

Creating an Atmosphere for Healing Trauma:
A Three-Fold Approach for Women Experiencing Homelessness

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11 May 2021

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Integrative project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Master of Arts in International Community Development,
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Author's Note:

This document incorporates material written for the following MAICD courses:
Community Development; Funding, Grant Writing, and Volunteer Management; Leadership;
Spirituality, Culture, and Social Justice; Research for Social Change; Thesis I; Thesis II

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Introduction

In communities across the United States, homelessness is a persistent issue complicated by several factors. By far, the greatest issue is a lack of affordable housing (“Making Housing”). Previous trauma, both as children and as adults, can complicate matters for women especially. Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) often set the stage for a lifetime of challenges based on lies that women believe about themselves. This marginalizing self-concept can prevent women from seeing the value they contribute to the community around them, causing them to choose unhealthy relationships or life-choices that add more traumatic experiences, which may eventually find them in an extremely debilitating situation—homelessness—creating yet another trauma of its own. In the past, those who sought to aid these women focused on teaching them life skills with the assumption that if they learn the necessary skills, the women will be able to exit the ranks of homelessness. However, this established exit route is far too often fraught with challenges that are too overwhelming for a growing number of women to overcome.

Due to the unique situations of women experiencing homelessness, each one needs to have tailored support to heal from trauma and unleash her full potential by understanding her innate talents. A combination of one-on-one mentoring with investigations into the lies that hold them back, and the hopefulness that results from the study of innate talents and gifts, is the empowering impetus that leads to housing stability. Drawing from lessons learned during an ethnographic in-house stay at a local women’s shelter, this thesis defends why programs that focus first on healing should take precedence over programs whose primary focus is on life skills. The first deals with some of the root causes of not being able to exit the ranks of homelessness.

Additionally, this thesis will present a framework for a healing-based program that includes a mentorship aspect and curriculum that identifies and nurtures innate talents, while

discrediting the devastating lies that prevent them from lasting stability (Appendix A). Also included is a theory of change to inform program evaluation (Appendix B).

An Ethnographic Study of a Women's Residential Program

In the realm of observation research, one is forced to come to terms with her own biases as well as presumptions. One must assume a stance of observation to collect information (Merriam and Tisdell 144) and is invariably made to see brokenness brought alongside opportunities and resources. This in turn develops respect and appreciation. I understood this to some degree when doing an observation of the homeless population in Chattanooga one day as I joined them at Community Kitchen. This experience made me realize that being an outsider looking in would never be enough for me to grasp what the truer needs of women in a transitional shelter are. Quantitative research of facts and figures of homelessness among women, single or with children, might provide a general understanding of their basic needs, but it was vital that I understand the complexity of their situation. Qualitative inquiry was necessary for me to gain some meaning from their context (2), to understand how they “interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute” to those experiences (6). To create more relevant life skills classes, I needed to gain a better understanding of the women staying at the shelter—beyond what I already knew by periodically working with them. The best choice of research seemed to be an ethnographic immersion “as a participant observer” (30), building a picture of their “lifeworld” to better understand their daily activities (Stringer 113).

Explanation of Fieldwork Choice

The last time I facilitated a life skills class at the Chattanooga Room in the Inn (CRITI), I lamented that only one of the women came to the class. It was not the first time this had

happened in the past six months. I wondered, “Where are the women? Why are they not engaging in these classes, which are designed to help them take tangible steps out of homelessness?” As I pondered over this dilemma, I took a fresh look at my teaching materials (which were provided for me), and I began to suspect the class materials needed some updating. A conversation with Sharon, Volunteer Coordinator at CRITI, informed me that my classes were not the only ones the women were skipping out on. This could partly be due to the new philosophy of the program. In the past, life skills classes were a mandatory part of the program. With a trauma-informed approach to care, women were released to make their own decisions (Creal). As a result, the women are choosing not to engage in the life skill classes. This is understandable since the fifteen-year-old curriculum was very basic, with no technological aspects to make it engaging for a society used to social media websites and a plethora of YouTube videos.

It was at this point that I seriously began to consider how to make the classes more relevant, interesting, and compelling for the women in the CRITI program. This led to my fieldwork study as a homeless woman within the program. My goal was to get a better idea of which life skills might be more necessary for today’s group of women and the best way to approach these skills. What I discovered through my fieldwork experience changed my understanding of what many of these women need most if they are to take the necessary steps out of homelessness into successful, independent living.

Chattanooga Room in the Inn (CRITI)

Chattanooga Room in the Inn (CRITI) offers a residential program for homeless women and their children from the greater Chattanooga, TN area. The program is now in its thirtieth year, serving homeless women and their children 24 hours a day, every day of the year. They currently run two programs: CRITI Program and HomeAgain. Women who graduate from the

residential CRITI Program can spend up to five years living in affordable, transitional housing (“HomeAgain”) and still receive the case management and other services they received while in-house. In 2019 the Chattanooga organization served 60 individuals (including 35 children, and 17 families) and the average length of stay was 103 days (“About Us”). A board of directors, comprised predominantly of women, help to direct, and support CRITI’s mission of providing a place for homeless women to stay in physical and emotional safety, address the issues that brought them there, and “learn how to pave the way to a brighter future [to] never be homeless again” (“Programs”). For those who graduate, the success rates each year of those who are still living in stable housing as of 2019 is 100% (“Home page”). Their success stories of permanent housing stability are beautifully inspiring. But for those who struggle to graduate, or drop out before they do, the stories are disheartening. Although the women are treated like adults who can make their own decisions, even if they are poor ones, such as quitting the program, it is troublesome to realize that their past trauma may have essentially made that choice for them.

The Life Skills Program

When CRITI’s program began nearly 30 years ago, the women came into the program, took the life skills classes they needed for success, and exited from the program in one to three months. A few took up to six months. The classes included practical skills such as short- and long-term goals, budgeting, preparing a resume, and nutrition, as well as intra- and interpersonal skills that included self-esteem, coping with stress, anger management, and social skills. In the past three years, the women coming into the program have been needing six months to a year to graduate, especially women with children (Creal). This is typically due to women not having a job or the lack of a high school diploma making obtaining a job difficult. This is particularly challenging for single mothers. The trauma-informed care policy change now enables the women to choose whether they take the life skills classes. Unfortunately, most do not see the value in the current classes which leads them to drop out of the CRITI Program before completion.

Subsequently, almost all fall back into homelessness (Kendall 2019). It is an alarming trend, and the current life skills training is not helping. I began to understand why when I became

‘homeless’ for two weeks in the summer of 2019. It is not that the life skills training is unneeded, but the women first need healing. Many of the participants need healing from childhood adversity and the added trauma inflicted in adulthood, which I will elaborate on later in this thesis.

A Faith that Informs Healing

I first learned about CRITI six months after moving to Chattanooga. My recent divorce shattered my sense of self and left me emotionally broken. When I was looking for a Divorce Care program to help me through this unbearable time, I stumbled upon CRITI, and its mission to provide safety for women and their children drew me in. Because of my childhood, the plight of single mothers and their children has always held a special place in my heart.

Unwed mothers, especially ones in their teens, were frowned upon in the 1960s. Through my young eyes and in my spirit, I knew my mother was not looked at the same as other mothers. Their contempt did not stay with my mother, either, as I was aware that no one looked at me like they did other children. I believed my unexpected birth was my fault. Despite a grandmother’s love and encouraging support, the lie of being unexpected and unwanted haunted me throughout my childhood. The memory stings and still creates a sense of poverty many years later. Yet, amid this poverty of sorts, another more profoundly gracious gift came to me in the later years of my youth. This gift battles against the lies and helps bring healing.

Healing for many, including myself, comes from the ever-growing sense that something greater than self is at work in the world. Many who call on this greater being experience a deep sense of love and experience healing from deep and superficial wounds alike. Researching over a 10-year period, studying projects that successfully helped 530 older women in and after homelessness, Moxley and Washington documented how deep spirituality was important to

recovery from homelessness. One woman, Jeannie, expressed that “it is the source of strength...you can draw on at any time,” linking meditation in a “quiet solitude of space” to “listen to that wee, tiny voice” (1048). She believed God could send her someone who might be able to encourage her or help her in tangible ways; she was not disappointed in this. Many women in Moxley and Washington’s study showed how the women’s spiritual and religious resources, which connected them to “higher-order values,” helped them to recover from the vulnerability that led them into homelessness (1040). Faith was an asset that led to “a complex process of mastery” for these women (1040).

An asset of faith involves engaging in practices that strengthen this belief of a God who hears and loves everyone. Marjorie Thompson, in her book, *Soul Feast*, shares how the spiritual disciplines, such as reading the Bible, prayer, and communicating with others of like mind, help each person to understand his or her place in the world. She puts forth the idea that humans “harbor a bedrock desire for a transcendent wellspring of meaning and purpose in life” (5). While other disciplines of thought, such as sociology, may attribute this desire to psychosocial need, “people of faith believe that [they] are *made* for relationship with God” (6).

Within the Bible, a story of change is available for all to discover. The story begins with a choice that breaks the relationship between man and his creator (*Family Walk*, Gen. 3). This choice leads man into unhealthy, traumatic circumstances which perpetuate over hundreds of generations, as portrayed in the Old Testament books (*Family Walk*). These circumstances lead to oppression and profound marginalization of body and soul. The Divine Creator promises He will repair this damage and sends Jesus. Over the course of his short life, as portrayed in the New Testament, Jesus shows the people how to recognize a poverty of spirit and what can be done about it: “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my

yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light” (Matt. 11. 28–30). For those within the story who choose to come to him and believe he can do what he promises, there are stories of change that involve healing of their trauma and lives that typically portray healthy bodies and souls, despite the political oppression of their time (Matt. 8.14–17; 17.14–18; Mark 5; Luke 5.12–26). I found their experience to also be true in my own life, as did CRITI participants Ineza, Dee, and Shaniece¹. The belief that the Divine sees and cares, carries these women through the challenging but rewarding healing process. This story of the Divine and a restored creation can be good news for many: a Gospel that brings hope and healing. Because this story of change has the potential to be the impetus of healing for other women in the CRITI program, it is the foundation for the mentorship program and the curriculum that goes with it. As in the original story of change, each woman will be given a choice to believe Jesus or not. The right to choose what seems best for their recovery from trauma is just one aspect of the program that will empower them to direct their own story of change.

