identities aids in challenging the largely White, middle-class, and heterosexist bias in feminist scholarship (McPhail, 2003).

Race, class, age, disability, sexual orientation, and gender are increasingly presented by recent feminist scholars as closely intertwined and in need of being studied in relation to each other (Choo & Ferree, 2010). Many people are multiply oppressed on several grounds, and it is important to recognize that hierarchies of wealth, power, and status exist within and between oppressed groups (Moreau, 1990). Academic literature is in the process of determining what intersectionality means (Choo & Ferree, 2010) and what methodologies can aid in analyzing intersectionality (Walby, Armstrong, & Strid, 2012). Walby and colleagues (2012) caution

against applying a hierarchy to forms of oppression and creating a “primary” oppression; instead, they advocate for recognizing that inequalities mutually shape each other but do not become something totally different. This reflects a relational rather than static view of intersectionality (Choo & Ferree, 2010). McCall (2005) emphasizes the heterogeneity within social groups, the need to examine inequality within, as well as between, categories of people, and the importance of structural power in shaping inequalities.

Attention must also be paid to the risk of essentializing the experiences of some women, such as middle-class White women, to those of all women (Walby, Armstrong, & Strid, 2012). I ascribe to the perspective that feminist theory can aid in the emancipation of people at all locations on the gender spectrum, due to the assumption of intersectional feminist theory that patriarchy harms all people (Dowd, 2010; McPhail, 2003), and that gender oppression is closely tied to other forms—for example, oppression based on ability or race (Choo & Ferree, 2010). I believe that our liberation requires an examination of how oppressions connect and compound each other, illustrated by this quote from an Indigenous activist group in Australia during the 1970s: “If you have come here to help me, you are wasting our time. If you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.” This quote is often attributed to Lilla Watson who requested that one individual not be cited for an idea “born out of collective process.”

As a White person, saying that I am an intersectional feminist can be dangerous because it could give the illusion that I am attending to racial oppression without me working to become aware of my privilege, and it can reinforce the centering of White, cis, middle-class, able-bodied women (Iphis, 2014; Uwujaren & Utt, 2015; Zeilinger, 2015). A White person, such as myself, identifying as an intersectional feminist might lead to a problem that intersectional feminism is

actually a response to “prioritizing the experiences and voices of cisgender, straight, white women over women of colour, queer women and those who fall outside this narrow identity” (Zeilinger, 2015, p. 1).

Feminist scholars such as Collins (1990) and Crenshaw (1991) have emphasized that women of colour experience oppression in a qualitatively different way than White women (Choo & Ferree, 2010). A key part of intersectionality is the recognition that multiple oppressions compound and transform the original, in that oppressions experienced due to gender or race are indivisible, simultaneous, and linked (Choo & Ferree, 2010). This challenging of the generalization from White middle-class women’s experience to all women moved Black womens’ experiences “from margin to the center” of theorizing (Collins, 1990; hooks, 1981).

White people do not understand the intersection of oppression based on race and gender, because we do not experience oppression based on race (Iphis, 2014). In fact, feminism that fails to be intersectional is referred to as “White feminism” (Uwujaren & Utt, 2015; Zeilinger, 2015). Labelling this exclusion and erasure of the contributions and perspectives of women who are not White, cis, middle-class, able-bodied, and heterosexual aids us in dismantling oppressive structures and actions that reinforce racism (Zeilinger, 2015). That dominant people might appropriate a term used to understand this domination is a very real fear (Iphis, 2014; Uwujaren & Utt, 2015). In order to respond to such concern, I present intersectional feminism as my goal and approach my feminism with the assumption that I will make many mistakes because of my privilege (Uwujaren & Utt, 2015).

Intersectional theory could be useful generally “to inform understandings of core sociological issues, such as institutions, power relationships, culture, and interpersonal interaction” (Choo & Ferree, 2010, p. 130). Due to the strong influence of such factors on the

development and analysis of policy, intersectional theory has much to contribute to this research. Many policies have differing impacts due to gender, and the way our society is organized around gender is often regulated through policy (McPhail, 2003). Intersectionality includes the individual level as a place of action for social change and a source of knowledge about systemic issues (Collins, 1990).

The participatory aspects of this research are influenced by critical theory in terms of supporting goals for democratic equality in relationships. Habermas (1984) described three conditions of the ideal (rarely achieved) speech situation: equality of access, equality of participation (freedom to question and to express needs and desires), and freedom from coercion. The goal of these communication ethics, he suggested, is to create more democratic processes in order to build a more just society. In social work, these communication ethics, combined with the critical analysis of macro structures, aid workers in addressing oppression at a micro level through their interactions with other people (Rossiter, 1997; Spratt & Houston, 1999). This model emphasizes the potential for action and influence between individuals and the state as well as the state and individuals. This active dynamic fits well with this study, in which I engaged front-line youth workers in policy analysis and learned more about their policy advocacy.

**An example of why critical theory needs feminism.** A feminist critique of Habermas (1984) is vital to informing a research project that concerns policy analysis, because of the gendered nature of access to a voice in policy development (McPhail, 2003). Men are more likely to be employed in the policy field, while women are more likely to be front-line workers (McPhail, 2003). As Fraser (1985) stated, “feminist women are struggling in effect to redistribute and democratize access to and control over the means of interpretation and communication . . . including political deliberations and decision making” (p. 128).

Additionally, the gendered nature of front-line practice reflects the status quo of undervaluing care work in Western societies, work that is dominated by women (Harlow, 2004). In Canada, similar to other Western countries, women are disproportionately professional “carers.” To illustrate, in 2009, 67% of all employed women in Canada were working in teaching, nursing or related health occupations, clerical or other administrative positions, or sales and service occupations; this compared with 31% percent of employed men (Statistics Canada, 2012). Feminist policy analysis emphasizes the importance of context in influencing the way social problems are framed by location, institution, and historically specific factors (McPhail, 2003).

Sinnerbrink, Deranty, and Smith (2005) stated that “to a great extent this question of ‘Critical Theory today’ remains the question of the interpretation of Jurgen Habermas’s work” (p. 8). One problem with this assertion is that in the *Theory of Communicative Action* (1984), Habermas said virtually nothing about gender, and his theory reflects assumptions about a male-headed definition of the heterosexual nuclear family, making unpaid and gendered labour such as childrearing invisible (Fraser, 1985). One of the main critiques of Habermas (1984) from feminist scholars is his lack of attention to the role of unpaid childcare work, particularly concerning the role that child rearing plays in the social reproduction of values from one generation to the next (Fischer & Tepe, 2011), but also as material production, in terms of not recognizing what labour is required to ensure the biological survival of children (Fraser, 1985). Habermas (1984) identified the roles of citizen, client, and worker in navigating between the systems and lifeworld. His failure to identify child rearer as one of these roles makes women’s struggles to balance the conflicting identities and tensions between these roles invisible and reinforces that raising children is solely a woman’s problem (Fraser, 1985).



This undervaluing of child and youth care and the erasure of this work in some critical theory is extremely relevant to the examination of policy analysis in the context of gendered and undervalued child and youth care that occurs in research (Harlow, 2004). Fischer and Tepe (2011) stated the necessity for critical theory to become feminist in order to remain critical, as the whole of society cannot be reduced exclusively to capital relations. This means making gender visible in critical theory. As Becker-Schmidt (1987) declared, “capitalism and patriarchy are two interdependent social relations, which cannot be reduced to the other” (as cited in [not available in English] Fischer & Tepe, 2011, p. 370). The effects of patriarchy occur at the macro and micro levels, and are not limited to the domestic sphere as Habermas (1984) assumed (Fischer & Tepe, 2011; Fraser, 1985; hooks, 1981).

Habermas (1984) distinguished between the categories of “system” and “lifeworld,” framing these as opposite categories. Fraser (1985) stated the need to challenge this binary thinking and to develop a framework that is sensitive to the similarities between these categories, particularly in how institutions, including family, reinforce women’s subordination. Fraser (1985) also challenged Habermas’ (1984) assumption that influence is unidirectional between lifeworld and systems, positing instead a multidirectional model that recognizes that the lifeworld or micro level also influences the macro or systems level (Choo & Ferree, 2010). Later in this chapter, I will explain the models that I used to interpret the connections between the individual, institutional, and systemic levels in this research.

Fraser (1985) argued that Habermas (1984) failed to recognize the use of power and money in the male dominance of the domestic sphere, as the latter limited his analysis of money and power in oppression to the systems category and did not define family as a system. Renault (2005) also critiqued Habermas’ (1984) reduction of politics to deliberations within the public

sphere, as this does not sufficiently address some forms of injustice that are enacted at the family level, such as domestic violence (Fraser, 1985). Habermas' (1984) theory tends to reinforce and replicate, rather than problematize, a major contribution to women's subordination: the gender-based separation of unpaid domestic work from paid work in the public sphere (Fischer & Tepe, 2010; Fraser, 1985). Emancipation requires a transformation of current gender roles rather than the reinforcement of androcentric thinking and the duplication of the status quo (Fraser, 1985). Front-line workers and youth experiencing homelessness both experience the consequences of child rearing being undervalued, under-resourced, and invisible in policy (Harlow, 2004).

### **How I Interpreted Critical Intersectional Feminist Goals in this Research**

In this next section, I explain how my theory integrates with my research practice. There are areas of overlap between my theoretical framework of critical intersectional feminism and my chosen methodology of PAR, which to me demonstrates a good integration of my theory and epistemology with my practice. In this section, I will elaborate on the common goals of making power visible, equalizing relationships, challenging dichotomous thinking, and engaging in knowledge production as an emancipatory act.

**Making power visible.** Collins (1990) identified the following four domains of power or potential sites for empowerment: structural, disciplinary, hegemonic, and interpersonal. Structural power is how institutions are organized to reinforce unequal power over time. Disciplinary power is not overtly racist or sexist policies; rather, it appears in how organizations are run, and it relies on hierarchy and bureaucracy as techniques to hide intersectional oppression experiences. Hegemonic power is the manipulation of symbols, ideologies, images, and cultural consciousness. This is where ideas such as "common sense" are used to further reinforce inequality and to block people in their pursuit of self-definition. This hegemonic domain is how

the lived experience of oppression is linked with the institutional reinforcement of inequality (Collins, 1990) or how the individual level is linked with the systemic.

Both elite and subordinate people need to believe the assumptions that hegemony presents in order for this kind of power to be effective (Collins, 1990). Social work plays a vital role in normalizing this power (Margolin, 1997). It is at this level that people internalize the messages from hegemony that block the envisioning of alternatives to the status quo and discourage questioning the elite's right to rule (Collins, 1990). In the interpersonal domain of power, people have the autonomy to work for change along with the pain of experiencing oppression. This domain of power is often invisible in that how people interact and their day-to-day practices often go unexamined (Collins, 1990). One of the goals of PAR and feminist research is to make this power visible (McPhail, 2003). The invisibility of this domain often erases resistance efforts that are affecting social change (Collins, 1990).

PAR values experiential knowledge and strives to make the day-to-day practices of people more visible as sites for taking action and changing the world (Sakamoto & Pitner, 2005; Weiler, 1991). In feminist research, making the influence of gender and the experiences of women visible is vital in challenging the generalization of the experiences of men to all people, with the resulting assumed neutrality of gender in shaping experience (McPhail, 2003). Making gender visible in policy will improve the policy we produce and will aid in emancipatory goals to render the world a more just place for all people (Weiner, 1989).

Examining the power within and between groups is vital in the PAR process (Khan & Chovanec, 2010). The examination of power is also important to social work due to the profession's role in creating culture, such as what is regarded as "normal" or how social problems are defined (Dean & Fenby, 1989; Rossiter, 1997; Sakamoto & Pitner, 2005). For

example, the service provider/service user relationship can be framed as one of service as a right or a privilege, as care or control, as dependence or interdependence, based on ideology (Moreau, 1990). Critical theory demands that social workers maintain awareness of the role that our profession plays in reinforcing the status quo and oppressive relations (Rossiter, 1997; Spratt & Houston, 1999).

Rossiter (1997) identified three principles necessary for justice-centered social work:

(1) social workers recognize their profession's role in the social construction of deviance, in the maintenance of this power, and the resulting responsibility to remain conscious about their agency in producing this culture; (2) social workers have a responsibility to work with themselves and others to understand how social formation is vulnerable or the empowerment that comes from realizing that "we are freer than we feel"; and (3) social workers have the responsibility of working towards building a just society based on democratic participation and discourse ethics. (p. 32)

As the first point illustrates, reflection is used in order to identify actions that can be taken in the pursuit of social justice. I will expand more in the subsequent section of this chapter about how reflection can be used in the pursuit of making power visible.

**Equalizing relationships.** The emphasis that PAR places on building reciprocity in the research relationship (Oliver, 2002) fits well with the study goal of reducing the gap between micro practice and macro policy/research work. Reducing the distance between researchers and front-line workers may assist in reducing the gap between practice and policy. PAR seeks to foster individual empowerment and to produce knowledge that can be used for social change (Oliver, 1992). One way this is accomplished is through challenging the unequal power dynamics in the research relationship.

As Strier (2007) stated, “genuine participation is more likely to flourish in the presence of egalitarian power relations between researchers and participants” (p. 861). Challenging the power difference in the relationship between the researcher and participants represents “the opportunity to explore and benefit from any commonality between ‘us’ [researchers] and ‘them’ [front-line workers]” (Carr, 2007, p. 274). Engaging in dialogue and collective action “enables us to see precisely how unequal power relations are reproduced through the many apparently trivial encounters that occur” (Hodge, 2005, p. 177).

In this kind of emancipatory research, knowledge is co-created through research “*with* rather than *on* practitioners” (Ruch, 2002, p. 213). Research based in critical intersectional feminism requires challenging the divide between researcher/researched (Boog, 2003; Carr, 2007; Herr & Anderson, 2005; Hodge, 2005; McPhail, 2003; Oliver, 2002; Strier, 2007). Choo and Ferree (2010) advocated the need to challenge the power dynamics in research in order to make the marginal central, and empower marginal groups to engage as subjects rather than objects of study. Dear reader, I’m sure you are already recalling that centralizing marginalized voices is also a goal of intersectional feminism in the pursuit of dialogue (Collins, 1990; hooks, 1981).

The hierarchy present in the researcher relationship needs to be challenged because dialogue requires an egalitarian relationship in order to achieve the goals of collective action and individual empowerment (Freire, 1970; Henderson, 1995; Moreau, 1990; Rossiter, 1997). Engaging in ethical communication does not remove the power dimension, but it centralizes the focus on how power affects systems and individuals, while opening the possibility for questioning pre-held positions and assumptions (Henderson, 1995; Spratt & Houston, 1999). Emotions belong in the dialogue process because this is how we develop empathy (Collins,

1990; Seikkula & Trimble, 2005) and the process of dialogue is in itself a humanizing one (hooks, 1981; Reason, 2005; Seikkula & Trimble, 2005). In order to facilitate and practice this dialogue, workers must be comfortable with conflict (Montero, 1994), be prepared to surrender their status as experts by framing their professional skills as complementary to experiential knowledge (Sakamoto & Pitner, 2005), engage in a process of demystifying knowledge, and be ready to exercise diplomacy and negotiation (Moreau, 1990).

PAR challenges the unequal power dynamic in research; however, it is difficult to challenge this dynamic in the context of a dissertation where one researcher's name will appear on the dissertation and one researcher will be judged individually on her research ability (Herr & Anderson, 2005). This potential difficulty was addressed in the research design by clearly articulating, in consent forms (Appendix A), the potential benefits and risks for all parties, including the benefits for me as a researcher and the benefits for front-line workers identified in the literature. This was done in order to be transparent about the reciprocity of benefits and the shared goals to improve services for youth experiencing homelessness in Calgary so that participants could make an informed decision about their involvement in the research.

**Challenging dichotomous thinking.** Examples of challenging dichotomous thinking include the assumption that the personal and political are linked (Hare-Mustin, 1978; McPhail, 2003), and the use of praxis, which combines theory and practice by exploring ways to put thoughts into action (Gutiérrez, 1990; Weiler, 1991). Emancipatory research requires challenging dichotomies (McPhail, 2003), including the divisions between practice and policy, researchers and researched populations, as well as people delivering and receiving services. Feminist theory informs the challenging of these dichotomies (Harlow, 2004; Weiler, 1991).

Rossiter (1997) explained how the micro and macro levels are linked in social work practice, stating “social work’s greatest strength is, ironically, the principle it has most failed to maximize—its insistence of seeing people within environments” (p. 35). Rather than explore the reasons behind social work’s refusal to dichotomize the individual and social, many social workers have chosen an “either or” perspective, such as policy or individual clinical work (Rossiter, 1997; Weiler, 1991).

**Production of knowledge as an emancipatory process.** This study sought knowledge for social change (Oliver, 1992). PAR is one form of emancipatory research that emphasizes the goal of social change. Emancipation means freedom from any kind of domination, “from restraint, control or the power of someone else” (Boog, 2003, p. 427). Emancipation is not limited to freeing oneself as an individual from domination; it also requires transforming society to a more socially just distribution of power and control (Boog, 2003). The emancipatory paradigm is about facilitating “a politics of the possible” by confronting social oppression at whatever level it occurs (Oliver, 1992, p. 110). Based on this emancipatory paradigm, emancipatory research seeks to generate knowledge “that is both valid and vital to the well-being of individuals, communities, and for the promotion of larger-scale democratic social change” (Brydon-Miller, Greenwood, & Maguire, 2003, p. 11). In this way, emancipatory research seeks knowledge that will aid in constructing more just societies, and it is useful in working for social change.

Israel, Schulz, Parker, and Becker (1998) explained how critical theory contributes to the emancipatory goals of PAR:

Research in and of itself will not resolve broader social issues such as racism and economic inequalities . . . That [these issues] are made explicit in . . . research, and that

the research process attempts to grapple with them and their implications for the construction of knowledge and the development of effective strategies for change, enhances the potential for . . . research to address social inequalities. (p. 195)

Research is framed as the beginning of a social change process that requires sustained action and reflection. This is one way in which PAR recognizes that “knowledge is related to power, and that power is related to change” (Lindsey & McGuinness, 1998, p. 1106). The goal of disseminating the research results is to inspire, in ourselves and other stakeholders, an obligation to take action based on our commitment to shared goals (Lindsey & McGuinness, 1998).

The limitations of applying PAR “within the bounds of a capitalist social-economic structure” must be acknowledged (Khan & Chovanec, 2010, p. 34). Advocating for universal social benefits in a political context of neoliberalism and cuts to basic social services provides an example of how this limitation might be experienced. It also must be recognized that social change is a long-term and non-linear process that requires both individual and collective action (Khan & Chovanec, 2010).

Status quo power structures are resistant to change partially because dominant groups control what is defined as knowledge (Collins, 1990). The strategy in this context is to present alternative ways of knowing, as Collins (1990) explained:

Alternative knowledge claims in and of themselves are rarely threatening to conventional knowledge. Such claims are routinely ignored, discredited, or simply absorbed and marginalized in existing paradigms. Much more threatening is the challenge that alternative epistemologies offer to the basic process used by the powerful to legitimate knowledge claims that in turn justify their right to rule. (p. 290)



PAR challenges the status quo by making forms of knowledge, such as resistance, visible (Reason, 2006). Collins (1990) agreed that subordinate groups have to create and share knowledge in order to survive in a dominating society. She saw the potential to challenge the processes of dominant knowledge generation through validating theory with real-life experience, validating knowledge claims through dialogue with ordinary people, and embracing the role of emotions in debate and knowledge creation for the goals of social change and personal awareness of systemic social forces. This work opens up opportunities for studying how people influence social conditions and how social conditions influence lived experience (Collins, 1990).

My research design challenges the status quo through initiating opportunities to include the perspectives of front-line workers in policy analysis (Herr & Anderson, 2005). When social change is part of research, risk levels increase because of resistance from dominant groups and authorities (Khan & Chovanec, 2010). Part of this risk originates in a group advocating for social change and experiencing a token reception of their recommendations for policy change. Token experiences with participation result when there is an illusion of consultation yet the status quo remains (Karabanow, 2004; Khan & Chovanec, 2010; McPhail, 2003). In order to gain a sense of policy efficacy, participants need to experience success in influencing policy decisions (Durose, 2009; Weiss-Gal & Peled, 2009). In the results chapter, I will present the group's recommendations for policy change and I will also examine actions that we took in pursuit of our goals of social change.

This possibility of experiencing a token reception of the research findings leads to an important ethical issue of concern. This research is grounded in theory that has demonstrated a link between a lack of involvement in macro-level work and practitioner burnout (Durose, 2009); however, experiencing a lack of efficacy in policy change after identifying the need for this

change could also contribute to burnout. I did not wish to undermine the resiliency of participants in the research, nor did I want to adopt a protectionist stance; however, it is important to recognize that the group members had to support each other through the experience of helplessness in affecting policy change. Herr and Anderson (2005) suggested balancing the tension of risk in PAR by reflecting on the risk of paternalism on the part of the researcher and, depending on transparency, to encourage consent that is truly informed by identifying potential risks and benefits and discussing how these factors are weighted from different perspectives. They advocated for ethics in PAR research as a negotiated and ongoing process between participants in the research.

The findings from this research provide a starting point or a framework on which to build future advocacy and strategic partnerships (Herr & Anderson, 2005). Cho and Trent (2006) defined catalytic validity as an eventual ideal in a process leading towards emancipation and social change; in this process, deeper understanding motivates us to take action. Lindsey and McGuinness (1998) offered examples of how involvement in PAR can promote further research efforts, such as a desire to engage in PAR projects in the future and the identification of a model for participatory projects. I think of catalytic validity as the degree to which our learning from the research changes our actions or how we integrate theoretical knowledge into practice.

Feminist theory also frames knowledge production as an emancipatory act (Henderson, 1995); this reflects my epistemological view and thus my approach to research. Focus on the macro or systemic level needs to consider the agency of individuals and their capacity to effect change, or it runs the risk of reinforcing a dualistic definition of individuals and society by failing to recognize the mutual influence of people on society and society on people (Collins, 1990; Rossiter, 1997). Habermas' (1984) theory of communicative action provides a framework

for understanding the reciprocal relationship between individuals and society, and for setting the ground rules for ethical and productive democratic debate (Spratt & Houston, 1999). Habermas (1984) defined communication as a vital part of shifting from an individual view of reason to a philosophy of intersubjective communication, thus expressing the need for democratic control over social processes, such as how justice is defined (Montero, 1994; Rossiter, 1997).

Sakamoto and Pitner (2005) advocated for social workers to embrace their sense of discomfort with the role of social work in oppression, social control, and defining deviance, and to use feelings of anger to propel action rather than avoid the discomfort that awareness brings. They proposed that liberation and empowerment of both the social worker and people accessing services should be the goal of social work practice, as this helps to achieve our shared goals of a more just world, beginning with equalizing the inequality of power in the service relationship (Sakamoto & Pitner, 2005). Reducing social workers' sense of powerlessness helps them to work towards social justice, by identifying potential sites for action (Sakamoto & Pitner, 2005).

### **How I Interpreted the Methodology of PAR in this Research**

PAR is better described as a research methodology or a theory of research than as a research method (Healy, 2001); a range of methods can be used under this methodology. PAR, based in theory, provides a working praxis for emancipatory research inquiry (Avison, Lau, Myers, & Nielsen, 1999; Dobscha & Ozanne, 2001). It is for these reasons, dear reader, that I have written this chapter as a united presentation of the theoretical approaches that influenced how I interpreted and implemented the methodology of PAR.

The goals of PAR are to deepen awareness of one's self, to increase participant co-researchers' ability to make their beliefs and understandings visible, and to catalyze new actions (Lather, 1986; Podger et al., 2013). In this section, I will describe how the methodology of PAR

is defined by: a participatory worldview, an understanding of participation on a spectrum, the idea of flexible and emergent research design, and the epistemology of learning through cycles of reflection and action.

**Participatory world view.** The goal of engaging front-line youth workers in policy work is grounded in a participatory worldview with emancipatory goals (Skolimowski, 1994), as front-line workers have traditionally been excluded from policy work (Durose, 2009). This worldview values different ways of knowing and frames practice-based knowledge as complementary to research knowledge (Collins, 1990; Oliver, 2002; Skolimowski, 1994), as well as necessary to inform policy (Forester, 1985; Kumashiro, 2002). It also encourages people with diverse perspectives and ways of knowing to participate in policy analysis and research, thus reducing the gap between micro front-line practice and macro policy practice (Weiss-Gal & Peled, 2009). The pragmatic approach also melds well with the participatory worldview that frames people as active agents in shaping their world and identifies the task of inquiry to be human problem solving (Reason, 2006; Skolimowski, 1994).

Empowerment is a more individual concept than emancipation, with indicators such as increased self-esteem, self-awareness, and self-efficacy (Jordan, 2004). Empowerment is framed as complementary to emancipation, with both concepts being interdependent (Boog, 2003; Collins, 1990). The participatory worldview has strong connections to individual empowerment (Skolimowski, 1994). In the words of Gibbs (2001), “the kind of research which reflects a social justice and empowerment orientation will be participatory, collaborative and action oriented” (p. 695). This participatory view recognizes that people have “a right and ability to contribute to decisions that affect them and to knowledge that is about them” (Reason, 2006, p. 189).

**Spectrum of participation.** From a participatory perspective, people are seen as experts on their own lives and are capable of self-determination (Strier, 2007). Increasing participants' skills and their confidence in using these skills contributes to emancipation and social change (Reason, 2006). PAR is designed to improve research participants' capacities to solve problems, to develop skills (including professional skills), to increase their chances of self-determination, and to have more influence on the decision making processes of organizations (Boog, 2003).

Participation is a process rather than an event and can be evaluated on a spectrum, with a continuum from consultation to full involvement in research (Gibbs, 2001). Beresford and Evans (1999) found in examining the spectrum of participation that "there does seem to be a relationship between the extent . . . of involvement in research and its capacity to serve an empowering function" (p. 674). In PAR, dialogue and member checking are some tactics for achieving authentic participation (Khan & Chovanec, 2010). In order for participation to be successful, there need to be individualized expectations, in that "each person need[s] to be free to engage at a level that [is] appropriate for him/her at that time" (Rutherford, 2011, p. 355). The importance of accessing the *quality* of participation from the perspective of the participants is paramount in PAR (Rutherford, 2011), and the methods chapter will describe how this was accounted for in the research design.

***Relationships and sustainability.*** Herr and Anderson (2005) have stated that the trustworthiness of data collected in PAR inquiries depends on the quality of the relationships formed through the process of research, and on building rapport and trust with and between participants. Maguire (1987) described this as a process of building credibility with participants. Groups provide social support through the change process, which is a potential power base for future actions, new understandings of self and others, new theories, as well as an opportunity to

learn new skills and view different perspectives through participation, listening, and observing others (Gutiérrez, 1990; Henderson, 1995).

The methods utilized in my research reflect a belief in the social nature of knowledge construction and in doing so provide “a rekindling of fun and wonder in the research process” as people learn together (Goss & Leinbach, 1996, p. 116). This building of relationships allows participants to draw confidence from others, as trust develops in the group and contributes to the sustainability of projects (Goss & Leinbach, 1996; Kitzinger, 1994; Maiter et al., 2008). The relationships developed through the research act as catalysts for future actions and reflection while contributing to building the capacity of communities (Podger et al., 2013).

This knowledge about the importance of relationships informs the methods chosen for my dissertation research, in that opening up more opportunities for front-line workers to talk and learn together may increase the sustainability of their involvement in working on the issue of homelessness at both systemic and individual levels (Gutiérrez, 1990; Sakamoto & Pilner, 2005). In PAR, sustainable relationships are built through reflecting, acting, and learning together (Reason, 2006). This process results in capacity building for the community as the group strives for equality in the research relationship and works towards the goals of empowerment, efficacy, and emancipation (Israel et al., 1998).

**Emergent.** The study is emergent through the action reflection cycles, in that the first phase informs the second, and data analysis occurs concurrently with data collection (Herr & Anderson, 2005). We added a phase, based on an invitation from a participant. The discussion chapter contains dialogue between co-researchers, and the action plan to disseminate the findings was planned by the participants. The emergent research design of PAR allows for flexibility and an ability to respond to changing needs (Brydon-Miller, Greenwood, & Maguire, 2003).

Emergent design means that the questions may change, the relationships may change, the purposes of the research or what is important may change (Reason, 2006). As a result, PAR cannot be programmatic and “cannot be defined in terms of hard and fast methods” (Reason, 2006, p. 197). Emergent design does not mean undisciplined; it requires awareness and transparency of choices made in the research design (Reason, 2006). In the methods chapter, I will share more details about the emergent changes that were made to the research design and how decisions about these changes were made.

When I designed this research, I prioritized creating opportunities to learn from emergent data by engaging in data analysis while simultaneously collecting more data. For this reason, I utilized the framework put forward by Charmaz (2010), based on her work using grounded theory, because she addressed these ongoing emergent cycles of reflection and action as well as how to integrate findings from diverse data sources. Grounded theory is primarily an inductive process, however Charmaz (2010) explains how deductive and inductive reasoning can be applied in a complementary strategy. This complementary idea is also present in the cycles of action and reflection in PAR. Charmaz (2010) also assisted me through her explanations of concepts such as the saturation point, where all the collected data explicated the emergent themes identified in the data analysis.

**Cycles of reflection and action.** It is important to note that “people new to action research tend to interpret [the cycles of reflection and action] too literally as representing a set of very distinct steps, rather than broad stages in an integrated process” (Somekh, 1995, p. 342). Although I am making the distinction between the reflection and action phases of the research, each of these phases were comprised of elements of both. This research design reflects an understanding of PAR as an iterative cycle of problem identification, diagnosis, planning,

intervention, and evaluation of the results of action, through which we learn in order to plan subsequent interventions (Cassell & Johnson, 2006). Determining integrity in PAR is dependent on the quality of participation, reflection, and action undertaken in the research (Lather, 1986; Lindsey & McGuinness, 1998).

PAR is a methodology that bridges the gap between research and action by including both in the cycles of reflection and action (Somekh, 1995). It is pragmatic in terms of offering an alternative instead of merely a critique (Gustavsen, 2003), and to some extent in seeing research methods as the means to an end (Rolfe, 1996). As Khan and Chovanec (2010) stated, the purpose of PAR is “to simultaneously solve problems and generate new knowledge” (p. 35). The pragmatism of PAR is a good fit with the practice-oriented goals of front-line workers (Butler, 2002; Jordan, 2004; Powell, 2002). As Bradbury Huang (2010) noted, “working in partnership with practitioners pretty much ensures the practical aims will be met—otherwise they won’t waste their time” (p. 98). My dissertation research design is emergent, a good fit with the epistemology of PAR, which pursues a balance between reflection and action in emergent cycles (Somekh, 1995).

PAR is described by Lindsey and McGuinness (1998) as “a way of creating knowledge to effect necessary action and change” (p. 1106). Reflection and consciousness-raising are prerequisites to taking action together (Reason, 2006). Gutiérrez (1990) described the process of empowerment and offered four psychological changes that are vital for moving individuals from apathy to action. These changes occur not linearly but simultaneously and enhance each other. One required change is that people need to *experience* increasing self-efficacy or a sense of personal power and the belief in one’s ability “to produce and regulate events in one’s life”



(Bandura, 1982, p. 122). Efficacy describes feeling more powerful and confident in your ability to affect others and influence social institutions (Henderson, 1995).

### **How I Used Critical Methods for Being a Participatory Feminist**

Dear reader, it is one thing to understand something on a theoretical level, but if we want to put this learning into action, then we need to understand how to implement these theories. In this section, I describe *how* I enacted the theories that I have reviewed through reflective practice, consciousness-raising, and praxis.

**Reflection.** Knowledge in this study is recognized to be co-constructed, in that the subjectivity of all participants, including the researcher, is acknowledged and celebrated as a diverse knowledge base (Collins, 1990). In the research design this is addressed through my reflexivity in the research proposal, the dissertation, and the research journal (Herr & Anderson, 2005). Critical and feminist theories support these methods and reflect this understanding of knowledge and practice (Henderson, 1995; Rossiter, 1997; Weiler, 1991).

Social workers have a responsibility to raise their own consciousness through engaging in reflection, reflexivity, and dialogue, based on principles of democratic equality, so that they can work towards empowerment for individuals and emancipation at a macro level (Henderson, 1995; Rossiter, 1997; Seikkula & Trimble, 2005; Spratt & Houston, 1999). Critical reflection, according to Sakamoto and Pitner (2005), is required in three areas: the micro needs of the person accessing services, the macro changes required in service systems, and the practitioner's own assumptions about their professional role and values. My participatory worldview would add slightly to the thoughts of Sakamoto and Pitner (2005), in that I think that the individual accessing services would know better what their needs are than a reflective social worker. In the

literature review chapter, I will expand upon how reflection was used in this research, as well as some of the critiques of this method.

***Social location.*** In order to be reflective practitioners, make informed decisions, and act as agents of change, we need to be aware of our own ideology, social location, or standpoint (Collins, 1990), and we need opportunities for our experiences and ideology to be contested and understood (Sakamoto & Pitner, 2005; Spratt & Houston, 1999). Social location acknowledges that power is relational and that our worldview influences our behaviour (Kanuha, 2000; White, 2007). Standpoint theory helps us to integrate our intersectional selves, which assists us in resisting definition from the outside (Collins, 1990). Examining our social location makes visible more forms of resistance, which can lead to collective action to change institutions (Collins, 1990). Social location concerns social power and requires an understanding of privilege and power and how this contributes to our identity (Mandell, 2008). Social location is intersectional and relational; each group shares situated knowledge from its own standpoint (Collins, 1990). For example, the critical and intersectional feminist theoretical frameworks guiding this research challenge the essentialization of front-line workers or the assumption that this group is homogeneous, as well as the oppressive binary between service providers and service users, in order to concentrate on our shared goals of improving outcomes for youth experiencing homelessness (Moreau, 1990; Williams, 1991). As Hunter (2003) explained:

Professionals are primarily studied *only* in terms of their status as welfare professionals, ignoring their position in other forms of social relations. . . . Failure to understand different aspects of welfare professionals' *social* identity ignores any capacity for action on their part, which is precipitated by aspects of positive identification other than their

professional or institutional identity. . . . The role of welfare professionals is perceived as one of delivery and is rarely interrogated in relation to policy making. (p. 333)

Recognizing the commonalities between front-line workers and people accessing services, such as shared frustration with systemic barriers and awareness of how policy decisions affect individuals receiving services, presents an opportunity to create a shared “we” rather than an “us” and “them” dichotomy in working to improve outcomes for youth experiencing homelessness. Acknowledging that front-line workers have identities outside of their professional role recognizes them as people, citizens, and members of diverse communities (Hunter, 2003). This opens up more possibilities for action (Newbury, 2011) through not limiting the view to professional communities, and through recognizing how change can be affected by individuals and communities. For example, many front-line workers are also parents or may have personal experience with homelessness; these roles may motivate an individual practitioner towards the goal of improving outcomes for youth, in addition to their professional motivations.

Examining the complex intersectionality of oppression in a group context aids in demonstrating that everyone is both privileged and oppressed, due to their diverse and fluid identities and group membership, as well as the relational aspects of oppression (Sakamoto & Pitner, 2005; Weiler, 1991). The relational aspects of oppression concern our relationship to other people in the group in terms of our social location (Mandell, 2008). For example, as a White settler on this land, I need to be aware that when I am in relationships with Indigenous people, these relationships happen in the context of the oppression of colonialism. As a White person, I benefit off the oppression of Indigenous people, whether this is my intent or not. This awareness of oppression is complemented by assuming personal responsibility for change (Gutierrez, 1990), which is similar to Freire’s (1970) idea of becoming an active subject rather

than remaining a powerless object. Shifting the focus away from self-blame allows people to concentrate on the causes of their problems rather than exclusively on how they cope with these problems as individuals (Montero, 1994; Moreau, 1990).

**Consciousness-raising.** Consciousness-raising is a technique for connecting specific individual experiences to the distribution of power in society as a whole, as well as a site for group efforts towards both individual and community-level change (Gutiérrez, 1990; Henderson, 1995; Rossiter, 1997; Sakamoto & Pitner, 2005; Spratt & Houston, 1999). It is a process of becoming aware of how oppression is enacted at the systemic, institutional, and individual levels. Consciousness-raising is a prerequisite to taking collective action, which is a fundamental goal of PAR, and feminist theory provides a foundation for how and why to engage in consciousness-raising activities.

Consciousness-raising was developed in feminist theory and practice, reflecting the assumptions that the personal and political are linked and interdependent (Hare-Mustin, 1978), that knowledge production is an emancipatory act, and that knowledge is created, not discovered (Henderson, 1995). Consciousness-raising requires cycles of reflection and action—reflecting on and analyzing experience, then integrating results into the development of future actions (Dean & Fenby, 1989; Gutiérrez, 1990; Henderson, 1995; Montero, 1994; Moreau, 1990; Sakamoto & Pitner, 2005; Spratt & Houston, 1999; Weiler, 1991).

Consciousness-raising emphasizes the importance of feelings and experiential knowledge because this reflects the view that we are all capable of theorizing from experience, and feelings about oppression must be felt in order to motivate action (Weiler, 1991) and empathy (Collins, 1990; Reason, 2005). As Irene Peslikis (1970) wrote, “what politicizes people . . . is not so much books or ideas but experience” (cited in Weiler, 1991, p. 458). Developing group consciousness

through awareness of how systemic factors affect individuals and groups results in a critical perspective on society that redefines problems as shared and emerging from a lack of power (Gutiérrez, 1990; Henderson, 1995; Montero, 1994; Moreau, 1990).

Reducing self-blame aids in addressing internalized guilt and shame, which can be immobilizing and reinforce feelings of helplessness. This stage can take quite some time and is key to moving towards a view of one's self as competent and able to act (Henderson, 1995; Sakamoto & Pitner, 2005; Spratt & Houston, 1999). Through this process, people become more aware of internal and external resources at their disposal (Montero, 1994).

Moreau (1990) described how internalized oppression, which originates with self-blame and identity being defined from the outside rather than by the individual, can contribute to self-destructive behaviours and impede one's capacity to believe in one's ability to act. He detailed a process of mimesis where oppressed people attempt to pass themselves off as members of the privileged group because of the rewards experienced when this is done. Unfortunately, this coping method often results in lateral oppression, as individuals try to distance themselves from the oppressed group instead of finding belonging based on shared experience (Moreau, 1990).

Moreau (1990) echoed Gutiérrez (1990) in identifying self-blame, internalized self-hatred, and guilt as reinforcing negative messages about identity and in impeding progress towards collective action. People who have internalized messages of self-blame can define suffering as being their fate and think they are not worthy of improved conditions (Montero, 1994; Moreau, 1990). If an individual feels unworthy, they are more likely to accept reformist concessions rather than push for additional demands (Montero, 1994; Moreau, 1990).

Emancipation moves beyond coping to addressing the root causes of problems of social inequality (Henderson, 1995). The only way to replace self-hatred with self-care is to validate

feelings of fear, hurt, and anger and connect these feelings to their source outside of the individual so they don't internalize these feelings as part of themselves (Moreau, 1990).

Developing a sense of belonging and community with other members of an oppressed group can contribute to individuals realizing they are not alone with their experience of oppression, and can expose them to the wide range of reactions to these experiences.

Consciousness-raising is a process of moving from a "me" to a "we" perspective, or from an individual to a collectivist view of social problems. This process of collectivizing experiences is a prerequisite to working for social change (Gutiérrez, 1990).

**Praxis.** Dialogue with others who share your problems is a key part of developing praxis (Gutiérrez, 1990; Herr & Anderson, 2005; Weiler, 1991), where theorizing occurs from experience and is applied back to experience (Henderson, 1995). Researchers in PAR seek praxis, or practical ways to put thoughts into action, then reflect on the validity of these actions (Cho & Trent, 2006). The interplay—between theory and experience, between action and individual as well as group reflection, between diverse experiences and perspectives, such as research and front-line practice, and between multiple methods—enhances the authenticity and utility of the findings (Herr & Anderson, 2005). In this way, experiential knowledge is valued as a way of validating theoretical knowledge (Collins, 1990). This research was designed to use multiple methods of analysis and ways of knowing in order to compensate for each method's limitations (Herr & Anderson, 2005). In the methods chapter, I will expand on how this interplay was facilitated.

### **Differences and Similarities between Youth Work and Social Work**

The role of my theoretical orientation in how I *do* my profession (Scourfield & Pithouse, 2006) is important to keep in mind for this discussion of the distinctions and areas of overlap

between the professions of social and youth work. As I explained in the introduction, I have been trained in the experiential practice of youth work and in a theoretical education of social work. For example, if I were a police officer with a critical participatory feminist theoretical orientation, I would expect to see some differences in how I would do that job as compared to other officers. I would expect that I would be more reflective than my fellow officers, that I would encourage opportunities to equalize relationships, that I would critique language and other ways unequal power manifests. My critical view of the status quo and my value of flattening hierarchies would be in direct conflict with the paramilitary aspects of that career, for example the requirement to follow orders without questioning them.

To return to youth work and social work, my theoretical framework pushes me to see more similarities than differences between these two professions. However, there are enough differences for me to prefer applying my local social work Code of Ethics (CASW, 2005) to the distance-reducing approaches of youth work (Lavie-Ajayi & Krumer-Nevo, 2013). When I ask myself what part of social work I am most proud of, the answer is community-level participation in problem solving. It is important to note that the critical social work that informs my practice moves beyond the Code of Ethics in examining how the relations of power play out in this profession, including examining the subjectivities of ideas such as “client” (Mandell, 2008).

First, I will present two areas of overlap that I identify between youth work and social work: being reflective practitioners and building linkages between care and social justice. Both professions are relationship based (Mandell, 2008; Phelan, 2005; White, 2007), and both professions place workers in positions where they have opportunities to shape the environments of young people (Crisp & McCave, 2007; Larson et al., 2009). An example of shaping the environment would be when a youth uses racist slurs in a program and the worker intervenes.

**Care and social justice.** In both social work and youth work, it is not enough to build trust at the individual level; workers also need to advocate for services for the collective need (Lavie-Ajayi & Krumer-Nevo, 2013). One way to model the connections between the individual, institutional, and systemic levels is the ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1977), which is referenced in social work (Besthorn & McMillen, 2002; Mandell, 2008; Ungar, 2002) as well as childcare and youth-care literature (Espelage, 2014; Larson et al., 2009; White, 2007). The ecological model outlines the systemic (macro) level, the institutional (meso) level, and the individual (micro) level. This is a dynamic model where individuals affect the macro level and are in turn affected by systemic phenomena such as policies and laws (Bronfenbrenner, 1977).

Several authors have described the ecological model of youth work as a process of navigating tensions (Larson, et al., 2009; Mandell, 2008; Tummers et al., 2009). These tensions or conflicting demands can occur between policy rules, professional codes, personal values, and the needs of people accessing services (Tummers et al., 2015). Larson and colleagues (2009) provided the example of youth workers debating how to provide a safe and inclusive space for youth who are part of rival gangs in the community. Mandell (2008) identified the ever-present tension between care and control that shapes the youth work role. Ecological reasoning involves navigating the intersections of the systems, institutions, and individuals (Larson et al. 2009). Larson and colleagues (2009) suggested that one way to collect this kind of expertise is to listen to youth who have experience navigating these systems.

When I began my social work education in Canada in the early 2000s, the profession was presented as holistic because problem identification included the meso and macro levels (Westhues, Lafrance, & Schmidt, 2001). An example of this would be including experiences with oppression such as racism, or assessing the adequacy of government social supports when



designing policies that address homelessness, rather than limiting analysis to individual factors such as job searching or budgeting skills. Youth work and social work both claim to be holistic professions under this definition of including the individual and systemic variables in assessments of the problem (Phelan, 2005). Nissen (2004) defined social work as the link between the individual and the macro levels, where society is framed as the source of social problems. Lavie-Ajayi and Krumer-Nevo (2013) described this holism as the link between personal attributes and social ills, with child and youth care seeking the improvement of youth well-being along with the reformation of social structures and institutions.

As introduced earlier in this theory chapter, both critical social work and critical youth work strive for the development of consciousness about the role of oppression in our lives, as this awareness leads to individual and collective social action (Lavie-Ajayi & Krumer-Nevo, 2013; Mandell, 2008; Sakamoto & Pitner, 2005). Critical theory includes power analysis and the pursuit of social justice (Lavie-Ajayi & Krumer-Nevo, 2013), and it aids in explaining how inequality and injustice are the root of personal problems (Mandell, 2008). Self-reflection allows us to identify possibilities for resistance and to navigate our subjective power (Heron, 2005).

The holistic approach of social work was a draw for me in my decision to enter the profession, because holism aligns with my critical feminist and participatory principles that guide me in linking the personal with the professional, the micro with the macro, and the individual with the collective levels (Mandell, 2008). I agree with Reason (2005) in my identification of healing these rifts as the goal of inquiry and education. My social work is holistic enough to include the Earth in the assessment of social justice (Dominelli, 2012).

I align with Mandell (2008) and Nissen (2004) in my view of “opposites” as inseparable and my belief that power cannot be removed from the analysis. Youth work is a process of

political socialization (Coussée, Roets, & De Bie, 2009), and workers are navigating care and control occurring in the same relationship (Mandell, 2008); this requires awareness of macro factors such as differences in social power, otherwise we run the risk that Margolin (1997) identified, of social workers building trust with youth and then using this trust to exert power over people accessing services, while reinforcing unequal power distribution in society. I agree that caring professions are at risk of reproducing social injustice and silencing suffering, particularly when our role in social control is ignored (Coussée, Roets, & De Bie, 2009). When I teach, I explain this concept as giving marginalized people just enough basic-needs items, such as sandwiches, so that no one asks why people would need sandwiches in one of the richest places in the world or riot when they find out the answer.

**Reflective practitioners.** When authority and care are combined, as in youth and social work, reflection is necessary as the personal and professional cannot be separated (Mandell, 2008). Reflection can get us unstuck when theory obscures some possibilities and can generate new actions to try (Mandell, 2008; Newbury, 2011). If critical reflection is not maintained, this work can reinforce oppression (Coussée, Roets & De Bie, 2009). As Larson and colleagues (2009) explained, each worker and each youth brings their own experiences, emotions, and ideas to the group. Since quality youth work depends on a worker's abilities when "shaping and responding to diverse events and situations that arise in their interactions with youth" (p. 72), reflection is required in order to navigate the tensions that arise in these relationships and the pursuit of goals in the systems described above (Larson et al., 2009).

Child and youth care (Phelan, 2005) and social work (Fook, 2007; Healy, 2001; Mandell, 2008) have as the goal of their education systems the creation of reflective practitioners. Phelan (2005) described the process of being a reflective worker as a responsibility to stay informed and

as a “way of being present” (p. 354). Mandell (2008) argued for the need to link professional self-awareness to the goal of social justice in order to retain the relevance to ethical relationship-based practice. Through reflection, the worker can examine the role of power in the working relationship, and develop critical consciousness so that they reduce duplicating the oppressive status quo at the individual, institutional, and systemic levels (Mandell, 2008). An important part of self-awareness is problematizing the profession of social work and examining the ways that our professional systems and actions can be oppressive through “the reproduction of unjust relations of domination” (Mandell, 2008, p. 237).

The areas of difference that I identify between social work and youth work are based on generalizations, and the ways that these professions are actually practiced are quite variable due to the influence of the theoretical orientation of the person doing the work of the profession, as I illustrated in the example about how I would practice police work differently because of my theoretical orientation. Now I will present three areas where these two professions differ: in valuing eclectic knowledge sources versus valuing specialized knowledge, in the expert versus peer approaches, and in the resultant difference in the amount of legitimacy granted the profession at the social level.

As an example of the impact of theoretical framework, a worker who has a positivist approach to practice would most likely prefer a specialized knowledge base, as this knowledge would be defined as quality due to having less variability and fitting with their idea of there being one objective, and knowable truth. In contrast, a worker with a participatory worldview, such as myself, would most likely err on the side of valuing diverse sources of knowledge, reflecting our belief that everyone knows something and that much can be learned through the confrontation between diverse ideas (Pini, 2002; Reason, 2006; Skolimowski, 1994). These

differences in theoretical framework strongly influence how an individual might interpret the goals of their profession and what constitutes ethical practice or appropriate boundaries (Mandell, 2008). I stress this point because there are positivist social workers who do not agree with the high value that I place on eclectic knowledge sources, and there are participatory youth workers who incorporate eclectic knowledge sources into their practice and strongly disagree with the idea of there being one knowable truth.

**Eclectic versus specialized knowledge sources.** Phelan (2005) argued that the use of social work textbooks in the teaching of child and youth care reinforces the positioning of child and youth care as a subset of other disciplines and “diminishes our academic integrity” (p. 349). Bessant (2007) agreed that child and youth care has a unique body of knowledge and that workers have specialist skills. In contrast, social work prides itself on collecting knowledge from diverse sources and then applying this knowledge under the values of social work. As Nissen (2004) explained, “social work can use knowledge from fields such as medicine or education, as long as this knowledge is applied in the pursuit of social justice” (p. 77). Even though I present this as a difference between the professions, keep in mind that this difference is not clear-cut. This diversity of opinions within the professions means that some social workers advocate for professional knowledge to become more specialized, and some childcare and youth-care scholars advocate applying an eclectic knowledge under the principles of child and youth care.

**The expert versus peer approaches.** Phelan (2005) argued that youth workers reject professionalism, with its reinforcement of class division, in order to align with youth that they work with—for example, by wearing clothes that are more similar to youth’ style of dress than to other professionals’. Coussée, Roets, and De Bie (2009) emphasized that youth work is intimate work requiring the negotiation of complex boundaries between the personal and professional

realms; for example, youth workers may see youth that they know from work at social justice protests in the community. Relationships with adults are seen as valuable resources that can enhance the social capital of youth and provide access to resources, information, support, and encouragement (Lavie-Ajayi & Krumer-Nevo, 2013).

Both Larson and colleagues (2009) and Phelan (2005) agreed that in child and youth care, relationships are formed through problem solving in the real world, which Phelan (2005) presented in contrast with clinical social work, as youth work is “not quietly reflecting while sitting in a chair and working in a more antiseptic environment” (p. 351). Phelan (2005) identified the professional distance required by one-on-one counselling to be detrimental to effective youth work. Additionally, external control creates safety for the worker but hinders youth development goals by limiting the youth’s autonomy (Phelan, 2005).

I agree with this in my practice. I was once offered a choice between a counselling position and a front-line job in an adults’ homeless shelter, and I chose the front-line job where I would be making and serving food with the people staying in the shelter. I explained this choice by saying that I had to live with them first if I expected them to be able to be vulnerable with me. The reason that the professional distance negatively affects the therapeutic relationship is because it is difficult to build trust when one person is in a surveillance role, or even a gatekeeping role between people and basic-needs services, such as food or shelter. Just take a moment, dear reader, to contemplate your ability to trust someone who has the power to apprehend your children. Would you be honest with this person about any difficulties that you might be having with parenting? We know how I feel from the Plexiglas story that I told near the beginning of this journey we are on together. Margolin (1997) referred to this concept as the “fiction of voluntariness” (p. 128).

Some social work scholars agree with Phelan's (2005) goal of reducing the distance between workers and people accessing services, such as Mandell (2008), who cited Heron (2005), who had defined critical social work as "a refusal of/opposition to the interlocking relations of power that pervade social worker encounters with clients" (p. 341). Mandell (2008) advocated working collaboratively rather than from an expert stance because this challenges dominant discourses and oppressive structures. Nissen (2004) was another social worker who advocated using informal power to check professional power and who presented a model of a power that could challenge social work's "idealistic self-image" (p. 79).

Unfortunately (according to my values), the distance between workers and people accessing services is generally increasing; this shift is partially due to the increase in professionalization and changes to education in both professions (Giroux & Schmidt, 2004). Both social work (Harlow, 2004; Hunter, 2003; Marston, 2000; Reutter & Duncan, 2002) and child and youth care (Bessant, 2007; Coussée, Roets & De Bie, 2009) are experiencing a neoliberal shift whereby problems are individualized rather than collectivized, and support for collective action is no longer seen as the goal of youth work (Giroux & Schmidt, 2004).

**Social legitimacy of the profession.** In theory, the general legitimacy of non-profit organizations depends on how front-line workers treat the people accessing services (Tummers et al., 2015). I would argue that evaluations of services from the people accessing those services are not readily available for members of the public. This is due to the fact that social workers generally have a much stronger voice in shaping public discourse about services than do the people accessing these services (Margolin, 1997). Both professions are marginalized because they provide care work, which is undervalued in a positivist and patriarchal society (Coussée, Roets, & De Bie, 2009). The gendered context wherein front-line workers are more likely to be

women and policy writers are more likely to be men (Harlow, 2004; McPhail, 2003) further marginalizes both professions. Social work has been engaged in its professionalization process for more time than child and youth care; as a result, social work enjoys more social legitimacy in instances such as testifying in court or commenting on social policy.

The way that youth workers distance themselves from other professionals affects the perceived legitimacy of the profession (Phelan, 2005). Workers navigate the tension between aligning with youth and accessing professional power in the service of youth (Coussée, Roets, & De Bie, 2009; Lavie-Ajayi & Krumer-Nevo, 2013; Phelan, 2005). For example, youth workers will sometimes use the jargon from other professions in order to build professional alliances, which increase their perceived legitimacy as professionals (Phelan, 2005). Youth workers distance themselves from professionals who reinforce the deficit narrative about youth, while using their professional legitimacy and access to professional spaces in order to advocate for the counter-narrative of systemic oppression (Lavie-Ajayi & Krumer-Nevo, 2013).

When youth workers align with other professions, they are seen by youth as being part of the oppressive authoritarian system that they navigate for services (Coussée, Roets, & De Bie, 2009; Lavie-Ajayi & Krumer-Nevo, 2013). As Lavie-Ajayi and Krumer-Nevo (2013) stated, youth workers are “in the difficult position of being at the very same time both within and in opposition to the established institutions and structures” (p. 1703). In other words, being perceived as a professional can interfere with relationship building between youth and youth workers, the main professional goal of youth work (Coussée, Roets, & De Bie, 2009). In my reflections about the Immersion phase of this research I will share some stories about taking off my staff vest, stories that demonstrate my tendency to value how the people accessing services perceive me over how other professionals perceive me. This is a strategy that has unique benefits

and risks; however, because of my participatory worldview, I feel that I am ethically accountable first to the people most affected by my work. When I teach, I feel accountability first to the students, and then to the institution employing me.

This concludes the theoretical approaches to methodology chapter, where I explored how I interpreted critical intersectional participatory feminist theory and how this theory was applied in the research, through methods such as reflection and consciousness-raising. In the next chapter, I will examine the knowledge from the literature about the research topics and contexts. If you are ready, dear reader, we will leap into what the literature knows about front-line workers and their involvement with policy work. I promise that eventually, all this theory will be balanced out with the action described in the methods and results chapters, for those readers that prefer to start their cycles of reflection and action with ACTION.



### Chapter Three - Literature Review

Dear reader, the process of conducting a literature review is an important contributor to the quality of the final result. In this assessment process, I chose literature that contained the direct voices of front-line workers or youth experiencing homelessness, as appropriate. I strove to find examples that were as local as possible, which outlined the context in which the research took place. In order to present the results from other people's studies, I had to assess the quality of the research and ask myself why I trusted these results. I also had to ask myself whether I was misinterpreting any results—for example, presenting correlation as causality or presenting research done with one group of people as representative of another group.

The review of the literature is an ever-shifting process. Over the years that I have been in the doctoral program, there have been rapid developments in practice, including research. For example, how we collect statistics about the experience of homelessness has become more standardized across Canada, partially due to the growth of organizations such as the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness [CAEH] and the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness [COH] (CAEH, 2016; COH, 2016). This standardization has enabled better comparison between contexts, which can assist us in identifying variables that contribute to homelessness, however standardization can also obscure homelessness such as people staying in hotels or their cars, people who are experiencing homelessness but would not be included in the counts. Also, in North America there is a rising awareness and critique of trauma-informed care (Baker et al., 2015; Hopper, Bassuk & Olivet, 2010; Jacobowitz et al., 2015; McKenzie-Mohr, Coates, & McLeod, 2015), and we have deepened our understanding of front-line implementation since Lipsky (1980) to include how frustrations with the system are passed on, through various forms of violence, to people accessing services (Tummers et al., 2015). I have updated the literature

review to include research that I read after the initial research proposal; however, some of that research appears solely in the discussion chapter because I read this literature in response to themes that emerged from my research results.

Now I will begin the review of the literature with the broad subject of the involvement of front-line workers in policy work. Multiple benefits for front-line youth workers engaging in policy work have been identified, including: reduced feelings of helplessness (Weiss-Gal & Peled, 2009) and burnout (Hamama, 2012; Harlow, 2004) among human service workers (Heinze, 2013; Ruff & Baron, 2012); policy which is more likely to be adopted in practice (Barkham & Mellor-Clark, 2003), and, importantly, improving outcomes by focusing on environmental influences (Heinze, 2013; Newbury, 2011; Ruff & Baron, 2012).

Front-line workers observe the effects of policies on the people with whom they work and are responsible for implementing policy changes (including cuts to services), yet they are infrequently involved in developing policy (Jones & Salmon, 2001). A limited body of research has examined the role of front-line workers in policy creation and identified barriers and facilitators for youth workers engaging in policy work, although it has been recommended that front-line service personnel work in parallel with policy developers (Cabinet Office of the UK, 2009).

In this chapter, I present an eclectic collection of literature from professions including nursing, child and youth care, social work, and psychology. I identify this diverse analysis of front-line issues, such as burnout—a concept defined in this chapter—as a strength because I view different perspectives as complementary to each other. At times, it was difficult to locate literature specifically about social work with homeless youth in Canada. Although there is a wealth of research about front-line workers, there is less research specifically about front-line

youth workers. I have provided additional information as we go along to explain my appraisal process when choosing literature for this review.

In the next section, I will explore how policy work interacts with the front-line context, then the barriers and benefits of front-line workers engaging in policy work, followed by how homelessness is defined as a social problem and the specific context of youth experiencing homelessness. Subsequently, I will provide background on two policies that pertain to the research, and define practice terms, such as strength-based work. Hang on, dear reader, while we dive into what the academic resources have to teach us about youth homelessness and the context of front-line workers!

### **The Context of Front-Line Workers and Policy**

Policy implementation, defined as putting policies into action and evaluating the impact of these policies in practice (O'Toole, 2000), is primarily the work of front-line workers who are “inextricably engaged both as subjects and agents in the policy process” (Jones & Salmon, 2001, p. 68). Front-line workers, or “street level bureaucrats” (Lipsky, 1980), have discretion in how policies are implemented as a consequence of their knowledge of local contexts as well as their informal, professional, and personal resources (Durose, 2009). In addition, they are often required to “balance the demands of policy implementation with the priorities of the communities that they work within” (Durose, 2009, p. 36). Lipsky (1980) introduced the idea of coping in the context of front-line work, defined as how workers navigate tensions between various stakeholders in public policy. In the discussion chapter, I will provide a review (Tummers et al., 2015) of recent developments in our understanding of implementation in the context of front-line work.

I began by introducing you to Lipsky (1980) who wrote a seminal work about front line workers and the influence of their implementation role in policy work. Tummers and colleagues (2015) offer a review of research that has built on the foundation of Lipsky (1980). Durose as well as Jones and Salmon (2001) approach policy from a participatory perspective. Durose (2009) provides a story of how front line workers navigate policy work in their own words, which I found valuable in informing the design of my research. Durose (2009) values front line workers' "local knowledge" (p. 35) and provides a case study to illustrate the tensions that front line workers face when engaging in policy work. The main source of data were interviews with 45 front line workers from community development teams (Durose, 2009). Jones and Salmon (2001) collected reflections from 56 university students who are interdisciplinary professionals, including social workers and youth workers. This research was valuable to the development of my study because it specifically examined how front line workers perceived their involvement in policy work. They introduced me to the idea of "policy literacy" or front line workers' comfort in engaging in policy work (Jones & Salmon, 2001). One limitation of both Durose (2009) as well as Jones and Salmon (2001) is that their research was conducted in a different context from mine, in the United Kingdom, although there are similarities with the North American context, such as the shift in discretion that has been experienced by front line workers.

Front-line workers are also among the few who directly "bear witness to how the broader conditions of public life influence people's lives and health . . . , which clarifies both the immediacy and the urgency of a social mandate to engage in public policy reform" (Reutter & Duncan, 2002, p. 303). Yet, they experience "marginality to key decision making processes" (Durose, 2009, p. 75). This lack of control combined with witnessing negative consequences of policy implementation in practice can create a feeling of helplessness among social workers and

other human service workers (Weiss-Gal & Peled, 2009). Reutter and Duncan (2002) present their research with preparing nursing students for policy work within the specific context of Alberta. Weiss-Gal and Peled (2009) present findings from 26 graduate social work students in Israel. It was useful to my dissertation research to see policy advocacy framed as part of professional work in these very different settings.

Front-line workers have experienced a loss in discretion over the past 50 years as a consequence of the change from a relationship-based approach to a management approach of delivering services (Harlow, 2004; Spratt & Houston, 1999) and an increasingly market view of social services and evidence-based practice that assumes rational choice (Harlow, 2004; Hunter, 2003; Marston, 2000; Reutter & Duncan, 2002). This shift (Bessant, 2007; Coussée, Roets & De Bie, 2009) has prioritized brief and short-term interventions resulting in “high turnover and vacancy rates contributing to poor services and higher stress” (Harlow, 2004, p. 171).

Harlow (2004) provides a feminist perspective on care work, making gender visible in this context that is important in order to align with my theoretical approaches. Similarly Spratt and Houston (1999) advocate for critical social work practice that strives to make power and assumptions visible. On the practical application end, Bessant (2007) and Coussée, Roets and De Bie (2009) offer a critical youth work perspective with examples of what critical youth work looks like in practice from Australia and Belgium. Marston (2000) provides an example of applying critical discourse analysis to a housing policy problem, which assisted me with integrating my theory into my research design. Reading articles about critical theory from diverse professional and geographic locations allowed me to develop an eclectic knowledge base from which to develop my research.

As a result of local experiential knowledge being devalued, accompanied by the increased hegemony of professionalism and expert knowledge, workers have experienced a “massive sense of fraudulence, and a disbelief in personal adequacy” (Rossiter, 1997, p. 32). However, reducing social workers’ sense of powerlessness not only helps them to apply their critical consciousness to working towards social justice, but also reduces the inequality of power in the service relationship, contributing to the empowerment of the worker as well as the person accessing services (Sakamoto & Pitner, 2005).

Rossiter (1997) advocates for critical social work and presents reflections from the perspective of a critical social worker. I found this work invaluable in examining how professional power is navigated by social workers. Sakamoto and Pitner (2005) provide a North American perspective about challenging the power dynamic between social workers and people accessing services. They provide examples of how the development of critical consciousness can contribute to reflective critical social work practice, which I found very useful when I was facilitating the focus groups in my dissertation research (Sakamoto & Pitner, 2005).

**Why and how to engage front-line workers in policy work.** There are multiple benefits to engaging front-line workers in policy analysis; unfortunately, front-line workers also face barriers in terms of their access to influence over policy. Front-line workers’ involvement in policy work is limited by scarcity of time (Baumbusch et al., 2008; Holtrop, Price, & Boardley, 2000; Spence, 2010) in the context of expanding caseloads (Fook, 2002, 2003; Fuller & Petch, 1995; Tummers et al., 2015), frustration with the process of developing policy (Holtrop et al., 2000), staff turnover, and shift work (Baumbusch et al., 2008). Further, front-line workers lack discretion and authority at the policy level (Smith & Hallberg, 2013) and are thus limited in their ability to innovate and recommend systemic changes (Cabinet Office of the UK, 2009).

