



terraluna
COLLABORATIVE

Developing Effective Evidence-Based Principles For Working With Homeless Youth

Supported by the OTTO BREMER FOUNDATION

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Youth Homelessness in MN



THERE ARE AN ESTIMATED **2,500**
HOMELESS YOUTH
IN MINNESOTA EACH YEAR

Context

OBF Youth Homeless Initiative

- Otto Bremer Foundation's Youth Homelessness Initiative has provided grants to six organizations over three years
- Goal is to improve outcomes in individual organizations and at the systems level

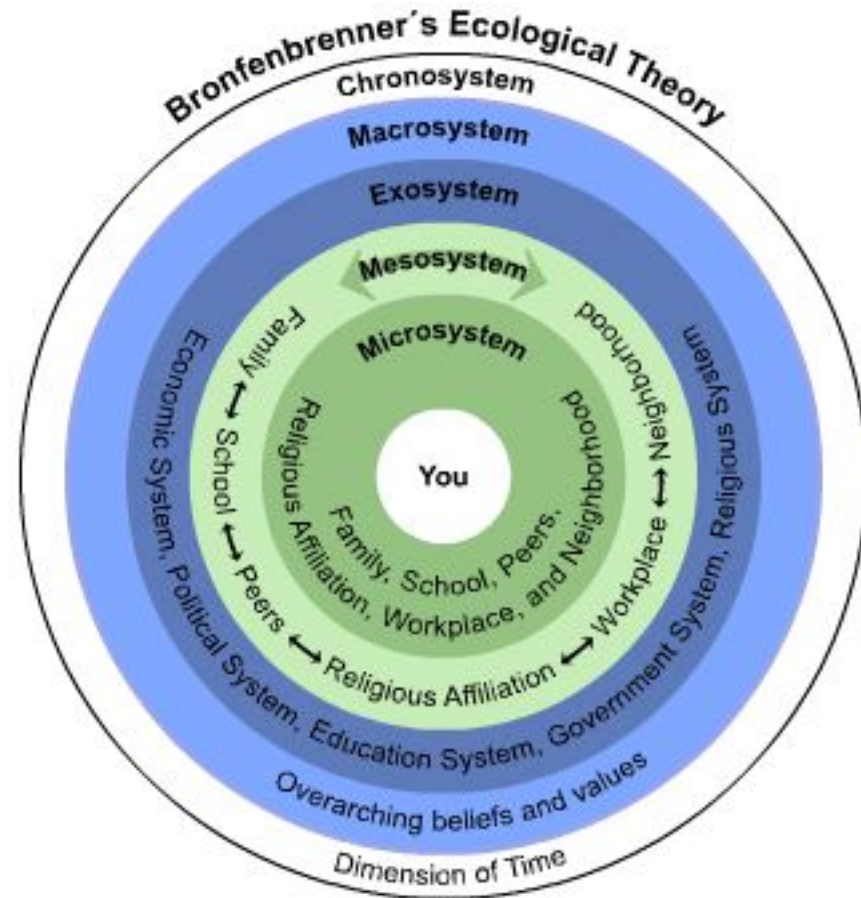


- Three emergency shelters
- Two drop-in centers
- One street outreach collaborative
- Two counties in the Twin Cities metro



