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COLLABORATIVE

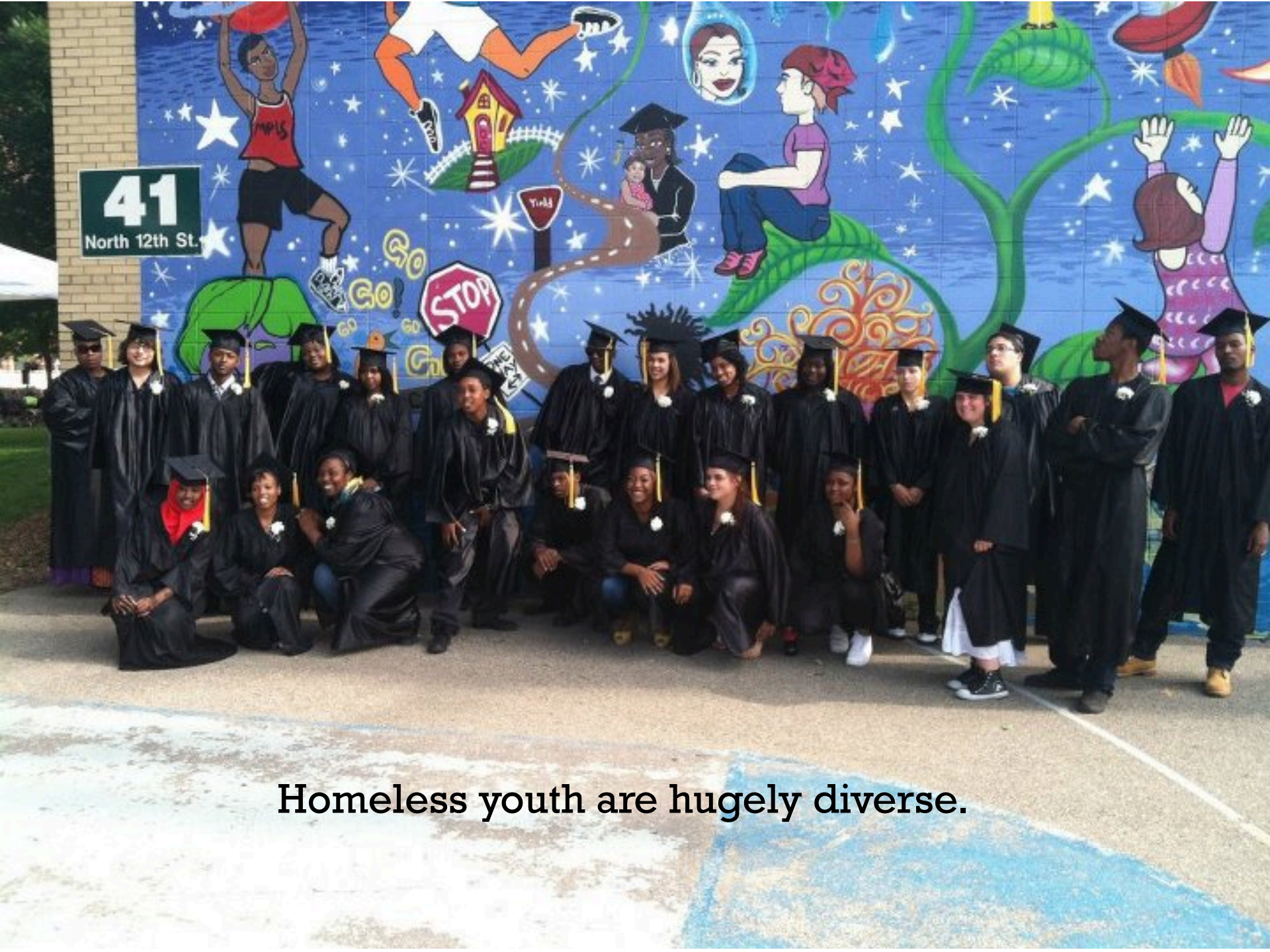
# Developing Effective Evidence-Based Principles For Working With Homeless Youth

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# Youth Homelessness in MN



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



Homeless youth are hugely diverse.



# Meet Serena.

Serena's 4-year homelessness journey began when her mother learned that she is a lesbian. Serena's sexuality proved too difficult for her mother to understand or accept...

*Read Serena's story here.*

<http://www.avenuesforyouth.org/>



# Meet Tara.

Tara became homeless when her family lost their home this year. They moved in with another family, but there wasn't enough room. Being the oldest, Tara moved out to be on her own...