Baumbusch and colleagues (2008) present a participatory approach to knowledge translation that was used in the context of front line nursing practice in Canada. Holtrop, Price and Boardley (2000) conducted research with 356 health educators in order to examine through regression analysis the relationship between self-efficacy and involvement in policy work. This work represented an important contribution from quantitative research, which helped to illustrate barriers and benefits to engaging in policy work, despite examining a different context than front line work.

Spence (2010) provides insight into the specific context of youth work with their research which describes tensions between policies and outreach youth work. This research project had many phases and different sources of data collection, which contributed to the research's trustworthiness. To begin this research 564 youth work projects returned a survey, then a typology was created and used to select 31 workers who participated in telephone interviews, finally an in-depth participant observational study was conducted at 11 of these projects (Spence, 2010). Fuller and Petch (1995) approach from an organizational perspective with their work examining the difference made by how social work teams are organized in Scotland. I learned a lot from how Fuller and Petch (1995) navigated the methodological challenges in their work comparing four teams who all worked with the same population. Fook (2003) offers a critical social work perspective from Australia, where theorizing from practice is encouraged.

The challenges to engage front-line workers in policy analysis are offset by several benefits, including overcoming issues of knowledge translation and policy implementation, creating practical and applicable knowledge informed by worker experience, and developing policy skills and confidence in applying these skills for front-line workers (Cabinet Office of the UK, 2009). Through this process, front-line workers also gain a heightened sense of meaning

from their work, develop their relationships with each other, and experience efficacy in affecting change at the macro level (Lau, Netherland, & Haywood 2003; Weiss-Gal & Peled, 2009). In turn, these benefits reduce burnout and staff turnover, which ultimately improves outcomes for youth accessing services (Heinze, 2013; Ruff & Baron, 2012).

Lau, Netherland, and Haywood (2003) present two case studies of building the capacity for understanding youth development in youth workers and the youth themselves. This was participatory action research with front line youth workers, which was invaluable to me in terms of their advice about time as a resource when designing participatory research (Lau, Netherland & Haywood, 2003). Weiss-Gal and Peled (2009) shared their experience training social workers in policy advocacy in a graduate course in Tel Aviv. In this research 26 students discussed their feelings about participating in policy advocacy, and recommendations for how to facilitate this kind of engagement were identified (Weiss-Gal & Peled, 2009). It was intriguing to me that students identified the need for emotional support in their engagement with policy advocacy (Weiss-Gal & Peled, 2009); this influenced the way that I framed my role as a facilitator of participatory research. Ruff and Baron (2012) offer a practical view of how critical theory is applied in youth work context with their relationship-based work with youth. Heinze (2013) offers more knowledge that is pertinent to the context of youth experiencing homelessness with their work identifying individual and environmental factors that contribute to youth development in the setting of a homeless shelter. In this research, 82 youth completed a series of developmental scales in order to compare their results at admission and discharge from the shelter (Heinze, 2013).

In policy research, the involvement of participants with knowledge of the local context adds to the practical relevance of the knowledge produced (Barkham & Mellor-Clark, 2003;



Durose, 2009; Fox, 2003; Kothari et al., 2012) and results in decisions that are more likely to be effective due to workers' motivation to improve practice (Cabinet Office of the UK, 2009; Fox, 2003; Papdopoulos & Warin, 2007). As Fox (2003) has suggested, this motivation is based on workers' perceptions of the relevance of research evidence to a particular setting, in terms of how learning can be utilized to improve practice. A reciprocal model of knowledge translation, which aims to engage participants who are normally excluded from the policy process, increases the likelihood of knowledge being incorporated into practice (Bradbury Huang, 2010; Healy, 2001; Rolfe, 1996).

Practice-based evidence, such as that provided by front-line workers, is concerned both the effectiveness of interventions and the ways to disseminate and implement research-based treatments and services (Barkham & Mellor-Clark, 2003). Weiss-Gal and Peled (2009) have contended that "what front line workers hear and see in their work—[is] an important and valid way of knowing" (p. 372). Chilvers (2008) and Durose (2009) echoed the need to include practice-based knowing as a knowledge source in policy analysis, to complement scientific theory. Thus, policy development should ensure that practice-based evidence about local context and practice conditions have been taken into account (Cabinet Office of the UK, 2009).

Barkham and Mellor-Clark (2003) approach from the context of psychology and advocate a balance between practice-based evidence and evidence-based practice. Papdopoulos and Warin (2007) examine if participatory processes are making policy more democratic. Their examination of decision making processes with the goal of democratizing these processes assisted me in facilitating the discussions during my dissertation research. Durose (2009) interviewed 45 front line workers as one source of data for her ethnographic approach to understanding how workers themselves describe their front line experiences.

Personal benefits for front-line workers involved in policy analysis include empowerment as well as “an ability to influence things on a macro level and perhaps to contribute to some kind of social change” (Weiss-Gal & Peled, 2009, p. 378). Durose (2009) suggested that “political literacy,” defined as “the confidence to engage with organizational directives and preparedness to address power inequalities in the work place,” is also a benefit of this form of engagement (p. 71). The reflections Durose (2009) shares about her research design and the conceptual definition of ‘front line workers’ were as useful to my process of designing my dissertation research as the results of this research.

Outcomes for youth are strongly influenced by the quality and consistency of care they receive from front-line workers (Heinze, 2013; Ruff & Baron, 2012). However, the documented high rates of burnout and turnover in front-line youth work and the increased workload on the remaining staff can result in disrupted relationships and inconsistent service provision (Embree & White, 2010; Newbury, 2011; Ruff & Baron, 2012). The shortage of opportunities for front-line workers to be involved in policy analysis is one factor that has been found to contribute to turnover and burnout (Hamama, 2012; Harlow, 2004).

Hamama (2012) conducted a quantitative study about burnout with 126 social workers who work with children and youth. They used four standardized questionnaires to assess how burnout is related to demographics, social supports at work, and work conditions. This researcher used a snowball method of recruitment and had a 75% return rate (Hamama, 2012). To me this illustrated the power of relationships in initial engagement with research and started me thinking about how burnout appears in the context of front line youth work.

**Burnout.** Dear reader, burnout and resulting staff turnover are part of the context of front-line youth work (Newbury, 2011; Newman, 2013). Burnout is defined as a process, rather

than an event. Hamama (2015) has identified three components of burnout: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. Newbury (2011) defined burnout as being isolated or feeling alone with problems, and proposed group reflection in staff meetings as a prevention method. Initially, Freudenberger (1974) defined burnout as the inability to cope with stressors at work; since then, the definition has expanded to include the relevance of systemic factors, such as organizational context and whether there are opportunities for workers to use their professional skills in their job (Hamama, 2012).

Research into burnout in care work began in the 1980s with studies of high staff turnover (Hamama, 2012). Newbury (2011) and Newman (2013) found that most front-line workers' frustration was not due to the behaviours of individuals with whom they worked; rather, it originated in the systemic barriers to providing effective services. Reynolds (2013) stated, "the problem's not depression it's oppression," and I agree; burnout is a systemic problem caused by witnessing oppression, and the solution is to replace oppression with justice. I also believe that oppression is compounded by blaming individual front-line workers for their responses to witnessing the effects of oppression.

Newbury (2011) offers some improvements to Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological model and demonstrates how models can be applied in front line youth work. Newman (2013) examines how clinicians practice in the context of working with asylum seekers in Australia, particularly how clinicians advocate for a trauma-informed human rights approach within this context. This article is related to the context of front line work with youth experiencing homelessness because practitioners who work with these youth also need to confront that they are working clinically with people who are currently experiencing trauma.

Staff frustration with systemic barriers and external pressures such as budget cuts can result in conflictual relationships between workers and people accessing services as well as contribute to bidirectional attitudes of blame or scapegoating (Brody & Phelps, 2013; Lavie-Ajayi & Krummer-Nevo, 2013; Newman, 2013; Rossiter, 1997). This pressure can also lead to lateral violence, which arises from the experience of being oppressed (Freire, 1970) and “occurs when oppressed groups/individuals internalize feelings such as anger and rage and then manifest these feelings through behaviours such as gossip, jealousy, putdowns, and blaming” (Embree & White, 2010, p. 167). When expressed between workers, lateral oppression can reinforce the development of authoritarian workplace cultures (Brody & Phelps, 2013), which can, in turn, contribute to higher rates of worker turnover and burnout (Embree & White, 2010; Hamama, 2012; Harlow, 2004). The consequences of lateral violence between professionals include low self-esteem, depression, self-hatred, negative outcomes for people accessing services, damaged relationships, and feelings of powerlessness (Embree & White, 2010).

In the specific context of working with youth experiencing or at risk of homelessness, the recognition of homelessness as a chronic experience of trauma (Bender, Thompson, Ferguson, Yoder, & Kern, 2013; Brody & Phelps, 2013) has important implications, as clinicians feel disempowered and deskilled when the environment an individual is in is not conducive to treatment because it is a traumatizing context (Newman, 2013). Workers who observe the negative effects of a traumatizing environment on an individual without having the power to intervene face a lack of efficacy and an ethical dilemma experienced both personally and professionally (Newman, 2013). Rossiter (1997) argued that power abuses in social work practice result from the epistemology of expertise, or the belief that one’s perspective is complete. This perspective, she asserted, blinds workers as to how services can contribute to

social control and oppression and leaves little room for the inclusion of the knowledge of the people accessing services in defining problems and solutions.

Brody and Phelps (2013) present evidence of the harms caused by stigmatizing systems of care, with a focus on the mental health system in the United States. Lavie-Ajayi and Krummer-Nevo (2013) examine an innovative theory-based practice model in Israel of structural youth work focused on working for social justice. This model was evaluated between 2009-2012 using mixed methods, with data collection methods including 94 interviews with front-line youth workers and 10 participant observations in team meetings and trainings (Lavie-Ajayi & Krummer-Nevo, 2013). Embree and White (2010) conducted an extensive review of the literature about lateral violence between nurses. They used an analysis created by Walker and Avant (2005) to create a conceptual map in order to identify recommendations for future research and practice implications (Embree & White, 2010). As someone unfamiliar with the ways that lateral violence is defined in nursing, I found this resource very useful.

Examining homelessness from the macro policy level perspective shifts the focus from the individual to systemic causes and contexts. Such analysis can bring new insights and prevent burnout, a consequence of the frustrating feeling of “spinning our wheels,” through revealing prospects for novel actions from different perspectives (Newbury, 2011, p. 103). For front-line workers, for example, the lack of knowledge about how to gain power and experience efficacy can lead to feelings of frustration and ultimately disempower the worker (Gutiérrez, 1990; Sakamoto & Pilner, 2005). Meaning derived from practice, support from professional colleagues, as well as the chance to experience efficacy at the macro level are protective factors against burnout and turnover, which, in turn, improves outcomes for youth accessing services (Hamama, 2012). In a study of the self-reported benefits of participation in policy analysis for health

educators, Holtrop and colleagues (2000) found improved health of the public (86%), improved situation or issue (80%), and making a difference in others' lives (73%).

Hamama (2012) examined three components of burnout experienced by social workers working with children and youth: 1) emotional exhaustion; 2) depersonalization; and 3) reduced personal accomplishment or "the diminution of self-esteem and ambition" (p. 114). Study participants reported moderate levels of burnout, which the researcher attributed to the protective nature of the meaning gained from youth work. In addition, having a community of other professionals to discuss work experiences with, such as supervisors and colleagues, explained a large amount of the variance in the burnout intensity experienced by newer social workers. The researcher hypothesized that this variance may be linked to professional self-confidence and self-esteem gained through supervision.

Engagement in policy work leads to increased confidence in applying policy skills as well as increased engagement in this kind of practice (Weiss-Gal & Peled, 2009). Increased engagement is important because many social workers feel powerless, voiceless, and as if they are unable to affect social realities, which contributes to burnout (Fook, 2002; Weiss-Gal & Peled, 2009). Front-line workers are uniquely situated in their ability to observe social problems and the effects of policies in their daily practice. Missing, however, is the capacity to bring this unique knowledge to the attention of the public and policy makers (Ruch, 2002; Weiss-Gal & Peled, 2009). Examination of systemic and macro-level structures is vital to improving practice (Etherington, 2007; Newbury, 2011). Critical policy analysis offers the opportunity to examine and recognize "how much structural change is required to make this a society that values all people" (McPhail, 2003, p. 58).

In order to prevent burnout, Hare-Mustin (1978) identified a need for front-line workers to be exposed to role models, which could be fulfilled through the development of a non-hierarchical community of practice. Generating opportunities for front-line workers to talk and learn together may increase the sustainability of their involvement in working on the issue of homelessness at both the micro and macro levels (Gutiérrez, 1990; Sakamoto & Pilner, 2005). At the very least, building a community of front-line workers will mitigate against the feeling of being alone with these overwhelming systemic problems (Newbury, 2011).

This concludes our exploration of the context of front-line workers. In the next section of the literature review, we will examine how homelessness is defined as a social problem.

### **Homelessness**

How social problems are defined and how issues make it to the policy agenda shape the power dynamics of policy debates (Oliver, 2002). Whether homelessness is defined as an individual failure or a systemic social issue, as well as how we understand the causes and consequences of homelessness, dictate how we propose to solve this problem. In this section, we will explore how homelessness is constructed as a social problem, including identifying contributors to youth homelessness and youth strengths, as well as how this information applies to engaging in relationship-based work with youth.

**Scope of the problem.** Graham, Swift, and Delaney (2012) argue that “all social problems are a result of flawed policy” (p. 182). I appreciate the boldness of this statement because it draws attention to the potential impacts of social policy on individuals and lends itself to a more rigorous accountability for policy writers about the impact of the policies that they create or alter. In the social phenomenon of “homelessness,” this link between policies and individual experiences is particularly evident; as Hulchanski (2009) stated, “homelessness is the

‘natural’ outcome of the way we have organized our housing system, and the way we allocate or fail to allocate income and support services when they are desperately needed” (p. 9).

The underlying problems that created the homelessness crisis in Canada in the first place, such as a lack of government investment in affordable housing, have not yet been sufficiently addressed (Gaetz, 2010), and a significant proportion of the population is impacted directly by homelessness. Rising inequality between the rich and the poor, as well as government supports being cut during austerity, also worsen the problem (Coussée, Roets & De Bie, 2009; Giroux & Schmidt, 2004; Harlow, 2004). Over the course of one year, an estimated 150,000 (Pye, 2008) to 300,000 (Laird, 2007a) people experience homelessness across Canada. These numbers remained relatively constant in 2016, although 82,380 people have been moved into more stable housing through the National Homelessness Partnering Strategy, which began in 2014 (CTV News, March 16, 2016).

Coussée, Roets, and De Bie (2009) explore how youth workers combat marginalization in the youth that they work with in Belgium, including the role that class plays in the interactions between youth workers and youth. I could not find a comparable class analysis originating in North American context. Gaetz (2010, 2012) is a Canadian researcher with the National Observatory on Homelessness [COH], who advocates for the idea of housing as a human right.

It is important to note that Calgary has a much higher unemployment rate (Johnson, 2016) and homelessness rate (CHF, 2015) than Edmonton. In fact, 53% of the total number of people identified as homeless in the point-in-time count in Alberta were experiencing homelessness in Calgary (CHF, 2015). This compares to 2,252 people in Edmonton experiencing homelessness during the same time, representing 33% of the provincial total of the seven largest cities (Homeward Trust Edmonton, 2015). Calgary is currently experiencing a 10.2%



unemployment rate, compared to the national average of 8.5 percent (Johnson, 2016). Despite having the same unemployment rate as Calgary just two years ago, Edmonton now has an unemployment rate of 6.9 percent (Johnson, 2016). The difference in these statistics illustrates the importance of taking systemic variables into account when examining the scope of homelessness across different contexts. In this example, Edmonton is the capital city of the province of Alberta, and as such, this city has more public service jobs than Calgary, so even in a recession they tend to have a lower unemployment rate than Calgary (Johnson, 2016).

Due to their age, inadequate life skills, and lack of employment experience, youth are one of the most vulnerable groups in the homeless population (United Way of Calgary and Area, 2013a). In 2008, a survey found 481 youth between the ages of 13 and 24 living on Calgary's streets (United Way of Calgary and Area, 2013a). In 2014, a point-in-time count of people experiencing homelessness in Calgary found 364 youth and 211 families with 329 children (CBC news, November 21, 2014). Overall, the rate of homelessness was reduced by two percent since 2008, which was framed as a victory by the Calgary Homeless Foundation because of the rate at which our population increased and our economy declined during the same time period (CBC news, November 21, 2014).

**Homelessness defined as a social problem.** Gaetz (2010) and Hulchanski (2009) have asserted that the homelessness crisis was created primarily through policy decisions. As Gaetz (2010) explained, over the past 50 years there have been a “number of significant structural changes in the economy, and more significantly, shifts in government policy have led to a cut in support for low-income individuals and families, and a reduction in the affordable housing stock” (p. 21). Examples of structural issues related to homelessness include low vacancy rates

for affordable housing, unemployment rates, as well as insufficient government income support requirements and amounts (Buckner, 2008; Zerger, Strehlow, & Gundlapalli, 2008).

In Canada from 1930 to 1945, very little new housing was built, and many people were “living in poor-quality, aging, and overcrowded housing, often in rundown neighbourhoods” (Hulchanski, 2009, p. 2). After 1945, a shift in policy occurred such that “people who needed to be protected during difficult economic times and supported in ill health and old age received the assistance they needed” (Hulchanski, 2009, p. 3). About 20,000 social housing units were created every year following 1973 (Hulchanski, 2009), which included cooperative housing arrangements and government-sponsored mortgages (Gaetz, 2010).

In the 1980s, policy shifted and was predicated on a trickle-down theory of economics based on the assumption that reducing taxes for the wealthy, particularly for corporations, would stimulate production in the economy and eventually benefit the most vulnerable (Amadeo, 2013). It was also during this time that the word “homelessness” came into common use in developed countries “to refer to the problem of de-housing—the fact that an increasing number of people who were once housed in these wealthy countries were no longer housed” (Hulchanski, 2009, p. 2). The initial cutbacks in social housing and related programs began in 1984 (Hulchanski, 2009) and were deepened in the 1990s, with drastic cuts to social services occurring in Alberta and at the federal level in order to balance government budgets. In 1996, responsibility for social housing was transferred from the federal to the provincial governments, leaving Canada alone among developed nations in not having a fully funded national commitment to housing (Gaetz, 2010; Hulchanski, 2009). These cuts had a profound and disproportionate impact on low-income earning populations, including single-parent women, visible minorities, and new Canadians (Gaetz, 2010). Youth experiencing homelessness often originate in families such as those

described by Gaetz (2010), and intergenerational poverty has been identified as a key risk factor for youth homelessness (Jackson & Hojer, 2013).

Buckner (2008) is an American researcher who systematically compared research studies conducted in the United States between 1987-2005 about the negative effects of poverty and homelessness on children. I learned a lot from how Buckner (2008) challenged assumptions made by previous researchers, including himself. In his review Buckner (2008) identifies poverty as a covalent variable in many of the studies, leading to a recommendation for further research informed by this new knowledge. Buckner's (2008) critique of his earlier research studies helped me to understand the risks of assumptions and the difficulty of separating variables of influence, especially in quantitative control group studies, where researchers might assume that they have more control. Reading this paper changed my front line practice and the way that I teach about homelessness because in terms of prevention these findings forced me to acknowledge that even if we end homelessness, we will still have children experiencing similar negative outcomes due to their experiences with chronic poverty. For example, my practice shifted focus in order to work on addressing intergenerational poverty so as to prevent future generations from experiencing the negative outcomes described by Buckner (2008). Zerger and colleagues (2008) also present a review of the American literature and offer a critique about how the focus on individual risk factors ignores homeless youth's experience with systemic oppression.

Calgary saw its homeless population grow by 650% between 1997 and 2007 (Gaetz, 2010, p. 24). After the flood in June 2013, Calgary's vacancy rate was 1.2% due to the amount of housing made unlivable from the flood damage (CBC, July 16, 2013). In Calgary, a damage deposit, consisting of a full month's rent, is typically required when renting an apartment and can represent a significant structural barrier. The average cost of a two-bedroom apartment in

Calgary during October 2011 was \$1,084 (Office of Statistics and Information, Government of Canada, 2011). A person earning minimum wage in Alberta at that time (\$9.40/hour) would have had to work more than 115 hours to earn an average damage deposit of \$1,084. This represents more than two weeks of full-time work. Housing is defined as being affordable if a household spends no more than 30% of its gross income on rental payments or 32% on home ownership costs (Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation, 2013). The discrepancy between minimum wage and average housing costs is a systemic barrier for youth who are homeless, in terms of acquiring and maintaining housing, particularly when taking into account the limited job experience and education of the majority of homeless youth (Kilmer, Cook, Crusto, Strater, & Haber, 2012).

In Canada, Alberta has the highest number of employed individuals (per capita) using food banks, illustrating the presence of the working poor (Laird, 2007b). As Laird (2007b) remarked, “[t]he booming Alberta economy, combined with low vacancy rates and lack of affordable housing has created a whole new class of homeless individuals—the working poor” (p. 37). Moreover, while youth represent about 25% of Alberta’s general population, they constitute approximately 43% of food bank users (Laird, 2007b). This example demonstrates the importance of systemic factors, such as vacancy rates and wages that keep workers below the poverty line, in creating the social problem of homelessness. Currently Calgary is in economic recession, with 141,271 people, or one in five Calgarians accessing the food bank in 2015 (Calgary Food Bank, 2015). Sixty-three percent of people accessing the foodbank used these services more than once in their lifetime, suggesting ongoing struggles with meeting basic needs (Calgary Food Bank, 2015).

Research and practice has often framed homelessness as an individualized problem, focusing on individual risk and protective factors without taking into account the environmental context or systemic forces at play (Etherington, 2007; Padgett, Smith, Henwood, & Tiderington, 2012). In the words of Hulchanski (2009), “it is simpler and cheaper to blame people for their personal failures. We all have our personal failures. But only for some does it mean finding themselves and their families un-housed” (p. 6).

Kilmer and colleagues (2012) advocate an ecological approach to working with homeless youth and families. Etherington (2007) takes a narrative approach to understanding drug misuse and how it can impact identity in her qualitative work with eight people who had experienced childhood trauma and drug use. Both of these authors advocate for a more systemic analysis of the issue of homelessness, in contrast to defining homelessness as an individual problem.

Individual risk and protective factors for experiencing homelessness are an important aspect of understanding how to prevent and intervene when an individual is experiencing homelessness; however, they do not represent the full picture of the causes of homelessness. As Kilmer and colleagues (2012) noted, many people with substance abuse and mental illness challenges do not end up homeless, and many homeless families do not face these challenges. Jackson and Hojer (2013) found that professionals serving members of the homeless community often individualized problems and “generally attribute[d] poor progress to individual characteristics of children rather than to weakness in the system” (p. 2). Thus, front-line workers play a key role in how services respond to issues of homelessness and how policies are implemented at the front-line level.

Some researchers have responded to the limitations of this individualized frame by advocating for the need for systemic analysis and macro-level interventions to take into account

structural disadvantages such as poverty, lack of housing and jobs, and inadequate health care (Etherington, 2007; Fantuzzo, LeBoeuf, Brumley, & Perlman, 2013; Newbury, 2011; Padgett et al., 2012). Newbury (2011) posited that while interventions that focus on the environment affect outcomes for individuals, additional attention to systemic issues might be not only more effective, but also more just or ethical “in that the onus for change does not lie entirely with the child” (p. 89). In this way, policy work can be considered a preventative measure if it eliminates the need for intervention through positive shifts in the environment. As Newbury (2011) stated, interrogating policy in new ways, including what is unsaid but implied, allows us “to recognize new possibilities for action” (p. 95), attend to systemic factors such as poverty, systemic racism, and gender inequality, and address systemic issues rather than locating problems within individuals (Newbury, 2011). This macro practice of policy analysis is complementary to micro practice with individuals and contributes to individual as well as social change goals (Newbury, 2011).

**The unique context of youth homelessness.** Youth homelessness is unique because youth is a period of time when young people are securing more rights and responsibilities but still experience certain levels of dependence on adults in order to focus on their school work instead of basic survival. Young people have not had time to acquire assets such as work experience or a credit record, which makes it difficult for them to be independent (CHF, 2011). For example Kilmer and colleagues (2012) have expressed concern about the lack of a developmental lens in trauma-informed care for homeless youth. They identified a gap in developmentally informed interventions that focus on the relationship between the caregiver and the youth by supporting the developmental process of adolescents negotiating more independence in the context of family homelessness. Fantuzzo and colleagues’ (2013) research

illustrated that the developmental stage a person was in when they had their first experience with homelessness was key in future educational outcomes. They found that out of a sample of grade three cohorts ( $n = 10,639$ ), children with first homelessness experience in toddlerhood had a 60% greater chance of not meeting proficiency in mathematics compared with children whose first experience with homelessness occurred in elementary school.

In addition to the importance of adopting a developmental perspective, it is vital to recognize that youth have fewer personal assets, such as work experience and completed education, when they have experienced homelessness (CHF, 2011), and social assets, such as credit ratings, access to identification, bank accounts, or references from landlords (Pleace, 2011). Further, they have less experience with problem solving, self-regulation strategies, and life skills such as cooking, money management, and job searching (CHF, 2011). Additionally, youth face age-based oppression. For example, they often cannot participate in democratic processes such as voting, yet they still experience the consequences of policies that they have a limited ability to shape (Bessant, 2007). Youth have increased opportunities for staying with family rather than living independently and are promised protection by the province of Alberta due to their status as minors. Children are more likely than other age groups to be dependent on adults to meet their basic needs, whereas youth are beginning to express their independence as part of their developmental processes. Article 27 of the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1990), which Canada signed in 1990, declares:

3. States Parties, in accordance with national conditions and within their means, shall take appropriate measures to assist parents and others responsible for the child to implement this right and shall in case of need provide material assistance and support programmes, particularly with regard to nutrition, clothing and housing. (p. 12)

Prevention of homelessness is a priority not only because youth who are homeless experience high levels of criminal victimization, including sexual exploitation (CHF, 2011), but also because the experience of being homeless is defined as an environment of chronic trauma which can contribute to the risk of intergenerational homelessness and poor outcomes that help people cope in the context of trauma but have long-term consequences and increase the risk of further victimization (Bender et al., 2013). These outcomes include substance abuse, declining mental health, involvement with the criminal justice system, and increasing social exclusion (Bauer, Baggett, Stern, O'Connell, & Shtasel, 2013; Brown & Ziefert, 1990; Kilmer et al., 2012).

**Diverse contributors to youth homelessness.** McNaughton (2008) has divided the causes of youth homelessness into three interrelated categories. The first consists of family issues, including experiences with abuse, family member's addiction, conflict, and strained relations, which contribute to the perception that the family represents danger rather than protection. The second category is comprised of economic problems, including a lack of affordable housing and employment, inadequate government supports, insufficient wages, and over-crowding. The final category, residential instability, includes being discharged into homelessness from care, prison, or hospital, multiple institutional placements, and de-institutionalization of people with mental illness. These three categories of demonstrate the range of social policies that could prevent or contribute to youth homelessness.

McNaughton (2008) engaged 28 people with experience of homelessness in a longitudinal study. The longitudinal aspect of this study allowed McNaughton (2008) to record how participants felt after they were housed. Originally I was drawn to this article because of the term 'material marginalization' in the title, which I believe indicates a critical and systemic analysis of the issue of homelessness. McNaughton (2008) makes a strong case of the need for



longitudinal research to examine people's experiences with housing and substance abuse over time, with this study, one of the first studies to follow people over time in the United Kingdom.

Homelessness is caused by complex interactions between individual and systemic risks, as well as protective factors (Kilmer et al., 2012). Youth experiencing homelessness are a heterogeneous group with diverse paths to homelessness (Brown & Ziefert, 1990). Experience with trauma and loss at an early age is one risk factor experienced by the majority of youth who are homeless (Padgett et al., 2012). Trauma is identified as both a cause and a consequence of homelessness (Bauer et al., 2013; Bender et al., 2013; Kilmer et al., 2012), which illustrates the need for prevention and early interventions with families. It has been found that violent family environments predict the onset of polyvictimization in youth (Finkelhor, Turner, Hamby, & Ormrod, 2011; Padgett et al., 2012).

Brown and Ziefert (1990) present a feminist relationship-based approach to working with women experiencing homelessness. Padgett and colleagues (2012) compared two different treatment models in use with 225 adults experiencing homelessness and mental illness in New York city, in terms of participants alcohol and drug use. The use of drugs including alcohol were self-reported, and researchers recognize that participants may under report use when they are in a program that requires abstinence from use. Researchers used a standardized scale in order to quantify drug use so that further analysis could be done in this quantitative study (Padgett et al., 2012).

Exposure to compound trauma or polyvictimization when the individual lacks a safe environment to recover from this trauma can cause further problems and increase risk factors for prolonged experience with homelessness (Heerde & Hemphill, 2013). For example, youth can respond to early victimization by engaging in high-risk behaviours, such as substance abuse or

high-risk sexual activities, which in turn heighten exposure to high-risk environments and further victimization (Bender et al., 2013; Heinze, 2013). The consequences of homelessness include the loss of safety, security, and privacy, which creates a stressful environment that can exhaust coping mechanisms (Brown & Ziefert, 1990). Experiences with trauma negatively affect one's sense of identity through reducing social inclusion and a sense of community belonging (Brown & Ziefert, 1990). The internalization of these negative feelings is further compounded as events such as domestic violence, sexual assault, and physical violence are frequently defined by the individual experiencing these kind of harms as their own fault (Brown & Ziefert, 1990).

This isolation and rejection is experienced as demoralizing and affects one's ability to persevere (Bauer et al., 2013; Brown & Ziefert, 1990). The social stigma associated with experiencing homelessness is also received from landlords and employers in the form of disruption of connections to social relationships and institutions such as school (Jackson & Hojer, 2013; Kilmer et al., 2012). The stigma associated with homelessness exacerbates the stigma associated with other conditions related to homelessness such as poverty, identifying as LGBTQ2S+, poor school performance, and/or mental health issues, which can compound feelings of isolation and rejection (Kilmer et al., 2012).

One of the other stigma-producing conditions related to homelessness is substance abuse. Substance abuse has been identified as both a precipitating factor and a consequence of homelessness (Xiang, 2013; Zerger, 2002), which becomes important in terms of preventing further harm. Older age, a history of parental drug use, and greater emotional distress have been identified as predictive of problem drug use in homeless youth (Moskowitz, Stein, & Lightfoot, 2013), as has experiencing sexual and/or physical abuse (Brody & Phelps, 2013). Homeless youth describe substance use as a strategy for coping with extreme stress and trauma—for

example, the stimulating properties of methamphetamine can assist with survival on the streets, or marijuana can be used as a substitute for medications that youth are not able to access (Christiani, Hudson, Nyamathi, Mutere, & Sweat, 2008).

Jackson and Hojer (2013) wrote an editorial article about what they learned from conducting a research study across five countries about social exclusion and the education of children in the care of the government. I choose this article because it focuses on the mezzo level youth's relationships with society, whereas most articles focus on either the individual level or the macro level of social policy. Xiang (2013) offers a review of the literature about the effectiveness of interventions for substance use amongst homeless youth. Reviews like this remind me how difficult it is to identify an effective practice intervention due to the difficulty comparing diverse research methods and outcome measures. To me this review represents an example of the need for duplication research in order to confirm or refute initial conclusions.

Homeless youth coping strategies can be positive-effective, such as seeking care at a free clinic when sick, or negative-effective, such as shoplifting food from a convenience store (Parr, 2013). Interventions require learning about an individual's survival strategies as well as the context in which they are trying to survive, and fitting interventions into positive-effective strategies already in place (Parr, 2013). I explain this as a process of examining what people are choosing between. For example, some youth with diabetes may not have access to healthy food because of poverty, but this does not mean that these youth are making "bad choices"—it means that barriers to healthy food need to be eliminated.

Homeless youth often have a background of risk factors for maladaptive coping strategies, including behavioural, emotional, and familial problems, which can lead to self-harming and suicidal behaviours including substance abuse, suicide attempts, and involvement

with criminal activities (Moskowitz, Stein, & Lightfoot, 2013). These maladaptive coping strategies compound in further consequences, and represent barriers to accessing services and escaping homelessness (Lalonde & Nadeau, 2012; Moskowitz, Stein, Lightfoot, 2013; Ruff & Baron, 2012). Maladaptive coping strategies include denial, self-blame, and problematic drug use, as these strategies focus on avoidance rather than problem-solving (Lalonde & Nadeau, 2012). More adaptive strategies include positive reframing, acceptance, emotional support, planning, humour, instrumental support, effective social skills, and emotional regulation (Lalonde & Nadeau, 2012).

Lalonde and Nadeau (2012) conducted a quantitative study with 41 people experiencing homelessness in Montreal and examined the relationships between Posttraumatic Stress Disorder symptoms and substance abuse recovery. Although this research was not youth specific, my study was enriched by the Canadian context and the comparison opportunities resulting from half of the people in the drug treatment sample having a potential diagnosis of Posttraumatic stress disorder (Lalonde & Nadeau, 2012). Moskowitz, Stein, and Lightfoot, (2013) tested a model of stress and maladaptive behaviors with 474 homeless youth in Los Angeles County, and found the model useful in predicting self-injurious behavior and risk factors for the use of maladaptive coping strategies.

Poverty in the family-of-origin is a risk factor for experiencing homelessness because of the lack of assets for weathering emergencies and accessing opportunities; for example, families in poverty often having limited job skills and savings in the case of job loss, which can result in homelessness (Kilmer et al., 2012). Poverty interacts with other risk factors such as mental illness, in that a low-income background can hinder a person's ability to fight off the consequences of mental illness (Heerde & Hemphill, 2013; Padgett et al., 2012), or the stress

resulting from living in poverty can affect a caregiver's ability to provide supportive, consistent, and involved parenting (Cook, Crusto, Strater, & Haber, 2012; Kilmer et al., 2012). A family in poverty has fewer assets to provide for youth transitioning to independence, including social connections for job opportunities, and youth are already experiencing a deficit of assets, such as work experience (CHF, 2011).

Poverty and trauma can be reinforced over generations (Jackson & Höjer, 2013; Kilmer et al., 2012; Ruff & Baron, 2012). Harm-creating coping strategies such as problematic drug use can be passed from one generation to the next as children learn by observing how parents and caregivers cope with their own lives (Etherington, 2007). People who have experienced childhood trauma are more likely to use avoidant coping strategies such as substance abuse, which identifies the need for early intervention to prevent intergenerational experiences with trauma and homelessness (Lalonde & Nadeau, 2012). Involvement with services systems is often intergenerational; for example, youth in the care of children's services are more at risk for becoming young parents and losing custody of their children to this system (Ruff & Baron, 2012). Nurturing connections to the education system is touted as one way to break cycle of social exclusion (Jackson & Höjer, 2013)

Some of the trauma that youth experience while homeless originates with the service delivery systems; the process of accessing services influences the outcomes for youth and is equally important (Kilmer et al., 2012). The process of accessing services can contribute to fear of stigma and judgement, which is a major barrier to homeless youth accessing services (McLoughlin, 2012). As Bauer and colleagues (2013) noted, within the healthcare system, homeless people are often labelled as "non-compliant" (p. 17) for their inability to follow through on care; this is a consequence of professionals blaming individuals rather than

considering contextual factors resulting from homelessness, such as a lack of privacy and transportation, a lack of access to reliable washrooms, and inability to take medication on a schedule. From a systemic perspective, these barriers demonstrate a greater need for inpatient care, where patients would have access to basic needs such as washrooms (Bauer et al., 2013).

Youth experiencing homelessness also identify examples of how systemic failures contribute to stigma, trauma, and increased risk factors for homelessness. Brown and Ziefert (1990) described how many people experiencing homelessness felt they had been failed by a child welfare system that did not prepare them for independent living, did not identify or ignored the child abuse they experienced, and did not provide a safe and stable environment where they could heal. Problematic histories with accessing social services can represent a substantial barrier to youth' willingness to access system services (Brown & Ziefert, 1990).

In addition to stigma, trauma experienced in the process of accessing mental health services is well documented and includes: loss of control (Bauer et al., 2013; Newman, 2013); force, coercion, segregation, abuse, and neglect in the mental health system (Brody & Phelps, 2013; Reidy, 1993); infantilization, medicalization, and withdrawal of support by family; police brutality and false arrest, as well as unwarranted psychiatric detainment, harassment, and intimidation (Brody & Phelps, 2013). Other barriers to services are systemic—for example, failure to achieve cultural and linguistic competency in services, or bias against traditional healing practices, “can reinforce historical traumas of racism, heterosexism, and other oppressions” (slide 11, Brody & Phelps, 2013). To emphasize, dear reader, these are harms caused to people trying to access mental health services. “Stigma is social death” (p. 1) in the words of Reidy (1993).

**Youth strengths.** Homeless youth also possess resiliency and other strengths, such as adequate social support and adaptive coping strategies, which aid them in surviving adversity and leaving homelessness (Lalonde & Nadeau, 2012). It is vital to recognize and build on these strengths, because a “deficit-focused approach contributes to stigmatizing judgements and produces barriers to families accessing services” (Kilmer et al., 2012, p. 394). Opportunities for youth and families to be partners in developing care plans and programs can help to address the feeling of not having control over one’s life, which can originate from trauma experiences; this participation can result in feeling competent and empowered, with more belief in one’s own ability to effect change (Bender et al., 2013; Kilmer et al., 2012). Participation can aid in developing programing that is sensitive to youth needs and diverse contexts (Bender et al., 2013).

Heinze (2013) proposed assessing the developmental assets of youth who are homeless, in contrast to evaluations taking a deficit perspective. Examining developmental assets, she suggested, recognizes the importance of environmental factors in supporting positive development, factors such as supportive relationships with adults, or engagement in activities to build skills contributing to positive self-identity and social competence. Benson, Scales, and Syvertsen (2011) developed a framework of interrelated developmental assets, including external assets such as strength-building experiences and relationships within family, school, and community contexts, as well as internal assets such as the values, skills, and self-perceptions of individual youth (as cited in Heinze, 2013). Youth with more assets exhibit fewer high-risk behaviours, including substance abuse, violence, and risky sexual activity, while exhibiting more thriving behaviours such as school success, helping others, valuing diversity, and maintaining health over time (Heinze, 2013). Front-line workers are uniquely situated in their ability to assess

and aid youth in identifying and strengthening these assets. Agency and government policy can facilitate or impede this process.

**Relationship-based work with youth experiencing homelessness.** Opportunities to develop supportive therapeutic relationships with caring adults is a vital protective factor in outcomes for youth who are homeless (Heinze, 2013; Jackson & Höjer, 2013). Brown and Ziefert (1990) advocated that services for people experiencing homelessness should centre on reconnecting individuals with themselves, other people, and communities. The first step, they suggested, is to address social isolation by providing opportunities to develop a sense of belonging, to establish trust, to contribute to their communities and care for others. Through experiencing valued social roles, and using collective bonds to solve problems, individuals become agents in controlling their own story and how their identity is defined, and they are able to take the risk of reattaching to themselves as well as other people (Brown & Ziefert, 1990). Framing youth work as relationship-based is not limited to individual therapeutic relationships; rather, it requires strengthening the web of relationships that make up the ecology surrounding individuals—for example, youth’ connection to school or their opportunities to contribute positively to their communities (Heinze, 2013; Newbury, 2011).

Interventions with homeless youth require relationship-based solutions. Specifically, workers need awareness of the challenges youth face in letting their guard down and accepting help, as well as how trauma influences emotional regulation and cognitive processing (Bender et al., 2013). As Brody and Phelps (2013) have explained, working from a relationship-based perspective recognizes that the quality of outcomes is dependent on gaining trust from the people that we work with.



Ruff and Baron (2012) defined relationships as “the key mechanism of change” (p. 396) and described a specific program as a model of relationship-based care that offers support to front-line workers in order to benefit the youth under their care. Focusing on relationships, and providing interventions informed by bonding and attachment theory, could help both staff and youth, as well as break cycles of intergenerational trauma (Ruff & Baron, 2012). Based on the assumption that both youth and staff are traumatized by the lack of resources and answers, the intervention has a foundation in the theory that enhancing staff members’ sense of support, efficacy, and job satisfaction will result in better outcomes for youth (Ruff & Baron, 2012). In this way, the well-being of front-line youth workers is connected to outcomes for youth.

### **Background Concerning the Concepts and Policies Pertaining to this Research**

Dear reader, now that we have explored knowledge about youth homelessness generally, I want to provide you with some background knowledge that will assist you in understanding the specific context in which my dissertation research was conducted. Two unique policies were analyzed as part of this research, and in this section I will provide some details about the content and formation of these policies. The first of these policies is the Housing First model, a human rights-based approach to housing policy. The second of these policies is Enhancing natural supports, designed to nurture the development of relationships with non-professionals who provide support for youth experiencing homelessness.

**Housing First.** Ten-year plans to end homelessness based on the Housing First model have been developed in Alberta, including Calgary (Alberta Secretariat for Action on Homelessness, 2008; CHF, 2008). In the Housing First model, the overall shift in philosophy is one from managing homelessness (providing basic needs through temporary services such as shelters) to ending homelessness (Gaetz, 2010). The goal is to move a homeless person quickly

into permanent housing while providing person-centred supports to meet their specific needs (Alberta Secretariat for Action on Homelessness, 2008).

In this model, sobriety and adherence to a mental health care regime are not necessary prerequisites to be granted housing; housing is framed as a human right (Tsemberis, Gulcur, & Nakae, 2004). A spectrum of housing is provided, from abstinence-based to low-barrier (Gaetz, 2012). Additionally, Housing First focuses on preventing homelessness through the provision of emergency assistance and adequate government supports (Alberta Secretariat for Action on Homelessness, 2008). This model has been found to be particularly effective with people who have mental health issues (Tsemberis, Gulcur, & Nakae, 2004). However, there is a gap in knowledge regarding differences in gender, age, ethnicity, or substance abuse within this population (Pauly, Carlson, & Perkin, 2012).

Prioritizing surviving in the now at the expense of future-oriented goals such as attaining housing is identified as a key barrier to accessing services. Interventions should recognize that people need to feel safe in order to be able to plan for the future rather than prioritizing day-to-day survival (Etherington, 2007). The Housing First policy recognizes that safety is a prerequisite to recovery by providing housing without requiring substance abuse treatment (Tsemberis, Gulcur, & Nakae, 2004). Decoupling housing from services allows more trust to develop in the clinical relationship, as it “enables people to be honest about issues they are facing” without risking their housing (Henwood, Stanhope, & Padgett, 2011, p. 82). This changes the nature of the helping relationship, causing less surveillance and engendering more trust (Henwood, Stanhope, & Padgett, 2011). Other ways this can be recognized in services include providing a daily stipend of money to enable people experiencing homelessness to attend programs based on future goals without sacrificing their access to basic needs in the present

(Mathebula & Ross, 2013). Having a future orientation or dreams for the future has been identified as a factor in resilience or people's ability to overcome adversity (Huey, Fthenos, & Hryniewicz, 2013).

Poverty also is a key factor in maintaining housing after experiencing homelessness (Falvo, 2009). One major critique of housing policy is that providing housing does not address underlying systemic issues of government supports keeping people below the poverty line and at risk of homelessness. Falvo (2009) provides an example of a Housing First program in Toronto which did not stipulate residents should not spend more than 30% of their income on rent. Sixty-eight percent of participants reported that once rent was paid, they did not have enough money to live on. This poverty was attributed by the researcher to government supports not being sufficient (Falvo, 2009). The level of poverty experienced by participants directly contributed to social isolation, which has important implications for well-being. For example, less than 10% of participants reported having a telephone, 26% reported that social interaction had "gotten worse" since they had been housed, only 40% reported that their social interaction had improved, and roughly two-thirds reported they "regularly ran out of money to buy food" (Falvo, 2009, p. 21). Stanhope and Dunn (2011) go further to state that the Housing First policy may hide inequality, poverty, and homelessness as a symptom of the capitalist market by making poverty and social inequality less visible.

The CHF (2011), in consultation with 21 stakeholders comprised of executive directors and managers representing youth-serving homeless agencies, as well as youth with lived experience of homelessness, developed a plan specifically tailored to ending youth homelessness. This policy is an example of the philosophical policy difference of Housing First as compared to treatment first, in that Housing First is working to end rather than manage

homelessness (Gaetz, 2010; Padgett, Gulcur, & Tsemberis, 2006). This plan was created in response to the unique context of youth, as compared to adult, homelessness and the increasing rates of youth homelessness in Calgary (Casey, 2011).

The recommendations include an emphasis on building a coordinated system, developing an adequate number of housing units, and identifying research priorities and policy changes (CHF, 2011). The policy recommendations require partnership and advocacy work with stakeholders such as children's services, the education, health, and justice systems, as well as the provincial and federal governments. The *Plan to End Youth Homelessness in Calgary* (CHF, 2011) is the first youth-specific plan in North America and represents an important learning opportunity for other municipalities in developing similar plans for their own contexts. There is a need for research focusing on gaining context-specific data about youth homelessness across the globe, particularly an analysis of how systems and policy, rather than individual factors, influence homelessness (Zerger, Strehlow, & Gundlapalli, 2008). Reducing the gap between macro policy work and micro front-line work has important implications for the development of theory as well as praxis regarding how this knowledge is applied in practice.

There is a gap in the literature in regards to how the Housing First model is applied to the youth population, as well as what outcomes result from these interventions (Goering et al., 2011; Pauly, Carlson, & Perkin, 2012). Housing may not represent the entire picture of what youth experiencing homelessness require in order to maintain housing. As Slenick, Kang, Bonomi, and Prestopnik (2008) suggested, "housing alone may not be the sole panacea to exiting life on the streets" (p. 225). Atherton and McNaughton Nicholls (2008) identified factors that make youth unique in terms of providing Housing First services, including their heightened lack of assets and

resources compared to other populations of homeless persons, as well as the moral imperative or need to protect youth from the harms associated with the experience of homelessness.

**Enhancing natural supports.** Participants described formal and informal relationship supports as complementary and necessary for healing from homelessness. In Calgary, United Way has recognized the importance of enhancing natural supports when working with youth (United Way of Calgary and Area, 2013b). This began with the Vulnerable Youth Investment Strategy (2012), which strove to build and strengthen healthy natural supports that youth have with family members, peers, mentors, and other non-professionals. They are currently piloting enhancing natural supports work with three agencies and have formed a community of practice with front-line workers.

The Alberta provincial plan to prevent and reduce youth homelessness (2015) recognizes informal supports, such as friends, co-workers, mentors, and neighbours, as “critical for [youth] success” (p. 20). These supports are also important in preventing homelessness and sustaining housing (GOA, 2015; VCC, 2015). In addition to sustaining housing, peer support has been identified as helping to combat pathology (MHCC, 2010), shame, and stigma (Mead, Hilton, & Curtis, 2001).

The Mental Health Commission of Canada [MHCC] (2010) endorses peer support as essential in mental health recovery, in their words:

Peer support works. Peer support is effective. People with lived experience of mental health challenges can offer huge benefits for each other. We found that the development of personal resourcefulness and self-belief, which is the foundation of peer support, can not only improve people’s lives but can also reduce the use of formal mental health, medical and social services. By doing so peer support can save money. (p. 5)

**Practice terms defined.** Front-line youth workers who participated in this research mention a few terms in the results section that I will define here for the ease of the reader. This is our last section, dear reader, before we delve into the methods, or how I worked to answer my research questions. First I will define trauma-informed and strength-based practice, and then I will explain what the charity model is.

Trauma-informed practice is working in a way that acknowledges the impact that experiences with trauma have, a vital consideration for youth experiencing the trauma of homelessness (Bender et al., 2013). McKenzie-Mohr, Coates, and McLeod (2015) call for politicized trauma-informed interventions with youth experiencing homelessness, and I agree with the recommendations. The politicized aspect entails addressing systemic causes of youth homelessness while supporting individuals with the effects of trauma (McKenzie-Mohr, Coates, & McLeod, 2015). Similar to Reynolds's (2013) challenge about experiences with oppression being the root of individually expressed trauma symptoms, McKenzie-Mohr and colleagues (2015) have challenged the dominant construction of trauma as a problem located within individuals. Trauma-informed practice works to prevent individuals from being blamed for their experiences with oppression (McKenzie-Mohr, Coates, & McLeod, 2015).

Strength-based practice is focusing on the strengths of the people you are working with rather than the deficits (Brendtro, Ness, & Mitchell, 2001). In my dissertation research, this refers to strength-based work with youth; however, this model can be applied to work with groups, families, and communities as well. In the discussion chapter I will present literature that explains tactics and ways of working that reflect a grounding in strength-based practice.

Strength-based practice is framed as challenging the deficit narrative that is commonly assigned

to people accessing services from the charity model (Crisp & McCave, 2007; Lavie-Ajayi & Krumer-Nevo, 2013).

The charity model often requires people to prove they are in need and dependent on the charity (Poppendieck, 1998); under this model, basic needs, such as housing, are not seen as a human right. The charity model distinguishes between people who deserve charity and those who don't (Margolin, 1997). This binary belief contributes to the practice of requiring people to meet certain conditions in order to qualify for basic-needs services, such as food or shelter.

Poppendieck (1998) and Margolin (1997) identified harms caused by the charity model, for both the people accessing services and the people providing these services. In the results chapter, I will present harms that the participants in my dissertation research identified with this model and alternatives that they proposed, and in the discussion chapter, I will present more detail from the literature that has researched the application of this model.

This concludes the literature review, where I have explored topics such as risks and protective factors for youth experiencing homelessness, in order to provide some background context on the topic that youth workers will be discussing in this study. More specific to the context of front-line youth work, I reviewed burnout as well as the benefits and barriers to front-line youth workers engaging in policy analysis. In the next chapter, I will present the process of how the research was conducted, as well as the tools and methods used to answer the research questions.

## Chapter Four - Methods

This chapter will focus on the research design, including processes and tools used in the four interconnected stages of this research. The study received approval from the University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board, and all participants provided written informed consent. Included in my ethics application was a declaration that this research was funded partially by the Calgary Homeless Foundation, as well as the Urban Alliance, a partnership between the University of Calgary and the city of Calgary. The Calgary Homeless Foundation funded the Preparing the Ground phase, enabling me to provide food and honorariums to participants in the first two focus groups. The Urban Alliance funding for the Reflection and Action phases allowed me to provide honorariums to participants, to pay for some of my facilitation work during the last eight focus groups, to hire a professional transcriptionist, as well as to travel in order to meet with policy makers and share the research results.

In this chapter, I will begin with myself, as I have been a key decision-maker shaping this research process; next, I will describe the four phases of the research and how changes to the research design were emergent ideas based on feedback from the participants. I will present how focus groups were applied in the context of the first phase, as well as the Reflection and Action phases at the conclusion of the research. I will describe the survey that was offered to participants as an opportunity to evaluate the quality of their participation in this research.

In this chapter, I offer reflections from my research journal that are presented as summaries of my notes. The majority of my research journal entries are reflections about my feelings, assumptions, and decisions in the research process. I believe summarizing the notes provides more clarity for the reader than using direct quotes of the sometimes cryptic passages. I



will respect the confidentiality of participants when I am sharing these reflections. I will begin by providing an introduction of myself as the instrument of interpretation in the research.

The original research design was to begin with general questions about youth workers and policy engagement, and these findings were to inform the design of the next part of the research—engaging front-line workers in analyzing a specific policy, the *Plan to End Youth Homelessness in Calgary* [the *Plan*] (CHF, 2011). This policy offers a tangible plan, complete with strategies and milestones for measuring progress, to end youth homelessness within the context of Calgary. Strategies focus on preventing further homelessness, housing youth who are experiencing homelessness currently, and improving service delivery systems, including data collection, in order to improve services for youth.

I chose this policy as the focus of analysis because it concentrates on areas that fall under the scope of youth work, such as recommending street outreach as an important relationship-building tool. This policy was an example of the Housing First model of addressing homelessness (Tsemberis, Gulcur, & Nakae, 2004), a model that was strongly influencing service delivery and funding in Alberta at the time of the research (Alberta Secretariat for Action on Homelessness, 2008; CHF, 2008) and was defined in the literature review.

My personal responses to the *Plan* (CHF, 2011) include frustration that addiction and addiction services are not included, along with a hope that we could learn something about how to prevent homelessness for more people through focusing on youth as a unique population. I see an opportunity for both critique and appraisal from a front-line worker perspective, which is reflected in the research questions where I asked workers whether they identified anything as missing from the policy. I think that the *Plan* (CHF, 2011) is flawed in some ways, but that it

represents a beginning in identifying the needs of youth who are homeless and how we can better support this population.

As the research unfolded, an additional phase was proposed by participants, which added to the diversity of data sources and increased the complexity of the research design. The Immersion phase, comprised of participant observation, was an emergent development that was not planned in the initial research design. Originally I designed the first phase to explore the barriers and facilitating factors for youth workers engaging in policy work generally, the next phase to focus on reflection or analysis of the *Plan* (CHF, 2011), and the final phase to establish, and engage in, actions based on what was learned in the previous phases. After the addition of the emergent phase proposed by participants, the research contained four phases: The first phase was Preparing the Ground, the second phase was Immersion in Context, and the Reflection and Action phases made up the third and fourth.

### **Research Phases and Emergent Research Design Changes**

In this section I will briefly outline the four interconnected research phases (as shown in Figure 1), including: research questions, recruitment strategies, method of data analysis, and how the results of each phase were applied. The detailed consent and recruitment forms, as shown to participants, are presented in Appendix A. Figure 1 provides an overview of the four phases in this research. The first phase was designed to prepare the ground for the rest of the research project, the second phase was emergently planned through the participants inviting me to immerse myself in the context of their ongoing policy work, and the last two phases were designed for complementary reflection and action based on the analysis of a specific policy.

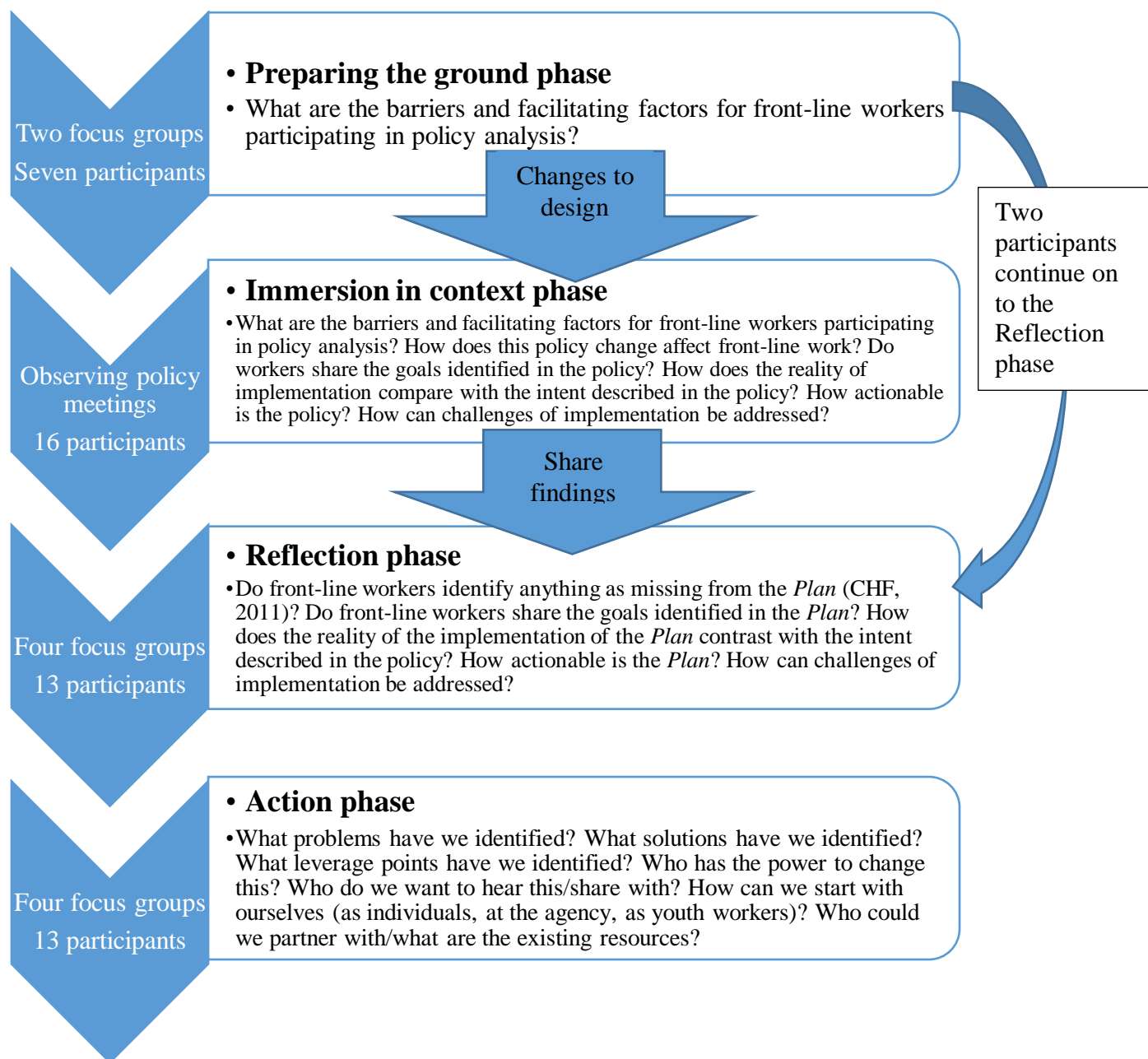


Figure 1. Research phases

As Figure 1 demonstrates, each phase was attended by a unique group of participants, with some cross-pollination between phases. For example, two participants from the first, Preparing the Ground, phase rejoined the group in the Reflection and Action phases. Figure 1 also displays the flow of data between the phases, such as the learnings from the Preparing the

Ground phase informing the redesign of the Reflection and Action phases, or the analysis in the Reflection phase of data collected in the Immersion phase, which informed decisions made in the Action phase.

**Preparing the ground phase.** Before I could begin designing the research, I needed to “prepare the ground” (Blackburn, 2000). In order to accomplish this, I searched, read, summarized, and reflected on the literature, then integrated this knowledge with my experience to create the research design. Additionally, I identified recruitment strategies and stakeholders who might have knowledge to contribute or interest in research results. The second part of preparing the ground was designed to begin processes of relationship and trust building, thus facilitating space for dialogue (Blackburn, 2000; Maiter et al., 2008). Lindsey and McGuinness (1998) referred to this process as “planning for participation” and stressed the importance of spending considerable time on this stage. This process allowed me to get oriented in the context of these specific front-line youth workers in Calgary and to ground the research design in this context. The development of collaborative and trusting relationships is vital to the success of PAR, and time to develop these relationships must be built into research design (Lindsey & McGuinness, 1998; Nelson et al., 1998). Although I had pre-existing relationships with some of the participants, I was meeting some workers for the first time. Similarly, some participants had worked together for over ten years and some participants had started working together the week before we started the research.

Before I began this phase, I prepared through engaging in a preliminary research project where I asked five experienced people for their advice about engaging in participatory policy analysis processes in Calgary. I received ethics approval from the University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board to conduct this preliminary study, and I summarized the results

in a paper for an independent study class that I took as part of my doctoral studies, with the intent to include this document as an appendix in this dissertation (Appendix B). Participants were asked to fill out a six-question survey about their experience facilitating participatory policy analysis processes. The questions were:

1. What success have you experienced when facilitating a group analyzing policy?
2. What challenges have you experienced when facilitating a group analyzing policy?
3. What methods have you used when facilitating a group analyzing policy?
4. What methods have you used to sustain participation in a group over time?
5. What methods have you used to engage a group in policy analysis?
6. What advice would you give someone embarking on a project to facilitate a group analyzing policy?

The goal of this research project was to collect information from people with lived experience facilitating policy processes in the context of front-line workers in Calgary and to add this knowledge to the knowledge provided by the literature review. In summary, participants gave useful practical advice on how to facilitate participatory policy analysis, advice that is also supported in the literature. They emphasized the need for patience, not rushing the process, and identifying individual strengths in the group. They identified the need to translate policy and demystify the policy analysis process by dividing up policy into manageable chunks, using plain language, and examining power dynamics. They suggested that frequent meetings and relationship building contribute to the sustainability of projects. They described the impacts of participatory policy analysis at the individual as well as macro levels, and the importance of sharing results and working towards social change.

Each of the five participants mentioned the importance of time in this work, and one participant brought up this topic twice:

With sufficient time, skill and sincerity, an authentic knowledge-making process is possible.

Time is crucial. If you are in a hurry for whatever reason, then no methods are appropriate. If you are in hurry, the group might believe they are being manipulated and chances are they are right.

Patience, patience, patience. Listen to what the group members are saying and try to identify key concerns and the accompanying policy. If you don't know, find out.

Try not to be too pushy unless people are really interested. Policy scares people; you have to approach cautiously.

Don't rush it; policy needs to be presented, discussed through a number of lenses.

Patience and time—keep focused on the goal and bring people back to what you are after—still have to be open minded and allow the process to unfold organically—we cannot go in as “experts” thinking we know the answer—that is what the group is there to help with.

I took this advice into account when designing and engaging in the research process, particularly reflecting on my skills as a facilitator and how these influence the research process. This foundation of knowledge from practical experience aided me in these research processes.

The Preparing the Ground phase was intended to inform the design of the phases that followed, through offering front-line youth workers opportunities to answer these research questions. The latter were developed based on the knowledge gained from the literature, which

identified multiple barriers and facilitating factors for front-line workers engaging in policy work in diverse contexts:

1. What makes it difficult for front-line workers to engage in policy (rules/systems) work?
2. What makes it easier for front-line workers to engage in this policy work?
3. What are the benefits to front-line workers engaging in this policy work?
4. What are some of the policies (rules/systems) that affect the work you do and the people who you work with?
5. What are some examples of policies (rules/systems) that you have worked to change?

I designed the questions to be open-ended, with terms such as “policy work” defined or interpreted by participants. These questions reflect my assumptions that front-line youth workers engage in policy advocacy, and that they can reflect on the reciprocal influence that policy has on their practice and that their practice has on policy. In the last question, the idea of change was broad enough to include forms of subversion such as how policies were implemented by front-line workers. Recognition of the possibility for subversion assumes that although front-line workers face barriers to influencing policy, they “hold power in more subtle ways, such as sabotage [and] non-cooperation” (Blackburn, 2000, p. 10).

The method chosen to discuss these questions was focus groups, which will be presented in the following section of this chapter. In order to qualify to participate in the research, people needed to have experience working on the front line with youth experiencing homelessness in Calgary. Participants were recruited through multiple youth-serving agency email lists and a presentation at a monthly organizing meeting for agencies serving youth experiencing

homelessness. In order to accommodate youth workers, two focus groups of two hours in length were held at different times at the University of Calgary.

I decided on the university as the location for this phase because I was concerned that hosting the groups at one agency or funder might present barriers to a diverse group of youth workers attending. I identified the university as more neutral ground than any one agency. Lindsey and McGuinness (1998) explained that the university can be seen as a detriment to participation or as lending legitimacy to projects, depending on participants' experiences with the university and other researchers. In the results chapter, I will share some feedback from participants concerning this location choice. The groups were held at different times, based on the feedback of an agency recruiting for the research, who suggested that some workers would be better able to attend a morning session and some would prefer an evening focus group. Participants were offered a \$25 honorarium for their time and knowledge.

