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DEVISING STRATEGIES, MANAGING NEEDS: A MULTI-LEVEL STUDY  
OF HOMELESSNESS IN CENTRAL FLORIDA

by

REBECCA YOUNG

B.A. University of Central Florida, 2014

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Arts  
in the Department of Anthropology  
in the College of Sciences  
at the University of Central Florida  
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Major Professors: Joanna Mishtal and Ty Matejowsky

## **ABSTRACT**

The homeless are a marginalized population vulnerable to structural forces and policy decisions, including lack of affordable housing, systemic inequalities, and lack of adequate social safety net. Homelessness is commonly medicalized (linked to individual deviancy and mental illness) by service administrators and policymakers, causing structural causes to be overlooked. A “vertical slice” approach is particularly useful to show perspectives and strategies that affect homelessness from multiple levels.

Using ethnographic research methods, this project explores homelessness in Central Florida from three distinct but interrelated angles: (1) the perspective of homeless persons, (2) the perspective of staff members at Hope Helps, a non-profit organization seeking to help the homeless, and (3) the perspective of policymakers. Methods include participant observation at Hope Helps, interviews with people from each group, and policy document analysis. Specifically, I examine how perceptions and discourses of homelessness affect the strategies of these three groups, and ways in which these strategies intersect.

Findings demonstrate that while homeless persons view the reasons for their own homelessness as economic, they perceive other people to be homeless for individualized reasons, including the use of medicalization and criminalization. Many perpetuate rhetoric that blames immigrants, minorities, and other poor persons for the lack of assistance services and jobs available. This greatly reduces homeless persons’ ability to collectivize, support each other, and protest for change. Staff at Hope Helps also uses individualized discourses, focusing on helping homeless and low-income persons budget resources, rather than working towards systemic change. Policymakers in Orlando, which in 2009 was considered the third “meanest city” in the

nation due to criminalization measures, are now focusing on a new Housing First approach, though the efficacy of this approach and their motives remain questionable.

This research has potential to make politics behind policies affecting the homeless more transparent. It would further identify a common language and interests, which can serve as the bridge between homeless seeking services, and service providers. Thus, results of this research have potential to improve the way services for the homeless are structured, and to inform policy relevant to the homeless in Florida. Further, it contributes to anthropological literature on discourse and neoliberalism, and how discourse can be used to justify particular policy directions.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES .....	vii
INTRODUCTION .....	1
LITERATURE REVIEW .....	4
Structural Violence.....	4
Coping Strategies .....	8
Discourses of Homelessness .....	10
Political Economy Approach .....	17
Urban Studies .....	22
Florida as a Research Site about Homelessness.....	24
METHODOLOGY: SITE SELECTION AND RESEARCH DESIGN .....	28
Group 1: Homeless Persons .....	30
Group 2: Hope Helps Staff.....	31
Group 3: Policymakers.....	32
Hope Helps Research Site .....	33
EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS.....	36
Previous Research .....	36
Reasons <i>Other</i> People are Homeless.....	38
Poor vs. Poor .....	41
Homelessness and Disability.....	46
Homelessness and Gender.....	52
DISCOVERING NEEDS, DETERMINING FEASIBILITY: STRATEGIES OF STAFF AT HOPE HELPS .....	61
Staff Perceptions of Homelessness .....	61
Staff Strategies and Deciding which Services to Offer .....	65
Client Responsibility and “Expert” Help .....	74
POLICYMAKERS MAKING HOMELESSNESS “RARE, BRIEF, AND ONE TIME” .....	79
History of Plans to End Homelessness.....	79
A Late Start .....	81

Making Homelessness “Rare, Brief, and One Time” .....	94
Plan Limitations .....	97
CONCLUSIONS.....	101
Significance .....	112
Reflections on “Studying Up” .....	114
Limitations and Future Research.....	116
APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL LETTER .....	119
APPENDIX B: RECRUITMENT SURVEY TO DETERMINE ELIGIBILITY OF HOMELESS PERSONS AT HOPE HELPS .....	121
APPENDIX C: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR HOMELESS PERSONS .....	123
APPENDIX D: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR HOPE HELPS STAFF .....	125
APPENDIX E: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR POLICYMAKERS	127
REFERENCES .....	129

## **LIST OF FIGURES**

Figure 1: Coordinated Entry Flow Chart (USICH 2015).....	96
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## INTRODUCTION

The homeless are a marginalized population vulnerable to structural forces and policy decisions, including lack of affordable housing, unemployment, systemic inequalities, and lack of adequate safety net. The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) reports that there are 564,708 people experiencing homelessness on any given night, but many more people will cycle in and out of homelessness throughout the year. The number of persons experiencing homelessness is likely even greater, since this also does not include people who are “doubled-up” or have had to temporarily stay in someone else’s home due to losing their own housing. Though the causes of homelessness are mostly structural, homeless persons are commonly subjected to medicalizing, individualizing, and criminalizing discourses that suggest they themselves are to blame.

Discourses surrounding homelessness affect public policy by defining who “the homeless” are, and thus how to deal with them. Criminalization, which links homelessness to crime, has previously been a common strategy of cities to try to remove homeless persons from the street and keep them out of sight (Donley and Wright 2008). In 2009, Orlando, the city in which this research takes place, was ranked third “meanest city” in the United States for its criminalization measures in a joint report released by The National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, and National Coalition for the Homeless (NLCHP and NCH 2009). Services that are offered by non-profit organizations, and the ways in which homeless persons are treated by service providers, also reflect service providers’ perception of who the homeless are and what homeless people need. Anthropological research has shown that homeless shelters often use medicalizing discourse, which links homelessness to mental illness, and causes shelter staff to focus on helping homeless persons “fix” themselves, rather than on the structural causes of

homelessness (Lyon-Callo 2000, 20001a). Literature has also shown service providers' uses of individualizing and infantilizing discourses as well. A "vertical slice" approach (Nadar 1972), which takes into account different actors' perspectives, would be particularly useful for showing how different strategies affect homelessness from multiple levels.

Thus, this project examines the issue of homelessness from three distinct but interrelated angles—from the perspectives of homeless persons, staff at non-profit organizations, and policymakers—using ethnographic research methods. Methods include participant observation at Hope Helps, a local non-profit organization seeking to help the homeless, and at Continuum of Care meetings, as well as semi-structured interviews with Hope Helps staff and key policymakers, and policy document analysis. Specifically, it will examine how perceptions and discourses of homelessness influence strategies from multiple levels. I chose this topic and location in order to significantly expand on my previous research on homelessness in Central Florida. Overall, I demonstrate the various mechanisms by which the structural underpinnings of homelessness are obscured or misunderstood, and I argue for the need to re-politicize the issue of homelessness as an urgent matter in need of political action.

First, I review current literature on homelessness, including research on structural violence, coping methods, and discourse, and relate this literature to Poverty Studies and Urban Studies more broadly. I have found that studies of homelessness can greatly benefit from using a political economy approach (Roseberry 1988) more commonly used in Poverty Studies in order to contextualize homelessness and services within the current political economic system. I then consider Florida as a particularly important research site for the study of homelessness. In 2009, 39% of homeless persons were in Florida, California, and New York (Enloe and Seager 2011), and four out of the ten "meanest cities" were found in Florida (NLCHP and NCH 2009).

Next, I discuss my research methods and research site, the nongovernmental organization Hope Helps, in more depth. I then explore research findings from all three groups of participants: homeless persons, staff at Hope Helps, and policymakers from Orlando and Orange County. I significantly expand on my previous research with homeless persons, which took place from 2012-2014, to include new themes that have emerged, as well as research findings from particular groups of homeless persons: women, and persons with disabilities who are living on “fixed” incomes. In the section on staff at Hope Helps, I discuss staff’s perceptions of homelessness, discourses used, and their strategies to prevent homelessness or to get homeless persons back into housing. In the final findings chapter on policymakers, I examine the area’s new plans to reduce homelessness through the Housing First approach, policymakers’ discourses and strategies, and the potential motivations for their recent changes in strategies in dealing with homelessness.

Overall, this research addresses the disconnect between the needs of homeless persons, and the current policies and services directed towards them. This research project has the potential to inform services and policies relevant to homeless persons in Florida, and to make the politics behind policies affecting the homeless more transparent, which is important in encouraging accountability and allowing for a more open discussion on the issues and solutions. Furthermore, Policy Study is a growing area in Anthropology, and this research will contribute to a deeper understanding of the ways in which the politically powerful use particular discourses to justify specific policy directions.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Structural Violence**

Anthropologists have increasingly been pursuing research about homelessness, offering important insights about ways in which power and agency operate in marginalized settings (e.g., Bourgois and Schonberg 2009; Kingfisher 2005, 2007; Hopper 2003; Lyon-Callo 1998, 2000, 2001a, 2001b; Mathieu 1993; Wolch and Rowe 1992). One of the themes of this research is the violence experienced by homeless persons living on the street or in homeless shelters.

For example, applied anthropologist Kim Hopper (2003) has been researching homelessness in New York City since the 1970s. Through participant observation, Hopper (2003) observed the violence and indignities homeless persons faced on a daily basis, including involuntary movement, the scarcity of common amenities, and harassment by passersby. He also observed violence within homeless shelters, including the degradation of homeless persons' self-worth by shelter staff.

Another extensive account of the violence homeless persons experience is Philippe Bourgois and Jeffrey Schonberg's (2009) ethnography, *Righteous Dopefiend*. Taking place in the Edgewater area of San Francisco, California, the authors analyze the structural and social forces that shape chronically homeless persons' lives. The authors conceptualize structural violence, following medical anthropologist Paul Farmer (2004), as the way political-economic organization harms vulnerable categories of people. For example, in the lives of the homeless this manifests itself in lack of affordable housing, unemployment, legislation that targets the homeless, requiring the homeless to travel long distances to receive services, and the chasing of homeless people from encampments and harassment by police officers. Meanwhile, the

experience of everyday violence, the social production of indifference to institutionalized violence, is seen in the way people try to keep homeless services, and thus the homeless themselves, out of their neighborhoods and out of sight (Bourgois and Schonberg 2009:16; Lyon-Callo 2001b). Homeless persons' experience of Symbolic violence, the way the subordinated misrecognize inequality as natural and blame themselves for their situation, can be seen in the way the homeless self-blame and self-govern instead of fighting policy and structural issues (Bourgois and Schonberg 2009:16-17; Lyon-Callo 2000).

With this in mind, Bourgois and Schonberg (2009) argue that scholars need to investigate the ways in which everyday, intimate, and structural violence are generated and how they are legitimized by symbolic violence. One of the ways in which this occurs is through habitus, or the way in which "social structural power translates into intimate ways of being and everyday practices that legitimize social inequalities" (Bourgois and Schonberg 2009:18). In other words, these practices are misrecognized as instinct and common sense. The authors theorize that structural violence is also legitimized through particular uses of the theory of power and normativity, whereby "power is not wielded overtly, but rather 'flows' through the very foundations of what we recognize as reason, civilization, and scientific progress" (Bourgois and Schonberg 2009:18). For example, the logic of biopower, wielded by the state (Foucault 1980), is internalized by citizens, and produces the belief that the government promotes the citizens' health and well-being. In this context, Bourgois and Schonberg (2009:19) conceive of the homeless as lumpen, following Marx, to convey "a subjectivity that emerges among population groups on whom the effects of biopower have become destructive."

One example of a dangerous structural problem affecting homeless persons is access to healthcare. According to Bourgois and Schonberg (2009:97) homeless persons' "primary

problem was gaining access to medical care because hospital services for the indigent were strictly rationed in the 1990s and 2000s,” due to federal cutbacks for indigent care reimbursement. The hospital responded to these cutbacks through deliberate, hostile triage of homeless emergency room patients. Consequently, the homeless “usually postponed seeking medical care until they were quite literally dying, in order to ensure admission to the hospital. Otherwise they risked finding themselves back on the street after several hours of waiting” (2009:97). The authors observed that “this structural problem caused by federal policy and the market driven logic of privately financed health care was obscured to patients and service providers alike” (Bourgois and Schonberg 2009:98). This caused the homeless to be seen as “manipulative frequent flyers” by the hospital workers, while nurses and doctors were seen as “bitches... and bastards” by the homeless (Bourgois and Schonberg 2009:98).

In order to contextualize the strategies and decisions chronically homeless persons make, which may not appear to make sense to outsiders, Bourgois and Schonberg (2009) utilize the concept of Gray Zones. The authors relate Auschwitz survivor Primo Levi’s (1989) description of Gray Zones, the way survival imperatives overcome human decency in the Holocaust camps, to the Homeless. They suggest that “addiction under conditions of extreme poverty and concerted police repression creates a morally ambiguous space that blurs the lines between victims and perpetrators” and that “most people fail to see the everyday ‘state of emergency’ in which the socially vulnerable are forced to live” (Bourgois and Schonberg 2009:20-21). In this context, actions that may seem morally wrong or maladaptive come to make sense.

Other scholars have also discussed issues of structural violence experienced by the homeless. Sociologists Stacy Wolch and Jennifer Rowe (1992) discuss the issue of involuntary movement. While some movement is voluntary, the authors argue that “unlike homed

individuals, the mobility of the homeless is much more profoundly influenced by involuntary forces: the police, the welfare system, and local businesses' attitudes and behavior towards the homeless" (Wolch and Rowe 1992:130). For example, police perform sweeps to keep the homeless from living permanently in one area, often forcing them to leave their resources behind. The welfare system also causes involuntary movement by forcing homeless persons to travel long distances in order to receive services. Some local businesses also force movement by refusing to serve the homeless or forcibly removing homeless persons from the premises as soon as a purchase is completed. According to the authors, forced mobility can hinder effective coping and "is to be avoided, since it not only depletes limited financial and physical resources, but also undermines self-esteem and creates dysfunctional (if justified) feelings of anger and alienation" (Wolch and Rowe 1992:138).

While scholars have discussed violence homeless persons experience in public spaces, structural/institutional violence can also take place within organizations attempting to help the homeless. In an ethnographic account of the shelter system in New York City, following the fiscal crisis of 1975, anthropologist Ida Susser (1999) showed how restrictions placed on families within the New York City shelter system could potentially hinder homeless families' ability to cope with homelessness. She observed that since men and teenage boys were excluded from the shelter system, separated from the mother and young children, the shelter system undermined potential cooperation and mutual responsibilities between men, women, and children. She concluded that "for homeless people in New York City, the experience of poverty reflects the constant interplay between institutional regulations and poor people's strategies of adaptation and resistance to such constraints" (Susser 1999:67). Thus, while institutions and organizations

that provide assistance to the poor or homeless might have good intentions, restrictions placed on them may actually hinder their ability to cope and their strategies for improving their lives.

### **Coping Strategies**

Other social science researchers have approached the study of homelessness through analyzing the strategies used by homeless persons to cope with being homeless, or paths taken to get themselves back into a home (Marr 2012; Wolch and Rowe 1992). Wolch and Rowe (1992) show that the homeless also face structural violence related to space and mobility in their daily living, and contextualize the strategies through which homeless persons attempt to “cope” with being homeless. They argue that the daily routines and social networks the homeless build are based on the services and resources available to them and their goals. Wolch and Rowe (1992:116) define a daily path as the “link between social networks and urban space... revolving around spatially fixed stations, pivotal points of return in the round of activities.” They suggest that the locale, the “intersection of an individual’s daily path and social network,” including “environmental features, social institutions and individuals and activities that are present in time-space,” represents an individual’s personal identity and they become psychologically attached to it (Wolch and Rowe 1992:116). If a locale falls below an individual’s accepted cultural norms, it can become damaging to their self-esteem and personal aspirations. This becomes problematic when a person becomes homeless because they lose the spatially fixed stations in their daily path, such as their home base or work place. According to the authors, in order to cope, such as by obtaining food, clothing, shelter, security, and income, a homeless individual will need to



develop an alternative network that does not rely on these fixed stations (Rowe and Wolch 1992).

In recreating their social networks or daily paths, Wolch and Rowe (1992) show that there are many different paths that homeless individuals can take that will affect their ability to cope. For example, if their short term coping strategy is formed around a shared pattern of substance abuse the network “can provide camaraderie and protection, but it may also exacerbate a dependence on drugs or alcohol that can complicate long-term strategies” and may also “involve physical or emotional abuse, further damaging self-esteem and coping capacities” (Wolch and Rowe 1992:117-118). A person’s “life path” may also be negatively affected by homelessness, since when a person becomes homeless their concerns are primarily directed toward immediate survival needs, rather than long term life goals (Wolch and Rowe 1992).

Some changes to a person’s daily and life path can be affected by place-specific circumstances, such as the city in which someone lives, or the assistance services they use. According to Wolch and Rowe (1992:124), “the philosophies and policies of the service agencies influence client notions about what successful coping entails,” such as by meeting day to day needs as opposed to reaching long term goals. Likewise, some cities focus on meeting the immediate needs of the homeless by providing lots of resources such as food and shelter. Other cities leave the immediate needs of the homeless to the homeless themselves and focus on trying to get them back into the workforce and into low-income housing.