Fieldwork Reflection

Upon completion of my in-house stay at CRITI, I discovered that the current life skills program we have does not work for many of the participants as a first line of service. They are different than the women of past years: they are in a different place (Creal; Kendall 2019). This difference is explained by Corbett and Fikkert’s poverty situations—relief, rehabilitation, and development. All the ladies come into CRITI due to the “urgent and temporary provision of emergency aid,” which is the first phase, or relief (104). The second phase, restoring people and

¹ For the protection of their privacy, all interviews with participants from CRITI were assigned pseudonyms.

their communities “to the positive elements of their precrisis condition,” is rehabilitation (104). The third, and last phase, is development: “a process of ongoing change” that moves everyone closer to right relationships with God and others (104). Most of the women used to move quickly to the development stage, needing only 3-6 months of rehabilitation and encouraging development within the safety of the residential program to complete their goals for housing independence (Kendall, 2019). Now many are coming into the program needing immediate relief, then moving to rehabilitation and staying there. Conversations with the women and gaining insight into their complex traumas indicate their need for a repaired understanding of their value and their gifts to help propel them into the development stage.

Corbett and Fikkert explain that mixing Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) with Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is a well-rounded way to help people like the women at CRITI to become healed and balanced in their understanding of themselves, the divine, and others. Even women living in poverty, with no place to call home, have a host of gifts such as their intelligence, creativity, knowledge, and innate talents. These assets can allow the women to explore “What is right with you?” and discover how they can be “stewards of their own gifts and resources,” allowing restoration of their whole being (126). Using Sue Annis Hammond’s AI model as an approach to ABCD, is a mindset that works well for this curriculum project in context with CRITI. It calls for defining what the ladies will look for (27); discovery of innate talent themes and gifting (29); dreaming of what could be by engaging them (31); considering an ideal use of those themes and gifts (design) as they understand the lies women tend to believe (33); and the delivery of what they already do that works, which can be built upon by this new knowledge (38). The AI approach to ABCD begins with leaders and mentors asking the women need-based questions that move them into discovery.

When asked which life skills would be most helpful for them in achieving their goals, most of the women at CRITI expressed that they do not have time for any of them. In probing deeper, it seems the emotional or mental capacity to engage effectively in the subject matter is exhausted, as Dee explains: “When I first arrived, my body hurt, my mind hurt. I’m a runner—when I’m scared, I run. I had to learn to breath...it took 3-4 months...to build trust, and feel safe, especially with the staff” (Personal interview). Although she was living in-house during my stay, Dee kept her interactions with me away from deep feelings such as these. It was not until a visit to CRITTI more than five months later that she was able to share these thoughts with me. Dee had come through severe trauma and was finally at a place where she could express, “I have a good feeling about where I am and my limits physically and mentally” (Personal interview). She did eventually choose to engage in life skills classes, and after almost two years of healing, developing the needed skills, and waiting for affordable housing, Dee left homelessness behind.

Life skills classes were not being held when I was in residence for fifteen days. If they had been, I have no idea how I could have made those meetings or had the emotional or mental energy to make much use of them. Journal entries during my stay expound on the many responsibilities both personally and as a resident, often ending with expressions of exhaustion: “I finally finished my chores at 11:48 pm and went upstairs. I was so tired I went to bed shortly after. It wasn’t until I awoke the next morning that I [realized] I had forgotten to ask the shift manager to inspect my kitchen chore...I now have an ‘incident’ on my record. It’s like doing your homework and forgetting to turn it in.” I was gaining a clearer understanding as to why the ladies chose not to attend the life skills classes. Yet interestingly, despite the ladies’ reluctance for them, when asked, “What do you think about exploring your innate talents?” each of them brightened expressing that this would be a helpful subject and they would attend meetings about

that topic. Aside from the obvious reason of it being a positive boost to realize they might have special gifts, I was intrigued by their willingness to set aside time and mental energy for this topic, but not the practical life skills training which is purported to be the best exit ticket from homelessness.

The Intricacies of Women Experiencing Homelessness

When considering the social and cultural dimensions of development, modernized approaches often dismiss gender differences (Willis 142). These differences include typical behavioral functions of men and women, which change over time. These changes can have very different effects depending on the gender (142). Women have ‘practical needs’ that include things in development that may be needed for women to fulfill their roles (i.e., access to water for cleaning and cooking), as well as ‘strategic needs’ which may involve “a change in the present state of gender relations” (i.e., legislation allowing them the right to own land or vote) (143-144). Keeping in mind gender, and their roles within the home and society, is key to developing the curriculum for women experiencing homelessness, as well as the team of leaders and mentors who will serve them. The life stage of those who attend will need to be considered as well, “in particular how the needs of children, young people and the elderly are met as part of the development” (154). The position women had before homelessness may inform their behavior. Childhood adversity and adult trauma will further inform their behavior. This can be a challenge for those who seek to serve them. Understanding the role of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), adult trauma, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), marred identity, and the effect of fear is necessary to effectively serve these vulnerable women.

ACEs and Their Impact on Women

Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are potentially traumatic experiences that occur before the age of 18 (“What are ACEs?”). They include multiple types of abuse and the dysfunction of the household. These include mental illness of a household member (including suicide attempts); the loss of a parent through death, divorce, or incarceration; any domestic abuse of either parent; or substance abuse by a parent. A study of ACEs and services, led by Holloway and Park, found that 87% of individuals experiencing homelessness reported at least one of the ten ACEs, and more than 50% reported four or more (90). The authors indicated that ACEs increased an individual’s “vulnerability to systemic challenges” as conditions for losing employment and becoming homeless (90). They also found that individuals “possess various areas of strength” that can be supported (90). It is this aspect that the curriculum would address—identifying and building on innate talents and strengths to bolster the women’s well-being. Increased well-being is one way to induce healing and allow the brain to move from *‘doing’* to escape danger, to a normal functioning brain that can help them process their way out of their homelessness (McDevitt).

Scientists have explored a potential link between ACEs and homelessness in adulthood. In a study by Leslie E. Roos et al., the objective was to “better describe and understand the relationship between childhood adversity and future homelessness” (S275). They learned that of the women who experienced lifetime homelessness, a.) 75.1% experienced abuse or neglect, b.) 60.9% experienced household dysfunction, and c.) 85% experienced at least one of the 10 ACEs (S277). A significant finding of their results was evidence of “a strong link between each type of investigated adverse experience in childhood and future homelessness” (S279). But what connects specifically with this thesis is their finding that “multiple risk patterns faced by

individuals with childhood adversity is key to understanding” how vulnerable their health and well-being are affected in adulthood (S280). This is another indication that working with women experiencing homelessness will require mentors to receive trauma-informed care training that includes a careful study of ACEs and their effects on women in adulthood.

Prevalence of Adult Trauma and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

Although ACEs can create the vulnerability and undergirding of potential homelessness in women as they enter adulthood, it is often trauma experienced in adulthood that creates the sense of fragility that pushes them into homelessness. In their study on older African American women, David Moxley and Olivia Washington conceptualized what recovery might look like in human services. They report that women become vulnerable through the childhood adversity and trauma that continues into adulthood. If their environments are failing to support them, then extreme experiences will create a sense of fragility that can “undermine functioning, resilience, and adaptability,” and the lifetime of marginalization can make people “susceptible to negative tipping points when social forces combine to push them into homelessness” (1041). Elizabeth Hopper et al. refers to trauma as “an experience that creates a sense of fear, helplessness, or horror, and overwhelms a [woman’s] resources for coping” (80). When adding the impact of childhood sexual abuse, women are often “four times more likely to have experienced sexual assault in adulthood and two and a third times more likely to have been physically assaulted as an adult” (Phipps et al. 4). The state of becoming homeless can create a traumatic experience as well: the loss of an individual’s home on top of previously experienced trauma can create “high levels of psychological stress” (5) that can extend for an indefinite period. The impact of this toxic type of stress (including post-traumatic stress) can be “devastating and long-lasting,” interfering with a sense of safety, any ability to self-regulate, strip one of the perceptions of

control or self-efficacy, and have detrimental effects on relationships (Hopper et al. 80). This helps to show how complex trauma can be and the challenge to heal effectively from it.

Another complication for women who enter homelessness is the prevalence of physical and mental health issues. Phipps et al. report greater incidences of psychopathology in women experiencing homelessness, “especially anxiety disorders and depression,” both of which often stem from medical problems and mental health issues and can grow worse in the situation of homelessness (5). We have seen this with the participants in the CRITI program. This deep sense of trauma on so many fronts has made it difficult for too many women to successfully exit homelessness. The lack of stable, supportive relationships and appropriate extended avenues for healing leave the women in a fragile state, unable to attend to skills that would lead them out of their vulnerable situation. Complications with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) can exacerbate this further.

Post-traumatic stress disorder looks different for everyone who experiences it due to distinct manifestations. In their study of individuals with mental illness experiencing trauma, Helfrich et al. pointed out that PTSD has three diagnostic indicators that inform the extent of trauma: intrusion, avoidance, and hyperarousal. The first indicator, intrusion, occurs “when a person experiences unwanted thoughts or reminders of the traumatic event” (117). Avoidance symptoms occur when individuals “actively avoid thoughts or reminders of the traumatic event” (117). Hyperarousal symptoms are related to “nervous system changes characteristic of the ‘fight, flight or fright’ response” (117). There is further indication that being female, having a history of abuse and victimization, and living in homelessness for longer periods of time correlates with higher incident rates of PTSD (Phipps et al. 4–5). Unresolved trauma creates a continuous toxic stress that heightens any of these three PTSD indicators. This especially seems

to be the case when the traumatic experience involved a total loss of control. Helfrich et al. investigated the prevalence of trauma symptoms before and after life skills intervention and found that “trauma symptoms were highest for most participants prior to life skills intervention” and were significantly decreased 6 months after the intervention (121). The authors defined life skills as the skills needed for “room and self-care, money management, nutrition management and/or safe community participation” (116). After intervention, Helfrich et al. found the symptoms of trauma decreased to levels consistent with those in the study who had not experienced trauma symptoms. Though they are not certain why, there are indications that “clear routine of the intervention” made it possible for participants to successfully “stabilize their traumatic symptoms” (121) and that trauma-informed therapy may aid in increasing participants sense of control (122). Although the authors did not mention the importance of creating trusting interactions, it can be implied since they used trauma-informed approaches, which rely on building a sense of safety and trust. Building trusting relationships with women who have been traumatized is necessary for successful life skills interventions; the trust allows for a sense of safety to open the mind to learning new skills (Creal; Collins; Kendall, 2021; Salem et al. 682). This sense of trust was so important for Dee to experience enough safety to effectively engage in the entire CRITI program and exit homelessness.