This research was originally planned as a World Café for 70 people, or a specialized form of the focus group approach to data collection (Brennan & Ritch, 2010). This method was created in the early 1990s by Juanita Brown and David Isaac (2001) and is described as a "learning and change management tool that enables large groups to think together creatively" (Schieffer, Isaacs, & Gyllenpalm, 2004, p. 2). Due to the low numbers of participants in the current study, the data collection method became a small focus group discussion rather than a World Café (Brown & Isaac, 2001). In the next section, I share my reflections regarding the discrepancy between my expectations and the actual numbers of participants. As a result of the low numbers of participants, the group was not able to experience the cross-dialogue pollination from moving between tables, commonly used in World Café method; however, I was able to create and maintain the atmosphere of the café as a safe place to have a discussion. Revolving



interactions between participants, remained, as did investment in responding to the ideas of other participants in the group. Chioncel, Van Der Veen, Wildmeersch, and Jarvis (2003) cautioned that groups should be small enough to allow for in-depth discussion on the policy topics, recommending between six and 12 people for a focus group.

Following the recommendations of Charmaz (2010), I began with initial coding of the poster board notes from the focus groups, identifying possible themes in the data and remaining open to new themes as they were identified. During this phase of coding, one quote might have appeared under many themes as data was compared and separated into categories. The process then moved into more focused coding to determine the adequacy of codes and assign labels to categories of data that summarized and accounted for each piece of data (Charmaz, 2010).

**Reflections from research journal concerning the Preparing the Ground phase.** In the first phase of the research, I learned a lot about youth workers' fear of "who will be there" when engaging in focus groups. I also learned that my expectations about the number of youth workers who would be interested in participating were not reasonable. I believe that my own eagerness to participate in research when I was a front-line youth worker influenced my expectations of other workers. Additionally, my desire to use a participatory method, such as World Café (Brown & Isaac, 2001), that would offer more opportunities for relationship building and community development influenced my hopes for higher numbers of participants. I assumed that front-line workers valued opportunities for their voices to be heard and that they would define this opportunity as such. In retrospect, hosting the focus groups at the university may have been alienating for front-line workers, especially from a class perspective. I may have been less aware of this possibility due to my own comfort with navigating between the cultures of front-line practice and the university.

As participants introduced themselves before the focus group began, most referred to themselves as experiencing burnout and exemplified this by sharing their current context of unemployment, frustration, or working in disability services. In my research journal, I reflected on why youth workers experiencing burnout were the ones who showed up for this phase of the research. Workers who had not experienced burnout had equal opportunities to participate; in fact, it is more difficult to recruit youth workers who have already left agencies or the field of youth work as a whole through the recruitment methods that I was using.

One conclusion I have come to is that they showed up because they had less to lose; they were already excluded from working for some of the youth-serving agencies due to earned reputations as “boat-rockers” for their advocacy at the macro level. These participants could speak of their experience with oppression in organizations because they no longer depended on these organizations for their livelihood. Not only did they have less to lose, they also had experienced silencing when advocating for more just policies and practices in the agencies where they worked and in the overall sector serving youth. I concluded that these workers cared enough to show up for the focus groups, despite their previous experiences with token participation, silencing, and helplessness in settings similar to the context of my research. Token participation in this sense means symbolic rather than genuine participation (Arnstein, 1969)—for example, collecting feedback after a decision has already been made.

I frame it as desirable for the research that front-line workers experiencing burnout showed up to participate. I have multiple reasons for this belief, based on my assumptions that critical thinking and challenging the status quo are often punished within the youth work context and that youth workers who advocate often experience silencing and token participation. It makes sense to me that workers who had these experiences might be driven to participate in the

research. In my research journal, I reflected on feeling a sense of justice amplifying the voices of youth workers who had been silenced, due to my previous experiences with similar frustrations when I was a front-line youth worker. We have lots to learn from research with workers who have experienced burnout and continue to be employed in youth work, as well as research with youth workers who have left the field.

I reflected on a concept that could be framed as a strength or a weakness of this research, dependent on epistemology and social location. I had pre-existing relationships with more than half of the participants in the Preparing the Ground phase. According to PAR, these relationships were part of the process of preparing the ground (Lindsey & McGuinness, 1998) and gave me the credibility within the community of front-line youth workers that I needed to be able to engage in this research. Trust was developed in our pre-existing relationships that led workers to choose to work with me in this new context. The results from the Preparing the Ground phase are exploratory and were not intended to be used as generalizations, so concerns about the results being biased toward a particular viewpoint are of less concern here. As established in this dissertation, there is no neutral knowledge creation. The goal of this phase of the research was to identify barriers, facilitating factors, and perceived benefits to front-line youth workers engaging in policy work *within a specific context*, so participants were self-identifying as workers with experience in policy work by choosing to participate. Later phases of the research took place with different sampling strategies, which helped to deepen learning by examining ideas from different perspectives and ways of knowing.

In the results chapter, I present a reflection about the valuable outsider perspective offered by the research assistants who took notes in the Preparing the Ground phase. These two research assistants were graduate students in the Faculty of Social Work, and they took notes in

the research as part of their research practicums. I felt that the reciprocity of them gaining experience in research and me being freed to engage more fully in the facilitation of the discussion itself was a good fit with PAR ethics (Maiter et al., 2008). Some of the feedback from participants attending the focus groups during the Preparing the Ground phase was that being invited to participate in research and policy work added to their already overwhelming workload. Emergent changes in the Reflection and Action phases were based on this feedback.

**Immersion in Context phase.** The learning from the original phase informed our need for the creation of the Immersion phase. As mentioned earlier, originally this research was planned as three phases, beginning with the Preparing the Ground phase, designed to inform the more time-intensive phases of Action and Reflection. One participant from the Preparing the Ground phase invited me to observe ongoing weekly policy meetings between front-line youth workers and funders. This offer resulted in the emergent development of the participant observation of the Immersion phase and the creation of a new data source, adding to the diversity of perspectives and possibilities for triangulation (Labaree, 2002).

My plan was to observe these meetings of 16 people until I reached a saturation point (Charmaz, 2010) with the research questions from the Preparing the Ground phase. However, these meetings offered more than another data source for the research questions from the first phase. One critique of my research design that participants offered was that the policy recommendations from the policy to be analyzed in the Reflection phase were outside of the control of front-line workers, whereas the Immersion phase offered opportunities to observe workers reflecting on how the policy implementation was affecting their practice. One unexpected outcome of this emergent phase was gaining knowledge about worker and agency values and how these values were enacted in practice.

The improved research design achieved multiple goals, including answering research questions from the first phase while immersed in the context of ongoing policy work already in progress and building relationships with and between front-line youth workers. Another improvement of this emergent design change was that because I was observing work that was already in progress, the research did not ask for more time commitments of front-line workers. These meetings offered time to build trust and form relationships with participants, in order to further prepare the ground for subsequent phases (Blackburn, 2000). I believe that this opportunity improved trust and allowed workers to deepen their responses in the Reflection and Action phases.

Additionally, the Immersion phase offered an opportunity to observe dynamics between direct supervisors and front-line youth workers. Since the pre-designed elements of my research focused on the context of front-line work to the exclusion of managers, the participant observation of the Immersion phase provided unique insights into topics raised by youth workers in the Preparing the Ground phase—for example, the influence their relationships with management had on opportunities for them to participate in macro-level advocacy.

I applied for an amendment to the research design and was approved to observe these meetings by the University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board. I developed a consent form, and all participants provided written informed consent for me to observe these meetings and take verbatim notes. I consulted the literature to prepare for my role of participant observer—for example, in navigating questions such as “if, when, and how to participate rather than just observe” (Kennedy-Lewis, 2012, p. 110). I agree with the model of participant observation described by Surra and Ridley (1991), with participant observation existing on a

spectrum rather than in a dichotomy, in order to account for the large amount of overlap between these roles.

After reading Surra and Ridley (1991), I reflected on my relationship to the phenomena being observed—youth work and youth homelessness. Reflecting on this relationship made visible to me how my experience with homelessness, combined with my relationships with other people who have this experience, contributes to my enthusiastic participation and sense of urgency in addressing these issues. This sense of urgency made it difficult for me to see observation and this larger research project as examples of participation; in fact, I did not make these connections, dear reader, until I was writing this chapter! I previously framed observation as a silencing of my voice rather than a way to record the collective voice of youth workers. I can now construct observation as a form of participation and as a way of contributing my research skills towards working on shared goals. I cannot control the emotion on my face or my sense of urgency when the topic of discussion is human suffering, and this passion contributes to sustaining my involvement with advocacy for social justice (Charmaz, 2010; Herr & Anderson, 2005).

I placed emphasis on the observer role in this research, as I wanted to reduce my influence on the meetings so that the perspectives of youth workers could be foregrounded. Additionally, I wanted to preserve the practical focus on what policy looks like when being implemented by front-line youth workers, as opposed to the analytical focus of analyzing a policy, which I planned to offer in the final research phase. The addition of this phase improved the balance between inductive and deductive methods utilized in this research, increasing the possibility of learning new things. The inductive process of observing in the Immersion phase complemented the deductive process of policy analysis that I had planned for the Reflection

phase. Inductive reasoning creates generalizations from specific observations, whereas deductive reasoning begins with generalizations and then applies them to specific context (Charmaz, 2010).

I had more influence in the other phases of the research, and I wanted to complement this with an emergent phase where I was immersed in the context of front-line youth work. I retained the participant role in terms of my note taking, occasional asking of clarifying questions, and recognition that my presence may have changed how workers participated in the meetings. Participant observation involves tensions between insider and outsider roles, centred on the issue of access to information (Labaree, 2002). I had the potential to be accepted as an insider because of my previous practice experience and relationships, as well as the potential to be seen as an outsider because of my research perspective and skills, combined with my lack of relational depth with some participants.

There are multiple ways that I was an insider or outsider in relation to others in the group (Labaree, 2002). For example, some of the participants engaged with me in political activism about affordable housing and feminism prior to and during the research; however, we had diverse opinions about how to approach these issues. The majority of the participants identified as women, but not all of these women identified as feminists, which created several insider/outsider contexts (Hsiung, 1996). Some of the participants in this research were Indigenous and some were raised speaking American Sign Language (ASL), perspectives with which I have limited experience and to which I am an outsider. Most of the participants did not have a social work background as I do, but we all had experience with postsecondary education in Canada. Being a participant observer is an ongoing process; at times I was far away from participants in my “outsiderness” or so close that we became indistinguishable, and there were many experiences in between.

One example of when I felt like an insider occurred when a youth dropped by the agency. Three of us had worked with this youth 10 years ago, and after the meeting we were all telling him how proud we were of him and listening to his updates. Another insider moment occurred when three of us were discussing a specific youth-serving agency that we had worked for, and a participant brought up their agency mission statement. All three of us groaned or rolled our eyes, as we see this slogan as hypocritical because it makes it sound as if the agency shares our values and ethics, yet this is not what it is like in practice. This scenario actually was repeated with a different agency and two different participants, but it concerned this agency's terrible track record of continuing to employ managers who, in our opinion, had done things that greatly warranted their dismissal.

In contrast, sometimes I was an outsider whose assumptions did not indicate an understanding of the context of front-line youth work. In my research journal, I reminisced about a time when a supervisor told me that I was the only non-manager to ask them which funders supported which programs. This memory was triggered on the first meeting I observed, when I asked the workers who the funder was for one of their programs. They said that I was "asking the wrong people," and this caused me to reflect in my research journal about my outsider assumptions. Other experiences that I had with outsider status focused on language—for example, as I described in the preface, I originally used the term "practitioner" rather than "worker" to refer to participants, until someone said, "Who are you talking about?" which I took as an indicator that they did not self-identify as practitioners. When I felt like an outsider, I tried to adjust and become more culturally appropriate or leave space for participants to lead the research.



I experienced tensions and conflict between my identities as a researcher, a front-line worker, and a person with lived experience with homelessness. One example occurred when I presented research findings from the Preparing the Ground phase during the meetings for the Immersion phase, and at a conference in Vancouver. The latter was a very interesting experience for me, as I had not been to Vancouver since 14 years earlier, when I was using crystal methamphetamine and living in extreme poverty. I will share the story, as I shared it on social media, describing how I navigated my insider and outsider status when I joined the protest of the conference at which I was presenting:

I'm at the conference organized by the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness. When I walked out of the swanky hotel tonight I began to wonder why there were so many Vancouver police in riot helmets. So I got to join the protest against the conference, which for me included discussing when we first learned the Cree song we were singing and who was visiting from where. Also when a Mohawk man said that "[prime minister at the time]'s social housing plan was privatized prisons," I shouted, "thank you for saying that." They had signs that said "social housing now." They banged on the glass and demanded to have their say. They made speeches about how the land was stolen and how the people inside were profiting off homelessness because the federal government will not build housing. I agree that we need to hold the government accountable and that social housing should not include a profit motive. So tomorrow when I present at the conference that I enjoyed protesting, I will start with messages from the protest and will share my frustrations with how I define action and advocacy. My only regret is that I didn't go upstairs and get my name tag [which would mean the riot geared cops would have to protect me from the protesters and let me in, then I could go out and bang on the

glass with the masked anarchists, then they would have to let me back in and I could go and get some shrimp dumplings for the crowd, etc.]. I love circles and veggie burgers with bacon and also being me!

The concept of a veggie burger with bacon is a metaphor for binary-challenging identities that was created as part of my Master's thesis. Veggie burgers with bacon are defined as:

A metaphor to explain my praxis work—the point where practice and theory overlap—of challenging thinking that only provides two options rather than taking a spectrum view that allows for diversity. Being a veggie burger with bacon enables you to bridge communities that are framed as the opposite of each other. This is a powerful and lonely position. I appreciate the diversity of perspectives that this position allows me. In order to find other veggie burgers with bacon you have to speak your story without shame and be the first to share what people are afraid to admit they have in common. This is a difficult and liberating process. We examined many examples of how we were veggie burgers with bacon including: being Métis, being raised middle class and then experiencing poverty and a range of examples across the sexuality and gender spectrum. The one example that came up the most was how one could cross the boundaries between social worker and “client.” (Huntingford, 2015, p. 88)

To return to my story about the conference, I did begin my presentation at that conference by raising the issues that the protesters had highlighted; I saw this cause some discomfort in the audience, which I hope led to learning. This polarizing topic additionally helped me identify allies at the conference who supported the critical analysis of the housing sector that was represented at the protest. Another great discussion began at that conference, due to the fact that participants who were presenting had red name tag lanyards and people with lived experience of

homelessness had black lanyards. There were many participants who, like me, could have fit into either of those categories and who saw the distinction as problematic and as reinforcing a hierarchy of knowledge. This separation between groups led to problematizing a sector that benefits off the continuation of homelessness, one of the goals of the protestors.

Gatenby and Humphries (2000) examined their roles as researchers from a feminist perspective and raised a reflective question about inequality between researchers and participants in terms of full emotional participation in research. Emotional labour comprises much of youth work, and so is vital to examine in this context. When I reflect on the quality of my emotional engagement with the research, I find that I did engage fully in terms of my emotional participation, and yet this emotional labor remained unequal compared to that given by other participants, due to their daily immersion with the community of youth experiencing homelessness. In my research journal, I wrote about the contrasting depth of the feelings between me and the other participants when four youth that we all knew died over the period of the research. I had worked and struggled beside these young people. I had visited them in jail and supported them when they got out. I had made food with and for them, and listened to how their days went. However, I had not celebrated their hard-won housing or spoken to their grandma a week before they died, as the other participants had. I did not have to go to work with youth the day after their deaths and try again to advocate for resources.

Homelessness is part of my real day-to-day life, regardless of what I do to earn money and regardless of my housing situation. I have relationships with people who are currently homeless whom I met because we share a neighbourhood. I have relationships with people I experienced homelessness with and people I worked with. When I see someone who needs water or shelter or belonging, I see myself. For me, this issue of homelessness is located mainly in the

personal sphere, and I pursue interventions in the professional sphere along with the personal in working towards justice on this issue. Going to some of the funerals with the front-line workers was an example of how, for those of us who attended, this issue extends past the professional sphere. Just under half of the participants and I have experiences of crying at each other's houses when talking about feeling helpless to effect change in unfair systems, or sharing how we broke the rules in order to practice in a way that we define as ethical.

In only half of the youth deaths did I witness their friends and families crying about their loss in my direct community. The day after attending those funerals, I did not have to witness another youth kicked out of their home and re-entering the cycle of homelessness. I did not have to organize the funerals or see the children of the youth who had died or inform their families or advocate for the police to investigate themselves regarding the death. Still, this hurt me deeply and made me think of all the times I have done this emotional labour and had to go to work the next day. I have much more distance from this hurt now that I am no longer a front-line youth worker, but this distance does not erase the relationships that I formed with youth during my time as a front-line worker.

I believe that my former experience as their colleague allowed youth worker participants to trust me and accept me as a participant, although our commonality as youth workers is not enough to assume that I am an insider (Labaree, 2002; Kennedy-Lewis, 2012). As Reinharz (1992) noted, being a participant observer is "as much about perceiving self as participant as it is the group accepting you as one" (as cited in Gatenby & Humphries, 2000, p. 98). Reporting of insider status is based on the researchers' and the participants' perceptions (Labaree, 2002), and as such it is difficult for me to discern how the meetings might have been different if I had not been observing or if I had been observing from different perspectives. Being invited to observe

the meetings was an act that brought me to an insider space, which gave me access to information that I did not have as a researcher on the outside.

Labaree (2002) questioned the assumption that being an insider is always positive, providing examples of ethical and relational issues that I also experienced while being a participant observer. The experience of being an outsider can challenge assumptions that might not come into focus if groups are homogenous (Labaree, 2002); experiences of feeling like an outsider catalyzed me to examine what had changed to shift me farther away from other participants. An example of this phenomenon occurred in the Preparing the Ground phase and is presented in the results chapter, with the outside perspective of the research assistants problematizing the normalized level of lateral violence that is ever present in youth work.

My experience with being a participant observer resonated more closely with that of Murray (2003), who reflected on her feeling of discomfort when taking notes during a conversation with a participant with whom she had become friends. She resolved this feeling by framing her position as one of first being a sociologist conducting research (Murray, 2003). This made me question how I prioritize my inside and outside roles when engaging in research. In contrast to Murray (2003), I seldom prioritize my role as a social worker. I have many examples where rejecting this role publicly assisted me in my work with people accessing services and people whom I was supervising, thus reinforcing how I frame my identity.

When I worked at a large adult homeless shelter, it was common for me to be the gatekeeper of access to basic needs for people who had been living on the streets for longer than I had been alive. In this context I often took off the vest that distinguished me as staff and stood on it, in order to signify that I was not going to hold that power over the people accessing services. When someone is deferring to my authority or refusing to participate because of unfair

power dynamics, I try to be a person first, a person who is both privileged and oppressed. This technique was most effective in diffusing larger institutional power struggles, although I believe it remained a mainly symbolic intervention, as the power status quo remained. Sometimes I can shed my professionalism, but I cannot shed my White privilege or get rid of my middle-class upbringing.

For example, during one incident my co-workers restrained a woman and caused a humiliating experience for her with the police; while this was occurring, I removed my staff vest in front of the 2,000 people staying at the shelter. This accomplished my goal of publicly distancing myself from a decision that I disagreed with and did not have the power to change. In that moment, I felt like an outsider to the staff team and simultaneously closer on the insider continuum to the people accessing services, while also being an outsider to that community due to my housing and status as staff.

In this situation, I felt the tension of being dependent on the shelter for my income and knowing that if I were fired, my housing could be at risk. I compared this to what people staying in the shelter would risk if they expressed their disagreement with staff decisions—possibly being barred from accessing the shelter for months in the winter. This was one of many examples where I attempted to surrender my professional power and align with people accessing services; there are other examples where I instead have retained my professional power and leveraged it in the pursuit of goals identified by people accessing services. If this had progressed past symbolic rejection of power, I would have quit or been fired and possibly stayed at the shelter as a result.

I had to intensively scrutinize experiences in order to see the positive sides of holding power over someone else, as opposed to seeing all unequal power as fundamentally unjust. As part of my work, I reflect upon what it is like to receive services from me, to develop a

professional relationship with me, and what I would feel if I were accessing services from the agency that employs me. I do sometimes still have trouble being associated with other social workers or even staff because of the unequal power dynamic in access to systems of support and my belief that this unequal power is harmful and undemocratic. I still believe models that aim to flatten power structures are preferable to the status quo hierarchy of institutions and systems (Huntingford, 2012).

Working with youth, power over action was often part of my professional obligations. For example, when I worked with youth who were engaging in prostitution, they were defined as sexually exploited youth who could be mandated to treatment “for their own good.” I found this a very difficult way of framing their situation, because I felt it erased some of the ways that youth did have autonomy over their lives. When I phoned the police to report child abuse of a youth involved in prostitution, I always apologized to the youth concerned for using this power over them and tried to explain the intent behind the policies. I told bosses that if I couldn’t explain a rule to the youth then I would not enforce it, as I believe that people have a right to evaluate whether a rule is just enough for them to obey.

There were times when I could see the short-term benefits of using this power over, for example, youth who would have the opportunity to eat food and get clean from drugs for 10 days when I did not think that they would have chosen this on their own. I also saw long-term negative impacts, such as a loss of trust in our relationship and giving youth the message that they have no autonomy and should wait to be rescued from the outside. I believe that when we hold power, we should acknowledge that power and take actions to try to share that power with people who hold less power than ourselves.

I will share my experiences with the cultural concept of “boss” in order to illustrate why I experience discomfort when being associated with hierarchy, other social workers, and staff. In the context of adult prison and the “justice” system, prisoners or people accused of crimes will often refer to police officers and prison guards as “boss.” I identify this as resistance to unequal power dynamics, a way to draw attention to the fact that if these two people met in a different context, the power dynamic would be reversed. This is a cultural practice that demonstrates the difference between fear and respect, in that respect is earned and fear enables the implementation of will due to the threat of violence on an individual or systemic level. Often in the dynamic of accessing services the violence that supports a fear response is that one person’s survival, such as through their access to food, is at the mercy of another person’s decision.

The first time that a man twice my age called me “boss” at an adult homeless shelter, I took off my staff vest and started looking for another job because I didn’t want to be his prison guard. I identified his actions as a resistance or a coping strategy for having to deal with oppression and loss of power. I have experience with abuse in common with many of the people accessing services at the adult homeless shelter, and I can understand why people might be triggered by the power dynamic of “while you are under my roof.”

To further explicate this concept of different kinds of power, I offer a joke that has been circulating on the Internet in different forms for quite some time:

A Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) officer stopped at Treaty Seven territory and talked to an Indigenous, an anarchist, and a feminist standing on the road.

He told them, “I need to inspect this land for illegally grown drugs.”

They reluctantly said: “Okay, but don’t go into that field over there...” as they pointed with their lips to the location.

The RCMP officer verbally exploded and said: “Look, you, I have the authority of the federal government with me!” Reaching into his rear back pocket, the arrogant officer



removed his badge and proudly displayed it. “See this badge?! This badge means I can go wherever I want, whenever I want.....on any land! No questions asked, no answers given! Do you understand?”

They nodded kindly, apologized, and went about their business. Moments later they heard loud, fearful screams; they looked up and saw the RCMP officer running for his life, being chased by a bull Bison. With every step, the bull Bison was gaining ground on the officer, and it was likely that he'd sure enough get gored before he reached safety. The officer was clearly terrified.

The Indigenous, anarchist, and feminist threw down their tools and ran as fast as they could to the fence and yelled at the top of their lungs: “YOUR BADGE! SHOW HIM YOUR BADGE!!!”

As demonstrated in the joke above, sometimes your professional badge or vest power isn't going to help you. The man calling me “boss” was reminding me of that. I want to practice in a way that gets me farther away from being the officer in this joke.

These struggles also represented a tension between the knowledge of lived experience and professional knowledge, as I was granted power over the basic needs of the man accessing the shelter due only to my employment there. Lived experience is earned, and when examining the issue of homelessness, that experience is very likely to be traumatic. In contrast, professional knowledge reinforces class inequality and is backed up by class privilege. It is true that I earned my professional knowledge, but the man staying at the shelter and I didn't have an equal chance to acquire it.

There are individual and systemic benefits to studying with my own kind, including gaining more knowledge about my social identity, improving my community of youth workers, and contributing to knowledge that can be applied to better serving and working *with* youth experiencing homelessness (Kanuha, 2000). The role of participant observer allows me to learn from the duality at the intersection of researcher, or the instrument of study, and the participant, or the subject of study (Kanuha, 2000; Labaree, 2002). In the context of the current research, we

are co-creating knowledge by reflecting and acting together, so the roles of researcher and participant overlap frequently. My insider status as a youth worker leads to increased accountability to the participants in the research, as I am conscious of the fact that real or perceived false representations will feel like a betrayal to my fellow community members (Labaree, 2002). The member-checking and opportunities to co-construct knowledge give me increased confidence that the findings represent the perspectives of youth workers who participated in the research.

Moving out of the participant observer role, into a more active facilitation role in the Reflection and Action phases, allowed me to develop my relationships with workers in a less constrained way, even though the focus continued to be on me facilitating space to amplify youth worker voices rather than my own. The multiple-phase design allowed me to nurture existing and new personal relationships (Labaree, 2002) rather than severing relationships at the conclusion of the Immersion phase. We strengthened relationships through our learning work in this research. I will provide more examples of how this growth manifested in my research journal reflections about the Reflection and Action phases.

Returning to the details of this phase, I observed these 60- to 90-minute meetings for nine weeks and took 21 typed single-spaced pages of notes, until I reached data saturation (Charmaz, 2010) regarding the research questions from the Preparing the Ground phase seeking to identify the barriers and facilitating factors for front-line youth workers engaging in policy analysis. During this time, I developed an improved sense of policy work in the context of front-line youth work and gathered examples grounded in youth workers' practice context. I handwrote notes each meeting and then typed them into my computer, in order to review the notes while the meeting was still fresh in my mind.

I then analyzed the data, applied codes from the Preparing the Ground phase to the practical discussions in the Immersion phase, and with this deductive process judged the fit with representative quotes. After data saturation (Charmaz, 2010) was reached with the codes from the first phase, I began the analysis process over again by identifying major themes and quotes that best illustrated these themes in an inductive process. In the first stages of this process, quotes appeared under multiple themes, with the process moving towards identifying which themes best explained the quotes (Charmaz, 2010). This initial coding process revealed tensions between pride and shame or stigma in the natural and professional relationships in the lives of youth accessing services. These findings will be presented in more detail in the results chapter.

The meetings being observed in the Immersion phase were focused on how implementing new policy was changing front-line practice; as a result, the findings from this phase were grounded in practice relevance. Participants identified a practice model that resonated with their work and that they previously had successfully applied to assessments with youth. When engaging in open coding with the meeting notes from the Immersion phase, I observed that several of the emergent themes were represented in the practice model that other participants had identified as useful. I conducted deductive data analysis and organized it under the four areas of the model, which will be described in detail in the results chapter. In this way, the Immersion phase produced practical examples, in the language of participants, which I used in subsequent phases to explicate emerging themes and draw links between theory and practice. The themes emerging from this data analysis were shared with participants, who offered their feedback in the Reflection phase.

**Reflections from research journal concerning the Immersion phase.** I put a lot of effort into limiting my overt participation in the meetings, in order to maximize opportunities for

me to observe what policy implementation looks like on the front-line level, as well as how workers approach and understand this policy work. This required a lot of effort, partly because I have trouble not participating in meetings concerning subjects that I am passionate about! Overall I was successful at leaving room for other participants to speak, with only one incident where I felt that it was more ethical for me to speak and share my knowledge than it would have been for me to remain silent. I will share the story that illustrates this struggle: workers were discussing a poster their supervisor had brought in that listed the reasons to provide trauma-informed care to youth experiencing homelessness.

I failed to emphasize observation over other forms of participation during this incident when I asked them whether they could tell me what trauma-informed care is or what it looks like in practice. This was an awkward moment because no one answered me or would make eye contact. Finally, a former co-worker of mine broke the silence by saying, “Look at Stasha’s face!! Her brain is going to explode if we can’t define this approach!” and we all laughed. No one would make eye contact with each other or attempt to explain what trauma-informed care looked like when applied to youth work practice. I waited in order to leave space for reflection and response, then shared three things workers had talked about earlier in that meeting that I felt were trauma-informed care: the idea of de-escalation with suggestions for assisting youth with this; the idea of triggers with plans for making the physical space more welcoming; and the idea of self-care for staff.

In my research journal after this meeting, I reflected on previous ways that I have played a role in helping front-line workers identify how their work is informed by theory. I see myself as a translator in my role, introducing front-line workers to ways that I believe they are expressing theories in their work (Baumbusch et al., 2008). From my perspective, participants

making fun of my nerdiness, or my need to connect theory and practice, indicated an acceptance of me in the community of youth workers. I hope that my actions in this translator role did not contribute to silencing workers in any part of the research. I experienced this exchange as reciprocal with workers sharing examples from practice that explicated theories and me offering themes from gathering examples together.

Months later when I had completed data analysis and had begun writing my dissertation, I made an entry in my research journal concerning the translator role and challenging a manager to identify their agency's theoretical approach, with similar results to the discussion about trauma-informed care. I have many examples from my involvement with the youth work community that demonstrate a lack of theory identification. Larson and colleagues (2009) cited Zeldin and Camino (1999) for their work, which found that many youth workers could not identify their goals for their interactions with youth. In this manager example, I later found out that the agency I was asking about does not have a logic model linking their programs to research and does not publicly state their philosophical approach to service provision. I value praxis or a strong link between practice and theory. To me, a logic model indicates transparent sharing of these linkages so that the agency can be held accountable to their mission and goals (Community Tool Box, 2016). Of course, a logic model is only one way to express this information; a theory of change model, a form of critical theory (Weiss, 1995), represents one of the other options. It makes me sad that the lack of a logic model, working philosophy, or approach to practice no longer surprises me. I believe that clear identification of philosophical approach and the linking of theory to practice create increased accountability and guidance for all the staff in an organization (Fook, 2002; Ruch, 2007; White, 2007).

Observing the meetings and taking detailed notes allowed me to use emergent PAR to examine front-line youth worker engagement with policy, using a range of methods and in diverse contexts. This opportunity increased the praxis in this research, or strengthened links between theory and practice, which is vital to the legitimacy of PAR research (McTaggart, 1997) as well as the usefulness of the findings for front-line workers (Fook, 2002; White, 2007). The perceived legitimacy and credibility of the findings will be an important factor in increasing the chances of the group experiencing efficacy when advocating for change based on the findings. The process of observing how front-line workers described a policy change affecting their work complemented our theoretical discussions in the Preparing the Ground and Reflection phases with a more pragmatic perspective grounded in practice (Charmaz, 2010). Receiving and accepting this invitation to participate strengthened the relationships between the participants and myself and demonstrated that I was seeking to follow their lead as the context experts. In consecutive phases, we were able to draw examples from these earlier discussions and practically and theoretically link them to the context of the *Plan* (CHF, 2011). The Immersion phase built a strong foundation for exploring further together.

**Reflection and Action phases.** The Reflection and Action phases were in the original research proposal and were designed to be complementary, with the third phase focused on reflection and the fourth focused on planning actions informed by the reflection in the previous stage. First the group examined the *Plan to End Youth Homelessness in Calgary* (CHF, 2011) and considered the following research questions: Do front-line workers identify anything as missing from the *Plan* (CHF, 2011)? Do front-line workers share the goals identified in the *Plan*? How does the reality of the implementation of the *Plan* contrast with the intent described in the policy? How actionable is the *Plan*? How can challenges of implementation be addressed?

These questions reflect the assumptions that I identified in the researcher-as-instrument section of this chapter. For example, the first question assumes that front-line workers have something to add to the policy and that the policy may be missing variables, such as addictions services for youth. In addition to these questions, the Reflection phase included reflection on themes emerging from the data collected during participant observation in the Immersion phase.

As the group moved into the Action phase, the questions shifted in focus to identifying potential stakeholders and partners that the group worked with to affect change based on the recommendations from front-line workers. During the four planning action focus groups, participants concentrated on identifying a) problems, solutions, and leverage points, b) groups and institutions with which we should share these findings, c) existing resources and possible partners to aid in planned actions, and d) what power we have as individuals to implement planned actions. I designed the following questions after the Reflection phase was complete and shared them with the participants as a loose guide for our discussions about planning actions:

What problems have we identified?

What solutions have we identified?

What leverage points have we identified?

Who has the power to change this?

Who do we want to hear this/share with?

How can we start with ourselves (as individuals, at the agency, as youth workers)?

Who could we partner with/what are the existing resources?

We returned to these questions at the beginning of each Action phase meeting.

The research process, as described so far, sounds clearer and more linear than it actually was. There were discussions about actions in the first reflection focus group, and about policy

being analyzed in the last action meeting. We discussed themes that emerged from discussions in the Immersion phase, even returning to the Preparing the Ground phase examples in some discussions. In this emergent and non-linear style, we were able to learn from the intersection between different kinds of knowledge.

Before we began the four focus groups that comprised the Reflection phase, I invited the creator of the policy being analyzed in this research to share updates and insights that had occurred since the policy was published in 2011. A representative of the Calgary Homeless Foundation shared the progress indicators tracked by the organization and reviewed with us the values driving the policy. One of the areas that was most specific to the agency that I was partnering with was the funder and policy support for outreach, including referrals supported by outreach, such as attending court with a youth.

Recognition of the power dynamic between the creators of the policy and the participants in the research is important in the ethics of this study. The CHF funds the majority of agencies that serve homeless youth in Calgary, the same agencies where the participants in this research were likely to be employed. The CHF is also a funding source for this research project. This situation can be seen as a potential strength in terms of the funder, the front-line workers, and the researcher having shared goals and existing relationships; yet it still remains an important power dynamic to consider.

In this Reflection phase, recruitment was based on a new strategy grounded in what was learned in the Preparing the Ground phase. Discussion with participants during this first phase led to a partnership being proposed between this research project and an agency that serves homeless youth. This proposition was accepted in order to incorporate this research into



participants' existing work schedules and thereby address one of the barriers to participation identified in the Preparing the Ground phase: a scarcity of time.

Retention of participants over time becomes a concern in research with front-line workers. As identified earlier, the lack of time for front-line workers is a compound problem including night shifts, multiple jobs, unpredictable schedules, on-call responsibilities, and issues with access to childcare. Often the realities and timelines of practice conflict with the researcher's desire for time to reflect (Herr & Anderson, 2005). High rates of turnover in employment, and burnout resulting in leaving youth work entirely, have the potential to impact the sustainability of the research group (Hamama, 2012; Harlow, 2004).

In addition to recruiting new participants, I invited participants from this first phase to continue on with the Reflection and Action phases, and two participants accepted this invitation. Similar to the Immersion phase, rotating numbers of youth workers attended focus groups at any one time, with a total of 13 individuals participating. A \$25 honorarium was offered to individuals each time they participated in the research. As they were being simultaneously paid by the agency due to the research occurring during work hours, participants employed by the partnering agency made a collective decision at the first meeting to donate their honorarium to a fund that was spent at the discretion of the staff team. The staff team saw this money as a budget for team building and spent the money on a fun-filled day sledding down a ski hill on inner tubes. As a group, we discussed the difficulty that the agency had experienced trying to secure funds for staff team building, as well as the importance of relationship building during fun times so that these relationships could weather the storms when staff were navigating crises together.

The focus group discussions from the Reflection phase were audio recorded and transcribed. During the data analysis, I coded the transcripts for emergent themes, following the

process outlined by Charmaz (2010), and presented the Immersion phase themes and the *Plan* (CHF, 2011) as a catalyst for discussion. These meetings provided opportunities for participants to reflect on research results, clarify the meaning of earlier statements, and expand on examples under different themes. The original intent for the four focus group meetings of the Reflection phase was to evaluate the *Plan* (2011). However, the discussion quickly shifted to the larger perspective of workers' perceptions concerning the idea of ending youth homelessness that underlies the policy. At first I was alarmed that this shift might indicate that I had chosen a policy to analyze that did not hold relevance for the front-line youth workers. After the first meeting, one of the participants made a joke about how I should leave the policy in the staff bathroom because at least they were a captive audience in there! I reflected in my research journal about how this actually hurt my feelings for a bit, until I remembered that the shift in topic also indicated adherence with PAR principles that encourage the research process to be led by participants.

All I had to do was kill the researcher in my head that wanted to control the process! I will expand on this idea later, dear reader, in the discussion chapter. To define this idea, Blackburn (2000), interpreting Freire (1970), emphasized that the researcher must “shed ingrained attitudes of ‘anti-dialogue’ which may have become automatic” (p. 8), such as the assumption of intellectual superiority. Blackburn (2000) critiqued Freire’s failure to address the possibility that researchers and educators might be unwilling or unable to kill the oppressor within them. I agree with Collins (1990) when she described academics as being in a position where they “simultaneously needed to challenge the same structure that granted them legitimacy” (p. 274). As she pointed out, the elites do not have to maintain how the validation of knowledge produced reflects their interests, because we will do it for them, due to “that piece of

the oppressor which is planted deep within each of us” (1984, p. 123, Lorde as cited in Collins, 1990). As Blackburn (2000) explained, the process of killing the researcher in our head or disempowering oneself is necessary in order to make room for the oppressed to be empowered. I see this as an ethical imperative because of this potential to further reinforce oppression. To a certain extent I agree with Collins (1990), who identifies a dichotomy between being radical or being promoted in university settings. It makes sense to me in terms of hegemony that radicalism would not be rewarded in status quo organizations, and I have heard a wealth of experiential knowledge that confirms this view. Still, I hope to identify exceptions to this rule and to influence change in this area. Most likely if I had less privilege, if I was not White or I had not been raised middle-class, I would just accept this as true. If I accepted this as true, I would concentrate my efforts on creating institutions that better align with my values rather than trying to change the university from the inside or the outside. Since I already respond in this way, perhaps due to the oppression that I face as a woman in a patriarchy, or a person with mental illness, I am less worried that I will be distracted by wistful hope (Lear, 2008).

All 13 of the participants from the Reflection phase carried on to the Action phase in order to plan actions based on the learning from the former phase. Details about the action that we engaged in will be presented in the results chapter; in this chapter, I will share the research decision making processes and reflections from my research journal about these processes.

Our first decision concerned opportunities to present at academic conferences. At the beginning of the Reflection phase focus groups, I asked participants whether they would be interested in presenting the findings from the Preparing the Ground phase at an academic conference. I explained that sharing results at academic conferences was something that I had committed to do as part of the funds that I received to support the research and that it represented

an opportunity to share our results with decision makers, policy writers, and other researchers. Two of the participants in that meeting had offered their knowledge in the Preparing the Ground phase and the other six had not. Some participants expressed their fear of public speaking as a reason that they did not wish to co-present. One participant offered to help compile and edit the presentation, as they felt that these tasks fit better with their strengths and preferences. This participant and I worked on the presentation through email, and I shared a link to a video of the presentation when I returned from the conference.

Later in the research process, when we were engaged in the action-planning focus groups for the final phase, I identified another conference and asked the group whether anyone wanted to co-present with me. This second conference was more practical than the first one, which was more research focused. Interest was much higher for the second conference. I believe that the workers were more engaged because of their involvement in the co-creation of knowledge for the phase that we were presenting about. We developed the presentation collaboratively as a team of four. The team included a practicum student who had a learning goal to improve her public speaking skills, and two front-line workers, one with 20 years of youth work experience and one with five. We met three times outside of the time allotted for the focus groups in order to develop and practice our presentation. The presentation was greatly improved through the addition of stories from their practice that explicated the themes we were presenting. Working together made our strengths and weaknesses more evident; for example, the three workers reduced the word count and jargon in slides that I had created, while I was able to explain research skills, such as why sharing our methods of data collection was important. We laughed a lot while engaging in this work together, and I took it as an indicator of acceptance when the participants made fun of my wordiness in subsequent focus groups. Two of us presented at the conference and debriefed

the experience together. We both felt disappointed at the lack of dialogue from the audience, as we had expected more discussion, challenge, and feedback from our practice colleagues.

All of the participants in the Reflection and Action phases had a voice in the discussion and decisions regarding how we wanted to share the results of the research. I shared what the budget was for the research sharing event, and we discussed the pros and cons of hosting this event at the agency, at the university, or in the community. The group decided to rent a room in a church that the agency had successfully used for youth events in the past. The church was close to the agency and accessible from public transit, and it was offered as a donation in kind, which allowed us to spend more money on food for the event. The team of four presented the results from the Reflection phase at this event. We invited youth through a poster in the partnering agency, workers and managers through an agency email list, people who participated in earlier phases of the research through email, and the general public through sharing the poster on social media. We were all excited that the audience included youth who had accessed services at the agency, as we were particularly eager to share results with them and listen to what they thought about the results.

In the Action phase, we identified stakeholders and decision makers in the issue of youth homelessness that we wanted to meet with to discuss possible future actions based on the research results. Participants did not hold much hope that meeting with government officials would result in change; however, they felt that we should meet with them because they have more power to implement our recommendations at the provincial level than we do. Members of the research team met twice with representatives from the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate and the Interagency Council on Homelessness. These meetings coincided with the release of the Alberta provincial plan to address youth homelessness (GOA, 2015).

Participants also identified the development and dissemination of a peer support manual as a potential action that could effect change based on the research results. In the first focus group, where we were planning actions, some of the participants suggested that we should write a peer model manual based on what we had learned through experience. Participants identified that this action fit with various themes that had emerged in the research, such as ideas about the peer model as a way to fight stigma, the need for services to be designed by youth who access these services, and the creation of leadership opportunities for both youth and youth workers. I was very excited about writing a manual together, based on our experiential knowledge and incorporating knowledge from the literature, because this would represent praxis or action supported by the research findings.

I brought up the idea of looking for funding for this project in order to better align with what we had learned in the research about youth workers doing this kind of labour for free and in addition to very busy schedules, including how this contributed to burnout. As we discussed in the meeting, the irony of this discrepancy was too much for us, as we would be making a decision that would not be based on what we had learned through our research together. Participants assumed that we would do this macro-level work outside of work hours, based on our passion to contribute to knowledge that could help improve services for youth. This assumption makes sense in the context of front-line youth work and was a prominent theme in the research that will be presented in the results chapter. This was an excellent experiential example of how difficult it was to decline doing the action for free. We all wanted to complete the action because we saw a need for it and identified it as something that would help the youth with whom we work.

The two funders that I approached about providing resources for this project required a registered charity to receive the funds and more than one agency partnering on the project. I asked an agency providing peer-based services to LGBTQ2S+ people whether they would like to partner on this project, but they turned down the opportunity because of fears of standardizing a model that is based on complexity and flexibility. Another agency that I approached was engaged in community development and poverty reduction initiatives that supported peer models in theory, but they did not have access to resources to support initiatives outside of their agency. Through these discussions, I was invited to meetings of agencies providing peer model services who were interested in developing a program based on peer support for people living in poverty.

I compiled a literature review about peer support and submitted it to the host agency as a way of increasing their access to information through my privileged access to academic sources and skills. This helped to strengthen our relationship as participants with different skill sets who hold shared goals concerning improving policy and practice. I made the decision to offer this literature review in order to contribute to reciprocity, an ethic of PAR (Maiter et al., 2008). Reciprocity is an “ongoing process of exchange with the aim of establishing and maintaining equality between parties” (Maiter et al., 2008, p. 305).

I volunteered my access to peer-reviewed articles for the purpose of teaching and scholarly skills, such as appraisal of research articles, in order to offer a gift to the people who were sharing their knowledge and time by engaging in this research. Teaching front-line workers about trustworthiness in research is a key contributor to increasing their capacity to engage in research and to critique other research in the future (Podger et al., 2013). I agree with the statement in the professional code of anthropologists regarding reciprocity, and interpret it to mean that researchers “should recognize their debt to the societies in which they work and their

obligation to reciprocate with people studied in appropriate ways” (American Anthropological Association, 1998, Section IIIA, point 6, as cited in Maiter et al., 2008). I tried to make this summary as useful as possible for the agency, with the idea that they could use it to justify funding proposals or policy changes, such as offering peer-model services. I felt this aligned with my part in developing reciprocity in our research relationship, as Maiter and colleagues (2008) identify: “the researcher can provide knowledge that can be used by participants and the community to maximize their potential to obtain resources” (p. 318).

In my research journal I reflected that it would have been a better fit with PAR ethics of sustainability and equality if I had taught literature review skills to the participants and we had collectively gathered information concerning what is known about the peer model. Transferring literature review skills to participants would have contributed to sustainability in terms of the group’s ability to conduct research in the future; however, this ignores the difference between us in terms of access to peer-reviewed journals. Most funding applications require citations of peer-reviewed journals as evidence. Upon further reflection, I feel that building reciprocity and sharing some of my labour with the group contributed to building more reciprocity in our relationships and offered a way for me to give back to the group effort.

New agency policies emerged from the discussions in the Reflection and Action phases, which was an unexpected result of the research. These policies were designed to increase communication within the agency that participated in this research, particularly in regard to transition plans for youth aging into adult services and agency orientations for recent hires. Workers also began developing transition plans for youth aging out of youth services, in response to a growing awareness of numbers of youth nearing an age when youth services would



no longer be available to them. Actions resulting from this phase will be presented in more detail in the results chapter.

**Reflections from my research journal concerning the Reflection and Action phases.** I felt as if some reflection time was sacrificed in the interpretation of data because I was trying to analyze data for the next meeting in two-week cycles. On the other hand, my quick analysis turnaround time of two weeks allowed time for participants to reflect and respond to my interpretations while the discussion topics were still fresh in their minds. This emphasis on reflection time for participants aligned to some extent with my participatory worldview and contributed to trustworthiness through member checking.

Did I really give them opportunities to participate and they turned them down, or did I expect them to have skills that they didn't? I reflected on this question in my research journal, particularly with respect to the meaning-making or data-analysis process, which White (2007) identified as part of praxis. Early in that process, I was concerned when participants did not directly respond to the emergent themes from the Immersion phase. At the time, I felt that they were refusing to tell me whether the themes were off track, and I wrote as a researcher that had failed to demystify the process of data analysis with front-line workers. I was concerned that something about the power dynamic was preventing workers from being open with me about their interpretations of the data.

Months later, when I was writing a report about the Reflection and Action phases, it occurred to me that workers had responded directly to the emergent themes. They did this by providing more examples that fit under themes such as belonging and stigma, thus deepening our understanding of different ways these concepts apply in youth work. Initially I had misinterpreted these discussions as distracting from the process of meaning-making because of

the repetition of some examples that had already been shared, along with some new examples. However, this *was* the process of interpretation—applying emergent themes to the context of youth work, examining fit, and adding exemplars of this theme or rejecting it as an irrelevant concept. Interpretation and meaning-making are the processes that result in praxis, or practice informed by theory and theory built from practice (White, 2007). This was an interesting learning experience for me about my confidence that youth workers would say something if my interpretation did not match their perspective. In this way we built trust, even while speaking different languages.

I recognized the processes of working forwards and backwards as examples of inductive and deductive reasoning in our work (Charmaz, 2010). From an inductive perspective, workers would provide practice examples, and I offered themes back to them that I recognized in these examples. The deductive approach came into play when we were discussing these emergent themes, and workers would provide examples that demonstrated that there was more to a quote than was captured by the theme or describe more examples that confirmed the theme. For example, when we discussed the theme of relationship-based work, one participant retold a story about going for coffee with a young man that she used to work with. When she first told this story, I interpreted it as an indicator of the importance of relationships that are not severed when a youth ages out of youth services. The worker who shared the story clarified that she didn't necessarily think it was an indicator of success, because she felt that belonging with peers was missing from the young person's life. The worker felt that the youth should "not have time to hang out with an old lady like me!" In this example I could see how I had deductively approached the data after identifying the theme of relationship-based work, and the participant

had drawn me back to inductive thinking by emphasizing the importance of belonging. In this process, we learned from the interaction between inductive and deductive thinking.

Writing in my research journal, I thought about the first focus group of the Reflection phase and my concerns that youth workers did not seem interested in the policy we were examining. One of the youth workers expressed that this policy was not relevant to front-line work, saying that what front-line workers were actually interested in and thinking about were practical issues such as: “Did the agency have enough tampons for the kids today?” This reminded me of the crisis orientation of front-line work and how concerns are very “in the now” and pragmatic (Bradbury Huang, 2010). It was gratifying at the end of the research, through the quality of participation in the survey, to have the same participant inform me that they now saw the importance and influence of policies on the work that they do. In other words, they identified the policy as something useful and relevant to their work. This connection was solidified through their work in trying to implement new policy in the agency and through our reflections in the research. I believe that implementing the new policy created an important opportunity for experiential learning that was complementary to my research design. This complementarity provided excellent conditions for developing praxis (White, 2007).

We analyzed a policy in the research that was not designed to be implemented by front-line workers, the *Plan to End Youth Homelessness in Calgary* (CHF, 2011). In contrast, the policy being implemented in the agency concerned enriching and developing the natural supports relationships, such as those with friends and family, as resources that could support the assessment and goal planning of youth accessing services. Although front-line workers were mandated to implement the policy in the Immersion phase, the integration of learning into their practice area of expertise grounded their reflections in practical and action-oriented examples, in

contrast to the theoretical focus of the Reflection phase. This parallel learning allowed us to examine the two examples of policy influencing their work, one at a macro policy level and one at the practice level. Additionally, this represented an opportunity to contrast our perspectives before and after implementing the natural supports policy. Workers experienced a shift in perception regarding their work, which catalyzed some workers to attempt to influence other people to share in this shift, including leadership with funders, co-workers, and the agency.

I particularly enjoyed being part of this learning when it was evident that workers were more aware of concepts, such as belonging, in their work and attended meetings with fresh examples to share that built on concepts discussed earlier. This feeling made me note in my research journal that I felt as though I was part of the workers' community of practice and that my research skills could be useful in the context of front-line work. At the time of this writing, I feel that my skills in data analysis were useful in this meaning-making process and that interpretation of data was an ongoing process in which I held a primary and influential role.

I recognize that the other participants had interpretive skills, especially those identified by Ruch (2007) and White (2007) as essential in developing praxis or theory informed by learnings from practice. I sustained my goal to reduce my influence on the interpretation of the data and to provide opportunities for other participants to develop capacity and experience with interpreting results. The idea of providing a catalyst for discussion fit well with my interpretation of my role in PAR.

In my research journal, I wrote about trying to respond to comments from participants, such as, "Stasha, you tell them [policy writers] this," with ideas about how we could tell them together. I went back and forth in my journal between thinking that this translator role (Baumbusch et al., 2008) and strengthening of worker voice was my responsibility in the

research, and hoping that participants would identify their own power and ability to speak their truth to power. I believe a compromise was found between workers gaining confidence through presenting to an audience outside of a postsecondary setting and me checking my interpretations of data in multiple ways with participants.

The concept of speaking truth to power is thought to originate from an old Quaker saying from the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Additionally, American civil rights leader Bayard Rustin stated in a 1942 letter that the role of religious groups was to “speak the truth to power” and was a co-author of the 1955 book *Speak Truth to Power: A Quaker Search for an Alternative to Violence* (American Friends Service Committee [AFSC], 1955). This concept has also been applied in political science, where the literature cites a 1979 book by Aaron Wildavsky as a seminal work presenting the idea of science speaking truth to power.

Braun and Kropp (2010) framed political science as moving beyond speaking truth to power by developing institutional responses to the problems identified as truth. I see truth as multiple and contested, which Braun and Kropp (2010) posited involves going “beyond truth” (p. 780) to identify and experiment with institutional responses. Hoppe (1999) identified the origins of the need to speak truth to power in political science as the need to disrupt elites holding power in society. Additionally, he recommended critical analysis of policy, and a participatory philosophy of “making sense together” (p. 209) in the policy processes (Hoppe, 1999). I agree that developing relationships is one way to critically reflect on a variety of perspectives; it is vital to this research, as the quality of our results depends on the quality of our relationships with each other (Brydon-Miller, 1997; Herr & Anderson, 2005).

Our relationships were deepened through our work in this research. This was accomplished through happy events such as celebrating birthdays together, along with more

grueling work such as confronting racism in a shared community setting. I present more details in the results chapter regarding what I learned from the experience of confronting racism together. In terms of relationship building, we met for coffee as people with privilege who share an identity-based community, to discuss our roles in the community conflict and what we could do. We got to know each other in different ways. For example, one participant and I went on a road trip to present research results and questioned why we had never done this in our friendship before. Another participant and I volunteered together at a fashion show fundraiser and discussed our experiences in patriarchal society, including unrealistic beauty standards and male entitlement to women's bodies. During the course of the research, I participated in an all-female moving team that was a reunion between three of us who had met 16 years ago, when we were in our late teens and early twenties. We reflected on how during our divorces it has always been our peer co-workers and youth with whom we worked in the past who showed up to help us move, who we can count on to be there when we need someone.

The levels of violence and barriers described at the meso or organizational level during the Preparing the Ground phase were overwhelming, then the Reflection and Action phases were conducted within an agency! Holding research meetings at the workplace was not recommended by Kahan (2001), who instead suggested a more neutral location. I spent extensive time reflecting on this change in the research design. When I was planning my research, I wanted to create opportunities for front-line workers from different agencies to build new relationships from learning together in the focus groups. I was afraid of the influence on the research of pre-existing relationships between workers from different agencies after the findings of the Preparing the Ground phase, which indicated that participants had concerns about these dynamics influencing their ability to participate. The small number of participants in the first phase also

concerned me, as sustainable involvement in the research was even more vital for the Reflection and Action phases.

During the design of these phases, I hoped shared experiences and relationship building would contribute to increased sustainability of the action components of the research. I will present more in the following section regarding what other researchers have discussed in the literature about conducting research within a workplace setting.

### **Focus Groups as Applied in the Phases Preparing the Ground, Reflection, and Action**

In the Preparing the Ground, Reflection, and Action phases, data were collected through focus groups, which are defined as carefully planned group discussions organized to explore a set of specific issues, with the goal to learn more about perceptions, feelings, attitudes, and ideas (Chiu, 2003; Kahan, 2001). Although the Preparing the Ground phase was originally planned as a World Café focus group (Brown & Isaac, 2001), as explained above, these discussions organically became a focus group due to a lower than expected number of participants.

In the Preparing the Ground phase, some participants expressed hesitation to participate in the study because they were uncertain it would be a safe place in which to express their views. Although focus groups enabled participants in the current study to hear the ideas of their peers, this methodological choice was not without risk, as it made anonymity impossible. Hoffmeyer and Scott (2007) stressed the need for recording existing power dynamics when using focus groups as a method—between participants and the researcher, and particularly when participants may have pre-existing relationships in workplaces. Recruiting only front-line workers and excluding managers assisted in reducing this risk in the study, although workers may have had pre-existing relationships, and some had formerly been managers. Hoffmeyer and Scott (2007) also recommended advising participants that confidentiality cannot be ensured outside of the

group, and that they can share their insights privately with the researcher. I could have used individual interviews or anonymous online surveys to offer participants more opportunities to share with the researcher anonymously; however, I wanted to encourage co-creation of knowledge, challenge unequal power dynamics, and develop relationships that could sustain actions taken together past the conclusion of the study. Participants in Goss and Leinbach's (1996) study, which evaluated focus groups as an alternative research practice, felt they had learned something valuable through exchanging views with other people, and none of the participants preferred interviews to focus groups.

The iterative nature of focus groups can ensure that the knowledge generated is grounded in the language and experiences of participants by decreasing researcher control and encouraging more informal interactions (Bagnoli & Clark, 2010). These informal interactions contribute to topics being led by participants, with them building off each other's ideas. Additionally, focus groups are useful for challenging the unequal distribution of power in the research relationship (Bollard, 2003; Pini, 2002), a major goal of this study. Nevertheless, future research on the nature of policy engagement among front-line youth workers could use individual qualitative interviews in order to provide confidentiality that would complement the benefits of group discussions, while mitigating the risk that participants choose not to share because they were concerned about the lack of confidentiality in the focus groups. On the other hand, workers in this study expressed relief at hearing similar stories from other focus group participants; these shared experiences may also contribute to deeper reflection and disclosure, noted strengths of the focus-group methodology (Kitzinger, 1994; Pini, 2002).

Focus groups reflect a belief in the social nature of knowledge construction, and in doing so provide "a rekindling of fun and wonder in the research process" as people learn together



(Goss & Leinbach, 1996, p. 116). This building of relationships allows participants to draw confidence from others, as trust develops in the group and contributes to the sustainability of projects (Goss & Leinbach, 1996; Kitzinger, 1994; Maiter et al., 2008). The confidence gained from other members of the group sharing about subjects that may be taboo can encourage deeper sharing in the group (Kitzinger, 1994). I trusted participants to make informed choices about what was safe and important to share within the context of the focus groups. In the quality-of-participation section of the results chapter, I share reflections from my research journal concerning opportunities to increase confidentiality while also complementing the shared learning of focus groups.

**Facilitator skills in focus groups.** The role of facilitator in the context of focus groups aims to create dialogue rather than extract information from participants (Chiu, 2003). The facilitator must prevent domination by individuals (Bollard, 2003; Chioncel, et al., 2003; Goss & Leinbach, 1996). It is common in focus groups for people of higher social status to interrupt, assume leadership, and dominate discussions; therefore, it is vital for the facilitator to provide diverse opportunities for participation, to make space for all participants' voices to be heard, and to confront domination (Chioncel et al., 2003; Goss & Leinbach, 1996).

During each focus group, I provided stimuli, such as materials or exercises that provided grounding for could help ground the discussion (Chioncel et al., 2003; Chiu, 2003; Kitzinger, 1994). Providing these theoretical or conceptual catalysts to begin the discussion facilitated a dialogical process between different ways of knowing and created opportunities for participation and the co-construction of knowledge (Chiu, 2003). Projection techniques, such as reacting to the policy or case examples, allowed participants to express their opinion in a less confrontational way and stimulated discussion (Goss & Leinbach, 1996). In this way, I worked to achieve a

balance between keeping reflections on topic and opening space for participants to lead the discussion in unexpected directions (Bagnoli & Clark, 2010; Chiu, 2003; Pini, 2002).

Facilitators must remain aware of the potential for “group think,” the potential for some participants to conform to the apparently dominant opinion in the focus group setting (Chioncel et al., 2003, Kitzinger, 1994; Pini, 2002). Consensus was not the goal of these focus groups, and this research does not claim to represent the views of front-line workers as a whole; rather, the results of the data were informed by a diversity of opinions and contexts (Dürrenberger, Kastenholz, & Behringer, 1999; Kahan, 2001). I will share two examples from the focus group facilitation where I had to navigate issues of dominant opinion.

In the first example, one of the youth workers held a philosophical view that was not supported by the majority of the group. They supported an abstinence-only model of drug recovery, in contrast to the harm-reduction view held by myself and the partner agency. Even though I disagree with their view, I tried to facilitate space for her to share her view by saying, “Lots of the kids feel the same way; could you share more about that?” Had I been a participant instead of a researcher, I would not have tried to make space to learn from this opposing view; I would have argued the benefits of harm reduction. This realization made me reflect on opportunities that I might be missing to learn from conflicting views in my practice. The second example of navigating dominant opinion occurred when one of the participants in the Reflection phase disagreed with some of the findings in the Preparing the Ground phase. They clarified that for them, fear was not a barrier to engaging in policy work. Rather, they were concerned that their efforts would not make a difference. This participant’s disagreement with the findings was a catalyst in my realization that I had initially misinterpreted the results in the first phase by

failing to see that workers did indeed feel fear, but that this fear did not actually stop them from engaging in policy work.

The quality of facilitation had far-reaching consequences. For example, in the Reflection and Action phases, focus group discussions were audio-recorded and professionally transcribed. Despite my facilitation attempts in asking one person to speak at a time, sometimes there was cross-talk on the recording, especially different participants having multiple conversations at once. The transcript of the focus group discussions reflects that some parts of the discussions are missing due to the cross-talk. During the Action phase when the focus groups discussions were dedicated to planning actions, I asked participants whether I could take notes in addition to audio recording the discussions. I made notes on a laptop during the meetings, and I read over the notes out loud at the conclusion of the meeting to offer participants opportunities to correct any comments that they felt I had not captured adequately from the discussion. I believe these notes improved my ability to record the complex ideas grounded in the perspectives of the workers.

**Methodological fit between focus groups and the goals of this study.** Dürrenberger, Kastenholz, and Behringer (1999) found focus groups useful in generating practical knowledge about complex policy issues, such as the policy under study in this research. The connection between private and public spheres is recognized within focus group methodology, as Kitzinger (1994) explained: “our personal behaviour is not cut off from public discourses and our actions do not happen in a cultural vacuum” (p. 117). Focus groups can provide opportunities for our experiences and ideology to be contested and understood through dialogue, which can further inform our actions (Sakamoto & Pitner, 2005; Spratt & Houston, 1999). Listening and sharing our views are political processes that build reciprocity (Maiter et al., 2008) and democracy (Brydon-Miller, Greenwood, & Maguire, 2003; Freire, 1970; Renault, 2005; Rossiter, 1997).

Dialogue with others who share your problems is a key part of developing this praxis (Gutiérrez, 1990; Herr & Anderson, 2005; Weiler, 1991), where theorizing occurs from experience and is applied back to experience (Henderson, 1995).

Dialogue requires an egalitarian relationship in order to achieve the goals of collective action and individual empowerment (Freire, 1970; Henderson, 1995; Moreau, 1990; Rossiter, 1997). Engaging in PAR does not remove the power dimension, but it centralizes the focus on how power affects systems and individuals, while opening the possibility for questioning pre-held positions and assumptions (Henderson, 1995; Spratt & Houston, 1999). Through relationships, groups can provide social support via the change process, a potential power base for future actions, new understandings of self and others, new theories, as well as an opportunity to learn new skills and view different perspectives through participating, listening, and observing others (Gutiérrez, 1990; Henderson, 1995). Focus groups enable connections to be made between individual and collective experiences and can provide space for reflexivity or shared reflection (Pini, 2002).

Consciousness-raising represents a vital step in one of the goals of this research: the pursuit of social justice. Through the use of focus groups, with the opportunities for dialogue and hearing other people's experiences, the goal is to create increased awareness of oppression and increased pursuit of social justice. Feminists have a long tradition of using focus groups for consciousness raising (Pini, 2002; Swigonski, 1993). Making connections between individual and collective experiences can contribute to the formation of collective identity and mobilization into collective social action, which is a primary goal of both feminist research and PAR (Bollard, 2003; Chiu, 2003).

Chiu (2003) suggested that the transformational potential of focus groups “lies in the equal value placed on different ways of knowing by an extended epistemological framework and the dynamic of knowing and doing embedded in the PAR process” (p. 165). Valuing different ways of knowing in a focus group allows opportunities for increasing critical awareness, as participants are exposed to views that may conflict with their own and are offered the opportunity to reflect on the origins of their beliefs (Chiu, 2003; Kitzinger, 1994; Swigonski, 1993). The limited research on the experience of participants in focus groups has found that participants appreciated the method as a learning and consciousness-raising activity (Bagnoli & Clark, 2010; Goss & Leinbach, 1996; Maiter et al., 2008; Pini, 2002). According to Pini (2002), focus groups provide the opportunity to confront “the assumption that one’s views are universally held truths,” which is key in developing critical awareness (p. 347).

In order to move from apathy to action (Gutierrez, 1990), people need to *experience* increasing self-efficacy or a sense of personal power and the belief in one’s ability “to produce and regulate events in one’s life” (Bandura, 1982, p. 122). Efficacy describes feeling more powerful and confident in your ability to affect others and influence social institutions (Henderson, 1995). As explained in the theoretical frameworks chapter, through this consciousness-raising process, people become more aware of internal and external resources at their disposal (Montero, 1994).

**Catalytic validity.** Guba and Lincoln (2005) identified research as a catalyst for action and as contributing to critical consciousness, which Freire (1970) called “conscientisation” and identified as necessary in order to challenge the status quo. Dear reader, I am extremely interested in the idea of research as a catalyst for action, as you will remember from the theory and methodology chapter. Catalytic validity represents “the degree in which the research process

reorients, focuses and energizes the participants towards knowing reality in order to transform it” (Bernard, 2000, as cited in Boog, 2003, p. 434). It involves asking whether the research results inspired action or behavioural changes. Catalytic validity involves how cycles of reflection and action lead to a deeper understanding of social reality for individuals, including the researcher, as well as the group (Herr & Anderson, 2005). This process of consciousness-raising provides a model for how researchers can learn from the knowledge and experience of local people (Brydon-Miller, 1997) in a shared revision of situations (Feldman, 1994). The development of these relationships can contribute to the sustainability of groups and projects (Goss & Leinbach, 1996; Kitzinger, 1994; Maiter et al., 2008). Catalytic validity is the degree to which empowerment and emancipation provoke political action (Cho & Trent, 2006).