*Read Tara's story here.*

<http://www.avenuesforyouth.org/>



Youth who are homeless have little control over what happens to them.

They are in the midst of their own individual journeys: past trauma, present struggles, and hopes for the future.

They want to love and be loved.

How do providers meet the diverse needs of these youth on their journey out of homelessness?

# 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



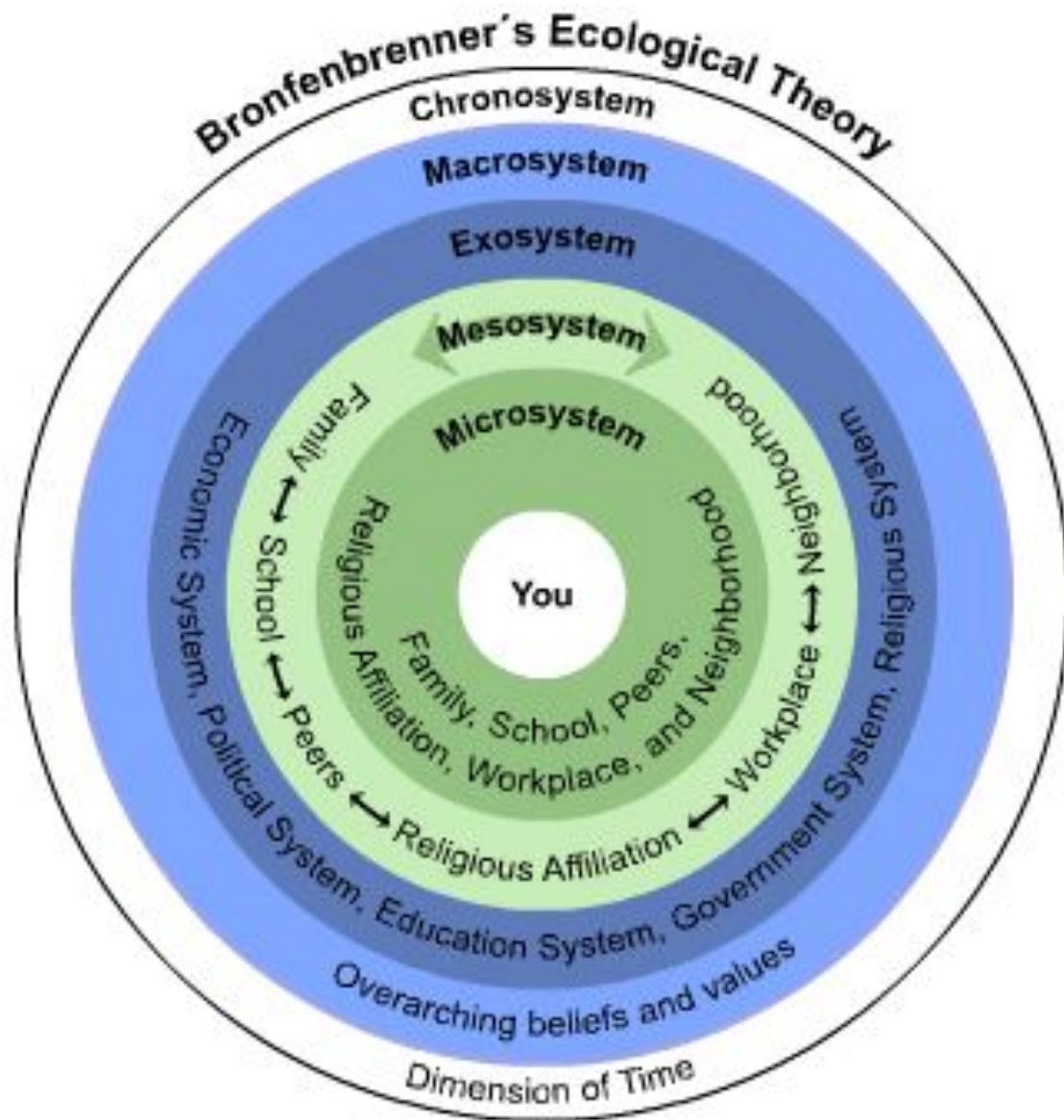


- Three emergency shelters
- Two drop-in centers
- One street outreach collaborative
- Two counties in the Twin Cities metro



# Underlying belief

Collaboration  
leads to better  
outcomes for  
homeless youth







- How do we want to collaborate?
- To what end?
- In what ways?
- And how can evaluation help us do this?

