

Housing Families, Restoring Hope

Trinity Pearle Harris-Fulmer

Dr. Forrest Inslee

GLST 5972

24 April 2019

This thesis project is submitted as part of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, International Community Development. The writing found in this document includes excerpts from Community Development, Project Management, Social Entrepreneurship, Research for Social Change, Fieldwork, Program Evaluation, Spirituality, Culture, and Social Justice, Leadership, and Social and Environmental Justice.

“I’m always wishing for something amazing, but when your life is shit then it aint no trade in. So, put me in your books, so you know what it’s like to live a life not knowing what a normal life’s like. Put a label on my head so you know what it’s like not knowing what a normal life’s like.”

- Keith Stanfield -

**Table of Contents**

**Introduction.....4-6**

*Thesis statement*

*Biological Families and Housing Issues*

*Foster Families and Housing Issues*

**Why Housing Is a Prevalent Issue Within the Current Foster Care System.....6-10**

*Behavioral Problems*

*Re-integration Problems*

**Rose Hill Cottages – Churchome Case Study.....10-11**

**Proposed housing project.....11-15**

*Services Provided*

*Bistro – Work Study*

*Hiring Unique Staff*

**Timeline.....15-17**

**Conclusion.....17-18**

**Works Cited.....19-20**

## **Introduction**

Within the foster care community, one of the largest issues is coming up with successful housing models and techniques that keep families together without enabling them to continually rely on others for support. The current system is overrun; we lack the number of foster care homes needed, and many children and youth are falling through the cracks. We have transitioned from a time of orphanages and asylum centers to foster homes. Since the early 1900's, we have accepted these forms of orphan care without pressing forward to a more effective and multifunctional system. Too many times the state focuses on the child, or the foster parent, or the biological parent; rarely do you see an organization successfully create a model that serves all three individuals. There is a significant need for systemic change.

The number one reason children and youth enter foster care is because of neglect. In Washington state the main reason for neglect is substance abuse – specifically opioids. Through substance abuse many are struggling with a lack of proper housing. According to Harburger and White, Washington state could save upwards of \$38 million if we use funding to provide housing and services to at risk families versus using all funding towards the foster care system and the services provided through that system.

Studies show that at least two-thirds of parents whose children are eventually removed have had substance abuse problems that led to them losing housing. Many individuals working in child reform “...argue that neglect is just another word for poverty” (Beam 29). Many of the problems associated with neglect are a result of financial instability. Harburger and White assert that “approximately 30% of children in foster care are there primarily due to a lack of housing” (495). The majority of homeless parents who have children in care are single parent households, predominately female led, in their twenties, with two or more children under the age of six.

Contributing to the issue, three-fourths of homes that are eligible for housing vouchers do not receive them due to a lack of funding.

Not only is housing a major issue for biological parents, it is also an issue that the state is trying to solve within foster care as well. I spoke to Mark Gordon who is a pastor and long-term foster parent. Mark Gordon and his wife specifically take in the “tough cases.” These include children and youth with behavioral issues and teenagers. Gordon explained that the biggest problems in foster care are “for sure not enough families. I think there is a real lack of training and a real lack of support... the system is overwhelmed.” With such a high onset of children coming into care, it is extremely important to begin preventative services for families who lack proper support.

To help meet the needs of the currently broken foster care system in Washington State, we need to search for new, alternative ideas for housing. This can be accomplished by finding the best practices in pre-existing housing models, advocating for the creation of new models, and working to make the system more flexible for new initiatives. By providing housing and services for at risk families, we can reduce the number of children entering foster care and save the state money that in turn can be used for the children and youth who are already in care. This thesis will include a proposal for a new housing project as an example of the solutions that will be addressed. This housing project will help at-risk families stay together and get the support, services, and care needed for successful parenting. In the book *Engaging Globalization*, Bryant Myers argues:

We must remember that everyone is in need of transformation – we ourselves, the poor and the church. We are all on a journey. Working toward a relationship of mutual

spiritual accountability with local churches is part of what it means to be holistic in taking both the gospel and the context seriously. (67)

I am proposing a housing complex that would reduce the number of children coming into care, which would lower the amount of foster homes needed and reduce the high number of cases that social workers are in charge of. Keeping families together in a healthy family unit should always be the main goal.

### **Why housing is a prevalent issue within the current foster care system**

Within foster care there is a lack of housing for children and youth. As I have mentioned above, biological families often have a difficult time finding housing. The state then considers a lack of proper housing as neglect and these children enter care. However, the lack of foster parents creates a system that tries to place children in any homes they can find. Many foster parents sign up to do foster care with expectations that do not match the children who are placed with them. Getting that “perfect match” in a foster family is slim to none; “in fact, most matches do fail: about seventy percent of all foster children in this country who have been in care more than two years have been moved three or more times” (Beam 89). With social workers being overworked and those in the Department of Child, Youth, and Families (DCYF) being overtasked, it creates a sense of urgency in quickly training new foster parents. However, the rate at which people are becoming foster parents is continually declining. A lack of homes creates a cycle of continual displacement for those in care which ultimately creates and worsens behavioral and mental health problems. One study shows that more than half of those in care experienced anxiety, depression, drug dependence, or PTSD and that twenty percent experienced multiple problems while being in care (Rivera and Sullivan 189). When I spoke with Mark Gordon about his experiences working with teenagers and youth with behavioral issues, he

agreed that behaviors worsen as children and youth have more placements. Gordon expounded on this idea by stating “the one thing kids thrive on, is security and stability...its very destructive for kids to have different placements”. Many of the behavioral problems children and youth in care are facing is because of the trauma from being removed from their family.

Through my fieldwork and interviews I found that a common denominator among families was a lack of adequate housing. This impacted the decision of the children being removed and also affected DCYF’s decision of giving the children back to the biological parents. I conducted my fieldwork at *A Place Called Hope* in Gig Harbor, WA. I was a case aide for this non-profit that worked alongside the state to help those in foster care. My job was to transport children and youth in care from foster families to court ordered visits with their biological families. During the visits I was required to supervise and make notes on the interactions between parents and the children. After a few weeks of visits, I was able to create relationships with the biological parents and children. This allowed me to interview and ask them questions. All of which impacted my thesis and ultimately the housing model I am proposing.

During my fieldwork I met with two children, Kate and Charlie<sup>1</sup> on a weekly basis and took them to visits with their parents. One of the things the foster parents wanted to know is if their parents had any tips on how to deal with the tantrums and behavioral issues they were experiencing on a daily basis. I spoke to the biological mom, Heather<sup>2</sup>, about this problem. She argued “before this, my kids never had this problem. We didn’t have problems with huge tantrums.” I then spoke to another family about this concept of behavioral problems getting continually worse once their child entered care. One biological mom of a pre-teen, Karen<sup>3</sup>, talked

---

<sup>1</sup> When last names are not used it is for the protection of identity and the names are pseudonyms.

<sup>2</sup> Pseudonym used for privacy.

<sup>3</sup> Pseudonym used due to individual wanting to remain anonymous.

to me about her concerns with her son. She told me that “he has never been like this; I’m really getting worried about him. They transferred him to another home, and it means he had to start a brand-new school... he said the kids are picking on him and he had just gotten settled in at his last placement. He has always been happy and talkative to me... now he barely talks to me and the only reason I know something’s wrong is because he keeps posting on Instagram about how the system is messed up and how the social workers are useless.” Another child I worked with was in his tenth foster home. There is no end to constant placement changes that happen while children and youth are in care, which ultimately impact them negatively. This is all on top of the stress and trauma of being removed from their biological families. Aimee Harris, a foster mom expounded on this concept of trauma:

The longer children languish in foster care, the more their behaviors become disruptive. Every new disruption in their lives makes it that much harder to heal and retrain the brain on not to act in survival mode (flight/fight/freeze). Lack of permanency disrupts healthy attachments and it causes severe mental, emotional, and at times, physical development. Kids deserve to have a family. Every. Single. One.

In Washington state a permanent home should be in place by the time the child has been in care for two years. This means they should have a permanent foster home, an adoptive placement home, or be back with biological family. By the two-year mark, if the court deems it appropriate, biological parents’ rights should be taken away as well; giving the adoptive placement the opportunity to adopt the child or youth in care. There is such a huge backlog of parental rights termination hearings that it often takes upwards of two to four years. This leaves children in limbo within the system for an extended period of time.



Children and youth in foster care have many different needs. Some children and youth need therapy, others go into juvenile detention centers, and others are in residential treatment centers. Different departments deal with each “special need” a child/youth presents. On top of that, many children and youth are listed under private agencies that work alongside the state as well. These private agencies work with the state, but are their own separate organization. This creates even more communication problems. Harris argued that “the need for more housing continues to be a problem because the state and private agencies are not providing enough awareness.” Together, the entire system is lacking because they are not working together. Petra Kuenkel, author of *The Art of Leading Collectively: Co-Creating a Sustainable, Socially Just Future* explains “getting the balance right among formal agreements, plans, rules of participation, and unstructured human encounter is paramount” (2943). The lack of communication between departments is causing great harm to those in care. The harm is so great that when children and youth end up going back with their biological family, re-integration is difficult due to the trauma they not only experienced while with their biological parents but also while being a ward of the state. Collective leadership, where we combine new leadership skills to involve all the different departments and individuals working within an organization, could change the communication within the departments for the better. Including the families and children/youth in the change process is also essential. Myers explores this concept of poverty and Christianity by articulating:

Our point of departure for a Christian understanding of poverty is to remember that the poor are people with names, people to who God has given gifts, and people with whom and among whom God has been working before we even arrived. (106)

This would ultimately help children and youth to get the services they need to be successful and will lower stress among the departments.

### **Rose Hill Cottages – Churchome Case study**

As I began my initial research on foster care and the housing problem, I began to look into group homes and different housing models trying to combat this issue. Bornstein and Davis, who are authors of *Social Entrepreneurship: What Everyone Needs to Know* assert “for change to happen, new institutions and new spheres of power would need to be created” (10). One of the most dynamic and inclusive housing models I found was that of Rose Hill Cottages. Rose Hill Cottages is a housing complex that is sustained by Churchome in Kirkland, WA. It was developed in 2007 for foster families who are licensed through the Churchome foster program. I spoke to Cheryl Haskins who has her Master’s in Business and is the Executive Director of City Ministries Child Placement Agency that works as a non-profit in conjunction with the state to find homes for those in foster care. Haskins explained the vision of Rose Hill Cottages as “a community where people who are around foster care are around others who are doing foster care.” Rose Hill Cottages is one of three divisions under City Ministries. The other two divisions are a Child Placement Agency and a school.