Research that aims for catalytic validity uses conflict as a catalyst for new thinking (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). As Freire (1970) articulated, “democracy requires participation which requires the prior development of a critical consciousness, on the part of participants, that dismantles the current hegemony, through their recognition of their present oppression” (p. 59). Challenging unequal power dynamics in the research relationship is vital to catalytic validity (Cho & Trent, 2006) because critical consciousness is only possible through authentic dialogue between the researcher and participants where both are “equally knowing subjects” (Freire, 1970, p. 31). Catalytic validity is the extent to which what we learn in the research changes our actions. In other words, catalytic validity is about how we put our theoretical learning into practice or how we integrate our knowledge into praxis (Lather, 1986).

PAR works towards democratic principles by breaking down the dichotomy between the researcher/researched and by perusing democratic change in broader society. The goal of PAR is to eventually make change, to open up room for discussion, and to create space for dialogue—

equalizing relationships is what creates space for dialogue (Maiter et al., 2008). Genuine change requires reciprocity; this study is a picture in time of the ongoing cycles of reciprocity (Maiter et al., 2008). Beach (2003) argued that any research creating resistance to the increased accumulation of wealth, power, and social capital has catalytic validity. This has important implications for policy research because capitalist ideology fails to recognize the qualitative costs of policy decisions, specifically the impact of inequality in a capitalist society (Beach, 2003).

In the next section, I will describe the methods that I used to offer participants an opportunity to assess the quality of their experience when engaging in the research. Evaluating the quality of participation was built into the research design in order to reflect the connection to rigour identified in the literature (Anderson et al., 2015; Pyles, 2015; Rutherford, 2011) and my personal ethics related to PAR.

### **Quality of Participation Survey**

Following the analytical position of Andersen and colleagues (2015), I define participation as a “matter of concern,” a concept that by its very nature is unsettled and cannot be standardized. Holding participation as an unresolved matter of concern contributes to increased awareness of which factors mediate participation. Participation in this study was not limited to activities that occurred within the focus groups (Andersen et al., 2015); workers are always participating with other people, in different ways. For example, workers may have participated through sharing their experiences and thoughts about the research with the youth accessing services, or had a conversation while smoking outside that was not recorded in the research data collection.

I interpret the concept “participation as a matter of concern” to mean problematizing why and how to provide opportunities for participation, while examining the quality of emergent, ongoing, and intentional participation. To me, this means applying critical thinking regarding which variables contribute to, or detract from, high-quality participation experiences.

Models, such as Arnstein’s (1969) ladder of participation, assume that power to act is located in the individual, that it is not influenced by systemic forces such as racism, as Pyles (2015) has pointed out in her critique. This model places a hierarchy on different levels of participation, based on the degree of autonomy and decision making power in each form. In my research I have used Arnstein’s (1969) model to define “token participation,” a low-quality form of participation identified by workers as reducing their willingness to participate in the future. There is general agreement in the literature that participation exists on a spectrum from token or manipulated participation, to more authentic and genuine participation, such as local people taking initiatives independently of external institutions (Pyles, 2015). This model allows me to attend to the quality of participation as a concern while I offer diverse opportunities for participating in the research design, including participating by saying “no” to some kinds of involvement.

In line with Anderson’s (2015) model, I have experienced participation as a “distributed, heterogeneous and relational process” (p. 10). For example, some youth workers participated in this study before any face-to-face contact was made, via their voices in previous research identifying a lack of involvement in policy work as a problem. Addressing the heterogeneous nature of participation requires researchers to be explicit about their choices in regards to participation (Anderson et al., 2015; Charmaz, 2010; Herr & Anderson, 2005; Reason, 2006).



PAR requires problematizing the process of the research and examining how intersectional power is related to gender, ability, race, class, and so on (Herr & Anderson, 2005; Lather, 1986; Reason, 2006). Participation is relational, particularly in PAR, where learning comes from mutual reflection and action (Anderson et al., 2015). This is vital to recognize in the design process because one participant's ability to engage can be influenced by other participants, including myself as a researcher. For example, in the Preparing the Ground phase, participants expressed hesitation to participate in the research discussion because they were unaware of "who else might be there" when they made this decision. In the Reflection and Action phases, participants raised issues of racism towards Indigenous people that the youth had experienced; however, racism experienced within the youth worker team or agency was not discussed in a group where White people comprised the majority. Indigenous and White people have ongoing and historic racist, colonial relationships that could contribute to a lack of safety for Indigenous people to speak about their experiences with racism and colonialism.

In order to provide an opportunity for participants to assess the quality of their participation in this research, one year after the data collection participants were emailed a survey containing the following five questions:

1. What do you identify as the risks of participating in this research? For example, did you identify a cost or loss as a result of participating in this research? Did you have concerns about participating?
2. What do you identify as the benefits of participating in this research? For example, what is different because this research took place? Did you identify gains or improvements as a result of participating in this research?

3. How did you contribute to the research? For example, what roles did you play? What would have been different if you had not been there? What knowledge did you bring?
4. What would you change about the research? For example, is there anything about the research design or decisions that you would do differently?
5. Do you feel as though you are a researcher? Please provide examples.

Workers' responses to this survey are presented in the results chapter, along with my reflections about participation during the process of the research.

I built a one-year time delay into my research design because I wanted participants to have time to reflect about their participation, and time to integrate what we had learned in the research into our lives. As I will share in the discussion chapter, after a year, one of the participants identified as a co-researcher instead of a participant and contributed to the discussion chapter.

In this chapter, we have reviewed the processes that I followed in the research, and ways that the participants and I worked to answer the research questions. I shared my reflections concerning research decisions and how power was negotiated in the research. You met the individuals that were involved in the Reflection and Action phases and saw how they influenced the research design and discussion topics. In the next chapter, we will be led by the words of participants in exploring the results for the four phases of research. We will learn about engaging front-line workers in general policy work, about a specific example of youth workers implementing a policy at the front-line level, and about how front-line workers' knowledge about youth homelessness influences their practice and policy advocacy actions.

## Chapter Five - Results

In this chapter I will present the results for the four phases of the research as well as the responses to the quality of participation survey. As we learned in the methods chapter, there was cross-pollination between the different phases—for example, participants discussing the results from the Immersion phase in the Reflection phase. For each phase I will present the themes that I identified from the diverse sources of research data and then share my reflections about these processes of theme identification. For this chapter, dear reader, I will not be addressing you as directly as the other chapters. This is not because I have forsaken you; it is because this chapter is where the voices of participants will guide you on the story. I will continue to provide you with reflections about how I interpreted the results, and to acknowledge my role as an interpreter of knowledge that the front line workers shared. We will meet up again in the discussion chapter, where I will explore how these results can improve our practice, including research and policy.

### **Preparing the Ground Phase Results: Navigating Risk**

In the Preparing the Ground phase, participants identified the barriers and facilitating factors that they had experienced when engaging in front-line youth work in Calgary. The intent in this phase was to explore policy work as experienced by youth workers and to use the knowledge gained to re-evaluate the design of the subsequent phases of my dissertation research. During the data analysis process, I identified the overarching story as: *Front-line workers navigating risk to participate in policy advocacy*. This central concept for this phase is comprised of themes and sub-themes, which I have organized under the micro, meso, and macro levels, as depicted in Table 1.

Table 1

*Thematic Presentation of Front-Line Workers Navigating Risk to Participate in Policy Advocacy*

Themes	Sub-Themes	Levels
Front line workers' skills	Connections between policy and practice Creativity in policy problem solving Navigating risk	Micro
Front line workers' context	Uniquely situated Strongly motivated Shared experiences of oppression Impact of previous experiences with policy engagement	Micro
Institutional policies	Opportunities for continuing education Promotion and benefits Implementation and discretion Overworked and overwhelmed	Meso
Organizational culture	Quality of supervision Turnover in leadership Relationships with managers Interrelationships between workers Consequences—sanctions and silencing	Meso
Gender		Macro
Pursuing accountability		Macro
Challenging dichotomy		Macro
Relationship-based work		Macro
Relationships with funders		Macro
Relationships between agencies		Macro
Relationships with the larger community		Macro
Reasons to risk	Improved practice, policy, and outcomes Increased ownership of policy decisions Increased job satisfaction	

**Front-line workers navigating risk.** Originally, I interpreted the overarching concept as being one of workers requiring safety to engage in policy work (Huntingford et al., 2014). This interpretation fit with what I heard from participants about feeling a lack of safety, such as with sanctions and silencing, experienced as a result of engaging in policy advocacy. What I missed with this interpretation was that workers had presented many examples of experiencing this lack

of safety and continuing to engage in policy advocacy, despite their knowledge of the risks. I believe that I made this assumption because I had internalized a problem-focused view of front-line youth workers (Maiter et al., 2008). Defining them as an oppressed group led me to miss seeing their autonomy and how they were already resisting and acting. Realizing this assumption allowed me to take a more strength-based approach to the interpretation and made workers' power more visible. The final section of Table 1 contains three themes that the participants identified as benefits resulting from front-line youth workers engaging in policy advocacy. These benefits were presented as worth taking a risk for, particularly the focus on improving policy and practice in the youth-serving system.

**Definition of policy analysis.** Participants described policy work as a very active process of struggle to change, or work around, policies that they felt were unethical or caused damage to the youth accessing services. This contrasts with the academic view of policy analysis as an analytical process. What the workers described went beyond reflection and policy analysis, encompassing advocacy for social change at the individual, institutional, and systemic levels. Reflective of the active pursuit of social change, many of the themes concerned *relationships* and dialogue with stakeholders such as other front-line workers, supervisors, funders, community members, and other youth-serving agencies. These relationships were identified as sites with the potential to change policy or build understanding with decision makers. Participants provided examples of how actions within these relationships had supported or interfered with workers' ability to effect change at the policy level. In this results chapter, I use the terms "policy work" and "policy engagement" to refer to the active process that participants described.

**Demographics of participants in the Preparing the Ground phase.** The seven participants identified as women and had between five and 15 years of professional experience as

front-line youth workers. Two of the participants identified as people of colour, and two participants had previous managerial experience in addition to current front-line experience. All seven worked at different agencies. Some participants had front-line youth work experience in provinces outside of Alberta in addition to their local experience. Two participants from this phase continued to engage in the subsequent phases. Due to the methods used in this phase, individual participants cannot be linked with their quotes. Quotes are presented from aggregate notes taken during the group discussion.

**Micro level.** Two themes comprise the micro or individual level. The first is workers' skills, which are categorized as specific learnable proficiencies and techniques that workers use to navigate risk and engage with policy in active and reflective ways. The second theme is workers' contexts, which refers to the situational environment and conditions surrounding front-line youth work, including social location that motivates workers to engage with policy work.

***Front-line workers' skills.*** Front-line workers' ability to make connections between practice and policy was identified as a sub-theme under workers' skills. In general, participants were able to identify how policies such as inadequate provincial income supports, the lack of accessible transportation for youth, and the futility of bylaw fines for youth, had direct implications for their practice with youth. This sub-theme indicates that workers have deep awareness about connections between policies and practice. One participant, for example, commented on the transformative nature of understanding the link between policies and practice: "once you look, are aware, you can't go back to ignoring it." This understanding of the linkage to practice is not universal; another participant suggested that some workers are "not aware of the macro world, [or] links to how policy affects work/youth."

Using creativity—the second sub-theme related to workers’ skills—was noted as an important strength in solving policy problems. As one participant explained, “front line is creative, sees potential, different ways of approaching, needs flexibility to [respond to] changing needs.” Another worker concurred, stating that “creativity for solutions [is] higher among [the] front line; we know the problems and are motivated to try new ways.”

Respondents explained that navigating risk was a key tension in workers’ decisions regarding engaging in policy work. As mentioned above, workers defined policy work as a very active process of advocacy for policy change. Standard implementation of policy was discussed, along with rule bending and rule breaking. Participants proposed that the low pay inherent in youth work allowed workers to take risks, in that workers could “accept being fired and just move on to the next job—the good thing about not making very much [money] is that you have less to lose, [you] could get a job at [name of coffee shop] for the same money, better benefits.” According to youth workers in this study, this idea of having nothing to lose continued into identifying high rates of burnout and leaving the field as motivation for them to advocate for systemic change through “having a stronger voice.” Participants in the study also expressed that the context of youth work mitigated their fear of consequences, as one participant shared: “not working/being in the field, being on hiatus, leaving the agency, frees us, we don’t have the fear.”

***Front line workers’ context.*** Participants explained that workers were uniquely situated, in that they “know what is wrong,” “have the experiential knowledge to inform policy,” “are the ones who do the work,” and “see how policy affects our work and [the people we work with].” Being uniquely situated, the first sub-theme related to worker context, centres the power of the implementation position, in that policy will not be transferred into action without being interpreted by front-line workers. Additionally, because of what workers witness in their work

with youth, they describe a second sub-theme of being strongly motivated by their “genuine care or concern for clients” and the “direct impact in improving [things] for youth, motivated by the obviousness of the problem—for example, providing bus tickets addresses an obvious need.”

In the third sub-theme related to worker context, participants in the study identified themselves and youth as having similar experiences of oppression. They described having a “fear in common” with youth in terms of assessing risk related to advocating for their concerns. As one worker expressed this, “[youth] don’t know if it is worth the risk—what if they get punished for raising the issue?” Participants in the study further noted that “token participation” and lack of “follow-through” was also a shared experience for youth and youth workers. As one worker explained, “youth show up when their voice is heard and acted upon; there needs to be follow-through.” One participant offered the following example of how this commonality can lead to tension rather than unity:

Youth workers get shit on, get shot as the messenger of the gaps in service for youth; youth vent frustrations on youth workers—there is a tension even though youth and youth workers have much in common: exploited, don’t have voice, money, or power.

This commonality of experiences with oppression was identified as a motivator for further policy advocacy as well as a potential catalyst for aggression between youth and youth workers.

The impact of experiences with policy engagement comprised the final sub-theme related to workers’ context. Workers identified a distinction between positive experiences with policy work that resulted in a feeling of efficacy or confirmation of their ability to effect change in the policy arena, and negative experiences that discouraged workers from trying again. Negative experiences with policy work were described as contributing to a sense of “apathy” or discouragement, expressed by participants as “been there, done that, got nothing out of it” and



“we have been taught our perspective is not valued.” As one participant described, “[it is] very frustrating to know what would work but not have the power to change it; [it makes you ask] ‘what am I doing?’ It makes you part of the problem; you are punished for being the messenger.”

In contrast, a worker’s ability to effect change in this area had a positive impact on policy engagement. Participants described how success with policy advocacy contributed to their confidence to continue advocating, stating: “the efficacy of experiencing your voice being heard [facilitates future involvement with policy work]” and “[you try] if you believe you can make a difference.” Participants offered examples of when they had experienced success in advocating for policy change, such as: “we won on the low-income bus pass for youth—now we are advocating for ticket donation.” Another worker provided the following example of advocating for secondary school to be free for students:

The victory was the provincial Education Act [policy] raising the age that they will pay for [secondary school] from 18 up to 21 years of age. The next push will be for the province to extend to 25 [years of age]. The city recognizes the need for this.

The successes that these stories exemplify were identified as encouraging further efforts in the policy arena, whereas experiences with token participation were identified as contributing to apathy or reducing further efforts. At the micro level, the interplay between workers’ skills and workers’ context influenced workers’ motivations and risk navigation in their front-line work with youth and their engagement in policy work.

**Meso level.** The meso, or institutional, level, contains the two sub-themes of institutional policies and organizational culture, simply understood as the written and unwritten rules of conduct within an organization. Institutional policies represent factors that are influenced by agency rules and procedures. Organizational culture encapsulates the wider context of the agency

and the meaning attached to people's behaviours and relationships within this context (Needle, 2004).

***Institutional policies.*** Within institutional policies, opportunities for continuing education on the meso level were recommended as necessary for front-line workers and managers as a means to improve services, including through contributing to skills and contexts that improve the odds of successful policy advocacy. As one practitioner articulated, “there are benefits. . . . if workers understand *why* they are meeting targets/program design, this leads to better referrals and system navigation.” Another participant identified how “formal education or theory base makes it easier; you have the language” with which to engage in policy work.

Youth workers noted that policy engagement was more likely to occur in organizations that provide opportunities for promotion and benefits, the second sub-theme of institutional policies. As one participant summarized, “the better you are taken care of by your organization, the easier it is [to engage in policy work].” Another worker linked opportunities for promotion to the rewards of policy work and reduced turnover of staff. She noted that “people who question the system are not promoted to management” and “more opportunities for upward mobility in the agency [would help reduce burnout]; [promotion is] rare in youth work.”

One idea resulting from the discussion of how agencies could support youth workers in their career paths included paying professional association dues, as agencies “benefit from them.” Another participant described the disparity in the risks and benefits of front-line youth work: “staff cannot access health services, getting strep [streptococcal infection] at work, can't afford IUD [birth control], glasses, staff are accessing the food bank. We need health for [the] staff team.” Not having access to promotions or benefits was identified as one of the risks of

staying in youth work as a field. Participants suggested that without these supports, organizations risk losing workers who carry policy knowledge and have experience with advocacy tactics.

The third sub-theme concerned implementation and discretion, an institutional area where front-line workers have the power to affect or block change. Youth workers in the study described tensions related to how different workers and agencies implement policies, including contradictions “between official and unofficial ways of doing things.” One participant expanded on this idea, highlighting an agency policy that stated if youth returned late, they were not permitted food, which conflicted with her own values:

A youth needs food in [his/her] stomach to work with support; [this means that] workers need to hide the fact that they gave the youth lunch. Makes the work underground, puts burden on workers, and attaches shame to doing the right thing.

This provided an example of how workers expressed their autonomy in implementation, in this case refusing to follow institutional policies while hiding this refusal from supervisors.

Participants expressed being overworked or overwhelmed, in terms of time and emotional stress, as key attributes affecting their policy engagement, in the fourth sub-theme of institutional policies. Experiencing a lack of success in advocating for policy change at the agency level contributes to feeling overwhelmed for workers. As one worker offered: “it takes so much time to change big systems. [This] seems overwhelming; when we can’t even experience success with internal agency change, what is the point in trying?” The role of the homeless-serving sector was also implicated in contributing to these feelings: “our system catches everyone failed by other systems, examples: health, mental health, justice, children’s services. There are many holes in the safety net and all this falls on youth workers/non-profits, [which results in it being] overwhelming.” The final contributors to the feeling of being overwhelmed were the demands of

worker caseloads, described as “burnout from caseload being all challenging; it feels like [you are] being punished for [having] competence/advanced skills.”

Participants gave a variety of examples of how time constraints contributed to feeling overworked and overwhelmed. Time constraints impact the quality of youth work and opportunities for involvement in policy work, including job demands. As participants noted: “not taking breaks in order to finish paperwork, doing this work on the side”; “no reflection time and no de-briefing time”; “horrible hours, for example 12-hour shifts 9am–9pm”; and that involvement in policy work would be “sacrificing our own time, which is rare and unpaid.”

***Organizational culture.*** The second theme on the meso level of organizational culture influences worker involvement in policy work in a variety of ways. For example, one youth worker noted that “if the agency is open to feedback, worker involvement in policy, it makes a big difference.” Another suggested that “cliques of power in work team culture, the culture of the agency, what is rewarded, how the organization is socially organized” also influenced workers’ likelihood of policy engagement. Questions were also raised about risk and the level of confidentiality within organizations: “Who will be there? Could we say this in front of supervisors/co-workers? Is it safe to share?” Another participant offered an example of the influence that organizational culture has on navigating risk: “this agency has at least five human rights complaints against them from staff but nobody knows [that] when applying for jobs.”

Quality of supervision, the first sub-theme of organizational culture, aided or impeded worker efforts in policy work, depending on the quality of the supervision received. Participants indicated the importance of: “having someone want to talk, listen, facilitate, making space and time for the discussion” and “supervisors who encourage” workers, with management who provides “knowledge about where to go, how to start, and opportunities.” Within quality of

supervision, participants emphasized the importance of debriefing and reflection time and how this is influenced by the culture of an agency. As one participant stated:

Front line is doing hard work without debriefing. Supervisors do not have debriefing skills or do not make time. We know debriefing is required and why, why don't [supervisors provide this]? Debriefing is confused with venting, sometimes actually discouraged, reluctance to talk about difficult issues, but will happen again; [it] feels like we don't learn anything for next time.

High turnover in leadership, particularly without facilitated transition between leadership changes, also impacted front-line workers' participation in policy work. Leadership turnover further contributed to disrupted services, higher turnover in front-line workers, gaps in knowledge within the organization, and disrupted supervision, including lost professional development opportunities for front-line workers to be involved in policy work. Participants also expressed that this turnover left them feeling frustrated about not being able to hold supervisors accountable for ethical youth work, as one participant described:

Agencies move supervisors, and the problem, around programs instead of addressing it. They pretend it is the first time. It is very difficult to get someone fired from a non-profit; problems are hidden, people are pushed out passively. They, for example, offer you a job in a program they know you don't want. Complaints about supervisors do not result in change. They can push front line out easily but not management. Front-line staff give up trying or leave [the agency].

Workers described their relationships with management as a factor in policy engagement—the third sub-theme of organizational culture. Specifically, in regards to developing innovative policy and challenging the status quo, “management gets scared of front

line, but engagement and shared goals creates power,” according to one front-line worker. Participants expressed having an unequal power dynamic in these relationships: “all agencies are plagued by management protecting management,” and “agencies are about what managers want,” which was described by one participant as the “easy way instead of the challenging [power] way.”

Participants also identified a shared frustration between managers and the front line about their limited ability to influence policy. As one participant noted, “in the team lead role there is no power to [effect] change but you get the stress of seeing what should change.” Alternatively, one respondent noted the association between workers having opportunities for cooperating with management and increased power to advocate, stating, “if we had the power to change, have a voice, it would be a powerful team, and it would reduce turnover, allowing us to stand together.” These two contrasting views demonstrate the spectrum of organizational cultural approaches in terms of front-line workers’ relationships with management.

Interrelationships between workers, representing the fourth sub-theme, also influenced youth workers’ engagement in policy work. Worker relationships contributed to the overall organizational culture in important ways. Relationships between workers were most often described as supportive—for example, inter-professional work assisted participants in framing issues. As one participant commented, “fresh perspectives can help remind us that it is not only about barriers—you also see the strengths, other minds, [other] ways of understanding.” Another similarly commented, “relationship trumps bureaucracy, it gives personal routes to bend rules, insider information exchange, we get kids housed by making relationships with landlords, registry, etc.”

However, some worker relationships were described as unsafe and contributing to lateral violence, when co-workers treat each other with anger and oppressively rather than directing this anger towards the people and systems from which the oppression originated (Brody & Phelps, 2013; Freire, 1970; Lavie-Ajayi & Krummer-Nevo, 2013). As one participant stated, “I have never seen an industry where we are so mean to each other, judgmental, negative. We need safety; where does all this judgement come from?” Another worker expressed a similar sentiment:

We need a safe place to talk about concerns. We are not safe with each other; what is that about? Perhaps, unrealistic standards, assumptions about being perfect, who needs help, internal resources, judging yourself, not being supported but always supporting all the time.

Participants also noted the experience of negative consequences, such as sanctions or silencing, as a result of advocating for policy change. These experiences with sanctions and silencing negatively impacted their willingness to participate in policy work. Participants expressed a fear of being terminated or of being “blacklisted [from the industry] as a shit-disturber/troublemaker.” One worker provided the following example of the repercussions she had experienced related to advocating for policy change at the agency level:

I challenged exploitive policies about people working 90-hour weeks while being classified as “part-time” relief [workers] so the agency doesn’t have to pay benefits; [workers ended up] owing tax because [they were] under taxed. I was blacklisted for challenging this; they can’t abuse me, so they won’t hire me.

Another participant described how the fear of agency sanctions shaped her decisions to participate in policy work:

The choice to participate is about weighing out the chances of being tokenized versus making a difference. Also the risk of being labelled a troublemaker, and consequences for further employment. She [referring to the example above] knows she won't get a job because she stood up for herself and clients.

Other participants explained the resulting risk of "criticizing the organization," as being labelled "not a team player," which means that "shit-disturbers are punished, brown-nosers or workers who toe the company line are rewarded." Organizations were described on the whole as risk-averse and unsupportive of worker policy advocacy efforts. Despite these risks, one informant suggested that "staff take the chance of getting their hand slapped to say what is wrong."

Participants also described feeling silenced or "encouraged not to bring up things that shouldn't be [happening]." They noted that "speaking up was punished because 'out of sight, out of mind.'" Some experiences with participation were described as "token" or as providing the illusion of consultation when decisions had already been made (Arnstein, 1969). Participants explained how this contributed to silencing: "faux consultation experience makes us wary, such as when there is a concern raised and the concern is systematically dismissed and diminished." Another participant offered this example:

An agency had a town hall [meeting] to announce that managers' pay was increasing and front-line pay was decreasing. Instead of being a genuine opportunity for participation, discussion, this was just a way to dismiss concerns while being able to report that they had invited [the] front line.

Institutional policies and organizational culture were perceived as having the potential to create agencies where front-line youth workers could experience fewer barriers to participating



in policy work. Participants shared examples of how institutional policies, such as promotions and benefits, along with features of organizational culture, such as relationships with management, could contribute to or detract from workers' willingness and ability to engage in policy work. The majority of the comments were about negative experiences, such as those with sanctioning and silencing. Despite this, workers framed these negatives as identifying potential sites for change—for example, when they raised the potential for front-line workers and management to cooperate and understand each other's perspectives.

**Macro level.** The macro, or systemic level, is comprised of seven themes, with more than half of these themes pertaining to relationships. At this level, relationships were seen as containing the potential for building collaborative power, as assets in navigating systems of power, and as vital resources in advocacy efforts. In this section, I will describe the macro level themes of gender, pursuing accountability, challenging dichotomy, and relationship-based work, as well as the relationships with funders, between agencies, and with the larger community.

**Gender.** At the macro level, gender was one of the contributors exerting influence over workers' decisions to participate in policy work. "Care work is undervalued generally. We [youth workers] deal with sexism generally, low pay. We are not taken seriously as a profession or expert," one participant noted. Workers identified gender as important for shaping the power dynamics within the youth-serving sector, as one person articulated:

Gender is a huge factor. Most supervisors are men, most front-line [workers are] women. We have experienced and witnessed gender-based dismissal of feelings and sexist managers; [they tell you] you are a little girl. If you show feelings, you are dismissed as irrational, overly emotional; [they] make us cry, then a complaint is dismissed because we are crying. [Front-line workers] turn to each other for support but don't see [the]

supervisor as [a] resource, not safe to talk—[and] sometimes the sexist managers are women.

Gender was also set within an intersectional analysis and the risk of sanctions due to speaking out against oppression. As one participant advised, “don’t bring up race ever or you will be excluded...or class...or gender.”

***Pursuing accountability.*** Within the second theme at the macro level, participants provided examples of pursuing accountability in youth work and how policy would be different if it were accountable to the youth accessing services. On the first attempts at data analysis, I labelled this theme “accountability”; after further reflection, I changed the label to account for participants describing this as an active process that overlapped with other advocacy efforts. The pursuit of accountability was a process of advocating to change policies that they defined as harmful to youth.

One participant raised the issue of hours of service: “We provide services from nine to five, Monday to Friday; this is sometimes a barrier for youth accessing. We have outreach to help with this, but we have limited resources.” Another front-line worker highlighted what they identified as unethical policies outlining consequences for youth’ behaviours within programs: “sending kids to the shelter as punishment for them or a break for staff, [it is] not right for homelessness to be used as a consequence.” To further explicate this context, it was identified as common practice to send youth to homeless shelters as a “time out” from group care and foster care placements, which workers objected to on ethical grounds.

Participants expressed the need for structures of accountability, stating: “we should have an ombudsman for youth rights” and “who are agencies accountable to for the ethics of how they treat youth?” One respondent articulated the interconnecting levels of accountability:

Supervisors should feel accountable to front line and for outcomes affected by their supervision—we seldom get reviews of our work. Usually only done for accreditation, to have something on file, hard to improve work or have an idea of how we are doing or where we can go from here—done in a token or fluff way, which is not useful and misses the point of what supervision is for: [to] improve our work.

*Challenging dichotomy.* Challenging dichotomy, the third theme, was comprised of examples that problematize framing ideas or groups of people as oppositional and binary. This theme was about breaking down divisions between “us” and “them” in order to pursue shared goals. In the section following this one, I share reflections from my researcher journal concerning how I am sensitized towards this concept because of my theoretical frameworks. Participants identified the potential for closing divisions such as those between front-line workers and management, as well as between the non-profit context of social work and the for-profit context of business. As one participant noted, the fact that “social work judges oil and gas, that doesn’t help anyone. Business should be involved to normalize and share problems rather than [promote] the charity model.” Participants expressed the desire to build understanding between management and front-line workers; “managers/supervisors [are] also frustrated,” as “they can get stepped on, too.” These quotes also describe how challenging dichotomous thinking could improve the relationships between managers and front-line workers, which were described at the meso level under organizational culture.

In another example of challenging dichotomy, one participant identified the need to re-frame families as a resource in the lives of youth rather than dismissing them as the “enemy.” As she explained:

Family work is key. Workers need more training. We tend to judge the family or not see them as a resource for youth. We need to be trained not to. Problems are framed as us versus them, we see them as the enemy; but it is necessary for follow-up, sustainability, and accountability to engage the family. Youth learn from negotiating new boundaries for living together. We are on the same team; we share the goal to help youth.

Front-line workers provided examples of how challenging dichotomous thinking applied to policy work, and how various dichotomies represented barriers to improving outcomes for youth. As one participant noted, “[If front-line workers have an] understanding of why there is a policy, [that policy work is] not black and white, [then we have] room to negotiate, we can make a difference, see a solution.” There was debate about the effects of assessment and labelling on youth, relating the importance of assessing strengths as well as problems, as one participant noted:

Youth having to prove [they are] “deserving” of care. [Many youth] are not enough, for example not “homeless” enough, not “poor” enough or not “bad” enough to get services. [This] teaches them to concentrate on the negative: “Now I do crack [the eligibility criteria? [Now] do I qualify?”

This approach is not strength-based; it is victimizing and negates youth’ strengths. Another participant emphasized how the charity model creates a dichotomy between deserving and non-deserving people, a value which doesn’t fit with youth workers’ model of practice:

We defined cell phones as basic need, got company to sponsor, want to give phones to reward success in high school, co-workers raised issue of what if we are supporting drug dealing by giving phones, this seems like a huge deserving/non judgement from the charity model. I am sick of the charity model. I don’t see my work as charity. We need

community building and social entrepreneurship. I am against this idea that we work with “poor people”; this causes us/them thinking. For many youth it is not an issue of money, distracts from real issues.

***Relationship-based work.*** Under the fourth theme at the macro level, workers emphasized that youth work has its foundations in building relationships. The development of trust is fundamental to relationships, and trust is fundamental to the navigation of risk. One worker noted that “the main work is to build relationships/trust.” Agency policy does not always recognize the importance of relationships in youth work, to the detriment of youth:

Age brackets [are] arbitrary, cause problems, indicate accountability to funders not youth, should be they leave program when they are ready, this work is based on relationship, asking them to trust [us] then kicking [youth] out, research tells us how much difference having one caring adult makes but then we are taking it away—“professional boundaries” prevent follow-up.

Participants provided examples of how safety in relationships could alleviate barriers to youth accessing services from a youth advocate or feeling comfortable with grievance procedures, both representing gaps in current policies and present due to a lack of recognition of youth work as relationship-based:

For youth the youth advocate is not seen as a resource because they don’t have a relationship or trust or know who they are talking to, they don’t know if it is worth the risk. The disconnect between youth workers and youth advocate, it leads to disconnect for youth, [there is] no comfort accessing with no relationship.

Preserving the relationship-based focus of youth work was identified as ethical practice by the participants.

*Relationships with funders.* The fifth theme encompasses examples of how relationships with funders influenced workers' navigation of the risks of policy work. As participants explained, funders created an environment characterized by "a lack of trust, respect, and acknowledgement for front line who are involved in macro work. Cutbacks make it difficult to speak; existing programs being cut makes it difficult to ask for more." Workers offered examples of how the funding environment affected their ability to innovate and improve existing programs and policies, "focus in discussions on [it being] ok to talk about 'new innovations' initiatives, but critique of existing [programs or policies] is not encouraged, doesn't address foundation of problem" and "agencies/workers hide under banners, for example 'ending homelessness.'" The funder's role in engaging in macro level work was described by one participant as maintaining the status quo:

The system reinforces itself. It is created to keep front-line workers at the front line without power to change policy. This is reinforced by funding, what gets rewarded and what gets punished. The system treats workers as disposable, rewards/creates burnout.

They are being blacklisted for thinking at the macro level, raising critical questions.

Another participant expressed a potential solution in her desire to try different funding models: "let's go rogue"—if [we tried to compete in the] funded model [we] would get eaten alive. We need social entrepreneurship. I talk about this all the time."

Participants offered the Coordinated Access and Assessment (CAA) meetings as an example of effective implementation of new policy. The CAA involved agencies working together with the funder to identify gaps in the system and to match youth with programs that best meet their needs. These meetings were created by the funder with the goal of reducing silos and improving communication between the youth-serving agencies. Participants valued the

accountability that working together transparently brought to the process of assessment. As one front-line worker noted, this macro-level intervention has resulted in systemic improvements: “it has changed the way we do things; we are experiencing more success in housing and sustaining housing for kids.”

***Relationships between agencies.*** In the sixth theme at the macro level, participants identified how relationships between agencies impacted workers’ safety to engage in policy work. As one participant suggested, “management doesn’t want workers to say anything, reveal secrets/reality to other agencies.” Another similarly expressed:

All the work is political, partnerships. In every meeting there is the fear of being fired, messing up the partnership. For example: funding for addictions program tied to a funder who doesn’t support [the] 12-step program, proven but not accepted as good practice; training in addictions for front line did not include 12-step, but many of the youth are using this service/experienced success with it. Workers get in trouble when raising this issue at meetings, silenced by other workers/agencies in order to keep funds.

***Relationships with the larger community.*** In the final theme in the macro level, participants identified tensions in relationships with the larger community, including the need to increase dialogue about youth homelessness and the potential role that youth workers could play in opening up this dialogue. As participants stated: “NIMBY [not in my backyard] affects how agencies function; [agencies] hide things, only present good to community, so there is no debate about ethics,” and “we can educate youth, clients, community members—like a church/the idea of being a witness.”

**Reasons to risk safety.** Participants also shared several benefits accrued from engaging front-line workers in policy work, benefits that they regarded as worth the risks identified in

earlier themes. First, workers identified that policy engagement could improve practice, policy, and outcomes for youth. One respondent suggested that policy work “increased communication between and within agencies,” which, she also asserted, led to more efficient system navigation and service delivery for youth. Other participants stated that policy work “helps you know your role, make more appropriate referrals, understand the importance of better assessment, [resulting in] better outcomes”; additionally, “[it results in] better trust in the systems you refer to, knowing the rules so you can make better referrals.”

Knowledge gained from policy work was perceived by participants as useful in evaluating current practice, in that it “allowed us to clarify if what we are doing is working, or what to change to do better.” Participants suggested that the service delivery “system could be changed from [the current] archaic way”; thereby “services would be cheaper, less [staff] turnover, less hierarchy—these are the benefits to engaging front-line [workers]” in policy work. Participants suggested that these changes would represent “a win/win for the agency, the system [in terms of service delivery to youth], and the worker.”

Workers noted increased ownership of policy decisions as another important outcome and facilitator of engaging participants in policy work. As one participant explained, “ownership over what we do . . . leads to more engagement.” This outcome was framed as correcting the problem that “workers are not invested, not involved with *why* we collect data, etc.”

Finally, participants described increased job satisfaction resulting from engagement in policy work, noting that elevated front-line involvement would “reduce turnover, [a] benefit to the agency [because they] don’t have to retrain, [it would be more] sustainable.” This engagement would benefit individual workers in terms of “increased work satisfaction, by



providing opportunities for growth and learning.” Participants identified policy as part of youth work and as part of sustaining engagement with front-line youth work.

### **Preparing the Ground Phase: Data Analysis Reflections from My Research Journal**

In the pursuit of transparency, it is important to note that I am sensitive (Charmaz, 2010) to the theme of challenging dichotomy due to my theoretical frameworks. Critical theory, feminism, and the values of PAR aid and encourage me to identify instances when concepts are framed as opposites. Identifying these instances represents opportunities to reduce distances in understanding, to make whole the fragmented world (Reason, 2005), and to challenge stigma, or the undervaluing of one side of the dichotomy. It is possible that another researcher would not identify this as a theme. Due to my epistemology and values, I seek out examples where two concepts are defined as opposite, then I find examples that refute this dichotomous claim.

I believe that many fruitful discussions in the Reflection and Action phases, including inspiration for planning our actions together, resulted from the identification of this theme. This deductive coding in an otherwise inductive process demonstrates an instance of doing feminist research or applying feminist theory to the activity of data analysis (Charmaz, 2010). In my work, including my research work, I seek out examples of others challenging dichotomy, because I have identified this action as vital in the process of doing feminism, challenging the status quo, and working for social justice. Making visible various stories of challenging binary notions is one example of how I followed feminist principles in the process of this research (McDowell, 1997).

Utilizing the three levels (micro, meso, and macro) of the ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1977) to organize the themes from the Preparing the Ground phase served a practical purpose through increasing the visibility of possible leverage or intervention points or

sites for action (Besthorn & McMillen, 2002). For example, the meso level suggested that scarcity of time and feeling overwhelmed were barriers for front-line youth workers engaging in policy work; as a result, the research design was modified so that research meetings could take place as part of work time. Participant recommendations under the theme of organizational culture influenced the decision to partner with an agency identified by participants as having a culture conducive to worker engagement in policy work.

Examining the results at the micro, meso, and macro levels retained a connection to action and how these themes manifest in the practice arena. This ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1977) reflects my view of praxis, which originates in my social work education and which I have applied in my front-line youth work practice. The ecological model explicates connections between the individual, institutional, and systemic levels (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). I appreciate that this model makes visible interdependence as well as mutual action between individuals and the larger context, reflecting an assumption about the world as a complex whole (Besthorn & McMillen, 2002). Critiques of the model include that it can reinforce dichotomies, and has the potential to focus on the individual coping rather than on changing macro systems, even though the model has the opposite intent (Besthorn & McMillen, 2002). I believe that there is a strong risk of focus on the individual level because we are operating in an individualized culture, created by and reinforced through capitalism (Giroux & Schmidt, 2004). Blaming or silencing individuals is easier than challenging societal status quos, and it is ethically repugnant. I work to address this risk of individualizing problems, through my focus on cycles of reflection and action, my interpretation of the Code of Ethics (CASW, 2005), and my critical intersectional feminist view of power.

My learning style is comprised of cycles that include a focus on “What do we change, now that we know better?” and that challenge the separation between theory and practice. This inclusion of action in the learning process helps to encourage social justice work that collectivizes individual experiences. I’m proud of my action focus because I feel that it challenges divisions between communities and the academy, particularly the critique about academic work being perceived as less than useful by community members, such as front-line workers or homeless youth. I prioritize accountability to community members with the most to lose, the people most affected by policy and practice changes. This ethical orientation aids me in maintaining my focus on action and systemic analysis.

My interpretation of the CASW (2005) social work Code of Ethics grounds my commitment to the pursuit of social justice and the need for including the influence of systems in defining problems and solutions. I agree with Foucault (Lavie-Ajayi & Krumer-Nevo, 2013; Nissen, 2004) in being cautious about trusting a profession that has a hand in defining what is “normal.” Much of the damage caused by the profession of social work has resulted from this power—for example, social workers’ roles in residential schools, and the overrepresentation of Indigenous youth in the children’s services and justice systems. As I present in the discussion chapter, I believe that social work does damage through the creation of “clienthood” or the dichotomy and hierarchy of “professional” and “client” (Gubrium & Järvinen, 2014; Hall, Juhila, Parton, & Pösö, 2003). As Coussée, Roets, and De Bie (2009) stated: “the welfare system operates as a hidden mechanism that aids in constructing the needs it then supplies” (p. 426), while simultaneously diminishing the social and political dimensions of these needs.

One way I combat this dichotomy is to start with myself, a concept that I found reflected in PAR (Reason, 2005). My experience with being a “client” assists me with empathetic

reflection. Starting with myself means that if I see a gap in services, I work to co-create an intervention to fill it, that I share my mistakes and fears with other people, including people accessing services. Starting with myself reminds me that I always have more power than I initially think to address seemingly insurmountable problems.

The fear that the ecological model could reinforce dichotomies is exemplified in the interpretation of the micro, meso, and macro levels as mutually exclusive instead of semi-permeable and overlapping (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). For example, from the front-line worker perspective there is a tendency to define supervisors or the government as the other because they hold more power at the meso and macro levels. My theoretical framework provides tools for maintaining awareness of this power while seeking examples of connections and overlap between the levels of practice. One way that I planned to address this critique of the model was through the identification of the challenging dichotomy theme. Workers provided examples of when management and workers combined their power or when the divide between families and workers was challenged, and I labelled these as examples of challenging dichotomy, an important step in problematizing our world in order to change it (Reason, 2005).

I follow the lead of Besthorn and McMillen (2002), who advocated “a call to action for the social work profession to return to its progressive, activist roots” (p. 229). They posited that ecofeminism offers “conceptual assistance” to social workers looking to reclaim the interdependence of the ecological model (p. 223). I agree that ecofeminism offers a holistic worldview that necessitates challenging dichotomies and hierarchy, which allows us to see our power as part of larger systems.

For these reasons, I do tend to organize the world in these overlapping levels, in order to make sense of how people located in the various levels interact and influence each other. I do not

believe that I forced the data to fit into this model, although I may be more likely to organize data in this way due to my theoretical frameworks, which I believe is important to recognize. Many of the themes identify relationships between two parties or contexts, which fits with how the ecological model examines patterns of responses and relationships (Besthorn & McMillen, 2002; Bronfenbrenner, 1977). In the next section, I will describe the application of a more holistic model that was recommended by participants in the Immersion Phase.

One example of how the contrast between insider and outsider views enriched this research is the two research assistants taking notes for the Preparing the Ground phase, who did not have direct experience with front-line youth work. They offered a valuable outsider perspective on the discussion. After the focus groups, the research assistants asked whether youth work was “really this horrible” and outright stated that they did not want to be youth workers, as it sounded traumatizing to witness oppression and experience being silenced within the work. Their outside perspective validated the severity of lateral violence in the context of low pay. The comments made by the research assistants added to the research by providing something that I could not provide: perspectives originating outside of youth work. I had never seen the work in this way because the level of violence became normalized for me after 12 years of being a front-line youth worker.

The research assistants’ outsider perspective allowed me to examine my assumptions and problematize concepts that I had accepted as normal. The theme of lateral violence provided an example of a concept that I might not have identified under the theme of organizational culture and interrelationships between workers, had their outside perspective not caused me to further examine this experience that I had normalized as part of all care work. These kinds of

experiences with conflicting perspectives sensitized (Charmaz, 2010) me to thematic concepts that I might have missed on my own.

This concludes the results from the first phase of the research, the Preparing the Ground phase, where I facilitated two focus groups. In the next section, I will explore the results from the phase in which I observed meetings where front-line workers were implementing a new policy.

### **Immersion Phase Results: Enhancing Natural Supports**

In the second phase, I was immersed in the context of meetings between front-line workers and a representative of their funder. The goal of these meetings was to implement new policy, described in the literature review, which encouraged front-line workers to support youth via the development and maintenance of natural supports, defined as relationships with non-professionals who were invested in the young person's well-being. In this Immersion phase, the intent was to observe the workers' roles with policy implementation first hand, in order to answer the research questions from the Preparing the Ground phase more fully, as well as to explore emergent themes grounded in front-line context. This phase offered me an opportunity to observe workers in discussion about how to evaluate their practice, so I was able to witness them in research roles as part of their practice and policy work.

These results take the form of four figures that we used to stimulate discussion and shape the results in the Reflection and Action phases. I offer the figures as they were presented to the research group, and the explanation of the themes with exemplar quotes as they appeared in our presentation of the cumulative research results after the conclusion of the final phase (Huntingford, Jones, Paik, Schmidt, & Walsh, 2015). These emergent themes contributed to the final results that were produced in the Reflection and Action phases, including the theme of relationship restoration that informs the idea of youth work as relationship-based work, and the

recognition that professional supports are not enough to heal homelessness, an idea that was generated from this natural supports work.

**Demographics of participants in the Immersion Phase.** Sixteen participants were engaged in the discussions that I observed in this phase, with 11 of these 15 continuing on to the Reflection and Action phases. The five people who did not continue on to subsequent phases were comprised of: the representative from the funder, a worker who had school on the days the research team was meeting, a representative from another agency that was partnering on outreach, and two managers who did not meet the criteria of being a front-line youth worker for the Reflection and Action phases. All but one of the participants identified as a woman, and two of the workers were Indigenous. The funder's role was to support the agency with implementing the new policies encouraging natural supports work and to co-create systems of accountability for evaluating the outcomes of their efforts.

**Assessment questions.** Figure 2 presents examples of questions that workers had identified as new assessment tools in their policy work. These assessment questions are grouped into the four areas of the Circle of Courage (Brendtro, Brokenleg, & Van Bockern, 1990), a model of practice that workers mentioned as a good fit with their values and context of practice. When Figure 2 was shared with participants as a catalyst for discussion in the Reflection phase, it contained exemplary quotes, as presented in Appendix C. The process figures for the Reflection phase will provide more detail about how the topics for discussion were chosen.

The assessment questions were new ways workers had identified to start conversations with youth accessing services about the natural supports in their lives. These assessment questions came up periodically in the meetings when workers were discussing strategies for implementing the new policies. During our presentation of the results at the conclusion of the

research, we invited audience members to ask each other the assessment questions and then reflect on their feelings (Huntingford et al., 2015). In the Immersion phase results, I presented these questions under the four areas of the Circle of Courage (Brendtro, Brokenleg, & Van Bockern, 1990): Belonging, Mastery, Independence, and Generosity. This model was built on the cultural wisdom of Indigenous peoples, the practice wisdom of youth workers, and developmental theory and research (Brendtro, Brokenleg, & Van Bockern, 1990).

The way we defined Belonging in our youth work was consistent with this model, in that a sense of community and connection to culture were important components (Huntingford et al., 2015). We agree that Belonging recognizes the power of social bonds and how we are all connected (Brendtro, Brokenleg, & Van Bockern, 1990). The Circle of Courage (Brendtro, Brokenleg, & Van Bockern, 1990) defines Mastery as developing competence in many areas, including having self-control, taking responsibility, and striving to achieve personal goals. Under this model, goals are pursued for personal growth, not to be superior to others, and people with greater ability are seen as role models for learning, rather than rivals (Brendtro, Brokenleg, & Van Bockern, 1990). Independence is defined as inner discipline: a person's ability to problem solve, set personal goals, and make decisions that align with their internal moral code. It means that people can rely on you and trust you at all times (Brendtro, Brokenleg, & Van Bockern, 1990). Finally, Generosity is defined as how we make positive contributions to other people's lives (Brendtro, Brokenleg, & Van Bockern, 1990).



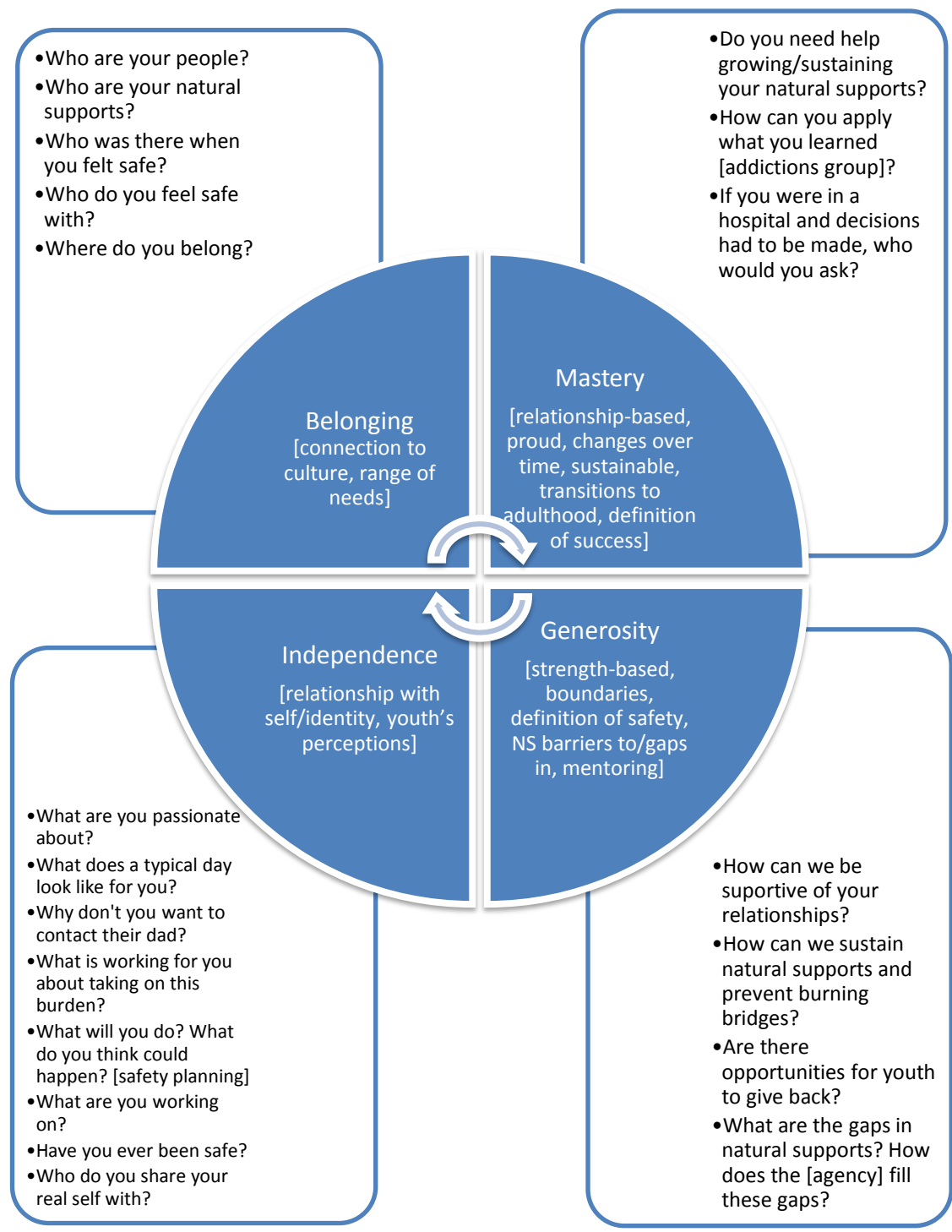


Figure 2. Assessment questions

In Figure 2, the centre of the visual contains the themes under each of the four categories that were exemplified with quotes from the meetings.

***Belonging.*** This category is comprised of two themes: connection to culture and range of needs. As one participant expressed, “spirituality is missing [from the assessment tool]—is connection to culture part of natural supports?” The range of needs theme referred to the fit between the services offered and the diverse needs of the youth. As workers explained, this diversity could be between people—“different people use us differently”—or even within the same person over time: “they have been accessing since they were 14, now they are 21, so they need very different things now.” This theme captured a topic discussed over all the phases of the research: “Do we want youth to belong at the program?”

***Mastery.*** This category contains six themes. The first of these was the recognition of youth work as a relationship-based activity, a recurring theme found in multiple sources over this research process. One worker recognized that their services were not limited to physical resources, stating, “they are high functioning, have social skills, job. They are not accessing basic needs, but relationships.”

The second theme was changes over time, which described the learning process for youth accessing services and the subjectivity of trying to capture outcomes that reflect Mastery. As one worker shared, “there is lots of cyclical movement.” Another participant described how indicators had gaps in efficacy for measuring outcomes over time, as they stated, “changes in drug use could be either extreme detox or escalation; scale records only show change, not the quality of change.” The third theme represented an evolution in thinking from the next visual presented, the pride/shame teeter-totter. This version was presented at our event for sharing the

cumulative research results, and has proud and sustainable on one side of a teeter-totter with stigma, shame, and bridge burning on the other side.

Workers described the theme of pride as a complex concept. Two participants identified examples of indicators of pride and how it is linked to positive identity: “now uses their real name, their brother phoned and asked them for advice” and “they have a lot of natural supports, used to use us a lot, now they just come to see doc and show off baby!” Another worker pointed out a risk concerning pride in relationship with youth: “kids can’t be afraid of disappointing workers, or they won’t be able to tell us what is going on.”

On the same side of the teeter-totter with pride is sustainability concerning youth’ pursuit of Mastery. Workers expressed concerns about their responsibility to teach youth how to sustain their skill development and achievements, stating: “financial readiness for independence—can they sustain it? This means choices, damage deposit” and “[the assessment tool is] only measuring right now; what if it is the one-off day in two weeks?” On the balance of the teeter-totter we have stigma, shame, and bridge burning. The Immersion phase was the first time that participants identified stigma as a major contributor to youth homelessness, but it would not be the last. Stigma and shame were described as risks of seeking help, either from natural supports—“looking at the strings attached to help, admitting dependence/being punished for asking for help/being vulnerable, especially with family/partners”—or from professional services:

Is [a youth drop-in program] a good place or a bad place? Who defines this? What about a sense of belonging? Do we want them to belong here? Do we want middle-class kids accessing? Is there a line? Youth are more at-risk in community than the space—this doesn’t exist, a place for a youth to go somewhere and belong.

This last quote presents the recurring theme of “Do we want youth to belong at the program?” a conversation that would contribute strongly to the themes about belonging and identity that emerged in the Reflection phase.

Relationship restoration skills were identified as vital knowledge for youth to master, and bridge burning was the label that participants applied to the destruction of relationships. In their own words: “the grandma bridge is burnt, she will help sometimes but not dependable, partner living in a house with five to six people [can’t help them]” and “[they] need support on how to not burnout natural supports.” This category of bridge burning continued to inform the theme of restoring relationships that was identified in the Reflection phase. Originally, bridge burning appeared as part of the themes for developing and sustaining natural supports. I include reflections about this development in the Generosity category.

The fifth theme of Mastery was transition to adulthood, which worried workers in terms of their responsibility to aid youth in the transition of Natural Supports—“the adult homeless community is accepting but not safe”—and formal services:

25-year-olds are referred to adult services up the street. We need to say this is the last food hamper, they are comfortable here versus in adult services when they have to book appointments, we need to find out the process so we can transition.

This discussion about transferring from youth to adult services led to changes in the agency policy about training new staff and supporting youth who are aging out of the program. These actions are described in detail later in this chapter when I present the action that resulted from the focus group discussions in the last phase.

The final theme of Mastery concerned the definition of success. In this theme, workers critically examined the values behind assumptions and policies. As one participant noted, “for

example, all this value put on not doing drugs? Where is the harm reduction in that?” Dialogue on this subject included identifying the risks of defining success as part of a dichotomy:

I stopped asking about wishes because the divide between success/failure makes me uncomfortable. How do we avoid assigning our goals for them? We have to avoid this [assigning of goals], it is their life process. We can support them on their goals.

In complementarity with respecting self-determination, another worker stated: “the most harmful thing is not having expectations for them.” After further discussion in the Reflection phase, this theme of how success was defined developed into the “youth’s perception of problems” and “youth-directed” themes in the final principle.

***Independence.*** Relationship with self or identity was a theme under the Independence category, which later developed under the second principle about relationship-based work that developed in the Reflection phase. Workers described examples of the interplay between identity and youth’ relationship with themselves:

He has intense, chaotic, always 911 relationships, he sees himself as the common bad factor. It doesn’t matter which drug he’s using, sees himself as “bad” and “broken.” The common factor is alcohol, he won’t allow himself to experience a world without alcohol, if he did he would see that he is not “bad.”

The words of one of the youth were quoted in a story told by a youth worker in the meeting: “They said, ‘I have to love myself before I can love someone else.’”

Youth perceptions was the other theme under Independence, which was identified by participants as a perspective that should be included in the assessment process. Workers were concerned that negative perceptions of self might be reinforced due to the context that youth were experiencing:

For example, the poodle that thinks they are a bulldog. Thinking you are tough as a coping mechanism for dealing with hopelessness. Of course you have to be tough! “Of course I want to hang out with the toughest kids, to protect myself!”

Another worker identified that these kinds of coping mechanisms “might be keeping them alive.” The category of Independence was interpreted in a systemic way, critically examining the influences on a youth’s sense of self and the contextual coping factors that should not be judged “maladaptive” when they were required for survival. Youth perceptions also was identified as a theme in the Reflection Phase and informed the development of principle four about formal supports not being enough alone to end homelessness.

**Generosity.** Strength-based work (Bendtro, Ness, & Mitchell, 2001) was defined as part of Generosity and focused on building upon youth’ strengths, rather than focusing exclusively on problems. As one worker described: “the protective factors—we want to build on that side.” Participants admired the resilient strength of youth, as one worker remarked in a discussion about a youth in a detox program: “They are very persistent. I believe that they can do it.”

Boundaries were described as a complex negotiation, sometimes between the workers and youth and sometimes between individual youth and the larger group of young people. One worker described negotiating boundaries with a youth who had a goal to achieve sobriety from alcohol:

They are lying to their program about their use [of alcohol] because it threatens their housing to tell the truth. Our boundaries with youth worker support are: if we go for an outing it will be to an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting, [the youth] not expecting the worker to drop everything instead of [the youth] planning. They desperately want to be sober; they have done seven months before.

Another participant described examples of when one youth's beliefs could be oppressive to other youth trying to access the services at the agency:

Some values we have a responsibility to challenge, not by ostracizing the youth, but by saying you can't do that here, such as racism/sexism. Remember when we had that skinhead youth, it was good to have challenging conversations, to give room to have these conversations. [Such as], "What do you know about gay people?"

The next theme was definition of safety, which was also defined as a collective effort.

One worker described a responsibility for youth workers to challenge youth who contributed to a lack of safety for other youth accessing the program:

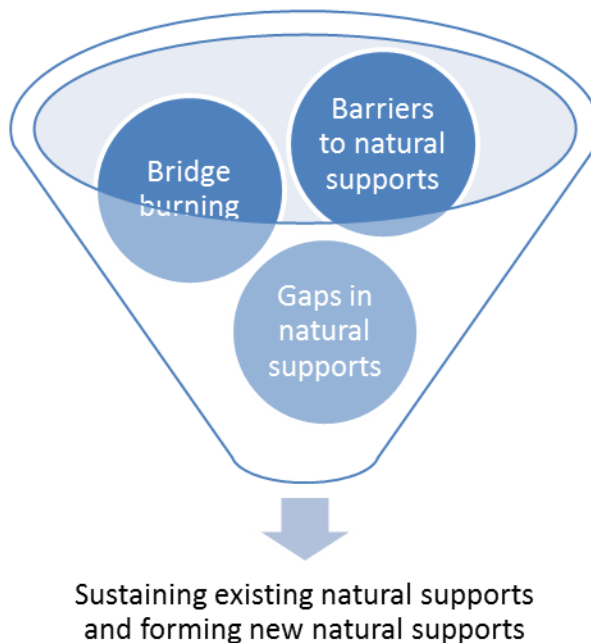
I'm a million chances girl. I see the number of people banned [from the program] increasing. Those are two of my favorite [youth]. We weren't consistent as staff, so the kids couldn't hold it together because it was too much work. We made it unsafe for him, people were afraid to hold him accountable. This is us failing him. If we are afraid of people, it is unsafe for them.

Similar to the results from the first Preparing the Ground phase, relationships between workers were identified as potential sites of risk or support: "in [the staff] team, I appreciate safe space where we can agree to disagree. Even if I seem aggressive, I am listening, and I do think about it [what other workers say]." One worker described the safety that results from belonging in relationships or communities:

You can be teased in loving relationships and it doesn't hurt. For me, it is about intention; they are not trying to hurt you. There are words that are offensive in some contexts and not others—for example, one of my friends saying something versus someone yelling [the same thing] out of a car.

Barriers to natural supports and gaps in natural supports were shared under the Generosity category in the group presentation of the cumulative research results. These themes continued to be discussed in the Reflection phase and were major contributors to the final principle, that professional supports alone are not enough to heal homelessness.

The original visual, Figure 3, was used as a catalyst for discussion in the Reflection phase and includes a list of what I defined as exemplary quotes. This discussion led to the understanding of bridge burning as the other side of restoring relationships, a development that contributed to the enrichment of sub-themes under the principle concerning relationships.



*Figure 3.* Sustaining existing natural supports and forming new natural supports



Table 2

*Sustaining Existing Natural Supports and Forming New Natural Supports*

<p><b>Bridge Burning</b></p>	<p>-he is connected to dad, he goes up and down with supports, depending on his addictions</p>	<p>-the grandma bridge is burnt, she will help sometimes but not dependable, partner living in a house with 5–6 people [can't help her]</p>	<p>-drives everyone but one YW crazy</p>	<p>-needs support on how to not burnout natural supports</p>	<p>-they [identify as trans] wants to take kickboxing -gym is not politically correct, don't want to burn contact</p>	<p>-has other supports, is burning bridges</p>
<p><b>Gaps in Natural Supports</b></p>	<p>-ID fund-getting more entire families looking for ID, a mom bringing all her kids, from teenagers to babies, for birth certificates -expensive process, navigating system, printing form—a special needed service, happening more [higher needs], UW would not have funded ID unless private donor did first</p>	<p>-she acknowledges that we kept her alive, she now realizes that she didn't have resources in her family</p>	<p>-agency paid for her work training [pro-serve]—used to take all the stuff from the back, now has a cheque she hasn't picked up</p>	<p>-couple wants to be together, he has barriers to treatment, couple fights and separates regularly, concentrating on medical, housing, pregnancy, is it a wise choice to live with drinking partner who gets beat up? He missed the ultrasound because of his drinking.</p>	<p>-she has ongoing emotional/physical needs for medical attention, wanted rides to medical appointments, no one in her life could drive her, YW said not a service we can provide</p>	<p>-they are friends with guy who can't come to [the agency], so they don't come here anymore</p>

*(continued...)*

<b>Barriers to Natural Supports</b>	<p>-what about relational losses and acuity?          -partners breakup/parents die/kids apprehended</p>	<p>-looking at the strings attached to help—          admitting dependence/being punished for asking for help/being vulnerable—          especially with family/partners —they can't help with everything on the list/the limits of help          -medicine wheel of kinds of help, for example might be able to help with basic needs but not emotional or vice versa          -What is the difference between family and community?          Sometimes can get physical help but harder to get/find emotional support</p>	<p>-new youth, YW talked to family in Red Deer, her sister found them an apartment for a month, family cares about her/worried</p>	<p>-has family in States, can't go because of charges, hates Canada</p>	<p>-connected to her sisters but they have addictions [no sober environment]</p>	<p>-has trouble connecting in community because of her anxiety</p>
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Bridge burning was a theme with a label grounded in the language of youth workers, as I presented to other participants at the third meeting during the Reflection phase:

Stasha: When I was looking at natural supports and what you guys said in those meetings, there's forming new natural supports but there's also sustaining the ones that the [youth] have. So this category was bridge burning. I started calling it sustainable, but you guys said "bridge burning" so much that I called it bridge burning.