Place-specific circumstances can also affect homeless persons exit from homelessness, and their ability to stay housed (Marr 2012; Wolch and Rowe 1992). Wolch and Rowe (1992) describe two different types of exits: Shallow exits, when individuals move into temporary or unstable housing and are faced with the risk of falling back into homelessness, and deep exits,

when individuals move into permanent, affordable housing, sometimes linked to social services. According to Wolch and Rowe, “structural and individual factors influence the course of homelessness and type of exit: for example, the lack of appropriate employment or housing opportunities, denial or termination of welfare or disability payments, or deepening addiction” (1992:118). Further, when individuals begin to exit homelessness they are often affected by “worries about how those left behind will manage, guilt about gaining the opportunity to leave the streets, and fears of leaving the support of their homeless networks” (Wolch and Rowe 1992:127).

### **Discourses of Homelessness**

The working of power through discourses has been explored in anthropological research on homelessness conducted with service providers and officials to examine perceptions of homelessness. Anthropologist Nancy Nelson (2008) uses Foucault’s concept of decentralized power, in which power is not necessarily concentrated, to explain how power is wielded through discourse. Nelson (2008) emphasizes the way social categories or labels both identify and subjectify populations, such as by distinguishing between the deserving and undeserving poor. Nelson (2008:109) argues that “labels legitimize the provisioning of aid for certain people while delegitimizing it for others...They make the social order appear natural. And through this legitimizing effect, aid discourse obscures the interests and intentions of powerful social actors and reinforces the perspective that aid and the need for it are nonpolitical issues.”

The importance of discourses in shaping homeless persons’ experiences is crucial, since as anthropologist Catherine Kingfisher (2007) demonstrates, discourses influence public policy

through particular depictions of the homeless as a subject category, and are therefore far from neutral but rather “fundamentally political and power laden” (2007:94). The discourses, often used by people trying to help, can also change how homeless individuals view themselves and the reasons for their homelessness.

One example of a discourse used to describe the homeless is the medicalized discourse of deviancy. This discourse is associated with a “continuum of care” approach in which shelter workers help people obtain and maintain housing while representing them as suffering from the effects of traumatic episodes such as depression, schizophrenia, or domestic abuse. Shelter workers attempt to detect and diagnose disorders through surveillance and interviews and then “determine what the homeless person should ‘work on’ while at the shelter” (Lyon-Callo 2000:334). Throughout this process, homeless persons are required to self-disclose (share all personal information with staff) and self-govern (to work to fix aspects of their lives seen as lacking). This leads many homeless persons to self-blame, thus directing their attention away from working towards societal change. It also leads many shelter workers to believe that the best way to combat homelessness is through helping the homeless “fix” themselves (Lyon-Callo 2000). Overall, this representation of the homeless as in need of medical care by shelter workers, though well intentioned, reproduces and reinforces the image of homelessness “as a social problem with an origin in individual deviancy,” instead of as an outcome of social structure and the economy (Lyon-Callo 2000: 332). The medicalization of homelessness therefore serves to depoliticize what are essentially structural, social and political problems.

An example that illustrates this phenomenon is Arlene Mathieu’s (1993) case study in New York City, wherein the Mayor deployed the medicalized discourse during a time when the homeless population drastically increased, effectively shifting responsibility away from the city’s

administration. Were homelessness to be understood as a structural problem by policy makers and the public, Mathieu (1993) argues, then perhaps society would be more likely to work toward collective solutions to address the underlying issues perpetuating homelessness, including making housing affordable.

Similarly, an “individualized” discourse makes homelessness understood as an individual problem. Here, service providers focus on improving an individual’s skill sets through job training or *résumé* classes. While this may help some people find jobs, it diverts attention from larger structural issues by putting the focus on individuals. Public belief in individual causes of homelessness also fuels marginalization of the homeless geographically. In the context of research on Not in My Backyard (NIMBY) responses to launching of services for the homeless in “their” neighborhoods, anthropologist Vincent Lyon-Callo (2001b:184) observes:

Unfortunately, despite the lack of resources adequate to meet the needs of homeless people, widespread public support for political movements aimed at decreasing systemic inequalities, which are a root cause of homelessness, have been largely absent... Instead, local governments and community residents continue to be more likely to attribute homelessness to shortcomings within homeless people themselves. Consequently, the most vocal and organized community mobilizations appear to be aimed at preventing the location of services for homeless people in ‘their’ neighborhoods.

The scholarship on homelessness observes further that the homeless tend to be governed either in criminalizing or infantilizing terms, depending on context and underlying purposes. Criminalization includes legislation that criminalizes sleeping in public spaces and panhandling, selective enforcement of laws, and driving homeless out of the area through police sweeps. According to a report by the National Coalition for the Homeless (NCH) and The National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty (NLCHP), “criminalization measures also raise constitutional questions and many of them violate the civil rights of homeless persons” (NCH

and NLCHP 2006:11). NCH and NLCHP (2006:11) suggest that when a city passes a law that places too many restrictions on begging it violates the First amendment (Free Speech), when a city destroys homeless persons' belongings or conducts unreasonable searches or seizures it violates the Fourth amendment (the right to be free from unreasonable searches and seizures), and when "a law is applied to criminally punish a homeless person for necessary life activities in public, like sleeping... if the person has nowhere else to perform the activity" it is violating the Eighth amendment (the right to be free from cruel and unusual punishment). However, these activities often occur and these types of laws often still exist.

Some laws also go against international human rights agreements that have been signed by the United States. According to the report by the NCH and NLCHP (2006) the right to movement, which includes the freedom to choose your own residence, guaranteed in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) treaty, is violated by keeping the homeless out of certain areas or forcing them to move to other spaces. Many of the international human rights agreements also have non-discrimination clauses. For example, the ICCPR protects equal protection of the law and the Habitat Agenda states that no one should be penalized for their status. Therefore, laws that ban necessary activities for the homeless in public spaces would violate this. The problem is the agreements signed by the U.S. are not self-executing or are non-binding, which means they "are not directly enforceable in U.S. courts" (2006:18). However, NCH and NLCHP recommend that the treaties "can be used persuasively to support legal arguments based on domestic law" (2006:18) and "advocates can use such law as a framework within which to fight criminalization" (2006:19).

While the homeless are often constructed as "dangerous," during their ethnographic research in Portland, Oregon, anthropologist Lisa Hoffman and urban scholar Brian Coffey

(2008) also identified governance techniques treating them as child-like through infantilizing discourse. The authors argue this process occurs through interactions wherein service providers' attitude that they "know better" than the homeless persons themselves results in many clients feeling disrespected, as if they are children, and leads them to "opt-out" of services such as shelters in order to retain their dignity (Hoffman and Coffey 2008). Hoffman and Coffey thus argue that progress towards solving the issue of homelessness "can only be accomplished when they are consistently treated with respect in a variety of settings, retaining a sense of dignity" (2008: 219).

Depictions of the homeless as a highly varied population, though seemingly and improvement, have also been identified as problematic. While the homeless are a diverse group, this discourse distracts from addressing the shared problem of inequality (Kingfisher 2007), as it constructs categories of subjects based on perceived deservingness. For example, the "marked" category consists of homeless individuals considered deserving of attention, while the "unmarked" do not. As Kingfisher (2007:103: shows, members of the marginalized "unmarked" category, will remain marginalized, and, thus, the problem in which the architects of the diversity argument were attempting to intervene will be recapitulated."

Rather than analyze how discourses have been used to create subject categories of homeless persons, other scholars have conducted research on how service providers determine "service-worthiness," and the discursive justifications they use (Wasserman and Clair 2013; Marvasti 2002). Medical sociologists Jason Adam Wasserman and Jeffrey Michael Clair (2013) found that in the context of determining service worthiness, "market and industrial justifications emerge from particular value orientations and, therefore, systematically exclude those who do not share these values" (2013: 162). In other words, market and industrial logics were used to

justify the exclusion of some homeless persons, while excluding others (mainly, the “street homeless”). Wasserman and Clair (2013: 171) explain market logic as follows:

Market justifications of service institutions concerned the idea that one had to exchange certain freedoms in order to access services. Market logic rests additionally on the assumption of a fair field of free association. What this means for service administrators is that no one is owed services, in the sense that no one has any inherent, unconditional claim to them.

Those who are not willing to participate in the exchange of freedoms (such as through following strict rules) to receive services are excluded. Another type of logic used for justification is Industrial logic, which focuses on efficiency and measureable outcomes. According to Wasserman and Clair (2013:168) “anything that impacts the efficiency of production is the antithesis of industrial logic by virtue of limiting output.” Therefore, they argue that the industrial logic’s exclusion of other models of service based on efficiency “mitigates [service providers] significant participation in structural reformations... as these are not related to the goals of treating individual pathology, they are distractions that negatively impact the efficient production of the shelter” (2013: 179). The authors, however, argue that these logics are not innately wrong, and problems arise due to the exclusive use of such logics that result in gaps in services. The authors observe that “discourse on homeless services tends to be a struggle aimed at *the* right model of service” (2013: 163). In order to address gaps in service administration, the authors call for the incorporation of many different logics and conceptions of services, instead of only one dominant way of providing service, since “given the diversity and complexity of homelessness, each is inevitably partial” (2013: 177).

Rather than declining services to those that do not match the provider’s values, sociologist Amier B. Marvasti (2002:618) demonstrates through ethnographic research at an emergency shelter that clients and service providers may also work together to dynamically edit

accounts into service-worthy narratives, exploring “how the meaning of homelessness is negotiated between clients and staff.” Marvasti (2002:619) uses the concept of narrative-editing to describe the process in which “a social worker and his or her clients jointly edit narratives of homelessness to reach a definition that rationally fits the mission of an emergency shelter and facilitates the administration of limited resources.” Similar to the description of market and industrial logic by Wasserman and Clair (2013), Marvasti (2002) describes Abbot House, the site of his research, as using these policies to fairly and efficiently distribute resources. Marvasti (2002:623) argues that “the absence of a fee-for-services accountability structure at the Abbot House means services eligibility is determined by rules and policies that focus on the moral character of clients.” Using intake interviews, the Abbot House service worker determines if the client’s stay can be extended, and if the client should be referred to other services. During the intake, Marvasti (2002: 628) observes that “service worthiness is interactionally accomplished or disputed” through four different types of narrative editing, with the goal of ensuring that clients’ stories remain relevant to the organization’s goals.

While most research on discourse is conducted with people in positions of power, anthropologist Robert Desjarlais (2000) examined homeless persons own constructions of identity and presentations of self within a homeless shelter in Boston. He argued that identity making is also pragmatic and political, as opposed to only cultural and historical, and demonstrated how homeless persons constructed presentations of self within relations of differential powers and in response to the discourses of others, often in a rhetorical, strategic, and “shape-shifting” way (Desjarlais 2000).



Overall, studies of discourses used to describe homelessness are important in elucidating how political and public apathy for the homeless is legitimized, however, it is often aimed at the improvement of services, rather than considering the political economic system as a whole.

### **Political Economy Approach**

The majority of homelessness research does not focus on the connection between homelessness and the larger political economic system. Anthropologist Anthony Marcus (2003:135) observed that while applied research on homelessness in the 1990s acknowledged problems of unemployment and lack of affordable housing, it focused on “questions of institutional reform for the emergency and transitional housing system, the counting of the homeless, and provision of psychosocial and social service remediation.” Since then, much of anthropological scholarship continues to focus on assistance services such as shelters and transitional housing (Lyon-Callo 1998, 2000, 2001a; Marvasti 2002; Susser 1999; Hoffman and Coffey 2008; Wasserman and Clair 2013), yet it is equally important to consider the political economy and policy developments.

Within the broader area of poverty studies, scholars have successfully connected poverty, and the lives of the poor and homeless to larger structural and socioeconomic circumstances using a political economy approach (Roseberry 1988). Urban anthropologist Ida Susser (1999:70) argues that “it is analytically misleading to view ‘the homeless’ as a category separate from other poor people in New York City. To categorize a person as ‘homeless’ carries the implication that this is a permanent characteristic rather than an experience through which s/he is

passing temporarily.” Therefore, it is useful to connect political economy approaches used in poverty studies to research on homelessness.

One example of a political economy approach is the way in which anthropologist Frances Fox Piven (2001) links increasing social and economic inequalities to the 1996 American Welfare reform and the reconstruction of the labor market. According to Piven (2001), the Welfare reform was advertised as a restoration of morals to the poor who subsisted on welfare, portraying them as having a lack of work ethic. However, Welfare served other purposes, such as creating a floor under wages, stopping them from falling too low since people may be able to survive without working. Piven (2001) argues that the actual purpose of the Welfare reform, as well as changes to Social Security, unemployment, and other assistance programs, was actually to make it increasingly difficult for people to survive unemployment, which in turn increases the size of the labor pool and makes employment less secure. With more people looking for work and less secure jobs, employers could pay people less and offer less benefits without as much threat of strike (Piven 2001).

Welfare reform, and the cutting of other social services, took place within the political economic context of Neoliberalism, the current period which is associated with the economic philosophy of the free market as a fair method of wealth distribution, privatization, and the cutting of social services. An analysis of the origins of neoliberalism is useful in understanding how neoliberal discourse has become hegemonic, particularly in the United States. David Harvey (2005) traces this process to the early 1980s in the U.S., when neoliberalization was touted as a form of freedom, with “the assumption that individual freedoms are guaranteed by freedom of the market and of trade” (Harvey 2005:7). In practice however, neoliberalism was used to restore the power of economic elites, who were in danger of losing their dominant positions.

Consequently, Harvey (2005:16) observes that “redistributive effects and increasing social inequality have in fact been such a persistent feature of neoliberalization as to be regarded as structural to the whole project.” While it is meaningful to consider freedoms of speech, conscience, and others, Harvey (2005), echoing economic anthropologist Karl Polanyi (1954), asserts that such discourses are a byproduct of a market economy designed to guarantee the freedoms to exploit others, to make profits without benefiting the community, and to keep technological inventions from benefiting the public, “which means ‘the fullness of freedom for those whose income, leisure and security need no enhancing, and a mere pittance of liberty for the people, who may in vain attempt to make use of their democratic rights to gain shelter from the power of the owners of property’” (Harvey 2005:37). This ideology is particularly destructive toward the homeless, whose superficial rights of freedom do not protect them against exploitation in the way that policies reflecting social justice would. However, urban poverty scholar Matthew Ruben (2001:455), argues that the discussion of such policies may prove difficult, since “the realm of policy has become more and more promiscuous under neoliberalism, taking over areas of public discussion that used to be concerned with ‘maximum feasible participation’ and community empowerment, replacing them with top-down prescriptions, individual empowerment, self-help, and pragmatic, mechanistic debates over tax breaks and market-based incentives.” In other words, the discursive space for discussing alternatives to neoliberalism is currently, for the most part, closed.

A political economy approach (Roseberry 1988) has also been used productively in the study of homelessness across social sciences. Anthropologist Kim Hopper, and Psychiatrists Ezra Susser, and Sarah Conover (1985) examine structural causes of homelessness through a case study of New York City. Hopper et al (1985:184) argue “the roots of homelessness are

found in the economic restructuring of the city” including deindustrialization, “the decline or relocation of smokestack industries, the loss of manufacturing jobs, the rise of white-collar professionals, and the refurbishing of certain urban environments,” as well as gentrification, which displaces low income residents from affordable housing.

One factor that has contributed to gentrification, as described by anthropologist Brett Williams (2001), is the ways in which debt-generating businesses, such as fringe banks, take advantage of people in poor neighborhoods for large profits and contribute to the deterioration of these neighborhoods. According to Williams (2001), banks entered the poverty debt market in the 1990s, shifting to high-interest, debt-generating business instead of productive investments in cities. She observes that many people don’t link banks to the deterioration, since “widely alleged and imagined isolation and cultural pathologies of central cities mask the destructive strategies of the nation’s largest banks and corporations, busily generating debt and deterioration there” (Williams 2001:84). Williams (2001) has observed that while affluent neighborhoods have many convenient banks, poor neighborhoods have hardly any that are accessible, and residents resort to using businesses such as cash-checking outlets and other fringe banks (which are usually owned and financially backed by larger national banks) instead. However, while cash-checking outlets have convenient locations and hours, Williams (2001:86) argues that “using cash outlets further impoverishes and disenfranchises residents, leaving them with no records or proof of payment, no ongoing relationship to build up a credit history, and in greater personal danger from carrying cash (itself in jeopardy from fire, theft, or loss).” Further, these fringe banks only offer services with high interests, and tack on fees. Many poor customers don’t realize that they are often paying more than they would at a bank for the same financial services. According to Williams (2001), even customers who do recognize the cost often must bear it due to a need for

immediacy, safety, or convenience. The types of debt-generating businesses and services she describes include pay-day loans, tax refund payment anticipation loans, secured credit cards, pawn shop loans, car-title pawns, and rent-to-own stores, all of which have high interests and market themselves to poor people with bad credit.