# Evidence-based Principles-focused Developmental Evaluation

*Why developmental evaluation?*

Because although there was intent to collaborate, they didn't have a common understanding about how the collaborative process would unfold or to what end



# Evidence-based Principles-focused Developmental Evaluation

*Why principles focused?*

Because guiding principles would give those providing services to homeless youth a basis for *how* to engage while allowing for adaptation in each context



# Principles

- Strengths-based Approach
- Positive Youth Development
- Trauma Informed Care
- Harm Reduction

# Principles



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



# Questions

*Would homeless young people also identify these principles as important?*

*What do these principles look like in practice?*

*Are there principles that have not been identified or articulated?*

*What is the impact of these principles on a young person's trajectory when homeless?*



# Methods

## Considerations:

- Understand phenomena through the meanings that people assign to them
- Focus on the full complexity of human sense making as the situation emerges
- Allow for multiple and sometimes conflicting perspectives

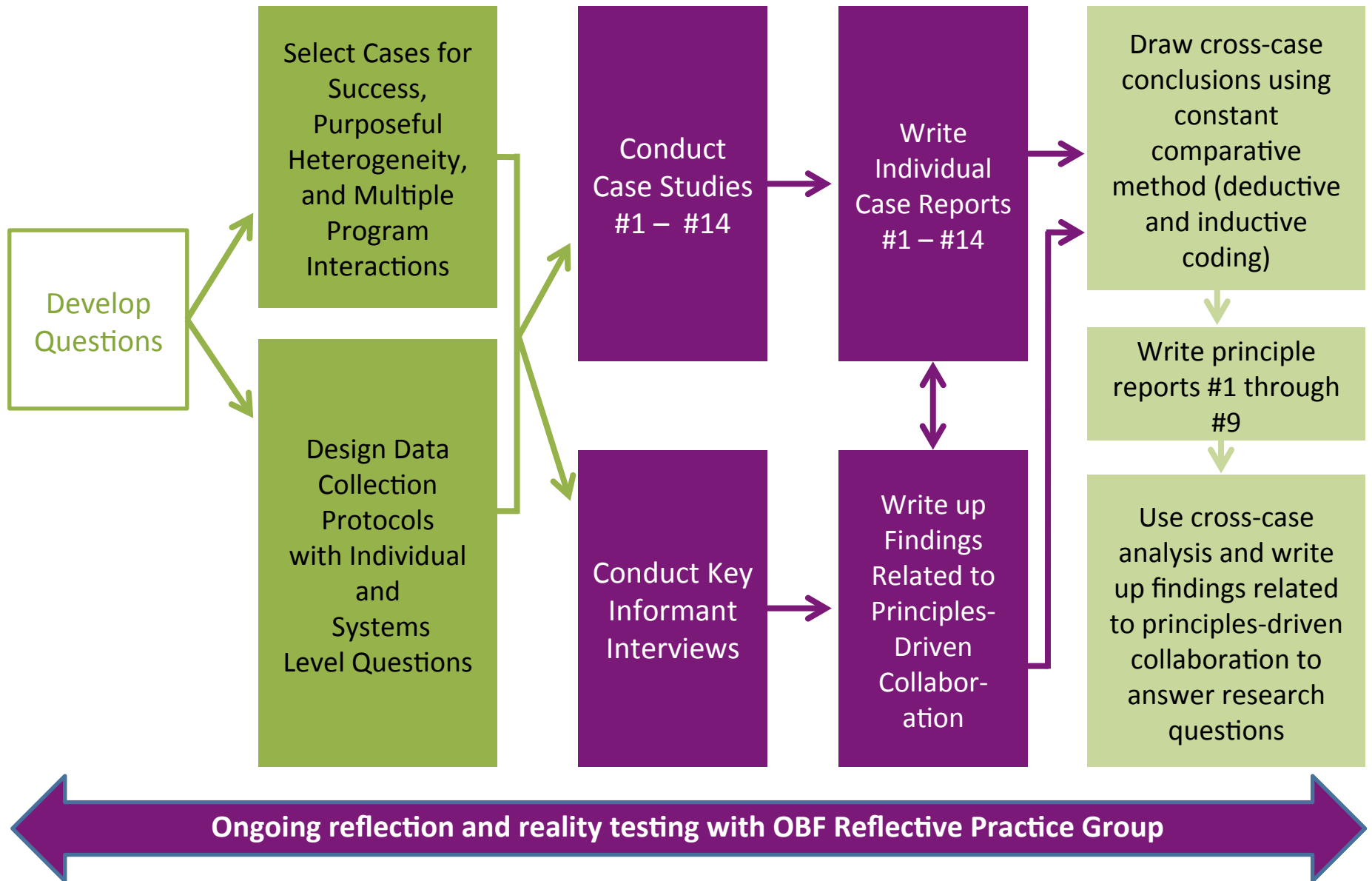
# Case Studies

Reflective  
Practice

## DEFINE AND DESIGN

## COLLECT, PREPARE & ANALYZE

## CONCLUDE AND TEST



# 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 discussed interrelationships between principles

**July 2013:** Presentation of final results and discussion

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

<b>Proposed principle titles</b>	<b>Number of case stories</b>
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