<Laughter>

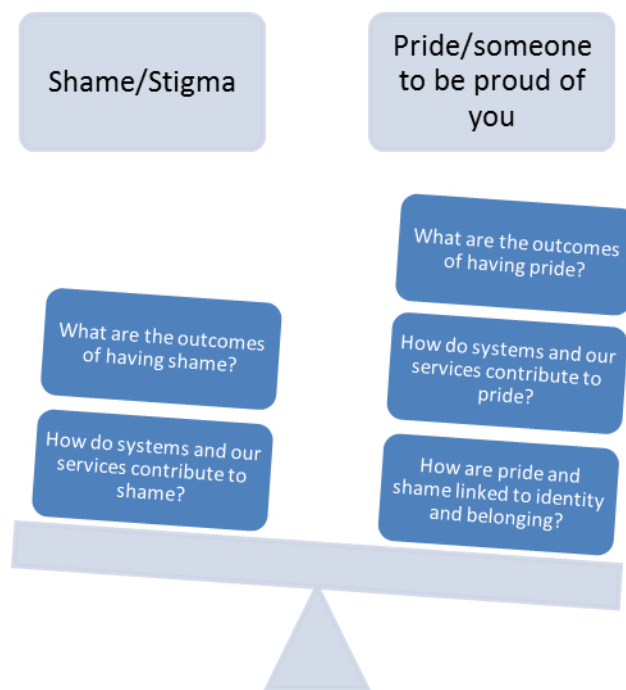
Riley: Cuz that's how we talk about it.

—October 9 transcript, Reflection phase meeting three

The research team chose these three quotes, all said by different people, to explain the concept of bridge burning during our final presentation: "[the youth] need support on how to not burnout natural supports"; "the grandma bridge is burnt, she will help sometimes but it's not dependable"; and "they are connected to Dad. They go up and down with supports, depending on their addictions." Two workers insisted that the last quote be included, in order to demonstrate that bridge burning was variable, in that relational bridges could be burnt and then repaired. Many of the examples of the variability of bridge availability were due to addictions of either the child or the parent.

**The pride/shame teeter-totter.** Figure 4 presents a teeter-totter image with shame on one side and pride on the other, a representation of the influence that experiences with belonging and rejection have on youth' identity and ability to accomplish their goals. Also included is a chart of exemplary quotes from the discussions observed in the Immersion phase.

This tension between shame and pride was described under the Mastery section of the Circle of Courage (Brendtro, Brokenleg, & Van Bockern, 1990) during our final presentation, but when I originally presented the results of the Immersion phase to workers it appeared in this visual. The development to present it under the Mastery category resulted because workers further explicated that shame and stigma contributed to the erosion of youth' positive identity, while pride and relationship-restoration skills contributed to the sustainability of relationships and well-being. This theme had a strong influence on the development of the four principles, especially the role of stigma in youth homelessness.



*Figure 4.* Pride and shame teeter-totter

**Forms of natural supports.** The final visual (Figure 5) displayed all the examples that workers had provided of relationships that youth defined as Natural Supports, with accompanying quotes. My goal with this visual was to display the diversity of relationships that had been discussed by participants.



Figure 5. Forms of natural supports

### Immersion Phase: Data Analysis Reflections from Research Journal

Results from the Immersion phase provided catalysts for our discussions in the Reflection and Action phases and informed the cumulative results of the research that we presented at the conclusion of the Action phase. The preparation of this presentation offered opportunities for us

to examine the data in new ways and to apply our unique strengths to the data analysis process. We worked together on a first draft of a slide presentation that I offered based on the changes that participants had made to the themes from the Immersion phase. The other participants added illustrative examples of the concepts, and the end result was more succinct and had more universally accessible language than when we started. For example, one worker defined Natural Supports as “an unpaid person that youth identify as their people,” and we used her answer when I asked her to define her ethnicity as an illustrative example of the complexity of belonging. With her permission, here is her answer:

Hmmm, culturally—I grew up in a bilingually and culturally split household: 50% hearing, 50% deaf. My paternal grandparents came to Canada from England and Wales. My maternal great-grandparents came from Poland and the Ukraine. My maternal grandparents were raised in residential schools for the deaf, so very little of the Polish and Ukrainian cultures were passed down to them, to my mother, or to me. Religion—my father was atheist, my mother is Catholic. Language—50% of my family used American Sign Language [ASL] exclusively and 50% of us used English and ASL. My skin colour is whitey.

This participant’s reflection on ethnicity resulted in the deepening of my reflections about my positionality in this research. It reminded me of the importance of being in touch with and sharing knowledge about my own Indigenous roots, particularly my relationship to colonialism and privilege. It reminded me about the risks of hiding behind the “normal” setting that is sometimes presented as neutral, such as in the case of assumed heterosexuality or the diversity that identifying solely as White hides. I appreciated that her reflection included intergenerational disruptions in the transmission of culture and deafness as a culture instead of as a disability. This

reflection was a very systemic and relational definition of ethnicity, and now I talk about having Scottish ancestors who experienced colonization from the British and in later generations moved to southern Alberta, where they perpetrated and profited off the colonization of Indigenous people in North America. As a result of the participant sharing this reflection, I have added stories to my introductions of myself, about class and how my grandpa did not want people to know that he came from a farming family. I have offered more detail and emphasized connections because I admired her work on this question.

Our presentation was much better than anything I can write here because it included stories from practice and genuine emotions from four different youth workers. To illustrate, when we were presenting about the second principle, one of my co-presenters shared a story about two youth who found home in their relationship with each other. These two youth could not stay together at any of the youth programs due to their differences in age and gender. They decided to turn down services so that they could have physical contact with each other while they slept, so that they could protect each other through their physical presence. The worker telling this story began to cry and identified this kind of love as something she had been seeking in her life. I'm not even able to do this story justice in the written form because the reader has no way to know at which point my voice breaks when telling this story, no way to see the face of my friend crumple when she remembers the trauma of not being able to help this couple find space to be together in a system that did not allow for finding home in relationship with another person.

Later in my journal, I reflected on feeling encouraged by witnessing examples of workers sharing how this research was contributing to their increased awareness—for example, referencing stories shared by other workers at previous meetings and explaining how they applied these concepts in their work. The example of discussing racism with a skinhead youth

was used as a template for starting discussions about addressing heterosexism and ableism within the space. Figure 5 provided examples of the forms that natural supports could take and was grounded in the practice examples provided by workers. I would return to this figure as evidence of progress when workers' hopes or motivation to go forward were waning. For example, when workers refused to read the policy that I planned to engage them in analyzing in the Reflection phase, I brought the figure to our next meeting and we discussed the role of stigma in "ending homelessness," a major concept in the policy that I had hoped they would analyze.

### **Process Results for the Reflection and Action Phases**

In the next section, I offer an outline of the process for the four meetings that comprised the Reflection phase. I will identify the number of participants for each meeting and the assigned pseudonyms for the participants, used to distinguish the speakers for quotes in the Reflection phase results. I will describe the catalysts used to stimulate discussion and demonstrate visually which catalysts originated with me (indicated by grey circles) and which with participants (black circles).



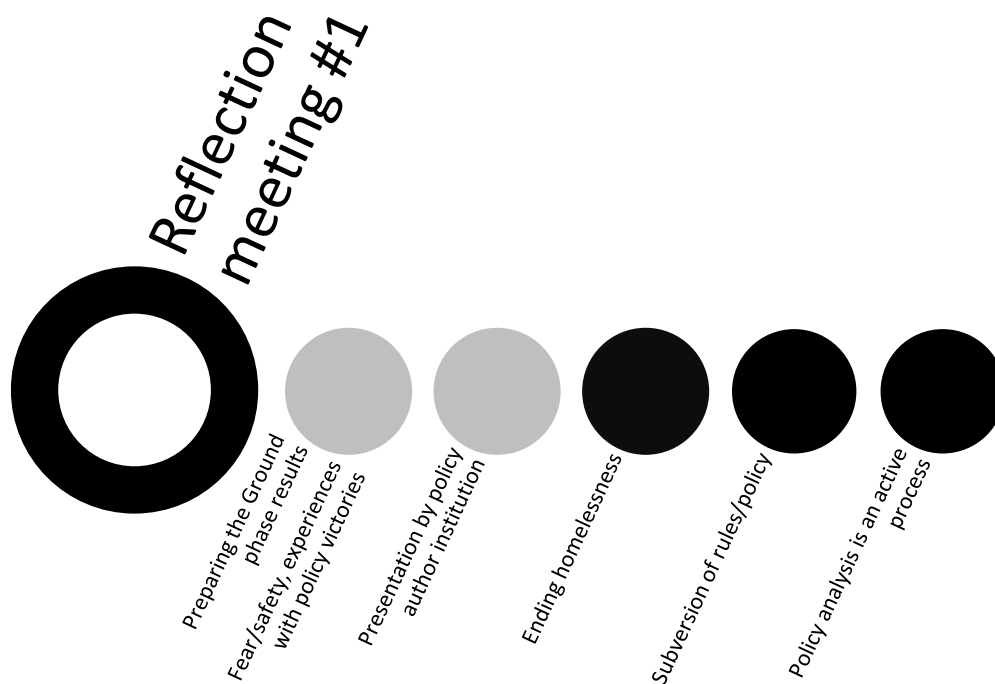


Figure 6. Catalysts for reflection meeting one

Previous to the first reflection meeting, I invited the institution that created the *Plan* (CHF, 2011) to meet with me and the other participants in the research. The representative spoke with us for an hour about the initial intent of the *Plan*, how the policy was being implemented and evaluated, updates about outcomes identified in the *Plan*, and changes made in the four years since the *Plan* had been written. I referred back to this discussion in the first meeting of the Reflection phase when we discussed the outreach program at the partnering agency in terms of how this program fulfilled some of the goals from the *Plan* (CHF, 2011).

In the initial reflection meeting, I summarized the Preparing the Ground phase results in the context of how these findings had informed changes in the research design. I asked the research questions in the first meeting that directly referred to the *Plan* (CHF, 2010), and workers began a discussion about the idea of ending homelessness that provides the foundational values and appears in the title of the policy.

In coding themes in the Preparing the Ground phase data, I had originally interpreted what workers shared as having an overarching theme of safety. Participant feedback in this meeting contributed to my later revelation that workers were actually providing multiple examples of how they subvert rules and policy in their everyday work, as opposed to my theoretical frame of seeing them as unsafe to act. Our discussion began with one participant saying, “It isn’t so much about fear...” It turns out that the participants were acting even while they described barriers to, and consequences from, taking these actions. They described policy analysis as an active and ethics-based praxis, in which they would find ways to transcend policies that they identified as causing harm to the youth. When returning to reflect on this meeting transcript in light of my interpretation correction, I noted, “When I start to figure out that I should emphasize what they have already done, the active advocacy/subversion, working undercover, etc.” This correction aided me greatly with the action meetings, in terms of recognizing actions that the workers were already engaged in and ways that they had power to effect change.

Participants in meeting one included: Kelly, the participant who engaged with every phase of the research; Chris, a participant with the most years of experience in youth work; and Riley, a participant who had recently graduated with their undergraduate degree in social work.

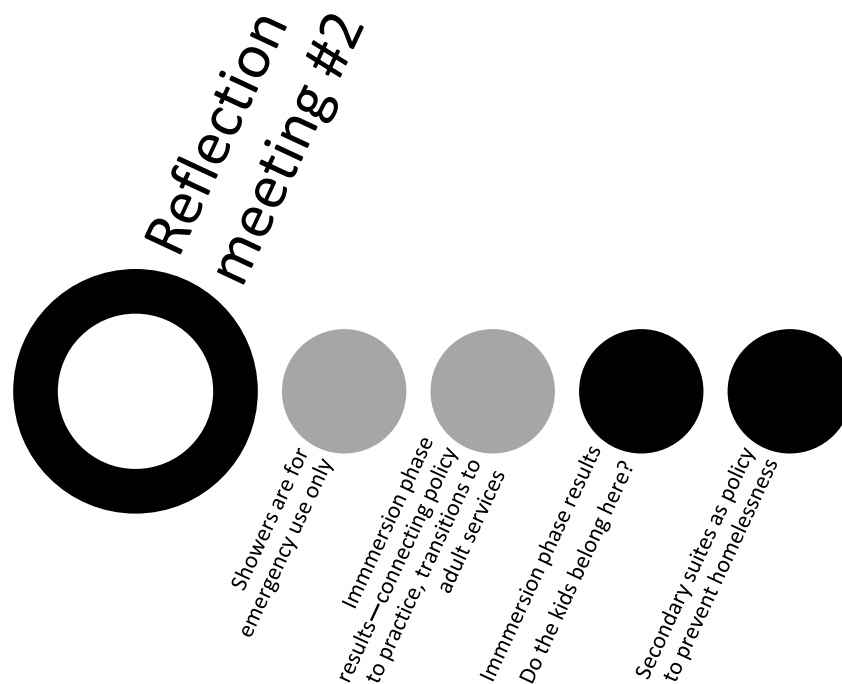


Figure 7. Catalysts for reflection meeting two

Meetings were held about every two weeks, with some variability due to holidays and agency events. I was nervous about the second group meeting because I was concerned that I had chosen a policy for the workers to analyze that they felt was not relevant to their practice, as indicated by the bathroom story that I shared in the methods chapter. I reminded myself that if the workers were telling me that the policy was not relevant, then I had learned something about how these youth workers viewed policy, a goal of the research. As a catalyst for this discussion, I wanted to demystify the concept of policy work. I presented a quick example that I had previously used to engage a graduate class of social workers in a conversation about what policy is and how it shapes our work with individuals. At the beginning of the meeting, I stated:

I wanted to ask you about, there's this policy in a youth-serving agency where they had a sign and it said: "Showers are for emergency use only." Part of why I look at policy and get all excited about it is cuz I think policy, or the rules that we write, shows the values

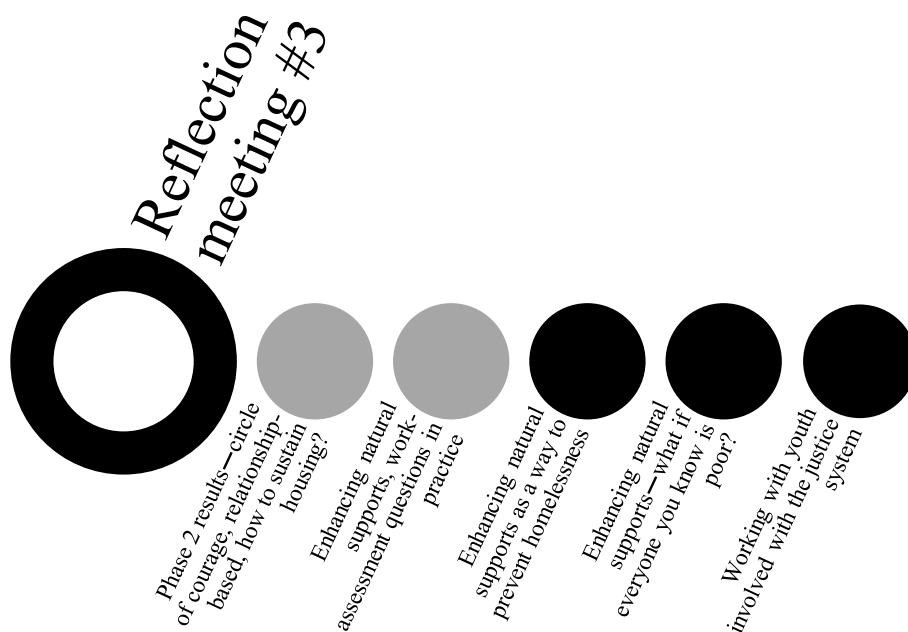
that we have, and the goals that we have. So I was wondering if we could talk about that policy “Showers are for emergency use only” and if you’ve worked for agencies that have rules like that.

I also provided some examples that workers had shared in the Preparing the Ground phase of policies that they had advocated to change as front-line workers, such as working in collaboration with other groups to lower the price for a municipal youth bus pass or increasing the age up to which the province would pay for high school completion. It was invaluable to be able to provide examples rooted in youth work practice.

The first phase also informed my provision of the catalyst of questions about youth transitioning to adult services and asking whether participants had any examples of the role that policy plays in that transition. This discussion later led to workers identifying policy improvements that could be made within their own organization that would aid in this transition. Workers returned to conversations that they were having in the meetings that I observed in the Immersion phase. This discussion focused on critical questions such as: Was there stigma associated with accessing their program? Did they want youth to feel a sense of belonging in the program? Would they send their own children to the agency to get identification? Would they be OK if their child was friends with a child from the program? Workers were actively struggling with these ideas, especially in the context of youth aging out of the program and then being cut off from relationships formed in the program. Participants identified aspects of this struggle in the “emergency showers” example and provided stories about the concept of “emergency rules” they had experienced in different programs. Additionally, participants raised the idea of secondary suites in residential homes as a policy that could prevent homelessness through increasing the municipal housing supply. During this time, the issue was being debated at City

Hall, and workers were unanimous about seeing this as a policy that could increase opportunities for renters.

This meeting had the highest number of participants in all the Reflection meetings. Sid was a youth worker who has lived experience, complementing other workers' undergraduate degrees. Robin was a youth worker who does not work for the partner agency. In this meeting, Kelly's views about addiction contrasted with the majority view that supported harm-reduction approaches. Riley was a vocal contributor to the discussion, bringing up policy examples from other countries as a catalyst. Sam coined the term "emergency rules" in this meeting, which will later appear as a sub-theme informing the third principle in the results for this phase.



*Figure 8.* Catalysts for reflection meeting three

The catalysts that I brought to the discussion were grounded in what I had heard when immersed as a participant-observer in the meetings of the Immersion phase. In this meeting, I informed the other participants that I was organizing the data under the four themes of the Circle

of Courage (Brendtro, Brokenleg, & Van Bockern, 1990), as per their identification of this model as useful in their practice. I had just identified the sub-themes contained under the theme of youth work being relationship-based, so I was looking for clarification and elaboration on this theme. One example of this was asking workers about relationships and how they can sustain or threaten housing stability for youth. I also inquired about workers' ongoing work implementing the enhancing natural supports policies, specifically asking about the implementation of the assessment questions that workers identified in the meetings in the Immersion phase.

The four workers in this meeting raised the idea of relationships as a facilitating factor in preventing homelessness, a theme that contrasted with the themes from the Immersion phase where workers described how relationships often threatened the sustainability of housing for youth. The new examples provided by participants further explicated the dynamic interaction between relationships and housing stability for youth, providing more depth to the relationship-based theme and sub-themes. Additionally, workers discussed some of the gaps in Natural Supports and expanded on ideas about agencies and Natural Supports filling complementary needs. In this meeting, workers provided a lot of examples from their work with youth involved with the justice system. These examples included improved access to assessments while incarcerated, and how youth' identity and belonging is affected by choosing to work for minimum wage instead of drug dealing.

In this meeting, participants' pre-existing relationships increased the depth of the stories. For example, Sid and Chris had worked together in various agency settings for over 10 years, so their stories had longitudinal and relational strengths. Together they had supported youth over time and they now had relationships with them as adults. Their accounts included intergenerational stories about how they got to meet the children of the children with whom they

had worked. Kelly expanded on their concerns about harm reduction, particularly as it applies to intergenerational drug addiction. Words such as “enable” and “dependence” featured prominently in the discussion. Kelly provided examples from their work when a youth’s drug addiction threatened the housing of other youth, including stories about partners, parents, roommates, and friends. Other workers supported parts of their arguments, even though disagreement was also present in the discussion. An example was this exchange between Chris and Kelly:

Kelly: It is um, I, I do wonder about that though with the youth that have had access to services since they were 14 [years old]. To me there’s something wrong with that. Like, OK, 14 to 23, 25 [years old], whatever, and they’re still coming here?

Riley: It’s like still a transition; what’s being done is adult transitioning.

Kelly: It’s almost enabling.

Chris: That dependence.

Kelly: Totally, I strongly believe that being a professional and being, having your own life, being non-professional is so important. Especially as a mother, a single mother, I can’t afford to take my work home at all.

Chris: No, I hope you don’t.

Kelly: I do sometimes find myself, I’ll just be watching TV and I’ll start having a conversation about something that happened at work, and I’ll find myself just overwhelmed with emotion. In that aspect I want my daughter to know these things, I want her to hear reality, what’s going on, but...

In this meeting, Riley drew a parallel between gang and fraternity recruitment processes and asked why one was stigmatized and the other rewarded:

Riley: It's so funny how that gang mentality works in two different areas of society. You think of it as the street people, but then think of fraternities and sororities, and rush week.

Sid: It's the exact same thing. It's the exact same actions, yeah. I mean, the people thing.

"Oh, you're Gamma Alpha Beta," people say, "woohoo." But people say, "Oh, you're an [name of a gang] killer, ugh."

Riley approached this work from a more privileged position in terms of class, and this perspective allowed them to draw this kind of parallel across class lines. The discussions were enriched through these contrasts. Sid approached from a more enmeshed perspective due to their experience as a youth accessing services. It was heartening to see Sid and Riley backing up each other's points and finishing each other's sentences in agreement after starting in such different places. Their relationship demonstrated the intersectionality of oppression in terms of what they had in common when it came to experiences with oppression; for example, Sid and Riley are close in age, and some of the other participants in this meeting were from a different generation than they were. Here is an example of their dialogue in the third meeting:

Sid: It doesn't matter what you say, definitely that oppositional defiance disorder, like any amount of authority...

Riley: It always goes back to the "man."

Sid: Inciting against, right?

Riley: And just being like, that is a part of me and that's who I want, and it's not gonna work for him, it's gonna get him into so much trouble, but again having that boundary. Is he gonna come back to the program? Probably not.



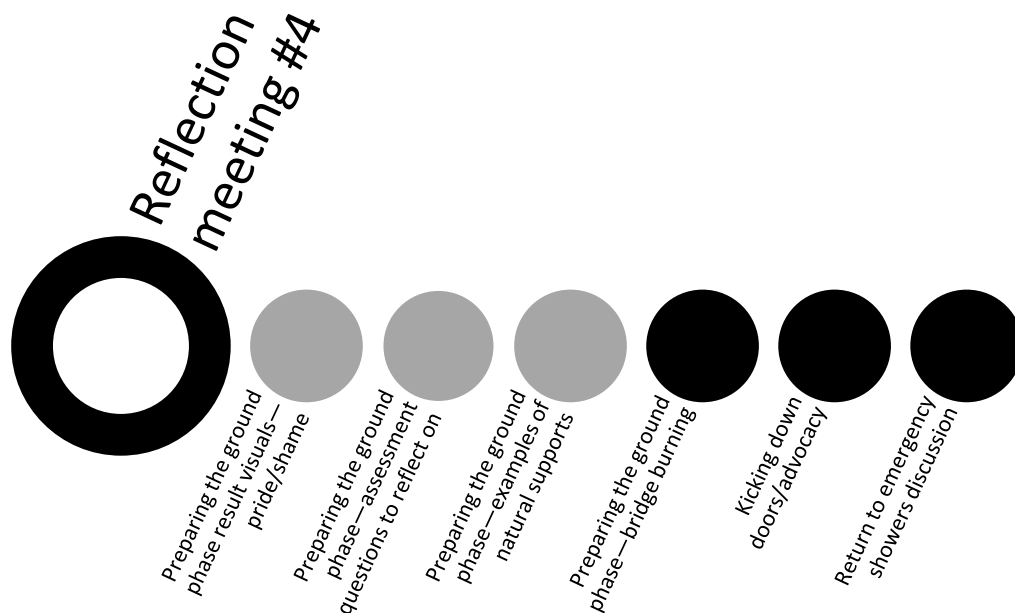


Figure 9. Catalysts for reflection meeting four

In the final reflection meeting, I provided participants with visual representations of my interpretations of what they had shared in the Immersion phase (Appendix C), as described in the previous section. The assessment questions that workers created together in the Immersion phase were presented under a model that workers identified as useful in their practice. Workers expanded on the themes of pride and shame by providing multiple examples of how experiences with belonging and acceptance shaped the identities of young people. Relationships as places to learn and grow continued to be a large part of the discussion.

The theme of bridge burning in relationships was a theme that I first identified as “sustainability of relationships”; however, workers used this language of bridge burning so often in the meetings of the Immersion phase that I labelled the theme in their language. Participants expanded this theme from their initial examples of this concept in terms of restoring individual relationships, to burning bridges with services, with the conversation returning to the idea of emergency showers. As part of this discussion, workers emphasized advocacy as part of their

work. As they stated, “We’re kicking down doors and ringing doorbells,” and, “We bug people until we get stuff done.” This kind of advocacy was identified as particularly important when youth faced practices at other agencies that workers identified as unjust. I was encouraged when participants linked the discussion back to the example of “emergency showers,” as I felt this indicated that this catalyst held some usefulness for the group.

With their outside perspective, Robin was able to provide context from outside of the partnering agency. All of the participants had worked at other agencies, and some currently worked for other agencies as their second job. Here is an example of when participants who worked at the partner agency were reminded by Robin that the policies that they were presenting as laughable were actually quite common in the youth-serving sector overall:

Riley: Look, if they were banned for a week and they’re not allowed to come back and they called and they’re like, “I’m gonna need a hamper,” we’re gonna walk a hamper outside to them. It’s not like, “Ha, ha, screw you for a week, figure it out.”

Sid: Figure it out.

<Laughter>

Robin: But a lot of agencies are.

Robin revitalized supervision as a topic, which led to the identification of the problem of high turnover in supervisors. In this meeting, Sid deepened the idea of bridge burning by illustrating how the concept could be applied to youth relationships with agencies as well as to relationships between individuals. Riley introduced some metaphors for advocacy, such as “knocking down doors,” which provided a catalyst for a further discussion about the relationships between workers from diverse agencies. In the conversation about advocacy, Kelly was concerned that the “knocking down doors” style of advocacy might “make people uncomfortable.” After this

meeting, I noted in my research journal that if I had been in the meeting in a practice role, I would have responded to Kelly by saying that I think people have to be uncomfortable in order to learn and change and grow. Upon deeper reflection, I acknowledged that I also supported her view of advocacy as a relational process that doesn't by definition have to be adversarial.

After the completion of the four meetings of the Reflection phase, we moved on to the Action phase, where we planned and executed actions based on our learnings from the previous phases. In the action meetings, a new participant, known by the pseudonym of Jamie, joined the research project, as they had just been hired at the partnering agency. This participant had pre-existing relationships with more than half the group, including myself. The action meetings were more structured than the reflection meetings, as we answered these questions:

What problems have we identified?

What solutions have we identified?

What leverage points have we identified?

Who has the power to change this?

Who do we want to hear this/share with?

How can we start with ourselves (as individuals, at [the agency], as youth workers)?

Who could we partner with/what are the existing resources?

During the action meetings, I took notes under these questions on large paper that all the participants could see. I would stop and ask participants whether I had recorded their thoughts accurately. I continued to audio record the meetings and have them transcribed, and these transcripts were included in the data analysis that resulted in the four principles.

Even though our discussions were structured by the research questions for the Action phase, our conversations were fluid enough to allow for new themes to emerge and old themes to be expanded upon.

In the first action meeting, the discussion focused on why homelessness exists, envisioning a world without stigma, identifying what actions we had already done/accomplished, and the idea of inviting the mayor for our results sharing. In this meeting, Chris linked themes about stigma with the example of youth from the LGBTQ2S+ community being over-represented in the population of youth experiencing homelessness. Chris continued to contribute knowledge that they had gained over decades of youth work experience, including reclaiming the concept of the peer model as an intervention that had worked in the past—in their words, “as some of us seasoned people who have been around a long time know...” In contrast, Jamie brought into the discussion the perspective of being new to the agency. In this meeting, Jamie raised the internal policy gaps of new staff training and transition planning for youth aging out of the system of care. Both Chris and Jamie used themselves to measure the fairness of rules, for example:

Robin: I don't think it should be age based...

Riley: I think there definitely needs to be that bridge because right now, we're two islands separated by a scary gap.

Chris: I managed when I was 25 [years old], I managed. I don't know that I was there. I managed barely.

Jamie: I'm 30 now; for me, I'm not even managing...

Robin presented stories about why they felt that staff training, team building, and burnout prevention would help improve outcomes for youth accessing services. Sid made a link between the need to intervene at the levels of family culture and organizational culture if we wanted to

make a difference for youth accessing services. In a discussion about the use of words such as “hooker” on mainstream radio and how this language contributes to stigma and makes it difficult for youth to transition out of homelessness, Sid expressed a spiritual element to inclusion instead of stigma: “I actually had to change the channel; it hurt my soul.” Or as Riley expressed it: “We don’t see numbers, we see people.” Riley enthusiastically agreed with Jamie that the agency needed a better policy for transitioning youth to adult services and training workers in the other programs that the agency offered. Both of these participants were instrumental in advocating for these policy changes, which were implemented at the agency level.

In the second action meeting, we discussed our local context, including: the impact that a recent flood had had on affordable housing; the natural reciprocity of youth wanting to help other youth; and self-awareness as a strength for both workers and youth. We also returned to conversations about bridge burning, transitioning youth to adult services, and leadership. This second action meeting was when Sam and Sid collaboratively created the term “Darth Vader leadership” to refer to some youth who may have used their leadership skills for goals that could be perceived as aligned with the dark side, but had nevertheless displayed strong leadership skills. Robin continued to advocate for action at the level of providing training for staff and provided examples from their work about barriers to staff training, such as not having staff coverage so that the agency could remain open during staff trainings. Chris and Sam discussed the theme of bridge burning between youth and agencies, agreeing that boundaries on this matter were complex:

Chris: The other thing that needs to happen is, you know, if there’s a place to fail and a place to learn, that they’re... I mean, we all know that there’s programs that if youth fail in that program, you don’t get another opportunity to try and learn and make it work. You

just get discharged and you don't go back. So then you burn through all of those resources before you know it, and then what?

Sam: I think it's OK to have places that you can't go back to.

Chris: I think it's OK to have second chances, too, though, right.

Sam: Exactly.

Jamie confirmed that youth wanting to help other youth was relational reciprocity and should be expected instead of discouraged in programs. Jamie also critiqued the limiting of autonomy when programs would not allow youth to display personal items in their rooms, such as posters or pictures. As they stated:

Jamie: It's a form of expressing themselves. Then when we're telling them that, well, don't express yourself, but express yourself.

Robin: Only in the right ways.

Jamie: Yeah, just the way I tell you to express yourself.

Jamie felt that in the process of transitioning youth to adult services, there were risks of making youth feel that they were not longer wanted or "did not belong" in the community of relationships that they had developed.

On the other side of the argument, Kelly presented some examples of specific youth who were over the maximum age that the program served, yet their co-workers were not talking to them about transitioning to adult services. I interpreted this conversation as Kelly's frustration with witnessing most of their co-workers subverting rules about age limits, which would put more pressure on workers who were trying to implement the stated rules. Here is a sample of the conversation:

Kelly: So how long of a period do you let them come, continue to come back like [name of youth] is a good example of that; he's been back about three times.

Sam: Did he turn 25 [years old]?

Riley: We all know he's 25.

Kelly: When nobody's had that conversation.

<Silence>

Kelly: Well he knows, right. He knows all the resources.

Riley: As soon as he walks in, you can be like, "[name of youth], you know you're too old to be here, so you're welcome to grab a sandwich and leave." On that part it's our responsibility to help him. So I know it's hard, but you have to.

Chris: He's fully aware of that.

Riley: He knows right, he's just pushing a limit.

Sid: He does...

Riley: Cuz he thinks we're a bunch of softies here.

In these conversations there continued to be an element of Kelly as the outsider, due to their approach to youth work and how it contrasted with the rest of the staff team.

In the third action meeting, we discussed use of technology to get messages out, and made some decisions about the actions that we wished to prioritize. In this meeting, Kelly identified the need for research with youth themselves when examining the issue of youth homelessness:

I think that would be awesome to actually sit down and have that conversation with, you know, the people who are actually affected and who, you know, this research is for and about. To actually have that conversation. I can think of so many youth [in the program]

that come on a regular basis. You know, how did you get here, what made you homeless?  
And to have that documented somehow.

In the discussion chapter, I will present my reflections about this idea of youth' perspectives legitimizing or refuting the research results.

Robin and Jamie discussed the need to engage in political conversations with youth, in order to enable them to apply their critical thinking at the systemic level:

Kelly: Yeah, they just disconnected from that whole part [voting, connection to policy].

Jamie: Then we just have to make that connection and that's that...

Robin: They [youth] don't see their power, they don't see that if 30 [youth] show up at City Hall that is more than the social workers who can show up at City Hall.

Jamie: Umhm. <Nodding affirmatively>

Robin: I think one of the hard parts is connecting with those youth. You get the [program] youth, but what agency will allow you to come in and say...

Jamie: And talk politics.

Robin: Exactly.

Also in the third action meeting, we discussed the idea of inviting the mayor to our presentation of the research results:

Stasha: Ok, so I want to talk about this [mayor] idea. What do you want him to change?

Robin: Everything.

Riley: The whole world.

Robin: Dear [mayor], we're gonna tell you this and then you're gonna' fix it, then when you do that, the next thing.



Stasha: Interesting to me, because really the federal government is supposed to be in charge of affordable housing, homelessness...

Riley: Ok, well they've done shit-all...

Stasha: Since the '80's they have done shit-all...and they pass it on to the province, so the feds still give some money, like when the [agency] applies for the federal money coming through the province. So the province, which is supposed to be releasing their plan to end homelessness "ahem"...

<Laughter>

Stasha: They, they are the power position on homelessness. They have, they've set up this whole infrastructure on the Alberta Secretariat on Homelessness. We could go and present to them. Um, we could, the seven cities meetings, right, cuz this is something we've learned in Calgary, but you could do this research with youth workers in all kinds of places and get some similar or different answers. Which we can't prove until we do that.

<Laughter>

Stasha: Then [the mayor], um, we could talk to him in a way, like advocating for secondary suites is how he is involved in homelessness right now.

Robin: I wonder how much he knows about what's really going on.

Riley: It would probably give him more power for his fight for secondary suites.

Stasha: So we thought of him because of secondary suites...

Robin: And because we actually see change coming from him.

Riley: Hope, hope.

Inviting the mayor to the presentation of our research results was one of two actions that were planned in this meeting but did not actually happen in practice. I regret that I did not invite the mayor. I was worried that participants were expecting the mayor to act when it would be difficult for him to effect change from his position. I should have listened to what the participants wanted instead of unilaterally deciding that the mayor could not effect change in this area. Upon reflection, we didn't have a lot to lose by inviting municipal politicians and by not inviting him I may have closed off an opportunity for partnership. This is my main regret from this research and I am still reflecting deeply on why I didn't follow through on this action.

The second action that was planned but did not happen was the creation of a podcast, with sound and visuals, which could be used to share our research results on the Web. Various participants committed to following up with investigating programs or people who could help us create a presentation in this media. We did not want the slides to be available without our descriptions and stories to explain them. At the fourth action meeting, which was our last meeting together, we focused on finishing the preparations for presenting the research results in person. In the end, we did not achieve the podcast goal due to a lack of resources available to us for recording and distributing the results online.

I agreed with the workers in the meetings who identified online resources as a way to have a much wider audience for our research results. I also shared with them one downside of having conferences post our research presentations online, which was that we could not update them as our interpretations evolved. For example, in this online archive of a presentation about the results from the Preparing the Ground phase (Huntingford et al., 2014), I present the overall theme as one of safety instead of the way it now appears as a theme about actively navigating

risk (Appendix D). In this way, stability was framed as sustainable but also as a risk to flexibility and our emergent form of research.

As you can see, the meetings focused more and more on the tangible tasks associated with the action planning, until our fourth meeting, where we reviewed our progress towards our goals and practiced our presentation of the research results. In the final meeting, we said our goodbyes in terms of working on this project together.

### **Reflection and Action Phases Results: Four Principles**

The process of data analysis from the Immersion and the Reflection and Action phases yielded four principles related to the *Plan to End Youth Homelessness in Calgary* (CHF, 2011); participants recommended that services for youth experiencing homelessness reflect an understanding of these principles. The principles recognize the influence of belonging and safety in rejecting the charity model while healing from shame, stigma, and social exclusion. Additionally, these principles focus on the healing power of restoring and expanding relationships with ourselves, with other people, and within the larger society. Each of the themes and sub-themes that comprise these four overarching principles are depicted in Table 3.

Table 3

*Four Principles, Themes, and Sub-themes*

Principle	Theme	Sub-theme
1. We cannot end homelessness without ending the associated stigma, trauma, and social exclusion. Homelessness is both a consequence of other problems and a shared community problem.	Homelessness as a consequence of other problems Creating/treating problems	
	Stigma	Accessing services Challenging isms Identity NIMBY
2. Prevention of and recovery from homelessness are about healing relationships with yourself, other people, and larger society. Relationships characterized by reciprocity can be safe places in which to learn, make mistakes, and develop the positive aspects of our identity.	Qualities of these relationships	Empowerment versus rescuing Restorative Safe to learn/share
	Threats to relationship-based work	In conflict with policy  Burnout takes away from Abuse of power
	Applications to practice	Supported referrals Leadership
3. The charity model creates stigma; the recovery model, including peer support, aids in transforming trauma and challenges dichotomy so we can experience positive identity and learn our strengths.	Influence of the charity model on policy creates stigma	Definition of “emergency”  Peer model in contrast to charity model
	Scarcity	Influences policy decisions Contributes to burnout
4. Professional supports alone are not enough to heal homelessness. Natural supports can contribute to a sense of belonging; strengthening natural supports is an important part of youth work. Through youth-directed services, guided by their perception of a problem, youth can identify and strengthen their natural supports, opportunities for leadership, and communities that they feel they belong in.	Youth’ perception of problems	
	Youth-directed	

**Demographics of participants in the Reflection and Action phases.** When we presented our cumulative research results at the conclusion of the Action phase, we presented our demographics in this manner: “We have 95 years’ total youth work experience. Some of us have been youth workers for longer than others have been alive. Half of us are parents” (Huntingford et al., 2015, Slide 2). My youth work experience was not included in the total because my role in this research was mainly one of listening and facilitating discussion, as opposed to sharing my youth work knowledge. In total, this project is informed by 107 years’ total youth work experience, not including the years of youth work experience that informs the literature that I consulted to guide this research process, or my supervisors’ experience with youth work. Participants in these phases chose to have their names appear on the aggregate final presentation of our research results, although I continue to present the data under gender-neutral pronouns in order to protect their individual confidentiality within the group.

Two workers who had participated in the Preparing the Ground phase rejoined the group for these final phases. The majority of the 12 participants in these phases had been part of the meetings that I observed in the Immersion phase, so we had some time to get to know each other and strengthen our relationships before beginning the Reflection and Action phases. These phases had diverse opportunities for participation—for example, a practicum student was not able to participate in the meetings but asked whether they could co-present the research results as a way to practice their skills in this area. Other participants supported this idea, as they did not identify public speaking as a strength of theirs or something that they desired to do. Robin, for example, said that they would contribute in any way other than presenting, and helped me improve the visual aids and make the food for the event. There was one worker who silently participated in one focus group due to having laryngitis at the time. They offered enthusiastic

nodding and the occasional whisper. Another of the co-presenters for the final research results was a worker who had school scheduled on the day that the focus group meetings were held. They expressed a desire to be involved in the project, and we found a good fit with presenting.

**Principle one.** The first principle provides a critique of the goal to end homelessness that is identified in the *Plan* (CHF, 2011). As the principle states, we cannot end homelessness without ending stigma, trauma, and social exclusion. Homelessness is a consequence of other problems and is a shared community problem. In relationship to the goal of ending homelessness, Sam provided an enriched conceptualization of homelessness:

So we're thinking about homelessness and what we've been given as an answer to homelessness is housing. But the opposite of homelessness is not housed, it's homed.

And that there is . . . all of the stuff about belonging . . . Because people aren't houseless, they're homeless.

Riley added, “[Home] is community, it's belonging.”

***Homelessness as a consequence of other problems.*** Participants framed homelessness as a consequence of other problems such as: discharge from services without adequate resources; a lack of mental health supports; and experiences with racism, stigma, and isolation. Thus, in order to address homelessness, attention must be paid to these root causes, as Chris described:

It's more about educating our community around the community, not our community, but the whole entire community about why homelessness exists. Until we address issues like mental health and people's choices and the communities that they belong to, [for example,] the LGBTQ2S+ community. Um, homelessness I don't think is going to stop until we're educated and the community is educated.

Participants added that although they identified community awareness of root causes as vital to addressing how youth experiencing homelessness are stigmatized, they also identified that this awareness was very limited and still contributed to the youth experiencing stigma. As Chris stated and Sid responded:

Chris: People are starting to talk about mental health, people are starting to talk about the LGBTQ2S+ community. Um, it needs to be bigger right? It needs to be bigger; everyone needs to know about it.

Sid: That awareness piece happens within a whole community. That isn't like talking to people that are in that community, that's on [social media], it's making those videos. It's reaching out. You've got some kind of singer or DJ or whatever talking about homelessness and making videos. It's that macro stuff [that makes a difference].

Additionally, participants identified how societal forces contribute to stigma and social exclusion in relation to the experience of homelessness for youth. Riley contrasted the way homelessness is addressed in Canada with other examples:

I think homelessness and the challenges that we're facing have a lot to do with social stigmas. If we look at other countries who view homelessness as a fault of society, it's very, very different than Canada. Extremely different. So it really, I feel that it really has to come from the top. Just like dealing with racism, dealing with prejudice and getting people informed.

Robin provided an example of a community-level factor that would need to be addressed in order to end youth homelessness:

Well I think one of the biggest problems is we have a zero vacancy rate to begin with. Other than sending kids home, which is not a good idea, you know, like unless they're

making new places to put people they're homeless. . . . There is nowhere [being built], and usually [youth] are hidden homeless, but they're still homeless.

***Creating/treating problems.*** Participants also explained that by failing to account for the trauma associated with youth homelessness, services could contribute to or exacerbate existing problems. One participant who had been formerly homeless offered the following example:

That was my experience; I couldn't go to counselling and open up my trauma about sexual assault while I was still homeless and totally at risk for that. Because you'd leave that counselling session, like, way too vulnerable, without your armour on, and no wonder you're terrified that you're not safe—you're *not* safe. It took me a long time to be safe enough to experience what counselling is actually like when you have that kind of foundation.

Distinguishing between services to cope with being unsafe while homeless and services to heal once in stable housing was identified as vital to providing trauma-informed services for youth. Robin described how youth experienced counselling while they were still homeless, stating, "Well, and the kids say, 'Counselling doesn't work, it just makes me feel like crap.'" Sid also noted the difficulty of accessing long-term counselling: "But is it doing any long-term good if the kids don't have the option of long-term counseling"? In this way, participants emphasized the need for trauma-informed services for youth experiencing homelessness, and identified short-term counselling as detrimental without access to long-term services and safe housing. As Robin explained:

We need more of the programs to do that [take safety into account]. We have to realize if you're on the street, we should be working on coping techniques and not opening the trauma box. And you know, like, we don't have much in that part.



*Stigma.* The theme of stigma was woven throughout the other themes comprising principle one, as participants identified it as a cause of homelessness, such as the example of LGBTQ2S+ youth mentioned above. Stigma further has four sub-themes that describe how accessing services can contribute to stigma, the processes of workers challenging “isms” such as racism or ableism in the youth spaces, how stigma affects youth’ developing identities, and the concept of Not In My Backyard (NIMBYism).

*Accessing services.* This theme first emerged in the Preparing the Ground phase; additionally, in the Reflection phase, this theme appeared at the meso level, concerning how youth interacted with the agency. Kelly provided an example of youth distancing themselves from the program due to the risk of being stigmatized if they were associated:

Yeah it’s actually, it’s almost like a denial. You guys know who I’m talking about.

They’ll go directly, they actually won’t interact with the computers [provided for the youth]. They’ll actually use the computer [provided for staff], almost like it’s their office. They’ll go in there, shut the door, start doing their whatever, right. It’s kind of funny to me to see that dynamic happening.

Stasha: So they don’t identify as belonging with the [agency]?

Kelly: Well, I think they do only because of their link to that one particular youth worker. That’s the only person they’ll go to and talk with and ask for help. Everything else is kind of invisible to them because they’ve got so much pride they don’t actually identify as being a part of the group.

Sid provided an example of how stigma concerning addiction can present a barrier to accessing informal supports:

He would come in and he hated the fact that his addiction had brought him down to this place and how he actually stayed away, and this is quite common with a lot of the guys I've talked to with massive addictions. Just the pride and shame of their addiction would actually keep them from going and accessing their natural supports because they did not want to be viewed as a druggie. They wanted to keep face. So a lot of, um, the conversation, that's when, you know, you would address shame and pride and talk about perspective on where you're at. I just remember a lot of the conversation was about "I can't believe I'm here, I can't believe I'm doing this or doing that" [as an indicator of addiction affecting his life]. "I sold my phone. I loved my phone. I sold it, [Sid]."

*Challenging isms.* Youth workers shared examples of how they intervened in the youth space to confront macro examples of oppression such as heterosexism and racism. Sid returned to an example that Riley had raised in the Immersion phase

Well, I think that Riley did a really good job of, um, explaining, cuz we did have a skinhead coming in and talk about the prejudices and stuff like that. He would bring it up quite often, but Riley called [explained] it, because it was his safe place to talk about it. He wanted, he didn't come off like, like [over the top], he just wanted to talk about it. Then with the conversation it was a safe enough environment to kind of be challenged, you know. So with that youth, I remember he brought up being homophobic and, you know, gays, that's not his subject; he was just very uneducated about it. So that gives us an opportunity because of that relationship and because he feels safe, to ask those questions like, "Well what, like, documents have you read to support that? Where have you read to support that? Where are you getting your information?" It's really interesting because I remember he said, "Cuz of my dad." And then, but it's really funny because as

soon as somebody says those words, like, you say, “Have you watched documentaries have you done this, this, or that?” then they go, “I only know that cuz of my dad.” Then you can see them [realize that they are] being ignorant, [and] a light bulb goes off.

In a different meeting in the Reflection phase, Sid and Riley discussed the balance between censorship and safety and how they nurture an environment where youth feel safe enough to ask questions and learn about oppression:

Sid: That was a safe conversation. Here are my ideas in a conversation, plus debate about it. Where we’ve had other youth coming in, they’re all sitting at the table and I remember Sam and I, them talking about, “Oh you’re gay,” and, “You just wanna screw this other guy,” and using it in very derogatory manner. In an environment like this it becomes extremely unsafe. It’s like you either shut your hole or you get out because those words are poison and that’s how hate crimes start.

Riley: Yeah, it’s about other people’s safety.

Sid: Yeah, if you wanna talk about it, unless you talk about where your information is, then that’s different. Then bringing in those stigmas and then just allowing it to happen, you know, in the space. So those are two very different things. So we’re telling kids that kind of language is not appropriate, it will not be tolerated, and it is poison in this space.

Riley: And that keeps it safe.

Sid: But then on the other end, if we need to talk about that, it’s open. It’s open to talk, to change, to think, and to grow.

*Identity.* Workers shared many stories about how young people’s developing identities were affected by stigma and shame. Sid provided an example of how addiction interacted with the stigma of social rejection:

It's really fascinating but heart-wrenching to see how a drug can really take away from somebody's identity and just how they sit there and they're like, "That's not me but it is me," and struggling with that. This isn't who I want to be, but I am this person. Then having a conversation around is this truly who you are or is this, you know, something that you're doing at this time. You know, that can be shameful, you know.

Jamie provided a critique of another agency's policies that did not allow youth to settle into their rooms by decorating because the service was defined as a temporary shelter, where they did not want youth to be "comfortable":

Sid: We're supposed to be sitting there doing, "Who are you as a person, what do you like, what don't you like." Something as simple as a frickin' room and putting posters up can lead to a strong sense of self. It's got therapeutic value that isn't being allowed to naturally evolve.

Jamie: It [decorating a shelter room] is a form of expressing themselves. Then when we're telling them that, well, don't express yourself, but express yourself.

Robin: Only in the right ways.

Jamie: Yeah, just the way I tell you to express yourself.

Workers also used this discussion of an example of how services created stigma through policies such as the rule about not decorating your room. Riley referred to this idea of internalized shame as the "slouch factor" in terms of how youth express shame in their body language.

*Not In My Backyard (NIMBY)*. The issue of NIMBY appeared multiple times in the discussion about secondary suites and stories about community reactions to affordable housing. This theme also appeared in the Preparing the Ground phase when workers illustrated how a fear of NIMBY caused agencies to hide things about their work or the people with whom they work.

Robin described the NIMBY concept thus: “A lot of it is the rich people saying, ‘I don’t want a secondary suite in my neighbour’s house because I know that a low-income family is moving in there and I don’t want that in my neighbourhood.’” Sid and Riley expanded on the role of stigma in creating NIMBYism:

Sid: The people, the alcoholics, you know, the domestic violence and then you know, the, the pedophiles and stuff like that. Are my kids going to be safe if so and so moves into the basement? They could have some issues and hurt my kids.

Riley: But that’s the social stigma that goes around low-income housing. “If you’re low-income, you’re low-income because you didn’t make the right decisions in life.” You know it’s not situational, and you know if you’re Aboriginal then you’re, like, for sure going to be judged. It’s the labels that go along with it that is just unbelievable. That’s what Calgary is fighting with, you know, and we’re not challenging the stigma.

**Principle two.** Principle two focuses on relationships and identity, defining prevention of and recovery from homelessness as about healing relationships with yourself, other people, and larger society. According to this principle, youth work is relationship-based and restoring relationships is vital in the process of healing from homelessness. Participants expressed the importance of relationship in their work:

I think the relationship plays a huge part on how you interact with the youth. I know that there’s some kids I’m really, really blunt and forceful with and there’s some I can’t be that way. So it depends on the kid, youth to youth, youth worker to youth worker, you know.

Participants also identified their own need for supportive relationships with colleagues:

I think, I think different levels of support for sure. Like if I'm having a hard day with something that's going on, I need the support of people that understand. So I need to talk to my co-workers because they know exactly what I'm talking about.

*Qualities of these relationships.* Empowerment versus rescuing is the first sub-theme for which participants provided examples that illustrated the difference in the quality of relationships based on principles of empowerment, in contrast to the quality of relationships based on rescuing. As Sid described, part of not rescuing is allowing youth room to make mistakes, as these mistakes offer opportunities for learning and developing confidence:

It's different, you can still walk beside, but realizing that person, even though it's a youth, they're still individuals, they are still a soul. They are still doing their own journey and really, you cannot do that journey, you are not walking their journey. You kind of just have to let go, if they need to make a mistake. They need to do this mistake in order to learn from it, to grow, to continue on their path. So if I'm sitting there and sabotaging that mistake, that can potentially just lead them to prolonging that lesson that needs to be learned.

The second sub-theme contributing to the quality of relationships was the ability to restore. Sid shared how youth often leave the agency in great conflict but after time seek to return and recover the relationship:

I think here we have a lot of kids who, who will act up in the space and we have to ask them to leave like just for the safety of everyone around them and for their own safety. It's like, "Ok, you kinda need to go for the day." But we've had a couple of kids who, it's been like, "Yeah, you can come back in two weeks and we'll see," because their actions were so severe that it warranted a longer period of time. A lot of the times [youth respond

by saying], “Fuck you, I’m never coming back, screw you guys.” We say, “If you wanna come back after two weeks, you have to meet with the person, the worker who you blew up at and do a little bit of mending.” [The youth responds,] “Fuck that, I’m never doing that.” Then give it two weeks and they’re like, “Hi, I need to talk to \_\_\_\_\_,” [Kelly giggling], and then we do and then it’s like, “Thank you for your apology. We accept your apology. When you did this it made us feel like \_\_\_\_\_ and in the future, let’s work on \_\_\_\_\_.”

Riley: Yeah, and there’s never, there’s only been one kid who we’ve had so far that has not come back to restore [relationships].

Stasha: I love the process, too, how they go from one extreme to the other.

Riley: Yeah. Fuck you, I’m here! I’m here to restore.

The ability for youth to access services and restore relationships with professionals after problematic behaviours was noted as being variable between agencies. As participants noted:

Riley: Over and over [we say to youth accessing services], like, come back tomorrow, come back in two days, come back on Monday, come back in two weeks, come back in a month, OK, you can’t come back but we’ll still meet with you. It’s never like they don’t know why they’re not allowed here. They always do.

Sid: I like that it’s not removing services, like, find a new way to do that in the community because you can’t be safe here.

Riley: Look, if they were banned for a week and they’re not allowed to come back and they called and they’re like, “I’m gonna need a food hamper,” we’re gonna walk a hamper outside to them. It’s not like, “Ha, ha, screw you for a week, figure it out.”

Robin: But a lot of agencies are [refusing basic needs services because of youth behaviours].

Youth workers in this study noted that ending homelessness is contingent on separating behavioural issues from basic needs services, specifically housing (Tsemberis, Gulcur, & Nakae, 2004). Workers provided the above example of the contrast between the intent of policies, such as Housing First, designed to ensure that youth can access services through restorative options for addressing behavioural issues. These policy changes are driven by the policy under review in this research, the *Plan to End Youth Homelessness in Calgary* (CHF, 2011), which emphasizes that youth should not be discharged from programs into homelessness.

Sid: I think that's another thing, too, with a lot of our programs. We have policies put in place so that a youth or an adult who is homeless, if they're following through with exactly what they want them to do, that person is still discharged to homelessness. Even though their mandate is that they're not released into homelessness. And that's ridiculous.

Youth workers in this study supported the idea of separating behaviours from housing and recognized that agencies are causing harm by not following policies that are based on the belief in housing as a human right. Therefore, denial of basic needs services was equated with denial of the human rights of youth, which damages the relationship between youth and front-line workers and detracts from youth' ability to be safe. Chris provided an example of the implementation of a specific policy originating with the Calgary Homeless Foundation, the policy for services, including the justice and health systems, to transition youth exiting programs into stable housing rather than discharging them into homelessness:



Well, because there's too many loopholes, right? So discharging to homelessness is absolute homelessness. So there's no place at the shelter, there's no place at friends', family, no one is taking you, so that's absolute homelessness. So some of the programs in the city will discharge people to a shelter or discharge them to time out [from the program]. So I think that's a loophole that they get away with when their mandate says, "We don't discharge to homelessness," but ultimately you are, I believe you are [discharging into homelessness].

Participants emphasized how this disconnect between the policy intentions and how services were actually delivered in practice affected their relationships with youth as well as their relationships with other agencies providing services to youth.

The final sub-theme comprising qualities of relationships was healthy relationships being defined by youth workers as those in which people could be safe to learn and grow, as explicated in the following story that Riley shared:

So when I was a teenager, our garden hose broke, so I was, like, use duct tape to fix it, and I thought brilliant idea, like I've solved the world's problems with duct tape.

Stasha: Sounds good. <Laughs>

Riley: This is gonna be great. My dad was like, "That's not gonna work," cuz he has experienced water pressure. Like, duct tape is not gonna hold cuz he's got experience.

But I was like it was in my head, "It's duct tape that solves it. I'm gonna use it, right."

And it was like my first, and I remember being so hard-headed and my dad being like,

"OK, then go do it," and he stood on the deck and didn't say anything and watched me,

and I'm, like, "It looks like it will hold." I did this, and it squirted right in my face, and he

was like, “What did you learn?” I was like, “OK, fair enough.” Yeah, no then he goes, “Well what did you learn?” I said, “Too many things.” My dad is right.

Sid: I think that parents and youth workers don’t do this too; [it] is the value of being safe to fail. So your dad is like, “What did you learn?” compared to, “If you only listened to me, like, you’re such an idiot.” That relates back to the fear of being stupid. “I cannot fail.”

Participants further described why they strive to build such supportive relationships with the youth with whom they work:

Chris: The other thing that needs to happen is, you know, if there’s a place to fail and a place to learn, that there, I mean we all know that there’s programs that if youth fail in that program, you don’t get another opportunity to try and learn and make it work. You just get discharged and you don’t go back. So then you burn through all of those resources before you know it, and then what?

Sam: I think it’s OK, to have places that you can’t go back to.

Chris: I think it’s OK to have second chances, too, though, right? Safe to fail, safe to learn.

***Threats to relationship-based work.*** This theme was comprised of three sub-themes, the first containing examples of when policies directly interfered with forming and sustaining relationships with youth. Some participants shared that they often had ongoing relationships with youth who no longer accessed services, despite agency policies forbidding such relationships; as one participant shared, “me and this kid are still very close, policy aside.”

Policies that did not allow relationships with youth workers to continue after services were complete contributed to burnout, according to participants, as Robin explained:

Well, cuz that's part of burnout too, if we only see people when they're in crisis. That's the setup: you can access services and this relationship when you're in crisis. But we never get to celebrate when they're OK. Like if you don't hear from a kid for two years then you don't know if they're in jail or if they're doing really well or if they're just trying to distance maybe from belonging to services.

Sid reflected on how as a result of specific policies, it was common for youth to be evicted from housing programs because they were trying to assist their friends:

Well how natural is that, how natural is it to be like, "I was homeless, you took me in, now you're in the same situation. Yeah girl, you can come and stay with me because you are my family and screw those other people." Then they get kicked out. Right, I don't know how many kids get kicked out because they're trying to help somebody.

Abuses of power on the part of the youth workers was the final sub-theme of the threats to relationship-based work. In the context of analyzing a policy at a local youth-serving agency that stated, "Showers are for emergency use only," participants explained that burnout interfered with their ability to work in a relationship-based way and contributed to abuses of power on the part of youth workers:

It could be really, really easy, you know. Like for you as a staff or staff that really don't give a shit, to put up a sign or inform them in that one phone call, "You are solely responsible for getting here," just cuz they don't wanna deal with the phone calls.

I think the other very big possibility, likely, is for punishment as well. You know, if one kid vandalized that shower, then that staff is pissed off and maybe a little bit burnt out, and they put up the sign because they're not dealing with any more kids vandalizing that shower. One kid wrecks it for everybody, which just goes on and on.

Another participant offered an alternative view of how burnout affects relationship-based work, emphasizing that being too involved in the relationship sometimes had the same effects as not being involved enough:

When I look at burnout, though, cuz I know for me burnout is different than it could be for the next person, the next person. But I do remember in other agencies sometimes it wasn't so much cutting yourself off from the youth and [not being able to] talk to them. I have seen staff work tirelessly with, with the youth with no change. Or there is change and then they go back to where they are [regress in behaviours] and that's very, very difficult for [the worker].

Abuses of power by youth workers, the final sub-theme, were described as interfering with relationship-based work, particularly in the context of a lack of resources, as Robin explained:

I think we've all worked in agencies, and I hope I'm wrong, but I think we've all worked in agencies with "that" person that doesn't want to deal with [anything].

Sam: Even that power reaction of wanting to punish usually means that they are feeling punished. Like, like when someone is asking for an emergency bus ticket, you're the one that they're looking at to, like, that is witnessing that scarcity and then has to explain there are not enough bus tickets.

Workers also referred to examples of abuses of power as "bullying" and described how people who abused power were protected within agency structures and hierarchies:

Sid: So here, it's like this: they can't stand that person and it almost becomes a bullying situation of staff. We're not going to give them services cuz actually we don't like you. It's just as likely that the supervisors are the bullies, not the front-line staff. Yeah.

Robin: Like, you know, I've left a lot of agencies because of the supervisors who were abusing the kids. You know, what do you do?

Riley: Who is gonna believe you?

Robin: Exactly. Then you go to the next [agency] and they're just as bad and they're feeding the next [abusive supervisor].

***Applications to practice.*** Supported referrals was the first sub-theme of how relationship-based work was applied in practice. Chris explained the reasoning behind the idea of supported referrals:

Chris: I think they appreciate that little bit of hand-holding, if you will, right?

Robin: Especially when you let the youth know that you don't know [either], let's go together.

Sam: Exactly, this is how we find stuff out.

Participants identified a need for these supported referrals based on empathizing with the stress of accessing new services:

Chris: So you said something earlier about sometimes these kids need to be taken to the places, right? Can you imagine, this is what I think about and how anxious they could get, and not because they have a mental illness, just because...

Sid: It's scary.

Chris: Because I don't even have anxiety or anything, but I get a subpoena in the mail and I have to be on the stand in front of the judge, so that to me is like my ultimate "Oh my gosh." This is what these kids are experiencing when you send them to a new agency.

Sam provided the following example of how supported referrals occur in practice:

But when we have someone in front of us, if I have someone in front of me that is turning 25 [years old] and I know that they're gonna be transitioning to adult services. Say if they were going to be transitioning to [British Columbia] I might go on the computer and look up things about [British Columbia] and I might even call and say, "This kid is coming and they need these types of services, what do you have there?" So at least when the kid goes . . . they have somewhere to start, they have an idea, they have some phone numbers, they have some contacts about where they're gonna get help.

Another way that relational referrals occurred in practice was when workers developed relationships with workers and youth at other agencies to which their youth were transitioning. This was defined as part of the job of youth workers, as Sid stated: "I will go down to there, yeah, talk to your staff, hang out with those kids if that makes it easier for them to access here. Then everybody was like 'What, you'll do that?' 'Yeah, that's my job.'" As Sid continued:

We're very much about community partners. So if we have a youth that is accessing here but living at another agency, that means one of our staff going down there to bond with that youth and that staff. [This is done] in order to make [the transition] much easier for that kid, the [agency] will go and do that. I don't think many other agencies would, because it's like, "Well no, that's your guys' [problem], it's no longer our concern."

The second sub-theme was leadership. Opening up opportunities for youth to be leaders was identified by participants as a core part of relationship-based work. Riley illustrated this with an example of two youth who had launched a campaign of resistance after being banned from services:

It's teaching that reciprocity. It's so they know, "Ok you're homeless; that doesn't mean you can't be a leader, that doesn't mean you can't step up."

Sam: [Those two boys] have tried that, in their own way, right?

<Laughter>

Sam: In my opinion and my values, a little misdirected in how they've done that.

However, it is what they are trying to do. They started a website, they started a movement!

Riley: They're the leaders in that community; people are following it.

**Principle three.** The third principle is that the charity model creates stigma, whereas the recovery model, including peer support, aids in transforming trauma and challenging dichotomy, and allows youth to experience positive identity, learn their strengths, and heal from stigmatizing experiences. Just a reminder to you, dear reader, that the charity model often requires people to prove they are in need and dependent on the charity; under this model, resources are not earned, nor are people entitled to them (Poppendieck, 1998).

*Influence of the charity model on policy creates stigma.* As Robin explained, “[agencies] set the youth up for failure.” Riley expanded on this idea with a story:

Like one of the youth who I am working with right now was kicked out of the [adult shelter] because she had mental health issues that were undealt with. They were like, you're not allowed to come back until you deal with your mental health. It wasn't so much deal with her mental health, but she had to do what they thought were the best steps. I'm not saying anything bad about the [shelter], but they're Christian based. Not everybody who is staying there is Christian. They're like “You can't get that until...” so this youth was like, “Well I don't want to stay at the [other adult shelter], it is not safe for me because I'm sober now and the [first adult shelter] is just gonna make that train fall off those tracks.” The youth got picked up and sent to a jail that actually took the time to

figure out medication and now they are properly medicated and doing really well. But then they were released back to [city] and it's like, "The place where I was staying fell apart. I have to figure out where I'm staying. Um, I need to stay at a shelter and I wanna stay at the [adult shelter]," because that's where they feel safe, but wasn't allowed back in till they could prove that that mental health stuff had been done. So it had to be a phone call with me, the youth, and Sam to be like, "No this youth has done this, this youth has done that." So [the agency was] even sitting on the fence after [the youth] met all of those rules, they were still like "I guess" [reluctant]. I honestly feel like they took that youth back only because there were two professionals on the phone who were like, "Screw you, this is the best we've ever seen this youth do, you're taking her whether you want to or not." But they were surprised that she made it [accomplished the goals they set out]. I think they set the bar so high that they thought she would never reach it, right?" Then it was like, "Hey guess what, I actually jumped over that bar," and they're like, "Oh damn."