The housing model is a community of twenty-two single family homes that have between three and five bedrooms each and leases ranging between \$1,600 and \$2,500 per month with a one-year lease for foster families. I asked Haskins to describe what the housing model for Rose Hill Cottages looks like. Haskins proclaimed “our idea is to have a community where foster families can live, not to manage them. Children in foster care need normalcy. Allowing relationships to form more organically.” According to Haskins the retention rates for foster parents has gone up because of the services they provide to families. Haskins argued that they

provided “placement, monthly health and safety visits, court, doctor appointments, visits, and our case managers. Our organization does visitation and transport.” This housing community has successfully created a program where foster families feel connected and supported which has resulted in more successful rates of retention as well as a decrease in constant placement changes for the children in their care. Through this housing complex and unique program set up, children and youth have had both success in foster homes and in reintegrating back into their biological families.

Similar to the Rosehill Cottages model, the housing concept I am proposing would house at-risk families, provide the services Haskins talked about above, and offer extra support services such as a daycare, a bistro, and rehab services. This would allow families to stay together. I argue that, ultimately, the behavioral issues that so many children and youth are facing while in care would be reduced, and the need for more foster homes would be null and void. As I mentioned above, this model would save the state money and give social workers and those working in the department more resources and time to spend on children and youth who are currently in care.

### **Proposed housing project**

The housing project will include a large housing complex located within a suburb in the northern Edmonds/Lynnwood, Washington region. This housing center will be a brand new and dynamic housing facility for families. Bornstein and Davis explain “in wealthy democracies, social entrepreneurs spend as much time renewing old institutions as they do building new ones” (44). In the epi-center there will be a large community center. The housing unit would allow for five families to live there. So, at most ten adults and roughly estimated, twenty-five kids would be present within this center. The center will include all of the services needed. The services will

include by-law, required services for both parents and their children. These services will include healthcare, occupational therapy, physical therapy, parenting classes, and drug/rehab classes. Parents and children would be required to participate in all of the services that DCYF and the court has ordered. Failure to do so would result in the removal of children and parents having to leave the housing center. The project will have on call directors who can help parents when issues arise. As part of their services, parents are required to meet regularly with social workers. There will be multiple on-call social workers who will also be at the center for any questions, concerns, or emergencies that may arise. This housing project will be one of the only of its kind to offer all required and supportive services to biological families and their children. Those who qualify will be families who have had experience with DCYF in the past and are on the brink of losing their children. DCYF would then give these parents the option of moving into the housing complex and doing court ordered services or they would have their children removed and put into care. Tom and David Kelley, authors of *Creative Confidence* assert “empathy means challenging your preconceived ideas and setting aside your sense of what you think is true in order to learn what actually is true” (90). The goal of this housing system is to keep families together, lowering the number of children who enter foster care and lessening the amount of homes they are put into.

The biggest resource will be finding a housing complex that is for sale and within our price range based on the funds we receive. The next largest resource we would need is employees to help run the programs within the complex. A volunteer led board of directors would be in place to help find employees. We would need to hire a program director, assistant directors, social workers, drug counselors, occupational therapists, physical therapists, psychologists, baristas, and childcare workers. Our funding would come from federal and state

contracts and grants as well as private donations through fundraising. If approved, the non-profit organization *Love Recklessly* would be willing to support and maintain the housing complex. They would provide the volunteer board of directors and the program director. The timeline on page 15 will show an estimate of how the housing complex will be initiated.

One of the primary goals of the housing project is to give mentoring services to the biological parents who are a part of the housing program. Whitten argues “a mentor can help a mentee learn almost immediately from mistakes or potential mistakes, rather than hope a person learns after months or years of making the mistakes” (19). The multiple coordinators both on call and within the housing complex give families the help and support they need as at-risk families. These coordinators act as mentors for the biological parents who are trying to become better parents for their children.

The foster care system is bombarded with a high increase of children coming from low income areas with a history of neglect. Katie Willis, author of *Theories and Practices of Development* explain that the International Labour Organization (ILO) categorizes basic needs as “basics of personal consumption – food, shelter, clothing; access to essential services” (104). Proper housing is one area that child welfare workers are constantly working to address. There are many different things that contribute to a lack of housing:

Such as poverty; domestic violence; the loss of youthful parents through addiction, illness, abandonment, incarceration, or death; and an increase in homelessness, family child welfare workers are increasingly confronted with the growing inability of families to acquire and maintain safe, permanent housing. (Cohen et al., 511)

To be able to maintain accountability and keeping the apartments/townhomes clean and in good shape, parents within this housing center will be required to pay rent. At the center of the housing community would be a bistro for parents to work at part time. It will also help give these adults value and a higher self-confidence. Kelley and Kelley articulate that we need to “pay attention to signs that someone around you is feeling undervalued or has lost his or her self-confidence” (57). A bistro gives employees with little to no work experience an opportunity to start off small and build confidence within the food service industry.

There will be three experienced baristas present. One to help run the front side of the bistro and one to help run the kitchen/backside of the bistro. They will both be present during the Monday- Friday shifts for a full eight hours. On weekends, there will be one manager for both the front and back end of the bistro. The parents who are working at the bistro will have an opportunity to be on-call shift managers after extensive training. Being as many of the parents are either going through rehab and/or are needing to complete court ordered services; shifts will be no more than four hours and will always have a qualified manager on duty.

Rosehill Cottages hired Cheryl Haskins as the lead Executive Director for their foster home housing structure, and she has her degree in business. Skookum House, another housing facility for foster care children, has a founding director with a degree in marketing and advertising. These two organizations are the leading models for foster care reform in Washington state. This leads me to believe that enlisting people with different skills, degrees, and resources ultimately helps to create a successful program. We need people in business and advertising to work alongside those with backgrounds in social services in order to successfully create a housing program that diminishes the rate of foster families closing their licenses and biological

families not getting their children back. This is why hiring people with many different backgrounds will help create a successful housing complex.

Below is an estimated timeline of how we will prepare and set up the housing complex. It is estimated that it will take approximately two years from becoming a registered non-profit, or finding a non-profit willing to support the housing complex concept, to the first families entering the complex. Two of the biggest milestones are finding enough funding and also finding a housing complex that is empty and for sale.

**Timeline**

| <b>Milestone</b>   | <b>Milestone Name</b>                         | <b>Milestone Description</b>   |
|--------------------|---|--|
| <b>Date</b>        |   |  |
| <b>Jan 1 2020</b>  | Establish<br>Organization and<br>Partnerships | Become a registered non-profit, or contact a non-profit willing to support a housing complex. <i>(Love Recklessly)</i> |
| <b>May 1 2020</b>  | Establish<br>Organization and<br>Partnerships | Become a Limited Liability Corporation (LLC)   |
| <b>July 1 2020</b> | Establish<br>Organization and<br>Partnerships | Contact DCYF to get approval as a partner organization   |

---

|                    |  |   |
|--------------------|--|---|
| <b>Sept 1 2020</b> | Identify Funding Sources and Community Site            | Apply for grants and loans for development of the housing community   |
| <b>June 1 2021</b> | Identify Funding Sources and Community Site            | Identify and purchase an existing housing community   |
| <b>Sept 1 2021</b> | Identify Funding Sources and Community Site            | Refurbish housing community as needed   |
| <b>Jan 1 2022</b>  | Allow the first families to join the housing community | Hire coordinators to work alongside the state assigned social workers for these families' cases<br>Hand out initial evaluations |
| <b>June 1 2022</b> | Build and Launch Bistro                                | Build bistro<br>Train parent employees<br>Advertise bistro in the surrounding community   |
| <b>Jan 1 2023</b>  | Hand out evaluations                                   | See Qualitative Inquiry Essay for more information on the evaluations   |
| <b>June 1 2023</b> | Meet with DCYF   | Go over evaluations and rates of success within the first year  |

---



|                   |  |  |
|-------------------|--|--|
| <b>Jan 1 2024</b> | Hand out evaluations   | See Qualitative Inquiry Essay for more information on the evaluations                            |
| <b>Jan 1 2025</b> | Hand out evaluations to those who are graduating the program | See Qualitative Inquiry Essay for more information on the evaluations                            |
| <b>May 1 2025</b> | Meet with DCYF   | Go over evaluations and rates of success of those who have “graduated”, or completed the program |

### **Conclusion**

When working with community, specifically broken areas of community, it is crucial that you empathize and identify the humanity in those you are hoping to serve before you begin working alongside them to meet their needs. Kuenkel argues “empathy is a mind-set, because it can become a value that we live by – seeing the person behind the task, seeing the story behind the person, reaching out to the humanness in other people” (1944). People who have been deemed the “other” by society have this sense of distrust. This is especially exemplified when families are torn apart. If we can show them that we see them as human and have empathy for their story and what they have been through, it creates an opening for relationship for reaching a larger audience. For issues like poverty and injustice, which are the roots of the overarching foster care problem, you need all sorts of people working alongside you. When you have the

right people in place, your organization can reach new levels that you would not have thought otherwise possible. By using this process, we can reach even more people and do it well. Collaboratively, these issues will be addressed in a way that will solve them long-term, not just short term.

We must remember that it is not us versus them. Kelley and Kelley explain “we’ve found that figuring out what other people actually need is what leads to the most significant innovations” (85). To serve foster care youth we need to be serving the foster parents and the biological parents. Jason Johnson, author of *Reframing Foster Care* articulates “it’s about advocating the cause of the helpless, seeking justice for the defenseless, and maintaining the rights of the oppressed” (97). This is where the housing model comes in. At-risk families are looking for housing support. Beyond that, they are looking for a community to give them encouragement and support. Whitten expounds that to “expect everyone to practice the Golden Rule – including you on occasion; first look within to see if the problem lies there” (64). Sometimes the simplicity of giving dignity and worth to a community is enough to change their generational legacy and solve many of the problems they may be facing. When we rally together, it is amazing what people can fix when we support one another.