# Example

## **Trusting Youth/Adult Relationships**

*True caring by staff is profoundly  
important to youth.*

And you be like, “Okay, I have all this on my plate. I have to dig in and look into [the choices I’m making] to make my life more complete.” And I felt that on my own, I really couldn’t. Not even the strongest person on God’s green Earth can do it. I couldn’t do it. So I ended up reaching out to [the youth shelter], and they opened their arms. They were like just, “Come. Just get here,” and they got me back on track.

**-Pearl**

If I was to sit in a room and think about, like, everything that happened to me or I've been through, I'll get to cryin' and feelin' like I don't wanna be on Earth anymore—like I wanted to die. When I talk to somebody about it, it makes me feel better. The people I talk to about it give me good advice. They tell me how much they like me and how [good] I'm doin'. They just put good stuff in my head, and then I think about it and realize I am a good person and everything's gonna work out better.

**-Maria**



[Rahim's] not going to send me to the next man, put me onto the next person's caseload. He just always took care of me.[...]I honestly feel like if I didn't have Rahim in my corner, I would have been doing a whole bunch of dumb shit. I would have been right back at square one. I probably would have spent more time in jail than I did. I just felt like if it wasn't for him, I probably wouldn't be here right now, talking to you.

**-Thmaris**

**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

# 9 evidence-based, guiding principles to help youth overcome homelessness

*The principles begin with the perspective that youth are on a journey; all of our interactions with youth are filtered through that **journey** perspective. This means we must be **trauma-informed, non-judgmental** and work to **reduce harm**. By holding these principles, we can build a **trusting relationship** that allows us to focus on **youths' strengths** and opportunities **for positive development**. Through all of this, we approach youth as **whole beings** through a youth-focused **collaborative** system of support.*

- 1. Journey Oriented.** Interact with youth to help them understand the interconnectedness of past, present and future as they decide where they want to go and how to get there.
- 2. Trauma-Informed.** Recognize that all homeless youth have experienced trauma; build relationships, responses and services on that knowledge.
- 3. Non-Judgmental.** Interact with youth without labeling or judging them on the basis of background, experiences, choices or behaviors.

- 4. Harm Reduction.** Contain the effects of risky behavior in the short-term and seek to reduce its effects in the long-term.
- 5. Trusting Youth-Adult Relationships.** Build relationships by interacting with youth in an honest, dependable, authentic, caring and supportive way.
- 6. Strengths-Based.** Start with and build upon the skills, strengths and positive characteristics of each youth.
- 7. Positive Youth Development.** Provide opportunities for youth to build a sense of competency, usefulness, belonging and power.
- 8. Holistic.** Engage youth in a manner that recognizes that mental, physical, spiritual and social health are interconnected and interrelated.
- 9. Collaboration.** Establish a principles-based youth-focused system of support that integrates practices, procedures, and services within and across agencies, systems and policies.

Principles developed by the  
Homeless Youth Collaborative on Developmental Evaluation:  
Avenues for Homeless Youth; Catholic Charities (Hope Street);  
Face to Face (Safe Zone); Lutheran Social Services (StreetWorks Collaborative);  
The Salvation Army (Booth Brown House); and YouthLink (Youth Opportunity Center).

**Dec 2013:** Principles adopted by the group

**March 2014:** Presented to the Trustees of the Otto Bremer Foundation

**April 2014:** Posted to the AEA365 blog and had 1500 hits within two weeks

**May 2014:** Check-in to see how agencies are using the principles

**October 2014:** Decided to expand the Collaborative and focus on principles-based outcomes

# Key Points

- All of the principles were evidenced in the case stories, some more so than others
- The principles were inter-related and over-lapping
- Thinking about the opposite highlights how these principles are different than the traditional approach (ex: meeting youth where they are rather than where you think 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 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



# 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.

Alexa, Asha, Harmony, Isaiah, Julia, Kenzo, Ladybug, Macnificent, Maria, Minna, Pearl, Thmaris, Unique, Zi for your openness and allowing us to learn from your journeys

Members of the Reflective Practice Group

Michael Quinn Patton

Jean A. King

The Otto Bremer Foundation