Deterioration and gentrification of poor and minority neighborhoods are also influenced by discriminatory banking practices and lack of fair loans available (Williams 2001). For example, Williams (2001) observes that the denial of loans causes houses stay on the market longer which reduces demand, and mortgage companies foreclose to collect insurance on mortgages they knew customers couldn't repay. Thus, neighborhoods with many abandoned properties are opened up to warehousing, displacement, gentrification, and thus homelessness (Williams 2001). According to Williams (2001), the situation may become even more dire, since "while the poor have developed many creative strategies to provide the essentials in life, such as doubling up, working under the table, managing collective living, and negotiating ongoing exchanges with friends and kin, they are increasingly vulnerable in the current economic climate" (Williams 2001:99).

In addition to recognizing structural factors shaping poverty and homelessness, Lyon-Callo (2001a) argues that scholars also "need to analyze how such economic restructuring is allowed to occur" (2001a:295). While it seems that homeless persons and, more broadly, the poor, have acquiesced to these conditions, Lyon-Callo (2001a) observes individual resistance among homeless individuals, including seeking better jobs, participating in "self-reform" efforts, complaints and noncompliance with shelter rules, and moving to other communities. However, he argues that while studies should account for human agency, they also need to explain "how it makes sense to particular social actors to 'choose' coping strategies that accommodate

homelessness instead of collective work challenging the material and discursive conditions that produce or justify the social relations” (Lyon-Callo 2001a:296). He proposes (2001a) that discourses of deviancy, self-help, and medicalization used by shelter administrators are what discourage collective mobilizations among homeless persons. In this way, he attempts to explain both the political economic context of homelessness, as well as how it is justified and perpetuated through discourses. Thus, this study aims to bridge the gap between discursive approaches used in studies of homelessness and political economy approaches used in poverty studies more broadly.

## **Urban Studies**

Scholars have also approached the topic of homelessness from an Urban Studies perspective. Urban anthropologist Charles Rutheiser (1999) shows the effects of Atlanta’s downtown revitalization on the poor and homeless. As Atlanta prepared to host the 1996 Olympic Games, the city government and revitalization committee worked to turn Atlanta into a traditionally urban “user-friendly city.” The notion of the “user-friendly city” is not uncommon in city planning. Rutheiser (1999:327) critiques this view, stating that “the characterization of the urban population as ‘users,’ rather than as residents, taxpayers, citizens, or voters... impl[ies] that the city is more oriented to visitors than residents, or rather, that the line between residents and visitors is no longer significant.” Further, the notion of user-friendliness assumes all users have the same needs, and excludes undesired groups of people in the city such as the poor or homeless (Rutheiser 1999). The exclusion of undesired groups from being considered legitimate users of the city can be seen in the way that construction and urban renewal projects in Atlanta

demolished areas of low-income housing, replacing it with more expensive real estate and green spaces. For example, in 1993 the city demolished the Techwood/Clark Howell housing area. According to Rutheiser (1999:332), “One of the most compelling aspects of the plan was that the area was widely perceived as an empty, decayed, and pathological space and that nobody would be displaced. But... empty spaces are rarely “empty,” rather, they are usually full of undesirable and/or unacknowledged users.” Urban anthropologist Setha M. Low (1999:9), quoting Elizabeth Wilson (1991:8), also discussed desirable versus undesirable users, but in the terms of who has full and free access.

The city has been perceived primarily as a male place in which women, “along with minorities, children, the poor, are not still full citizens in the sense that they have never been granted full and free access to the streets... and they have survived and flourished in the interstices of the city, negotiating the contradictions of the city in their own particular way.”

Around the same time, following the Central Area Study II (CAS-II), a cooperative report by the City of Atlanta, Central Atlanta Progress, and Fulton County, the city began an institutionalized crackdown on homelessness that continues today. They banned behaviors such as panhandling, loitering, and sleeping on park benches in certain zones of the city. According to Rutheiser (1999), “recent city policy has gone considerably beyond CAS-II recommendations, with the homeless viewed as ‘predatory’ rather than a victimized population.” Rutheiser (1999:328) observed that “both the city government and the business community are more interested in making downtown less amenable to these undesirable users. Actually, the homeless are not users at all, since users ‘use’ the city by spending money.” This shows the type of “users” that city officials and business elites want in “their” city. Similar to Hopper et al (1985), who argue that homelessness was exacerbated by deindustrialization and gentrification, Rutheiser (1999:332) observed that residents displaced by Atlanta’s construction projects were relocated

and given Section VIII vouchers, but “as these vouchers only provide from three to five years of subsidized rent, this relocation strategy provides only a temporary fix to the problem of low-income housing” and that many of those displaced from low-income housing have become homeless.

Similar to literature on desired “users” of the city, Kingfisher (2005) argues that the undesirability of the poor and homeless in the city may be in part due to public discourse which highlights a nonpoor/poor binary, which she describes as follows:

The nonpoor represent society and civilization, maleness, “good” (that is, controllable) nature, order, autonomy and freedom, intentionality, independence, universality, mortality, and rationality, and the poor represent femaleness, “bad” (or uncontrollable) nature, disorder, need and necessity, want, desire, particularity, dependence, immorality, and irrationality” with gender being the key axis of this binary (Kingfisher 2005:277).

The conceptualization of the poor as different and separate from the nonpoor, as well as “uncontrollable,” can be observed in policies that treat them as a separate group of people, such as those that require drug testing for welfare applicants, even though the poor are no more likely to use drugs (Alvarez 2014).

Overall, Urban Studies scholarship can help us understand the goals and strategies of city leaders, such as the goal of revitalizing the city through relocating the poor and homeless. It also sheds light on how city leaders conceptualize the purpose of the city and the types of populations they wish to serve.

### **Florida as a Research Site about Homelessness**

Building on this scholarship, my research explores the experiences of the Florida homeless in Oviedo, a suburb of Orlando. Florida is an important site for the study of



homelessness. In Florida, the situation is particularly acute with over four times more homeless than what shelters can accommodate. There are 86,000 homeless persons in Florida on any given day, and only about 22,000 shelter beds (NAEH 2012). Furthermore, many Florida cities have passed criminalizing laws that exacerbate the problem of homelessness.

One such city, the metropolitan area of Tampa-St. Petersburg, has the highest rate of homelessness in the United States. According to the 2012 Report generated by the National Alliance to End Homelessness—a nonprofit organization that has been tracking and reporting on this issue—there are 57 homeless for every 10,000 residents, and 20% are children (NAEH 2012:50). Despite the extent of homelessness in the Tampa area, effective policies are lacking to address the structural causes of homelessness, in particular in the domain of affordable housing. In 2013, the city of Tampa passed a new ordinance prohibiting people from sleeping on sidewalks and storing property in public spaces. Laws such as these criminalize the homeless who may have nowhere else to perform these activities, as lack of affordable homeless shelters is another problem faced by this population. Since the passage of the new ordinance, incarcerations of the homeless have increased, while the limited shelters continue to fill every night. The city's current approach focused on the removal of the homeless from public spaces falls short in addressing the problem and diverts limited resources from working to develop effective policies that could help solve the underlying root causes of homelessness.

The city of Orlando has also passed criminalizing laws, making it increasingly difficult for the homeless to survive in this urban environment. The Orlando Municicode, Sec. 18A.09. – Prohibited Activities in Parks and Recreational Facilities Owned or Controlled by the City, makes it illegal to: (a) Lie or otherwise be in a horizontal position on a park bench where prohibited by signs, (b) Sleep at any time during the hours from sunset to sunrise of the

following day, (c) Construct any hut, shanty, or other shelter, (d) Cook foodstuffs except where facilities for such preparations are provided by the City, (e) Set or stroke a fire except where appropriate facilities are provided by the City, (f) Discharge or deposit human wastes, except in toilet facilities provided by the City, (g) Sleep or otherwise be or remain in any bushes, shrubs, or other foliage where prohibited by signs, and (h) Bathe or otherwise be or remain in a water fountain and/or reservoir. While these laws do not specifically mention homelessness, it is clear that the homeless are being targeted, since these are activities that they would need to do in public, having no home in which to sleep, bathe, or cook.

This study examines the experiences of the homeless in Central Florida, focusing on Oviedo and East Orlando. Oviedo is a suburb in Seminole County that neighbors East Orlando, which is located in Orange County. Both cities are part of the same tri-county Continuum of Care, a HUD planning body made up of Seminole, Orange, and Osceola Counties. While Orlando and Oviedo are separate cities, their borders are mostly arbitrary to persons experiencing homelessness, who often travel in between the two cities to obtain different resources. The majority of the research takes place at the non-profit organization Hope Helps, located in Oviedo, which helps low income and homeless persons through a food pantry, thrift store, and other assistance services. Through participant observation and interviews at Hope Helps, I examine how food pantry clients who have experienced homelessness view the reasons for their homelessness, and how they strategize to obtain and maintain housing. I also examine discourses used by Hope Help's staff to describe homelessness, and how that affects how they strategize to help their clients. Finally, I examine the new plan set out by policymakers for Orange County and the City of Orlando, the strategies used by various stakeholders, and the new discourses that have potentially led to this change in strategy.



## **METHODOLOGY: SITE SELECTION AND RESEARCH DESIGN**

This research project explores the topic of homelessness in the Orlando/Oviedo area from three distinct but interrelated angles: (1) from the perspective of homeless persons themselves, (2) the perspective of the staff members at Hope Helps, a non-profit organization seeking to help the homeless, and (3) the perspective of government officials and other actors working on policy related to homelessness. I began developing this research project with three specific research questions:

**RQ 1.)** How do homeless persons at Hope Helps understand the reasons for their homelessness, and how do they strategize to acquire necessary social services?

**RQ 2.)** How do the staff at Hope Helps understand the causes of homelessness and how do they strategize to meet the needs of the homeless?

**RQ 3.)** How do government officials working on policy related to homelessness understand the causes of homelessness, and how does this affect their strategies and policies aimed at resolving homelessness?

Methodologically, this is an ethnographic study involving participant-observation, semi-structured interviews with all three groups of participants (homeless persons, staff at Hope Helps, and policymakers), and policy analysis. Participant observation enabled me to ground this study in the emic perspective, allowing for a greater depth of understanding of research participants and the context (Dewalt and Dewalt 2011). Throughout this research, Hope Helps staff and policymakers served as key informants in that they have a significant role within their respective realms of knowledge and practice, namely Hope Helps staff within the realm of providing services for the homeless, and the policymakers within the realm of designing and/or implementing policies addressing homelessness. Key informants therefore provide important

insight into these settings due to their specialist roles or positions within specific settings (Marshall 1996). All Interviews in this study were recorded with permission from research participants and typically lasted between 15 and 45 minutes, with the exception of informal interviews which were not recorded. It was clear that the data from interviews had reached saturation once repeated themes and some variations began to emerge (Corbin and Strauss 2008). Once completed, Interviews were transcribed in a Microsoft Word Documents then uploaded into NVivo text-based data analysis software, in which the researcher coded and analyzed them thematically. During coding, I looked for pre-set themes, such as medicalization and diversity discourse. However, during analysis, themes also emerged from the data that were not pre-set (Dewalt and Dewalt 2011), including “gendered experience,” “living on fixed income,” and others. Findings were then triangulated (Fetterman 2010) by combining knowledge from participant observation, interviews, and policy analysis.

I chose Hope Helps as my main research site because I had volunteered at Hope Helps prior to launching this research, working in the food pantry and at fundraising events; therefore, I had an established professional relationship with this organization. It is also the site of my undergraduate honor’s research project, which took place between January 2013 and May 2014, during which I focused on homeless persons’ strategies. This Master’s research project is a significant expansion of my undergraduate research. Before collecting data, I completed CITI training and received IRB approval (IRB Number: SBE-15-11289). I will now discuss my methods in three separate sections associated with the three groups of participants. After that, I will discuss Hope Helps organization in more detail.

## **Group 1: Homeless Persons**

As part of my undergraduate research project, I had conducted 16 interviews with persons who had or were currently experiencing homelessness. During that time, participants were recruited through recommendations from volunteers and Hope Helps staff, a flyer describing the research project on the Hope Helps bulletin board, as well as by sitting at the food pantry sign-in table and inviting clients to participate. Following this initial recruitment, I used the snowball method to enlarge my sample size. These interviews provided a base of information that was built upon as I conducted my Master's thesis project.

As part of my Master's research, I conducted 11 new interviews with homeless persons, which significantly expanded the data from my previous research. Since I previously had learned that it was difficult to visually assess who had experienced homelessness, I created a recruitment survey designed to determine whether or not a person qualified to participate in a semi-structured interview. I waited in the lobby of the food pantry and asked clients if they would like to participate in a short survey, administered by the researcher, which asked clients if they had (1) ever stayed in a shelter for one or more nights, (2) lived in a hotel for one or more nights, (3) stay in someone else's home (such as a friend, acquaintance, or relative) due to financial reasons or eviction (also known as doubling-up), or (4) spent the night in car or public space (See Appendix). If the clients answered yes to any of the questions above, I invited them to participate in a semi-structured interview. After the survey, I also noted observations of the person's ethnicity, gender, and approximate age, in case this information later proved significant. However, I did not ask them this information, nor did I collect their name or other identifiable information.

In addition to the recruitment survey, there were other inclusion and exclusion criteria used to determine if a person could participate in a semi-structured interview. In order to qualify, persons had to be over the age of 18, be currently homeless or have experienced homelessness in the past (as determined through the survey), and they must receive food or other assistance from Hope Helps. Persons under the age of 18 were excluded. People who had not experienced homelessness (as determined by the survey), and/or did not receive assistance at Hope Helps, were excluded. Also, persons were excluded if they were not proficient in English, since this is the language best understood by the researcher.

Once a person was determined to be qualified, I used the conference room at Hope Helps as a quiet and confidential space to interview (Bernard 2006:211-220) and verbally obtained informed consent. No identifying information was collected, and participants were assigned a pseudonym in order to protect their identity. Directly following the interview, participants in this group were compensated for their time with a \$10 gift card to Winn Dixie.

## **Group 2: Hope Helps Staff**

Staff at Hope Helps were recruited to participate in semi-structured interviews through email (see appendix). Before the interview took place, I gave participants a full explanation of the research project and verbally obtained informed consent. In order to participate, persons in this group had to be over the age of 18 and currently staff members at Hope Helps. Persons who were under the age of 18 and/or not currently employed at Hope Helps were excluded. At Hope Helps, I was able to interview the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Chief Financial Officer (CFO), Development Manager, two Volunteer Coordinators (one before she retired, and her

replacement), and two Case Managers, for a total of 7 interviews. Staff members that participated were assigned pseudonyms, but were later given the option of being named if they wished to be.

### **Group 3: Policymakers**

Policymakers were recruited to participate in semi-structured interviews through email or by phone (or voicemail). I initially contacted the Orlando Mayor, the Orange County Mayor, and all five District Commissioners for the city of Orlando. However, due to the busy schedules of government officials, many referred me to their assistants or consultants. I was also referred to the Central Florida Commission on Homelessness, and Homeless Services Network, which were involved in setting the goals, and making and implementing the plans to resolve the issue of homelessness in Orlando, as well as for the tri-county “continuum of care.” Due to differences in the organizations and jobs of the persons I was referred to, interviews were slightly less structured, and were tailored to the area of policy expertise of the given research participant. However, before the interview took place, interviewees were given a full explanation of the research project and informed consent was verbally obtained. I was able to speak to representatives from the Orlando Mayor’s office, Orange County Mayor’s office, the Florida Commission on Homelessness, and the Homeless Services Network. All participants’ names were changed to pseudonyms, but participants were later asked if they wanted their real name to be included. In order to qualify, participants had to be over the age of 18 and currently be involved in the city or county’s homelessness planning and policymaking process. Persons were excluded if they were under the age of 18 or not involved in the process.



As part of my research with this group, I also conducted participant observation at the Central Florida Poverty Conference, which took place at the Florida Hospital in the Dr. Phillips area of Orlando on January 29<sup>th</sup> 2016. During the conference I was also able to informally interview persons involved in these organizations, as well as other organizations that appeared to be key players in the plans to resolve homelessness. I also conducted participant observation at the tri-county “Continuum of Care meetings,” which took place in a conference room at what used to be a Quality Inn in downtown Orlando. The Continuum of Care (CoC), is an organization created through the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act in order to provide funding from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to non-profit organizations through competitive grants. The CoC is made up of non-profits who become members by registering, and is ran by a non-profit organization that is designated as the “lead agency.” At meetings, organizations discuss matters, such as how “coordinated entry” works.