**Works Cited**

- Beam, Cris. *To the End of June: The Intimate Life of American Foster Care*. Mariner Books, 2014.
- Bornstein, D. and Susan Davis. *Social Entrepreneurship: What Everyone Needs to Know*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2010.
- Gordon, Mark. Personal Interview. 27 July 2018.
- Harburger, Deborah S., and Ruth A. White. "Reunifying Families, Cutting Costs: Housing-Child Welfare Partnerships for Permanent Supportive Housing." *Child Welfare*, vol. 83, no. 5, Sept.2004, p.493.EBSCOhost, library.northwestu.edu/scripts/proxy.php?link=https://search-ebSCOhost-com.nu.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=f5h&AN=14536557&site=ehost-live&scope=site.
- Harris, Aimee. Personal Interview. 7 August 2018.
- Haskins, Cheryl. Personal Interview. 29 November 2018.
- Heather. Personal Interview. 5 September 2018.
- Johnson, Jason. *Reframing Foster Care: Filtering Your Foster Parenting Journey through the Lens of the Gospel*. Credo House Publishers, 2018.
- Karen. Personal Interview. 20 July 2018.
- "Keith Stanfield - So You Know What It's Like Lyrics." *Musixmatch*, www.musixmatch.com/lyrics/Keith-Stanfield/So-You-Know-What-It-s-Like.

Kelley, Tom and David Kelley. *Creative Confidence: Unleashing the Creative Potential Within Us All*. New York: Crown Business, 2013.

Kuenkel, Petra. *The Art of Leading Collectively: Co-Creating a Sustainable, Socially Just Future*. Chelsea Green Publishing, 2016.

Myers, Bryant. *Walking with the Poor: Principles and Practices of Transformational Development*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2011.

Rivera, Marny, and Rita Sullivan. "Rethinking Child Welfare to Keep Families Safe and Together: Effective Housing-Based Supports to Reduce Child Trauma, Maltreatment Recidivism, and Re-Entry to Foster Care." *Child Welfare*, vol. 94, no. 4, May 2015, pp. 185–204. EBSCOhost, [library.northwestu.edu/scripts/proxy.php?link=https://search-ebshostcom.nu.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lgh&AN=110870819&site=ehost-live&scope=site](https://search-ebshostcom.nu.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lgh&AN=110870819&site=ehost-live&scope=site).

Whitten, Neal. *Neal Whitten's No-Nonsense Advice for Successful Projects*. Vienna, VA: Management Concepts, Inc., 2005.

Willis, Katie. *Theories and Practices of Development*. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge, 2011.

**Contextualization: Table of Contents**

**Introduction.....24**

*Thesis Statement*

**Why Contextualization is Important..... 24-26**

*Definition of Neglect*

*Fieldwork Experience*

*A Mother's Confusion*

**Cultural Brokers – Local Assets.....26-29**

*Somali Immigrants and Foster Care*

*Hofstede's Indices*

*Stillaguamish Tribe and Foster Care*

**Creativity and Innovation.....29-30**

*Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA's)*

*Theories and Practices of Development*

**Vocational Work.....30-31**

**Innovative Contextualization in The Foster Care Community.....31-34**

*Housing Model – Local Assets and Local Wisdom*

*Housing Model – Hofstede*

*Housing Model – Localized Contextualization*

*Vocation, Christianity, and Contextualization*

**Conclusion.....34-35**

**Works Cited.....36-37**

*“We live in a world in which we need to share responsibility. It’s easy to say ‘It’s not my child, not my community, not my problem.’ Then there are those who see the need and respond. I consider those people my heroes.”*

*-Fred Rogers -*

## **Introduction**

Contextualization is the practice of creating and designing programs that emphasize the specific cultural characteristics and resources of a certain people, place, and time. Now, when we begin talking about culture and certain people groups, people usually think about race and people from other countries first. However, in the context of this essay I will be focusing more on the specific cultural characteristics of those within the United States.

The foster care system within the United States is comprised of families from all different walks of life. One common saying among the foster care community is “it is not illegal to be a ‘bad’ parent.’ What this really means is that every family has a different idea and opinion on what they believe to be good and bad parenting skills. Culture impacts how parents are raised and how they choose to raise their children. In this essay I will be considering the question about why creative and innovative programs need contextualization to be successful. I will also be talking about how a newly proposed housing model could help revolutionize the foster care community and impact my future vocation.

## **Why Contextualization Is Important**

Children and youth in care are not only going through extreme trauma from being taken away from their biological families, they are also going through a major culture shock that can have continuing negative impacts. Those in care “are truly refugees from a war they can’t begin to comprehend” (Harrison 2). They are being thrown into a whole new environment and culture with expectations and rules that are very different from what they are used to. This culture shock comes from being used to certain values, practices, and behaviors that may be the complete



opposite in the homes they are entering. Certain behaviors in the past that were accepted are now not okay. Just as each family has their own familial unit, they also have their own culture.

Another complex example of the impact of culture is how neglect for one family may not be the same to another. As for the state, neglect is defined as improper housing, food insecurity, and an overall lack of adult supervision. According to the Washington State Legislature abuse or neglect is defined as:

Sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, or injury of a child by any person under circumstances which cause harm to the child's health, welfare, or safety, excluding conduct permitted under RCW [9A.16.100](#); or the negligent treatment or maltreatment of a child by a person responsible for or providing care to the child. (RCW 26.44.020)

The Washington State attorney general would add that the “[RCW 26-44-020](#) defines abuse and neglect as “... injury... negligent treatment or maltreatment of a child by any person under circumstances which indicate that the child's health, welfare, and safety is harmed” (Ferguson 1). Neglect is one of the most difficult things for child welfare workers to identify. Neglect is difficult to define because each family has a different idea of what that means.

One example of cultural confusion within foster care is about a family that stayed with me. I remember my family having a sibling set of three stay with us. They came to us in diapers and little else. I spent about forty-five minutes washing the girl's hair because it was so knotted, and her scalp was dark brown from not being washed. Her brother's teeth were beginning to decay and often caused him pain. Eventually the dentist fixed his teeth after the social worker got approval from the biological mother. The biological mother asked the social worker if the water the kids were drinking from the tap had caused the decay. She genuinely did not understand the

basics of brushing and flossing teeth as important and didn't put the two and two together. When the children were first removed, the mother and grandmother's biggest concern was that the kids go to Sunday school. They were removed from the home because it had no running water or electricity, and the grandmother was a hoarder. Due to different cultures and traditions it is important for the government to note these when they are removing children and placing them in foster care. Programs and development for at-risk families need contextualization and cultural support to successfully get these children and youth back in a safe home.

During my fieldwork, I spoke with another biological mother, Heather<sup>4</sup>, who was confused when in her parenting class they told her that kids shouldn't drink water from hoses and that is something that they will look for during house visits. Heather noted "I remember growing up and playing outside and my mom telling me if I was thirsty to have a drink out of the hose and I did, and I'm perfectly fine." Something as simple as this can cause confusion for many. Within these parenting classes and other programs, we need to come up with creative and innovative ways to bridge the cultural confusion on what is considered "bad" parenting and neglect and pursue family preservation.

### **Cultural Brokers**

One important skill set to remember when working with contextualization and community development is to utilize the local resources. According to the National Center for Cultural Competence (NCCC) "cultural brokers can help to ease the historical and inherent distrust that many racially, ethnically, and culturally diverse communities have toward health care organizations" (4). The NCCC also mentions the importance of cultural brokers within

---

<sup>4</sup> Pseudonym used to protect the individual's identity

government offices and community-based organizations. Because many of the individuals needing cultural brokers are families with radically different cultural views on healthcare and community involvement, it is important to have them readily available in government offices and state service organizations. Immigrants are one specific group of people who would do well with having cultural brokers more readily available to them.

There is a high percentage of Somali immigrants who have come to find homes in Seattle, Washington and Portland, Oregon. Somalia is located above Kenya and next to Ethiopia. According to Hofstede's cultural indices, the United States has "one of the most individualist cultures in the world..." with a high score of 91 on the scale of individualism, whereas Somalia and countries surrounding it have a low score on the individualism spectrum. In their culture they are used to coming together in a collectivistic nature to provide for the needs of their community. Once coming to the United States there is a huge difference which leads many immigrants away from community and towards the government for help. The culture shift for many Somali immigrants in Seattle has led them to working with the government to get proper housing, healthcare, food, and schooling.

There is a small percentage of immigrant children in foster care; however, because of cultural differences there has been an increase in Somali children entering care. It is a very hierarchal society and therefore some believe the men in the household are in charge. Within the foster care system many of the Somali children are coming in due to abuse allegations. Although it is culturally acceptable for Somali men to hit their children and wives (they believe in polygamy), it is not something that is culturally or legally sanctioned here in the U.S. This is where new programming and extra support from social workers would come in. We need to advocate for these families by creating more open forms of communication on the cultural

differences between their country and the U.S. Although certain things are illegal in the U.S., that cannot be disregarded due to cultural differences. It is important we make an effort in explaining why our culture is different in hopes that they will understand and accept these differences because they are now living in a different country with different laws.

Another cultural aspect specific to the Somali people and therefore Somalis in foster care is religion. Viola states “today, 99 percent of Somali citizens are Sunni Muslim and 1 percent are Christian.” Many of the families who are Somali and are working with child welfare services request that their children be placed in homes that practice Islam. Mohamed writes “... Pew Research Center estimates that there were about 3.45 million Muslims of all ages living in the U.S. in 2017, and that Muslims made up about 1.1% of the total U.S. population.” Unfortunately, child welfare services have a difficult time explaining why Somali children cannot live with families who practice Islam because there are not enough foster families who practice that religion. For so many people and cultures, religion is extremely important and explaining this to families and spending time understanding their perspective on this issue is not being done. This is a prime example of where the use of cultural brokers could come in handy when working with these families.