The Role of Marred Identity

There are times when individuals seem especially challenged with moving forward, and it involves something other than strictly traumatic experiences. The sense of vulnerability that extends over long periods lead to what Jayakumar Christian calls a “marred identity” (qtd. in Myers 127). In his book, *Walking with the Poor*, Bryant Myers discusses different systems of poverty and the poor, addressing both the nature of poverty and the causes of it (105-148).

Christian makes it clear that poverty is a disempowering system. He sees “the poor household embedded in a complex framework of interacting systems” include four systems: social, cultural, spiritual/religious, and personal (123). Myers adds biophysical as a fifth system, but the most significant system for this thesis context is the personal system, which includes psychology. All the other systems combined result in the “tragic marring of the identity of the poor” (127) and it occurs in three important ways:

- ❖ “The poor are systematically excluded as actors” because society sees them as “damaged goods” with nothing valuable to contribute.
- ❖ Because of “a lifetime of suffering, deception, and exclusion” internalized within them, the poor “no longer know who they really are or the purpose for which they were created”, leaving them feeling they have nothing to contribute to their society “other than to serve.”
- ❖ This results in a poverty of being, which leaves a person feeling “they are no good and cannot get things right.” (Myers 127)

This idea that those who suffer in poverty do not know who they are, nor do they believe they have any gifts or abilities of value, is something I have vaguely felt throughout my life and what some women at CRITI seem to portray. Those who grow up in poverty make “understandable, rational, and necessary emotional adjustments as a way of coping with the chronically oppressive and seeming immutable reality in which they live,” and these views tend to be passed onto their children who “take them as normative, ordained, and unchangeable” (Myers 128). As a child raised by a parent who grew up in poverty, I came to believe that my only worth is to be of service to others and that outside of this I have little value. A key aspect of this distorted identity, and why the distortion persists, is due to Christian’s “web of lies” that insidiously traps the poor

(128). This web of lies involves the social, political, economic, and religious systems of individuals and communities (130). The marginalized, with their marred identity, have believed the lies and deceptions about themselves which have been spoken into them from society, as well as the significant people in their lives who have abused them. They are trapped and need a way out. Truth about the lies they have absorbed is essential to gaining a healthy identity.

Fear as An Immobilizer

In most of my interviews with the participants at CRITI, there was a theme of fear. For Carole, fear is a strong element that resulted from years of a mood disorder, headaches, anxiety, and her eventual inability to stay in a job she was trained for. This perceived failure added even more to her fears and created crippling anxieties about her future. Another participant of CRITI expressed the initial fear of being in a new place with freedoms of choice. Coming from a prison environment left Pamela with a need to “adjust to [my] new surroundings” (Personal interview). She related the fear of “opening up” to the caseworkers and the other participants, as well as having to sign up for and do new things, such as ride the city bus (Pamela).

Some of the participants are parents of children they care deeply for and worry over. The fear of what might become of them in this situation of homelessness drives a quiet-spoken mother of middle age to work hard at her manual labor job. For Shaniece, love for her children and thankfulness for what they have come through gives her a sense of hope for her and her children’s future (Personal interview). Her 13-year-old daughter, who has undergone multiple heart surgeries, listens to my interchanges with her mother with quiet patience, and a demeanor that seems to reflect her mother’s hope. This hope seems to dispel at least some of their fear for the time being. But in the case of Katlego, there is a public portrayal of confidence and energetic ideas for her child’s future as a potential homeschooler (Private interview), yet in the privacy of

her room, which is next to mine, I often hear her raise her voice loudly in irritation of some kind toward her two children. Ideas and visions seem like motivators in the presence of others who empathize, but fear of whether she can bring those visions into reality creeps in when crowded into a small bedroom with a teenager and a kindergartener. The same day my stay ended, fear of the CRITI process and letting go of money for a savings fund drives Katlego to leave the program before she has completed half of it.

Sometimes fear of the future is pushed to the back of the mind, like in the case of Ineza. She is a young mother with three young children and has experienced many years of marginalization as a member of a minority tribe (Personal interview). She was orphaned at 13 in one of the poorest nations on earth, spent nearly 10 years in a refugee camp, was accepted into the United States with her spouse, a preschooler and baby. Ineza did not have a high school diploma and knew very little English. Within months of arriving, she was abandoned by her husband and expecting her third child. Between learning English well enough to get a minimum wage job, raising three children now, keeping up faithfully with her CRITI chores and expectations, learning to drive, and diligently saving money to succeed on her own, fear was a self-conscious driver. There was no time to dwell on it while Ineza welcomed the freedom to strive for an independence that she could not have experienced in her birth country. Yet that fear lingered there behind her tired eyes, even as she eventually graduated from the program and entered stable housing.

The success rate of these six women in graduating from the CRITI program and experiencing stable housing was only three out of six (Dee, Carole, and Ineza). Though it is unknown what has become of Katlego, Shaniece moved in with her son and his wife and Pamela eventually achieved stable housing through the outside support she received from her CRITI

caseworker. Fear seems to immobilize many of the women from achieving stable housing and I began to understand why through an experience of my own while living in-house at CRITI.

The Effect of Fear on the Brain

Fear is my thorn in the flesh. It has hounded me ever since I can remember and is the most significant battle of my inner life. During my in-house stay at CRITI, there were daily stresses from responsibilities of family and chores, transportation issues, and graduate classwork. During this challenging research experience, I was also facing a court hearing, as well as a fine of \$1,500 due to the height of the grass in one area of my yard. Although my father had since taken care of the grass, the hearing still loomed disturbingly. I was extremely nervous about going to court and felt powerless up until the day before the hearing, which happened to be my last full day at CRITI. After praying, I dialed the number for Legal Aid in hopes they could at least give me some advice on what to do in preparation. The person I spoke with was calm and gracious, giving me the courage and ability to reread the letters from the city. I then made a second call and within the hour, the case was dismissed. Astounded, I wept with relief and intense gratefulness to God for nearly an hour; I had not realized until then how much this issue had been preying on my mind. This court experience, along with a conversation with Casey Kendall, helped to clarify that when a person struggles with fear, they often cannot see the simple solutions to their problems (2019). This experience was the defining realization that my thesis project needed to take a turn and move in a different direction. The women at CRITI—and likely those at other women’s shelter programs—need a focus of life *support* before life *skills* can be successfully attained. The outflow of my fieldwork experience has led me to create this curriculum that would be used in a mentorship program with leaders and mentors diligently trained in trauma-informed care practices.

A Three-Fold Approach to Healing

Considering the evidence that trauma, fear, and a marred identity can cause the mind to struggle with learning new skills, I propose a focus on the healing of trauma and the repairing of a marred identity. This first line approach for the context of CRITI involves three key aspects: a gospel-centered focus, a trauma-informed mentorship program, and a curriculum for healing that includes the study of innate talents as a support while being exposed to the lies that immobilize.

Emphasis on A Gospel Focus

There are several key reasons for making this option gospel centered, recalling that this essentially means ‘good news for broken relationships and damaged lives.’ First, disunity of mind, body, and spirit shows itself in numerous ways by broken relationships and the trauma that often robs an individual of their identity. This can leave individuals with a sense of inexplicable loss. Therefore, going back to the roots of how healthy relationships begin, and providing an atmosphere for exploring what the Bible has to say about a gracious and loving God, is a sensible part of the program. The second reason is that trauma comes from a direct assault to the personhood and dignity of everyone, and the lack of processing it—or doing so ineffectively—can turn a soul impotent or bitter. If unity of the whole person is going to take place, these things would need to be understood, confronted in the gentlest manner possible, and processed with a mind toward forgiveness, when attainable. Bryant Myers states that “God’s project in history is at heart a simple one. It is the story of creation and redemption by the God of Israel and Father of the risen Christ working through the Holy Spirit. God’s story tells us how things started, lost their way, can be redirected, and how God’s intention for God’s creation is restored in the end” (58). Learning about gracious love can be the impetus for learning how to love self in a healthy way, opening the way for the healing of trauma.

In keeping with this mindset, the Three-fold Approach to Healing program can be undergirded with the holistic story of Jesus. Transformation for these vulnerable women must include “the world of the poor and the non-poor in light of the whole biblical account” (Myers 98). Incorporating His story from beginning to end will allow for a proper understanding of the gospel and its meaningfulness (98) as each woman engages with the curriculum. This holistic story, according to Myers, must include eternity in its view of time to help participants develop the courage to consider the “service of higher goods” over “mere accumulation of wealth” (98). It should also include “a holistic view of human beings” (99). This includes not only a divine story for mankind, but how everyone sees their own and the story of others. The goal of the program is to induce healing. If a participant comes into the program with no faith-base, the gentle exposure to the Gospel may be what they need to begin the healing process. For those who have a different faith ideal already, there will be ‘space’ to compare the faith ideologies and to choose what would best help them to heal. The Chattanooga Area as a context, where churches abound, makes the Gospel story a viable focus for the program.

Learning to see others who are different in faith as acceptable individuals can sometimes be a challenge. Richard Beck points out how it is easy to see what is “unclean” as dominant over even what is pure. He calls this ‘negativity dominance’ (30). Within the Three-Fold Approach to Healing, care should be taken to see others who are different not as a contamination but embracing them, as Jesus did with the perceived outcasts of his society, such as the man with leprosy (*Family Walk* Matt. 8.1–3), tax collectors (Luke 5.27–29), the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4.4–27), and the woman with an active bleeding disorder (Mark 5.25–34). Although it is human nature to consider something unclean making anything good also unclean, Jesus’ contact with every person flips the negative to a positive. This ‘positivity dominance’ (Beck 30)

can help each person to see how with the divine can teach appreciation for others in the group, regardless of their faith base.

Long-Term Mentorship Program

The challenge of every leader is to understand—and accept as valuable—that every person has a unique perspective of how they see the world. A collective leader looks for ways to use these perspectives to the best advantage in a change initiative. The most effective change initiatives will engage in contextualization, copowerment, and collaboration. In *The Art of Collective Leadership*, Petra Kuenkel lays out a leadership style that addresses each of these. Leadership and change initiatives involving a vulnerable population, such as this one, take time. It is expected that mentors will be working with their participant partners for several years. The following aspects of the program will help to clarify why this is to be the case, beginning with the development of the leaders and mentors.

Framework for Leadership

Cultural contextualization involves the process of observing and appreciating the cultural characteristics of a given group of people or community. Engaging in observation helps with understanding areas of strength and competencies discussed in Kuenkel's Leadership Compass. These include six dimensions: future possibilities, engagement, innovation, humanity, collective intelligence, and wholeness (60). Within this observation is the idea of appreciating those competencies—areas of strength—that are already available in the current leadership (121). When considering development programs, such as this Three-Fold Approach, it is important to consider that each person (mentor, individual staff) comes with a unique perspective, so how leaders see the change they want to initiate and how they approach this change will be unique as well. Kuenkel points out that leaders may not be able to approach in their area of competencies;

partnerships or collaborations may be the key to obtaining the missing aspect needed for effective leadership. If this is the case, leaders must first understand what the needs are, how they can best effect the change that is wished for, then analyze which competency of the compass is best suited for the initiative. A competency may have to be developed in a particular area before leaders can be effective change agents (78).