### **Hope Helps Research Site**

Hope Helps is a non-profit organization that assists homeless and low-income persons in the area by providing a variety of services, including a food pantry, thrift store, and “case management,” during which a case manager reviews a client’s expenses, helps with budgeting, potentially provides financial assistance, and connects them with other local services. The staff of Hope Helps also conducts advocacy by participating in community events, and hosting “community nights” at local food stores where they advocate while fundraising for the organization.

Hope Helps's main annual fundraising events include the Vision of Hope Breakfast, at which local community members, business leaders, and politicians are invited to attend and make a pledge to donate to Hope on a regular basis, and the Shamrock n Run, at which marathon participants donate through their registration fee or sign up to "snooze for Hope," where participants donate, but sleep in instead. In 2012, I volunteered at the Vision of Hope Breakfast, passing out programs to guests before they took their seats. Hope Helps also holds two main annual outreach events, including Christmas in the City, at which donated food and children's presents are given out to clients whom sign up, and the Back to School Bash, which provides families with donated school necessities such as backpacks, supplies, and clothes. Profit from Hope Helps's thrift store also provides part of the organization's budget, and the thrift store is further useful in that case managers may give vouchers to homeless persons or people in crisis that allow them to choose the items they need from the thrift store for free.

At the food pantry, volunteers walk through the pantry with clients, carrying bags full of groceries that the clients choose off of the shelves. Only persons that live in Seminole county are able to receive food from the pantry, but persons without homes are still able to receive food, and persons that live in any county are allowed to receive the federal government's TEFAP (The Emergency Food Assistance Program) food, as opposed to privately donated food. Visitors from other counties are generally given a bag of food the first time they come in, and are referred to a food pantry that is closer to where they live. Additionally, clients must qualify to receive food from the pantry. However qualifying is not difficult since participants may qualify by income, or automatically qualify if they receive government assistance such as SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program), Medicare or Medicaid, and/or SSI or SSDI (Supplemental Security Income or Social Security Disability Insurance, respectively). For those who qualify,

the amount that clients are able to take is based on the size of their family, and is organized based on protein, dry goods, vegetables, desserts, bread, and other categories.

Hope Helps has also added two programs to the food pantry to help their clients. HENS is a program in which disabled or elderly clients sign up to have volunteers bring groceries from the pantry to their home, rather than make the trip themselves. The Kids of Hope program was also added to provide extra food to families with school age children during times when their children are not in school, and thus not able to receive free or reduced lunch. These supplemental lunches are typically packed with food that kids enjoy and that is prepared or easy to prepare, and families pick them up at the pantry when they are there to pick up their usual food.

Overall, Hope Helps's programs were created to assist with their mission of preventing and reducing homelessness in their community through housing, outreach, prevention, and education (HOPE is an acronym for this). I will discuss other aspects about Hope Helps, such as how it was founded and how it has changed throughout this research in the findings section of this paper.

## **EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS**

### **Previous Research**

This research builds on previous ethnographic fieldwork which took place between 2012 and 2014. I will therefore begin by discussing my previous findings, and then discuss how my current work extends from those previous findings. My previous research focused on analyzing discourses used by homeless persons to describe the reasons for their homelessness and the strategies they used to obtain and maintain housing. The narratives of the homeless in this study revealed that they view the primary reasons for their homelessness as stemming from economic circumstances related to housing or employment, rejecting discourses of medicalization and criminalization as it applies to them. However, they typically viewed the economic realm as an autonomous “abstract” entity, rather than resulting from policy decisions. Depictions of political and economic forces as isolated from each other also parallel neoliberal discourses which shift responsibility for social and political problems away from the state and collective solutions, and toward individuals (Young 2014).

The discourse used by people in this study, and the strategies they used to cope and find housing can be summarized by Melissa, a woman whose daughter and granddaughter were also experiencing homelessness, who asserted that “people should help people. We don’t put it on the government.” I found that this sort of philosophy aligns with the actions of the homeless, who in this study relied on networking to sustain themselves, actively seeking services from non-profit organizations, support from churches, and assistance from people in their community, rather than collectivizing and working towards systemic change (Young 2014).

Further, the actions and narratives in this research demonstrated that in contrast to depictions of the homeless as passive receivers of services, homeless persons see themselves as active agents, and devise strategies to improve their living situations. I conceptualize agency following anthropologist Sherry Ortner as “the forms of power people have at their disposal, their ability to act on their own behalf, influence other people and events, and maintain some kind of control in their own lives” (2006: 144). Even those who are not considered powerful have the ability to exercise some degree of influence in the ways events unfold. Thus, even though the homeless are not politically powerful individuals, they demonstrate a degree of agency in the way they resist, and act to better their lives, even when acting within a severely constraining system. The homeless I have interviewed generally reject the medicalizing discourses that depict the homeless as in need of professional help and believe they are able to help themselves through their own agentic strategies (Young 2014).

Another important part of homeless persons’ strategies was looking for work. While many interviewees were unable to find full time, decent paying jobs, many were able to earn some income through “odd jobs” such as mowing lawns for people in their community, running errands, or participating in the day labor pool. Many interviewees felt that if they could just gain stable, better paying employment that they would be able to maintain housing. However, many noticed that minimum wage was not enough to live on, and that it was difficult to find housing that they could afford. Instead of looking to policies related to living wage or affordable housing, many focused on trying to survive, and just trying to earn more money. While they often realized that their homelessness wasn’t their fault, that it was an unfortunate circumstance of losing a job and housing, many felt it was their own responsibility to find a place in “the economy” (Young 2014). In this way, the research participants seem to reproduce the dominant neoliberal

discourses of self responsibility. Yet, these discourses also function to express an important sense of agency that can be seen in the way participants strive to better their own lives.

Overall, my previous research showed homeless persons as active agents, strategizing through networking. I argued that the reasons homeless persons focused on networking and finding better employment, rather than working together towards systemic change, was due to neoliberal discourse, which positions individual responsibility over the responsibility of the state to ensure the welfare of its people (Young 2014). Building and expanding on this research, I will now broaden the representation of homeless persons to include other actors, contexts, and themes that have emerged.

### **Reasons *Other* People are Homeless**

Despite recognizing the reasons for their own homelessness as economic or extenuating circumstances, some interviewees had very different thoughts about why other people became homeless. When citing the reasons for their own homelessness, interviewees typically said it was the loss of a job due to a company downsizing or other circumstance that was not in their control. However, I also asked each interviewee if she or he thought other people became homeless for similar reasons. To my surprise, many interviewees felt that while it was possible for people to have lost their home due to similar reasons, the majority of homeless people were homeless due to individual reasons such as substance abuse issues, mental illness, or lack of motivation. Most interviewees, whether they were chronically homeless or had just experienced it briefly, felt that their story of how they became homeless was unique or unusual compared to reasons other people became homeless.

For example, Kelly, an African-American woman who had just moved to Florida to live with her daughter, explained that the cause of her homelessness was that her daughter was using Kelly's disability money for herself, and when Kelly intervened her daughter locked her out of the house and would not let her back inside. Without any of that month's money, and without any of her belongings, Kelly had nowhere to go. However, when I asked if other people became homeless for similar reasons, Kelly responded, "I'm telling you where I live at if they get money they would rather go buy drugs than to stay somewhere safe and that's a lot of the cause of the homelessness in this world with adults." While Kelly had extenuating circumstances that led to her own homelessness, she believed that the majority of homeless persons likely became homeless due to spending their money unwisely, for example on drugs, rather than using it towards finding a safe place to live. Kelly was not the only interviewee who felt this way.

Another example of this reasoning is Jason, an older white male with a spinal cord injury who had been living on income from Social Security and his wife's job, recognized that their homelessness occurred after his wife lost her job and they could no longer afford rent payments. Jason also recognized that housing that was affordable was difficult to find, and that rental assistance programs such as Section 8 were difficult to access. However, when asked what might hold other people back from being able to get back into housing, Jason responded that "to tell you the truth I think it's a mindset... I think what holds people back is... how they think about themselves, how they think about society, because I've met a lot of people that are angry that are homeless, very angry and very undiagnosed through mental illness, so there's definitely a lot of mental illness and I think that's what keeps people back from going forward." Both Kelly and Jason, as well as many other interviewees cited individual reasons other persons may become homeless, such as addiction, mental illness, lack of education, and others. Despite having

experienced homelessness themselves, these same interviewees saw their own situations as different, but echoed medicalizing and criminalizing discourses when talking about others.

Some interviewees also used the diversity discourse, suggesting that there are many different reasons people become homeless. Jim, an older white male who had been living on the streets off and on, reasoned that “the old assumption is that it was the hobo, the alcoholic, the drug addicted, the ones that were substance abused, that could not conform to, you know, the societal norms. But there are several reasons why people are homeless.” Some of the reasons Jim listed included the loss of a job, social friction with roommates, drug addiction, or that people may even opt out of housing in order to save money.

The sociological theory of “Othering” is useful to examine the ways in which participants mark themselves as separate and different from other homeless persons. In the process of Othering, a distinction is made between “us” and “them,” with “us” having positive qualities, while the Others possess negative qualities (Krumer-Nevo 2002). According to Sociologist Michal Krumer-Nevo (2002), Othering is mainly used against those at the margins of society, such as minorities, women, disabled persons, and the poor. Social Philosopher Julia Kristeva (1991) suggests that during this process we project undesired qualities within ourselves onto the Other. Anthropologist Kim Hopper (2003:46) argues that the Othering of homeless persons occurs not just in popular discourse, but within scholarly literature as well, particularly in the depictions of homeless men as “the tramp, the moron, and the shelterized man.” The narratives of homeless participants in this study suggest that whether conscious or not, they do attempt to separate themselves from other homeless persons through the process of Othering.

While they may or may not have realized it, however, many of the homeless persons I interviewed had common situations. Many had lost a source of income, such as a job or their



spouse's job, and then lost their housing. Some had also had a falling out with someone, such as a roommate or family member that was a part of their support structure. Many had trouble finding a place to live that was affordable, or a job that paid enough to allow them to stay housed and have savings to fall back on in an emergency. In other words, they all had the common experience of living on a fragile threshold where one unexpected cost or loss of income could cause them to fall through the bottom. However, these shared circumstances were largely under-realized, as many people looked to individual or a diversity of individual reasons why *other* people became homeless, or dismissed them in an attempt to distance themselves from other homeless persons. Until people realize and utilize knowledge of these shared circumstances, these structural causes of homelessness, it is unlikely that they will be able to work together towards a larger social change.

### **Poor vs. Poor**

Perhaps another reason why interviewees thought they were so different from others in their same circumstances, is because of the way in which neoliberal rhetoric pits poor person against poor person. Historically, this type of rhetoric has been used by the State to create Others and redirect blame from the government for the cutting of services onto poor persons, who are described as abusing those services. In this section, I will briefly discuss the history of this rhetoric and analyze how it is being used by research participants.

After the 1970s fiscal crisis, the Ronald Reagan administration began using rhetoric that blamed “welfare queens” for abusing the system. “Welfare queens” refers to a derogatory nickname given to people on welfare, typically African American women on welfare, used to

portray them as using the government's money to buy luxury goods rather than food and necessities (Harvey 2005). In general, this discourse was also used to legitimize economic inequality, since it suggested that if anyone just works hard enough they can "live the American Dream" of being financially successful and upwardly mobile. Therefore, anyone who was perceived to not work hard enough, such as people on welfare who were "living off the government," deserved to be poor. Further, it suggested that while some people are indeed in need of welfare, the reason there was not enough was that the "deviant," selfish, and lazy poor people were taking the resources from people who actually needed them.

This sentiment has been echoed in some interviewees' narratives. Juanita, a young Spanish woman with three elementary aged children voiced her concern that "a lot of people are getting over on the system and then the ones that need it are without it because of so many people that are taking it without really needing it." Juanita lost her job and house due to leaving her husband. She felt that there would have been more of a "safety net" available to her if other people using government assistance, including welfare and food stamps, were not using the assistance without actually needing it. Rather than recognizing that these services were severely cut, Juanita instead believes that there is not enough to support her due to too many people abusing these services by being greedy or using them when they could be providing for themselves.

Similarly, Jenny, a woman who had experienced episodic homelessness but that is currently living in a cabin on a generous man's property, felt that others that were less needy (or even less deserving) than she was, but were receiving more help:

I don't have a child so I have no medical at all. None. So I can't get any help... But yet I know a lady who married a Spanish guy 10-15 years ago she has three kids by him... she uses and gets all the benefits of her children being Spanish. She

gets full medical for her and her three kids. They pay, she gets 800 dollars a month plus she gets 600 dollars a month in food stamps, and she's a drug addict. You know and she owns a house. They paid 110,000 dollars cash for a house. No questions asked and it's hers. But yet, how can you do that and still get all that state assistance but yet somebody like me can't get it at all.

Jenny is upset that she has not been able to qualify for Medicaid, a government health care program for poor persons that can be very exclusionary. She describes that another white woman she knows gets Medicaid, Welfare, and food stamps, and believes that she is able to receive this assistance because she married into a Spanish family. Jenny observes that many people on government assistance are minorities. As reflected in her statement, Jenny and others sometimes believe that this is because minorities are favored by the government. Other examples of people believing that minorities are favored by the government can be seen in their opposition to policies such as "affirmative action" that are seen as having the potential to give someone an advantage because of their race (Karjnen 2010). However, people do not realize that these types of policies are meant to ensure equal opportunities for minorities, who historically have been disadvantaged in the United States. However, rhetoric that blames minorities, immigrants, and other "greedy" poor persons for "taking all of the services" that other people need is used to cover up the fact that policy changes are what actually caused the lack of services. This, and other narratives of the people I interviewed express a fear that there is not enough assistance to go around. While interviewees tend to blame others rather than policy, their fear is not unfounded. It generally takes years of being on wait lists for programs such as Section 8 rental assistance and Welfare for people to receive assistance, and in many cases, when someone receives assistance it is not enough. Jenny explains that she receives a meager \$190 a month for food from food stamps, and that if she has "any income whatsoever they start deducting from that \$190 a month." However, rather than recognizing the role of policy in shaping the assistance

(or lack thereof) available, this type of rhetoric, which is repeated and spread through dominant discourse, pits poor people against each other and diverts them from collectivizing and protesting, or working towards policy change.

This type of rhetoric is also not limited to assistance programs. When I asked Jenny about the reasons behind her observation that there were so many people trying to work and so few jobs, she responded that:

That I don't know. You need to send a letter to the government and ask that question. Sometimes I think maybe we need to go to the doors and close them and go "we're full and can't take any more."

During the interview, it was clear that Jenny was talking about closing U.S. borders and not letting any more immigrants in. Rather than questioning the government for not increasing employment opportunities or supporting the unemployed, Jenny is questioning their current immigration policy. The idea that the U.S. is "full" and cannot take any more immigrants is perpetuated by some politicians who place the blame for high levels of unemployment, and even high rates of crime on immigrants. For example, recently, presidential candidate Donald Trump has been using this strategy, suggesting that in order to "Make America Great Again" we need to build a wall around the United States (paid for by Mexico) to keep all the "illegal immigrants" out, since they are mostly criminals and are taking our jobs. Clearly, this is an unrealistic representation of undocumented immigrants, however, Trump has been doing well in the polls, mostly with white conservatives with lower levels of education (Ross 2015).

Blaming others for the lack of jobs or for the lack of openings in assistance programs has been a common strategy of many Republican leaders since the late 1970s, and especially after the 1996 Welfare overhaul. Under Reaganomics, also known as neoliberalism, administrations began making subtle changes to policies such as raising the age of retirement for Social Security,

allowing people who were on disability or retirement to work with less penalties, disqualifying legal immigrants from receiving assistance, and lowering the amounts of assistance such as food stamps so that less and less people would be able to survive while unemployed (Piven 2001). Then in 1996 the Welfare system was severely gutted by the Bill Clinton administration, and many politicians began pushing “Workfare,” over welfare, a program designed to make people receiving assistance work to receive that assistance. The culmination of these changes, along with an attack on unions, resulted in a much larger and insecure labor force that was easily replaceable and could be more easily exploited by employers (Piven 2001). However, rhetoric blaming others such as immigrants or “greedy poor” people, largely worked to cover up the real policy changes that assisted in creating these circumstances. In fact, according to anthropologist Francis Fox Piven (2001), the rhetoric was so popularized that even Democrats, such as Bill Clinton who was responsible for the 1996 Welfare reform, have taken it up in order to gain public support. While the current President, Democrat Barack Obama, did not use this same rhetoric, presidential candidate Donald Trump, who is currently running as a Republican but has been previously registered as a Democrat and Independent, is popularizing this discourse once again (as discussed above).