Within foster care, social workers must take on both the role of being a social worker and that of a cultural broker. Social workers who specifically work for Native American tribes must work on this balance. My little sister is a part of the Stillaguamish tribe, and she has a specific social worker who works extremely hard for all the kids she oversees. However, she does not have a degree in Native American history, she herself is not Native, and she hadn't had any prior experience with the tribes before entering this job. The importance of having cultural brokers within the foster care field should be a main priority. Because my sister is a part of the

Stillaguamish tribe, one cultural practice we had to respect was to not cut her hair. The Stillaguamish people believe that each person's "story" lives within their hair and therefore they do not believe in cutting it unless one has gone through a major change in their life. We waited until my parents became her official guardians before we took her to get her hair trimmed. The Cultural Broker Guide argues that "cultural brokers may not necessarily be members of a particular cultural group or community. However, they must have a history and experience with cultural groups for which they serve as broker" (5). It is extremely important that cultural brokers get the respect from the community they are trying to serve. I love my sister's social worker, who uses the knowledge she has gained of the Stillaguamish people to bridge a gap between her tribe and my family. It would be helpful to create programs that allow for cultural brokers to enter the foster care system and help biological families understand why their children were taken.

### **Creativity and Innovation**

One innovative approach to bridging this confusion and gap between appropriate and inappropriate parenting skills and different cultures is by giving extra support and training to Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA). CASAs are volunteers in the community who are appointed by a judge to advocate for children and youth in foster care. They are meant to be a stable individual in a child or youth's life as they transition into and out of foster care. If we give CASAs extra training, they could be great cultural brokers for families. Currently, they focus on working with the children and youth in care, not necessarily their biological families. If we can change this program to also include another mandatory 10 hours a month towards the biological families, it could help open the dialogue and clear some confusion on issues that are often not explained by social workers due to time constraints. It would also take off some of the extra

stress put upon social workers. Many of the children and youth coming into care who have physical or mental health problems have lacked proper care due to their families not having the proper knowledge or services on how to appropriately care for them. The NCAAA explains:

Cultural brokers have a range of skills that enable them to (1) communicate in a cross-cultural context, (2) communicate in two or more languages, (3) interpret and/or translate information from one language to another, (4) advocate with and on behalf of patients/consumers, (5) negotiate health care and other service delivery systems, and (6) mediate and manage conflict. (14)

Although it would require more time, effort, and training, CASAs could become effective cultural brokers for many families and help support and explain healthcare and other issues related to children and youth who are in foster care.

### **Vocational Work**

The values and practices of contextualization are extremely important in social justice work. In my future vocational work, I hope to help create programs that use local assets and incorporate the importance of working with different cultures. Harrison asserts that foster care “means loving children who will ultimately leave us, then drying our tears and letting ourselves love again” (50). One way I specifically want to incorporate contextualization in with my vocation is by proposing a new housing model for families within the child welfare system. I am the program director for a small non-profit called *Love Recklessly* and we hope within the next two to five years to put this dream into action, if approved.

Within the foster care community there is so much change that each of the families go through. If foster families and the institutions that are a part of foster care can try to understand

the cultural affects, then it can help ease some of the major confusion that comes with multiple placements. For example, not everyone understands how to fill out paperwork for housing vouchers, or how to get a job. Social workers are already overwhelmed with the amount of work they have and often cannot help the parents. On the flipside foster care parents are asking for help with the kids in their care to get the services they need.

By proposing a new housing model for at-risk families who are having their children removed, we can give them the support they need. Moving is considered one of the most stressful life events. Not only do these moves negatively impact the core of each child it also creates a lot of confusion about how the child should behave.

### **Innovative Contextualization in The Foster Care Community**

The model I am proposing is a housing complex in a suburban area that has a community center in the middle and provides all the services needed for both children, youth, and parents. The program would be open for families that the Department of Children, Youth, and Family (DCYF) considers at risk but not at imminent risk of their children being removed. These families may be on the DCYF radar but are yet to the point of having their children removed. This housing model would be one option that the state gives these families before taking legal action and removing those in their care. Everything from occupational therapy to parenting classes to rehab would be available within this housing community. To create healthy and uplifting community within the housing complex, there would be a daycare center for when parents were doing their own services. Cohen-Schlanger et al., explains “child welfare experts, therefore, have recognized for some time that inadequate housing can be a risk factor” (550). The goal of this model would be to encourage at-risk families to gain skills through local assets (e.g., cultural brokers) and to help with the housing crisis for children in care by putting family

preservation first. The use of cultural brokers is an example of a local asset within our community. In my housing model, I would be employing CASAs with extra supportive services and training for them to become cultural brokers for families who are a part of the community. Not only would these individuals have local wisdom for the communities they are serving and the area, but they would also be able to create better relationships with the families.

As mentioned above in the Cultural Brokers section, Hofstede's indices indicate that the United States is a highly individualistic country. This creates a culture within our society where many are afraid to ask for help. The opposite of an individualistic society is a collectivistic society where many people within the community work to serve and support one another. Although we have many programs in the U.S. designed to help serve at risk families, many do not know about them and are unsure how to ask for the services they need. Within my housing model, I would be providing on site services for families. Not only does the housing model provide a supportive community, it also helps families get into programs to fulfill the services they need to complete. Many times, biological families are confused and struggle to get their services going because they do not know how to. We would provide extra support that most social workers do not have time for, to show these families how to get their services completed. Creating a community within the housing model would provide a healthy support system for at-risk families.

An example of localized contextualization that is specific to the biological families who are a part of the housing community is the job opportunities at the bistro. Along with housing and services, there will also be a small bistro that is a part of the housing compound and will provide work opportunities to families living there. Although working at the bistro is not mandatory, those staying in the housing complex will need to pay monthly rent. They are free to



work outside of the center, or they can work at the bistro within the complex. Many of the biological parents who will be a part of this housing complex will also be going through rehab for drug or alcohol addiction. This means that they need flexible work hours, but they also need work experience again to be able to be employable out in society. The bistro is a specific program created to give these parents work experience with a flexible schedule to help prepare them for other jobs. Working at the bistro also gives parents accountability because they will be paid hourly and be required to pay rent. Many of the people who are a part of the program may lack education and work experience. The culture that these individuals are coming from has enabled them to think that they are stuck where they are at. The bistro gives them an opportunity to change their future and how they perceive themselves. It also changes the trajectory of their cultural legacy within their families.

Rivera and Sullivan proposed a simpler housing model that doesn't provide extra services but could help lower the homelessness rate and ultimately lower the number of children and youth in foster care. A housing model for at risk families "...offered by a transformed system, will minimize the trauma experienced by children in out-of-home placements, reduce the child welfare caseload, and reduce expenses associated with foster care" (Rivera and Sullivan 201). We will be using local assets of physical space in a suburban area that is easy for people to access. With the community center there and all services provided, it gives families a better opportunity to focus on the things they need to be better parents. Harburger and White declare "recognizing the critical importance of supportive housing programs, child welfare workers often rely on partnerships with faith-based agencies, local nonprofit housers, and public housing authorities to access housing subsidies for families and youth" (500). Another thing that would be incorporated is the use of cultural brokers.

As a Christian, I believe in the power of vocational work and how that can be expressed within the church. Mark Gordon, a pastor and long-time foster care parent claimed “Jesus followers, I believe can do the most good for the kids and the foster system. Not everyone can be foster parents but everybody in the church can support foster parents. There needs to be an awakening in the church and trust needs to be built in the system” (1). Implementing contextualization practices into the foster care system is important because without it many families are left confused, frustrated, and non-compliant to the services being provided. In my future vocational work, I intend to use cultural brokers. Another way I want to mix contextualization practices into my vocational work is to create a mentorship program for children and youth in care. The focus would be to have an adult of the same race/community background that the child is from to help ease them into their new environments. This would help bridge some common complaints from children and youth in care who do not “feel at home” in a foster home. The adult mentor would also have an opportunity to explain to foster parents why their child may be behaving in certain ways and how to fix those behaviors.

### **Conclusion**

Creating programs within foster care that include contextualization and an emphasis on culture/race can be difficult. Some people believe that no matter how many programs we provide it will not be enough. Harrison contends “I wondered if there was anyone who genuinely believed that a parenting course and some couples counseling was likely to change the dynamics of a family that had known generations of poverty, incest, substance abuse, and violence” (52). The reality is that no, the current system is not properly equipped to change the dynamics of at-risk families. However, adding contextualization and cultural differences training to the current mix of programs could help alleviate some confusion and work for individuals on both sides of

the child welfare system. The housing model and mentorship program I proposed are two ways that non-profits working with families impacted by foster care can help bridge the cultural gap.

To conclude, contextualization within programming for foster care is important because each family has a different idea on what is appropriate and what is not appropriate when being a parent. A new housing model and mentorship program could be innovative ways to solve confusion among biological families regarding some of the common issues that come up like healthcare needs, what neglect entails, and other things. In my future vocational work, I hope to use my non-profit as an outlet for a mentorship program that uses cultural brokers and contextualization to create a safe atmosphere for youth going through culture shock. Willis states “first, it is argued that NGOs can provide services that are much more appropriate to local communities” (109). The goal of cultural contextualization is to create opportunities for families to be seen and heard regarding all their concerns. The goal of foster care is for children and youth to be able to go back home. Many of these families come from years of poverty and need more than parenting classes to get on the right track. Willis claims that NGOs “are able to provide such services more efficiently and effectively through drawing on local peoples knowledge, and also using local materials” (109). Families need someone who can explain why these parenting classes are important and what parenting may look like to different types of families. For those working with child welfare services it is important we look at the cultural reasons why they may not be parenting properly.

### **Works Cited**

“Attorney General.” *Salary & Benefits | Washington State*, [www.atg.wa.gov/child-abuse-neglect](http://www.atg.wa.gov/child-abuse-neglect).

Beam, Cris. *To the End of June: The Intimate Life of American Foster Care*. Mariner Books, 2014.

“CASA Overview.” *CASA: A Powerful Voice in the Life of a Child*, [wacasa.org/volunteer/](http://wacasa.org/volunteer/).