Although collective leadership has numerous applications in which it is useful, there is an area of concern where this style will have limits, particularly for a program that will be serviced by volunteers. Parker Palmer, in his book, *Let Yourself Speak* (2000), points out that if leaders “are to cast less shadow and more light, we need to ride certain monsters all the way down,” exploring the “shadows they create, and experience the transformation that can come as we ‘get into’ our own spiritual lives” (85). This program will be most effective if individuals are willing to go on an inner journey to objectively see themselves, their competencies, and their need for improvement. If the leaders, including mentors, cannot effectively see these within themselves, they will not be able to see them in others. This will limit their ability to mutually share with others or collaborate effectively. It will result in a lack of trust and cause all stakeholders, including the participants who are being served, to hold back.

Expectations of Leadership, Mentors, and Staff

In his book, *Exclusion & Embrace*, Miroslav Volf puts forth the idea that we use judgement to see the aspect of “‘separating’ and ‘binding together’” (65) of life in various ways, both are positive in turn but can easily be twisted into something negative. We also use judgement to create boundaries based on our understanding of what must be bound to us (the good) and what must be separated from us (the bad). So, judgement is the predecessor of both

the process of differentiating the things of life and the resulting boundaries we set. But there is something that quantifies judgement: the attitude and focus of the heart.

It appears that our source for making judgements that eventually lead to exclusion or inclusion is the key. If we rely on the imperfection and bent toward unholiness that we are so prone to in our humanness, we will judge and exclude, often with the violence of elimination, assimilation, domination, or abandonment (Volf 75). But if the source for judgements comes from a holy God who created all things for His glory, it may lead instead to mercy and grace informing our boundary process. The condition of the heart and deepest parts of the soul are the key to dangerous boundaries of exclusion or gracious binding together of ourselves with others.

Volf also puts forth the idea that ‘embrace’ is the opening of a person’s whole being to the idea of ‘other’ first (141), then the willingness to reach out with “a gesture of invitation” (142), waiting for other to reach for you in reciprocity (143). It is giving room for self and other to be distinct yet transformed (143). It is being ready to forgive when wounds are inflicted, according to Volf, because we have first inflicted wounds on a forgiving God (119). As a result, space can be created “for the offender to come in” (126). Embrace is the eventual forgetting of the sins of others, because through Jesus, God forgets when individuals repent of their own wrongdoing (135). Embrace is ultimately the act of “nonremembering” when passing from this life into the next, for one can only see His eventual glory if he does (138). Leaders—in connecting with mentors, staff, and participants of the program—must be able to understand clearly about exclusion and embrace, knowing the right balance of judgment in either case, then training their mentors in this understanding.

Trust seems to be a guiding factor in the effectiveness of Kuenkel’s collective leadership style. She believes trust must be earned or created; more specifically, she believes “trust is co-

created” (47). Trust is a cornerstone of sorts “because it contributes to the vitality of a system of actors, and it contributes to the vitality of each individual as part of that system” (47). Without it, effecting the greatest change will be limited. This will be a key concept for the leadership team to keep in mind. They not only need to develop trust in each other, but also in the mentors, so that they in turn can create a sense of trust in the women they are mentoring. A guiding principle of the entire program would be for leaders and mentors of this Gospel-focused, life support program to be trained in trauma-informed care.

Comprehensive Trauma-Informed Care (TIC)

In their report, “On the Frontlines: Perspectives of Providers Working with Homeless Women,” Benissa Salem et al. uncover five themes in working with homeless women and helping to guide them into stable living situations. Throughout each of these themes some key things were identified that are important for those working with homeless participants, or those at risk for homelessness, to keep in mind:

- Building trust and developing rapport with participants (680),
- Managing hostility and anger of the participants by practicing self-care to avoid secondary traumatic stress (682),
- Build empowerment by developing a positive and encouraging attitude (682),
- Be open to certain types of needs such as being a health buddy or navigating the participant through complex appointments, providing them with support and supplemental information about any chronic diseases (Salem et al. 682).

These five themes of Salem et al. are aspects of a framework of care that Hopper, et al. describe as: “an understanding of and responsiveness to the impact of trauma, that emphasizes physical, psychological, and emotional safety for both providers and survivors and that creates

opportunities for survivors to rebuild a sense of control and empowerment” (82). The program of life support using mentors would be built on Hopper et al.’s framework of understanding. This includes the necessity of being mindful of any secondary trauma that can be created when individuals are affected by the traumatic experiences of another and might be imposed upon the mentors. Regular meetings to talk about issues of concern will need to take place between the leaders and mentors to be sure no one is being swept up by a “swirling vortex of need” (Williams). Leaders will need to create meeting topics to aid every person involved in staying healthy. A first step is to guide the mentors through the same curriculum that the participants will use, focusing on the lies that often hold them back and the truth about their innate talents and gifts that will propel them forward in a healthy way.

Curriculum Focused on Talents and Lies

Winseman et al. mentioned, “You’ve been told that to become strong, successful, or truly serve God and the world, you must ‘fix’ your weaknesses. You’ve been told that your talents and strengths are a source of sinful pride,” but this is not the case (1). It is invigorating to consider that the best way individuals can succeed is to build their lives around their “greatest natural abilities rather than [their] weaknesses” (2). This is the impetus for providing a curriculum of study on innate talents and gifts for women who struggle with trauma, PTSD, fear, and/or a marred identity from years—potentially generations—of abuse and traumatic experiences.

The curriculum lays out expectations for its use, with an understanding that anyone using it would do so under the specialized training of TIC for leaders and mentors. This is vital, along with a strengths-based look at talents, for a foundation of safety and hope throughout the rest of the curriculum, which deals with the many lies that women tend to believe. In her book and companion study, *Lies Women Believe and the Truth that Sets Them Free*, Nancy DeMoss

Wolgemuth (2018) lays out forty-five lies, broken into nine sections, that women tend to believe and the progression of how women come to believe them. Each of the ten sections address a group of lies, then counters them with truths from the Bible. The last two chapters of the book discuss how to counter other lies that are not addressed in the study and twenty-two truths to dispel any lie that an individual or society might attempt to impress upon women.

The curriculum is a 20-week program, addressing talents during the first seven weeks, then switching over to address the lies for 12 weeks. The last unit, which switches back to talents, can be done in one or two weeks, depending on the remaining topics to be discussed. The leader will have the discretion to go more in-depth with the topic of forgiveness and how to live out passions within by using their strengths. Through the process of mentors supporting participants, each person will address their strengths-base *before* having to expose the lies they believe. The expectation of the program is that each participant will experience enough healing of their trauma to then take up the life skills classes they need to assist in exiting homelessness.

A tentative plan at this time is that CRITI will work with an appropriately trained Supervisor of the program and her assistant—the funds for which will be obtained from a grant that will be set up by a separate organization—who will then oversee the search for mentors by tapping into local churches, colleges, universities, and the community. The search will include screenings to be sure the mentors are culturally inclusive-minded and open to the Gospel focus of the program that stresses healing and restoration of the whole being. Once the mentor pool is chosen, the Supervisor will then plan training sessions on trauma-informed care and lead the mentors through the training sessions, as well as the curriculum on Talents and Lies, to equip them for working with participants from CRITI. Mentors will work at building trusting relationships with participants. Once a trusting bond has been created between at least two

mentor/participant pairs, the 20-week study program will begin. The general mindset for leaders and mentors will be long-term, preferably two years. This longevity of a trusting relationship is key to bringing participants through the stages of recovery to eventual stability in housing and life.

Sustaining the Three-Fold Approach to Healing

The three components of this healing approach require a supervisor/director, an assistant, at least a dozen volunteer mentors, resources for training, and the need for three separate books for the curriculum will require some significant funding. And if TIC is developed with in-house materials, it will also need funds for developing a library of training materials. For a new development organization, this will need careful planning on several fronts.

Collaborations with Religious, College, Hospital, and Community Organization

Collaborations with outside organizations are an effective way to gain the number of volunteers needed, who will have the qualifications required to support women who have experienced childhood adversity and adult trauma. Volunteers can be obtained by collaborating with the local churches (there are over 100 in the Chattanooga area). Screenings and training can be consolidated at a few of the larger church communities. Another option is approaching leadership in Sociology, Psychology/Counseling, Community Development and Nursing programs at local colleges and universities. The Chattanooga area has several of these options available, with at least one Nursing program already proactive in poverty simulation events.

A third option is to tap into the local hospitals, which are active in community care programs that seek to enhance healthy living choices among the city's poorer neighborhoods. Alleviating poverty in families often reduces hospital emergency room visits with non-emergency patients. The hospitals may be open to collaborating with internships for their

resident doctors and the nursing staff (Higgins). Organizations like the United Way can help streamline the process for finding community members with a heart for volunteering. Local businesses in Chattanooga will often partner with the United Way of Greater Chattanooga to give their employees a volunteer day (“Volunteer”). Employees skip work together and choose a service organization such as CRITI to volunteer their time. Some of these businesses will also donate goods or cash funds to help support service groups in meeting the needs of those living with poverty. This one-day support will not suffice for mentorship, but it may open the door for a volunteer to learn of the mission, discover that it meets her passion for service, and apply for screening to be a long-term mentor.

Funding through Grants

A significant challenge when working with volunteers in a project as sophisticated as this one is a lack of knowledge base needed for the task. This can be addressed with proper training, assuming they have been carefully screened. It is necessary for then to have a heart for providing an atmosphere for healing, as well as the willingness to learn and be trained in the TIC approach. Once there is a properly screened volunteer base, and they are well trained, it is good to then settle on a process for empowering them (Joyaux 295). In her book, *Strategic Fund Development*, Joyaux points out that enabling your volunteers “encourages participation, shares responsibility and authority, enhances self-worth of others, and energizes everyone in the organization” (295). Although ‘enabler’ is often a “pejorative term,” Joyaux believes the truest sense of the work is “a value-driven philosophy that invests influence and responsibility in all parties.” With this philosophy, “value-driven” must be defined using the desired goal of the program. Three-Fold Approach to Healing goal is a foundation of healing and restoration that

leads to housing stability. Screenings to assure each volunteer is open to this will need to be carefully pursued.