In conclusion, I have found that while many homeless persons view their own homelessness as economic, they often view other peoples’ homelessness as due to individual reasons such as mental illness or “mind-set.” This may be due to neoliberal rhetoric that emphasizes individual responsibility over collective or government responsibility, and which pits poor people against each other in competition over jobs or who should actually be considered deserving of the limited assistance available. Such rhetoric is ubiquitous on the U.S. television and other popular media, and reinforced by some politicians who use it to redirect blame for

unemployment and cuts to social services away from conservative policies and use fear and frustration to gain support. At the same time, the use of these discourses by poor persons themselves can be viewed as an agentic attempt at Othering themselves from other poor persons, in order to gain needed sympathy and support.

I will now discuss issues that emerged among specific sub-groups of persons experiencing homelessness: people on fixed income from Social Security, and women. Defining and understanding sub-populations of homeless persons is something that has been expressed as important by policymakers, who are now attempting to adjust the federally recommended, state modified Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness to make it less of an unsuccessful “one-size-fits-all” solution (NAEH 2000; USICH 2015).

### **Homelessness and Disability**

People considered part of the work force are not the only ones who may experience homelessness due to lack of sufficient income. In my previous research, Rob, an older underemployed white man suggested that “a lot of homeless people get Social Security Disability checks and they don’t have enough to get a place to stay. It isn’t enough income so they live homeless.” As I continued interviewing other homeless persons, I realized the extent to which people living on fixed income, such as Social Security Disability and Retirement, did not receive enough income to maintain housing. Income such as Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) are considered “fixed” because they typically do not change unless someone applies for more, unlike income from work, in which people may have the ability to work more or less hours to change their income, or may receive

bonuses or be promoted. Income from retirement or alimony payments can also be considered fixed income if it is a set income that cannot be adjusted over time to keep up with the growing costs of living.

Rick, an older white man temporarily living with two friends in a motor home, has been homeless for a long time now and has most often lived in a tent in the woods. However, Rick explains that, “I get SSI. I get a check every once a month. But I still don’t make enough to get an apartment or anything. I live on that as far as food and clothing. When I run out I head to churches.” Having experienced homelessness off and on for many years, often for long periods of time, Rick has realized that his fixed income from SSI is just not enough to afford housing. When I met him, he was living in the motor home, but a few weeks later his friends, who also used the Hope Helps food pantry, said that he had been hospitalized, and that he would not be living with them anymore. I worry about Rick, likely being back in a tent in the woods, since as he describes, “before I really didn’t care. But now I’m like 59 years old, bones start getting weak, you’ve got to have a place to stay now days because it’s rough.” Rick, or assistance programs such as Hope Helps attempting to help him, cannot solve Rick’s problem by helping him find a job or a better paying job. For people such as Rick, the most they can do under the current system is try to stretch their fixed income as far as they can, and rely on other assistance programs and the community for help when they run out.

Janelle, a middle-aged white woman, experienced homelessness when her husband stopped paying alimony, and she could no longer afford her rent on her disability income alone. She described another issue with disability payments, stating that “I think my SSI has been raised maybe forty dollars over the last ten years. You know it’s not like you get these huge cost-of-living raises.” Cost-of-living raises refers to mandated adjustments in fixed income or wages in

order to reflect inflation or increasing life expenses. Janelle feels that her SSI has not been raised enough to reflect how expensive living is, for example how expensive rental housing has become. Since Janelle rarely receives alimony and often has trouble finding decent, affordable housing, she has had to move four times in the past year. One of these times was because her house was condemned due to a mold issue, and others were due to not being able to afford rent. She is now hopeful that she has found a place where she can stay for a while, narrating that:

We got into a little four-plex house owned by the guy that owns Toyota grocery. He's a really nice guy and he has a whole ton of properties for lower income people. So we got into that finally... I do have a housing deposit and he's letting us pay it as we go so I've only paid 50 dollars on that. I think it's a 600 dollar deposit. And then I didn't have enough for my rent last month so I'm like 150 dollars behind on my rent but he's being totally cool about it. It's wonderful.

As mentioned by many other interviewees, for the poor and episodically homeless, the difference between becoming homeless or staying housed often depends on an understanding landlord that might be more lenient in accepting late payments. These narratives show how having no financial cushion of any kind leaves people with extremely low income vulnerable and at the mercy of others.

Another issue with Social Security disability income is the time it can take to be approved and to receive assistance. Sandra, a woman currently living in her car with her 80 year old mother and 12 year old daughter, began applying for Social Security Disability Insurance when she lost her job due to health reasons. However, since the process took a long time, Sandra used up her savings and lost her condo while waiting. She moved her family into a hotel while she waited for her disability income and the back pay that she thought she would receive for the time she had to wait. Sandra explained that her family was happy in the hotel:

[We moved] into hotels because your cable, wifi, is all included. We were in one that was a handicap room which more than accommodated our whole family.



Everybody had our own space, it was great. We were all happy. We were fine. We just can't afford 1800 a month. We still have our stuff in storage. When I come out of the hotel hopefully all my stuff in storage is going to go in a home... If I had my back pay we would be in a house right now. We wouldn't be having this conversation.

Due to the very high cost of the hotel, her family was forced to move into their car while they waited. Now that Sandra has begun receiving her disability income (without the back pay), she explains that while she can now afford rent, she still cannot afford a down payment (or security deposit), and that her family will likely be living in their car parked at a Walmart parking lot until they can. Since temporary housing is expensive, and poor and homeless persons typically do not have access to a lump sum to get over a hurdle such as a security deposit, this can become a barrier that keeps homeless persons from getting back into housing.

Out of the interviewees, so far only Kelly, mentioned earlier, has been able to maintain relatively stable housing while on disability income. Kelly receives disability because of her two open heart surgeries. Unlike most of the other interviewees, Kelly was able to get into the Section 8 housing program while she was living in Kentucky before she moved to Florida. Section 8 is a federal program that provides housing vouchers for low-income persons, predominantly persons with disabilities. The vouchers are a guarantee that the government will pay a portion of the tenant's rent directly to the landlord as long as the tenant also pays a portion. While it can still be difficult to find a landlord that will accept Section 8 tenants, Kelly has generally been able to maintain housing, except for when her daughter kept her money and locked her out of the house.

Most of the other interviewees have had trouble getting Section 8 housing, however, as seen through my conversation with Jason (introduced earlier):

**Researcher:** What has been your experiencing trying to find housing?

**Jason:** It's been very difficult. I've looked everywhere. I've looked at the center of independent living. I've sent for a voucher for Section 8, because if I lose my home I definitely will need somewhere to go. And again, I feel the voucher and the shelter that I've gone through are not accessible so there's not a lot for me personally. It's because a lack of accessibility.

**Researcher:** Did Section 8 go through for you?

**Jason:** No not yet. I'm on a wait list. They said it could take up to a year. You know, because I have a disability. If I didn't have a disability it would take up to two years they tell me.

Even when people make it on the wait list, they are still not guaranteed to eventually receive it. Dianne, a woman who had been moving around living with different family members, has been on the wait list for Section 8 in the past, but did not end up receiving it. She explains that "I did apply for Section 8 down in Volusia County and I was on the waiting list for years and they sent me a letter, oh you know you got to resubmit that you want to be on the waiting list, and I didn't get it sent off in time so I'm off the waiting list." Some people are on the waiting list for so long, that they have to be contacted years later to see if they still need to be on the list. In this way, people who are not able to respond in a sufficient amount of time are cleared off the list. Further, even after a person receives a Section 8 voucher, they are still not guaranteed assistance. First, they must find a landlord that is willing to accept the voucher. Thus, Section 8 housing is not a quick or easy solution for people on disability that cannot find housing that they can afford on their fixed income.

After recent changes in policies, described by Piven (2001), that reduces penalties for working while receiving SSI/SSDI, some interviewees attempt to work on the side. However, this is not a real solution to their homelessness either. As Janelle explains:

I can work. I worked and made 500 dollars a month, which is the cap for me. But then... my taxes would go up. So it's Social Security, you don't pay taxes. But on alimony you do, so if I showed any kind of income it causes two problems: It causes my taxes to get all messed up and then it shows that I have a source of income. I have an earning potential and that money would come off my alimony. It just doesn't make sense. It's not put there to help.

For Janelle, working on the side does not make much sense because then she would just receive less alimony (when her ex-husband actually pays it). However, even for others that do not have this same issue, there is still a cap on how much money they are able to make. As Janelle suggests, it seems like the stipulation that allows for the small amount of extra income from work that recipients can make is not meant to help the recipients. In 2016, \$733 is the Federal maximum payment for SSI,<sup>1</sup> though some states may supplement this amount. In Janelle's case, any alimony paid to her would be subtracted from her SSI payment. If a person is working, if she make over \$65 in income from work, half of her earnings would be subtracted from their SSI payment. Then, if one's income exceeds \$733 (and whatever the State has added), one will be disqualified from receiving SSI, and will no longer have that money to fall back on. Thus, for workers being able to earn a little bit more money through working does not benefit them very much. What is worse, it may allow government assistance providers to justify sending less money for assistance. This stipulation also might have been in place to benefits businesses, since as Piven (2001) argues, increasing the size of the labor pool, such as through making it increasingly more difficult for people to survive unemployment and encouraging people on SSI or retirement to continue to work, creates a large, insecure workforce that can be more easily exploited by employers, such as through paying wages that are too low.

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<sup>1</sup> See <https://www.ssa.gov/pubs/EN-05-11015.pdf>

## Homelessness and Gender

While both men and women can struggle with homelessness, there has not been a significant amount of ethnographic literature that specifically discusses what it is like to be a woman experiencing homelessness. In the past, it was generally believed that most homeless people were mentally ill men. However, this is no longer the case as many single women and women with families become homeless as well. During the analysis phase of this research, one of the findings that emerged was that women, as a participant category, expressed some issues that were specific to them. Liz, a woman that was sharing housing with Rick and another man in a motor home, discusses the stress and violence she has experienced living on the streets:

You've got to set your standards above law and rules. The dos and don'ts so you can protect yourself. You just don't hang around to see anybody. You learn to read people and judge them... They can be judgmental, or multiple personalities, anxiety, stress, or they have to get medical help. That's me. I wound up having a lot of anxiety of stuff that has happened. And people. Because of people. And plus the past, the things that have happened to you. Like hell, I've been raped, beaten, robbed... You don't get that close with people on the street baby. You can be kind but you've got to pack yourself and watch out.

Liz is observing that besides just following standard laws that everyone must follow, when one is living on the street there is another set of rules to follow in order to survive. For example, Liz feels like she constantly has to be cautious around people she meets on the street. She discussed how people she was close to, people she trusted, ended up hurting her. When she said "you've got to pack yourself," she tapped her hip, signaling that she was talking about carrying a weapon, such as a gun in order to protect yourself, though she did not have a weapon on her at that time. However, Liz also feels that she does not have much of a choice when it comes to trusting strangers, since sometimes they provide help that is necessary to survive. Having to take these

types of risks makes her vulnerable to violence. She tells the story of how she met the man who owns the motor home she is currently living in:

He just picked me up one day and asked me “hey mam do you need a ride.” So you know, I’m a little dare devil. I hopped in “yeah, please.” And then we got to talking. A dude just stole my purse. And I was walking around down to Sanford looking for this guy and I never did see him again. So Johnny, he said “well mam would you like to go to my home then we can get you a bath, get something to eat, and watch you some TV.”

While it may have been risky to trust someone who picks you up on the side of the road, Liz’s decision was very constrained. The concept of gray zones is useful for understanding the risks people such as Liz are forced to take, since on the streets they are constantly living vulnerably in a state of emergency. Liz was homeless, and she had just had her purse stolen with what little money she had and her ID inside. Despite the danger, she did not really have any other reasonable options. Similarly, gray zones apply to other homeless persons in that their decisions are constrained as well, such as by having extremely limited resources and no safe place to call home.

Besides the threat of physical violence, Linda, a woman who is currently “couch surfing” at a friend’s house but has lived in her car, discusses some personal issues unique to women:

I know it sounds really personal, but one of the things that’s a major concern that comes up with us as females is where do you go to the bathroom? And I’ve seen the homeless guys and no offense but they just pee wherever. Females can’t do that. A lot of places won’t even let you use the restroom because they just look at you like you’re scum. I’m not scum.

Linda feels like hygiene is an issue that she has due to her homelessness, since she is often not able to shower or change clothes as much as she would like. She feels that this also affects how people perceive her and her ability to get a job:

I just ran into somebody... She says, “why don’t you go for these jobs, why don’t you apply?” How am I supposed to do that when I’m cruddy? I’m disgusting to

my own self. I know that I smell. I'm sweaty. I'm sticky. I've been wearing the same clothes for four days. And you want me to present myself as I'm here to apply for this job? No. And first impressions do count... You're going to basically blow it, blow all your chances because they're going to look at you and go, "oh my god you're disgusting." You don't want to be disgusting but you have no choice. Because you don't have anywhere to do simplistic things such as going to the bathroom, taking a shower, changing your clothes, brushing your teeth. These are all simple things human beings should be entitled to. But yet our society does not provide those services... You need a job because you're homeless, but you can't get a job because you're homeless.

While shelters may have bathrooms and showers, many interviewees have found that shelters are not accessible. Seminole County, which neighbors Orange County, has one homeless shelter, but it is almost always full and has a waitlist. While there are a few shelters in Orlando and Orange County, many interviewees still felt they were not accessible. In fact, while I was doing my recruitment survey, 25 out of the 43 people experienced some type of homelessness (living in a car or public space, hotel, doubling up, or staying in a shelter), and out of those 25 people, only 5 had stayed in a shelter. In contrast, 9 of the 25 people had stayed in their car or a public space. While this was not intended to be a formal survey of the use of shelters per se, it still shows how small a percentage of people experiencing homelessness have stayed in shelters. Moreover, when I questioned them further in interviews, the majority of people who had stayed in shelters had not done so while they were living in Central Florida.

Besides shelters, there is one other place in the area where homeless persons can go to take showers. However, not everyone is aware of it. The "Oasis" walk in center for the homeless, in Longwood, Florida, offers free showers, laundry, haircuts, computer access, and cell phone charging. These are things that housed people do at home, but that the homeless may have no other place to do. While these services are very useful, the Oasis is only open four days a week, three hours a day, and homeless persons may only visit three times a week. Thus, even if a

homeless persons is able to travel there at the available times, they still may not have the opportunity to shower as often as they feel they need. Further, in the city of Orlando it is illegal to bathe in public restrooms, so often people really do not have anywhere to perform these activities.

While men and women may both struggle with hygiene while homeless, cleanliness of appearance has traditionally been an aspect of gendered social norms. There is generally more pressure on women to look nice, as opposed to having “cruddy” clothes and appearance. As Linda observes, this would affect both men and women’s abilities to get decent jobs. However, the pressure to look nice may not affect men as much, since typically men are more likely to be able to find temporary hard labor work, such as yard work, that may not require them to look nice or clean.

### *Divorce*

Another issue that has been underdeveloped in the literature, is how divorce affects homelessness. I was surprised by how many women interviewees had experienced divorce, and felt that it was a part of the reason they became homeless. Counting only women who specifically mentioned divorce in the interviews, Linda, Rosa, Jenny, Janelle, Giana, and Juanita, were all divorced (or in the process of becoming divorced) from their husbands, and felt that it had in some way affected their homelessness. This differential experience of divorce can be especially acute in more traditionally defined marriages in which the income is covered by the husband only.

Linda, for example, felt that she was a displaced homemaker. Since her and her husband lived comfortably on his income alone in a “well-to-do” neighborhood in Oviedo, Linda had

never had to work. After the divorce, Linda had no savings or income, she was not awarded any alimony, and she had no work experience. While she did have an Associate's degree, Linda experienced that, "when I'm thirty years older than the average person that's starting [looking for work], a lot of people won't even look at me because of my age." Meanwhile, while Linda attempts to find a job that will allow her to afford housing, her ex-husband is still housed and earning "six figures."

Rosa experienced similar circumstances. She graduated with a Bachelor's degree in journalism, but since her husband's career was becoming very successful, they decided she would be a stay at home mom. Now that they are divorced, Rosa does not know how she can get back into a career in journalism, since at the time she was in school they had none of the same technology, and she lacks the work experience necessary in journalism. She describes how she "put the newspaper together with a corded telephone and a manual typewriter." After living in a shelter, Rosa has now found an apartment through an organization called Scattered Sites, which pays part of her rent while she works as many hours as she can at Publix. Scattered sites is a transitional housing program that requires homeless persons to meet certain requirements before being able to enter, such as having a full-time job. Due to these barriers that certain homeless persons cannot meet, and the fact that there is limited space, not everyone is able to find housing in this way. Further, transitional housing programs only provide assistance for a certain amount of time, and when this program ends in six months, Rosa will have to find housing that she can afford on her own. Many homeless persons end up homeless again after their time in transitional housing programs ends.