Cohen-Schlanger, Miriam, et al. “Housing as a Factor in Admissions of Children to Temporary Care: A Survey.” *Child Welfare*, vol. 74, no. 3, May 1995, p. 547. EBSCOhost, [library.northwestu.edu/scripts/proxy.php?link=https://search-ebSCOhost-com.nu.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=f5h&AN=24227283&site=ehost-live&scope=site](http://library.northwestu.edu/scripts/proxy.php?link=https://search-ebSCOhost-com.nu.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=f5h&AN=24227283&site=ehost-live&scope=site).

“Compare Countries.” *Hofstede Insights*, [www.hofstede-insights.com/product/comparecountries/](http://www.hofstede-insights.com/product/comparecountries/).

Cultural Brokers: [http://nccc.georgetown.edu/documents/Cultural\\_Broker\\_Guide\\_English.pdf](http://nccc.georgetown.edu/documents/Cultural_Broker_Guide_English.pdf)

Gordon, Mark. Personal Interview. 27 July 2018.

Fieldwork Data. *A Place Called Hope*. June-October 2018.

Harburger, Deborah S., and Ruth A. White. “Reunifying Families, Cutting Costs: Housing-Child Welfare Partnerships for Permanent Supportive Housing.” *Child Welfare*, vol. 83, no. 5, Sept. 2004, p. 493. EBSCOhost, [library.northwestu.edu/scripts/proxy.php?link=https://search-ebSCOhost-](http://library.northwestu.edu/scripts/proxy.php?link=https://search-ebSCOhost-)

com.nu.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=f5h&AN=14536557&site=ehost-live&scope=site.

Harrison, Kathy. *Another Place at the Table*. Jeremy P. Tarcher/Penguin, 2004.

Heather. Personal Interview and Fieldwork. 20 September 2018.

Mohamed, Besheer, and Besheer Mohamed. "A New Estimate of U.S. Muslim Population." *Pew Research Center*, Pew Research Center, 3 Jan. 2018, [www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/01/03/new-estimates-show-u-s-muslim-population-continues-to-grow/](http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/01/03/new-estimates-show-u-s-muslim-population-continues-to-grow/).

Nelson, Lloyd. "Foster Care Quotes." *Foster and Adoptive Family Services Blog*, 19 Feb. 2019, [foster-adoptive-kinship-family-services-nj.org/foster-care-quotes/](http://foster-adoptive-kinship-family-services-nj.org/foster-care-quotes/).

Viola, Katharine. "Religion in Somalia Before Islam." *Synonym*, 28 Sept. 2017, [classroom.synonym.com/religion-in-somalia-before-islam-12087877.html](http://classroom.synonym.com/religion-in-somalia-before-islam-12087877.html).

*WAC 296-307-640*: [apps.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=26.44.020](http://apps.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=26.44.020).

Willis, Katie. *Theories and Practices of Development*. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge, 2011.

**Qualitative Inquiry: Table of Contents**

**Introduction.....39-40**

*Thesis Statement*

**Qualitative Methods and Values.....40-41**

*Culture and Dignity*

*Contextualization, Copowerment, and Collaboration*

**Why Use Qualitative Research in Community Development.....41-45**

*Action Research*

*Appreciative Inquiry*

**Housing Project as a Case Example.....45-49**

*Qualitative Methods and Fieldwork*

*Outcomes*

*Qualitative and Quantitative Methods to Measure Impact*

*Evaluations and Qualitative Elements*

**How Qualitative Inquiry Impacts My Role as a Social Change Worker.....49**

**Conclusion.....49-50**

**Works Cited.....51-52**

## **Introduction**

Research comes in many forms, but what makes research unique is not only the many forms but the overall purpose of each form. With community development and social justice work, we use qualitative research because it allows us to dive deeper into the problems that plague our communities. Quantitative research is a way of gathering data, usually from large groups, into usable statistics or numerical data. Together, these two research methods can help create change in our communities. Scerri and James assert "... indicator-based projects are extremely valuable tools for measuring where a community 'is at' in relation to some or other given concept of 'sustainable development'" (41-42). Qualitative research looks past a simple problem and solution equation; it looks at all of the factors that relate to that problem and seeks to fix not only the problem, but the root of the issue as well.

Within the United States of America, we have become complacent and stuck in the same research patterns. This cycle continues as researchers try desperately to understand and solve social justice issues. Foster care is one area in particular that is difficult to get data on. Maluccio et al., declares "... many of the studies focus on generic foster care and do not distinguish among long-term, short-term, emergency, and treatment foster care" (493). Because the research techniques are often very traditional and more quantitative in nature, you lose out on a large portion of information that could be useful to government workers seeking to fix problems and holes within the current system. Scerri and James insist "bringing together qualitative with quantitative approaches in community studies and development is one of the key methodological issues in the field" (41). If we can combine the two large research sectors then we will be able to come up with more logical solutions that promote community development and fix social justice problems. Glass et al., reasons:

The majority of studies use quantitative methods to look for associations between various aspects of care journeys and mental health and focus on children past the age of infancy. Therefore, there are gaps in our understanding of the ways in which maltreatment and care experiences may affect younger children. (2)

In this essay I will be talking about the importance of qualitative inquiry within community development work and with the housing model I am proposing as a case example.

### **Qualitative Methods and Values**

The point of qualitative research methods is to gain an understanding of the culture, the values, and the history of a people that impact the choices that community is making. A sense of humanity, worth, and dignity are core values that every individual desire's and therefore it is an important part of community development work and social justice change. The main overarching characteristics that inform qualitative research methods are described below:

The following four characteristics are identified by most as key to understanding the nature of qualitative research: the focus is on process, understanding and meaning; the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis; the process is inductive; and the product is richly descriptive. (Merriam and Tisdell 15)

By focusing on the process of qualitative research, it grounds us and reminds us that the goal and purpose of this research method is to understand how people are making sense of their world and lives. Sunstein and Chiseri-Strater describe culture "...as an invisible web of behaviors, patterns, rules, and rituals of a group of people who have contact with one another and share a common language" (3). When working with at risk families we need to be aware of the culture so as to give proper context when we use qualitative research methods. Understanding their culture and



why they make the decisions they make helps create a sense of humanity within those you are researching. Quantitative research has less emphasis on these values.

The three values that are seen throughout the ICD program are contextualization, copowerment, and collaboration. Contextualization is defined as a process in which you develop and create programs with special attention to how they will impact the culture of which the individuals are a part. Copowerment is defined as a mutual relationship in which both sides are made stronger by the other. Collaboration is defined as acknowledging your organization's limitations, seeing other groups' strengths, and coming together in pursuit of the same goals. Each of these values are indicated within qualitative research methods. Qualitative research allows researchers to ask bigger, overarching questions while preserving a sense of humanity, worth, and dignity within the community they are researching.

### **Why Use Qualitative Research in Community Development**

The qualitative research and inquiry approaches are distinctive in that they allow 1. More information to be identified and 2. People from that community to become involved with creating solutions. One of the biggest reason's community developers use qualitative research is because it shows a more accurate depiction of the social justice problems many communities are facing. It gives us a face and an experience versus a statistic or a number. Merriam and Tisdell claim "qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (6). It is more than handing someone a survey of questions and compiling a list of data to present.

Qualitative inquiry and research allow both those affected by the problem and those trying to solve the problem to have a voice. When we use this research method, we can begin to see new reasons as to why problems are not being solved. Within community development and social justice work, many of the problems people are facing are diverse and are more complex than a simple math equation. Simply put, those who are actively engaged with and experience the problem you are trying to solve, usually have the best ideas and advice on how to solve that problem. As community developers we need to incorporate qualitative inquiry into our research to find resolutions to community issues.

The qualitative research approach is comprised of multiple methodologies. One of the most common research methods that is beginning to be used by those working within foster care is that of action research. Action research is described as "... a systematic approach to investigation that enables people to find effective solutions to problems they confront in their everyday lives" (Stringer 1). Unlike quantitative or experimental research, action research actively looks to engage every dynamic that is seen in a social justice problem. Action research is unique and often used within community development practices because it actively seeks to engage participants who are involved, at some level in the process. Merriam and Tisdell declare "... as one engages with the participants, and together researcher and participants decide on next steps working toward coming up with solutions to the problem" (49). Both community developers and social justice workers strive towards helping at risk communities with whatever problems they are currently facing.

Too often, those in power see a problem, find a solution, implement that solution, and see that it does not change the issue. Within foster care, the government or the state is making decisions that they believe will have positive outcomes for the families they are working with.

The reality is that these programs end up failing because they are not properly meeting the foster care community's needs. People working within an office or working at the capital are creating policies that they assume will repair the issues facing the foster care system. However, without engaging with people who are experiencing the problem, we lose something extremely important when creating a resolution. When we work with the people we are trying to serve and use qualitative research methods, such as action research, we begin to create solutions that fix the root of the problem. Stringer explains:

Action research therefore is based on the proposition that generalized solutions, plans, or programs may not fit all contexts or groups to whom they are applied and that the purpose of inquiry is to find an appropriate solution for the particular dynamics at work in the local situation. (5)

The children and youth in foster care are consistently thrown into new programs and different “solutions” to many common problems.

Housing for example is an extremely complex mess in foster care. According to authors of *Placement Disruption in Treatment Foster Care*, “placement instability of children in foster care has long been identified as a concern by social service professionals” (Smith et al., 200). There are not enough foster homes; there are not enough housing facilities for families who qualify for housing; and the government is running out of money and resources to fix these problems. Due to the nature of foster care everything moves very fast and those who are in care often feel they do not have a voice in the decisions that are made. They are considered wards of the state, which means, that social and government workers are in charge of their welfare. Often what happens is a group of adults (social workers, Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASAs), Guardian Ad Litem (GALs), and other government workers/volunteers) make decisions on

behalf of these children without speaking in depth to them about their opinion on that decision. Action research brings back the humanity in creating solutions for communities. Stringer advocates that while “action research is not a panacea for all ills and does not resolve all problems but provides a means for people to more clearly understand their situations and to formulate effective solutions to the problems they face” (8). When working with at risk families it is extremely important to hear out each person’s opinion, especially the child who is in care, before making decisions on behalf of what is best for the child in that person’s opinion.