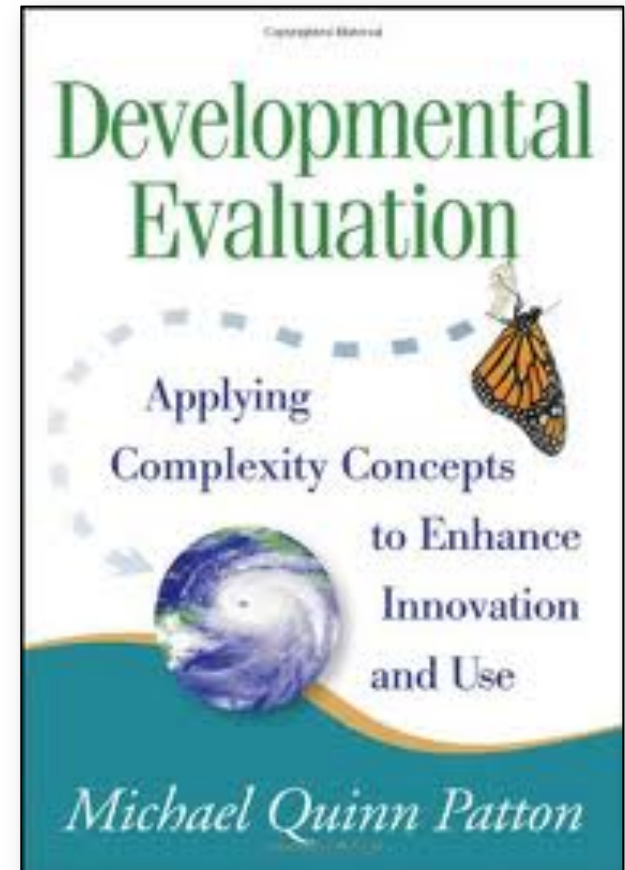
Challenges When Serving Youth Experiencing Homelessness

- Successful solutions do not lie within individual organizations but within collaborations across systems.
- The identification and implementation of best practice models or effective practices as yielded limited results.



Developmental Evaluation

- Developmental evaluation of the principles-driven work
- Engaged reflective practice group in collaborative work around shared principles



Principles Based Approach

“A principals based approach is appropriate when a group of diverse programs are “all adhering to the same principles but each adapting those principles to its own particular target population within its own context” (Patton, 2010).

Principles

- Journey Oriented
- Strengths- and/or Assets-Based Approach
- Positive Youth Development
- Trauma Informed Care
- Harm Reduction



Principles



- Non-judgmental Engagement
- Trusting Youth-Adult Relationships
- Holistic Approach
- Collaboration

Process Questions

Question 1:

How do homeless youth actually experience the principles?

Question 2:

What does implementation of these principles look like in practice?

Outcome Questions

Question 3:

What are the impacts of the principles on ways to work with homeless youth?

Question 4:

In what ways does the work impact the trajectory of the lives of young people?

Emergence

Question 5:

What other important principles may be guiding the work with youth, or are principles not yet fully identified, labeled, or fully understood?