Training can be provided using one of several options: pay for an organization to do the training at a cost, or provide your own free training using books, online resources, and the knowledge base of the supervisor/director. Since finances may be limited in many organizations who wish to use this curriculum, a list of books and free websites on topics such as TIC, spirituality, and leadership is provided within the curriculum. Even so, there are considerable costs related to the salary of the Supervisor/Director and the Assistant, as well as the books needed for each mentor and participant. There may also be the cost of renting space if the homeless organizations who partner with this Three-Fold Healing Program, do not have the space in their buildings to have the program on their campus. The best way to provide these funds is to apply for and receive a grant. But a word of caution is advised here. Karsh and Fox point out that “some organizations have learned that chasing grants can take them away from their core mission or move an excellent program in the wrong direction” (16). Instead, organizations should be very clear about their mission and which direction they should be headed in, then find funding that will “flow from and support [the] mission” (17). When one funding option begins to dry up, it is wise to approach another funder.

Careful records of the program costs and needs should be available for grantmakers who might be interested in funding the program in part; this will show them that program leadership is realistically projecting the income (Karsh and Fox 215). Since the goal of a program is sustainability, the program leadership should be open to multiple types of funding, including fundraising that keeps in line with the stated mission of the program.

Program Evaluation

Any community development program will need to be evaluated at intervals to be sure the mission of the program is being met. To initially inform stakeholders, a simple “so-that chain” has been created to clearly show the strategies that will be implemented at the start of the program, and the outcomes that are expected to take place at different time intervals. In its simplest form, the So-that Chain could look like the chain in Appendix B. The theory of change for the Three-Fold Approach to Healing from Trauma begins with training mentors in TIC approaches and the Gospel focus of healing and restoration, as well as the leadership expectations mentioned previously, then moves into expected outcomes for the CRITI participants, and ends with the final goal of a reduction in the number of homeless women and children in the Chattanooga area. Between each step is an arrow which implies “so that,” meaning one aspect of the program is accomplished *so that* the next aspect can occur. Each step in the chain is an area of change that is expected within the program (Gienapp et al. 24).

Another type of evaluation, which gives more details about a program theory of change, is the Logic Model. It allows for a concise list of expectations at each change initiative, beginning with resources and ending with the desired goals, making this the design plan most likely to lead to success (WK Kellogg 5). These and other theories of change are valuable documents of information for the stakeholders: those who have “a vested interest” in the findings of an evaluation (Patton 61). Although it has not been prepared for this thesis, a detailed theory of change is one of the expectations for the Three-Fold Approach to Healing program at its inception.

Limitations for Curriculum

The fieldwork research was done at a specific homeless transitional shelter program with seven participants in-house at the time of my stay. Although it is a small sample, research and understanding within the city's homeless servicing organizations leadership comes from a much larger sampling over the course of several decades.

This curriculum project is specifically designed for use with the framework discussed on mentorships. Attempting to use it in a heavily altered state, particularly without mentors, is very likely to yield different results, potentially doing more harm to the women it is intending to help. This study also assumes the women who will be serviced are experiencing significant trauma, which seems to be prevalent in the Chattanooga area context. It is possible that another city context will have different levels of trauma, and this will have to be considered as the complete program with mentors is put into use. The prevailing sentiment for this curriculum's use is to "do no harm" so the women who are homeless will not be retraumatized and the mentors and staff will not experience secondary trauma.

Conclusions

In the Chattanooga, Tennessee area well over 600 individuals, 200 in families, are living outside or in shelters on any given night ("Facts About Homelessness"). Though there is a consensus that these homeless individuals need to be cared for, my concern for this thesis is with the women who experience homelessness within transitional shelters, particularly the Chattanooga Room in the Inn (CRITI). The years of trauma and marginalization the women have experienced have brought them to a standstill within homelessness. Debilitating fear, lack of a community who can support them emotionally and physically, sometimes without a high school

diploma or GED, lacking skills for success, and working minimum wage jobs (if they have one) that do not provide a living wage have left them without the means to exit homelessness. Though they are provided a safe place to stay in the transitional program, with at least one meal a day provided, it is still not a home. And there are more women and children waiting to enter the limited bed program.

Life skills classes are a valuable resource for learning the skills needed to exit homelessness. However, it is necessary for individuals to be able to focus their minds on the topics to learn effectively. For many of these women experiencing homelessness, childhood adversity and adult trauma, along with mental health issues in some cases, make it very difficult for the women to focus the mind and learn. Trauma has essentially hijacked their ability to process as affectively as they might were they not experiencing toxic stress. Limited emotional support has left many of them feeling lonely and fearful of their future every day. The women need to develop relationships that lead to a sense of safety and this takes far more time than the typical 6-9 month stay. Safety is needed to develop trusting enough relationships to begin the healing process. And although the caseworkers at CRITI do a wonderful job of being supportive, they are limited with time and the activities they can do. Most significantly, there is a loss of relational continuity when the women leave the program.

The Three-Fold Approach to Healing program is designed to go with the women to whatever transitional shelter they end up at within the city, whether they “graduate” from a residential program or not and continues even if they find stable housing more quickly than anticipated. The program design includes mentors who are matched up to participants according to comfortable connections that foster the likelihood of bonding. In this safe relationship, spending time with someone who’s ‘got your back,’ the women experiencing homelessness can

begin to heal from their trauma. When this begins, they can then work through the curriculum of Talents and Lies with their mentor as support. The exploration of the natural talents within them becomes the impetus for positive change. This can create a foundation of well-being that assists the women in facing the lies they have been trapped by. Undergirded with trauma-informed care approaches, this gentle exposure to change allows them the space to think clearly and to pursue the skills they need to exit homelessness.

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Appendix A: Curriculum for Study on Lies and Talents

The Lies Women Believe:
How Understanding Talent
Can Reveal Truth and
Promote Healing

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Using A Three-Fold Approach to Healing

The systemic poverty of our time has made success difficult for some groups of people particularly women who are experiencing homelessness, often with children in tow. The childhood experiences they had were often abusive or neglectful, and this early trauma sometimes leads them into more traumatic experiences as adults, complicating their ability to succeed.

This curriculum is designed to be a program with three interacting parts for the healing of trauma in women who are homeless or are at risk of becoming so. The three parts involve a mentorship program to meet the community and relational needs of these women, a curriculum on innate talents and the lies women tend to believe that hold them back from succeeding, and all of this centered on the love and sacrifice of Jesus. It should only be used with this population of women if there are dedicated, carefully trained leaders and mentors who can “walk along the road with them.” All interactions with the women should be trauma-informed so as not to create new trauma on top of the current struggles.

Christ-Centered Focus

There are several key reasons for providing a gospel centered program. First, disunity of mind, body, and spirit shows itself in numerous ways, but the root goes back to a lack of understanding that humans are created in God’s own image by His own hand (*Family Walk*, Gen. 1.27–27), and how they can so easily lose their way when they are ignorant of this. Therefore, going back to those roots, and providing space for exploring who God is, as well as His original purpose for humankind, is a sensible part of the program. The second, is that trauma comes from a direct assault to the personhood and dignity of each person effected by it, and the lack of processing it—or doing so ineffectively—can turn a soul impotent or worse: bitter. If unity of the whole person is going to take place, these things would have to be understood, confronted in the gentlest manner possible, and processed with a mind toward forgiveness. Bryant Myers states that “God’s project in history is at heart a simple one. It is the story of creation and redemption by the God of Israel and Father of the risen Christ working through the Holy Spirit. God’s story tells us how things started, lost their way, can be redirected, and how God’s intention for God’s creation is restored in the end” (Myers 58). Myers states further that “to be true to our identity as

Christians, we must be in Christ and be doing mission, loving God, and loving our neighbor. We are not who we truly are unless we are doing both” (84).

The Mentorship Program

A mentorship program set up under carefully chosen leadership will be long-term and open to women experiencing homelessness at any organization in the area who has a case worker. Mentors will be Gospel-focused and consistent followers of Christ in their own churches. Due to the significant challenges that homeless women experience, social supports, and life satisfaction are often lacking (Phipps 6). Matching them with the social support of a mentor “may assist in increasing feelings of connectedness and decreasing physiological, social, and emotional distressed cause by homelessness” (6). Helping to create this can take time so mentors will be signed on for two-year contracts. This will allow time for connections of trust and safety before engaging in the valuable understanding of their innate talents and the equally valuable, but unsettling understanding of the lies they may have fallen prey to.

A Study on Talents and Lies

The homeless participants explore innate talents and are shown truth to combat the lies they believe through a 19–20-week study which may help to dispel some of their adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and any adult trauma. Individually or combined, these experiences can be a contributing factor of homelessness and “the state of becoming and being homeless is a traumatic experience in and of itself” (Phipps 5). Because of this, these women often feel loss of control over their lives or the ability to affect the change necessary to exit homelessness. This study on the innate talents they possess, placed there by a holy God during their creation (Psalm 139.13–16), will give them the realization they have assets with which to work with to affect the change needed. With this knowledge they can then address the lies that have kept them trapped and the truth that can set them free. As they work through this study program, it is hoped their trauma will be diminished to a significant enough degree to focus on the life skills they may need to exit homelessness. Mentors play a significant role in walking the homeless participants through this program, helping them to build connections that increase life satisfaction and potentially exit homelessness (Phipps 7).