Historically speaking, as a society, when we have seen a problem we immediately jump to the quickest “solution.” This has ended up perpetuating long held social justice issues and has impaired any sort of systemic change. The appreciative inquiry model was designed to see what areas an organization or a program is doing well. Hammond argues “another reason for ‘everyone’ to be included is the basic principle of change management that those who have a say in creating change are more likely to implement it” (21). One of the largest complaints that those involved in foster care have is the large amount of miscommunication and the disregard of suggestions and opinions from biological and foster families. The goal of appreciative inquiry is to look within the current system or organization and see what is working well before scratching everything and beginning again. Unfortunately, due to the fact that foster care is a large subsection within the government, qualitative research and appreciative inquiry are underutilized.

Leaders can see a problem and find a “solution” to that problem, often without speaking to those who are experiencing the issue firsthand. Sometimes this even means overhauling an entire program or policy even if aspects of it were good. Each state has their own requirements. The state saw an issue of having social workers who lacked formal education and how that was impacting their work. Through that they then made it mandatory for any oncoming social worker

to have their Masters in Social Work (MSW). The individuals applying for social worker positions now have the formal education; however, they lack the experience. Many of the social workers coming into the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) office are ill prepared for working with at-risk families, and they end up making many mistakes or quitting. This then perpetuates the constant turnover and confusion within the office. Hammond reasons that “appreciative inquiry suggests that we look for what works in an organization; that we appreciate it” (38). If the office had used appreciative inquiry, they would see that having a staff who had experience and knowledge working with at-risk families is extremely important and cannot be taught. The formal education aspect can be taught through required teaching sessions at the workplace.

The goal of these research methods is to gather enough firsthand information to remedy the root of social justice problems. We often try to fix these issues quickly and it only solves the problem superficially. Maluccio et al., asserts “... in the U.S., as elsewhere, many of the available studies are characterized by inadequate sampling, lack of control or comparison groups, and imprecise definition of key variables, among other problems” (493). To end the perpetuating cycles that plague the foster care system we need to incorporate new and innovative research methods.

### **Housing Project as a Case Example**

Qualitative inquiry and research methods were extremely important and impactful to me while I was doing my fieldwork. I would not have come up with the housing model if it had not been for the research I did, using qualitative research. During my fieldwork, I found that many of the biological families had a desire to get their children back and to complete the services the state had issued for them; however, many of them needed extra support in order to figure out

how to get these services. I remember speaking with a mother who was confused on how to get and use the housing voucher the state gave her. She told me, “This will barely pay for a room to rent from someone, and they won’t let me have the kids back if I am renting a room... it is considered inadequate housing in their eyes for two children...” Of the families I worked with during my fieldwork three out of four were led by single moms who lacked proper housing. Cohen et al., alleges “of those households experiencing housing problems, 40% were headed by females” (512). Even if these families were receiving housing vouchers, they were finding it nearly impossible to find someone who would actually take the voucher or a place that would be cheap enough for the voucher to be used. One study claimed “... more than two-thirds of single-mother households searching for affordable housing with tenant-based Section 8 certificates reported discrimination by landlords who refused to participate in the Section 8 program” (Cohen et al., 513-514). I began to speak to these families and ask them what they needed to be successful parents. Just about everyone said housing.

I chose to dig deeper and began to ask about what else they needed. One mother said she grew up in foster care and never learned how to be a parent and never had support when her child was born. One dad, barely in his twenties, was unsure how to hold his newborn child properly and couldn’t figure out how to calm her down. Another dad struggled with anger management because he grew up with an abusive father. Each of these families needed housing and services from the government but what they truly wanted was someone to hear them out. These families began asking me questions about how to get jobs, how to change diapers properly, potty training, how to play with their kids, etc. They needed community. They all desired having healthy relationships with others that could teach them and support them. If I had not begun asking them more questions about housing and add their personal history and culture

to the research I was conducting, I would not have arrived at this idea of creating a housing model had it not been for the qualitative research conducted throughout my fieldwork and interviews. This research showed me not only a solution to the housing crisis, but a solution that prevents more children from entering into the system.

In a hypothetical evaluation of the housing model I have created, outcomes are an important aspect that show what is going well. Leslie Aaron explains “outcomes can give a powerful testimony to the work that is done by an organization” (1). The three main outcome markers I am hoping to see within an evaluation on the housing model are listed below.

1. Parents have an increase in parenting skills as well as a confidence in implementing them within their families.
2. Fewer children and youth enter the foster care system in Washington state.
3. State required services for parents are improved by providing extra support services on top of those required by the state.

Understanding the outcome markers that the housing model is hoping to achieve is important for constituents to prove the success of the program. According to Aaron “the change made evident in outcomes can help the organization explain why they do what they do in a clear way to potential (and current) donors, volunteers, participants, or the general public” (1). Not only is the housing model hoping to reduce the rates of children going into care by keeping families together, it’s hoping to have revolutionary programming for biological parents to give them a community they can lean on emotionally while they are completing their services. This way the parents feel they can have someone to contact after they are finished the program versus many state programs not having the resources or time to continue supporting families after they have completed their required services.

Although I believe qualitative inquiry is extremely important when coming up with programming and services, quantitative inquiry allows for a more concise answer to the success or failure of a program or service. I would use an interview and open-ended questionnaire where parents and children can answer questions in their own words on their opinions of the housing community and the services provided. These numbers, quantitative inquiry, would give constituents a concise answer of the success of the program. I would also have therapists and child care that is present at the housing complex write their observations from the beginning of working with a family to the end, when the families are ready to leave. This would give a qualitative feel to whether the services provided are helping families or not. There would also be individual interviews in which the social workers would speak with the families as to their opinion on the housing complex and the services provided. This would give them an opportunity to voice any concerns or opinions that could be used to help make the whole complex better.

Community developers should use qualitative approaches within their evaluations because it will give very specific ways to change the program, service, or organization as whole to create a better system that can serve people better. The use of qualitative research within the field of community development is important because it is the only way we can begin to truly understand and flesh out some of the problems and come up with solutions that are not just temporary fixes. Culture and community constantly change, which means the people we are serving are going to be changing and the problems that are impacting them will continue to have changes. Our programming will need to change as these changes among our communities happen. Qualitative approaches in evaluations allow community members to give advice on how to improve the organization. Although I have experience with foster care, I do not have experience coming from the eyes of biological families. When evaluations are conducted in a



qualitative manner it gives specific feedback that gives us ideas that we may not have thought about before.

### **How Qualitative Inquiry Impacts My Role as a Social Change Worker**

Qualitative approaches to inquiry give people working within community development, like myself, an opportunity to be more impactful in social justice change. When it comes to community development and social justice, the problems communities are facing are much more complicated than we may assume. For example, housing within the foster care community is severely lacking, causing many children to not have a stable foster home. If we do a quantitative research inquiry as to what to do, it will be simple: create more foster homes. Qualitative inquiry goes beyond that and asks why we have so many children coming into care and why we cannot get more foster homes. Lack of housing for at-risk families, drug and alcohol addiction, mental health problems, and an overall lack of support are all huge reasons why children are entering care at an alarmingly high rate. We can create more impactful change when we choose to dig deeper at the problem we are looking into. We give these communities a sense of respect and dignity when we ask them why this problem is there and give worth to all of the intricacies of the problem.

### **Conclusion**

When we are researching large communities, like those involved in foster care, it is important to identify the small nuances among cultures. As a people, we all desire community and to be seen and heard. Qualitative inquiry is one-way researchers can give a voice to those who do not feel heard. Although quantitative research is important, in community development,

qualitative research gives better context and shows others why people make the decisions they do. As Sunstein and Chiseri-Strater explain:

The term community holds many different meanings in the same way that the terms culture and subculture do. In fact, the three terms sometimes overlap. A community can be formed around geography, race, class, religion, gender, profession, beliefs, traditions, rituals, shared experiences, or ideals. Communities are everywhere, and some are more obvious than others. (43)

When we are working with families in foster care, we are experiencing multiple different communities and cultures that can clash. Qualitative research gives us the opportunity to identify all these differences that make up a community and allows us to gain context on the issue we are trying to solve. It is time we updated how we do our research. Oppenheimer claims “as we gain more understanding of choices that involve both rational and moral components, we may be able to improve our prescriptions for the design of the political institutions which can prevent the injustices so visible in America...” (308). There are more complexities with the families involved in foster care than we are looking at. When we use qualitative inquiry, we can begin to see why those involved in this community make the choices they do. If research is about seeing a problem and trying to identify a solution that builds a community up, we need to look past simple, temporary solutions and dive into the true problems facing these families. This is how change happens.

### Works Cited

- Cohen, Carol S., et al. "Housing Plus Services: Supporting Vulnerable Families in Permanent Housing." *Child Welfare*, vol. 83, no. 5, Sept. 2004, p. 509. EBSCOhost, library.northwestu.edu/scripts/proxy.php?link=https://search-ebSCOhost-com.nu.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=f5h&AN=14536558&site=ehost-live&scope=site.
- Glass, Samuel et al. "Does Quantitative Research in Child Maltreatment Tell the Whole Story? The Need for Mixed-Methods Approaches to Explore the Effects of Maltreatment in Infancy" *TheScientificWorldJournal* vol. 2016 (2016): 1869673.
- Hammond, Sue. *The Thin Book of Appreciative Inquiry*. 3rd ed. Bend, OR: Thin Book Publishing, 2013.
- Maluccio, Anthony N, et al. "Family Foster Care: Cross-National Research Perspectives." *Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Social Services*, vol. 87, no. 4, 2006, pp. 491–495., doi:10.1606/1044-3894.3564.
- Merriam, Sharan B. and Elizabeth J. Tisdell. *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*. 4th ed. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2016.
- Oppenheimer, Joe. "Book Review: Considering Social Justice: A Review of David Miller's Principles of Social Justice." *Social Justice Research*, vol. 15, no. 3, 2002, pp. 295–311.
- Aaron, Leslie. "Outcomes for Program Evaluation." Handout. Northwest University. Kirkland, WA. n.d. Print. – saved in thesis documents

Scerri Andy, and Paul James. “Accounting for Sustainability: Combining Qualitative and Quantitative Research in Developing 'Indicators' of Sustainability.” *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, vol. 13, no. 1, 2010, pp. 41–53., doi:10.1080/13645570902864145.