Design

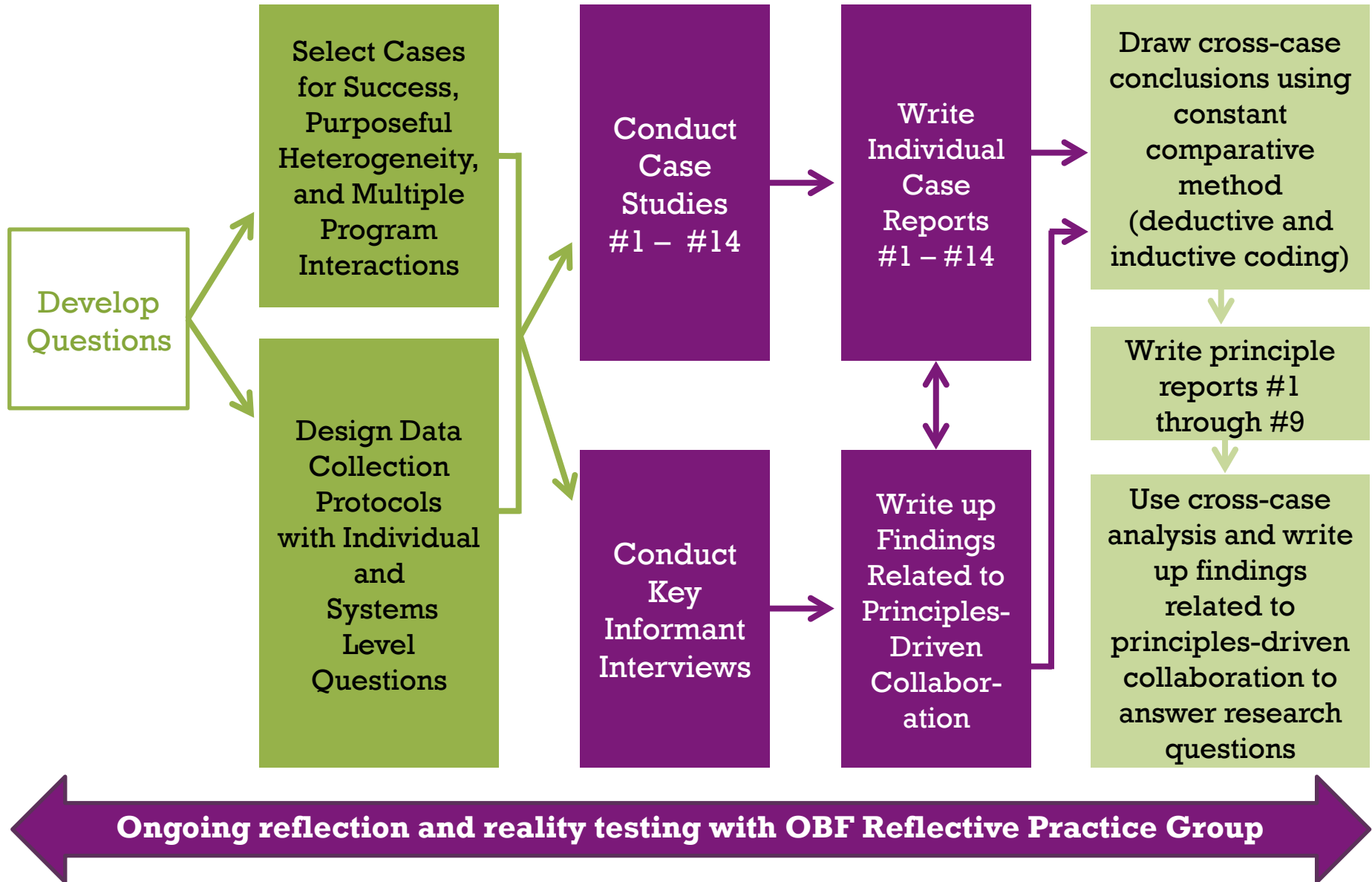
Interpretive Approach

- Interpretive studies generally:
 - Attempt to understand phenomena through the meanings that people assign to them
 - Focus on the full complexity of human sense making as the situation emerges
 - Attempt to understand phenomena through the meanings that people assign to them
- Appropriate for systems with multiple and sometimes conflicting perspectives

DEFINE AND DESIGN

COLLECT, PREPARE & ANALYZE

CONCLUDE AND TEST



Gaps in Youth Homeless Literature

There is a lack of literature related to youth homelessness that:

- Privileges the voice of young people who have experienced homelessness
- Explores causes and solutions from a systems perspective

Youth Demographics

Gender: 9 Female, 5 Male

Age first independently homeless: 13-19 years old

Current age: 19-23

Race: African American (9), Multiple (3),
Caucasian (1)

Foster care: 9 youth/ 65%

Juvenile justice: 8 youth/ 57%

Pregnant or parenting: 5 youth/ 36%

Sexual exploitation: 6 youth/ 43%

Reflective Practice Group

December 2012: Selected sample

January 2013: Reviewed and made modifications to interview protocol

February 2013: Review a rough transcript and coded for evidence of principles

March 2013: Reviewed a completed case study and coded for evidence of principles

Reflective Practice Group continued

April 2013: Teams of 3-4 people read three case studies and conducted a cross-case analysis

May 2013: Group members reviewed the write-up of the first principle

June 2013: Everyone read all of the principle briefs and we:

- 1) discussed interrelationships between principles and
- 2) made visual representations of the interrelationships between the principles

Reflective Practice Group continued

July 2013: Presentation of final results and discussion

August 2013: Group members identified applications for practice and next steps

September 2013: Group members prepared write-ups for the principles

October 2013: Reviewed revised write-up of principles and started to word-smith principle statements

Findings

Question 1: How do homeless youth actually experience the principles?