Training for the Mentorship Program

Leadership Team Requirements

In her book, *The Art of Leading Collectively*, Petra Kuenkel addresses eighteen guiding aspects which are divided into six dimensions (86–87). These dimensions encompass the range of human competencies (85). Her premise for the Collective Leadership Compass is that the strengthening of these human competencies “increase the resilience of the system of actors and their capacity to better co-create” (77). When we have a team made up of ‘actors’ who have a range of perspectives that cover all these areas, we have a team who can see things from all angles. Consider these dimensions and their unique guiding aspects from chapter 7 of Kuenkel’s book (you will discover that some of these align with the talent themes):

- ***Future Possibilities***
 - Future orientation—dreams, visions that revive passions, and the sustainability of them (88)
 - Empowerment—trust in your ability to make a difference and claim it (89)
 - Decisiveness—schedule meetings, develop targets to meet, celebrate joint successes with collaborators for building “confidence in the initiative” (90)
- ***Engagement***
 - Process Quality—drive change, mutually respect others, and emotionally engage with the vision (93)
 - Connectivity—seeing the world as a web of connections where belonging, and the desire to contribute urges us to learn from others and genuinely care (94–95)
 - Collective Action—“co-design of initiatives and joint planning,” focus on what can be achieved first, “creating prototypes,” and “joint evaluation of results” (96)
- ***Innovation***
 - Creativity—cherish ideas and regard them even when they challenge status quo or indicate challenges (97)
 - Excellence—creating with perfection “is a matter of honor” and mastery to bring about possibilities (98)
 - Agility—the capacity to “adapt to new situations” (100)

- ***Humanity***
 - Mindfulness—introspections that leads to transformation (102)
 - Balance—a rhythm of passion for life, commitment, and reflective renewal that leads to a clear path, despite complexity (103–104)
 - Empathy—seeing “the person behind the task” and “the story behind the person” to touch the “humanness in other people” (105)
- ***Collective Intelligence***
 - Dialogic Quality—engaging others in meaningful conversations that draw out multiple perspectives for a practical outcome (107)
 - Diversity—processing “different perspectives and diverging interests” to create progress (108–109)
 - Iterative Learning—empowering collaborations to learn collectively
- ***Wholeness***
 - Contextuality—attention to how everyone attends, the “quality and heartfelt intensity” of each individual, and synchronized collaboration for sustainability (112–113)
 - Mutual Support—understanding each person’s potential for success when delivered with high quality (114)
 - Contribution—the heart and passionate energy that strives for excellence despite possible friction of personalities (115–116)

A team that embodies these dimensions of Kuenkel’s Compass does not happen by chance; a conscious decision must be made at every meeting or workshop as a group, and in every one-on-one interchange with the women they will be mentoring. This is the kind of mindset needed for a program of mentors who can learn from each other, and their supervisors, and back each other with their strengths. Then it must be purposely spilled over into their mentoring relationships, because homeless women need the power of seeing their strengths to overcome—heal from—their marred identities. Leaders need to always remember that they set the tone to make everyone feel safe. If the mentors do not feel safe, they will be “forced to expend [their] time and energy to protect [themselves] from each other” and this will “inherently weaken” the program (Sinek 6:00).

As a leader for individuals who may come from diverse cultures in the United States and abroad, you will need to consider how your leadership style may become an issue. In their book, *Cultures and Organizations*, Hofstede et al. warn that “vertical relations in organizations are based on common values of superiors *and* subordinates” and that “beliefs about leadership reflect the dominant culture of a country” (331). Those beliefs may conflict with the typical top-down leadership style of the dominant American culture. Consider that even in the U.S. there will be a dominant culture in every community, but it may not be the same as mainstream America. Engage in as much study on cultures and customs within your community as possible, even before beginning the mentorship search. Since all mankind is designed by a holy God, every culture is dominant and therefore worthy of respectful consideration. Reading about different cultures, such as Austin Channing Brown’s book, *I’m Still Here: Black Dignity in a World Made for Whiteness*, and Nabeel Jabbour’s book, *The Crescent Through the Eyes of the Cross*, will help you gain a unique perspective of a few American minority cultures. Tim Keese’s book, *Dispatches from the Front*, gives snapshots of cultures from around the world, which may be helpful if refugees from any of those countries become participants of the mentorship program. Hofstede et al.’s expansive book is filled with in-depth intricacies of most of the nations around the world and will be a valuable resource for learning how to appreciate each national culture. Mentors and any staff will need to be trained to appreciate each individual woman as specially designed by God—with the potential to bear the image of Christ. At no time should any mentor or participant have to feel within their heart that there “ain’t no friends here” due to the lack of appreciation for differences (Brown 65).

Mentors and Staff Expectations

Each mentor should be carefully screened for long-term service potential (at least 2 years) and already bearing the image of Christ in their daily lives. They will need at least three references attesting to their faith, including one from a pastor verifying their membership, as well as consistent service and attendance within their church body. Each mentor will be expected to attend leadership meetings and all training sessions before being matched with a participant. Each month, “Getting to Know You” events will be opportunities for mentors to meet potential participants, allowing for naturally occurring conversations that may lead to bonding. Participants will have the absolute right to choose who they are matched with. This will begin

the process of building up a sense of power in creating positive change in their lives. This is key for these women who are experiencing a highly vulnerable situation in their homelessness.

Mentors will be expected to be open to training in cultures, poverty, and how to be the bearers of copowerment, which assumes they can learn from the women experiencing homelessness as much as these women can learn from them. There is no hierarchy in this framework for service, only mutual respect, and consideration. Participants will need to understand this, especially given that they are choosing their mentor. For everyone to remain free from trauma, respect is required by every person. Anyone who struggles from this will need to have further training, potentially matched to a leader who will mentor the mentor. This allows time and grace to learn what is needed before finding other areas where they can serve better, or encouraging them to join ministries elsewhere. If participants struggle with respect, they should be given the opportunity to learn grace by spending time with a leader who is well trained in trauma-informed care and cultures. They can also be allowed to help with aspects of “Getting to Know You” events to give them time and space to develop the respect needed for choosing a mentor. There should be a process already in place for any participant or mentor to bring their concerns or struggles to leadership. These concerns must be addressed with careful consideration for both parties, and conflict resolution used whenever possible to heal any breach of trust. These are opportunities for everyone to learn biblical mercy and grace. Leadership should use whatever resources that might be necessary in these situations, including their own talent themes and gifting. Resources under the book category, “Healing Connections with God and Each Other,” may be helpful in working with challenging behaviors.

College Collaboration—graduate students as mentors

The local colleges and universities have nursing, psychology, and sociology master’s programs which you may be able to collaborate with to increase your available pool of mentors. Be aware that you will need to make it clear that this is a Christ-Centered program and any applicant for mentorship must be able to sign a statement of faith and back up their integrity with at least three references (this also pertains to mentor applicants from churches and other volunteer organizations). They should have a heart to provide an atmosphere for healing based on the biblical model for healing the mind, body, and soul, as well as the willingness to learn and

be trained in trauma-informed care and approaches that help adults who have experienced childhood adversity.

Trauma-Informed Care Training Options

You can provide training through several options: pay for an organization to do the training at a cost or provide your own free training using books and online resources. Since finances may be limited in many organizations who wish to use this curriculum, the following is a list of book and video resources that can be used for leadership and mentor training purposes. For the leader, those marked with an asterisk are recommended as a place to begin. Based on your mentor applicants previous training, you may want to supplement with these resources. Creating a library with these books, is a great way to encourage further research and understanding for your mentors and any other staff, paid or volunteer. The leader must be well versed in Trauma-Informed Care before attempting to train mentors and any staff persons.

- **Books on trauma and healing from adverse childhood experiences**
 - **The Body Keeps Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma*, by Bessel van der Kolk, M.D.
 - *Suffering and the Heart of God: How Trauma Destroys and Christ Restores*, Diane Langberg
 - *Running on Empty: Overcoming Your Childhood Emotional Neglect*, Jonice Webb, PhD
 - **Lifeskills for Adult Children*, Janet Geringer Woititz, Ed.D & Alan Garner, M.A.

- **Books on healing connections with God and each other**
 - *Connecting: Healing for Ourselves and Our Relationships*, Larry Crabb
 - **The Roadmap to Reconciliation: Moving Communities into Unity, Wholeness, and Justice*, Brenda Salter McNeil
 - *Reconcile: Conflict Transformation for Ordinary Christians*, John Paul Lederach
 - **The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict*, Ken Sande
[This may be especially helpful during the Lies portion of the curriculum.]

- *A Place of Healing: Wrestling with the Mysteries of Suffering, Pain, and God's Sovereignty*, Joni Eareckson Tada
- **Lies Women Believe: And the Truth That Sets Them Free*, Nancy DeMoss Wolgemuth

- **Books on understanding poverty**
 - **When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty without Hurting the Poor*, Steve Corbett & Brian Fikkert
 - *Becoming Whole: Why the Opposite of Poverty Isn't the American Dream*, Brian Fikkert & Kelly M. Kapic
 - **Walking with the Poor: Principles and Practices of Transformational Development*, Bryant L. Myers

- **Books on ethnicity, race issues, and how we subconsciously see "Other"**
 - **Unclean: Meditations on Purity, Hospitality, and Mortality*, Richard Beck
 - **I'm Still Here: Black Dignity in a World Made for Whiteness*, Austin Channing Brown
 - **The Crescent Through the Eyes of The Cross: Insights from an Arab Christian*, Dr. Nabeel T. Jabbour
 - *Dispatches from the Front: Stories of Gospel Advances in the World's Difficult Places*, Tim Keese
 - *Foreign to Familiar: A Guide to Understanding Hot- and Cold-Climate Cultures*, Sarah A. Lanier

- **Books on Leadership**
 - **Leadership and Self-Deception: Getting Out of the Box*, The Arbinger Institute
 - **Living Your Strengths: Discover Your God-Given Talents and Inspire Your Community*, Gallup: Albert L. Winseman, Don Clifton, & Curt Liesveld

○ **Books Required for Leaders, Mentors, and Participants**

- *Lies Women Believe: And the Truth that Sets Them Free*, Nancy DeMoss Wolgemuth, 2018
- *Lies Women Believe Study Guide*, Nancy DeMoss Wolgemuth, 2018 (Leaders and Mentors only)
- *Living Your Strengths: Discover Your God-Given Talents and Inspire Your Community*, Gallup, Winseman et al.
- *Holy Bible*, New International Version or Christian Standard Bible is recommended.

○ **Online trauma training for free**

- *Trauma-Informed Care Webinar Series*, National Health Care for the Homeless Council [A 4-part series that covers defining trauma-informed care, the effects trauma on our society, and aiding trauma victims in healing. The videos are about one hour each.]

The leader may know of more resources that are helpful for training and the implementation of this curriculum, but they should be sure to read the books that are starred before attempting to lead mentors through their training, which includes the following study.

Special Notes on the Study

There are several things to take note of in the study. First, and most importantly, there are comments and warning for certain places where there might be triggers for those who are enduring a past trauma. Leaders should take special note of these and be sure to address them with the mentors before leading them and their participants through the study together. Where noted in the study, leaders may want to break the large group into smaller groups of a mentor/participant set or two sets to address more delicate issues. This may help the participants feel less overwhelmed. In these cases, the leaders should prepare the mentors to lead their participant through the question(s), while the quietly overseeing the process. But the leader should be prepared to aid the mentor if needed. The leader will need to prepare some places for the women to go if they should need some space and/or privacy to work through challenging

memories or the emotions attached to them. Mentors should already be trained in how to “be” with participants during these times and when to encourage them to come back to the study.