Smith, Dana, et al. “Placement Disruption in Treatment Foster Care.” *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders*, vol. 9, no. 3, 2001, pp. 200–205.

Stringer, Ernest. *Action Research*. 4th ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2013.

Sunstein, Bonnie Stone and Elizabeth Chiseri-Strater. *Fieldworking: Reading and Writing Research*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2011.

**ICD Values: Table of Contents**

**Introduction.....56**

*Thesis Statement*

**Personal Transformation.....56-58**

*Denial, Guilt, Despair, and Hopelessness*

**Social Justice to Me.....59-60**

*The Cycle of Poverty*

*The Act of Simplicity*

**Be an Influencer.....60-61**

*Personal Connection and Advocation*

**Copowerment and Future Work.....61-63**

**A Philosophy of Service .....63-66**

*Seeing Others as Objects*

*The Box and Self-Deception*

*Housing and Supportive Services*

**Future Vocational Choices .....66-67**

*Love Recklessly*

**Conclusion.....67**

**Works Cited.....68-69**

*“Sit in my room, tears running down my face and I yell  
Into my pillowcases, you say you coming to get us  
Then call 'em a minute later just to tell us you not, I'm humiliated  
I'm in a room with a parent that I don't barely know  
Some lady in the corner watching us, while she taking notes  
I don't get it mom, don't you want to watch your babies grow?  
I guess that pills are more important, all you have to say is no  
But you won't do it will you? You gon' keep popping 'til those pills kill you  
I know you gone but I can still feel you”*

*- NF -*

## **Introduction**

Everyone wants to be accepted. It is the humanity in all of us that desires approval and affirmation. In this essay, I will be talking about how my own personal transformation through this program created an opportunity for me to find copowerment within my leadership. My future vocation and passion is for at-risk families, the local Washington state foster care system, and adoption. Through advocating for these families, it has allowed me to see my own transformation. I think as citizens we should all care about social justice issues in our communities. This idea that as citizens we should be more involved reminds me how important advocacy is for foster care. The practical implication of this challenge is to continue to speak with others about how important it is to care about social justice issues in the community. This Master's program and its values of respect and dignity for all who are living are what will change communities for the better. Social justice is about seeing people and meeting them where they are at. This is how we can change the world.

## **Personal Transformation**

I go back and forth between feeling guilty and feeling hopeless about foster care and the state it is in. Foster care is more than just unskilled parents who lack support and therefore cannot care for their child; it is an example of hopelessness and deep-rooted sadness in our society. Moe-Lobeda argues "for people who care deeply about others and who seek to live in ways that enhance life and ameliorate suffering, denial is a seductive ingredient of moral oblivion, the bouillon in the soup, perhaps" (95). My own personal transformation began when I entered this program. I came into this program knowing I wanted to research and write about foster care. What I had not realized until recently was that my goal was to prove that biological families were innately evil and that in every situation foster families were always the best choice



for a child. I will be describing in further detail how I came to this realization and how I have made a personal transformation in my own thinking on this topic.

To properly begin my story of “othering,” I must explain my feelings of denial regarding an experience that transformed how I treated others. Moe-Lobeda explains that “we “distance ourselves from the horror and terror that inhabit” the products and activities of our daily lives. To see would be nearly unbearable” (96). My parents began doing foster care a few years ago. One day we got a call for us to take a legally free baby who was only a few days old. My mom said yes. Her name was Cherish. We loved her dearly and she quickly became a part of the family. Six months later her social worker contacted my mom saying that she would be transferred to another foster home to be with her half-sister. In Washington state the social worker is not required to do a full search of potential biological family that could take the child until the child moved into a potential adoption placement. My family was under the impression that we were on the road to adopt Cherish. Her social worker was also under this impression until she did a full check on family and found another foster family who had her sister. It is another example of the unfortunate way the system is set up. We had about two weeks with her before she was moved. Up until that point I had not understood how misguided, and insensitive the foster care system was. I also did not realize my own bias and ill formed opinions that were forming about biological families.

I was in complete denial of the huge issues that are continually plaguing the current system which puts the needs of the child/youth last. As you can imagine my denial quickly changed into hurt and anger. By “recognizing the complexity of systemic injustice, we may feel powerless to make a difference in the face of the massive suffering it causes” (Moe-Lobeda 97). Before this very traumatic experience I had not been very involved with how the foster care

system worked. In fact, I had unintentionally “othered” the children and youth in care because I was under this preconceived idea (hegemonic vision reared its ugly head) that the system we had in the United States worked well and these children’s needs were met. I had this huge revelation quickly after Cherish left. Although my denial of the foster care system faded away, I was immediately struck with feelings of guilt and a hovering feeling of hurt. I decided that I would join this program (MA in International Community Development) and pursue working towards helping fix the holes and problems in our current foster care system.

I was approximately halfway through this program when I realized that so many of the problems in the foster care system are because of the policies and laws that the government has put in place. Going up against the government seemed impossible, and I easily became discouraged. Loving Cherish, being a part of this program, and learning the ins and outs of the system has transformed my opinions of those involved in foster care and has given me the courage to continue fighting for others like Cherish. Moe-Lobeda asserts that “on a level too deep for words, I fear being shattered by them” (96). Although I still struggle with these feelings, I find a sense of peace in being a part of this program and continuing to try to help change the foster care system.

My personal transformation was an example of healing. Although I have become more knowledgeable about at-risk families, foster care, and adoption, the transformation that took place had to do with my heart and how I viewed people. I went from being someone who chose to be in denial and to be angry to someone who broke out of that shell and mindset to see families as real human beings. This experience pushed me to a new level and I broke through my own comfort zone. That kind of transformation is what changes a community and what makes social justice work so important.

### **Social Justice to Me**

As Christians, or self-identified social justice workers, our vocation, spiritual disciplines, and political and social engagements should all be affected by our views on justice and how that relates to poverty and the poor. In the video, *Generous Justice*, Keller asserts "...the widow, the orphan, the immigrant, and the poor... if you are not intensely concerned for them, it's a sign your heart is not right with God" (8:30). As I mentioned above each of the topics listed are important when it comes to us making a concrete stand for a social justice issue, such as poverty. Poverty is not only lacking basic necessities or finances; it is a mindset many people are stuck in due to the government or societal standards they are held to. Choca et al., declares the "underlying the reality of homelessness are three other interconnected factors supporting emotional well-being: relationships, education, and employment (471). Social justice is about giving individuals a voice and a sense of dignity.

For centuries society has been perpetuating the poverty cycle and mindset because they assume, they can decide what level of value everyone falls under. Berry argues that "when humans presume to originate value, they make value that is first abstract and then false, tyrannical, and destructive of real value" (225). The concept of spiritual simplicity denies this idea that humans can and should place value on things of this world. The only person who can do that is God. As a society we have deemed the widow, the orphan, the immigrant, and the poor as lesser than and we live in a world that says it is okay to treat them that way. One common issue that is facing society is "contemporary culture lacks both the inward reality and the outward lifestyle of simplicity... we crave things we neither need nor enjoy" (Foster 80). Our culture has shifted into this idea that happiness comes through selfishness. The United States is a very individualistic country and it continues to struggle with serving those who are at risk in our

communities. Simplicity is an act that most of us do not engage in. Living simply so we all benefit is hard for a country that strives on personal achievements. Advocating for others and taking time to acknowledge the humanity in each of us is what will break this idea of poverty.

What I propose, in order to change behaviors among individuals who can help reduce poverty in the world, is to encourage individuals to remind themselves what is truly important in life versus what society has been saying is important in life. I believe that if people begin to change their mindsets about how they should live they will then see people who have been considered “the other” as people again. Because they will not hold value in what those people possess but will hold value in what those people can give. This is a concrete change in one’s life because it will change how people live their lives and it will become an expression of what they believe. To change the cycle of poverty, we need people to change their mindset, their values, and what they deem as important. We need to get back to Jesus’ version of simplicity and to advocate on behalf of those who cannot advocate for themselves. Those in foster care often feel that they are not being heard. We need to take a step back and see those considered as “others” as how Jesus sees them. It is time to begin advocating for them.

### **Be an Influencer**

In the future I hope to serve as an influence and a voice for at-risk families who are involved in Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF). Tyebjee explains “six in 10 Americans have had personal experience with adoption, meaning they themselves, a family member, or a close friend was adopted, adopted a child, or put a child up for adoption. A third have considered adopting a child. Those with personal experience are more likely than those without to have favorable opinions of adoption” (688). One of the biggest ways we can influence social justice change is by being advocates and speaking on behalf of those who do not

have a predominate voice within our culture or society. Most Americans have some understanding or experience with adoption. This ultimately means that they may also have experience with the foster care system.

When someone has a personal connection to a social justice issue it is way for conversation to begin. According to Tyebjee, “people who had themselves or knew someone who had been an adoptive or foster parent were more positive about foster care and less likely to have no opinion about foster care” (691). Continuing to speak to people about those who are affected by the foster care system reminds individuals of their own experience and understanding of the system. Once again, children and youth in care often feel unheard. If we can show people their stories it can spark something and cause a systemic and societal change in how we perceive and interact with at risk families, foster care, and adoption.

### **Copowerment and Future Work**

Copowerment is defined as a mutual relationship in which both sides are made stronger by the other. My understanding of copowerment is when two opposite people groups come together and create a relationship through programming or policy that mutually benefits one another. As a leader it is important to identify copowerment within your leadership so as to create the best programs, services, or products for the community you are serving.

Petra Kuenkel’s leadership model indicates the importance of copowerment in leadership through two specific dimensions. The two dimensions of innovation and future possibilities are two dimensions in the leadership model that use the value of copowerment. Kuenkel explains we must “take responsibility and consciously shape reality toward a sustainable future” (1162). To have a sustainable future we must work together. Future possibilities and growing within a

corporation or organization will not happen without copowerment. I think about my dad working at Ford for years and then collaborating with Lincoln a few years ago. He now successfully helps to run and interact with both sections of the company as well as their constituents. Kuenkel declares “we need to act and drive innovation in a context of understanding the world as an interconnected system and understanding humankind as a web of relationships” (1202).