| Proposed principle titles | Number of case stories |
|--|-------------------------------|
| Trusting youth-adult relationships | 14 |
| Journey orientation | 13 |
| Collaboration (across organizations and systems) | 13 |
| Holistic approach (well-being & mental health) | 13 |
| Trauma informed care | 12 |
| Positive youth development | 12 |
| Harm reduction | 10 |
| Non-judgmental engagement | 9 |
| Strengths and/or assets based approach | 6 |

Question 1 Key Points

- All of the principles were evidenced in the case stories, some more so than others
- Some were evidenced as described in the literature (*example: Trauma informed care*) and others somewhat differently (*example: Non-judgmental engagement*)

Example: Trusting Youth-Adult Relationships

Themes identified in the youth interviews related to Principle 1: Trusting youth-adult relationships

- Past experiences make it hard to trust
- Non-judgmental engagement is an essential first ingredient in developing a relationship
- Learning to open up is important and happens through relationship
- Relationships help youth learn to ask for and receive help

Example 1 continued

- Listening is as important as doing
- People matter more than programs
- It means a lot when staff convey that they truly care
- Relationships are the critical ingredient for effective programming
- Consistency of staffing is important

Question 2: What does implementation of the principles look like in practice?

Complex Developmental Orientation

Recognizing where youth have been, are, and would like to be; utilizing strengths to support youth development (*Principles 1-3*)

Meeting Youth Where They Are

Recognizing that youth have likely experienced trauma and responding in appropriate way; helping youth to reduce the potential for harm in their lives. (*Principles 4-6*)

Question 2 continued

Relationship Orientation

Recognizing the importance of and power of relationships for healing, growth and transformation. (*Principle 7*)

Bio-Psycho-Social-Cultural Well-Being

Recognizing that well-being involves multiple aspects of the youth's lives; recognizing that one organization cannot be/do it all. (*Principles 8-9*)

Question 2 Key Points

- All of the principles are overlapping and, some more so than others
- Thinking about the opposite highlights how these principles are different than the traditional approach (ex: meeting youth where they are rather than where they should be)

Question 3: What are the implications for practice?

Working in a principles-driven way:

- takes time
- is non-linear
- is highly individualized for each person and context
- requires consistency of understanding and cohesiveness of implementation across multiple levels of the system
- requires high degrees of judgment and trust

Question 4: How do the principles impact the trajectory of young people?

Complex developmental orientation:

helps youth develop a new mindset, see a different future for themselves, and further develop the strengths and capacities needed to realize this future

Meeting youth where they are:

helps youth meet their basic needs, feel safe and work towards reducing current and future trauma

Question 4 continued

Relationship orientation:

supports the inter-related processes of learning to open up and trust, healing and beginning to see and believe in one's own potential

Bio-psycho-social-cultural well-being:

connects youth with the resources necessary to meet biological, psychological, cultural, spiritual and social needs

Question 5: What is not yet fully identified, labeled or understood?

Three needs were identified in the case stories:

- 1) learning to love and be loved
- 2) navigating complex family relationships
- 3) developing community connections and a sense of belonging



Across levels of the systems

- Staff to youth
- Staff to staff,
within
organizations
- Organizational
programs,
processes and
procedures
- Across
organizations
- Across systems



What's Next?

Develop principle statements that provide guidance for action in varied, complex and changing environments.

Draft Statements:

- **Journey Oriented**

Recognize youth are on a personal and continuous journey influenced by where they have been, where they are going, and the diverse aspects of their current life.

Implications for Policy Makers and Funders

Conceptualization of the problem:

Individuals versus systems

Organizational relationships:

Collaboration versus competition

Evidence: Randomized controlled trials
versus rigorous localized evaluation and
adaptation

Success: Linear and predictable versus
complex and non-linear

Implications For Evaluation

We need more examples...

....of what it looks like to develop, use,
and adapt Effective Evidence-Based
Principles

What's Next? continued

- **Holistic**
Engage and support mental, physical, spiritual and social health and as interconnected and interrelated
- **Trusting Youth-Adult Relationships**
Be trustworthy by acting in a way that is caring, authentic, and supportive

Thank you.

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Members of the Reflective Practice Group

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