The second thing to take note of are the words in italic and regular font. The italic sections are the words the leader will say to the group as they lead them through the study. The leader can use their own wording if they like, but they should be sure they are getting the same point across to the group. The words in regular font are in brackets. These sections are notes to the leader, which will include specific things that will need to be addressed or prepared before meeting with the group that week. Leaders may wish to include the mentors in on these things; having a team effort can help to make things go more smoothly. The leader should be sure to speak the truth of talents and gifts into the mentors and the participants. Careful notes should be kept of each of the mentors’ themes, and they should be encouraged as appropriate. A leader’s example will help them do the same for their participants. Careful notes should also be kept of each participant, so they can be encouraged when grappling with tough lies. The leader should remind mentors and participants of their unique value instilled by God and pray with them if they are receptive to it.

Lastly, the leader will have their own talent themes and giftings within them. They should feel free to put them into practice as they lead the group! However, they should make sure they are keeping things simple enough to be the most effective at getting either their’s, or the author’s, point across. The leader will have studied and been trained in good leadership skills so all they must do now is use the gifts they have been given to be the best leader possible, showing Jesus to others.

Lies that Tear Down and the Talents that Build Us Up

Unit One: The Study on *Living Your Strengths*—Part One

Week One: Introduction to and Assessment of Innate Talents

Although lies are told to me in a variety of ways, I am still responsible for making the choices that end up harming me (and my family). Coming to understand these choices that create stress and pain is a process that takes time and patience with myself. If I am not in a place where I have positive things to consider about myself, it will be very hard to do. I need to understand what is good and positive about who I am to effectively cope with what might need to be changed. Chances are very good that you need this, too.

So, before we begin our study on lies that trap and bind us, we are going to look at what and who we are that is right. In Psalm 139 of the bible, King David expresses the beginning of our lives and his belief that God has explicit designs on us. As you read these words, keep in mind they apply to each of us, as well as David:

Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast. If I say, “Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me,” even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you.

For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was women together in the depths of the earth, our eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.

Psalm 139: 7–16 (NIV)

*As we consider the idea that God has designed each one of us from the beginning, with a special plan, we will take a close look at the 34 talents that have been identified by the Gallup group in *Living Your Strengths*. Instead of living in a way that is frustrating and often nearly impossible, we are going to learn how to live based on our strengths. Most of us spend so much time thinking about what our weaknesses are—which others may tell us daily—that we may not even realize we have gifts built within us to offer to others.*

You will soon learn some wonderful things about yourself that make you unique and full of value! The first thing you will need to do is answer the questions on a Pre-Study Query. Then you will take the StrengthsFinder assessment with the computer (laptop, Chromebook, tablet). When you complete the assessment, you will have a report about your top five talent themes. You will be able to take that report with you and read it over this week. Next time we meet, we will talk about how to turn a talent theme into a strength as we discuss chapters 1 and 2 in Living Your Strength.

Week Two: What Does the Report on Themes Mean for Me? (Chapters 1 & 2)

As you looked through your report this past week, you may have wondered what your themes mean and how they play out as a strength. You may have been surprised at the talent themes listed because you never heard these words in connection with talents or strengths. We typically think of speakers, or athletes, or musicians as the ones with talent. But they are manifesting their talents with those activities. This week we will investigate the terms strength, talents, skills, and knowledge and how they interact with each other through us. Then we will discuss what we mean by “The right fit.”

Terms that Bring Power-Chapter 1

You will notice as we read the book that a big part of the focus is about how your talents can be used for church related activities. You may be part of a church body and this will be helpful to you. If you are not, that is okay. You may focus on how your talent themes and strengths can play out in your everyday life at work, school, or at home.

We will now discuss the section titled “What Is A Strength?” then look at what the bible has to say about this. Open your books to page 7 of the hardback copy if you wish. If you have the eBook or the Audible version, you may just listen and take notes, then read it over later this week.

[Depending on the participants in the group, you will want to judiciously choose one of the strengths stories. It may be that none of them are appropriate for your group, in which case you may want to share your own story of how learning about your talents changed your way of thinking and doing.]

The Right Fit-Chapter 2

[You can start this section by reading sections of the chapter to the group, pulling out portions that will be most helpful to your current group. Use the “Managing Lesser Talents” page in the appendix and print copies onto colorful cardstock. These cards can be handed out when you get to this section of the chapter. Encourage them to keep this with their book so that when they go through the lesser 29 talents, they can write on their card which of these lesser talents to avoid in future decision-making.

You may want to skip over the section on Spiritual Gifts for now, depending on your participants. If so, just make a quick mention of it and a promise to address it at another time for anyone who is interested. It will be better to wait for the participants to be involved with a church organization and more familiar with walking with Jesus. Gauge your group’s interest in whether to skip it or not.

And again, be judicious about what Strengths Stories you share with the group.]

Week Three: Strengths-Based Congregations (Chapter 3)

This week's focus is on what a strengths-based congregation looks like and how to create one. So many times, churches look for bodies to fill a position in need instead of looking at the talent within the congregation and allowing the strengths available to dictate what the positions or programs ought to be. Now, you may not be attending any church right now and you may wonder why you should sit through this discussion. I want you to consider, if you did choose to begin going to a church, how you would like the church to do things, such as finding the right people to do the various jobs. There are teachers, greeters, various jobs during worship time (musicians, singers, readers, preaching), administrative folks, maintenance needs, decorating to consider, etc. Think about these things while considering other contexts as well, meaning: how would using talents and strengths in your workplace or family situation look? So, here we go!

[Consider what to highlight from the chapter in your talk this week. There is a lot in this chapter to discuss so there is an outline in this Appendix to print and hand out to your group this week. Use your own talents and strengths to make this chapter engaging, especially for those who are not connected to a church congregation yet and may be leery of all this “religious” talk. Help them to get a picture of what it means to be in a relationship with the Creator, and how working together with each person’s strengths can make for a safe and thriving church. They just might begin to have a longing to be a part of one themselves!]

Unit Two: The World of Talent in 34 Themes—Part 2

In this unit, we will look closely at each of the 34 talent themes over the course of 4 weeks. Although you may have your top five, it is important to understand what each of the other themes entail; you may want to identify who might have a talent theme strength that you do not in case you need assistance with a particular area in the future. [Give an example of something here.] Each week we will address 8-9 themes and what they entail. We will also be celebrating those who have the themes in our group this week, charting names as we go.

[Decide on whether to use large post it charts or other large paper that can be hung on the wall of the room as the weeks go by. Keep in mind that each person has the book in some form to go over these during the next week, so just pull out the highlights and ask the group to brainstorm what kind of task; position in the church, workplace, or home; or career might be an obvious fit for the talent theme. Remind the group that any talent can be used in most corporations and even within the home!]

Talents in Week Four:

Achiever, Activator, Adaptability, Analytical, Arranger, Belief, Command, & Communication

Talents in Week Five:

Competition, Connectedness, Consistency, Context, Deliberative, Developer, Discipline, Empathy, & Focus

Talents in Week Six:

Futuristic, Harmony, Ideation, Includer, Individualization, Input, Intellection, Learner, & Maximizer

Talents in Week Seven:

Positivity, Relator, Responsibility, Restorative, Self-Assurance, Significance, Strategic, & Woo

Unit Three: Study on *Lies Women Believe*

*Now that the group has built up some positive strengths, it is time to switch to addressing the lies that may be keeping us “stuck.” In this unit we will be addressing the lies we believe about the true Creator and various areas of our lives through the book, *Lies Women Believe and the Truth That Sets Them Free*. We will begin with the foundations of believing lies that keep us from being effective and the process for breaking free from them. Then each week we will address different areas of lies we might believe, counter them with truth, and take an honest look at where we might need to break free.*

[When we have finished this unit, we go back to Living Your Strengths and finish with areas of growth and service in our talents and strengths.]

Week Eight: Foundations—Chapter 1

[Each chapter begins with a dear diary supposedly written by Eve. Do not read these in the group since they are conjecture and not biblically accurate in their entirety. This fact should be pointed out to the group lest those who are unfamiliar with the Bible think that these excerpts are copied from it.

The participants will have their own copies of the book, so take out the highlights of the chapter and discuss these most weeks. Each participant will have their mentor to talk with during the week about what they learned from the group session and what they learned from their reading. This week is an introduction/foundation week so make it engaging for everyone with creative learning ideas. Use your talents!]

Week Nine: Lies We Believe About God—Chapter 2

Beginning with this week, we will address the lies in each category and talk about the truth, usually matched with scripture (especially today's topic), and then give you time to break apart from the group to meet with your mentor. Together you will look at the "Making it Personal" section. You may write in your books or put your answers in a journal that you can add your thoughts and ideas to in the days ahead. Your mentor will help explain this section when we get to it.

[Mentors should understand that the first two questions and the first part of question 3 should be done individually. The "renew your mind by the Word of God" should be done together the first few times until the participant feels comfortable with it. The mentor should make sure that question 4 is carefully considered by the participant and the steps they come up with are shared with their mentor. If the participant is part of a social program such as CRITI, this question of the study will be shared with their caseworker as well. The mentor should use the prayer in #5 to end their study time with a participant.]

Always bring the group back together near the end of the meeting time and allow individuals to share what they learned if they wish.]

1. God is not really good.

[This lie and the second may be troublesome for a few of the participants. Watch for trigger symptoms and plan a signal for the participant's mentor to take them out of the group discretely. (Everyone should be prepared for this possibility since you addressed it the first week each participant joined the group, giving them the freedom to "get space" if they should need to.)]

2. God doesn't love me.

3. God is just like my father.

[This lie may need to be skipped depending on one or more participant's triggers of trauma. As mentioned in the section on trauma, you must know the rudiments of any trauma as shared by the caseworker who referred the participant to your organization for this study. It will make a difference, especially now that we have begun to address the Lies we believe. Addressing this may be particularly difficult for some in the group, so keep your sensitivity ears and eyes open to potential re-traumatizing episodes. The weeks you had with your group up to this point will give you an idea of who may need to skip this question or address it with their mentor. It may be that you will need to break the group up in the beginning to give more privacy, so be prepared with notes for the mentors to use in case you do.]

4. God is not really enough.

5. God's ways are too restrictive.

6. God should fix all my problems.

Week Ten: Lies We Believe About Ourselves—Chapter 3

[This week's lies may be particularly difficult for many of the participants, especially 7, 9, and 10. Be ready for the real possibility of breaking up into smaller groups—with two or three sets of participants and mentors—to help reduce some stress.]

7. I am not worth anything.

8. I need to love myself more.

[This one may be confusing. It is not an issue per se about loving “myself” as much as it deals with priorities. It is God we must learn to love first, then we are able to love ourselves. The lie is that we come first before all others, including God. Be sure this point is made clear.]