Copowerment and innovation are about seeing the value in one another’s ideas and realizing that without that connection each side will lose something. As I continue to work at the non-profit, *Love Recklessly* and continue to work with Washington state and government employees, I hope to see a change in policy and programming to include copowerment. Cohen-Schlanger et al., claims “child welfare experts, therefore, have recognized for some time that inadequate housing can be a risk factor” (550). We have the evidence from studies that prove that giving at-risk families supportive services and housing reduces the number of children coming into care and ultimately saves the state money, time, and effort.

One specific example of how I am seeking to address copowerment in my future is with the housing model I am proposing. By saving money and resources, the government and state could use the money for children and youth already in care and it would give parents the support they need to be healthy parents in the eyes of the state. According to Harburger and White:

Parents and their children should not be penalized for poverty or the circumstances into which they were born. Supportive housing empowers parents to care for their children in their own homes and moves them closer to self- sufficiency. It returns the obligation to provide safe housing for all children to housing agencies, freeing up limited child welfare resources for children who are in imminent danger. (504)

Not only am I proposing a housing model that incorporates copowerment within its structure, I am also working on creating relationships with foster families, biological families, and the children/youth involved. If we can create relationships with each of these family sects, then we can connect them and create healthy relationships between the families with the overall purpose of enriching the child's life and well-being. This would help biological parents to experience and see what a healthy family looks like and would give foster families the opportunity to get information, family history, and advice on how to care for the child in their care. Currently our system is not set up where these connections can be made well. I hope to use copowerment as a leading value in my leadership to create a dynamic at *Love Recklessly* where foster families, biological families, and the children/youth in care can all have healthy relationships that strengthen one another.

### **A Philosophy of Service**

My own philosophy of service and social justice as a whole has gone through many transitions during this program. My research and thesis focus on the foster care system within the United States. Specifically, I chose to focus on the issues surrounding a lack of proper housing and a lack of services for at-risk families. My limited understanding of foster care and government services at the beginning of this program led me to believe, strongly, that biological families who cannot care for their children properly should not continue to receive services and drain money from our state that could go towards foster care programs. During my fieldwork I realized that I had a firm belief that these parents should not be allowed to parent again. My thought process and philosophy on this changed as I continued my fieldwork and began to understand at risk families and the issues plaguing our current foster care system. To put it simply I began with a mindset of us versus them and changed when I realized I had been seeing

these people as objects and not human beings. Bud Jefferson from the *Arbinger Institute* claims “I saw others as less than they were – as objects with needs and desires somehow secondary to and less legitimate than mine” (563). To serve a community well we first need to see the community as a group of human beings. We cannot serve properly if we go in thinking a community is a problem; a community may have a problem but overall the people within that community are bigger than their problems.

My family has been involved in foster care and adoption for years. I am more involved with the foster care system because of this program of study. For my fieldwork I served as a case aide for a few months in Gig Harbor. I began to work directly with biological families who are in the process of trying to get their children back. The whole foster care system is very sterile and by the book. There is not much room for deep and personal relationship with the families involved because there are too many cases and because it is crucial to maintain an unbiased opinion. Going into this work I realized I was already biased. I had my own philosophy of how biological families should be treated. I honestly loathed these families. I had such a bad taste in my mouth because of my own previous experience that it made the whole fieldwork experience difficult. Not only did I see these individuals I was working with every day as objects, I also knew that the impersonal way I was treating them ultimately was impacting how they were treating me. When there is no relationship whatsoever you must deal with huge walls. Biological families are the very people I had put inside my own box due to my self-deception, and to serve them and their children properly, I would need to change. I had purposely created a barrier between us: my beliefs that no matter what they did, they did not deserve to get their children back and that foster care was the best thing for them.



I was treating these people as objects due to the self-deceptive thought process; I had led myself into. I truly believed that the foster parents were the ones who should have the support and were the better option. I felt that I was being fair by treating these families as objects. I remember the day that I began stepping outside the box of self-deception. During my fieldwork, I was speaking with a family about their concerns of bruising on their son. Upon further inspection, it was quite clear that the boy had many bruises that were in strange areas. Fast forward and the boy was removed from his foster parents for abuse and neglect. This moment sparked a shift in how I thought about and treated these families. I began to, and am continuing to, actively create relationships with the biological families. Hearing their stories, asking them how the search for a job was going, and if they enjoyed the weather were extremely small steps that I began taking. It was difficult for both me and the families, who were used to being treated as objects by many people, but eventually a small relationship formed. These families need extra support, but that does not mean they do not have the potential to be good, healthy parents for their children.

Through further research I found that studies are now showing that not only is it better mentally, behaviorally, and physically for children to stay with their biological families, it is also saving the state money. Harburger and White attest that “most families can successfully and safely care for their children in their own homes with the proper assistance; however, the current child welfare funding structure prioritizes maintaining children in out-of-home care over preserving them in their homes” (494). Studies being conducted show that there is in fact a decrease in spending when funds are allotted towards housing and services for families to stay together. I cannot deny these statistics or studies and my philosophy on out-of-home care and

foster care in general began to change. Through this fundamental change in my own philosophy, I began thinking about how this could also impact my own vocation.

### **Future Vocational Choices**

My goal is to not only be a foster parent one day but to work within an organization to help support families who are impacted by foster care. I feel led both vocationally and spiritually to work with and serve at-risk families and the foster care community. To be free from self-deception, an act of creating space where it is me versus others, I need to continue to create relationships with the biological families involved. Jefferson explains "... no matter what we're doing on the outside, people respond primarily to how we're feeling about them on the inside. And how we're feeling about them depends on whether we're in or out of the box concerning them" (514). Changing both how I feel about someone on the outside and inside will ultimately make me a better leader because I will be interacting with individuals who need just one person to see them as human.

For now, *Love Recklessly* is offering supportive services for foster families and is working in conjunction with our local DCYF office to change policy. For my thesis project, I am proposing a housing community model that would give at risk families housing and supportive services. The goal is to reduce the number of children going into the system while saving money on behalf of the \$1 billion that is designated to DCYF that could be used towards newer programming for those already in care. My philosophy on foster care has changed drastically. I used to believe that biological families should just have one shot. If their children are removed, then it's for the best for them to stay in the foster care system. Children and youth need a safe and loving home, there is no argument there; however, now I believe that if their biological parents can provide that with some extra support then that is what is best for the child. With this

mindset having changed, I created this housing plan as a potential model to be implemented. I hope to see it come to fruition in the next few years as I continue my vocational journey working with the government, Washington state, and those impacted by foster care.

### **Conclusion**

Each of the values that have been instilled in us all have the same core concept: humanity. To change our communities and world we need to quit trying to solve everything using an equation. Too many times we have forgotten to reach out to people and just create relationships. James Ferrell argues that "... but all of those who have really made a difference... the Ghandi's of the world, the Kings, the Mandela's, because they allowed their hearts to be moved by the humanity of others, they moved humanity" (0:15-0:37). To be successful in any capacity we must see the humanity in those we serve and work with first. We all have imperfections, have made wrong choices, but universally we all want love and acceptance. Foster care will not change until we begin serving these families well and seeing them as important individuals in our community.

### Works Cited

- Arbinger Institute. *Leadership and Self-Deception: Getting Out of the Box*. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2010.
- Berry, Wendell. "Two Economies." *The Art of the Commonplace*, ed. Norman Wirzba, Counterpoint, 2002, pp 219-235.
- Choca, Miryam J., et al. "Can't Do It Alone: Housing Collaborations to Improve Foster Youth Outcomes." *Child Welfare*, vol. 83, no. 5, Sept. 2004, pp. 469–492. EBSCOhost, library.northwestu.edu/scripts/proxy.php?link=https://search-ebSCOhost-com.nu.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=tfh&AN=14536556&site=ehost-live&scope=site.
- Cohen-Schlanger, Miriam, et al. "Housing as a Factor in Admissions of Children to Temporary Care: A Survey." *Child Welfare*, vol. 74, no. 3, May 1995, p. 547. EBSCOhost, library.northwestu.edu/scripts/proxy.php?link=https://search-ebSCOhost-com.nu.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=f5h&AN=24227283&site=ehost-live&scope=site.
- Foster, Richard. *The Discipline of Simplicity*. "Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth, HarperCollins, 1998, pp. 79-95. Print.
- Harburger, Deborah S., and Ruth A. White. "Reunifying Families, Cutting Costs: Housing-Child Welfare Partnerships for Permanent Supportive Housing." *Child Welfare*, vol. 83, no. 5, Sept. 2004, p. 493. EBSCOhost, library.northwestu.edu/scripts/proxy.php?link=https://search-ebSCOhost-

com.nu.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=f5h&AN=14536557&site=ehost-live&scope=site.

Keller, Timothy. Generous Justice, April 12-14, 2011: Christ+City Post-conference. *The Gospel Coalition*, 2011. Google: Tim Keller, Generous Justice/Scroll to Videos/Choose Generous Justice the Gospel Coalition YouTube - Mar 24, 2014 or The Gospel Coalition Vimeo - Aug 4, 2011

Kelley, Tom and David Kelley. *Creative Confidence: Unleashing the Creative Potential Within Us All*. New York: Crown Business, 2013.

Kuenkel, Petra. *The Art of Leading Collectively: Co-Creating a Sustainable, Socially Just Future*. Chelsea Green Publishing, 2016.

Moe-Lobeda, Cynthia. *Resisting Structural Evil: Love as an Ecological-Economic Vocation*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2013.

“NF – How Could You Leave Us.” *Genius*, 22 Apr. 2016, [genius.com/Nf-how-could-you-leave-us-lyrics](http://genius.com/Nf-how-could-you-leave-us-lyrics).

Smith, Dana K, et al. “Placement Disruption in Treatment Foster Care.” *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders*, vol. 9, no. 3, 2001, pp. 200–205., doi:10.1177/106342660100900306.

Thompson, Marjorie J. *Soul Feast: An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1995. Print.

Tyebjee, Tyzoon. “Attitude, Interest, and Motivation for Adoption and Foster Care.” *Child Welfare*, vol. 82, no. 6, 2003, p. 685.