While other women experienced having to look for work for the first time after being divorced, some women already had jobs. Giana explains that she became homeless when, "my



husband had left and I couldn't afford the rent, so I had to do something." Giana works at Party City, a retail store that sells party supplies, part-time, since she has not been able to find a full-time job and has children to take care of. There is also a gendered aspect to divorce in that women often end up with greater responsibility for taking care of children, with enormous associated time and expenses, while husbands may not have these duties and costs. Therefore, it makes it more challenging for women, many of whom have worked only part-time during marriage or put their careers or education on the back burner, setting themselves up for low income after divorce.

Further, it is not surprising that either women or men who became homeless had trouble paying rent on their own. The ALICE study conducted by the United Way (2014:28), which stands for "Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed," found that in order to just survive (as opposed to being stable or comfortable) in Florida in 2012, a single adult would need to make \$9.32 an hour, 40 hours per week, 50 weeks per year (or \$18,624 annually). They calculated this using "minimum cost options." This includes housing at \$624 a month, and not a lot of room for emergency expenses (United Way 2014:28). In the Orlando and Oviedo area however, housing generally does not cost as low as \$624 a month, with interviewees having trouble finding one or two bedroom apartments for less than \$1,000 a month. The ALICE study also shows that women may be at a greater disadvantage than men, due to discrepancies in wages based on gender (United Way 2014:20). For example, In Florida in 2012 women with less than high school education earned a median annual income of \$15,221, while men earned \$19,979. Even with a high school education, women earn an average of \$21,285 a year, while men earn 27,098 a year, and the gap continues for all other education levels (United Way 2014:20).

The ALICE report, whose acronym stands for the population of working poor families which the organization hopes to understand, aimed at establishing what they call an “ALICE Threshold,” a sort of new poverty line for the working poor. As mentioned earlier, for a single adult, the survivability budget means working full time at \$9.32 an hour (United Way 2014:28). However, the state minimum wage is below that, and many people have trouble finding full time jobs due to the restructuring of the labor market (Piven 2001). Even when the “minimum cost options” are available, it is easy to see how both men and women (but especially women who on average earn less) would have difficulty maintaining housing. In fact, the study specifically says, “this budget also does not allow for any savings, leaving a family vulnerable to any unexpected expense, such as a costly car repair, natural disaster, or health issue” (United Way 2014:31). If such an unexpected cost occurs, persons under the ALICE Threshold would likely end up homeless if they are not able to receive timely assistance.

The un-survivability of minimum wage has been documented elsewhere as well. In her book *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America*, journalist Barbara Ehrenreich (2001) went “undercover” to work in the minimum wage service industry in the Florida Keys in order to investigate if it was possible to live on minimum wage. She found that many of her coworkers were homeless, living out of their cars or sharing rooms in hotels when they were able to pool their money together. In the course of her investigation, Ehrenreich (2001) was faced with homelessness herself due to lack of sufficient income and affordable housing. She eventually attempted to work two full-time jobs, which was impossible to handle due to sheer exhaustion. She ended the investigation knowing that she would not have been able to pay her next month’s rent at the trailer home she was living in. While, Ehrenreich was able to return to her more comfortable lifestyle as a journalist, her coworkers during the investigation, as well as other

people who work minimum wage jobs, do not have that luxury, since it is their reality.

Ehrenreich's (2001) documentation of the deterioration of her living conditions as the project went on brings attention to not only the impossibility of material survival on minimum wages in the current US economic structure, but also to the dehumanizing and stigmatizing conditions with which lowest income employees struggle.

Recently, there has been protests in some states for major increases in minimum wage, in which people are arguing the minimum wage should be raised to \$15 an hour. These protestors have realized that it is unrealistic to expect people to live on the current minimum wage, and hope that the protests will bring attention to the issue. This movement has some similarities to the 99 Percent Movement, a movement that is against increasing economic inequality, specifically the way in which 30% of America's wealth is owned by the top 1% of the population. These two movements show that not everyone accepts the current extreme social and economic inequalities that exist in the U.S. Another recent presidential candidate, Democrat Bernie Sanders, a self-described Democratic Socialist, is supporting minimum wage increase to a living wage, arguing that no full-time worker should live in poverty (Sanders 2015). Similar to Trump, Sanders has gained a lot of support, though mostly among young people. These two presidential candidates have very different beliefs and policy suggestions, yet they both are very different from presidential candidates in the past and are proposing dramatic change. Currently, it appears that Americans are frustrated and want change, but have different ideas of what this change should entail.

In conclusion, there are many issues specifically faced by women and people that are living on fixed incomes, such as from Social Security disability, that are understudied in current ethnographic literature. As we will see in later chapters, it is sub-populations such as these that

policymakers are attempting to understand to better adapt solutions to them, rather than having “blanket prescriptions” for all homeless. In the next chapter, I will discuss how the organization Hope Helps at which I have conducted this research, understands the causes of homelessness, and how they strategize to help keep homeless persons, or those at risk, in housing.

## **DISCOVERING NEEDS, DETERMINING FEASIBILITY: STRATEGIES OF STAFF AT HOPE HELPS**

In this chapter, I will discuss three main themes that emerged in interviews with Hope Helps staff and participant observation: (1) Hope Helps staff generally view causes of homelessness as diversified, but mostly due to financial crisis; (2) Hope Helps staff decide what services to offer through finding needs to meet, then determining whether it is feasible; and (3) Hope Helps staff believe it is the client's responsibility to remain financially stable, but that they may need "expert" help. Understanding the perspectives of staff members is important for understanding how non-profits such as Hope Helps strategize to help homeless persons, and how non-profits in general strategize to ensure their own survival. Due to cutbacks in government assistance in the United States, such as the 1996 Welfare Reform, non-profits have increasingly provided necessary assistance to low income and homeless persons.

### **Staff Perceptions of Homelessness**

The narratives of the staff members I interviewed suggest that Hope Helps staff view the causes of homelessness as diversified, but mostly due to financial crisis, while they are living paycheck to paycheck. Betty, Hope Helps's first volunteer coordinator, explains the causes of homelessness as follows:

It's really various... Most of ours are living on the edge, but as far as the homeless there's maybe 20% that are veterans. I would say just unemployment and of course recently because we went through this bad depression we've had a lot of people that have lost jobs and couldn't keep their homes and they're on the street. And homeless also considers those who are living with other people... And I think sometimes medical assistance isn't handy for a lot of people and so they don't get what they need there when they're out on the streets because we no longer have mental hospitals like we used to in those days.

Betty helps recruit volunteers and conducts volunteer orientation for all new volunteers, teaching them about the organization's mission and the different volunteer positions available. This quote shows that Betty believes there are many different reasons why people become homeless, similar to the diversity discourse discussed earlier. She describes that most of Hope Helps clients are people on the verge of homelessness, not necessarily actually homeless, but that there is a wide variety of sub-groups of homeless persons, including Veterans, people who are unemployed, and people who are mentally ill. She also believes that people may become homeless due to a variety of reasons, such as the economic depression or the closing of mental illness institutions. The idea that the increase in homelessness was due to the closing of mental institutions was largely voiced by politicians in the 1980s in order to undercut homeless persons credibility and justify removing them from public spaces (Mathieu 1993) and is part of the medicalized discourse of deviancy that many shelters use (Lyon-Callo 2000). However, Betty also focuses on people who cannot find jobs, at least with the population that Hope Helps serves. Allison, a case manager at Hope Helps, also describes a diversity of causes, mostly related to unexpected finances:

I think here it's a little different than what you might see in downtown Orlando with those homeless. Our population we get a lot of families that are on the verge of homelessness so something has happened where they're unable to make their rent this month or pay their utility bill. Something that happens, car problems where they have a big car bill or medical issues, and that gets them behind so it's a little bit different for a lot of the population we see here. So I'd really say just unexpected finances because they're so close to, you know, they're just making it month to month and then when something unexpected happens it really throws them off and they get further behind.

While Allison has recently joined Hope Helps after working as a case manager in the private sector, she was previously a case management intern at Hope Helps while she was earning her Bachelor's degree in Social Work from UCF. The homeless, defined in this way, is the population that Hope Helps aims to serve. Both narratives contrast the population that Hope

Helps usually serves in Oviedo with “typical” or downtown Orlando homeless persons, who according to staff may have different reasons for becoming homeless and may need different types of assistance, such as mental health services or substance abuse counseling. Allison’s observations that the majority of clients that Hope Helps serves are on the verge of homelessness, is likely correct, though those clients may have experienced homelessness before since many low income families may be episodically homeless. The population Allison describes is also similar to the population described by the United Way (2014) as ALICE (Asset limited, low-income, employed), in that they are often living month to month with little savings to fall back on in the case of an emergency. Policymakers and other non-profits involved in the CoC have also contrasted the chronically homeless (typically associated with people living on the streets in downtown Orlando) with those that are episodically homeless (typically live doubled up with other families or in hotels). These definitions help inform policy and how and which services are offered.

When I first began my undergraduate research at Hope Helps in 2012, I recruited participants by sitting at the food pantry sign-in table with the two volunteers that ran the table. To gain participants I used a flyer on the bulletin board, recommendations from volunteers and staff, and eventually the snowball method. As I sat at the sign in table, the volunteers and I would look for clients that did not have an address listed on their check-in sheet to ask if they had experienced homelessness. Volunteers were also already aware of some individuals who would qualify, since many had volunteered there for many years and knew clients by name. However, in this way we mostly found people that were more visibly homeless. In fact, staff and volunteers expressed the beliefs that Hope Helps didn’t really serve that many “actually”

homeless people, since they mostly focused on prevention and served people before they became homeless.

For my Master's research I realized that this type of recruitment was limited because we couldn't always tell who had experienced homelessness by visually assessing the person. This time, when I recruited people through a survey designed to determine whether participants qualified as homeless (as defined by either staying in a hotel, doubled up, car or public space, or homeless shelter), 25 out of the 43 people had experienced some type of homelessness, which is over half of the people I attempted to recruit. While this survey was just intended for recruitment, I did seek to survey everyone that walked in until I found someone to participate in an interview, and it gives a general idea of the extent to which persons at the food pantry have experienced homelessness. Thus, while the population that Hope Helps serves may currently be housed but "on the verge of homelessness," it is likely that many have experienced homelessness in the past.

It is also unclear how many people were "chronically" as opposed to "episodically" homeless at Hope Helps, due to the arbitrariness of these policy definitions, which are used by HUD and taken up by other non-profit organizations who follow HUD documents and funding. While it can be more obvious where a person has been staying, such as in a tent versus in someone else's home (for example, due to lack of access to hygiene facilities described previously by interviewees), it is not as obvious whether a person has a disability, and how many times/for how long they have been homeless. According to a report from the Central Florida Commission on Homelessness (CFCH 2014:6) which has been used to inform Orlando and CoC policy, chronic homeless is defined as people who are homeless for "a year or longer or have experienced at least four episodes of homelessness in the last three years and have a disability." Episodically homeless is defined as someone who has "recurrent problems with housing, often



due to seasonal/minimum-wage income jobs or sporadic domestic situations that affect stable housing” (CFCH 2014:6). In this study, some interviewees received Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) but were not homeless for longer than a year or for more than four times in the last three years. Moreover, some interviewees could have been defined as chronically homeless, but it was unclear whether or not they had a disability (they did not receive SSDI). However, as I will discuss in the next chapter, the purpose of these definitions appears to be to determine the path through which the individual will be led back into housing in the new plan that Orlando and the CoC have recently established.

As we have seen, at Hope Helps staff generally defines their population as on the verge of homelessness due to financial crisis. Thus, it is not surprising that their services are focused on the prevention of homelessness through case management and financial assistance, and through giving away food so that clients can spend the little money they have on their bills instead. Given the complicated and somewhat flexible ways of defining homelessness, the questions that emerge are: how do Hope Helps staff strategize to help their clients?, and how do they define their population in the process of assisting the homeless?

### **Staff Strategies and Deciding which Services to Offer**

When a person signs up to volunteer at Hope Helps, they must first attend volunteer orientation. During orientation, the volunteer coordinator explains how Hope Helps began, the mission of the organization, and areas in which you can volunteer. During interviews, staff also told stories of how Hope Helps started, and how different services were added. Betty, one of the first staff members to be hired when Hope Helps began, describes the founding of the organization as follows:

Krissy and her husband were at a soccer practice for their son, and they were just sitting in the bleachers watching the game, and there was a young couple sitting near them. So Krissy being Krissy, she started talking with the family, and the family confided in them that they were homeless. Now in order for that to happen that family must have really been in dire straits because it's very humbling to have to tell someone that you're homeless or that you need something. So this family was in a dire crisis, and Krissy's heart just swelled up and overflowed with emotion for that family. And it was obvious that the woman was pregnant also. So the family had been trying to get services, but they had nothing. They didn't have a cell phone; they didn't have any transportation anymore; they didn't have any money. So how do you get from place to place? How can you find places to go when you have no way to even contact places? So Krissy contacted a few friends and they pooled some money together and they put the family up in an inexpensive facility for a few nights. And in the mean time during the beginning of the week Krissy and her husband were calling everybody they could think of in the phone book services that might be able to help them, and it was very frustrating to find places that would help. You'd call one and if they couldn't help, then that was kind of [the end]. They didn't refer you anywhere else. It didn't seem like anybody knew what anybody else was doing, which was very frustrating. But on the third day one of those non-profits did call back and say that they did have room for the couple. So they did eventually end up with some help, but just that experience that she had actually almost made her angry to think that here in our country families have to go through all of this to try to find assistance, and you know this family really had no way to find assistance. And they needed a lot of help because once you're homeless and your car has been taken which had all of your possessions in it, you don't have anything. You don't even have probably have your birth certificate anymore or if you had any kind of certificates where you had graduation, college, whatever, any of those documents that would all need Social Security Cards, all that kind of stuff was taken from their car... So that's how Krissy got started because she just couldn't let go of knowing that it was so hard for people in America to find assistance. And so she just confided in her pastor and they prayed about what she was going to do, how could she help. And she had no background in non-profits, and was she really being called to do something? And then this thrift store here needed a new owner because the lady that had it had been sick on and off and couldn't keep it up. So the pastor suggested this might be a way to put your foot in the door so that's what she did and that's how it slowly got started.

This narrative shows that Hope Helps was founded after the discovery of a need, and Krissy's desire and ability to meet that need. Krissy and many of the first staff members of Hope Helps had no experience running non-profit organizations or systematically helping the homeless.

Betty, and many of the other first staff members were members of Krissy's church, and received

training while on the job. Betty, for example, was a respiratory therapist before joining Hope Helps as the volunteer coordinator. After starting her job at Hope Helps, she attended workshops for volunteer management at Rollins College in nearby Winter Park in order to learn more strategies for managing volunteers. This type of beginning is therefore different from the way top-down organizations may begin with pre-conceived notions of what the needs of the homeless are and which services they will offer, since it began with an observed need and grew into a service from the bottom-up.

While Hope Helps started as a thrift store in 2007, it has grown significantly, soon adding a food pantry, a case manager, HENs and Kids of Hope programs (as discussed in the Site Selection section of this paper), events, another case manager, and eventually moving to a new building to allow more space to add more services. Interviewees describe that similar to the way in which the organization was founded, new services are added based on staff discoveries of needs, but while also keeping feasibility in mind. For example, Betty describes when Kathleen, a former case manager, came up with a new program:

Well first of all it's do we have personnel to do it? We're a small facility so we really can't do anything else right now. What we're offering is about all we can offer because we don't have any more space to do anything. Of course money, how much money do we have to do it? I guess the real need, you know, what they think is a real need. Like the Kids of Hope lunch program that we have, we didn't have it in the beginning, but the case manager, Kathleen. at that time saw that need and we were able to squeeze that in by packing the lunches on the day the pantry was closed. So we try to do what we can and I'm happy to say that we will be moving the pantry and the offices to a new facility very soon so we will have more room.

This interview took place before Hope Helps moved to their new facility. Betty discusses making decisions to offer services as informed by both the perceived need and the feasibility, or the ability of Hope Helps to offer it with their current resources. Since staff at Hope Helps work

directly with homeless persons and low-income clients in the food pantry, thrift store, and case management sessions, they are close enough to the population they're serving in order to receive feedback, such as in the form of other needs not currently being met. At weekly meetings, the lead staff of the food pantry, case management, and thrift store meet with the management office where they recap the week and are able to bring up these new ideas. This description is demonstrative of what economist William Easterly (2006) refers to as "Searchers," using the term to describe organizations working in development that find what works in a bottom-up style. In contrast to top-down organizations or "Planners," Searchers receive feedback from the population they seek to serve, set realistic, feasible goals, and therefore achieve better, measurable results (Easterly 2006).