Riley expanded on the idea that some agencies set behavioural expectations so high that youth cannot achieve them, resulting in youth not being able to access services, and agencies blaming individual youth so the agencies can be absolved of the responsibility to provide services.

The bar is being set by the agencies. I think that almost removes that guilt feeling for those agencies, right? It's like, "Well, we've created it, and whether they achieve it or not, it's up to the clients." It's putting that whole thing, let's put it on them, and if they don't keep it, it's not our fault.



Participants agreed that stigma had to be prevented and addressed in order to achieve the goal of ending homelessness. Sid provided an example of how people in low-income housing were stigmatized by neighbours, despite no longer being homeless:

But that's the social stigma that goes around low-income housing. If you're low-income, [it is assumed that this is] because you didn't make the right decisions in life. You know it's not situational, and you know if you're Aboriginal then you're, like, for sure. It's the labels that go along with it that is just unbelievable. That's what Calgary is fighting with. You know, and we're not challenging the stigma.

Riley: It's not just Calgary. Like, out in Langdon, where I live, they were trying to build a whole row of townhouses for [affordable housing]. Yeah and the people shut it down.

They were like, "No we don't want this riffraff in our town. We moved out of the city to not have to deal with, you know, low-income people. If you wanna live outside of the city in a nice little picket-fence community, then you better damn well have earned it.

In a later meeting, Riley offered the following example of services delivered without stigma:

They treated addiction not like, "Ewww, you do drugs," but [as] a disease. They viewed mental health as not a shame. It wasn't a stigma, it was just like, "Oh, you're depressed, I'm 5 foot 5," like it was the same level of stigma.

Under the theme of how the charity model creates stigma, the definition of emergency is the first sub-theme. This sub-theme was closely linked to the idea of scarcity, which is explained in the next theme. The notion of "emergency rules" refers to a discussion about a sign at a youth-serving agency that said, "Showers are for emergency use only." In these discussions, Sam coined the phrase "emergency rules," which we then used for the sub-theme label. As Sam

illustrated, these beliefs about scarcity and the creation of emergency rules influence how agencies distribute resources:

It's about limited resources. Like what you're saying about staff. So maybe there's a limit in the amount of staff that can supervise. Um, we used to have more sort of in an emergency kind of rules around here, um, but we, we've opened it up a little bit more. Like tampons didn't used to be so much out. Um, there was like a limited amount. Um, but now we just like it's full all the time right? So it's sort of that idea of abundance versus scarcity. So I think any time there is a rule about something that says you can only have this during an emergency, it's about scarcity. When you have abundance, when you know that you have access to something, um, and that that access will always be there, then you're able to be more open with it. You actually might even use less.

Workers discussed the meaning behind the idea of emergency showers:

Robin: Do I have to have a job interview? Is that a good enough excuse to have a shower? Or do I have to have cleaned my room that day or what? Like. Yeah, it makes me ask what is a shower emergency? You know, basic human rights involve showering. So back to your thought there with staff and stuff, does it mean we need to hire more staff? Does it mean a kid needs to, you know, get something special to claim the shower or what?

Riley: Yeah kinda that same thing, like, what constitutes an emergency? Cuz an emergency to the person who needs the shower versus the person who would have to clean the shower are two very different things, I would think.

The second sub-theme of the peer model presents an alternative to the stigma-producing charity model. Building on the idea of reciprocity as presented in principle two, the peer model

challenges stigma and judgement by bringing together people who have similar experiences. The peer model is the final sub-theme of how the charity model creates stigma. The process of sharing experiences helps to fight shaming and blaming individuals, but without considering systemic factors. Participants identified the peer model as a model that had succeeded at challenging stigma in the past, and they suggested this model addressed the feeling of “you’re the only one, like you feel as if you’re the only one.” It was also identified as a means for promoting youth leadership and developing positive identity in youth’ communities, as participants shared:

Robin: And for some of these kids, it resonated right? “I went to leadership training.”

That’s the first thing they can put on their resume.

Chris: And the leadership training can kinda go back to the peer support.

Stasha: We have come full circle.

Chris: Leadership with teenagers and so many different what was it? [names of peer support agencies from the past]

Riley: [names of peer support agencies from the past]

Sid: Yeah, they’re all different names and stuff. I loved leadership.

Sam: Honestly, if I were to think about the youth that are currently not able to access the [agency] because, ah, because of their behaviours, all of those young people would see themselves as potential leaders...Quite possibly.

Participants were inquisitive as to why peer support programs no longer existed, when in their opinion they had been effective. As participants said:

Chris: And I mean you know some kids that sat on the [peer model program] who are now working in programs.

Sid: When we worked at [peer model program] together, that filled an important referral.

Chris: It sure did; so did peer support. Some of us seasoned people who have been around a long time know that there used to be, um, a [specific program], and there was youth who sat on that board and were welcomed at committee meetings when it came to decision making. So to me, when you say that, I feel like we're working backwards. Because we're trying to reinvent the wheel, but it was working before.

Another participant suggested that "other agencies are afraid of peer support and boundaries and grey in that there is a lack of clarity in the relationships between 'client' and 'professional'."

**Scarcity.** Stigma was not the only negative aspect of the charity model. Participants explained that scarcity also had a negative influence on agency policies. Scarcity, rather than inequality, is the theoretical frame of the problem in the charity model. Inequality implies responsibilities for people with privilege to equalize opportunities, whereas scarcity can excuse redistributing wealth through a belief in meritocracy. Sam linked this concept of scarcity directly to their childhood, stating:

I'm thinking about my own personal example, so when I used to live at home we had lots of kids and one bag of cookies. So we would, we would hoard the cookies, we weren't allowed to hoard the cookies but we did. So the cookies would come in, the cookies went in the cupboard, and they were supposed to stay in the cupboard. Every single one of us kids would take our five or six cookies and we would own it, we would hide it under our bed. Because we weren't confident that our six cookies would be there when we went to get them. Someone would steal them.

Sid hypothesized that emergency rules might result from staff burnout, a concept that comprises the final sub-theme of scarcity, and for which I present supporting literature in the discussion.

Sid explained how witnessing scarcity contributed to burnout in youth work, stating:

Even that power reaction of wanting to punish usually means that they are feeling punished. Like, like when someone is asking for an emergency bus ticket, you're the one that they're looking at, that is witnessing that scarcity and then has to explain there are not enough bus tickets.

Another participant expanded on the linkage between scarcity and staff burnout as follows:

Robin: You know when you want to tell a kid that your best option is to commit a crime so that you have a bed and three square meals a day in jail. You know there's something wrong with that picture.

Riley: Yeah, bad advice!

In a separate meeting, Kelly shared, "I also feel extremely guilty when I have, like, a young family with a baby coming asking for a bus ticket and we say no. That really bothers me."

Participants provided many other examples of witnessing scarcity and carrying the responsibility to inform youth that there were not enough resources available to meet their needs. This, they noted, contributed to a sense of urgency to improve services:

Robin: Well, and yeah, you're witnessing those moments, like we were talking last time, about when a 17-year-old calls and says, "Do you have housing?" and you have to tell them that, even if they get triaged through this or that, that they will be waiting—that there is not enough housing for the people [who need it].

Riley: I think, sometimes I wonder, like, cuz we, we are the ones, we are the lower people who have to tell the kids, "Sorry, there's not enough housing." I wonder if the people

who are deciding and voting on the secondary suites, if they had to tell kids every day, “Sorry, you’re homeless, there’s not enough places,” if policy would move so much faster because they would have that emotional “holy crap, I have to tell this 16-year-old kid there’s nowhere to live.” Cuz we get the burden. We’re holding the burden of their policy.

Robin: I think that weight is huge on front-line staff.

The third principle focused on how services and policies contributed to stigma and other problems; in the fourth principle, these services are recognized as not being enough to heal homelessness on their own.

**Principle four.** In principle four, professional supports alone are not enough to heal homelessness. Natural supports can contribute to a sense of belonging; strengthening these supports is an important part of youth work. Through youth-directed services, guided by their perception of a problem, youth can identify and strengthen their natural supports, which creates opportunities for leadership and communities that they feel they belong in. In accordance with this principle, participants emphasized the importance of natural supports and belonging in community as part of youth’ recovery from homelessness. As Sid noted:

Just looking at some of those kids that have not transitioned very well or at all to the adult clinic, it’s more about community. Like finding a community, cuz they have none and it’s so scary. Like they’re safe here, it’s not judgmental: I know I’m OK, I know these people, and finding a community. So maybe part of that transition is those volunteer programs. Finding a community outside of the [agency] before you come here. Because you’re not going to be, you’re not gonna...

Sam: You can’t stay forever.

Natural supports were also described by participants as providing supports that formal services could not, as Riley said: “[A]t 3:00 am in the morning, the kids are phoning their friends and their family and their partners because they can’t phone us.” Formal and natural supports were framed as complementary, as in this example provided by Chris:

So family can support them, but [for example] when youth are in jail they can’t afford to accept collect calls, so the [agency] would help with that. So it’s kind of interesting how the [agency] services recognize the gaps in natural supports, not that those aren’t really important emotionally or in pride ways. Um, but that there are things that the [agency] can do for you that the families can’t. So, like, a kid’s family saying, “Go to the [agency] and get [provincial supports for adults], it’s time, like, you’re transitioning” [to adult services].

***Youth’ perceptions of problems.*** Ensuring that services were driven by the youth’ perceptions of their problems was identified as vital to the process of recovery from homelessness. Youth’ definitions of their problems were relative, based on their various experiences, as Sam explained:

So this idea, like, if you’ve had a chronic illness for your whole life, that’s normalized for you. That’s what you think it is, or one kid would be terrified, like the first time they get kicked out of home is that first-time trauma of “I’m homeless” but there [are] lots of kids who that happens [to] six times a year or six times a month, and it’s part of everything. It’s like, “I’ll find some couch to sleep on and then I’ll go back,” and whatever.

Basing services on the youth’ perception of their problems also helped youth build self-awareness, according to participants:

Sid: And you don't realize that you do it and that's the thing. My family, my home, would be, like, "You left the door unlocked." I'm like, "No I didn't, somebody else did," you know, or just full-blown denial. But that's a teenager. And then when I did live on my own, I'm like, "Oh dear God, they weren't kidding."

<Laughter>

Sid: They weren't kidding, I know, but I had to experience that. I was in total denial, couldn't pass the blame to anybody. But I was, I grew up in a safe environment. These kids aren't, so they get a strip torn off of them left right and centre, and they, they were like me. Being like, "What are you talking about, I didn't do that, it's not a big deal."

Sam: So I had my place and I had my, one of my kids that I support, staying with me. When they stayed with me, all their friends came over. So I would wake up in the morning and there would be bodies lying all over the couches and sleeping on the floor. And there would be bowls of cereal left out, so all of my cereal was gone, all of my milk was gone, and that was, right, because they had a place and they would say, "Yeah, come and sleep on the floor—you can stay there." Then they got their own place and then those people would be coming over to their place and sleeping on the couch and eating all their cereal. They would complain to me, "What are they doing? They're eating all my food and I cannot afford to feed everybody, and they should, like, not do that."

Participants also viewed basing services on youth' perceptions of problems as a method of facilitating an increase in youth' awareness and opportunities to make mistakes in a safe environment, as Sam and Sid discussed:

Sam: But it's also about developing the self-awareness.



Sid: It's the developing, but we have to also keep it in mind that a teenager cannot, they cannot. They have [forgetfulness], you know, they're argumentative and they very much suffer from the lack of dual perspective. It's not their fault. But then we expect them to be an adult and get it.

Sam: Well, and that way you learn that self-awareness is by living with lots of roommates, and over time...And living alone and then realizing, like, "Why is this house so messy, cuz I live here by myself."

**Youth directed.** According to participants, services should be youth directed and recognize the diversity of youth, while reflecting the belief in youth as leaders in their communities. Services being youth directed was preferable over what Sid described:

We also label when we speak to youth. So when we're saying, "Why don't you do this?" or, "You need to do this," [we are actually communicating a judgment].

Robin: These are my goals for you. <Laughs>

Youth were seen as leaders with strengths, with great potential to effect social change, as Sid noted:

Or even giving them the materials and the skills that they would need and the confidence, cuz that's it, it's the confidence to make a difference. A lot of these young people want to make a difference for their community or for their people, and so it's like, you know, making a video or whatever, posting it on the Internet. Challenging today's society based on their judgments and all that kind of stuff. It would be brilliant.

Participants also connected the provision of opportunities for youth to lead and the development of their confidence to try again. Participants provided examples of when they involved youth in

the development of services and how this led to greater youth engagement with the services, as Chris shared:

I don't know that we have a youth advisory panel, but everything that we do here we want the youth' input on. So when we started our substance use group, we asked all the kids in the space what would a name be, and what would that look like and what would you like to see. As we're running the group, we hand out a feedback sheet at the end of every group. What do you wanna see? What do you wanna learn about? What did you take away today, right?

The theme of youth-directed services was approached from a strength-based perspective, reframing youth' authority-challenging behaviours as leadership:

Sam: Leaders get in trouble first.

Riley: Yeah, all the time.

Sid: I know this little kid that would come, he would be here, definitely if he was allowed back in here he would be here, and he would just be, like, tickled pink to engage and be a leader. He really is, actually, he's a genius, he's a great leader that went to the dark side. He's like Darth Vader.

Sam: Maybe that's what we could call it is Darth Vader leadership.

Participants identified youth-directed services as important in recognizing the diversity of the youth accessing services and the resulting need for diverse strategies in the recovery from homelessness, as two participants elaborated:

Sam: I think that's the thing about the same thing doesn't work for everybody. So there's gonna be lots of people out in the world that say, "Listen, what worked for me was I did something wrong and there was an extreme consequence and I learned my lesson and I

pulled up my boot straps and I learned from that.” So I think there has to be the diversity that people are different. So sometimes it does work to have these really strict rules and these really strict expectations, because that’s what people, that’s what people will work up to.

Sid: I think that would be hard, though, because every kid is different. So if you had interview questions about if a kid does this, this, and that, what do you think you could do? If somebody asked me that, I’d be, like, it depends on the kid. Some kids need a little more than others, in a different kind of push or a different kind of step back, than the next kid does. Everybody’s different, and respecting them as people that way.

Riley: Hear, hear!

Principle four highlights the complementary nature of formal and natural supports, and the importance of youth being given decision making power to reflect that they are the experts concerning who they identify as belonging with, as well as who they trust as their natural supports. Further, youth-centered services were noted as vital to success in recovery from homelessness. Participants also identified youth as potential leaders, with many strengths, who have a right to define problems and solutions in their recovery process.

### **Reflection and Action Phases: Data Analysis Reflections from Research Journal**

These two phases contained the most involved participation of the front-line workers, which fits with my values. I reflected in my journal about opportunities for the research to be more grounded in the culture, language, and ideas of participants. The concept of bridge burning and building was one example of using participants’ language to label themes. To give an idea of how prominent this metaphor was, in our final reflection meeting, which lasted 55 minutes, the word “bridge” was mentioned 21 times by participants and six times by me.

I reflected in my journal when Sam said that the presentation of the four principles looked beautiful. I was thinking about different ways of knowing and of expressing knowledge, and I felt that this feedback reflected a spiritual understanding of what we had learned from youth work. Sam and I both cried while practicing the presentation in the car on the way to the conference and while presenting. We both care about youth work, and we express love for the kids that we work with. I am interpreting what Sam said about the presentation being beautiful, but I am interpreting it from the context of 10 years of friendship and working together. As I wrote in my research journal: “I think that knowledge that cannot be expressed in words often remains invisible in academic work and that the beauty of understanding is a great victory when achieved.”

### **Quality of Participation Survey**

Of the original 12 participants in the Reflection and Action phases, six people had moved to other jobs or out of youth work entirely when I distributed the survey, a year after the final research phases began. Four people out of the original 12 responded to the Quality of Participation survey. Two participants responded to the questions jointly and two as individuals. One of the four people who completed the Quality of Participation survey was involved in all the phases of the research.

The Quality of Participation survey contained five questions concerning the perceived risks and benefits of participation that workers identified, ways in which they contributed to the research, suggestions for change, and whether they self-identified as researchers. I present the participants' responses under five headings with direct quotes from their written answers.

**Risks of participating.** The first of five questions asked what workers identified as the risks of participating in the research. Two participants didn't identify any risks or concerns, with

the qualifier that they were both very open to talking about their work and “felt comfortable answering the questions and having the discussions.” Another participant perceived risk originating from the fact that they could not return from knowing what they had brought forward into consciousness in the process of the research:

I cannot un-know what I have learned and that makes the injustice and hypocrisy in the child welfare system, the “helping professions” and the charity model stink like rancid meat. I find that it is difficult to continue to do humane work in systems that are so obviously inherently flawed and inhumane.

This awareness led to a sense of urgency in the pursuit of change, or as the participant stated, “I had an expectation that change would happen more quickly.” A different participant expressed concerns about pre-existing relationships and how this might affect their safety to be honest about issues in the focus groups. Another concern raised about fellow participants was the worry that other participants might “not follow through with the research meetings.” Finally, a participant explicated a possible barrier from the Immersion phase where the meetings were held at the university, which they identified as “a very intimidating place for people who do not work or study there.”

**Benefits of participating.** The second question asked participants to identify what they perceived as the benefits of participating in the research. The main theme that emerged from workers’ answers was that change represented a primary goal sought by workers; as one participant stated, “Change is the only benefit.” Change as it related to outcomes for youth was rated of particular importance, as one participant noted:

If we can make better working conditions for front-line workers (having our opinions heard, better hours, better pay) then the agencies benefit by having more/better work being done which will lead to the clients getting the individualized help that they need.

Engagement of front-line youth workers was seen as necessary to this change process, as one participant offered:

A benefit I see to this research is that most studies in this field do not look at front-line workers at all, and front-line workers are essential to making sure programs and clients are successful. This this is an area that no one seems to be looking at.

Participants qualified their statements about change by including the temporal element:

The fact that the change is slow and at this point can only be identified as sporadic, pocketed or eventual is unnerving and frustrating. However, without the idea of change or of the beginnings of change, there will never be any. Therefore, the benefit is that the change has started—as slow a process as it is.

Additionally, workers qualified that the breadth of the change was important, as one participant shared: “It depends what level the information is taken to—who is going to hear it, is it going to make a difference?”

Three participants emphasized that the ideas they were presenting were not new or radical ideas. Some even felt that the research discussions were a review of history, as two participants shared: “We think it was a bit of a refresher on what things should look like, what things used to look like—e.g., peer support, youth sitting on boards and committees.” Another participant stated:

My biggest dream is that 20 years from now this change will seem obvious and very simple. The best I can hope for is that no one will remember how innovative it seemed—because it really is not innovative at all.

**Ways participants contributed.** The third question in the Quality of Participation survey concerned how participants contributed to the research, and the focus in the replies was on the years of front-line experience that workers brought to the research. One worker identified specific roles in which they contributed, stating:

“I think therefore I am,” in other words, I talked a lot! I attended meetings, I shared my thoughts, I shared a lifetime of experiences, I shared my interpretations and perceptions of others’ experiences, I worked on the presentation. I presented to the community on the findings.

Other workers put forward that they were able to discuss themes emerging from the research with youth and “to pass on feedback from youth” through the focus group discussions. One participant identified their status as “a front-line youth worker who is on a leave of absence due to burnout and stress” as a strength for contributing to the research, because “being currently out of the field and not working for a youth agency, [they] could give honest feedback without having to worry about ‘protecting’ any agencies.”

**What participants would change about the research.** The fourth question was what the participants would change about the research. Three of the participants responded that they would change nothing, with one participant validating the usefulness of my insider status as a former front-line youth worker, stating, “You did a fantastic job, and because you also have experience it was helpful.” One participant suggested multiple areas for improvement, including: holding the meetings at a community centre or public place as opposed to the university and the

partner agency; providing anonymous ways for participants to provide feedback that they did not feel comfortable sharing in the larger group; asking multiple-choice rather than long-answer questions on the survey; and combining all the focus groups into a one-day meeting to ensure that people who participated were there for all the topics. This participant identified as an outsider to the partner agency and illustrated how this represented a potential barrier to their involvement, stating:

The next set of meetings were held at the [agency], so many workers from there attended, but that contributed to the one or two people who didn't work there, such as myself, to feel like an outsider coming into "their" meetings.

This concern and research decision are presented in the methods chapter as well as the discussion.

**Did participants identify as researchers.** The final question in the quality of participation survey was: "Do you feel that you are a researcher?" and requested that participants provide examples of how they engage in research. The short answer from three of four participants who responded was that they did not identify as researchers. One worker identified that they "felt like a participant . . . I just contributed my knowledge and opinions." Another respondent demonstrated their research skills by answering the question in this way:

According to *Dictionary.com*, a researcher is one who makes a "diligent and systematic inquiry or investigation into a subject in order to discover or revise facts, theories, applications, etc." *Free dictionary.com* says it is: "One who inquires:" and lists synonyms as inquirer, inquisitor, investigator, prober, querier, quester, questioner. *Merriam-Webster* defines researcher as one who does "careful or diligent search" or one who executes a "studious inquiry or examination; especially: investigation or experimentation aimed at



the discovery and interpretation of facts, revision of accepted theories or laws in the light of new facts, or practical application of such new or revised theories or laws.” Based on those definitions I would identify myself as a researcher in that I have done a diligent and practical inquiry into mine and others’ work. I have probed and questioned others and myself as to motive, intention, and assumption. I have examined thought and the physical manifestations of that thought through actions and discussions. I investigated others’ thoughts, theories and applications. I continue to inquire and question on this topic and all topics that relate to relationships and their application within my work with regard to the development of self or the evolution of systems that help the “other.”

My interpretation of this participant’s description of conducting research is that it echoes the ongoing process of PAR, with dialectical relationships between inductive and deductive thought, between reflection and action, between the self and the other. In the next section, I present some reflections from my research journal regarding the data analysis of the Quality of Participation survey.

### **Quality of Participation Survey: Reflections from Research Journal**

When I read the last quote about how one participant defined their role as a researcher as one of reflection and action based on “diligent and practical inquiry into mine and others’ work,” I felt soaring hope that the research process had contributed to demystifying the process of research and reclaiming it as part of front-line youth work. I was hoping that more participants would identify ways that they were researchers, not just in their work but in multiple facets of their lives. In my research journal, I identified ways that I had witnessed participants acting as researchers, including by asking questions, bringing in resources to the discussions, pointing out

each other's strengths in the policy work, and providing examples of different theoretical concepts as they appeared in their practice.

I reflected in my journal about how the participants identified only macro benefits resulting from the research, such as raising the voice of youth workers, rather than individual-level benefits. Participants listed risks at the individual level, such as breaches in confidentiality leading to employment consequences; however, this did not lead to the identification of individual benefits, such as increased research skills or theory-informed actions. To me this indicated a distancing from the research role and caused me concerns that experiences with research in the current inquiry would not be sustainable, due to a lack of connection between this research project and youth workers' everyday lives and work.

One example of how relationships contributed to the sustainability of this research was evidenced in the two participants who completed the survey together. I remember times when I worked with one of the participants and she would use this "let's do this together" technique to support more people in participating in the kind of tasks that no one wants to start but actually are not that time-consuming once you get started. I have seen them use this technique with the youth we work with and with colleagues, experiencing great success engaging people. This technique provided lessons to remind me about the strength of relationships in lending the courage to begin a novel task or challenge our assumptions together.

One participant drew a parallel to positivist values: "I look at this very much the same as if someone who was doing research in the medical field asked me to answer medical questions for their research." Honestly, I felt hurt by this expression of objectivity, when one goal of my research was to create space for people to explore their subjectivity and the subjectivity of other people in the group, including my own. When I read this quote, I feel as if it is describing a

sterile and token experience with participation, which is not the organic exploration and challenging of unfair power dynamics that were my goals. This was the same participant who suggested that the Quality of Participation survey should have been multiple-choice rather than long-answer questions. These tensions made me more aware of the diversity of epistemologies within the group of participants and introduced me to the idea that my style of research might feel unwelcoming for people who have a more positivist view of knowledge production.

One theme that stood out from the survey responses was that the ideas being put forward by youth workers were “common sense” and should not be considered radical. I reflected on a conversation that I had with one participant while we were travelling to present some of the research findings at a conference. We had been slated to present under the subject heading of “youth empowerment” and were talking about how we were just asking for basic human rights to be respected, a concept that we hoped would not be viewed as a radical idea. Within the context of youth work, advocating for a base level of compassion is not viewed as innovative or exceptional. Both the participant and I felt saddened to have our work seen as exceptional or novel, especially when our desire is for the respect of the human rights of youth to become more normalized and expected. As I wrote in my research journal: “We are radical, in that we expect everyone to be this radical.”

In the next chapter, I will provide my interpretations of how the results fit with the existing knowledge in the literature, as well as how they could be applied to practice, policy, and future research.

## Chapter Six - Discussion

Hello again, dear reader! This chapter is divided into two sections: (1) the discussion that my co-researcher and I had about this discussion chapter; (2) my answers to the reflective questions of how what we learned in the research can be applied to practice, including research and policy work, as well as actions that I took as a result of these learnings or how I integrated the research results. First, I will present the process and six questions that shaped the conversation between us two researchers. However, the main presentation for this section will be a transcript of this discussion, complemented with citations when we mentioned someone else's ideas.

I choose to present the first section of this chapter as a transcription of a conversation for a variety of reasons. This chapter is the integration of all the learnings from the research with the literature concerning what we already knew about the subjects of the research. One reason that I decided to co-create this chapter is because I teach best in an oral tradition of exchanging stories. When I am speaking, I am able to offer more connections and perspectives than when I am writing in an academic style. Integration of these research results with the rest of my knowledge has happened in how I tell stories from the research. I want to speak in my best voice when I share about the “so what?” and “now what?” from this research. I want to include stories that appear in practice but not in the literature. I want to include me.

The feedback that I have received from my teaching has valued the “genuine” and “real-life” examples that I provide to illustrate theoretical concepts that I am presenting. People within the university setting have expressed that this is “engaging” and “refreshing” (Evaluations from graduate students, 2013), which leads me to believe that real-life examples are sometimes lacking. The examples that we provided from our practice made our presentations of research

results engaging and grounded in practice; I think it is ethically appropriate for me to keep these connections to practice intact. The final reason that I choose to present this discussion orally is my desire to challenge the undervaluing of oral knowledge. Storytelling in this way allows me to engage as an entire person, which I think makes my dissertation more useful and applicable to practice, including day-to-day life.

The process for creating this chapter started with me inviting my co-researcher to participate in a discussion. I invited this one person because they identified as a researcher in the Quality of Participation Questionnaire that was completed a year after the research had been conducted. I think that waiting a year accomplished the goal of identifying what about the research had remained important to people who had participated in the research. I believe that Sam was still thinking about the research because it was useful and validating for them to participate. I want to understand how to make my research more useful and validating for more people. I believe that it respected the reflection process to follow up with people who had participated in the research a year after the project was complete.

I explained this chapter to Sam as a place to answer questions pertaining to the “so what?” and “now what?” of the research results. My colleague chose to use their gender-neutral pseudonym from the research, Sam. I shared the most recent draft of my dissertation write-up, and we both reviewed the results section before we planned two meetings a week apart. Appendix E contains the notes from our discussions at the first and second meetings, organized under six general headings and guiding questions. During these meetings, we discussed stories that we wanted to tell in the discussion chapter and agreed on a process for the discussion. We decided to set a timer for 10 minutes for each discussion topic and then gave ourselves 10 minutes at the end for any final thoughts. We audio recorded our discussion, which turned out to

be just under an hour and a half. I hired a professional to transcribe the discussion, the only changes that I made were to add citations where we referred to other people's ideas.

### **The Discussion**

In this section, I present the discussion between two co-researchers, myself and Sam. To present some context about our relationship, we each wrote about 200 words about how we met and why we are friends. I present Sam's description first, followed by my own:

[Sam:] I met Stasha on the porch of a group home that was on a stroll. We were on the porch because we were chain-smoking cigarettes. During that first meeting, Stasha spoke of a utopian group home that was falling into disarray. "I don't know what has happened there," she said. Stasha had blue hair and heavy army boots. She looked tough and tiny all at once. I thought the youth in the house would have no choice but to like her because she was a curious mixture of rebellion and innocence. I liked her. I admired her Tank Girl tattoo. I thought it was a tattoo of her because I did not know who Tank Girl was. I was right and wrong all at once. The next time I met Stasha was when we worked together trying to convince young people that they deserved to sleep inside no matter what the people around them told them that they were worthy of. Next we worked very hard over coffees, bacon and eggs to figure out what we were worthy of. I think she wrote all that stuff down somewhere.

[Stasha:] We have known each other for over a decade. We first met when we were working for a youth drop-in program. A specialized outreach program for youth experiencing sexual exploitation had just been cut after being absorbed by a larger institution. We had both worked for this program at different times and we shared history and analysis of why this program was no longer. It took us a while to get to know each

other because we are similar. I asked Sam if they wanted to get a beer outside of work. They said that they didn't drink and I said that I didn't either! As we examined why a non-drinker would invite in this way, I clarified that I meant that I would like to be their friend outside of the workplace. Since then, we have shared many breakfasts while discussing the hypocrisy that we see in the world. I respect us because this discussion includes how we ourselves are hypocrites. We strive both to accept ourselves as we are right now, and to grow into our better selves. I admire how Sam's emotions propel them to do the right thing, according to their values. As we explain in the discussion, we are street fighters not victims.

I would also like to share this quote from the poet Kahlil Gibran because Sam once gave me this quote so that I could learn a really important thing that they had learned before me:

Your children are not your children.  
They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself.  
They come through you but not from you,  
And though they are with you yet they belong not to you.  
You may give them your love but not your thoughts,  
For they have their own thoughts.  
You may house their bodies but not their souls,  
For their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow,  
which you cannot visit, not even in your dreams.  
You may strive to be like them,  
but seek not to make them like you.  
For life goes not backward nor tarries with yesterday.

The transcript of our discussion is presented, edited only for clarity and to make names of people or agencies confidential, unless names appear for citations that we referenced in conversation. The conversation was loosely organized around the following six questions:

Why did we do the research?

Why did Sam invite Stasha to observe the meetings?

What is [the use of] policy?

How do we navigate accountability?

How do we navigate Professional Patty?

What would we do differently next time?

We begin with the first of these questions, exploring why we each chose to engage in the research.

**Why did we do the research?** I present the transcript of our answer to this question:

Stasha: So we were gonna start with question number one, why did we do the research?

Sam: There's a lot of reasons why I was interested in doing this research and they've changed over time. So when I was first interested in this it was, I was already doing research in my own mind about natural supports. There were policies that I was coming up against and ah, actually not following and lying about. In order to do the work that I was doing with enhancing natural supports or trying to figure out how to enhance natural supports. So I wanted to be a part of this research and I wanted to have Stasha come and observe and listen to our meetings so that we could talk about the process of policy and how we were gonna get through some policy stuff and through some policy changes. I also thought it was hilarious that Stasha loved policy, and thought that it was important, and something that she had control over maybe.



Stasha: (laughing) It is pretty hilarious in retrospect to think you have control over anything so large. Um, I wanted to do the research too to try to gather evidence about things that I felt that I already knew. Like not just confirming it, but trying to demonstrate, trying to show people who didn't have front-line practice, somethings about it. In terms of trying to influence policy or witnessing policy. And I think we're both really curious and brave.

Sam: Yes. Yes.

Stasha: Because I think you need to be both, so I'm glad that we ended up here having this discussion.

Sam: I'm glad too, what you just said reminded me also that I find it ah, maybe physically painful sometimes to follow or adhere to policies that are written, thought up and written by people that have never had front-line work. So I think participating in this helped me to feel like I was, that I was making a difference in a certain way even if it wasn't directly related to policy.

Stasha: For me, honestly being able to see front-line workers while I was away from front-line work really helped me get through because I identify with that culture. With being pragmatic and wanting things to be useful and then asking is this doing harm to the people we work with? Then changing things if it is doing harm, like not just sitting with that. Cuz there's lots of research that says, "Oh the system is doing this thing that's causing harm," and then nothing changes or this policy is causing harm. That's really hard for me when I see that our actions don't change after we know something. So for me it's important that this was like a genuine effort in terms of that, and in terms of talking to people who don't know about that context of being homeless or being front-line or even looking at social policy.

Sam: One of the things that I realized, I “realized” is such a soft way to say this thing. But oh  
<pause, weeping> that I had harmed people by following policies.

Stasha: It’s a big pain, it’s hard, it’s hard to hold that and know that.

Sam: Yeah.

Stasha: I think a lot of it is painful. It was for me too, like even in my assumptions and then seeing what that did or how that led us off track, like a respectful place. Yeah. Like I remember when we were doing the final presentation and my friend was like, “You didn’t recognize the Indigenous lands that we are on.” Then after that I started doing that with every presentation and because of that I’ll add it at the beginning of the dissertation and I’ll make sure that I keep space for that and do that. But at the time I just felt like shit about being a White settler, colonial asshole who’s up there like holding knowledge production and then not even placing themselves, like not even talking about the oppression that I am reinforcing by forgetting that. Right. <Laughs>

Sam: Yeah. It is, it’s painful, right.

Stasha: I agree about that. That whole process of uncovering how we’ve oppressed people, really enjoyable. <Laughs>

Sam: Yeah, and that the system, when I, when I discovered, when I realized, when I came to know that I was the system that I hated.

Stasha: Yes. I figured out that I’m a terrible listener. Now to be a researcher, to be a good counsellor, like a good social work support, that’s basically about listening. All those things that I’ve chosen to do. So I better get better at it right? Like when I listen to those transcripts of our discussion and there’s times where I’ll interrupt you and say what I think you’re gonna say; instead, if I had shut up then you would have just said it and then

I could have written it down and shared it with people. That makes me feel like crap when I'm reviewing, when I get that feeling in my stomach of like, "Oh and there I silenced the front line, oh look at that."

Sam: Yeah. That happened to me last weekend when there was a person that used a racial slur and a person of that race was there, and instead of letting them talk about how that made them feel, I just jumped in and kind of took over the conversation. It's you know I'll forgive myself for it but...

Stasha: Cuz your intentions are good you're trying to defend them. Then we had that talk about what is White fragility (DiAngelo, 2011) and how is White rage different from White tears? But that's how we learn those things. Like I had that painful community meeting where, it was the same thing, I was so mad because I hadn't experienced racism every day of my life. It hadn't been normalized and worn down for me, and so when I saw it, when I was like, "Oh that all-White board of directors didn't respond to your accusation of racism, well fuck them." Totally, the consequences fell on the group of people of colour who can't act that way at a public meeting because there's consequences. But then I, because of my privilege do [act that way]. Yeah, yeah, we're trying to help, look at us.

Sam: It's so helpful, just shut up and listen, that's helpful.

Stasha: That's what we've learned.

<Laughter>

Stasha: Yes. I think we both do that though like try to leave space for other people's voices. We have learned that over time, we've been friends a long time.

Sam: We have.

Stasha: Things are improving!

Sam: Yes.

**Why did Sam invite Stasha to observe the meetings?** I present the transcript of our answers to this question:

Stasha: Second question, why did Sam invite Stasha to observe the meetings and then what problems did this solve?

Sam: So I wanted you to observe the meetings so that you could see the process of what we were coming up against in policy. And about how as a group, as a larger staff team, front-line staff team, we were navigating that or not navigating that. The level of honesty and um, authenticity and frustration that would sometimes come up in those meetings about how are we gonna do something different. How can we do our work differently if we're not allowed to work differently? So I thought that was really important and I want that to be addressed in academia. I want people that don't work front-line shifts to understand that people wanna do better. Front-line workers want to do better. They wanna do the things that they said that they were gonna do when they got their degrees. That there are things that happen when you're in the workplace, following rules and being trained by supervisors and being trained by managers and adhering to values of organizations - that get in the way of what you know to be right.

Stasha: Umhm, and that's exactly what I think—I was so excited as a policy nerd once I got to the meetings, cuz you had taken it back to talking about values.

Sam: Yes.

Stasha: So these are our values, because you realized that the reason there were so many feelings <laughs> was because it was a values argument, like a moral argument. Like the majority of the staff supporting harm reduction, then having like one staff on the team who really,

her values were not in line with that. And watching those kind of discussions which were still respectful but very emotional right? Because people are thinking about this person who's died or this other person who has died you know, has been denied services, judged by stigma or whatever. That was where I learned the most, is leaving space for, like listening right? You invited me to listen instead of kind of getting people to do what I wanted them to do, because I was out of touch with what front line was doing at that time because I'd been in school.

Sam: We were at an amazing place where we could even be open about talking about harm reduction because five years ago—

Stasha: Oh my goodness.

Sam: The company line was not harm reduction.

Stasha: Umhm [agrees]. Nor the government line ... you couldn't talk about that in proposals.

Sam: No, or when we had government addiction workers in the space, we had to secretly do harm reduction. Not in front of them.

Stasha: Yeah. I remember those days.

Sam: It was terrible.

Stasha: They had all the resources for non-harm reduction but then we were secretly doing it.

Then there was like the abstinence playing cards and whatever.

Sam: Yes, so we couldn't, to have an addictions worker who was paid by the government of Alberta to help people with addictions, and then to be a worker who cannot actually be honest with the addictions worker about what's going on for the, for the person that we're working with, that's not a good situation for anyone. No one is being effective.

Stasha: Today I was talking to three addictions workers all women over the age of 60, they are

afraid to get a prescription for medical marijuana because it's a drug. But the drugs that they're on, oh my goodness, are highly addictive prescription medications. So the risks of marijuana being a drug and an illegal drug, even when you take that away, people have that in a different category than alcohol, than all these other things that tons of social workers do, like I just see that "I'm not a client" kind of thing there. Which makes me glad that ah, I walk that line right? Cuz I don't wanna be in either of those categories [client or social worker]. <Laughs> Well it really helped the research, I think it helped to ground it in actual front-line experience, which is what I wanted, but then I think while I was in school and working on the proposal, I was disconnected from the context, that didn't help me. Right? In terms of trying to be grounded, so next time that's one thing that I would like to do differently is involve the group more from the beginning right? In terms of what would be useful questions or what do we wanna explore. So to take it back further for more participation further on.

Sam: What I wanted was that someone outside of our staff team could vouch for us that we were actually working.

Stasha: Yeah, it was something about evidence right?

Sam: Yes.

Stasha: So that's good, cuz I'm OK with research being this kind of validation too, of let's capture this moment in time. Or what can we learn from this process. That was a huge process you guys were engaged in over years even... can you talk a little bit about what happened before...

Sam: ...before those meetings, yeah absolutely. So what happened before was that there were three of us that were hired to engage in an innovative process to look at how we engaged

natural supports of vulnerable young people. That was our job. So we, we spent a year having those conversations by ourselves. We went through a very similar process, the smaller group, as we did with the larger group. So by the time you were in our meetings that was, was my second time around.

Stasha: That's what I thought.

Sam: Doing that discovery. One of the reasons we had to do that is because while we were the smaller group working on this stuff and thinking about this stuff and trying different things, and trying to be innovative and trying to pull back the layers and, around natural supports and why professionals were not comfortable in engaging natural supports of young people.

Stasha: Excellent question.

Sam: Yes, that was interesting because no one wanted to admit that they were uncomfortable doing that.

Stasha: Certainly not.

Sam: But none of us had talked to a parent in five years, none of us had asked about the relationship with an uncle, you know. So we weren't doing that work and why weren't we doing that work? So we did that and while we were doing that, the rest of the staff team thought that we were not doing anything at all. They thought we were wasting time. They thought that we were over-using resources that could be spent with young people. They thought that we were um, they thought that we weren't being good team members because we weren't doing the work that they were doing. The work that they were doing was the work that they'd always done. So by the time we got to that big group, that was what that big group was about. That big group was about sharing with the bigger team

about what this process was.

Stasha: Yeah.

Sam: Some people got into it and other people didn't. I think it is one of the things that I learned in working with natural supports or trying to engage natural supports, is number one - it's hard on the ego. If you get into youth work because you wanna help save, rescue people.

Stasha: Yeah good words.

Sam: You don't get to anymore cuz it's not actually you doing it.

Stasha: No.

Sam: So you have to get out of the way, you have to skootch over, you have to get in the back seat. You are no longer a primary player, you are a supporter. And for people that have had the rush of being centre stage, it's hard to then go to the back and just do stage managing.

Stasha: Umhm. [agrees]

Sam: So there was that. Yeah.

Stasha: So in terms of enhancing natural supports is the back seat and support role and...

Sam: And that's what we learned and that was what we were in the process of figuring out when you were in our meetings. Because that's another thing we learned, I can tell people that they have to get out of the way. I can tell people that they have to move into the back seat and they're not going anywhere. They have to figure that out on their own. So that's what we were doing when you were listening.

Stasha: Such an interesting process. And it was too, to study the process, like what came out of those meetings and those years. Like I saw some of those presentations that you did about your findings the first year. When you were presenting from your agencies to the other



agencies that were kinda doing parallel processes. That [the findings were] not as useful to me as the process. How do we actually, cuz you were doing what I wanted to study—engaging front-line youth workers in policy analysis. Just you know better than to call it something so alienating.

Sam: <Laughing>

Stasha: Right? <laughs> Let's make meaning out of this.

Sam: That was such an interesting thing that I was doing that.

Stasha: You were doing that while making fun of me for doing that same thing...

Sam: I was doing that thing. Indeed I was.

**What is [the use of] policy?** I present our response to these questions:

Stasha: Making fun of me...For having this as a goal this whole time. Speaking of which, we wanted to talk about question number three, we put “what is policy?” but also “what is the use of policy?” And I wanted you to talk about this because that is a big part of what came out of the research, is even though I had this assumption that policy analysis meant advocacy and change and action. (Because as a front-line worker it did. We'd analyze, it wasn't like a theoretical discussion.) That is not how the literature defines it.

Sam: No and that was never my experience of policy analysis. And I think that might, like thinking about it now, that might be a personality thing. So I, as mouthy and as rebellious as I am, I'm at my very core a rule follower.

Stasha: It was so intriguing [to me] when you outed yourself as a rule follower. I'm fascinated by this.

Sam: And I think at your core, at your very centre, you are an anarchist.

Stasha: I think so too. <Laughing>

Sam: So those are the two ends of the spectrum really. And how then, me being a rule follower makes me believe that I actually have no power in policy analysis, why would I analyze something that I have no power to change. Whereas you as an anarchist, believes that you have power to change things.

Stasha: Oh yeah.

Sam: Which is so curious to me.

Stasha: It is and often we act the same.

Sam: Often we do.

Stasha: We end up in the same place. <Laughing>

Sam: Yes, we do.

Stasha: I like it. It is, being the leader of the anarchists is an interesting position.

Sam: Yes.

Stasha: I do ask if I can understand why a rule is present, usually just by asking, like in theory I could follow it, but not if I disagree with the reasons [behind the rule]. Like if the youth shelter told me “You can’t give the kids cigarettes” um, not because they’ll die of lung cancer or get addicted or already are or whatever, but because the kid might sue us for supporting their smoking.

Sam: Yes.

Stasha: I can’t not do something for the suing reason right?

Sam: Yeah and neither can I.

Stasha: Yeah you and I talked about CYA [Cover Your Ass]. Like the first time we found out what that means, do you remember the first time?

Sam: That I found out what it meant?

Stasha: Yeah or that someone said that to you in response?

Sam: Um, I can't remember a specific incident but I do, I do remember a lot of ass covering going on at the first group home that I worked in. I had to do a timed log. I had to write every 15 minutes and I worked live-in. So I lived in, seven days in, seven days out

Stasha: Oh my goodness.

Sam: We had a timed log that was every 15 minutes. And I worked there for two years, so for two years for one week at a time, every 15 minutes I would write down where every young person was and what they were doing. In the case of an incident, I would be writing every five minutes where people were, what was happening.

Stasha: How did you know what was happening if you were writing that much?

Sam: It was very difficult. That was my first and very intense experience of ass covering.

Stasha: Oh yeah.

Sam: Because the reason that we did that was so that if there was an allegation of abuse or something happening in the house, in an incident we would have a written documentation of what was happening. Now as you can imagine, in some instances we would back-date things.

Stasha: Yeah. <Laughing> That's a good way to say it.

Sam: Oh my goodness it's been one hour since I have updated the log book, so I'm going to go back and in my memory, "What was happening half an hour ago..."

Stasha: Every 15 minutes.

Sam: What was happening 45 minutes ago, and try to get that in there.

Stasha: Ooooo dear. Yeah I remember, like the first person who ever said that to me in a serious way was a police officer, which didn't help because of how I feel about that kind of

authority. He was talking about child sexual abuse but he was talking about how you cover your ass when you're alone with a kid. I was like F you...

Sam: Which is why I had to write down where everyone was every 15 minutes.

Stasha: Yeah, yeah.

Sam: It was a co-ed, it was a male houseparent and a female houseparent and a co-ed ah, kid complement [two workers and a group of youth living in the program].

Stasha: But if you were sexually abusing a kid you would just write down, "They were in the kitchen having a frickin sandwich" or whatever.

Sam: Yeah, yeah. That's what bugs me. That doesn't actually protect the kids from abuse. It protects the stupid company from being sued or whatever.

Stasha: I think we talk about that in the next question, yes about accountability, which it was really important in the research and our talking about it after the fact. But first I have an anarchist story about the post office.

Sam: Could you please tell me that story about the post office?

Stasha: OK. I lost my wallet last week and then I had a package at the post office. I had to go and pick it up, so I had a temporary Alberta Driver's License. I had a very old student picture ID that had a picture on it with my name, then I had a bill with my address, all these things. My birth certificate, you know, stuff that proved that I was me. So I went to the post office, I go to pick it up, I have the little slip from them dropping it off, then the lady who works as the post office says you need government-issued ID to pick up your mail. So I'm kinda lstill OK, and I hold the ID beside my face. I say, "Well it's me, this is me, I'm Stasha, look at all the stuff that says Stasha on it." Then she just says again, which really triggers me <laughs> when the person just says the rule again without the logic. So

she says, “You need government-issued ID to pick up your mail.” And then I started to get upset and I’m kind of listing out of social skills and I’m like, “Well can’t you use your logic?” <laughing> and trying not to swear and stuff. So that doesn’t work so I kind of back away. But then I returned because the thing I’m trying to pick up in the mail is my prescription which is a very timely matter. So I stand in line because she’s working with a co-worker. Then she does this thing when I’m next in the cue. She puts her little plastic sign down which says, “Closed please use next wicket.”

Sam: Which means fuck off Stasha.

Stasha: Yes it does and that is what I think social workers are like. Like the Plexiglas comes down with the little hole in it, and then they can decide whether I eat or not, whether I deserve it or not. Then I talked to her co-worker and he told me that she was his boss. <Laughing> Then finally I looked over at her past her closed wicket sign and said, “What am I supposed to do?” She informed me with this inner sanctum knowledge from the policy world that I would never be able to Google this information but if I could find a total stranger with provincial ID I can sign something without proving who I am at all. <Laughs> So they can pick up my mail. I can’t do it, even with a picture of myself but however, any stranger will do. Like I could have grabbed her co-worker there and signed it over to him and got him to pick it up for me.

Sam: Which I think is one of the things, is the relationship between logic and policy.

Stasha: Yes.

Sam: That I have a wish, a desire that policy be logical.

Stasha: Me too.

Sam: Often it isn’t and so then that makes me angry and then I don’t follow it. Then it means

nothing to me. It's like the sign that says "No smoking" that I smoke in front of.

Stasha: Oh yeah.

Sam: Because there's no logic as to why I can't smoke there. So I'm not gonna listen to it.

Stasha: I've also learned that I would be fired from the post office immediately.

Sam: Yes, because you would use your logic above the policy.

Stasha: Yes, I would.

Sam: That's what I expect people to do. Um, I have not always done that, sometimes even though logically I know the policy is incorrect and it's not logical and it's actually hurting someone. I have followed policy to keep my job.

Stasha: I've denied people toothpaste. Homeless people, I've not let them have like a blip of toothpaste because of some policy thing. I will remember every single one of those things. Because people, I remember when they wouldn't give me toothpaste as well. It's such an awkward position, I think that's systemic, that part of "We're the one denying the toothpaste but there's a lot of things going on above that." I think logic is still emotional right, like I understand why she didn't want to deal with me.

Sam: Oh interesting.

Stasha: Why she put down her sign. Because I wasn't being super logical either was I?

Sam: Nope.

Stasha: I wasn't like "Oh you work for the government at the post office."

Sam: Well she did have the answer and you just had to ask the right question.

Stasha: In the right way, I came back and the second time it went better.

Sam: Right, yes.

Stasha: Once I realized I needed to calm the hell down if I was to negotiate rather than fight.

Because the fight she's gonna win, every single fight and that does cost me something.

Sam: And that sucks.

Stasha: Yeah it sucks.

Sam: That sucks so bad.

Stasha: It does. That's like bowing down to the judge. Like in court when you enter you're supposed to like bow. I can't do that. When I worked for [an agency] they told me that, I started laughing. I was like, "What are you talking about? Like bow to the king?" No job is gonna make me, no you can't pay me enough. That was my practicum right? I didn't do it ever, I couldn't, I couldn't do it. I can't bow to someone just cuz they have a job.

Sam: And you got away with it.

Stasha: Hopefully, I hope that didn't affect kids' sentences right. <Laughs> Cuz we were linked right? So I was there supporting kids so sometimes when I had blue hair. One time I had to take off my bandana, it was like a purple bandana but she, the judge, thought I was gang affiliated cuz I was sitting with the kids. So and it goes both ways. Sometimes now when I write a reference letter for someone trying to get into the faculty of social work I think that it might not help them. Because some people don't value what I value right? If I'm like they have all this experience, they have all this practical knowledge and people are like, "Well keep them out of here." Just not what they want. Um Sam, why do you think that you identified as a co-researcher ah, and other people didn't?

Sam: I think that has to do with my curiosity. That I am curious about, about things. I ask questions. It's gotten me into trouble in all sorts of places. In my family and in my work, I ask questions and I'm questioning. So and people react to that. But that makes me a researcher. I think it has to do with my age. It has to do with my experience, um, and it

probably has to do a little bit with the fact that I had spent that year in that small group so this was my second time around and I was sharing that.

Stasha: I love that part of the process. Like I see how that was so necessary and helped with those things. It gave you time too.

Sam: I think too because I, I have a relationship with you that is a friendship so I understood or felt safe about where your research was coming from and where it was going to go.

Stasha: Well we needed that trust to even start, right? I wrote a little bit about that in [my research journal]. About how I couldn't have done it without this invite. Like it wouldn't have been a genuine thing cuz no one would have invited me cuz, who am I right? I'm glad you took pity on me because you saw me stumbling along trying to get back in touch with this thing instead of just being, "Oh you're in touch with this thing, you've been here this whole time why don't you just tell me what you're up to." Instead of it being prescribed kind of.

Sam: I'm not sure that it was pity, Stasha. I'm not sure that I pitied you.

Stasha: <Laughing> Good.

Sam: What I felt was I have a pair of roller skates and you have a brand new key.

Stasha: I like that.

Sam: Why don't we get together and see what happens?

Stasha: I'm so glad it worked out.

Sam: Yes.

Stasha: It was magical timing I figure. Because there aren't that many, like if we look at our 20 years of youth work, there's not that many examples of those policy processes, especially the double helix, like time to reflect and then kind of meet yourself.



Sam: It has happened one time in my 20-year career, and I highly doubt it will ever happen again.

Stasha: I'm glad I was there.

Sam: There you were.

Stasha: Frantically scribbling.

Sam: Yes you were.

**How do we navigate accountability?** In the following transcript, we discuss accountability in our work:

Stasha: OK, let's talk about accountability. You were gonna talk about when you were on strike, when you crossed your own line.

Sam: So we were on strike. We had a program for, it was a social learning alternate school program where I was a youth worker and we unionized. The agency that I was working with unionized and I was a little bit of a back supporter of that happening first of all. Then we did go on strike and I did cross my own picket line.

Stasha: Did you boo yourself? Were you like, "You scab!" <Laughs>

Sam: I didn't boo myself. I sometimes felt disappointed in myself.

Stasha: Yeah it's hard.

Sam: For crossing my own picket line. But I did it secretly. So the policy of a union is not to cross the picket line.

Stasha: That's right.

Sam: Because then it sends the wrong message to the bigwigs. So I crossed my picket line subversively and quietly and not in front of everyone.

Stasha: To get like a cookie for the kids.

Sam: Yes to take kids for coffee so that their lives weren't adversely affected by our need to strike. All of that was really uncomfortable - what's the logic, what's the right thing to do? If I cross - what am I saying, who am I betraying? If I don't cross - what am I saying and who am I betraying? So that was a very narrow little line that I walked. That was a difficult decision, but I think I made what was the best one for me.

Stasha: I don't know why but I think we know more than most people that doing nothing is a decision with consequences. That it is a choice.

Sam: Yes.

Stasha: And that it often results in being complicit, and that it drags, it is hard to talk to people about that if they don't know what that is. If they haven't kind of experienced that. Cuz there are nurses who talk about that. They don't wanna go on strike because the people who actually feel those consequences are the patients.

Sam: Yeah.

Stasha: The people who they serve. And so that tension, keeps them sometimes in exploited labour situations. I have never participated in a youth work union, I have often asked entire classrooms full of front-line workers, "Do you get any lunch breaks?" and no one does. [I am] asking those kind of questions about could someone you know make one, are we interested in this union? I haven't experienced. I experienced one union that protected managers and treated front line as very disposable labour. Um, and that was very unsatisfying. But my first experience with youth work was the peer model, reciprocity, like you don't even believe this exists because it was so awesome. <Laughs>

Sam: Yeah.

Stasha: And because you haven't had that place yet...

Sam: Yet. You talk about it like it is going to happen! That is so funny to me.

Stasha: Oh it's happening. I have this hope. I don't understand where it comes from. It's happening. Yet. I'm going to make it and show you.

Sam: There you go, yeah OK.

Both: <Laughing>

Sam: Just keep going.

Stasha: Well and it's hard for me because that was normal. Then that was my expectation, I felt really spoiled by that. Where was reciprocity, respect, accountability? I fricken expect that now. It's been downhill since then, since I was 20.

Sam: You peaked early.

Stasha: Exactly.

Sam: Your youth work career peaked.

Stasha: Oh right at the beginning yeah. Then social work school, more and more disappointments. More and more. Just finding out places I can't work. So back to accountability, we talked a lot about how we feel accountable to the kids, how that changes things.

Sam: Yeah I have had that experience. I have had the experience of feeling accountable to my relationship with, with the kids that I work with. Not in a weird no boundaries kind of way, but I am the adult or I am the older person in the relationship because I have also worked with people that are considered youth that are also adults. So in those relationships how, we're in it together. I feel like we're in this thing together and I do feel accountable to them. I feel more accountable to, to the people that I work with than to my bosses.

Stasha: Yeah me too.

Sam: And that has always been the case. I felt more accountable to my own children than I did to my [partner]. I feel more accountable to my children than I do to anyone in my family. And perhaps that's a power thing that I see myself as the protector and the person that has to be accountable to them. Because if I'm not accountable to them, who will stand up for them, who will help them, who will guide them?

Stasha: We've seen what it's like when there isn't that, right? When that's not filled in.

Sam: Yes.

Stasha: We don't need that. Cuz that's how I am about that boundary about hugging. I always say, "Well who do you want to hug them?" Because that's who they'll get it from is their pimp or their drug dealer whoever is giving it out. You know that was always important to me in terms of what people are choosing between.

Sam: Yes.

Stasha: Because that was your, one of your breakthroughs about the natural support stuff was that we're not actually their friends.

Sam: We're not their friends, and as friendly as we might feel towards them as, as protective as we might feel. I am accountable to them, but I'm not their friend and I can't be their friend.

Stasha: You're not their family either.

Sam: And I'm not their family. I never will be their family. I've taken kids home, I've become foster care, I've moved from youth worker to foster parent and I'm still not their family, I'm still not, I never will be.

Stasha: Well I liked what you said about we have to admit where are they for Thanksgiving,

where are they on their graduation or their birthday or whatever. Because then we could do better youth work at least in terms of trying to fill-in or identify who is doing that for them. Cuz there is so much judgment with that. All these people have natural supports—it's just we don't approve of them. We don't approve of their values...

Sam: We don't approve of their behaviour.

Stasha: Their habits, their behaviours, their identities.

Sam: So we believe that we can pick then um, who is in their life and, and we have, I have. I have absolutely been in situations where I prevented young people from connecting to their families because I believed, and I was given that power to believe by my supervisors and by my agency, to be that one who decided who was in that young person's life, and that's shitty.

Stasha: Yeah for everyone, even for you, for everyone that's a weird thing. What a weird thing how we end up there. Like when Shirley (Steinberg, 2016) was doing that presentation, and she was talking about how in the '80's when they were doing the journals, she's a teacher so they were doing journals with kids at school. I was getting more and more excited because I knew what the punchline was. Not everyone did know what the punchline was right? And she's like, "Well why would parents be getting all upset, why wouldn't they, what would the kids be saying that the parents wouldn't want them to say?" My eyebrows were going crazy. I was so excited. She was pacing back and forth and like unravelling this, she saw my eyebrows in the audience and referred to them. She was like, "Oh you know what I'm talking about." That is why I'm an anarchist. One time my friend was working for [municipal government] and she was doing a participatory project with youth. She asked them what social justice issue they wanted to work on.

They said they wanted to legalize marijuana. She was like, “Oh shit like I can’t do that in the scope of my job, I can’t help you do that, I can’t have the video I present to city hall be about that.” But she asked them what they wanted to do so now she knows.

Sam: And then she had to say, “Sorry not that.”

Stasha: Yeah then she had to crush it.

Sam: “What do you want to drink?” “I’d like to have a Coca Cola please.” “Well I’m sorry you can’t have anything with caffeine.”

Stasha: Also you should be ashamed of wanting any of those things.

Sam: What would you want to drink now? Like asking someone what they want and then trying to tell them what they want.

Stasha: Yeah it’s rude.

Both: <laughing>

Sam: Yeah it’s rude.

Stasha: It’s rather rude.

**How do we navigate Professional Patty?** In the next transcript, we define and discuss the idea of Professional Patty (Vaid-Menon & Balasubramanian, 2016):

Stasha: Ok, so we’re back and we’re gonna talk about question number five where we were talking about how do we navigate professional Patty or authority and stigma kinda caused by the system. I saw DARKMATTER and I’ll put this citation in later.

[DARKMATTER is a Trans south Asian performance art duo comprised of Alok Vaid-Menon and Janani Balasubramanian]. But they were talking about this idea of Professional Patty and how it’s the opposite of genuine. It’s like how we keep distance between ourselves and feelings, so we don’t have to have feelings. So we can just do

paperwork and keep the distance and don't think about the people we're hurting with our profession. And I really liked that idea. Like they used it at the beginning because all the white people were afraid to clap because they just talked about this horrible emotional thing about racism. Everyone was scared in the audience and so they were like, "Well we're gonna get Professional Patty out of here so that we can have a real experience here, as human beings and actually connect." It reminded me of those stories about taking off my staff vest and looking at a person and saying, "Ok, can we sort this out now." Cuz that's often the only thing that I know how to deal with Professional Patty, is to not be her right? <Laughs> And sometimes I understand why [other people want the distance], I don't have kids and stuff it's different for me to quit a job. Even though just myself, of course this is important. But about risk and why people go to Professional Patty. I understand those things. We were also talking about our experiences being managers and why we hate that. <Laughs>

Sam: I think it is about changing the accountability. Because when I agreed to be a manager, I actually am switching allegiances from being accountable to the youth to being accountable to my boss. I enter into an agreement then that says I will be accountable to the upper management so I've moved myself up.

Stasha: And you're a spy for them right?

Sam: Yes.

Stasha: Then the other people...

Sam: Yeah and I have to tell on them.

Stasha: Then I know right, that I can't tell you that I'm doing the harm reduction when the government worker is there because then that puts you actually at risk.

Sam: Right.

Stasha: Because then you have to decide whether to tell on me.

Sam: Right.

Stasha: Or not, or punish me.

Sam: So then I have to ignore things too. I have to pretend that I don't see things, then I have to, I then think about them as the, the front-line staff. I've joined the other team. Yeah and that I, I honestly will never burn out of front-line youth work. But I can burn out of being a manager so fast.

Stasha: We both did. I think we both do [burnout] in like two minutes from being a manager. I don't like it because I don't support hierarchy. I think it's ridiculous for me to be at the top of a triangle for no reason. Like of how you get there, I've never trusted that.

Sam: Yeah and I, this is another place where we disagree. I do support hierarchy.

Stasha: I know.

Sam: But I support owning where you are in it.

Stasha: Yeah being honest.

Sam: Being honest cuz I've had the experience of being in a very hierarchical system where the person who is at the top of the triangle says, "No, no, no, I am just like you."

Stasha: Open-door policy.

Sam: Yeah it's bullshit, and they might believe it, they actually might believe it but it's not my experience. I think hierarchies can work well if people know what their job is and what their role is, and that they don't try and pretend to be something else.

Stasha: I think that they're fake and that they hurt everyone including the person at the top because they are never, they could always be replaced and I think they spend so much



time worrying about that, that nothing happens. But yes, I like it when we disagree because then we learn.

Sam: Yeah it's good.

Stasha: Can you tell that story about what you learned when you went back to the hairdressing after you...

Sam: Yes, that was actually a little bit about hierarchy and it was about teamwork as well, and I also learned about myself. I was unable to continue working as a manager or a team leader or whatever it was that I was doing. I needed a break and I needed to go back to school and I needed to change some things. I couldn't make the changes that I knew needed to happen and I couldn't unlearn them. I couldn't spend two years—

Stasha: I love this.

Sam: —learning the things that I learned and then pretend that I didn't know those things.

Stasha: Umhm [agrees].

Sam: So I had to leave, which I did. I spent some time working at a hair salon and looking at how that team worked and how ah, one of the interesting things in lots of social work situations is that people, first of all, they spend a lot of time judging each other and policing each other.

Stasha: <Laughs>

Sam: And counselling each other and they, and there is some ah, like I'll just move on. So...

Stasha: <Laughing>

Sam: So when I was at the hair salon I watched how the people at the hair salon, and this team is a team of people that have worked together, some of them 30 years. They've been doing hair, which is front-line work.

Stasha: Oh yeah.

Sam: Very similar to front-line work. They deal with people, they deal with people's issues, they deal with people's requests...

Stasha: Translate their vision.

Sam: They deal with people's identities. Like all of the stuff that they are working with and they're getting paid. So I watched how they did that and how it was, it was a much healthier system that was happening in the hair salon than when I was at a social work agency.

Stasha: So glad you got that comparison. Cuz some people never do. Like they only see youth worker.

Sam: Yes, and people were getting helped. They knew what they wanted when they came in, they wanted a haircut or they wanted a colour. They would come in, they would say, this is what I need, this is what I want. They would discuss it with their hairdresser, they would negotiate it.

Stasha: You mean the hairdresser wasn't like you, "You'll have a bob, you're the bob type, take the bob, the government is funding the bob."

Both: <Laughing>

Sam: They're allowed to choose whatever hair do they want.

Stasha: I don't know what mystery place this is, where people get to choose.

Sam: But sometimes the hairdresser has to say to the person, "Your texture of hair does not work with that thing, this could be a consequence of doing this thing." So they're educating at the same time, and then the client gets what they want. And if they don't get what they want, they call later and they complain and we try and fix it if we can. We know that

there's people that are never gonna be happy and there's this very interesting culture. I learned that I love to help people. I like to hear what they need and I like to have that happen for them and I like to be the person that supports them in getting what they need. I like being of service.

Stasha: When you said that it was the identity part, you learned [at the hairdresser job] that you were not the person you were told you were at the [non-profit agency]. That is so important.

Sam: Well cuz I kinda got told that I was a bitch.