9. I can’t help the way I am.

10. I have my rights.

11. Physical beauty matters more than inner beauty.

12. I should not have to live with unfulfilled longings.

Week Eleven: Lies We Believe About Sin—Chapter 4

[Depending on who your participants are and their religious background, you may wish to use extra care when using the word “sin.” At the very least, consider how to define it so everyone is clear about what it means. For instance, it may make it clearer to describe it as an action that keeps us away from God, who is holy in all things. This week is a great time to address how Jesus bridges the gap between our holy Creator and our unholy, imperfect selves. Do remember that each participant has the right to choose what they want to believe, and this power is important for them. Respect for their right to choose is paramount!]

13. I can sin and get away with it.

14. My sin isn’t really that bad.

15. God can’t forgive what I’ve done.

[Watch for triggers on this one and 16. Mentor’s should be on alert to discretely assist their participant in getting some privacy space if needed.]

16. It’s not my fault!

17. I can’t live in consistent victory over sin.

Week Twelve: Lies We Believe About Priorities—Chapter 5

This week we can tie in the work we did on talents and strengths. Making the time needed to address the proper priorities in our lives may depend heavily on our understanding of what we have for talent themes and strengths. Let us take motherhood as an example: This does not mean I do not have to be a mother because I do not have the talent to be one! It simply means that I use my talent themes and strengths to address motherhood in my own unique way, being aware of what I may need help with as a parent. We only have three lies this week but so much goes into them. Even if you are not a mother, understanding what God says about motherhood is important so you give proper respect those who are mothers.

18. I don’t have time to do everything I’m supposed to do.

19. I can make it without consistent time in the word and prayer.

20. My work at home is not as significant as the work or other activities I do outside the home.

Week Thirteen: Lies We Believe About Sexuality—Chapter 6

The topic of sexuality is often an uncomfortable one for many. It is either a significant part of who you are, or something not addressed in your minds until it is triggered by conversation or your senses. This week's topic may be of discomfort to you, but I encourage you to persevere through it, because the truths revealed may end up giving you peace in this area.

[Be aware that many of the women who are homeless or at risk for homelessness have experienced sexual abuse either in childhood, adulthood, or both. The topic may trigger memories that are challenging so mentors should be on alert for signs of distress, disgust, or anger. Mentors should be ready to provide a space for their participant to gain control of their emotions.]

- 21. I can't tell anyone.**
- 22. My sexuality is separate from my spirituality.**
- 23. This is who I am.**
- 24. God's standards for sex are out of date.**
- 25. I have to have an outlet for my sexual desire.**

Week Fourteen: Lies We Believe About Marriage—Chapter 7

Many of you may not be married now, nor have you ever been. But it is still important to look carefully at what God says about this institution. One reason is that you may get married in the future and it will be important for you to understand the truth about it. Another is so that you can be a proper support for your friends who are married, perhaps even helping them to learn the truths you are learning now.

- 26. I have to have A husband to be happy.**
- 27. It's my job to change my mate (or children or friends or...).**
- 28. My husband is supposed to serve me.**
- 29. If I submit to my husband, I'll be miserable.**

[This one might trigger some trauma for a few participants; even if they are not, or never were married, they may have lived with a significant other. This distinction should be addressed with care. And be sure to cover the lies and truth about submission; that section will be freeing to everyone. This includes addressing the difference between something that they might simply dislike and outright abuse (see page 177). Have mentors be on watch for a participant's need for privacy or space on this lie and #26.]

- 30. If my husband is passive, I've got to take the initiative, or nothing will get done.**
- 31. There's no hope for my marriage.**

Week Fifteen: Lies We Believe About Children—Chapter 8

[We are looking at the idea of ever having children as much as what to do if we already have them. Even if the women do not have any children yet, they may discover they already believe some of these lies due to their own upbringing, or their feelings that they will do better than their parents because of these beliefs. Encourage the women to keep an open mind about this topic, drawing on their talent themes and strengths to help them through it.]

- 32. I have a right to control my reproductive choices.**
- 33. We can't afford (more) children.**
- 34. I can't control/can control the way my children turn out.**
- 35. My children are my number-one priority.**
- 36. I'm not/she's not a good mother.**

Week Sixteen: Lies We Believe About Emotions—Chapter 9

[Address this week with care since there may be participants who struggle with mental and emotional health issues. We want them to trust their doctors who may have given them medication for chronic issues. Even with a growing and healthy relationship with their Creator, they still may not have enough chemicals naturally occurring in the brain to help them with emotional and mental health issues. This needs to be made clear to reduce a perceived need to defend themselves and their situation.]

- 37. If I feel something, it must be true.**
- 38. I can't control my emotions.**
- 39. I can't help how I respond when my hormones are out of whack.**
- 40. I can't bear being depressed.**

Week Seventeen: Lies We Believe About Circumstances—Chapter 10

[This week may be troublesome to most of the participants. If they come from social service agencies, they will likely be living in challenging situations brought on by circumstances they may have not been able to control. Be especially on alert to the traumas experienced by them. This might be a good week to break up into some smaller groups with mentors sharing the role of lead and you—unobtrusively—rotating to the different groups.]

- 41. If my circumstances were different, I would be different.**

[Watch out for this one. This may be true in extreme cases. Research has shown that we can become different people when we have experienced severe trauma (Porterfield and Lindhout) or toxic stress over long periods of time (CITE). This distinction may need to be addressed privately with certain participants first, then as a group share if it is appropriate.]

- 42. I shouldn't have to suffer.**

43. My circumstances will never change–this will go on forever. [This truth of this lie will give much needed hope for some participants. Be sure to make it clear that, although we may suffer some things, being homeless or marginalized in other ways by society are not acceptable circumstances to be stuck in. They need to know we support their right to safe, permanent housing, as well as work that gives them the opportunity to support themselves. These opportunities can take time, so there may be suffering during the process. The Scriptures on painful circumstances may be helpful for the ladies.]

44. I just can't take any more. [You may need to take some extra time on this one to encourage those who struggle with what they see as a hopeless situation. Tying in their talents and strengths work at this point may give the encouragement needed to believe this is not true.]

45. It's all about me.

Week Eighteen: Going Forward–Knowing Truth to Combat Lies–Chapters 11 & 12

We are blending chapters 10 and 11 this week to finish up our study on Lies.

[Continue with the highlights from chapter 10, putting the emphasis on the foundational truths that will help us to dispel any lies that come our way.]

Unit Four: A Return to Talents and Strengths–Wrapping it All Up

We now return to the last part of Living Your Strengths. Let us recap what we have been doing for the past seventeen weeks.

- 1. We did an assessment on talents and learned our top 5 themes, addressing what it means to have the right fit.*
- 2. We talked about what it would be like to have a church body that focused on what we are good at and avoiding what we are not.*
- 3. We looked at each talent theme in detail to understand how we are of value just as we are, and how to develop our strengths.*
- 4. We switched over to a study on the Lies Women Believe and addressed lies we have been struggling with, creating plans for overcoming them.*

And now that we have faced some challenging things about ourselves, we are ready to focus some more on what we are good at. Let us look at Chapter 5 in Living Your Strengths.

[Address Outcomes and Forgiveness, particularly considering our study on the lies we sometimes believe. Then direct the participants in finding their top 5 talent themes within the chapter to find ways they can grow and be of service to others. To cap off this last week, discuss Calling. You should also have a discussion on what it means to identify and live their passion by using their strengths.

Have a celebration of some kind! Nineteen weeks is a long time for many people to commit to something. Let these women know they made a huge accomplishment by working through so many challenging things. You should have certificates for each participant that state their 5 top themes. Have the mentors plan these and the celebration using their talent themes and strengths.

Make a statement about each mentor and the strengths they used throughout the study before the certificates are handed out to each participant. It will help the participants to see these themes and strengths in action, giving them encouragement to practice using their own.

This week's session should end with a program evaluation form to assess the effectiveness of the curriculum. It has follow-up questions that encourage the women, including the mentors, to process what they understood about themselves in the first week and how they see themselves now. Use a poster or dry erase board to go through each of the questions with them; some participants might have trouble envisioning positive future things for themselves. A sample form is included in Appendix C.]

Before We Begin Exploring Talents and Gifts

Before we begin our study, think about the things you like to do. Consider this as far back as you can remember. Then answer the following questions:

1. What did you enjoy doing as a child? (Drawing with chalk, reading, riding a bike, shopping, fixing your hair, eating: Anything counts!)

2. Did this change as you grew into a teenager? As a young adult (18-24)? If so, write down the new things you enjoy doing.

3. Think back over the past year write down your thoughts to the following questions.

a. What did you *dislike* doing at your job, at home, or any time of the day? (Getting up early does not count but saying what kept you up late at night would.)

b. What did you enjoy doing at work or home or in the community that you could happily spend hours doing (maybe even losing track of time while doing it)?

Now, let us explore your innate talents and discover how your talents might fit with what you enjoy!

Things to think about before we begin looking into lies:

Consider what some of the most difficult things are that you must do. This can include any are of your life, from transportation issues, work, home responsibilities, relationships, etc. Choose a word or phrase to express your thoughts. If you can think of 2 or 3 that is good. Any more is better, but not necessary. Just write out what comes to mind when you think about a typical day.

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Now, let us look at some lies we as women tend to believe about ourselves and our roles and responsibilities. While we explore these lies, we will discover how they affect our view of ourselves and our relationships with others.

We have completed our study on Talents and Lies. Now it is time to consider some things you learned about yourself through the study.

**What talent themes did your StrengthFinder test show reveal to you?*

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

**What is at least one thing you learned about a talent theme and your strengths that are connected to it?*

**Now, look at your Pre-Curriculum Questions form from the beginning of our program. How could you use your strengths and your enjoyments to lead you into a future job you would love?*

**Switch your thoughts over to the Lies portion of our study. List one or two lies (or categories) that you discovered you struggled with. You may have struggled with a lot of them and that is okay. For now, think about the one(s) you feel like you can manage working on. [When you feel confident of the truths of those lies, you can move on to another one.]*

What is one or more things you could do to help yourself remember the truth? [Your talent themes and strengths can help you with this!]

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Appendix B: So-That Chain, Theory of Change for Three-Fold Approach to Healing

Mentors will be trained in trauma-informed care with a Gospel focus to support CRITI participants



CRITI participants will begin to feel safe emotionally as well as physically



CRITI participants will engage in learning about their innate talents.



With this increased sense of value, CRITI participants will feel strong, as well as safe to investigate the lies that hold them back from exiting homelessness.



CRITI participants will clearly see the changes they may need to make based on truth



CRITI participants will now engage in the life skills classes they need to prepare for exiting homelessness.



CRITI participants will graduate successfully into stable housing



Chattanooga, TN will see a decrease in the homeless population among women and children.

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