However, finances and other resources can greatly hinder non-profits from being able to provide services in the ways they believe are best. In the next sub-section, I will discuss the ways in which lack of resources available have been a challenge to Hope Helps and potentially other non-profits.

#### *Money and the Ways It Cannot be Used*

With finances and other resources, Terry the Chief Financial Officer (CFO) at Hope Helps laments that "unfortunately, it isn't a perfect world with that... A lot of it is cost-benefit." Resources, or at least the ways in which Hope Helps is allowed to use those resources due to stipulations, can be limited. For Hope Helps, at their old location (2007-2015) this included space. As they added services, the small building was soon a thrift store in the front, a food pantry in the back, with offices on the side. In fact, food pantry clients used to have to line up out the back door of the building, and thrift store personnel would sort items in the same area that the

case managers and staff had cubicles. However, Hope Helps was able to successfully grow. The thrift store has moved to a new, nearby but separate location, located down the street from the new food pantry. Currently, they are a little short on space since their third building is still being prepared, but they are hopeful it will be completed soon. Terry explains this process:

[Before] we didn't have the ability, the finances, to expand and get into a bigger place so you can only do so much. Once we made the decision... to look at buying a building, once you do that then you know you're going to have the space so we made the decision to hire an additional case manager, and Jessica's able to secure additional grants to pay for that. So a lot of time your finances have something to do with that.

Before expanding their services, such as through hiring a second case manager to help with the client case load, Hope Helps needed to make sure they would have enough space and finances to support this expansion. As Terry describes, many times the ability of a non-profit to expand is affected by the availability of space and grants to pay for it. However, as Jessica the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and Terry explain, grants are not always a reliable part of an organization's budget:

**Jessica:** ... We'd love to think that every year the same [grants] are behind us.

**Terry:** they change what they're interested in donating to. They change their timing and yet you budgeted for the same timing and you're competing with all the other great non-profits out there that are all going after the same money.

**Jessica:** our reporting has to be really on and accurate... the last grant that I did which was the mind blowing grant of the year... had I'd say 50 different questions of how we do things. They want to know your outcomes and your outputs and your measures and how you're doing this and you're statistics, what you've served, anticipated.

**Terry:** And much of this was added from the same exact grant prior years. There's a lot of behind the scenes things that goes on behind non-profits... It's challenging.

The way that grants change what they are interested in funding, the timing of the grant, make non-profits reapply, and change the information they want in the application can make it difficult for non-profits such as Hope Helps to anticipate what their budget will be for the year in order to plan how they will use the money. Grants specify what they are interested in funding by listing “priority areas.” For example, Jessica planned to reapply to a \$30,000 grant they had previously received from the Orlando Magic professional basketball team. However, when it came time to reapply, they had taken alleviating hunger off of their list, switching funding priority towards childhood obesity, healthy hearts, the arts, and other areas that Hope Helps no longer was able to fit into. Thus, if Hope Helps planned on having this grant when they made their yearly budget, they would be short \$30,000 that they need to support their plans, and would have to struggle to find the money elsewhere. This can make budgeting for non-profits very difficult since funds can be uncertain, and risky since they may make major decisions based off of this uncertain budget.

Another issue with grants that can limit organizational plans is that they may come with stipulations about how the money can and cannot be used. Terry explains that Hope Helps often doesn’t apply for certain moneys “from government agencies because of the guidelines that come with it. Because we often fill in the gaps of people who wouldn’t fit government guidelines to get any help. We get them before they get there, so they don’t get there. Because they may make too much.” Sometimes government agencies have stipulations related to income levels of the population that can be served using those funds, which may be restricted to only people with extremely low income. However, in order to be able to serve a wider population that is still in need of help, Hope Helps chooses not to apply to these specific grants.

In fact, Hope Helps purposefully focuses on fundraising with other donors such as foundations, churches, and individuals, some of which are volunteers, and some of which donate

as little as \$10 a month. In this way they hope to be able to use the money as they see it is needed, and not be burdened by what people who may be very distanced from the issue demand. Anthropologist Mark Schuller's (2012) concept of autonomy is useful to analyze this strategy. This concept refers to how much autonomy non-governmental organizations have from donor agencies, or in other words, how much control they have over their activities based on what type of funding they receive. Instead of being held accountable to the interests and demands of a single, specific donor agency, Hope Helps's diversified, privatized funding allows them to remain flexible in the type of assistance they provide. According to staff, this was a conscious decision on the part of Hope Helps to reject government funds on the grounds that it could restrict their work.

It is important to note, however, that while Hope Helps is not beholden to a single specific donor agency, it is common practice for all non-profit organizations to have a Board of Directors. Jessica, Terry, and Ashley, the Development Manager at Hope Helps, explain the Board as follows:

**Jessica:** Yes so all non-profits should have a board of directors, and so they annually will help set the strategies and goals for the year. They approve the budget that we put together. And they don't oversee day to day, that's us, but they just make sure that the organization is in compliance with keeping up with those goals and strategies. And they help fund raise, and they also bring in kind of a diversity of talents like a lawyer, someone in health care, someone in non-profit that can help guide us if we have questions.

**Terry:** They hold us accountable but they're also resources for us to draw on. It's hard to define these things.

**Ashley:** Like with events they don't necessarily help plan an event but they come to an event or support an event or sponsor it. But we might have one or two board members on a committee for an event.

**Jessica:** And they oversee me, so they can hire or release the CEO. That's what the board does too.

**Researcher:** Okay, so do they choose their own members?

**Jessica:** They have a nominating committee, it's the governance committee and throughout the year they kind of keep an eye out for what type of person they would like to bring in to keep the board diverse and then toward the end of the year they nominate, vote them in, motion them in and they start in January. So tomorrow is our first new board meeting with five members and they have a three year term.

While the Board of Directors has some control over activities such as the annual budget and holds the non-profit accountable for their spending, Hope Helps mostly considers them a resource to draw upon. However, other non-profits' relationships with their Boards of Directors may be strained if the Board has different ideas and goals than the staff themselves.

While staff has found that diversified, private donations give Hope Helps more control over the services they provide, these donations can still come with stipulations. Terry gave the following example:

A donor specifically gave funds that she wants us to use to get this weekly delivery, and it's enough to get a weekly delivery for a year, and so we're getting this organic food shipped from the other side of the state. That's non-efficient use of that money. We could do a lot better with that money, but that's what the donor wants so that's what you do. So sometimes it's difficult to explain to your funders this is not the highest and best use of this money. So the clients benefit but they maybe could benefit even more.

Hope Helps calls these types of donations or grants "restricted funds," since the donor specifies what the donation can be used for. Even if they have extra money or could use it somewhere else, that money can still only be used what it was specified for. In this example, a donor wanted clients at Hope Helps food pantry to have fresh vegetables for the part of the week that Hope Helps has usually run out of the fresh food. In this way, the donation was useful. However, since the donor stipulated where the food had to come from, Terry feels that the money could have



been used more efficiently had the donor not made that stipulation. Hope Helps is still grateful for the donation, but it would be more beneficial if they could use it in an unrestricted way.

Another issue with many grants and donations that Jessica has brought up is that some may specify that all of the donation must go directly to the clients and cannot go towards “overhead” or running the program. She says, “of course everybody wants to give you money to give directly to the client but even if all we are was a pass through pantry we would still have to have an employee, even if that’s all you did. So that’s hard. That’s frustrating sometimes, people don’t understand that you have to run it.” According to Jessica, many people do not want their donations to go to running the program, since they want it to directly benefit the clients. While this is understandable since donors want their money to be used in the way they see as best, this may leave Hope Helps little money to pay its employees and Jessica feels many people don’t realize all the work that employees do that Hope Helps needs money to pay them for.

Sometimes, in order to obtain money to pay employees and use for other expenses, Jessica, who is in charge of the grant writing, must write grants that include “running the program” as part of its use. However, Terry laments that when you take the risk of including this in your grant, you might not get the grant, because most grants prefer the money to go directly to the program itself.

Some programs are also better funded than others at Hope Helps, due to what grants and donors want to fund. For example, Terry explains that, “We could get enough money donated to Kids of Hope to do our entire budget, because it’s [for] kids. But we wouldn’t be able to spend most of our budget because it doesn’t take that much to do that.” According to Terry, since helping kids is something that appeals much more to donors, and more funds are available for it, they could potentially get way more money than they need for the program, but not be able to use the extra money anywhere else since it was specified as Kids of Hope only. Jessica even

jokes that Kids of Hope is sometimes funded so well that they could put caviar, considered to be an overly expensive food, in the kids' lunches. Meanwhile, funds to pay for other programs, employee salaries, and other expenses can be extremely low. Hope Helps still feels that all donors have good intentions, it is just sometimes difficult to budget for the non-profit as a whole when funds are restricted to only certain uses.

Now that I have discussed how Hope Helps defines the population that they seek to help and how they strategize and make decisions on which services to offer and how to seek funding, I will examine one of their services, case management, in greater detail.

### **Client Responsibility and “Expert” Help**

As discussed earlier, staff at Hope Helps generally believe that people become homeless due to a diversity of reasons, but mostly due to financial crisis or the loss of a job. However, staff did not cite the role of government in providing a safety net for people who lose a job, for ensuring a living wage that allows workers to save money to use in times of hardship, or to pay enough through SSDI for disabled persons to be able to afford to be stable. Research findings in this study suggest that while Hope Helps staff do not generally blame the client for the crisis, they believe it is the client's responsibility to be financially stable, and that the client may need “expert” help to do so. For example, when I asked Allison if budgeting in case management sessions seemed to help most clients, she responded that:

Sometimes there are clients that just month after month they're just not making enough. So we try to refer them to employment agencies or we'll ask for them to give us their resumes so if we hear of any job opportunities we can pass it along. So certain situations where they're just not making enough money and their expenses are just too high, paying one bill may not really assist that specific client, so it really just depends.

Responses such as this seem to portray a belief that it is the clients' responsibility to find a job that is able to support them, not the government's responsibility of sustainable minimum wage or having a social safety net. At the very least, it shows that staff believe that the best or only way to help clients become stable is to help them find a better paying job or budget better with the money they are making. As discussed in the previous chapter, the focus on individual responsibility is typical of neoliberal discourse in the United States, and the core tenant of "self-responsibility" is also evident in Hope Helps case managers' understanding of financial struggles. The concept of hegemony is also a useful concept with which to analyze these types of responses, since it shows that staff attempt to work within the current political system and its prevalent discourses, rather than working to change it, despite the fact that it clearly does not work well for the poor that they aim to help, since they believe it either cannot or should not be changed. The concept of hegemony explains how a current system can remain relatively stable even when it mostly benefits relatively few people, since the majority of the population sees it as "common sense," natural, and inevitable, even though it is a culturally and social constructed understanding of how the economy and society work (Gramsci [1935] 2000).

However, though clients are held responsible, staff at Hope Helps can provide "expert" assistance during case management sessions. Allison describes the process as follows:

So a client will call, we'll get some background information on their situation. And we have a data system called HMIS that a lot of agencies in the Central Florida area use. So we will look them up to see if they have been to another agency recently, have they been in a shelter. That's only as good as the data that gets put into it so sometimes there's information, sometimes there isn't, just depending, or maybe they haven't been to another agency before. So we'll check that, then check our system to see if they've been to Hope before, find out any background information from that, and then the client themselves. Then we'll advise them on any paperwork to bring in. Then they'll come in and we'll go over their financial situation and the reasons where they got where they are. A lot of people are job searching so they're struggling while they're unemployed, those

types of things. So we'll go over their information, see if there's anywhere they can make cut backs. Or maybe they haven't been coming to the pantry because they didn't know about it so we can recommend that since if you come to the pantry you can save money while you're applying to food stamps that way you can use that money towards your bills. Then we will go over, not with the client, but what our budget is and see if we have the funding to assist them and let them know whether or not we are able to assist them. If we don't have the funding or if for some reason we are not able to we like to refer them to other resources to try so that way we're not leaving them with nothing. They can go to other agencies and see if they can have any success there.

As this narrative shows, case management involves the case manager working together with the client, providing “expert” help, as evidenced by the systematic process and the way data is documented in HMIS. Case managers do their best to help clients budget better with their current, often meager resources, and as shown in the narrative they also help them obtain new resources such as by referring them to other services, helping them apply to programs such as food stamps, and even providing financial assistance in paying their bills or rent in times of crisis if there is room in their budget. These services have proven useful in helping clients maintain housing.

However, while case managers have good intentions in helping clients budget and strategize to better their situation, the idea of “expertise” in assisting clients at non-profit organizations can be used as a justification for the necessity of the services they provide. This is often necessary for obtaining funding for the organization, but can lead to the clients, such as the poor or homeless, to become the “non-experts others,” and to be medicalized or infantilized (Hoffman and Coffey 2008; Lyon-Callo 2000). Most case managers have degrees in Social Work, and thus, are indeed experts. However, feminist thinking has shown that the very idea of “expert” can be used to disenfranchise the efforts and ideas of “non-experts,” and can be used to further an agenda through authoritative knowledge (Browner and Press 1996). The process of

case management itself perpetuates the idea that it is the individual client's responsibility to remain financially stable, since the process focuses on assisting clients to budget or find a better job, and thus be better able to fit in to the current political and economic system, instead of advocating that there is a problem with the system and working towards systemic change. Again, I do not believe it is the intention of case managers or that those involved in non-profits are even aware, but rather the process of case management and the idea of "expertise" in non-profit organizations in general, can perpetuate discourse that enforces the current political economic system, a system which is not beneficial to the population they serve. While it is critically important that services and support are offered to the homeless, the focus of some non-profits on individual help, rather than also raising questions and advocating for policy changes in Florida, raises questions about how to create long-term improvements to the plight of homeless persons.

Overall, I found that Hope Helps is an organization that similar to the way in which it was founded, provides services to homeless and low-income clients based on discovered needs and feasibility in the desirable bottom-up rather than top-down style. I've also discussed ways in which they strategize through the types of funding they apply for and accept in order to retain a relatively large amount of autonomy from their donors so that they are able to help clients in the way they feel is best. Though, private donations may still come with stipulations that may make the donations be used in a way that is still useful, but less efficient than the way staff would use it otherwise. These struggles are likely experienced by other non-profit organizations, and Hope Helps strategizes to remain relatively autonomous may prove useful to others. Focusing on case management at Hope Helps, I have shown that while this services are useful for helping clients maintain housing, the idea of "expertise" and the process of case management is less than ideal in that it perpetuates the discourse of individual responsibility, which in turn contributes to the

hegemony of the current political and economic system, in which self-responsibility and “pulling oneself up by the bootstraps” remain the assumed norms of improving one’s situation. In the next chapter, I will discuss the strategies and official plans of policymakers in Orlando and the tri-county Continuum of Care to make homelessness “rare, brief, and one time.”

## **POLICYMAKERS MAKING HOMELESSNESS “RARE, BRIEF, AND ONE TIME”**

As a city, Orlando has a particularly bad reputation for the way it treats homeless persons. In 2009, The National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty and the National Coalition for the Homeless (NLCHP and NCH 2009) released a report on the criminalization of homelessness, which listed the top 10 “meanest” cities in the United States. Orlando was number three on the list, following behind Los Angeles, California, and St. Petersburg, Florida. As its reasoning for ranking Orlando third, the report cites the law passed in 2006 by Mayor Buddy Dyer which banned giving food to homeless persons in groups of 25 or more without a permit and more than twice a year, the arrests of members of Food Not Bombs for giving food to homeless persons, and the multiple anti-panhandling laws that Orlando has tried to pass. Thus, when I recently began researching the strategies of policymakers in Orlando, I was a little surprised to see “End Homelessness” as one of the key priorities listed on the front page of the Orlando Mayor Buddy Dyer’s website.<sup>2</sup> Further, when I clicked on the “End Homelessness” link, the Mayor voiced support for the City’s new implementation of Housing First, a model that is typically considered the opposite of criminalization approaches to homelessness. So what has changed? First, I will examine where recent “Ten Year Plans to End Homelessness” came from, and then, I will discuss potential reasons why Orlando began their plan comparatively late.

### **History of Plans to End Homelessness**

In 2000, the National Alliance to End Homelessness (NAEH 2000) released a Plan to End Homelessness in 10 Years. This was the first major plan that brought attention to the

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.cityoforlando.net/mayor/> (accessed 3/19/16)

increasing issue of homelessness in the United States, citing systemic and social causes of homelessness, and advocating for the Housing First approaches that are still considered “best practices” today. It provided a “snapshot” of homelessness demographics, and argued in detail that addressing homelessness through Housing First, as opposed to transitional housing or ignoring homelessness, would actually save communities money. The plan also suggested the need for better, coordinated data to be entered by agencies that serve the homeless to be used for planning purposes. It then listed current resources, such as federal programs and grants, that cities and states could take advantage of in their plans to end homelessness. In fact, many of the ten year plans developed afterwards by the federal and local governments greatly resemble this plan.