Stasha: Yeah that seemed to be the prevalent message. I've gotten that before.

Sam: That I was crazy, I was like you know when the guy talks about his crazy ex-girlfriend or his crazy whatever, I was that, I was that person. I mean maybe I was, maybe I was acting in a crazy way because I couldn't help the people right? I couldn't help them get what they needed. They came in and they said they wanted this thing and I wasn't allowed to let them have that. And that made me crazy.

Stasha: Yeah.

Sam: But I got to learn that I, when allowed to help people I actually can do that, yeah I really can.

Stasha: Well I'm so frickin glad that you got a case study outside of [youth work], cuz I think that's some of the problem. Right, like I just did youth work uninterrupted and I didn't see other stuff, so when lateral violence came up the research assistants were like, "Holy crap," after they recorded the first focus groups, they were so scared and never wanted to be youth workers. We're like, what are they talking about, the other workers judge them and then attack them and then silence them and then fire them. What's that about right?

Both: <Laugh>

Stasha: Then I realized that I think that's totally normal, I think that's work. I think someone calls you a "cunt" and you give them a chocolate muffin and then your boss fires you for giving them a muffin because you didn't have the muffin to give or it was someone else's muffin or they'd had one already or something.

Sam: Yes.

Stasha: That's not a normal situation. Oh my goodness. Oh and we talked a little bit about how neither one of us had youth workers when we were growing up.

Sam: I didn't have a youth worker. Not in the first year of the research I was doing but in the second year of the research I was doing I realized that it was a really, really lucky thing that I didn't have a youth worker. [Note: After our discussion, Sam requested that I add this quote from resiliency researcher Michael Ungar (2014), whose research we find useful in our youth work, to further illustrate this point:

One of the surprising things that youth tell me is that collaboration between professionals, paraprofessionals, lay service providers, families, and communities *impedes* the healthy development of children when caregivers participate in the construction of problem-saturated identities. (Ungar, 2014, p. 5–6)

Stasha: Me too.

Sam: Because if I would have had a youth worker, that youth worker would have done reality therapy with me and told me all of the things that I was, and then I would have been those things.

Stasha: Yeah me too, I could have been learning disabled instead of gifted or whatever, or somebody would have told me that I was at-risk for this or that, or that I was being

abused in this or that way. Like there were people who abused me, but I thought we were fighting. And I thought I was winning and if anyone had changed that, I don't think it would have been as easy for me, I don't think I would have gotten through in the same way.

Sam: Well you wouldn't have won. If you would have figured it out...

Stasha: I'm glad I thought I was winning!

Sam: Then you did win.

Stasha: I don't wanna be abused.

Sam: You weren't abused.

Stasha: I was a street fighter.

Sam: You were a street fighter.

Sam: That's the interesting thing about not having a youth worker was that I never got told what I was, so then I wasn't "it." People are going to roll their eyes at that, but it's true.

Stasha: It's so true.

Sam: My identity was chosen by me and my capability, my... <Crying>

Stasha: That's why I'm uppity. I do think I deserve things. I do think that there is this weird justice, despite all evidence <laughing> that there is not, that there never has been. That's why you don't believe me about the youth work utopia. Because all I've watched is it being crushed, eroded, it's all loss and grief and I'm just sitting here like a daisy being like, "Oh it will be fine Sam." Not yet Sam, not yet. Just hold your breath for another 20 years we'll get her going here in Calgary. Cuz we talked about that, I asked you the kinda scary question. I asked you was there anything we could have done to help you support all that work from enhancing natural supports, actually being implemented, changing

policy, changing the agency, youth work, anything. You told me that one story about the elevator and the kid.

Sam: Yeah so it did change things. And I think that that's part of being um, it's part of being an early adopter. Like in a change process it's part of being an innovator, in that it's really hard then to kind of wait around for the rest of the team to catch up. I'm not good at waiting anyway.

Stasha: We decided we're both not good at that.

Sam: Not at all.

Stasha: Because we get so excited.

Sam: Yeah.

Stasha: When we have the breakthrough, then we become evangelical, in that we forget that we had like a 20-year process to get there.

Sam: I did.

Stasha: And all these things had to happen.

Sam: Yeah.

Stasha: It's not good.

Sam: And I won't allow that for someone else and I have to allow that for someone else. So I don't have any feelings of um, I'm not a victim of where I worked. I did an important job, I did some really interesting research. I engaged a staff team in an analysis of policy. Even though I had no idea that that's what I was doing, I did do that. So now it has changed because I was in the elevator at my new place of employment and I was asking a young person about his sister and how she was doing and how they were doing and how their relationship was. That's a really normal conversation for me to have now.

Stasha: Good.

Sam: He said, "Yeah she's a good natural support for me." And it mattered.

Stasha: And he's implemented that, like he finds it useful. See to me that's good validation too.

Sam: I never talked to him about natural supports. I've never given him the spiel. Someone else had given him that spiel or someone else has talked to him about who his natural supports are. So it has entered the water. It is in the water of youth work now, it is in the discussion of youth work now. I know for sure it wasn't five years ago because I looked for it and I looked for it hard and I Googled for it.

Stasha: You searched.

Sam: I searched.

Stasha: And re-searched.

Sam: I researched and overturned stones and asked people questions and no one was talking about it, and now they are.

Stasha: That's why when I asked people at the end if they thought they were researchers, I can list the ways everyone in those meetings was a researcher. Like is every day, is in their work, is in their problem solving, their parenting, their whole life. Like how they reach out to their community of practice to get information, bounce ideas off people. But they don't identify, like I think that I do a lot of research. But I'm very hesitant to call myself a researcher because of my experience with researchers. <Laughs> And what that is, so it was important to me not to like steal the knowledge of front line, misinterpret it and then use it for nothing and then they never hear about it again.

**What would we do differently next time [in youth work and research]?** In this final segment of the transcript, we discuss ideas we have for improving our practice, including research:

Stasha: The next thing we're talking about is what we would do differently the next time, in youth work or in research, because there's different kinds of practice that we do and it has ways that I didn't see how I still tried to keep control over something and it made it worse, right. If I could let that go and invite people more from the beginning and then it was shaped more in context, it will be better. Like most things if you can relax, it will go better.

Sam: Umhm [agrees].

Stasha: Like when we were talking about this before I told that camping story where we go camping with the tough street kids and it's three in the morning and they're all in the tents and you just hear this giggling. Just giggling and they're making um, static electricity fireworks in their sleeping bags. This adorable time where they're finally safe, they're like enjoying themselves and the next day when we're hiking up the mountain and they're all frickin cranky cuz we didn't get enough sleep last night. I say, "Well we should have made them go to bed." Well that's a very interesting statement miss youth work, right? Made them? Made them? So how? So drug them, just knock them out with an object or, how exactly, and then what would that hike have been like the next day. What I actually would be interrupting there is like joy, safety, giggling, like come on social work get out of my giggling. I know those boys who went on that camping trip have had much worse problems than...

Sam: Tired on a hike?



Stasha: Yes when they're in the mountains. I know they haven't been to the mountains since then. That was like seven years ago right and so those things about privilege, but it scares me that I want to control people. Where is that coming from? What do I think that's gonna help with? It's scary. I do think I know better or whatever. It freaks me out. You wanted to talk about the fun of passing because we also disagree about <laughing> whether or not it's fun. But I like this idea. Is it like a spy thing or being undercover?

Sam: Yeah, I think it is about, I'm an actor and I like taking on different ah, personas and I enjoy when I can pass. I enjoy when I can trick people into thinking I am something that I'm not. I, I do enjoy that.

Stasha: Well we will have to use this more as technique. Cuz we didn't really plan into the action - Sam will go under cover and pretend to be something.

Sam: Yes. I think I pretended to be a manager and that wasn't actually that fun.

Stasha: Well think of it, you dress up as a manager for Halloween - does that sound fun?

Sam: <Laughing>

Stasha: How engaging. <Laughing>

Sam: I think that has a little bit to do with going back to my own youth. Right, like, how I didn't have a youth worker so I didn't have someone calling me out all the time. Saying, I mean I have a daughter now who will call me out on everything.

Stasha: She does hold us accountable.

Sam: She really does and I'm not sure.

Stasha: She's so strict.

Sam: That's a good thing.

Stasha: She has strict policies; she adheres to the policies.

Sam: She listens to things right, when I talk often about being authentic and being honest and then she sees me in a public situation being very, very fake, she will address it with me directly.

Stasha: I like it when she called us out on gossiping cuz we were totally gossiping.

Sam: We were gossiping.

Stasha: Yeah and then we were just both like, "Yeah we're gossiping this is horrible." <Laughs>

Sam: Yeah we should not do this.

Stasha: She's right.

Sam: She is right.

Stasha: That's what makes me so furious.

Sam: I do like passing, I do like getting away with stuff.

Stasha: I think the reason I think it's painful is cuz I think it is that thing where they're defining us. Like when people see blue hair and then say that I'm articulate. Their assumption is that people with blue hair cannot speak clearly or cannot string their ideas together.

Sam: But doesn't that make you feel smarter than that?

Stasha: No it makes me so angry for all the blue-haired people out there.

Sam: See when I was cheerleader and then would have a conversation and someone would, and I was...

Stasha: Oh you like whipping it out?

Sam: Yeah Stasha, I do I love it.

Stasha: I like that angle. I do like, I did like it when they thought I was the kid. Then I would whip out the phone and the keys or whatever, the power items, or the elevator key.

Sam: See, you like passing too.

Stasha: I liked it when the cops thought I was a kid and couldn't find the authority figure to talk to. I enjoyed those delicious moments.

Sam: You're the authority, those are delicious moments.

Stasha: OK, I see this angle, oh my God I can't believe you converted me on such an emotional issue. Love it.

Sam: <Laughing>

Stasha: Um, is there anything else, oh yeah, I asked you the hard questions of could we have done anything to make it more real. We decided that it might actually be happening because of that elevator story.

Sam: It is happening, it is happening.

Stasha: You were part of that, you are because you're talking to the kid in the elevator about his sister. That's the real thing.

Sam: And I am, and I feel right in doing it. I feel um, I feel like I learned something really important about natural supports and not oppressing youth. Even if I thought that I had their best interests at heart.

Stasha: Even if you were oppressing them for their own good.

Sam: Right, which still happens all the time, people get oppressed for their own good all the time, but I'm more aware maybe when I'm, when I am prone do that. When I'm prone to make them wanna go to bed and stop giggling.

Stasha: Yeah, exactly.

Sam: So that then they can go on the hike that I wanted them to go on because I brought them to the mountains to go on. I am aware of those times when I'm doing that so then I can, I can make a choice. I can make a choice to continue or I can make a choice to be different.

Stasha: What we're talking about now, now that we're so elderly you know.

Sam: Yes.

Stasha: We aren't actually their peers. <Laughs> And now, when we were 20 we actually were.

We both have experiences where they were a year older or younger than us, the kids in the house. That's the different kinds of pros and cons about that time too right? Like I think because that's interesting, cuz part of the reason why I got better at that is cuz I got older and I got more confidence and efficacy and belief in myself and stuff. So I could control less. But like in my 20s that's when I was doing the most youth work and I was closer to being their peer. What they experienced there is this weird kind of like control and um, I wasn't old enough to know that you can't control kids. I still thought because I had just been a teenager that they did know what we were doing - the adults, the adult team, the authority.

Sam: And I think that would have been up to your supervisor to help guide you through. Because as a supervisor you work with your front-line staff, but you have to let some stuff go. If you think that you were the best youth worker that ever walked the earth, it's hard to watch someone else do it wrong. So then that also is a bit of letting go and not wanting to control everything.

Stasha: Well and good supervisors don't control everything too right?

Sam: No they don't.

Stasha: Hilarious.

Sam: And good managers don't control everything.

Stasha: Well the answer is anarchy. I'm glad we came to this conclusion, turn off the tape recorder. No just kidding.

Sam: <Laughing> Yeah, I think it, I'm not sure if it's anarchy...

Stasha: I think it is. Ooooo now [Sam] changes the answer.

Sam: I think it is about giving space and listening and walking beside someone when they figure it out and it's about being flexible in our own brains about how the ending could end and about how the possibilities could unfold. Those are all important things.

Stasha: Which is actually about less and less control. That's why I like this kind of research, there are kinds of research where you could have invited me to that meeting all you wanted but I couldn't have come, or I couldn't have gone through ethics again. Like we did have to wait and there was a little delay because of all those policies and processes. They don't trust you to make that decision about whether to invite me or not. They want to protect you, that stuff is all interesting to me too. But I like that it gives space to move. You try something, you think about it...you try again...

Sam: I think now too that I am open to working with natural supports that that's also something that I talk to the natural supports about. So I can think of several instances in the last year where because of that, letting go of control is something that I've learned. I'm able to talk about that with the natural supports. Cuz they wanna control those kids too and sometimes some of the strife is about them wanting to control and I can share about how walking beside them and not making these hard strict rules for them to fight up against might be helpful in some situations.

Stasha: Yeah well said, I'll just tell the story of the rabbit then I'll ask you if you have anything else you think.

Sam: OK.

Stasha: Cuz you've heard this a thousand times. So we're trying to be participatory, we're doing

community kitchen with the street youth. So every week we gather on Fridays and we ask them, “What do you want to make next week?” We engage them in the planning and say we make omelets for six weeks in a row because they all work at [breakfast restaurant] and so they have skills and they wanna do that. Or we have bannock cuz someone knows how to make it. OK, great. But almost every week while we’re having this participatory, democratic discussion of what we wanna have next week, half the boys are saying, “Well we wanna eat rabbits.” Cuz there’s a bunch of bunnies in the parking lot where we have community kitchen. So they get a huge reaction out of the staff and some of the other kids when they say they want to eat these cute little bunnies. Like the vegetarians, my vegetarian co-worker is like, “Ah, we don’t wanna think about that.” OK, so it keeps happening and then I notice that we’re doing that adult thing where we’re like, “Do you want some ice cream, oh you do, oh you can’t have any,” right? You can have whatever you want for dinner except rabbit. <Laughs> And that event, though it’s a joke and they’re all kind of, they’re doing the teenage thing of pushing the boundary and we’re doing the crap adult thing of squashing their rabbit dreams. So the next time a funder asked me if they could have this bunch of kids, access to these kids for research purposes which they weren’t paying the kids for or you know, there was nothing offered. So I asked them for money to get them rabbit, so I told this story right? So then there’s this huge part where I go to the expensive restaurant and I ask to talk to the chef, like it’s all snobby, there’s certain seating times. I’m not there during the proper times and I’m wearing inappropriate clothing, and whatnot. But the chef comes out and he’s actually interested in this because he’s making food for really rich people who like send it back to be, to show that they know something about food or whatever. So he is willing for like,

\$200 which would not cover a lot of rabbit let me tell you, he made us like 20 portions of two rabbit legs in tiny boxes. So we were able to follow through and call the children's bluff on wanting to eat rabbit. Then people who were horrified by that community kitchen idea did not show up, my co-workers and other people. Then a lot of the boys who were demanding rabbit, showed up and tried rabbit perhaps for the only time in their lives. I made a big pot of poverty pasta to fill us up so that we could sample this item cuz it wouldn't have been enough. Then after that, after that whole thing, then the next community kitchen I was like, "Finally we're genuine, we're ethical youth workers, we finally followed through, after all that effort we gave them bunnies." Then when we were in the discussion about what to have next week, I was like, "Ha you can't even say bunnies." So they were like, "We wanna eat your pet cats."

Both: <Laughing>

Stasha: I was like touché, they escalated it.

Sam: That is their job, they are doing their job.

Stasha: It's perfect. So that is the story of how teenagers will always be one step ahead of you.

Sam: And that's important and it's one of the reasons why.

Stasha: Yes.

Sam: I love, I love, love, love still love youth. When we were at Dr. Shirley Steinberg's talk (2016) and she talked about how there was that reverend who said to her, "What's wrong with you that you wanna spend time with young people? No one likes them." And that idea, that first of all there's something wrong with them and we're just waiting to get through this terrible stage of being a young person. That their adolescence is something, a cross for us to bear.

Stasha: Umhm [agrees]. Ugh yeah. For everyone, like it doesn't make any sense at all. And that we've made up, like, good that you pointed that out too. I like people who are critical thinkers and call out hypocrisy and "the Emperor has no clothes" [\*Cultural note: This term refers to a children's story by Hans Christian Andersen where a community leader is tricked by some people into giving them money for nothing by telling him that only incompetent people cannot see the fine suit of clothes that they have made him. Everyone around the leader keeps telling him that the clothes look great because they don't want people to think they are incompetent. At the parade, a child in the crowd yells out 'look the Emperor has no clothes', only then can everyone admit what they knew all along.] and that's unfair. I like that and I miss them so much. Like both of us cried about, that we're not going back to youth work. It took me so long to even admit that. If you had tried to make me say that five years ago, I wouldn't have done it.

Sam: Yeah and I'm just at the very beginning part of realizing that this is my last little stint in youth work. That I am doing youth work now, but I won't do it forever and I'm never gonna go back to working live-in shifts at a group home. I'm never going to go back to having the opportunities that I had to work as closely as I did with youth. And that's a loss right? I have to grieve a little bit.

Stasha: We're gonna freakin' miss that. I think more than most losses in my life right because it did um, it did support that kind of anger as motivation for action. Right? Like that was a good space for that because as soon as you feed them rabbit, they're on to the pets.

Both: <Laughing>

Stasha: That was so awesome, I thought I was done. I thought I had achieved ethical youth work in this unethical world and I was so pleased and I wanted to ride it out for half a second.



Sam: No, no.

Stasha: And they wouldn't let me and I love that. Because what, oh so I treated them like a human being one time and it took all this effort cuz the whole system is against that. Well you don't get a cookie for that.

Sam: With my own daughters, I feel that, that bit of uncomfortableness when they're pushing me to the next level. They're growing up, they are changing, they are still youth and will be youth for a long time so that's a blessing. I love them, I love them when they're rolling their eyes at me, I love them when they're challenging me and challenging me to be a critical thinker. And to why this rule is and why they have to do this thing and I love that.

Stasha: I think we would be severely more complacent if we didn't have them.

Sam: Yes.

Stasha: Like especially the thing about gossiping, like about our bad habits. She helps with that.

<Laughs>

Sam: Yes she does.

Stasha: I like it, I like it when she won't compromise. "Sam has had enough recreational time this week because they have been to singing, they have been to the play and now it's Friday and it is time for family time." I'll take that policy cuz I'm like that sounds like a valid argument.

Sam: Yeah it is a valid argument.

Stasha: Is there anything else you wanna say about any of this?

Sam: Well I wanna say thank you.

Stasha: I wanna say thank you too.

Sam: Thank you for including me and allowing me to talk and for witnessing my process.

Stasha: Thank you for inviting me and for showing up for this weird painful process <laughing> that we are constantly engaged in. I'm glad that we're curious and brave. And I know it's hard to maintain that so I'm glad we have each other. Thanks for not leaving me alone with this weird task.

<Clapping and laughing. Recording ends.>

### **So What?**

These post-research follow-up questions are reflections after all this information has been collected and interpreted: What is the use of this knowledge? How can we apply what we have learned in our practice, research, and policy? How does what we learned fit in with the knowledge in the literature? This reflection is presented under three themes that relate back to the problem of stigma identified by participants in my dissertation research. We will start with the process of co-constructing an identity as a “client,” then we will explore ways to challenge the stigmatization of youth as a group, and finally I will present what I would do differently in my practice, including research, based on what I learned.

My original research questions were about policy and front-line youth workers. The results chapter gave detailed answers to these questions. Overall, I heard that for the front-line workers who participated in my study, policy work is witnessing the effects of policy and advocating for policy change. Policy advocacy was one way that workers attempted to affect social change. Additionally, I heard the front-line workers tell me that as a society we cannot end homelessness without ending stigma.

The literature provides examples of how the systems of care cause stigma (Bauer et al., 2013; Brody & Phelps, 2013; Lavie-Ajayi & Krumme-Nevo, 2013; Newman, 2013; Rossiter, 1997; Vitus, 2014). Lavie-Ajayi and Krumme-Nevo (2013) summarized the impact that social

exclusion can have: “the wellbeing and risk behaviour of young people is linked to social exclusion, oppression, limited resources and role models, and the extent to which young people feel connected and recognized” (p. 1698). Coussée, Roets, and De Bie (2009) recognized individualizing social problems as a process of othering by constructing someone as a social failure. For example, there is a cartoon that appears in many versions on social media. It shows a homeless man being pointed at by a mother with her child, and the mother says, “You don’t want to turn out like him.” In light of these findings, I strongly advocate for social work to stop contributing to processes of stigmatizing people (Hall et al., 2003; Humphries, 2004; Margolin, 1997; Reidy, 1993; Rossiter, 1997; Vitus, 2014). I see a need to reduce the distance between the “us and them” that is reinforced by the idea of “professionals” and “clients” being opposite roles. If we want to put the whole back together, then we should start with ourselves (Reason, 2005).

We must create alternatives to the charity model if we are to stop creating stigma. Charity carries stigma and shame, because judgement of failure is the pre-requisite to qualifying for charity; additionally the charity model does not address root problems (Poppendieck, 1998). As Poppendieck (1998) illustrates, providing “charity food [gives] enough strength to go back to get more charity food” (p. 232). The binary division between people who give and people who receive charity in this model also robs both parties of their human identities as people who give and receive help in their communities (Poppendieck, 1998). Further, it is demoralizing for both parties to witness problems such as poverty, without working on root causes (Poppendieck, 1998). Front line workers who participated in my dissertation research, identified witnessing youth suffering without working on root problems as a variable contributing to a loss of hope for both workers and youth accessing services.

**The process of turning people into “clients”.** There is no universal idea of what “client” is; instead, the role of “client” is contextual, fluid, and co-constructed between the professional and the person accessing services (Gubrium & Järvinen, 2014; Hall, Juhila, Parton, & Pösö, 2003). Hall and colleagues (2003) challenged social workers to problematize the question of who or what a “client” is in social work interactions. At the micro level, a “client’s” internal world and identity is shaped by what it means to be a “client.” Social work involves categorizing and normalizing people, and as a result, the definition of what it means to be a “client” is often defined based on negative definitions and personal shortcomings (Hall et al., 2003). This definition “places the social workers hierarchically above the client and allows them to manage the shortcomings and problems of the clients” (Hall et al., 2003, p. 13). In this way, by constructing “clients,” social workers reinforce their professional power.

At the meso level, the shared understanding of what “client” means in the organizational culture becomes part of constructing the definition (Hall et al., 2003). Participants in my dissertation research presented examples of how organizational definitions about who qualifies as a “client” can exclude some youth from being able to access services. In the results section there were quotes about organizational rules that forbade feeding youth who had returned after the institutional curfew, an example of refusing services based on the “client’s” lack of conformation to the organizational rules. Workers had multiple conversations about the benefits and risks of labelling youth with various diagnoses, providing examples of when labels assisted youth in qualifying for programs and when labels presented a barrier to accessing programs, such as when a youth had been labelled as “high-risk” or “hard-to-serve.” Later in this section, we will return to the label of a “bad client” and I will share the work of Kirsi Juhila (2003), who has questioned how someone could be a “bad client” in the context of services that are open to all.

At the macro level, we return to stigma, or the way that larger society constructs what it means to be a “client” of social services (Hall et al., 2003). As Rossiter (1997) has pointed out, social work has a lot of influence over what it means to be a “client” at the individual, organizational, and systemic levels. Even though social work has more power to shape these definitions, often because we control the written artifacts that define “client” (Margolin, 1997), people accessing services still have influence (Hall et al., 2003).

Juhila (2003) has researched homelessness for more than 15 years and “came to realize that the lack of housing or financial resources was not sufficient to explain the homelessness. In addition to these explanations it seemed to have a great deal to do with the categorization of homeless people” (p. 21). Juhila (2003) explored forms of resistance that people assigned to the category of “client” employ in their part of the co-construction of that category. I identified a strong link between the idea of “emergency showers,” which was discussed frequently in the Reflection phase focus groups in my study, and Juhila’s (2003) research question about how people could be labelled as “bad clients” in a drop-in program that states that “all people in need of support are welcome” (p. 84).

Juhila (2003) identified cases in transcripts where social workers and people accessing services had different expectations of each other’s institutional role. For example, one person accessing services asserted their right to evaluate the professional services that they were receiving, more a consumer than a “client” identity, since evaluation of services assigns expertise to the person accessing services instead of the person delivering them (Juhila, 2003). In this example, the worker defined the “client’s” evaluation of the services as irrelevant, due to these services being the only ones available. This silenced the “client’s” evaluation of the services and returned the status of expert to the worker as the gatekeeper of referrals to the only service

available. On the surface it appears as if the person accessing services was assigned the label of “bad client” because he refused the “help” offered by the social worker. When we go deeper into the idea of co-constructing the “client” label, we can see that he was assigned the label of “bad client” because he asserted his expertise instead of passively “being helped” by the social worker.

He refused to play the role of “client” that the social worker expected him to. This example demonstrates what the “bad client” can make visible about how we define the idea of “client” through our actions, words, and interactions (Juhila, 2003). Alasuutari (2014) also found that when people accessing services defined the problem as originating with the social services being provided, the social worker re-asserted their own expert status and did not make the system the target of the intervention. Alasuutari (2014) pointed out that social workers are the gatekeepers of whether feedback that is critical of the service delivery system is heard by this system, which could be a very powerful tool for improving the system.

I believe that Juhila’s (2003) research makes an important contribution towards the goal of problematizing how social workers contribute to the co-construction of what it means to be a “client” and a “professional,” particularly in the context of homelessness, by providing techniques and theoretical support for making this construction more visible. My experience reinforces the literature, which has found that work in the field of homelessness is particularly rife with the reinforcement of the idea of class morality, or viewing homelessness as an individual moral failing (Hulchanski, 2009).

White (2003) explored the role of social workers as moral judges, interrogating the idea of professional judgement in social work by examining transcripts of discussions between social workers and parents under investigation for child abuse. Specifically, White (2003) provided

examples of social workers assuming “that the best interests of the child are to be served by disbelieving the parents” (p. 179). Youth workers in my dissertation research were having breakthroughs with their enhancing natural supports work after they unveiled how their work was influenced by the same assumption. Participants identified that challenging this blaming and exclusion of the parents from the work with youth was necessary in order to provide better services to the youth. Workers experienced a shift in their practice from working with youth to working with the entire family and community, as presented in the results and as Sam explained in our discussion. Brendtro, Ness, and Mitchell (2001) advocated for parents to be seen as a valuable source of knowledge in working with a youth. This challenges the idea of a professional expert because it values the parents’ knowledge over the professionals’; as one parent stated, “I have been watching and worrying over my child for 15 years. Do they think I know nothing?” (Brendtro, Ness & Mitchell, 2001, p. 160).

White (2003) identified a hierarchy of accounts as defined by workers investigating allegations of child abuse, which revealed that workers place the account of the child as the most trustworthy, followed by other professionals’ and then parents’, with mothers being believed over fathers. Interestingly, the only time that workers did not believe children was when children denied that they were experiencing abuse at home (White, 2003). This is a very important set of circumstances to examine because it is an example of when the account of the child is in conflict with the professional assessment of the problem—thus, the child’s story challenges the expertise of the worker.

I agree with White (2003), who advocated for social workers to be explicit about why they find certain accounts trustworthy, and to be more reflective about their subjectivity in these decisions. However, I also believe that social workers have proven that when they supervise and

investigate themselves on these accountability issues, the idea of an infallible professional expert is reinforced rather than problematized. For this reason, I do not believe that social work can accomplish the goal of problematizing our use of power on our own. In the *Now What?* section of this chapter, I will share some ideas that I have for building new structures of accountability for social workers.

**Challenging the stigmatization of youth.** Skott-Myhre (2008) defined youth, and their relational process of constructing their identity, as a vibrant creative force in society that can help us to problematize oppressive social institutions and systems. Youth in this Western society are often rejected and dismissed as being too idealistic, too defiant, too emotional, and for having fluid purpose and identity (Skott-Myhre, 2008). I absolutely agree with Skott-Myhre (2008) that these qualities that youth are rejected for are the exact strengths required for engaging in critical reflection and action to work for social justice in our communities. After I read *Youth and Subculture as Creative Force* (2008), I renewed my commitment to include my angry 15-year-old self in consultation when making decisions as a professional social worker. Being in touch with this part of me brings me closure to accountability to my rebellious values and to the people that I serve in my work.

Brendtro, Ness, and Mitchell (2001) presented a model of strength-based youth work based on the Circle of Courage (Brendtro, Brokenleg, & Van Bockern, 1990), which workers in my dissertation research identified as useful in their own practice with youth. These authors described how we are rejecting the youth who need the most help, when instead we should be the adults that they need, “who can conquer fear and rejection with love” (p. xi). As Brendtro and colleagues (2001) stated: “we must never look down on those who look up to us” (p. x).



Participants in my dissertation research talked about creative problem solving during every phase of the research. Creative problem solving was a value and a skill attributed to both front-line workers and youth. In the literature, Lavie-Ajayi and Krumer-Nevo (2013) recognized creative problem solving as a strength of front-line workers, and as a requirement for navigating uncertain situations. Bendtro and colleagues (2001) described a practice process whereby workers and youth frame problems as opportunities for youth to realize the potential that they already have, to develop their own identity through being leaders and making decisions. It is through navigating problems that youth can develop the four areas of the Circle of Courage (Brendtro, Brokenleg, & Van Bockern, 1990): generosity, belonging, mastery, and independence. These authors haven taken a different view of youthful defiance than Skott-Myhre (2008) and myself, stating: “When youth become partners in their own education and healing, they no longer use their considerable talents in rebellion and defiance” (p. 108). The way that I interpret this is that, if we stop oppressing youth through equalizing our relationship, then we can free up their considerable talents for challenging oppression in other facets of their lives. One caution that I hold is that there are many youth who are conservative, reinforce the status quo, and do not defy authority. I need to be careful not to essentialize youth as a group and not to romanticize their rebellious attitudes.

I believe that shared creative problem solving gives us a place to meet youth. I agree with participants in my research, as well as Bendtro and colleagues (2001), that we have a responsibility, as people with adult privilege, to work to create and maintain spaces for youth to define themselves. I believe that play dismantles hierarchy. I believe in the critical power of youth playing with their identity while mocking social institutions and systems. I believe that youth can be our critical role models in our mutual work for social change (Skott-Myhre, 2008).

Despite my caution about conservative youth, I believe that the process of being a youth in society holds a magnitude of potential for the pursuit of social justice.

In this research, we learned that professional supports alone are not enough to end youth homelessness (Karabanow, 2004). Neither social work nor youth work is going to end youth homelessness. Social work's talk about structural causes of poverty, including homelessness, do not align with how we actually define problems in our day-to-day work (Margolin, 1997). After social work and youth work are removed, what remains is me as a person, as a community member, as someone who thinks that redistribution begins at home and that the personal is political. Someone who has extensive experience with "social play" (more on that later, dear reader) and pushing boundaries. Someone who has examined this issue as a "client," a researcher, a youth, and an adult, a front-line worker, a youth worker, a social worker, and a community member. This is a lot to play with.

I think that if adults played more, we could heal a lot of dichotomies and flatten a lot of hierarchies that I believe are causing harm. Although I fully support the authors of *No Disposable Kids* (2001) in their assertion that we must stop rejecting and abandoning kids, I also look forward to learning what happens when we listen to what kids are rejecting in our hegemony. As Skott-Myhre (2008) stated, "becoming ourselves is a call and response process" (p. 17). In this way, identity is formed in community (Nissen, 2004). I want more of my responses to be from youth who have no problem calling out hypocrisy and injustice in our service systems, institutions, and most importantly, the hypocrisy within myself that manifests in my reflections and actions. I believe that youth would be very well suited to assist in the creation of spaces for radical youth work, such as in the example explored by Virtus (2014), which I will present after the idea of having "nothing to lose."

In my dissertation research, participants talked about the idea of having “nothing to lose,” which I also identified in my stories about interacting with social workers. A quote from a youth explaining what punk rock culture is, in Skott-Myhre’s (2008) book, reminded me of this concept: “And just saying fuck everything. We’re going to do it our way and we’re going to have fun about it too. . . . a bunch of kids who lost hope and decided to do their own thing” (p. 17). I respect this way of doing things. I see the Zapatistas creating and sustaining their own schools and farms as another example of a group of people who “lost hope and decided to do their own creative thing.”

Vitus (2014) shared an example of how to challenge the stigmatization of youth through deproblematization in her work with “wild girls.” She describes a program that works with “at-risk youth” with the goal of resisting this definition (Vitus, 2014). Similar to the school described in *No Disposable Kids* (2001), this program actively ignores the files and labels that girls have been assigned before entering the program, in order to make space for youth to define themselves and identify their personal strengths. As Margolin (1997) demonstrated, labels and jargon effectively prevent “clients” from having a say in their own identity development. In my dissertation research, youth workers identified the importance of “Darth Vader leadership” or the concept of supporting youth to direct their own identity development, even or especially when you don’t agree with the youth or you think that they are making a mistake. I’m sure you remember the story about the hose and the duct tape, dear reader, used to describe the idea of leaving space for youth to learn and change and grow.

Creating space for decisions to be youth led and youth directed requires healing some of the labels that professionals, institutions, and service systems have imposed on youth (Brendtro, Ness, & Mitchell, 2001; Karabanow, 2004). Vitus (2014) offered concrete strategies that the

community used “to keep girls’ troubles from being turned into system-defined problems” (p. 99). This distinction between everyday troubles and system-defined problems is vital in resisting the process of being turned into a “client,” because system-defined problems are defined as requiring an expert professional to “solve,” whereas everyday troubles are something that we all experience and do not justify professional surveillance in our lives (Vitus, 2014). Finally, dear reader, an active example of front-line workers trying to work themselves out of a job!

Workers enlisted five strategies in their attempts to rewrite the narrative that youth were hearing about themselves: 1) maintaining silence about problems, 2) rewording the girls’ situations, 3) creating girl-ruled space, 4) taking control of external identities, and 5) ambassadorship. These five strategies strongly align with my participatory critical feminist stance. The first strategy is to intentionally ignore how the youth have been defined by professionals, institutions, and systems. The second strategy is a strength-based intervention, similar to where workers reframe the girls as “energetically responding to life troubles” (p. 90) and they “valorize difference” (p. 90) in their shared cultural space. This is shared space because workers strive to equalize relationships between youth and adults in order to make more space for youth to be leaders and make decisions. The fourth strategy is to take control of “polluting information” (p. 97), such as case files from previous interactions with the social services system, and to interfere with girls’ interactions outside of the shared cultural space, such as job placements or school projects (Vitus, 2014). I love the idea of calling what the workers do “interfering” because this makes the invasion into youth’ lives visible. The final strategy (Vitus, 2014) has a strong resonance with the peer model recommended by the participants in my dissertation research, that of youth becoming ambassadors for the wild girls in the larger community. This strategy offers youth opportunities to define themselves and their community in

their own words. It offers an introduction to a community where youth are demonstrating autonomy and efficacy (Vitus, 2014).

Hearing about this example in Denmark (Vitus, 2014) gave me a lot of hope because it presents a model for working in line with my participatory critical feminist values. More importantly, this organization is aligned with the four principles identified in my dissertation research:

1. We cannot end homelessness without ending the associated stigma, trauma, and social exclusion. Homelessness is both a consequence of other problems and a shared community problem.
2. Prevention of and recovery from homelessness are about healing relationships with yourself, other people, and larger society. Relationships characterized by reciprocity can be safe places in which to learn, make mistakes and develop the positive aspects of our identity.
3. The charity model creates stigma; the recovery model, including peer support, aids in transforming trauma and challenges dichotomy so we can experience positive identity and learn our strengths.
4. Professional supports alone are not enough to heal homelessness. Natural supports can contribute to a sense of belonging; strengthening natural supports is an important part of youth work. Through youth-directed services, guided by their perception of a problem, youth can identify and strengthen their natural supports, opportunities for leadership, and communities that they feel they belong in.

The organization described by Vitus (2014) places the same emphasis on the importance of not creating stigma as service providers, and on healing stigma through opportunities for youth to define themselves and make mistakes. I can't wait to tell Sam that we are moving to Denmark!

**What I will do differently in practice, including research.** Skott-Myhre (2008)

reminded me that I believe that creative resistance to domination is, as he said, “our natural state” (p. 17). I'm hesitant about the idea of “normal” or “natural” because I support the idea of diversity as a strength and problematize the idea of “normal,” but I do believe that people's first response to domination is to resist in creative ways. I say “reminded me” because being away from communities of youth for five years almost made me forget that revolutionary play should happen every day. I am eternally grateful that the youth that I worked with for 12 years prepared me well for this dark time, when I would be with few revolutionary critical role models when I needed them the most. I believe that they would be proud of me for engaging in the action that I will share in the next section, and that is the most important measure of validity for me as a researcher.

The research results are principles and as such have wide applicability across the macro, meso, and micro levels of context (Crisp & McCave, 2007). Larson and colleagues (2009) applied participatory principles to creating opportunities for youth to learn by doing, in order to balance support and high expectations for the youth. This represents one way of fulfilling the fourth principle identified in my dissertation research, that services and problem definition should be directed by the youth themselves. At the institutional level, organizations can provide ongoing training and support for the development of organizational culture that locates problems at the structural rather than individual level when examining youth homelessness (Bessant, 2007; Karabanow, 2004; Larson et al., 2009; Mandell, 2008). Specifically, organizations need to create

space for workers to reflect (Bessant, 2007; Newbury, 2011). At the meso level for youth, workers should focus on creating opportunities for youth to belong and act as leaders in their communities (Brendtro, Ness, & Mitchell, 2001; Larson et al., 2009). At the macro level, I will reiterate the goal of challenging the stigmatization of youth (Bendtro, Ness, & Mitchell, 2001; Vitus, 2014). As Scourfield and Pithouse (2006) state: “professional knowledge can be considerably less important in guiding practice than the way that professional and lay knowledge combine within organizational culture to impact on the lives of service users.” (p. 324)

Lavie-Ajayi and Krumer-Nevo (2013) identified the need to create a counter narrative to the status quo, which often frames youth AS the social problem. In fact, the discourse of youth AS the social problem goes hand-in-hand with the professionalization of youth work, defining youth as a threat that can only be addressed by professionals (Coussée, Roets, & De Bie, 2009). Nissen (2004) saw the need to challenge the criminalization of youth. Bessant (2007) saw youth as an oppressed group in society that faces prejudice and unequal power in their relationships with adults, in that they are denied the right to vote but expected to fulfill other expectations of citizenship without having representation.

Removing blame for social problems from individual youth affects their sense of belonging and worthwhile allowing them space to shape their own identity (Bessant, 2007; Crisp & McCave, 2007; Lavie-Ajayi & Krumer-Nevo, 2013; Nissen, 2004). They frame challenging individual blame as a kind of advocacy that workers do in dialogue with other professionals, because professionals are the source of the individual deficit narrative (Hancock, 2004; Lavie-Ajayi & Krumer-Nevo, 2013). Having positive regard for youth challenges internalized oppression and opens up space for youth to explore the best things about themselves (Crisp & McCave, 2007).

For me the most difficult part of research is the possibility of watching important results and radical recommendations be ignored by people with power and no lived experience with homelessness. One case in point is the *Community Voices* (2014) research that was conducted in Calgary in 2011. This was a PAR project wherein 41 participants with lived experience with homelessness collected and analyzed the research results, creating eight policy recommendations. From my perspective, these research results are extremely valuable because they are grounded in the knowledge of people most affected by policy concerning homelessness. It is unjust for people to share their knowledge and then witness no change based on the sharing of this knowledge. The report emphasized the importance of building understanding as well as taking action—in their words:

Community Voices compels us to make connections between “our” humanity and “theirs”—and blur the lines that separate one human being from another. Without false separations, it becomes impossible to uphold myths, stereotypes and beliefs that “blame the victim” and distance us from viewing homelessness as a collective social issue that can be addressed by each and every one of us. While research can be an important vehicle for social change, and [PAR] a process for personal and social transformation, it is by understanding and accepting the findings, and by implementing the recommendations that will bring about real change. (p. 51)

I agree with this assessment about the importance of changing our actions based on what we learn in the research. One lesson that I will be applying to my future research is the importance of gathering resources, including time, for advocating for decision makers to listen and change their actions based on research results. In the future I would plan to negotiate an ongoing group



of people who are dedicated to sharing the research results with stakeholders who can create change, and sustaining these changes through relationships between stakeholders.

Many of the recommendations from the *Community Voices* (2014) report are supported by the four principles identified by the youth workers in my dissertation research. At the macro level, *Community Voices* (2014) recommends an awareness campaign about homelessness, calling for homelessness to be addressed through a social justice and human rights framework. This aligns very closely with the youth workers' identification of the importance of developing relationships and understanding with the larger community about youth homelessness understood as a community-level rather than an individual problem. When homelessness is framed as a lack of inclusion, as it was in my dissertation research and in *Community Voices* (2014), solutions include affordable housing in the for-profit market, accomplished through living wage and rent control policies, as urged in the seventh recommendation of *Community Voices* (2014). Participants in both research projects identified the need for a national housing strategy in Canada, something strongly advocated for by the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness (2016).

I have witnessed and cheered for many presentations from the co-researchers that were involved with *Community Voices* (2014). I have seen them present to audiences of social worker students, activists for renters' rights, people with experience of homelessness, and politicians. I have seen people wince and cry at the quotes from people who have been homeless. But I have not seen people changing policies and programs in response to what we learned from the *Community Voices* (2014) research. To me this indicates that the block between knowledge and action is about power. Specifically, what gives people the will to make change? Emotionally reacting to the quotes only leads to change if people with privilege don't turn away from those

feelings. Dear reader, I hope you remember the link with the story that made me cry. I shared it way back when we started this journey with the introduction. I do see the potential for gifts of stories to result in feelings, including empathy and further understanding, which could result in new actions. These disappointing experiences inspire me to look for ways to sit with my own and other people's discomfort, because I believe that we must be uncomfortable in order to learn and change and grow. Good thing the next section is all about taking action!

### **Now What?**

Dear reader, I have but one more question to answer before we complete this particular journey together. For me the question of “now what?” is vital to planning my next actions and reflections. I agree with Collins (1990), who argues that it is not enough to critique systems of domination—we must construct new knowledge and new alternatives. This section is about an action that I took in response to what I learned in this research, with the story of this action divided into three themes.

First, we will revisit the quote from Huxley (1933) about what I have done with what has happened to me. Next, I will present how the action that I took challenged Professional Patty (Vaid-Menon & Balasubramanian, 2016), a theme that you remember from the discussion between Sam and myself. Finally, I will present the idea of killing the researcher in my head and provide examples of how this tactic made me a better researcher. Hang on, dear reader, we still have a few more dichotomies to challenge!

**What I am doing with what has happened to me.** I heard the front-line workers who participated in my dissertation research say that they had trouble securing funding resources for youth in prison to communicate with their families. Workers described one story when all a youth needed was a stamp to send a letter to their family, but no one in the youth's natural

support system could make it out to the prison in person to bring the money to buy the stamp. I worked with a lot of youth in prison, and I saw the difference that being able to buy shampoo had on youth' mental health. Dear reader, please take a minute to really think about who would bring you canteen money if you were incarcerated. Is this person mobile and wealthy enough to come by the out-of-the-way prison during limited business hours to place money on your account? If the person cannot do this for you, this means that you have no access to stamps for communicating with your loved ones. If you are lucky enough to have a person who could help you in this situation, I want you to thank them when you see them next, because they are a precious gift in your life.

To return to what I heard the participants say about how it was difficult to fundraise for youth in prison to work on their relationships, I wanted to do something to help with this gap in resources. I got divorced during this dissertation process, and I broke up with a friend of 10 years. The last summer that I worked on my dissertation, I was feeling the loss of these relationships and questioning my identity as someone who was close to having a doctoral degree. As I expressed in my discussion with Sam, I was feeling very isolated by the individual process of writing my dissertation. I was panicking as I ran out of money and didn't know when I would be able to find a job.

I decided to write myself 100 love letters, one each day for 100 days. I wanted to do art because I felt really out of balance with writing being the prominent form of expression that I had been engaged in for five years. I wanted to do art because I needed to heal things that couldn't be expressed in words. I wanted to turn my love letter writing capabilities back to myself because I had been out of balance with focusing on my relationship with myself. I wanted

to receive a love letter every day because I needed to balance out the rejection that I was feeling with some joyful inclusion.

After I finished my campaign of love letters to myself, I took pictures of each letter and contacted two staff members at an agency that does outreach with youth who are in prison. I told staff about my idea to have a fundraiser using my 100 love letters as an art show and book of photographs, in order to raise money for “our siblings in prison.” My main goal with this project is to show youth that we cared about them, no matter where they were. I also want to build empathy with people who wouldn’t donate to such a cause because they felt that some youth don’t deserve contact with their families.

The relationships that were developed between an agency that serves youth experiencing homelessness and an organization that offers drop-in art and art auction space every Wednesday night are invaluable. Building my relationships with staff and youth at both agencies has really helped me to reintegrate back into community after my doctoral studies. The changes in context that I appreciated the most were the opportunities for youth and youth workers to work towards shared goals that had nothing to do with individual pathology. I wanted to show the strength that comes from vulnerability, and the healing power of treating ourselves with love.

Another action that I took as a result of this research process was to start a group, on social media and in person, called *Treaty Seven Survivors of Social Work Belief Systems*. We are a group of people who wanted a place to talk about how social work causes harm. Our group includes social workers, people who have experience being a “client,” and people who have both perspectives. Just starting this group made a lot of interesting things visible. The group name was created with resistant humour and disciplined intent about our goals. As the creator of the name stated, “I like Survivors of Social Work B(elief)S(ystems)...therefore naming what we need to

help transform as part of the group name.....What you pay attention to Expands, so the name of the group is important.”

This action demonstrated that social workers were the people most afraid to critique social work, and I believe some of the people who could effect the most change if they did speak up. I have a lot of social work friends who have personal experience with domestic violence or accessing mental health services, but they do not speak about these experiences in all aspects of their lives. Some of these friends shared their experiences with being stigmatized by their work colleagues when they spoke about events such as accessing counselling themselves. Some of my friends who were social workers were afraid of losing their jobs or their professional accreditation if they publicly criticized social work. One friend posted about this fear and then deleted the comment. Some of my friends who have experienced being “case-micro-managed” by social work were also interested in joining the group, and in “hearing the other side.”

More than 50 people “liked” my post about starting this group, 25 people joined the online discussion group, and about 10 are engaging in dialogue within the online group. As one of my social work colleagues stated, “I can’t tell if I’m encouraged or disheartened by this response!” I think that this response indicates that I have found a way to turn my monologue into a dialogue (Seikkula & Trimble, 2005), a transformation based on love, which makes a “we” that is much stronger and more sustainable than me by myself. This strength comes from diversity and identifying our similarities and differences. With this action, I finally feel that instead of straddling a fence between social work and other people, I have burned the fence down. I fully expect to experience multiple attempts to rebuild the wall, not just from outside but also from inside the group. I have confidence that we will learn a lot and deepen our relationships by monitoring this fence and reporting on our findings.

I feel that it is very important work to challenge the “us and them” divide between social work and people who have attempted to access services from social workers. I know that I am doing good work when all of my friends can participate in one group, instead of segments of my friends being excluded. I feel a responsibility to try something to problematize the assumption that social work is “good” (Margolin, 1997). When I was reading books for this discussion chapter, I felt that my readings offered me no suggestions for reform or revolution. In fact, I felt paralyzed after reading about the magnitude of the problems that I have outlined in this chapter. My life experience has taught me that when I feel paralyzed, it is very important to act, to try something new and to make myself, and hopefully other people, uncomfortable! I have already learned a lot from taking this action. Also, I see the potential to share and learn much more.

**The peer model threatens Professional Patty.** The rejection of fixed identities, such as “professional,” allows us to explore infinite possibilities as “entire people” (Skott-Myhre, 2008, p. 177). Youth work must be engaged in as a “mutual political project” (p. 177) where we keep things fuzzy and grey, so that adults “forget for a moment that they ‘know’ young people” (Skott-Myhre, 2008, p.178). Coussée, Roets, and De Bie (2009) described this grey context in which youth work takes place as the border-line. It is on this unsafe, insecure edge where we can free ourselves to play with creative problem-solving together (Skott-Myhre, 2008). Larson and colleagues (2009) recommended that researchers should contribute “guidelines for creating successful adult–youth partnerships, balancing youth ownership of projects with adult supervision and applying ethical principles” (p. 82). I agree, with the specification that adults should only be able to participate under strict youth supervision, such as a community accountability board! Since we know that Professional Patty (Vaid-Menon & Balasubramanian,

2016) crushes creativity, our first task will be to understand how social work constructs professional identity.

Margolin (1997) believed that social workers use empathy and trust building as tactics to gain further access to people's personal lives, in order to judge them and then sanction for any deviations from the "norm." He did not believe that individual social workers do this with the intention to hurt people; in fact, social workers' intention and belief that they are "helping" or "doing good" is what makes this construct so dangerous. Margolin (1997) used case files and transcripts of discussions between social workers and people accessing services to demonstrate how social workers justify their professional right to judge and the unequal relationship between themselves and people accessing services, as well as how this stabilizes middle-class power to define the poor. He showed how social work controls jargon and written discourse about "clients" and populations, which prevents people accessing services from having a voice in how they are defined (Margolin, 1997). He raised a great question for social work: "When is helping domination?" (p. 6).

Margolin (1997) interrogated the unequal power in the social work/"client" relationship. For example, he examined the discourse in social work literature about the idea of empowerment of "clients" and stated that the fact that you can empower someone else means that you hold the power. In other words, offering to empower someone is offering to briefly stop oppressing them. After I read this, I began to apply the same concept to the distinction between co-researchers and participants. I worry about justifying research where I extract knowledge from participants, and I also worry about thinking that we have achieved justice when somebody identifies as a co-researcher. I asked myself, "What if Sam had said something that I didn't want to include in *my* discussion chapter? What am I most afraid that they would say?" I believe that the answer to

what I am most afraid of is that Sam would say that I had oppressed them and reinforced existing inequality. I am still the gatekeeper of whether Sam is heard or not, and that makes visible our unequal power. I try to remember that just because I offered to stop oppressing Sam briefly doesn't mean that it should be assumed that I am "doing good."

In my dissertation research, participants identified the charity model as causing harm, particularly in how this model creates stigma for the people accessing services. Margolin (1997) and Poppendieck (1998) agreed that the charity model causes harm, not just for the people accessing services but also for the people providing them. Both of these authors identified the hypocrisy of framing control as caring, as the source of the harm caused to service providers.

The difference between a charity model and a peer model is empathy. In the peer model, the people offering help can put themselves in the place of the people accepting help because they understand how it feels to be there (Brendtro, Ness, & Mitchell, 2001; Crisp & McCave, 2007). In contrast, the charity model is motivated by the person helping wanting to be seen as "doing good," which turns the person accessing services into an object in the other person's goal achievement process (Brendtro, Ness, & Mitchell, 2001). Dynamic, meaningful communities and more humane services are created when organizations create a culture that encourages input from people most affected by services, and structural analysis of social problems such as youth homelessness (Karabanow, 2004).

Margolin (1997) used the examples of famous social workers Mary Richmond and Jane Adams to illustrate the difference between charity and community models. Jane Adams said neighbour instead of "client" and did not keep files from her home visits, because why would you keep a file on your neighbour? Mary Richmond, on the other hand, was for the professionalization of social work and developed the idea of keeping case notes on the "clients"



that she was working to change. Jane Adams worked to change institutions and structures instead of framing the problem as located within the individual (Margolin, 1997). I prefer the model where you don't take notes on your neighbour, and I will need a lot more reflection and action time before I can address how social work could better navigate our role in investigating child abuse.

The actions that I am taking are about challenging the assumed "good" of social work and questioning the helpers or biting the hand that feeds (Margolin, 1997). I assess that I am more safely positioned to do this than when I relied on social workers to provide for my basic needs. As a professional registered social worker, I may have more to lose than before I had this designation, but I also have access to more power. I feel that these actions are preventative in terms of the potential for me experiencing burnout in social work. Margolin (1997) defined burnout as a symptom of what social work is hiding from itself about the hypocrisy of framing control as caring. Dear reader, you will remember what Skott-Myhre (2008) and I prescribe when you want to address a hypocrisy problem: youthful defiance, unstable emotions, and ever-shifting identity.

At the next annual conference of my professional association, I am applying for a session facilitated by the *Treaty Seven Survivors of Social Work Belief Systems*. I believe that this action will make many more interesting power dynamics visible. My prediction is that they will accept my application. It has been my experience that large, powerful organizations are very concerned with keeping up public appearances of being open to critique. I am very curious who will show up for such a workshop in our professional context, and what we can learn in that space.

I feel that this process is an excellent way to identify brave risk-takers in a risk-averse world. I feel that injecting this tiny amount of street youth culture into such a conservative and

well-protected context is my gift to my profession. I agree with Margolin (1997), who posited that the assumption that social work is “good” is causing harm to both social workers and people accessing services. I have experienced this harm from both perspectives. In the results chapter, participants described harms caused, such as lateral violence between workers, burnout, and the abuse of youth accessing services, which sometimes included the withholding of basic needs services. Solution may lie in institutional structures such as our professional association or youth-serving non-profit organizations. As Karabanow (2004) illustrates, youth homelessness is a structural issue that can be addressed at the meso or institutional level. As he states:

Anti-oppressive organizational structures attempt to build safe and respectful environments for marginalized populations. Through grass-root social development, active participation, underscoring a structural analysis of the problem, consciousness raising and social action, anti-oppressive organizations allow for the emergence of meaningful and vibrant community settings. (p. 58)

**How to kill the researcher in your head.** During this research process, I became more and more afraid to be a social worker. I still am. I don’t want to be an agent of social control who uses empathy to trick people into sharing information which will later be used to judge them deviant (Margolin, 1997). The action that I took was designed to help me leverage my discomfort with the label of social worker into learning about why I fear being a social worker. This action also helps to prevent the development of a dichotomy between being a social control agent, or being anti-oppressive in every way. It challenges this dichotomy by acknowledging that most of my professional actions will have elements of both. The process of killing the researcher in your head, which I describe in this final section of the discussion chapter, follows the same line of thinking about learning from the confrontation between opposites.

Skott-Myher (2008) saw the potential of living on the unstable, marginal edge, for it is there that, because there is no one there, “we all become everyone” (p. 185). I describe this encounter as navigating the world as a veggie burger with bacon (Huntingford, 2015). During the process of this research, the language of the front-line workers that emerged into the theme of “bridge burning” catalyzed another metaphor for me, the idea of bridges taking the most fire in war. A veggie burger with bacon is a kind of bridge between communities that are framed as opposites. During war, bridges take the most fire because they connect places that would be isolated without the bridges.

Bridges are often attacked because they represent a threat to the dominant power if they are allowed to continue connecting. I see youth as bridges, or veggie burgers with bacon, in terms of age, being neither children nor adults. I frame this position as courageous and vital in our goals of making the world more just. I will take a stand to protect that bridge. As Skott-Myher (2008) stated, youth work is an “encounter of potential; that is to say, a tentative, provisional encounter . . . , an exchange between guerillas whispering in the dark” (p. 184). I believe that this creative marginal edge, where there is no safety, is a magical location where social change takes place.

I agree with Skott-Myher (2008) that what we need is ontological healing, and that this is accomplished through recognizing all knowledge as useful in our reflections and actions. I believe that social work needs to let go of professional identity in order to understand what that means. Skott-Myher’s (2008) ideas about the revolutionary power of taking a minority stance assisted me in taking an action that I believe will assist in the goal of understanding how professional identity may be causing harm to both social workers and the people assessing services from them (Margolin, 1997).

The idea of minority is defined by the positioning of this group in relation to the dominant majority, and the power of this strategy lies in separating yourself from the majority just enough so that you can problematize the hegemony (Skott-Myher, 2008). Minority/majority is not presented as a dichotomy because we all have communities where we are positioned in the minority role (Skott-Myhre, 2008). For example, being a researcher minority in the youth worker policy implementation meetings assisted me in making visible learnings about the culture of youth work that would not have been visible to me as a member of the youth worker majority. The way that the research assistants made the lateral violence of youth work visible because of their minority status is another example of how this technique was used in my dissertation research.

The idea of “killing the cop in your head” is my favorite way to explain how internalized oppression results in us keeping ourselves down. This idea originated with the civil rights movement and Black anarchists (Williams, 2015). It is important to understand that this term was developed to explain why even if we achieved anarchy, people of colour would not be free until we eliminated racism as well (Williams, 2015). One way that I have acted as the minority (Skott-Myhre, 2008) is by trying to kill the researcher in my head.

Trying to kill the creativity-crushing expert in your head is no easy task; she doesn't go down without a bunch of struggle. Sometimes I can keep her down for years, but then she pops up at the worst times and I have to apologise for actions taken because of her fears. When I was taking my masters of social work degree, I began having up to five panic attacks a day. I attributed some of this to my shift in perspective and loss of hope from my recent experience working in an adult homeless shelter when most of my experience had been with youth. What happened there was that I met all the kids' parents. I saw their last names and thought about the

stories of abuse at their hands that their kids had told me. I had been dismissing parents as my enemy in the youth work that I did, but when I was providing for their basic needs and listening to their stories about abuse, I no longer could. I was overwhelmed by the intergenerational trauma of poverty, residential schools, stigma-causing services, racist immigration policies, and the loss of children to child welfare. I was looking at a grandmother, a mother, and her daughter sitting at a table together in a homeless shelter.

The counsellor that I was working with at the time helped me to explore how I was afraid of accepting my identity as someone with a masters of social work degree. My stories about my experiences with social workers, which I shared in the introduction, gave you some idea of why I didn't want to be associated with "social worker" as a label. Additionally, I had just witnessed multiple examples of three generations of a family describing the stigma and individual blame that they had internalized from their interactions with social workers. I did not find belonging with my classmates who were entering private practice for one-on-one counselling or perceived community development as something that happened in faraway places.

The way that I dealt with having five panic attacks a day was to talk about it. When I talked about my experience, people started telling me about their own panic attacks. Co-workers told me about their experiences with panic attacks, and I asked why they hadn't talked about these earlier. Youth that I worked with would talk about their panic attacks after I explained to them why I had left the meeting with their parents. What all this talking made visible was that my co-workers were hiding their trauma symptoms because they wanted to be perceived as an expert instead of a "client." I had uncovered that workers were ashamed to experience the exact symptoms that they were claiming to be non-judgmental about in the youth. This also did not motivate me to align with social work.

After I started the *Survivors of Social Work* group, my friend phoned me and explained why she didn't feel safe posting in the group. She was not the only one of my friends in the group who felt unsafe to post because of who else was in the group. She shared how she was having panic attacks at work and felt that she had to be "the expert" or she would let down the people that she worked with. We traded a lot of stories about how our friends and family perceived social work and university degrees, as well as how we ourselves felt about social work as a profession. I told her about Magolin's (1997) idea of navigating the margins as a minority and stepping back from social work just enough to critique it.

She spoke about racism and always having to prove yourself worthy of basic human rights, along with how this contributes to internalized oppression. We talked about how our experiences with oppression have motivated us to try and gain power through our educational achievements, which have isolated us from our communities of support. We talked about our experiences with being tokenized by our fellow social workers. We found a space to discuss our conflictual relationships with social work, within and outside of ourselves, hopefully without risking our livelihoods. Even if nothing else happens as a result of this group formation, this is a great victory that no one can take away. Since I started the group, I have had more and more moments and spaces like this. It feels much better. It is interesting to me that by sharing when I thought that I was a minority, I was able to experience the belonging of learning that I was not alone. It turns out that other people saw that the emperor had no clothes and were waiting to find someone else to confirm what they saw. I see research as a way to start conversations like this.

Skott-Myhre (2008) asserted that emotions and intuition are required for youth work because we need these skills to identify the revolution before it can be seen. In this context, being risk takers is a strength that youth model for us (Nissen, 2004). The revolution is potential,

it is just on the horizon, it is where we “explore what has not yet been” (p. 180)—where we imagine and create a better world. Skott-Myre (2008) advocated for us to go to the edge by becoming an age traitor—that is, by surrendering our privilege and flattening our relationships with youth in a world that privileges adults. This idea of aligning with youth over professionals was described by Riley in this conversation that we had in the fourth Reflection phase focus group. Workers were describing their location on the do-not-hire list for having reputations for advocacy. Also, Sid and Riley had just shared a story about advocating with a 17-year-old who was trying to secure housing after being released from the hospital:

Sid: I’m totally on a black list yeah for sure.

Riley: I think we all are.

Stasha: I would only hire people from the black list.

Riley: Other agencies are telling our kids not to come to the [drop-in program] because they know we’re kicking down doors and ringing doorbells and “Hey are you home, hey can we talk, hey.”

Kelly: It makes people uncomfortable.

Riley: So we’ve had kids that are staying at group homes and in program [and staff are saying], “Don’t go to the [drop-in program], they’re not really gonna help you in there.”

Sid: “You’re a little too old to go to the [drop-in program].” I got that last week.

Riley: It’s kind of like because they know it’s the [drop-in program]. We ring, ring on the phone. We knock on doors. We bug people until we get stuff done.

Stasha: Well, it’s like what you said—if there hadn’t been two workers witnessing and advocating they would have just crushed that person [in the story].

As I reflected in my research journal, Kelly provided an alternative view of this kind of advocacy, as they did not support the confrontational style that was being described. For me, actions that make people, including myself, uncomfortable are often the beginning of growth and learning. Why would we change if we remain comfortable?

When I was away from youth communities during my dissertation, what I missed most was the anger. To me, anger indicates a belief in the possibility of justice or a vision of a better world. As Skott-Myhre (2008) explained, anger indicates that we want something better. Participants in my dissertation research identified that youth and youth workers are often oppressed in similar ways and are angry about similar injustices. I believe that this overlap of common anger represents a very important starting place for the mutual political project of working for social change (Skott-Myhre, 2008). This is an opportunity for us to partner with youth and respect their dignity through equalizing this relationship (Brendtro, Ness, & Mitchell, 2001).

Nissen (2004) described “a network of social workers working with socially excluded youth to attack narrow minded professionalism” (p. 74). This network used a method with the name of anti-method because no method is right or best; instead, the method chosen is situational. One method that they used, that warmed my heart, was a text written by Anton Makarenko called *The Road to Life* (1935). In this book, “the worst enemies are always the pedagogical professional” (as cited in Nissen, 2004, p. 76). This is because the professionals remain in theory and don’t engage with real life (Nissen, 2004), and as such they are useless in the goal of solving our society’s problems. I cannot freaking wait to start a book club to read that text with some radical youth. I will tell them that I need a booster shot to keep down the



Professional Patty (Vaid-Menon & Balasubramanian, 2016), whom the university has been feeding.

Professional Patty (Vaid-Menon & Balasubramanian, 2016) is one of the cops that lives in my head and sometimes appears as the youth worker who says, “We should have made them go to bed.” There is also a control-hungry researcher and an angry kid who wants justice. I want to share another story as an example of the cops in our heads. One year, we were organizing a march to converge with an annual Take Back the Night [TBTN] march occurring in our communities. Some of the goals of organizing a parallel march were to challenge the closed structure of how the march was being organized, to involve people of all genders in this work raising awareness about violence against women, and to march in a more public and visible location than the TBTN march had taken for the past couple of years. The action was a kind of coup because the all-White organizing committee had not responded to our emails inquiring how to be involved in decision making for the march.

This represented one of the first times that I had organized with other social workers. When comparing this experience to other organizing projects, I was struck by how afraid the social workers were to challenge authority. We had made a group decision to march on the sidewalks and obey all traffic signals instead of taking the streets. Despite this compromise, people expressed fears about being arrested. I asked them if they had ever been arrested for using the sidewalk before. After much reflection, I realized that the social workers that I was organizing with were middle-class—in other words, they were not freed by having nothing to lose. After this experience, I started seeing this fear of confronting authority as a severe liability in working for social justice. I saw more examples of social workers advocating for actions to be less radical; however, I knew that they would never be satisfied with the level of risk. As the

saying goes, generals die in bed. Dear reader, I'm sure that you are already yelling this out, but allow me to echo: CHALLENGING OPPRESSION REQUIRES RISK TAKING!

Youth know this. Youth press on the limits to find out where they are, and then they move them just a little further away, as illustrated in the eating rabbit story. If we are courageous enough to learn from youth, we can improve the frequency and duration of how we press and change the limits. Organizing with social workers made me horrified at how developed the cops in some people's heads are. Youth know that "those who do not move, do not notice their chains" as Rosa Luxemburg may have stated. It is uncertain if this quote was actually said by this person, however it is most often attributed to them. I recommend that social workers move more. We know that people don't feel our chains until we move, but it is also important to note that if you are never uncomfortable then you might assume chains are present when they are only in your mind.

When I am working on problematizing a concept, I start by asking what is presented as the opposite of that concept. For this reason, I'm exploring what the concept of "social play," the school of social play, and the profession of "social player" can teach us about the profession of social work.

**Strengths and limitations.** This research was not intended to be generalized to all youth workers or other contexts; the goals were to provide an opportunity for front line youth workers to share their knowledge about policy and to catalyze further actions and learnings. In terms of catalyzing new actions, my repositioning of myself in relation to my profession of social work represents an outcome of the research and a promising vantage point. In the future, I would plan more follow up meetings for after the research process, in order to sustain working relationships and encourage follow through on actions and knowledge sharing. One strength of this research is

that I was able to offer a dialogue, rather than a monologue in the discussion chapter. To me this dual perspective on how we define policy analysis and approach social justice driven youth work, is valuable because the ways in which we disagree offers a more complex analysis for you, dear reader.

The next time that I engage in participatory research I will put more of my energies into demystifying research processes such as interpreting meaning from data. Examining the social issue of homelessness from the perspective of front line workers demonstrated a valuing of their knowledge about policy, which I define as an important step in equalizing relationships and how knowledge is valued between front line workers and researchers. In future research efforts I hope that the four principles will be examined by youth with experience of homelessness, as I believe that their direct experience would be a valuable method of validating or refuting the importance of these principles in youth work. This research demonstrated multiple ways that front line youth workers advocate for policy and societal change in their work with youth experiencing homelessness. Presenting examples of *how* the four principles are applied in youth work increases the usefulness of the findings to practice.

An additional strength of this research is how it bridges practice and theory. It wasn't enough for workers to state that natural supports are key to preventing homelessness, they also had to identify how this theoretical concept would change their actions, if they wanted this value to be reflected in their practice. Sam was able to identify themselves as a researcher, once they identified themselves as a person who is curious about how we enact our values in practice and how our practice reflects our values. When I am working on demystifying research processes, I am going to return to Sam's idea of being a curious problem solver who desires alignment between their values and their actions.

Through my reflection during this research process I improved my awareness of ways that I am privileged, ways that I interrupt, and ways that I am risk-adverse or afraid to release control. Each of these areas gives me places to start with my goals to be less oppressive in my interaction with other people. Work on navigating my privilege, listening deeply, and taking risks (in accordance with my own advice) will improve my practice, including research, and will assist me in working for social justice in ways that are more congruent with my values.

### **The Beginning**

Thank you, dear reader, for sticking with me on this long and sometimes overwhelming journey. I hope you remember to play with what you have learned here. I have entitled this section the beginning because my learning cycles of action and reflection are ongoing. During this research project, I reflected deeply and took courageous actions. I engaged in reflexivity with other people, and one of the participants identified as a co-researcher, something that I view as an extraordinary resistance process in an oppressive world. I integrated my many selves more fully through examining youth homelessness through old and new lenses. I became a better listener, which will help me to navigate my privilege, especially at times when I should be quiet and listen to people with lived experience of oppression. These are great gifts for going forward.

Through this research, I gained a better understanding of the power available to veggie burgers with bacon who live on the margins. I reasserted my claim to living on the margins, through my action to reposition myself in relation to social work. I still can't bear the idea of doing Plexiglas social work, and I feel much relieved to have distanced myself from perceiving that as "normal" for social work. By navigating my role as a social worker against social work, I will learn a lot about social work and myself, from the inside and the outside. I look forward to exploring my role as a creative social player. I hope that I have been able to share the research

results and reflections in ways that enable other people to use this knowledge to inform their own play. Dear, dear reader, I cannot wait to hear what kind of actions you have planned, and have started, as a result of what you have learned here. Please send me an email at [veggieburgerwbacon@gmail.com](mailto:veggieburgerwbacon@gmail.com) and tell me some stories about your play!

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## Appendix A – Consent forms

**Preparing the Ground Phase Consent Form**

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**Name of Researcher, Faculty, Department, Telephone & Email:**

Stasha Huntingford, Faculty of Social Work, [shunting@ucalgary.ca](mailto:shunting@ucalgary.ca), 403-978-6384

**Supervisor:**

Dr. Christine Walsh, [cwalsh@ucalgary.ca](mailto:cwalsh@ucalgary.ca)

**Title of Project:**

Working for Youth who are Homeless: Policy Informed by Front Line Practice.

**Sponsor:**

Calgary Homeless Foundation

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This consent form, a copy of which has been given to you, is only part of the process of informed consent. If you want more details about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

The University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board has approved this research study.

**Purpose of the Study:**

**Phase I:** The results of this study will contribute to knowledge about the process of engaging front line practitioners in policy analysis, which will in turn contribute to our understanding of how to reduce the knowledge translation gap between practice, research, and policy development. Other research has demonstrated that engaging front line practitioners in policy analysis can help in developing their confidence with applying their skills at the macro level, as well as reduce feelings of helplessness and burnout. Reducing burnout and developing policy informed by front line perspectives can improve outcomes for youth and the implementation of policy.

**What Will I Be Asked To Do?**

**Phase I:** You are invited to participate in a discussion about front line practitioners engaging in policy analysis. The goal of this discussion is to learn more about the benefits, barriers and facilitating factors to youth workers engaging in policy analysis.

**What Type of Personal Information Will Be Collected?**

Should you agree to participate, you will be asked to provide your gender, age, experience with youth work, and education. Any reference to specific non-profit agencies will be removed from

the data collected. Your decision to participate will in no way affect funding for your agency or your employment.

People who choose to participate in phase one will be asked for their email addresses and phone numbers. This contact information may be used to invite you to participate in phase two of the research. Email addresses and phone numbers will not be shared with other parties.

### **Are there Risks or Benefits if I Participate?**

Front line practitioners, this researcher, and the Calgary Homeless Foundation (developers of the policy under study) have a shared goal of improving outcomes for youth who are experiencing or at-risk of becoming homeless. This research represents an opportunity to understand how policy development, analysis and implementation can assist in meeting this objective. In addition to contributing to knowledge (outlined in the first section of this form) that could aid in improving practice, this research has some potential benefits for individuals participating.

The results of this study will contribute to knowledge about the process of engaging front line practitioners in policy analysis, which will in turn contribute to our understanding of how to reduce the knowledge translation gap between practice, research, and policy development. Other research has demonstrated that engaging front line practitioners in policy analysis can help in developing their confidence with applying their skills at the macro level, as well as reduce feelings of helplessness and burnout. Reducing burnout and developing policy informed by front line perspectives can improve outcomes for youth and the implementation of policy.

In Phase I you will be offered a \$25 honorarium for attending the event.

These research results are being used by Stasha Huntingford in the completion of her doctoral studies and will be published as a dissertation.

Anonymity cannot be maintained due to discussions occurring in a group context and within a community where participants may already know each other, however steps will be taken to ensure confidentiality. At each focus group meeting we will begin by reviewing the limits to confidentiality so that participants can make an informed choice about which information they choose to share in the group. Any information that identifies individuals or agencies will be removed from the focus group transcripts. Participants are being asked to share their personal views which do not represent the views of the agency that they work for. The choice to participate in this study is in no way related to employment or funding with agencies that practitioners are employed with.

### **What Happens to the Information I Provide?**

Participation is completely voluntary and confidential. You are free to discontinue participation at any time during the study (you do not have to share the reason for this decision). If you choose to withdraw any information already collected will be retained by the researcher.

No one except the researcher, the group of participants, and her supervisor will be allowed to see

or hear any of the data collected. All group participants will sign a confidentiality form. Only group information will be summarized for any presentation or publication of results.

The data collected are kept in a locked cabinet only accessible by the researcher and her supervisor. The anonymous data will be stored for five years on a computer USB, at which time, it will be permanently erased.

All participants in phase one will receive a report through email and these findings will be used to inform phase two. The group of participants in phase two will plan how the results of the research will be shared.

This research has a range of opportunities for participation and levels of commitment. There are four main options listed below and you can choose to participate in one or all of them.

**Phase I** consists of the one day World Café event to identify barriers and facilitating factors to front line practitioners engaging in policy analysis.

**Phase II** consists of four weekly focus groups over a one month period to analyze the *Plan to End Youth Homelessness*.

**Phase III** is the action phase where the group will decide how to share the results from Phase II with other stakeholders. This phase consists of four weekly focus groups over a one month period.

**Co-researchers:** In the data analysis of Phase II and III there will be an opportunity for participants to engage as co-researchers in the analysis of the data from the focus groups. There will be a one day workshop where training will be provided on qualitative data analysis, if you would like to participate in this portion of the study. All members of the research team will sign a confidentiality agreement.

---

### ***Signatures (written consent)***

Your signature on this form indicates that you 1) understand to your satisfaction the information provided to you about your participation in this research project, and 2) agree to participate as a research subject.

In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the investigators, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from this research project at any time. You should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

I would like to participate in **Phase I** of the research (a one day World Cafe):

Participant's Name: (please print) \_\_\_\_\_

Participant's Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date:  
\_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's Name: (please print) \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date:  
\_\_\_\_\_

I am interested in more information about **Phase II and III** of the research, please contact me at the following email address \_\_\_\_\_

### **Questions/Concerns**

If you have any further questions or want clarification regarding this research and/or your participation, please contact:

*Stasha Huntingford,  
University of Calgary, Faculty of Social Work  
403-978-6384, [shunting@ucalgary.ca](mailto:shunting@ucalgary.ca)  
Supervisor-Dr. Christine Walsh, [cwalsh@ucalgary.ca](mailto:cwalsh@ucalgary.ca)*

If you have any concerns about the way you've been treated as a participant, please contact an Ethics Resource Officer, Research Services Office, University of Calgary at (403) 210-9863; email [cfreb@ucalgary.ca](mailto:cfreb@ucalgary.ca).

A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference. The investigator has kept a copy of the consent form.



## Immersion Phase Consent Form

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### Name of Researcher, Faculty, Department, Telephone & Email:

Stasha Huntingford, Faculty of Social Work, [shunting@ucalgary.ca](mailto:shunting@ucalgary.ca), 403-978-6384

### Supervisor:

Dr. Christine Walsh, [cwalsh@ucalgary.ca](mailto:cwalsh@ucalgary.ca)

### Title of Project:

Working for Youth who are Homeless: Policy Informed by Front Line Practice.

### Sponsor:

Calgary Homeless Foundation

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This consent form, a copy of which has been given to you, is only part of the process of informed consent. If you want more details about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

The University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board has approved this research study.

### Purpose of the Study

The results of this study will contribute to knowledge about the process of engaging front line practitioners in policy analysis, which will in turn contribute to our understanding of how to reduce the knowledge translation gap between practice, research, and policy development. Other research has demonstrated that engaging front line practitioners in policy analysis can help in developing their confidence with applying their skills at the macro level, as well as reduce feelings of helplessness and burnout. Reducing burnout and developing policy informed by front line perspectives can improve outcomes for youth and the implementation of policy.

### What Will I Be Asked To Do?

This researcher is asking permission to observe the Enhancing Supports meeting and to take notes organized with the five semi-structured questions that were used in the first phase of this research:

- 1) What makes it difficult for front line practitioners to engage in policy [rules/systems] work?;
- 2) What makes it easier for front line practitioners to engage in this work?;
- 3) What are the benefits to front line practitioners engaging in this work?;
- 4) What are some of the policies [rules/systems] that affect the work you do and the people who you work with?;
- 5) What are some examples of policies [rules/systems] that you have worked to change?

The goal of this observation and note taking is to learn more about the benefits, barriers and facilitating factors to youth workers engaging in policy analysis.

**What Type of Personal Information Will Be Collected?**

No personal information will be collected. Any reference to specific non-profit agencies or individuals will be excluded from the data collected.

**Are there Risks or Benefits if I Participate?**

Front line practitioners, this researcher, and the Calgary Homeless Foundation (developers of the policy under study) have a shared goal of improving outcomes for youth who are experiencing or at-risk of becoming homeless. This research represents an opportunity to understand how policy development, analysis and implementation can assist in meeting this objective.

The results of this study will contribute to knowledge about the process of engaging front line practitioners in policy analysis, which will in turn contribute to our understanding of how to reduce the knowledge translation gap between practice, research, and policy development. Other research has demonstrated that engaging front line practitioners in policy analysis can help in developing their confidence with applying their skills at the macro level, as well as reduce feelings of helplessness and burnout. Reducing burnout and developing policy informed by front line perspectives can improve outcomes for youth and the implementation of policy.

These research results are being used by Stasha Huntingford in the completion of her doctoral studies and will be published as a dissertation.

**What Happens to the Information I Provide?**

Participation is completely voluntary and confidential. You are free to discontinue participation at any time during the study (you do not have to share the reason for this decision). If you choose to withdraw any information already collected will be retained by the researcher.

No one except the researcher, the group of participants, and her supervisor will be allowed to see or hear any of the data collected. Only group information will be summarized for any presentation or publication of results.

The data collected are kept in a locked cabinet only accessible by the researcher and her supervisor. The anonymous data will be stored for five years on a computer USB, at which time, it will be permanently erased.

---

***Signatures (written consent)***

Your signature on this form indicates that you 1) understand to your satisfaction the information provided to you about your participation in this research project, and 2) agree to participate as a research subject.

In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the investigators, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from this research project at any time. You should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

I would like to participate (I give permission for a researcher to observe the Enhancing Supports meetings):

Participant's Name: (please print) \_\_\_\_\_

Participant's Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's Name: (please print) \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Questions/Concerns**

If you have any further questions or want clarification regarding this research and/or your participation, please contact:

*Stasha Huntingford,  
University of Calgary, Faculty of Social Work  
403-978-6384, [shunting@ucalgary.ca](mailto:shunting@ucalgary.ca)  
Supervisor-Dr. Christine Walsh, [cwalsh@ucalgary.ca](mailto:cwalsh@ucalgary.ca)*

If you have any concerns about the way you've been treated as a participant, please contact an Ethics Resource Officer, Research Services Office, University of Calgary at (403) 210-9863; email [cfreb@ucalgary.ca](mailto:cfreb@ucalgary.ca).

A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference. The investigator has kept a copy of the consent form.

## Reflection and Action Phases Consent Form

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### Name of Researcher, Faculty, Department, Telephone & Email:

Stasha Huntingford, Faculty of Social Work, [shunting@ucalgary.ca](mailto:shunting@ucalgary.ca), 403-978-6384

### Supervisor:

Dr. Christine Walsh, [cwalsh@ucalgary.ca](mailto:cwalsh@ucalgary.ca)

### Title of Project:

Working for Youth who are Homeless: Policy Informed by Front Line Practice.

### Sponsor:

Urban Alliance

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The University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board has approved this research study.

### Purpose of the Study:

**Phase II and III:** The *Plan to End Youth Homelessness* policy is the first youth specific plan in North America, and represents an opportunity for Calgarians to be leaders in action on this policy area, as well as to share learning from this process. There is a stated need in the literature to recognize what makes the experience of homelessness as a youth unique, as well as how to provide services specifically to youth that prevent homelessness and recognize housing as a right. Front line practitioners are often in a position where you witness the impact of policy on the youth that you work with, and this knowledge can create policy that improves outcome for youth.

To create the Plan the Calgary Homeless Foundation consulted with 21 stakeholders comprised of executive directors and managers representing youth-serving homeless agencies, as well as youth with lived experience of homelessness, Plan recommendations include building a coordinated system, developing an adequate number of housing units, and identifying research priorities and policy changes all of which require partnership and advocacy work with stakeholders such as Children's Services, the education, health, and justice systems, as well as the provincial and federal governments. Missing from the development of the Plan however is involvement of the front line practitioners who are ultimately responsible for implementing the policy.

### What Will I Be Asked To Do

**Phase II and III:** You are invited to participate with a group of front line practitioners analysing the Plan to End Youth Homelessness created by the Calgary Homeless Foundation in 2011. The goal of this group is to analyze the policy and record this feedback. After the initial four weekly focus groups engaged in policy analysis, the group will create a one month action phase to share the results of the study and partner with other stakeholders in the Plan to End Youth Homelessness. The focus groups are two hours long and will be audio recorded.

#### **What Type of Personal Information Will Be Collected?**

Should you agree to participate, you will be asked to provide your gender, age, experience with youth work, and education. Any reference to specific non-profit agencies will be removed from the data collected. Your decision to participate will in no way affect funding for your agency or your employment.

People who choose to participate will be asked for their email addresses and phone numbers. This contact information may be used to invite you to participate in other phases of the research. Email addresses and phone numbers will not be shared with other parties.

#### **Are there Risks or Benefits if I Participate?**

Front line practitioners, this researcher, and the Calgary Homeless Foundation (developers of the policy under study) have a shared goal of improving outcomes for youth who are experiencing or at-risk of becoming homeless. This research represents an opportunity to understand how policy development, analysis and implementation can assist in meeting this objective. In addition to contributing to knowledge (outlined in the first section of this form) that could aid in improving practice, this research has some potential benefits for individuals participating.

The results of this study will contribute to knowledge about the process of engaging front line practitioners in policy analysis, which will in turn contribute to our understanding of how to reduce the knowledge translation gap between practice, research, and policy development. Other research has demonstrated that engaging front line practitioners in policy analysis can help in developing their confidence with applying their skills at the macro level, as well as reduce feelings of helplessness and burnout. Reducing burnout and developing policy informed by front line perspectives can improve outcomes for youth and the implementation of policy.

You will be offered a \$25 honorarium for attending each focus group.

These research results are being used by Stasha Huntingford in the completion of her doctoral studies and will be published as a dissertation.

Anonymity cannot be maintained due to discussions occurring in a group context and within a community where participants may already know each other, however steps will be taken to ensure confidentiality. At each focus group meeting we will begin by reviewing the limits to confidentiality so that participants can make an informed choice about which information they choose to share in the group. Any information that identifies individuals or agencies will be removed from the focus group transcripts. Participants are being asked to share their personal views which do not represent the views of the agency that they work for. The choice to participate in this study is in no way related to employment or funding with agencies that practitioners are employed with.

**What Happens to the Information I Provide?** Participation is completely voluntary and confidential. You are free to discontinue participation at any time during the study (you do not have to share the reason for this decision). If you choose to withdraw any information already collected will be retained by the researcher.

No one except the researcher, the group of participants, and her supervisor will be allowed to see or hear any of the data collected. All group participants will sign a confidentiality form. Only group information will be summarized for any presentation or publication of results.

The data collected are kept in a locked cabinet only accessible by the researcher and her supervisor. The anonymous data will be stored for five years on a computer USB, at which time, it will be permanently erased.

All participants in phase one will receive a report through email and these findings will be used to inform phase two. The group of participants in phase two will plan how the results of the research will be shared.

This research has a range of opportunities for participation and levels of commitment. There are three main options listed below and you can choose to participate in one or all of them.

**Phase II** consists of four weekly focus groups over a one month period to analyze the *Plan to End Youth Homelessness*. In the data analysis of Phase II there will be an opportunity for participants to engage as co-researchers in the analysis of the data from the focus groups. There will be a one day workshop where training will be provided on qualitative data analysis, if you would like to participate in this portion of the study. All members of the research team will sign a confidentiality agreement.

**Phase III** is the action phase where the group will decide how to share the results from Phase II with other stakeholders. This phase consists of four weekly focus groups over a one month period.

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***Signatures (written consent)***

Your signature on this form indicates that you 1) understand to your satisfaction the information provided to you about your participation in this research project, and 2) agree to participate as a research subject.

In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the investigators, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from this research project at any time. You should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

I would like to participate in **Phase II** of the research (four weekly focus groups to analyze the Plan to End Youth Homelessness):

Participant's Name: (please print) \_\_\_\_\_

Participant's Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's Name: (please print) \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

I would like to participate in **Phase III** of the research (four weekly focus groups to share results with other stakeholders):

Participant's Name: (please print) \_\_\_\_\_

Participant's Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date:  
\_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's Name: (please print) \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date:  
\_\_\_\_\_

### **Questions/Concerns**

If you have any further questions or want clarification regarding this research and/or your participation, please contact:  
*Stasha Huntingford,*

*University of Calgary, Faculty of Social Work  
403-978-6384, [shunting@ucalgary.ca](mailto:shunting@ucalgary.ca)  
Supervisor-Dr. Christine Walsh, [cwalsh@ucalgary.ca](mailto:cwalsh@ucalgary.ca)*

If you have any concerns about the way you've been treated as a participant, please contact an Ethics Resource Officer, Research Services Office, University of Calgary at (403) 210-9863; email [cfreb@ucalgary.ca](mailto:cfreb@ucalgary.ca).

A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference. The investigator has kept a copy of the consent form.



## Appendix B – Advice on Facilitating Participatory Policy Analysis

### Introduction

The purpose of this research was to collect practical experiences from human service professionals who have conducted group policy analysis. This information will be included as an appendix in the researcher's dissertation to complement the knowledge from the literature on participatory policy analysis. Participants were asked to fill out a six question survey about their experience. The questions asked were:

- 1) What success have you experienced when facilitating a group analyzing policy?
- 2) What challenges have you experienced when facilitating a group analyzing policy?
- 3) What methods have you used when facilitating a group analyzing policy?
- 4) What methods have you used to sustain participation in a group over time?
- 5) What methods have you used to engage a group in policy analysis?
- 6) What advice would you give someone embarking on a project to facilitate a group analyzing policy?

Five participants responded and NVivo software was used in coding their responses. This study was granted ethics approval from the Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board at the University of Calgary.

### Theoretical base

Contributors identified popular education as an important theoretical base for engaging groups in collaborative learning.

*There is a whole range of instructional techniques and metaphors in the popular education tool kit.*

*I would check out the rich popular education literature and start with the amazing work that's been going on at Highland in Tennessee.*

*“Instead of thinking that you put pieces together that will add up to a whole, I think you have to start with the premise that they're already together and you try to keep from destroying life by segmenting it, over-organizing it and dehumanizing it. You try to keep things together. The educative process must be organic, and not an assortment of unrelated methods and ideas.”— Myles Horton, *The Long Haul: An Autobiography**

*We use PAR [Participatory Action Research] principles to ground the teaching and the methods but one could not really call it PAR apart from the long term goals to make action in health reform more viable.*

### Methods

A wide range of methods were suggested by the contributors.

*I have tried short term focus groups and meetings that used directed questions and PAR methods in the past.*

*Members divide the policy into segments and present it to the members according to the agreed to lens. For example, we looked at the AHS [Alberta Health Services] and EMS [Emergency Medical Services] policy through the lens of municipal authority, fire response and funding sources.*

*Brainstorming, Appreciative Inquiry, Deliberative Consultation, 'Researching' the policy question, 'Options appraisal' – Evaluation of possibilities/solutions, Policy Analysis cycles/processes*

*Learning journals can provide a process whereby the group gains confidence in sharing their experience while supporting a collective record of the experience.*

*Ask questions, Set the policy issue/s and or container/boundaries together, Let consensus and or tensions emerge – and capture them*

*Exploratory, Deliberative, Evaluative, All of the above*

The merits of small and large group discussion were presented.

*Sometime spent discussing the issues and the parameters of the project in one large group so everyone has a chance to share their experiences and ideas - this also gives me a chance to keep the conversation 'contained' to the purpose while respecting peoples voices. Then moving into small group discussions so people can spend more time dialoguing and creating solutions in a small group.*

### **Challenges with PPA**

Contributors describe the importance of dialogue in PPA and the challenges of “*managing passionate conversations from multiple people*”, the difficulty with “*gaining sufficient consensus to act – especially across organizational and or moral or ethical boundaries or differences*” and with “*sustaining participation and contribution*” over time. Participant’s comfort with engaging politically and critiquing power structures was described as a challenge:

*“In Canada, challenges occur when students are reluctant to engage power issues directly since they often have not been prepared to do so in their educational experience. Similar challenges occur abroad and compounded by language differences which can complicate communication. At the same time, global cultures often have more experience with direct political action (e.g. Philippines) and might share them if they feel safe.”*

Time was identified as a significant challenge:

*Often people are busy dealing with the challenge of everyday and don't have the time or energy, literacy skills etc to delve into it. This was our challenge in the group as well.*

### **Action-Practical goals**

Connected to the concept of impact many contributors discussed the importance of “*follow up*” and action resulting from analytical debates.

Dissemination or what happens after the policy analysis was vital to framing group expectations of policy analysis and honoring the need for policy and social change resulting from research. Contributors described the importance of facilitators “*not wanting to make false promises*” about the impact of the research and “*actually making any real difference*” was described as a challenge in PPA.

*I organized many workshops and showings in which the community researchers told their stories.*

*I think we did a fair job of sharing these learning's with our audiences (we showed the display and facilitated workshops around Alberta, Saskatchewan, BC) policy analysis was not the goal of the workshops, instead we focused on poverty awareness. I believe this was an important element that was missing from the project.*

*When it comes to policy it is not a guarantee that you will change anything so the outcome may just be making a submission with recommendations - we cannot control how policy makers will respond. So have to be careful how you message outcomes.*

*I have found people generally interested in learning about policy but there are few avenues to go with the analysis once it is undertaken. Policy makers might be willing to do a focus group to say they had input but the follow up was very limited apart from times when the policy analysis was part of a policy development process. Public engagement however seems to be a long lost art at the federal and provincial level.*

Contributors expressed the importance of providing examples of successful policy change

*Within any group I try to tie their voiced concerns to policy. I will work to inform group members about jurisdictional responsibilities of different levels of gov't. I give many examples of how people have changed policy (because almost every group I have worked with thinks that "you can't change city hall"). I try to inform and educate about which policy impacts them the most. Sometimes no one is all that interested but occasionally group are and then magic happens!*

*People have to know why policy is important but that it is just a statement of political will for a period of time. People seem to reify policy and see it as 'the good book' and it is important for people to hear stories about policy being challenged or changed.*

Action and policy change were not the only impacts of PPA that contributors described. The impact of policy work was identified as an important variable in engaging people in policy analysis, and in assessing the quality of PPA. Contributors identified how the experience contributed to individual skills and confidence. Learning, recording the process, gaining confidence and consensus to act were some of the other impacts.

*Individual and collective learning, Sufficient consensus to act as a whole, Acting beyond the initial analytical session/s*

*Share knowledge and learning/s, Listen a lot – create individual and collective narratives*

*Let consensus and or tensions emerge – and capture them*

*Seek some sort of 'collaborative advantage' and if possible – action*

*I believe that for the community researchers there was a deepened understanding of the impact of policy on their lives.*

## **Sustainability**

Sustainability was strongly connected to relationships, the impact of the research, and the frequency of meetings. Building capacity for future policy analysis with participants was identified as an important contributor to sustainability.

*For the most part people with lived experience and/or students are very interested in contributing to discussions related to policy change. Policy has real life implications in a way that affects no other stakeholders (e.g. policy makers and to some extent service providers). So engagement has been a big success*

*Frequent meetings (weekly), developing a terms of reference with the group, letting the group set the ground rules (e.g. must be sober when attending meetings), and payment for services rendered.*

*Also, if you are respectful in your approach and sincere in your intentions this helps people feel they are actually contributing and want to stay engaged.*

*Bit of education on what policy is, how to do policy analysis and what the implications are - keeps people focussed on the topic. Also, small group exercises to 'practice' e.g. if you had \$100,000 and could create a feed the kids program, could provide a social worker for in home support for families at risk or could change provincial legislation to say anyone making less than a certain income gets free rent and/or groceries - how would you allocate your money to get the greatest impact?*

*It is important to engage everyone actively while creating some fun along the way.*

*it is a grass roots network that has grown from 6-125 villages and small communities through the internet*

*We also have meeting to plan next steps etc. these are open and are held every 3.r 4 months.*

*Other participation has been limited by the goals of the project and I seldom have attempted to prolong participation beyond the date agreed to.*

*Much of that time was spent maintaining my relationships with the researchers. I provided support, coaching, mentoring and believe I helped them uncover their unique skills that contributed to the work*

### **Facilitator skills**

The importance of patience and time as a resource in PPA was emphasized by all contributors.

*With sufficient time, skill and sincerity, an authentic knowledge-making process is possible.*

*Time is crucial. If you are in a hurry for whatever reason, then no methods are appropriate. If you are in hurry, the group might believe they are being manipulated and chances are they are right.*

*Patience, patience, patience Listen to what the group members are saying and try to identify key concerns and the accompanying policy, If you don't know, find out.*

*Try not to be too pushy unless people are really interested, policy scares people you have to approach cautiously.*

*Don't rush it, policy needs to be presented, discussed through a number of lenses.*

*Patience and time - keep focussed on the goal and bring people back to what you are after - still have to be open minded and allow the process to unfold organically - we cannot go in as 'experts' thinking we know the answer - that is what the group is there to help with.*

Translating was identified as a key skill for engaging a group in policy analysis.

*Policy is often perceived as boring, academic, political and irrelevant to "real" people's lives. Even social workers feel this way! The challenge is to make policy real and help people understand their private lives in the context of public policy. It is often not easy to read or understand and so a good deal of work needs to be done to make it plain language and accessible. Often the people most negatively affected by policy are least able to understand its impact.*

*Policy was "plain language" and researchers participated in power exercises where they were better able to understand the link. Workshops were created and discussed held to walk people through a given policy to increase their understanding.*

*Explain in short, plain language way what the policy says and how it is being implemented or how it is not.*

*In Canada, challenges occur when students are reluctant to engage power issues directly since they often have not been prepared to do so in their educational experience. Similar challenges occur abroad and compounded by language differences which can complicate communication. At the same time, global cultures often have more experience with direct political action (e.g. Philippines) and might share them if they feel safe.*

The importance of understanding context, for the group engaging in PPA and the policy itself was emphasised by contributors.

*Understand the Policy issue/question/problem/challenge/opportunity....*

*Understand and be transparent about your role as facilitator? Advocate? Analyst?*

*Know the group, Understand the context*

*The other real piece of advice from my history is 'DO THE RESEARCH' All too often policy analysis is just a bitch session and that does no one any good. Bitch in a controlled environment and then leave it. Mind you that almost never happens until people are engaged in data, or study through a lens.*

Delegating tasks was identified as a key skill in PPA and as having an integral role in participants developing confidence in applying their skills and identifying their strengths. Contributors described seeking a balance between what the facilitator can provide from their skill set and empowering participants through opportunities to contribute. This balance is described in the literature as well, as Somekh (1995) describe: "it is difficult to get the balance right [in negotiating the relationship between researcher/participants], but mutual respect, self-awareness, and honesty make good starting points" [...] "there is a difference between giving practitioners more control and burdening them with work someone else could do more easily on their behalf" (p. 346).

*I provided support, coaching, mentoring and believe I helped them uncover their unique skills that contributed to the work. For example the women enjoyed public speaking so I worked to arrange more opportunities to give presentations. One woman was a very strong writer and wrote the final report. I*

*provided very hands on help from driving the women to workshops, hauling AV equipment and the photo display to many different venues and ensuring everything worked well so that the women concentrated on their presentations. I did the "technical" part of our presentation (powerpoints with stats etc.).*

*Don't do it all at once. Set out the aspects to be studied and break it into segments. By doing this each member has a responsibility to the group and they become experts in their chosen segment.*

## **Conclusion**

In summary contributors gave useful practical advice on how to facilitate PPA, advice that is also supported in the literature. They emphasized the need for patience, not rushing the process, and identifying individual strengths. They identified the need to translate policy and demystify the policy analysis process by dividing up policy into manageable chunks, using plain language, and examining power dynamics. They suggested that frequent meetings and relationship building contribute to the sustainability of projects. They described the impacts of PPA at the individual as well as macro levels, and the importance of sharing results and working towards social change.

## Appendix C - Circle of Courage Results from Immersion Phase with Exemplary Quotes

Here are the quotes from the Immersion phase orgained under the four headings of the Circle of Courage (Brendtro, Brokenleg, & Van Bockern, 1990), which I shared with participants as a catalyst for discussion in the Reflection phase. The first theme is Belonging, followed by the sub-headings of connection to culture and range of needs.

### **Belonging [connection to culture, range of needs]**

- where do kids go for a sense of belonging?, mentoring opportunities, diversity
- Is the [agency] a good place or a bad place? Who defines this? What about a sense of belonging? Do we want them to belong here? Do we want middle class kids accessing? Is there a line? Youth more at-risk in community than the space –expectations are unique to the youth –Is a relationship enough to come downstairs [on-going relationships between YW and youth, is that a service provided by the drop-in?] –this doesn't exist, for a youth to go somewhere and belong
- I asked him 'where do you belong? I don't think he has an answer –we have coffee once a week, he's a young man, he shouldn't have time for that
- belonging, humans need this
- who would say they belong at the [agency]? Or [adult homeless shelter]? –people do go there to belong –so many problems, violence, still want that belonging –I used to be very sensitive to other people's judgements, then I said 'I don't care, it's not your life' –I resented their judgements, but I would 'go mom' on kids, example-he said 'I know I shouldn't hang out with them because they are in a gang', was so relieved to hear me say 'they are still your people'
- his natural supports, if you are a certain way, you will find people who are this way too–of course those are his people until he believes that he is worth more than that, then he can see that love is not abuse –the pretty woman syndrome of waiting to be rescued when you have to rescue yourself-YW I have this problem too!

#### **\*Connection to culture/spirituality**

- he has church
- spirituality is missing, connection to culture part of natural supports?

#### **\*Range of needs**

- this work should be recorded through this tool –capture different needs, including those youth with basic needs met
- values of [agency] –non-judgementalness-debt could be a variable and someone looks rich and is poor, how do wealthy families needing access to ID fit with diversity? –observing judgement but not acting on it, what need are they filling, how could they achieve this in other ways?
- different people use us differently –also lots of work calling other people

## **Mastery [relationship based, proud, changes over time, sustainable, transitions to adulthood, definition success]**

### **\*Relationship based**

- started when YW at a different agency, still call it by that name, think it is the same because the people are the same, wants to be a support in other people’s lives
- tool not being used arbitrarily, used if we have a relationship, example of someone just accessing ID fund, then we don’t need to ask these questions
- I have trouble linking the names with the relationships, good to expand relationship building to beyond kids you have an existing relationships with
- “regular” example-FASD high functioning, social skills, job, -not accessing basic needs but relationships with [agency]

### **\*Proud**

- we discussed unhealthy relationships, what if they think we don’t trust them to make good decisions for them[selves]?
- protective factors his job, loves it, feels proud of himself
- 3 agencies found similar learning [from first phase], infused into all programs, idea of mentorship, as natural as possible [supports]
- now wants to be a YW-I know a million kids have said this
- YW really impressed with this kid, got into SAIT [trades college], bought a car (sent me a photo-be proud of me!), working at [adult shelter] woodshop program, teaching others
- he has a tonne of family supports, just comes to check in/hug YW, wants us to be proud of him
- connected with dad, love/hate relationship with dad, doesn’t want to disappoint by saying he is drinking
- now uses his real name, his brother phoned and asked for advice
- comes here to show us how much he has grown and he is proud of who he is, he is hilarious
- she has a lot of natural supports, used to use us a lot, now she just comes to see doc and show off baby!
- kids can’t be afraid of disappointing workers, or they wont be able to tell us what is going on.

### **\*Change over time**

- stages of change
- pregnancy falls under medical needs, chronic conditions don’t increase acuity –for example kid with cerebral palsy,
- changes in drug use could be either extreme detox or escalation, scale records only change not quality of change
- I have deep love and deep hatred for the scale-I like the idea of measuring change over time, the idea of outcomes –the acuity will be high and then back down again as part of the process
- theory of change questions, requires supervision to follow youth over time
- how do you choose 6 months for follow up? 3 months not long enough, also don’t have the capacity to follow up with all
- I like it, it is consistent –good to see change, a youth can still be medium to high but captures change
- does it [how NS can help] change? [over life course]
- be more intentional-part of this is writing things down –show youth their PROGRESS, we took time to write down their perceptions –process in place for kids viewing files, need to remove other’s information, especially medical needs to be reviewed with a doctor
- changes captured through acuity scale –grounds the intentional working-refresh over time



–there is lots of cyclical movement

**\*Sustainability**

-financial readiness for independence –can they sustain it? This means choices, damage deposit

-how comprehensive should assessment be for this context [agency]

-page one is supposed to be ongoing conversations

-the doctor fills out the AISH medical application, two of the YW trained in this, walk with someone over time

-only measuring right now, what if it is the one off day in two weeks?

**\*Transitions to adulthood**

–transitioning to adult homeless community = accepting but not safe

-25 year olds referred to adult [agency] services up the street –need to say this is the last food hamper, they are comfortable here vs. in adult services when they have to book appointments, we need to find out the process so we can transition

-referred by family, ‘go to the [agency] and get AISH’, almost aged out

-he is aging out, he needs to think about this

-he has a few years connection with [agency], doesn’t come in as often as he used to, only coming when he needs us

-he’s 25, we really need to ask people in that age group who their people are

-cut ties with all services

–Is the [agency] a transition place?

-he is working regularly, if he starts drinking again then slippery slope, we tell him the change we see in him, he knows he is 22, how it can’t carry on, he needs to get his shit together,

-she has been accessing since she was 14 now 21, needs very different things now

**\*Definition Success**

-working towards goals, what are the kid’s goals? –resistance to the word goal, nothing they have done to block the goal, don’t like personal blame for systemic problems, self-esteem breaker, a set up –instead we use the word ‘wishes’

–the kids and us don’t always know how to respond in a way that’s healthy –before I used to talk about what a good youth worker I am or what a good program the [agency] is, but now it’s about HOW I help them better doing what THEY are doing, it is way harder and also way better rewards –if I do it for you then you will keep coming back to me to do it- more intense investment now/front loaded but giant return

-How do we define success? –YW feel betrayed and disappointed by kids relapse, let down when kids not doing well, Kids can fail and be safe, leave room for them to make mistakes–I stopped asking about wishes because the divide between success/failure makes me uncomfortable –how do we avoid assigning our goals for them? We have to avoid this, it is their life process, we can support them on their goals –for example all this value put on not doing drugs? Where is the harm reduction in that?

-their attachment is in crisis after experiencing life in care –help them survive or get through the day is success –examples of removing autonomy + success, my dad took credit for everything I did –kids give their successes away to us all the time, self-esteem, they think they are not worthy –I love climbing with kids because they can’t give it away, it is them –so I self-check, am I trying to take credit

-outcomes-at the beginning we asked ‘what is an indicator of success?’ –it cuts the relationships to say ‘if youth comes here less=success’ –means only crisis, stigma to access [agency]

-What the expectations are? What they are capable of? –the most harmful thing is not having expectations for them

## **Independence [relationship with self/identity, youth's perceptions]**

### **\*Relationship with self [Identity]**

- she said 'I have to love myself before I can love someone else' -
- [he is]working on identity, aboriginal but not status, gay, addiction, identity work most important, identifies as Scottish-he is searching for identity, work, trying on hats
- kids are searching for one person who can care, and they don't have it -who you are and who your people are is fluid, linked to identity
- he has intense chaotic always 911 relationships, he sees himself as the common bad factor, doesn't matter which drug he's using, sees himself as 'bad' and 'broken' -the common factor is alcohol, he wont allow himself to experience a world without alcohol, if he did he would see that he is not 'bad'

### **\*Youth's perceptions**

- I tried page one, they should choose to answer or not, kid gave one word answers, other YW explain her history of one word answers, when she sees form she shuts down
- he has family, don't know if he considers them supports,
- none of mental health distinguishes if mandated or voluntary to hospital-does the youth define it as a problem for MH & addictions?
- humans are bad at self-assessment, tension between inside perception and outside presentation - poodle that thinks they are a bulldog, as a coping mechanism, dealing with hopelessness
- youth's perception changes risk-how do they define their problem? Reaction to that relativity/comparison -not as bad as used to be/someone else -example of kids bickering being normalized, what we get used to -"doesn't want to live by herself, I'm too little"
- I hate someone's perception of their own acuity, problems are relative to how we see them - example kicked out is normalized for him, 8 times in 6 months, doesn't consider it stressful,; different for a kid who has never been kicked out before = would show the same on the scale.
- natural supports work after basic needs met -hard to see your own supports -we need to ask 'why don't you want to contact your dad?', who can you talk to about this? -example, she felt that she was burdening her dad, we did identify that she feels her school friends are like her 2<sup>nd</sup> family, she felt like it betrayed dad to feel this way, -she said it's going ok, but she looks like she is carrying a burden, she made a self-portrait with RIP on it, described stress as like pingpong balls in brain, wants to sleep at night, -teenage depression is a real issue, -talked about gratitude journal, yoga, art, exercise
- is this too much for page one?, no next level, [page one] grounding us in the youth's perceptions
- these questions are more important for kids growth -need this info for when they are breaking down/triggered-page one is starting the journey
- she wants a healthy partner but doesn't know what that is, has a fear of being alone
- I think it is a gift to live in my work, talked with a friend in prison, talked with my friend with a 17 year old daughter on the street, my friend is the mom, her perspective is that the daughter is spoiled, telling her there is another perspective, of how the daughter might have experienced her childhood
- couple-she got IUD, he talking to police about the pictures posted online, he knows who did it, she has a sponsor hasn't returned to treatment,-normalized-love is being beaten, sold on stroll-
- example of mental health and addiction interacting =flashback and self-medication/coping might be keeping them alive?

## **Generosity [strength based, boundaries, definition of safety, NS barriers to/gaps in]**

### **\*Strength based**

-are there strengths on page one?

–when creating file don't forget to record strengths and accomplishments

-[he is]very persistent

--protective factors –we want to build on that side –need to identify-know how they [youth] define it

### **\*Boundaries**

-makes mistakes and choices that they don't agree with, they say she can't live there, then they work it out –when the accident happened the family swept back in, now a process of setting boundaries, family relationships very tenuous, worried about the slippery slope that might result in her doing heroin again

-some values we have a responsibility to challenge, not ostracizing youth, but saying you can't do that here-such as racism/sexism –examples of boundaries-if youth is always high on meth, might come in high to get services, if you just chose to smoke a joint, you can come back tomorrow, -skinhead youth, good to have challenging conversations, he now has one-on-one with a YW who is black, give room to have these conversations, 'what do you know about gay people?'

-setting boundaries with her while YW away, normal boundaries are YW texts with her, she has two YW in her program for her supports but she is still attaching to us

-lying to her program about use because it threatens her housing to tell the truth, boundaries with YW support, if we got for an outing it will be to an AA meeting, not expecting worker to drop everything instead plan, she desperately wants to be sober, has done 7 months before

-new client –met girl who has past relationships with YW writing letters to other youth we know, both push boundaries about the other, they have never met but are saying they love each other in letters, he is in jail

-we are not that different from the youth, the struggles we have been describing are also what they face-situations, coping, addiction, self-change, awareness, navigating

–as teenagers, feel controlled by everyone, she is making those decisions, she is getting something from it, borderline personality disorder, there are rewards to crisis-attention, my smoking-I know the consequences, there are also benefits for me how do we deal with attention seeking? –really careful about time in the space, does she feel rejected?

–can feel the attachment/that this is not a professional conversation –who is responsible for the info?-for example the difference between saying 'think about who you are safe with' instead of give me the info, don't have to give workers the answer, just think about it

-Are these questions too deep? I choose to stay away from questions this deep, I don't want them to get too attached –we talk about these topics but not so intentionally, I found it scary, requires a foundational relationship

### **\*Definition Safety**

-what becomes normal when someone is terminally ill, level of stress becomes normal –what is safety, how defined,–link to natural supports

-being done on paper, when I go to remand I refer to notes before I go in –should we transfer this info to computer, how update? –tracking info from page one for outcomes, consider safety for confidentiality of YW having notes on kids –need to return to page one as a grounding –opposed to the idea of having files on kids that they can't see –you shouldn't write things down that you wouldn't share with the kid

-I'm a million chances girl, I see the number of people banned increasing, those are two of my favorite boys, we weren't consistent as staff so kids couldn't hold it together because it was too much work, we made it unsafe for him, people were afraid to hold him accountable, this is us failing him –if we are afraid of people it is unsafe for them

-I use fear to keep kids safe, When I took him to skatepark, took him to Fish Creek, told him there were mountain lions in the area –stranger danger, my mom taught me to fear –if you make friends here you are going to die –she said she got it, -do you have examples of how this might result in your death?–example of her smoking crack because it was passed to her, it is harm reduction for decision making, provide safe environment –what do we think as a team of using fear to teach, example your penis will fall off if you get that STI –once they figure out it's not true doesn't work anymore, would affect relationship –she could die, what i was telling her wasn't a lie, could die not did-but these relationships could turn into natural supports, should we block that? –ask questions, get the youth to name the consequences –balance between when to hold hand and when to make room for failing safely –intricate process, they are not going to learn from our mistakes, our own mistakes stick, experience it-‘what are you going to do?, what do you think is going to happen?’

–who you feel safe with? -can be teased in loving relationships and it doesn't hurt-about intension, not trying to hurt you –are there words that are offensive in some context and not others, one of my friends vs. someone yelling it out of a car

I asked him ‘when have you been safe?’he said with his old foster family but that he hasn't been safe in quite some time

– [in the staff team, I] appreciate safe space where we can agree to disagree, even if I seem aggressive, I am listening and I do think about it

-Victim/Aggressor is not either/or, -he's already tainted, seeking those relationships, -bad ass friends to help her feel safe, that is what you need to make it –she wants acceptance –perpetrator tipping point, easier for her to go that way here –why so black and white? –could say that about 75% of the kids here –the space is not for her, but it works for some people –was a huge outcome for her not to access us in the crisis last week, -i'm not here to judge who needs and doesn't need what we are offering, just offer it, we can provide services in the community as well

#### **\*NS barriers to**

-what about relational losses and acuity? –partners breakup/parents die/kids apprehended  
 -looking at the strings attached to help –admitting dependence/being punished for asking for help/being vulnerable –especially with family/partners –they can't help with everything on the list/the limits of help –medicine wheel of kinds of help, for example might be able to help with basic needs but not emotional or vice versa–what is the difference between family and community? Sometimes can get physical help but harder to get/find emotional support  
 -new youth, YW talked to family in red deer,–her sister found them an apartment for a month, family cares about her/worried

-has family in states, can't go because of charges, hates Canada,

-connected to her sisters but they have addictions [no sober environment],

-has trouble connecting in community because of her anxiety

#### **\*NS gaps in**

-ID fund-getting more entire families looking for ID, a mom brining all her kids, from teenagers to babies for birth certificates, -expensive process, navigating system, printing form –a special needed service, happening more [higher needs], UW would not have funded ID unless private donor did first

- she acknowledges that we kept her alive, she now realises that she didn't have resources in her family
- [agency] paid for her work training [pro-serve] –used to take all the stuff from the back, now has a cheque she hasn't picked up
- couple wants to be together, he has barriers to treatment, couple fights and separates regularly, concentrating on medical, housing, pregnancy, is it a wise choice to live with drinking partner who gets beat up? He missed the ultrasound because of his drinking
- she has ongoing emotional/physical needs for medical attention, wanted rides to medical appointments, no one in her life could drive her, YW said not a service we can provide
- [NS]friends with guy who can't come to the [agency]
- kid called for \$10 canteen for hygiene items, I wasn't able to make it that weekend, asked the boyfriend to send money, he doesn't really have money -2 other YW would not make the phone call to ask the boyfriend, youth did not present him as the boyfriend to other YW, just he will answer your call, the barriers of phone calls from prison, is this natural supports work to try and access non-professional supports?
- she is pregnant, a lot of family but they are struggling [poverty],
- doesn't know a lot about supports



## Appendix D – First Interpretation of the Preparing the Ground Phase

Slide 1



## Safety for Front Line Youth Workers to Participate in Policy Analysis

**Stasha Huntingford**, Doctoral Candidate; **Christine Walsh**, PhD.; **Meaghan Bell**, Manager Research and Policy Calgary Homeless Foundation



Slide 2

## Introduction

Multiple benefits have been identified in the literature for front line youth practitioners engaging in policy work, including:

- reduced feelings of helplessness (Weiss-Gal & Peled, 2009) and burnout (Hamama, 2012; Harlow, 2004) among human service workers (Heinze, 2013; Ruff & Baron, 2012);
- policy which is more likely to be adopted in practice (Barkham & Mellor-Clark, 2003) and
- improving outcomes by focusing on environmental influences (Heinze, 2013; Newbury, 2011; Ruff & Baron, 2012).



Slide 3

## Introduction



- This research was designed to contribute to a deeper understanding of the barriers and facilitating factors to engaging front line youth practitioners in policy analysis
- We sought to explore homeless-serving sector front-line youth worker's experiences with engaging in policy development

## Methods

### Data Collection

- Focus groups, which are defined as carefully planned group discussions, organized to explore a set of specific issues, with the goal to learn more about perceptions, feelings, attitudes and ideas (Chiu, 2003; Kahan, 2001).
- Dürrenberger, Kastenholz and Behringer (1999) found focus groups useful in generating practical knowledge about complex policy issues.
- The connection between the private and public spheres is recognized within focus group methodology (Kitzinger, 1994)
- Focus groups allow researchers to examine the importance of context, enable connections to be made between individual and collective experiences, facilitate challenges to dominant beliefs, and provide space for reflexivity (Pini, 2002).

### Data Analysis

- Following the recommendations of Charmaz (2010) the lead authors began with initial coding of the notes from the focus groups, identifying possible themes in the data and remaining open to new themes emerging.
- During this phase of coding one quote might appear under many themes as data is compared and separated into categories.
- The process then moves into more focused coding to determine the adequacy of codes and assign labels to categories of data that summarizes and accounts for each piece of data (Charmaz, 2010).



- Participants were recruited through multiple agency email lists and a presentation at a monthly meeting for youth serving agencies.
- The study received approval by the University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board, and all participants provided written informed consent.

Slide 5



## Results

### Micro Level

- **Practitioner skills**
  - **Ability to make connections between policy and practice**
  - **Creativity in policy problem solving**
  - **Navigating risk**
- "in crisis work, some [practitioners] are not aware of macro world, [or] links to how policy affects work/youth", & "once you look/are aware [of the connection] you can't go back to ignoring it".
- "creativity for solutions [is] higher among front line, we know the problems and are motivated to try new ways".
- "accept being fired and just mov[e] on to the next job – the good thing about not making very much [money] is that you have less to lose, [you] could get a job at [a coffee shop] for the same money, better benefits!".


Slide 6

### Micro Level

- **Practitioner context**
  - **Uniquely situated**
  - **Strongly motivated**
  - **Parallel between oppression of youth and practitioners**
  - **Impact of unsafe experiences**

### Results

- "we have the experiential knowledge to inform policy" & "we see how policy affects our work and our clients".
- "[we] see direct impact in improving for youth, motivated by obviousness of the problem, example: bus tickets obvious need".
- "for youth it is not seen as a resource because they [...] don't know if it is worth the risk, what if get punished for raising issue? –isn't that interesting that youth and workers have that fear in common?"
- "been there, done that, got nothing out of it" & "we have been taught our perspective is not valued".

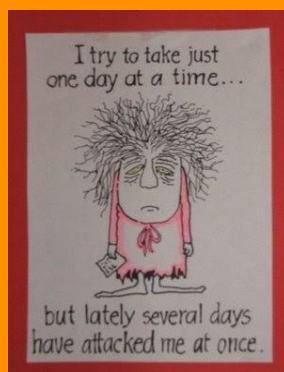


Slide 7

## Results

### Mezzo Level

- **Institutional policies**
  - Opportunities for on-going education
  - Promotion and benefits
  - Implementation/discretion
  - Overworked/overwhelmed



- "benefits for the agency if workers understand WHY meeting targets/program design, better referrals/navigation, justifies raises, informed front line can become informed management".
- "how does the system promote the passion? [It is] reinforced, people who question the system are not promoted to management"
- "example no food if returning late, need food in stomach to work with support, -workers need to hide fact that they gave lunch - makes the work underground, puts burden on workers, attaches shame to doing the right thing".
- "our system catches everyone failed by other systems, examples: health, mental health, justice, children's services -there are many holes in the safety net and all this falls on youth workers/non-profits [which results in] overwhelming" & "no reflection time and no debriefing time".

Slide 8

## Results



**Mezzo Level**

- **Organizational culture**
  - **Quality supervision**
  - **Leadership turnover**
  - **Relationships with managers**
  - **Relationships between practitioners**
  - **Sanctions**
  - **Silencing**

- "having someone want to talk/listen/facilitate, making space and time for the discussion"
- "good supervisors leaving agency [results in] workers leav[ing] as well".
- "management gets scared of front line –but engagement/shared creates power".
- "I have never seen an industry where we are so mean to each other, judgemental, negative, we need safety where does all this judgement come from?"
- "fear of being fired" & "fear of being blacklisted as a shit disturber/trouble maker"
- "token faux consultation experience makes us wary (examples town halls after decisions already made, tea with CEO-awkward when there is a concern raised and the concern is systematically dismissed and diminished".

## Results

### Macro Level

- Gender
- Accountability
- Challenging dichotomy
- Experiencing policy efficacy

- "don't bring up race ever or you will be excluded...or class...or gender"
- "sending kids to the shelter as punishment/break for staff, [it is] not right for homelessness to be used as a consequence"
- "Social work judges oil and gas, doesn't help anyone - business should be involved to normalize/share problems rather than charity model"
- "efficacy of experiencing your voice being heard [facilitates future involvement with policy analysis]" & "[you try] if you believe you can make a difference".

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## Results

### Macro Level

- Relational work
- Relationships with funders
- Relationships between agencies
- Relationships with the larger community



- "not being able to talk with clients after client or worker leaves agency, no follow up, disruption of relationship, no continuity of care or follow up"
- "a lack of trust/respect/acknowledgment for front line who are involved in macro work – cutbacks make it difficult to speak -existing programs being cut makes it difficult to ask for more"
- "management doesn't want workers to say anything/reveal secrets/reality to other agencies"
- "NIMBY[Not In My Backyard] affects how agencies function, hide things, only present good to community so no debate about ethics"

Slide 11

## Results

### Outcomes of engaging front line practitioners in policy

- Improved practice, policy and outcomes for youth
  - Increased ownership of policy decisions
  - Increased job satisfaction
- "helps you know your role, make more appropriate referrals, importance of better assessment [results in] better outcomes" & "services would be cheaper, less turnover, less hierarchy, these are the benefits to engaging front line"
  - "ownership over what we do, which leads to more engagement"
  - "increased work satisfaction, by providing opportunities for growth and learning"



## Slide 12

## Discussion


How does your research contribute to preventing or ending homelessness?

- Nurturing safety for front line practitioners to engage in policy analysis addresses an issue that contributes to burnout and negatively affects outcomes for youth
- Engaging front line workers in policy analysis leads to policy that is more likely to be adopted in practice as well as policy that is informed by environmental influences



## Discussion

- **Micro**-safe space for discussing policy to nurture creativity/engagement
- **Mezzo**-agency level safe space, lateral violence
- **Macro**-policy efficacy, gendered care work, relationship based work



- Build an organizational culture that supports on-going education; cooperation between management and front line; providing quality supervision; and rewarding critical feedback on policy issues.
- Offer promotions and benefits for front line practitioners; ensure diverse caseloads, set aside time for policy work as well as reflection; and address turnover in both front line and management staff
- Recognize the context of relationship based work and how front line burnout is related to outcomes for youth

## Appendix E - Notes from Two Planning Meetings with Sam

I took notes during two planning meetings where Sam and I identified priorities for our conversation, which is included in the discussion chapter.

### **First Meeting of the Co-researchers**

-when Sam was on strike-we shocked people when we crossed our own picket line for the kids. We were not qualified as an essential service, certainly not paid as an essential service, yet the youth workers felt accountable to the youth – we have both noticed that people who do not feel accountable to youth get promoted –all our examples when we get called out on ‘it’s not about you’ for example Heather, accountable to system, accountable to boss, hierarchy, to being a good employer, but not specific to youth work, could be any job **Accountability: What did the research teach us about accountability that could change actions to improve services? How do we nurture people/agencies/systems who/that feel/build accountability to the youth?**

-definition of policy analysis -let’s analyze this table, then that’s where it stays, that’s why I put in title – so analysis is not relevant if it changes nothing, -Sam still finds policy not relevant –partly because they tried and couldn’t change it, but mostly because policy is based on nothing [not grounded in practice], it’s ass-covering, CYA-stories about first time hearing this term -I’m not gonna follow it (ungrounded rules), dis-connected from work –If analysis means digging in, pulling off layers, curiosity = then we are very interested! [Curiosity?] Policy analysis: **Why Sam identified as co-researcher and others didn’t?** - didn’t connect policy with us, reason Sam identifies as co-researcher is because of ENS

**Managers, why we hate them (ourselves)/Challenging Professional Patty**– running from being manager, Sam’s story about ENS, the manager factor, what we put up with for the kids, moments at the vet without partners, verses team at work, identity. -defining our own identity Sam: I’m not the person I was told I was at the [agency], at hairdresser saw a team outside of youth work have a functional team, skill in helping people become what they want to be, at this place they stay for 20 years, Sam’s story of what they learned at the hairdresser break: -appreciated, acknowledged, work own business at station, autonomy within, pods of space close but don’t interfere, ‘client’ is ok when you have a contract, accountability, have choice to switch, they are in a power position, it can work –the beans story **Identity: Did our actions change as a result of the research?** What I am doing with what happened to me?

-can upper-middle class people be a safe space for homeless kids?

**How could funding/policy be different so that a program/agency could be genuine?** Sam has never experienced this utopia, Stasha has but then eroded, unsustainable and crushed, [...] most recent try, we learned that even if we exploit ourselves the system crushes it -in Sam’s own family, negotiation, thinks

horrible parent, being the leader of the anarchists, when [...] left helped to believe that it could be possible -betrayal, expectations and hope, other people don't hurt you, serenity prayer

**Times kids have felt betrayed by /painful truth time** because I told her the truth, how youth workers are not her friend, she tested it and confirmed, part of the dream that we sell, if I found out that you were being paid this whole time that we were hanging out, navigating the transition, the camping control story

**Challenging dichotomy between youth and adults** identify with teenagers, car expectations, I'm fucking broke, [kid] learning to drive, stretching themselves, in frustration tears, this was my car 6 months ago, dive in is the only way to be 16, -the strength of youth, us not being impulsive enough when we do presentations

**Risk and fear**-at which point do we step in? When do we try and 'make them', short amount of time to do youth goals, Stasha camping story

**The fun of passing** –good theme because we disagree! Could talk about under defining our own identity? -trying to live the straight life, Sam's friend who manages a building, hoarding not logical, don't fight it, expecting resistance

Process: Email the notes, next time we will finalize categories and questions. Theme important, the story grounds it, puts it in the earth, presentation at the church, [audience member] asked about a story = understanding

-identify the power dynamic as different not necessarily unfair, process, mother/father benefits,

**Ideas that Stasha would like to cover if we have interest/time:**

Stigma was a big theme in terms of systemic oppression. What kinds of stigma do we face and how do we resist and cope with this?

How have our actions changed as a result of what we learned in this research?

What would we do differently or try next time?

How did this research impact our relationship?

## Second Meeting of the Co-researchers

Notes about the notes from the first meeting: it is more people that aren't **accountable** to the youth want to be promoted –kinda had to, age thing, supervisor started being younger than you with less experience and not accountable to the youth –why we accept [mutual colleague] –Lateral violence, ruined word [manager] bullying, power -hairsalon, he told me I would never move up because I'm breeder said the gay man -parenting with the door open, being **accountable** to my community, only works if your community does accept child abuse, -we crave that kind of youth work – hierarchy, level [we work at] is community, reciprocal, no above or below [Stasha], -back to utopia not existing,

**Transformation**-Sam: I will never do youth work the same way again –neither of us are going back [to youth work] –it is family work not just youth work, maybe not talking to parents but thinking of them, -ens identifying supports, -sad about not going back -in the elevator, with kid from school asking about his sister, he says 'she's a good natural support for me'

**Painful professional truth time**-telling the truth about people who are paid, I would pretend/felt that I was their friend but I was being paid, think that they [youth] are family, feel love feelings, -who is their real family? Who is at their head table at wedding? Professional is only doing it right now but gotta be thinking about it, -Stasha being in individual society trying to think about community

**What we have learned from our privilege**-We are both very extremely judgemental, -met this woman volunteering, [she was] lying about big obvious things, saying the r word, I said to myself [Sam] "just leave it Sam", reaction to her saying a racial slur compared to [mutual friend who is from the group being slurred], this sounds like white rage/fragility –it is the first time we [both White] have heard a racist micro-aggression all day, but [mutual friend] probably deals with it all the time, -we have the expectation of justice Stasha: stubbing the toe all the time might make you notice the pain less/underreact, but doesn't mean that it doesn't hurt

-invited to the meeting by Sam made all the difference in the research –Stasha explain why[made a difference] and Sam **why did you invite me/what problem did it solve?**

-what would we change next time, location for the research next time [one example that Stasha wrote about]–but imagine the benefit to the uni of having people from reality up there! –class war

? there is nothing we could have done to push/implement [the policy at the agency]-**painful truth time** - maybe this change will happen in ten years, maybe it will seem normal, it will not be marginalized, it will not be radical –utopia that we [don't] believe in

-when we find the new great thing, the epiphany, we want it to be shared, sometimes this [urgency] doesn't allow for other people's process -examples parenting for Sam and teaching for Stasha. We want to share the process more/better **what we would do differently next time**

**-the reason that we did the research** –we pursue self-transformation –curiosity requires braver, then you change, might find out that you have to change –then you have to change all the policies

**-what is [the use of] policy?** Sam: policy is not irrelevant – all transactions need to be witnessed, then second rule, everyone needs to witness this –ie. bus tickets, **Authority**-go ahead and chop down the tree where the kids meet [to smoke], the kids will still gather!! F you–makes me mad, Myles Horton story - Darth Vader leadership from the research – what does it look like when we support youth but not their goals or tactics? Stasha: Post office story, -goal of the rule -bureaucracy, what I think sw is, afraid to make a decision but at the same time retaining power-over the decision

**We didn't have youth workers/Labels and stigma**-I would have known all these labels, known I was at-risk, didn't have anyone to tell us learning disability/gifted, define self and possibilities –had dance, friends –had nerd, school and river –parents had issues but I knew that I was loved and supported – Neither of us had youth workers

**Why did we do this research? What is in it for me?** About our relationship, Stasha gets phd, talk about in public, -Sam gets validation, everything that I did –welcome to your defense, evidence, neglect is harder to prove –prove [intent] meant to hurt you –reminds Stasha of trying to prove neglect, -might always feel that away about everything,-always fighting –protection/openness –are we more or less open with youth work? Can't separate having aged 22 years, 22 year olds really are friends and peers but now we are older

Process-set timer for ten minutes six topics then 10 minutes to wrap up (70 minutes)

- 1) **Why did we do the research?**
- 2) **Why did Sam invite Stasha to observe the meetings/what problem did this solve?**
- 3) **What is [the use of] policy?**
- 4) **How do we navigate accountability?**
- 5) **How do we navigate Professional Patty/authority/stigma?**
- 6) **What would we do differently next time [in youth work and research]?**