In 2001, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), under the George W. Bush Administration, began an initiative to end chronic homelessness, the sub-population of homeless persons considered most vulnerable and most costly to taxpayers. This initiative reopened the United States Inter-Agency Council on Homelessness (USICH), which urged cities to create their own Ten Year Plans to End Homelessness in 2003. In 2010, as many communities’ Ten Year Plans were nearing an end without much positive results, USICH released a new, more detailed plan called the Opening Doors Plan, which still resembled NAEH’s (2000) plan, but included more “action steps,” “operational definitions,” and easy to follow flow charts (USICH 2015). Opening Doors still represents the current federal plan, but has been amended twice: in 2012 to incorporate more information and plans to address youth homelessness, and in 2015 to incorporate more information on ending Veteran homelessness. The 2015 amendment also extended the deadline to end chronic homelessness to 2017, and set a goal to end homelessness for families, youth, and children by 2020 (USICH 2015:8). Also, one of the operationalized



definitions added in this plan is that of an “end to homelessness,” describing that it “means that every community will have a systematic response in place that ensures homelessness is prevented whenever possible or is otherwise a rare, brief, and non-recurring experience” (USICH 2015:10).

Some cities, however, began their ten year plan later than others. Orlando’s plan, which was released in 2008, never really gained momentum. While Housing First models, mostly Rapid Rehousing, had been discussed and had received limited support, it was not until around 2013 that Orlando and the surrounding tri-county CoC really began pushing the types of practices recommended in NAEH’s (2000) and USICH’s (2015) plans. In this next section, I will explore possible reasons why Orlando finally began these changes.

### **A Late Start**

In 2008, the Central Florida Commission on Homelessness (CFCH), also known as the Regional Commission on Homelessness at the time, was founded and released its ten year plan to end homelessness called “Ten2End.” However, as Orlando Sentinel journalist Kate Santich (2010) reports, the commission was not able to meet the communities’ expectations. They were not able to raise their proposed budget, were not making progress on their goals, and many of the board members stopped showing up to the meetings, which occurred once every four months. In 2010, CFCH partnered up with the non-profit organization United Way in the hopes of being able to accomplish more. While the commission was supposed to remain autonomous, United Way provided expert consultants and office space, and acted as a “fiduciary agent” of the commission so that donations to the commission were tax deductible. However, Jeff Gore

(2011), writing for the Orlando Weekly, reported that the commission was still struggling, not being able to reach their now \$400,000 annual budget, and employing only one outreach worker. He also criticized them for their spending, stating that in their first year, out of the \$199,721 they spent, \$125,000 of it went to their CEO Ray Larson's salary (Gore 2011). If over half of the money spent went to one man's salary, how could the group really be committed to ending homelessness?

It appears that even their partnership with United Way was not able to save the former commission. Santich (2012:1) reported that two years after the merge, the struggling CFCH would be reborn as a non-profit organization, and suggests that one of the issues with the former commission was that it was not regulated, since it was not a legal entity beholden to bylaws. In contrast, as a new non-profit organization CFCH would have a board of directors, bylaws, and financial accountability. The CEO of the commission, Ray Larson, was also set to be replaced. According to Santich (2012), the city agreed to give CFCH \$200,000 of their \$900,000 proposed budget for the first three years to cover operating costs, part of which was aimed at attracting "high-caliber CEO candidates" to replace Larson. Quoting Jim Wright, a Sociology Professor at UCF, Santich (2010) describes how the previous commission representatives were "laughed out" of the Orange County budget hearings, and were not able to raise enough money. Hopefully, the revamped CFCH with a new CEO would be able to carry more political force.

My ethnographic work shows that the new non-profit CFCH has been much more successful. Lisa, a representative that I interviewed from the Orange County Mayor's office, describes the changes in the commission as follows:

So the Central Florida Commission on Homelessness really is our region's convening and advocacy organization and it's been around for a few years in its actual entity as a public charity. Before that it was kind of a non-entity. It was just

kind of a collaboration, and that group prior to the current organization really wrestled with the issue and tried to implement some national strategies, one being Ten2End, which it was a pretty widely followed goal to end homelessness in ten years. However, they soon realized that was not realistic without actual kinds of best practices about how to really identify who our homeless are, and the fact that one size does not fit all in terms of this issue... So the kind of evolving of the Central Florida Commission on Homelessness, they're really out researching best practices bringing it back to our community and then promoting these best practices.

Echoing the findings of the news articles, Lisa notes that the organization used to be a “non-entity” that was not very successful in its ten year plan. The city of Orlando and Orange County now recognize CFCH as the leading advocacy organization, which is a very different view than of the previous commission being “laughed out” of county budget hearings. However, Lisa feels that the difference between the last agency, and the new successful non-profit version is their focus on bringing “best practices” back to our community. The use of terms such as “best practices” is representative of discourse used in the currently popular “evidenced-based” policymaking, which suggests that only methods and policy that have been proven to work should be implemented by policymakers.

Before CFCH became a non-profit, Larson and one other employee came to visit UCF and actually spoke with representatives from the Anthropology Department, including Dr. Joanna Mishtal, Dr. Beatriz Reyes-Foster, and myself, in order to gain support for his Downtown Outreach Program, likely since he only had one outreach worker. As part of this program, Larson wanted students to volunteer to help convince homeless persons on the street to “come in to be sheltered.” However, Larson, previously a preacher, used religious language and suggested that the only way to get homeless persons off of the streets was to be their “shepherds.” This type of patronizing discourse made us uncomfortable due to the historic use of handouts to force people to convert during periods of colonialism and today by some religious development agencies. The

language he used was also similar to infantilization discourse in that he suggested that the homeless were not capable of helping themselves or making their own decisions, if given the chance, such as through making more resources available to them. This type of language also does not align with “evidenced based” policymaking, which could help explain why Larson did not have much success gaining support from policymakers.

One the other hand, the new CEO of CFCH, Andrae Bailey, appeared to be very in-tune with the type of language that policymakers respond to. At the 2016 Central Florida Poverty Convention (where I conducted participant observation) hosted at the Florida Hospital, CEO Andrae Bailey told a room full of policymakers, community members, and non-profit staff that he did not care whether they were Republican or Democrat, Conservative or Liberal, what he cared about was numbers. “Numbers,” being associated with “evidenced based” policymaking, research, and “best practices,” were likely much better received by policymakers. Tim, a Project Manager at CFCH that I interviewd discusses the organization’s change in direction:

Before Andrae came on board from 2007 to say 2013, [CFCH] kind of languished and didn’t have much direction. What Andrae did was identify the problem, which was pretty obvious: the population of homeless individuals in this region was growing exponentially year by year and the resources to respond to that problem were what they had been for 20 or 30 years, and the response itself had stayed stagnant for that amount of time. What he brought, or at least gained support for, was the Housing First model... So that was really the game changer here was adopting the housing first model. It absolutely has not been easy and there’s still a lot of work to go. It’s something that some providers in this area have been hesitant to get on board with, but the data is there. It started in 1992 Dr. Sam Tsemberis in New York City who kind of came up with the Housing First model, and from that beginning to now with a lot of different data in between it has shown that somebody that’s put in Permanent Supportive Housing five years later, 85% of the time, they will still be there. So they won’t fall out, they won’t drop out, they won’t become homeless again.

According to Tim, it is the data on Housing First’s success that has been accumulating since 1992 that will eventually convince hesitant providers to “get on board.” Permanent Supportive

Housing (PSH) is a form of Housing First in which wrap around services are provided to the tenant. Rapid Rehousing, the other form of Housing First, does not necessarily include wrap around services, and is currently geared more towards families and episodically homeless persons, who are considered to be more self-sufficient than the chronically homeless. Tim felt that it was Andrae's ability to use research and Housing First data that was able to help him gain support for the model, where the previous commission had failed. Again, it is likely the use of discourse involving words such as "data driven," "evidenced-based," and "best practices," which were commonly used by policymakers in this study, that allowed Andrae to be taken seriously and led to his success in gaining support where Larson had failed.

Further, researchers hired by CFCH, similar to the report by NAEH (2000), were able to show that implementing Housing First would save taxpayers money. According to the report, a chronically homeless individual living on the streets would cost taxpayers in the local Continuum of Care (Orange, Volusia, and Osceola Counties) an average of \$31,065 per homeless person per year, or \$48,989,505 annually considering the number of chronically homeless persons in the area, conservatively estimated to be 1,577 (CFCH 2014:27-28). This average cost considers what Creative Housing Solutions (CHS) has found to be the largest financial impacts of homelessness, including incarceration, emergency room use, and hospitalization, and was calculated using exact costs of incarceration and aggregated costs of hospitalization for 107 confirmed chronically homeless individuals in the tri-county area (CFCH2014:15). In contrast, Housing First, specifically Permanent Supportive Housing for chronically homeless individuals would only cost an estimated \$10,051 per person per year, or \$1,075,457 annually for 1,577 chronically homeless individuals, as calculated by the average spent on units of housing by two current PSH facilities in Florida (CFCH 2014:28). In other

words, the “numbers” showed policymakers that the plans were worth their support. Dana, a representative from the Orlando Mayor’s office, agreed that this was part of the City’s reasoning:

It just makes economic sense. Especially when Rebecca Sutton, the CFO, she’s fiscally conservative, [which] when you think sometimes about social justice you don’t always really think about the Republicans... but Rebecca saw the economics of what it is that Housing First does. And she keeps saying well it’s a no brainer. She goes it just made simple sense. That these folks are costing us this much, these folks cannot resolve their own homelessness and if we don’t do anything about it we’re just going to continue to see them on the street... and so she looked at Housing First, Mayor Dyer also looked at evidence and success form other cities that have implemented Housing First and really has championed the Housing First along with the commission.

According to Dana, the Orlando Mayor and CFO were both convinced by the evidence that Housing First would work. Throughout these narratives, there is also a sense that this evidence, the numbers and data, are politically neutral. Dana describes the CFO as a fiscally conservative Republican, a stereotype which does not typically reflect concerns of social justice. However, “even she was convinced” by the numbers, because they “just made simple sense.” The idea of numbers, especially those that represent dollars, as neutral is similar to neoliberal discourse that posits the free market as a fair, politically neutral force. In this way, numbers can become a politically neutral force that are considered convincing in their own right, as if they “speak for themselves.” Thus, this type of discourse has been fairly convincing on both sides of the political spectrum. However, as I will argue in my conclusions, Housing First is not necessarily politically neutral just because it can be justified by numbers and data.

Another factor that likely pushed Orlando and the CoC to start working towards implementing Housing First is that HUD would no longer fund what they call the “Housing Ready” approach, which characterizes transitional housing and other programs that will not house people until they are “ready.” “Ready” usually refers to when a person has reached the

organizations' goal, which may include that the person has found full-time employment, has stopped abusing substances, and/or has converted to Christianity. For example, Scattered Sites, a transitional housing program used by Rosa, an interviewee in this study, can be considered a Housing Ready approach since it required applicants to maintain a full time job in order to be a part of the program. After the Opening Doors plan was released in 2010, HUD began promoting Housing First over Housing Ready, and recently, interviewees have alleged that HUD will now only support Housing First approaches through its competitively awarded grants. Since the CoC receives the majority of their funding through HUD's competitive grants, this is likely a major factor in pushing Orlando towards change.

Interviews and participant observation also support that HUD's funding changes have had an influence. Lisa describes that the CoC's relationship to HUD is that "HSN has to report up to HUD every year how the dollars were used and so that will also determine future years' funding. HUDs definitely performance minded. They want to know where the dollars go and what the outcomes are for the programs. That's really important." Homeless Services Network (HSN) is the lead agency in the CoC that reports to HUD each year. Lisa suggests that in order to continue to receive funding, HSN must show that the CoC is attaining sufficient outcomes in order to be awarded HUD money the following year. When I attended a CoC meeting in February 2016, HSN voiced similar concerns, urging other members to make changes towards becoming Housing First models, and provided training resources to teach members how to better document data in HMIS (discussed in a previous chapter) that will be used to show program outcomes to HUD.

According to HUD's website, during the application process for the CoC grants, CoC members must submit their specific project application to the lead agency (HSN) who ranks the

projects as Tier 1 or Tier 2 in terms of HUD's list of priorities, and submits the Consolidated Application to HUD. When reviewing applications, HUD first ranks the CoCs' Consolidated Application. A CoC's high ranking on this list will guarantee that they will receive funding for all of their Tier 1 projects. CoCs receive points based on their encouragement of projects that follow the Opening Doors plan, which includes Housing First, (both PSH and Rapid Rehousing) and increasing affordable housing, as well as the CoC's performance towards reducing homelessness.<sup>3</sup> HUD also reviews the individual project applications, and will remove any programs that do not meet HUD's qualifications. If the lead agency submits any projects that do not qualify, or does not rank them according to HUD's guidelines, they will lose points on the Consolidated Application, which will delay and likely reduce their funding. Thus, the application process as described in HUD's Fiscal Year 2015 CoC Program Notice of Funding Availability (FY2015 CoC Program NOFA), likely successfully encourages many CoCs, including Orlando's, to make changes in accordance with the Federal Opening Doors plan.

The city of Orlando and Orange County have close ties with the CoC, which has probably also encouraged their support of Housing First. For example, Lisa describes her role at the Orange County Mayor's Office, saying "I go to represent the Mayor at the Central Florida Commission on Homelessness, their executive meetings, as well as sit on several of their sub-committees. I'm also a representative for the CoC, and internally I support [Orange County Mayor Teresa Jacob's] staff that work in both homelessness and housing." Being on boards at both CFCH and the CoC keeps Lisa, and thus the Orange County Mayor's office updated on the progress CFCH and the CoC are making. Lisa also is a point of contact at the Mayor's office for HSN, which holds the Rapid Rehousing contract from Orange County and the PSH contract from

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<sup>3</sup> For a full list of criteria and points awarded see HUD's FY2015 COC Program NOFA, Section VII (page 42). <https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/Revised-FY-2015-CoC-Program-NOFA.pdf>



the City of Orlando. As part of the contracts, HSN is in charge of locating units of housing to be used for Rapid Rehousing and PSH through forming agreements with landlords. Rapid Rehousing is a Housing First model that is recommended for families and the episodically homeless, rather than PSH which is recommended for the chronically homeless. The differences between the two is that PSH clients have permanent case managers and services to assist them, since by definition as chronically homeless individuals they are disabled, whereas episodically homeless persons are considered more independent and not in need of services tied to their housing. While Orlando is specifically focusing on the chronically homeless, Orange County is mostly focusing on family homelessness. However, according to Lisa, Orlando, the county, and the CoC work very closely since all of their goals are complimentary. Thus, these close ties likely keep Orlando and the County committed to the goals and logic of Housing First.

Overall, the city of Orlando has had a late start, releasing its abandoned Ten Year Plan in 2008, and not gaining much political support for the Housing First model until around 2013. Until relatively recently, the city and county could be described as anti-homeless through their participation in criminalization measures as an attempt to keep homeless persons out of sight. I argue that some of the main forces behind this change include the Federal Opening Doors Plan, HUD's funding prioritization of CoCs that are switching to Housing First, and the ability of the new non-profit CFCH to successfully advocate and gain support for the approach through "evidenced-based" policymaking discourse. However, since Housing First has been around for over 20 years, there are likely other reasons why Orlando and Orange County have recently become much more supportive of Housing First, and they are not reasons that policymakers would officially give. In the next sub-section, I will discuss these potential unofficial reasons.

### *So Really, Why Now?*

When I asked a group of non-profit workers “why has Orlando decided to change their approach now?” at the Central Florida Poverty Convention, the counter-narrative was that the politicians were willing to try something new after the brand new Dr. Phillips Center for the Performing Arts was built in downtown Orlando, and the many homeless persons were “ruining” the area’s image. While non-profits, the City of Orlando, and the CoC now closely work together to resolve homelessness, there was likely tension in the past due to differences of approaches. Evidence of tension include frustration over the Mayor’s former “non-entity” CFCH’s lack of efficiency, and the hostile arrests of Food not Bombs non-profit members for giving food out to homeless persons. While past tensions likely contribute to this theory, it does not mean that it is completely unfounded. Coincidental to the timing of the gained momentum towards Housing First, the planning for the Arts Center began in 2008. The Arts Center then opened in 2014, and further high end development was expected to follow. According to the development section of the Dr. Phillips Center’s website,<sup>4</sup> the “completion of the Arts Center will result in an increased market to support additional upscale hotel rooms to serve the Arts Center and other downtown venues.” If upscale development is a goal in downtown Orlando, the presence of homeless persons living on the streets would likely deter from the new upscale image. While this reasoning is theoretical, it is in line with Orlando’s reputation as the nation’s third “meanest” city. Also supporting this suspicion is the fact that Orlando is focusing on the chronically homeless, the most visible population of homeless people.

Further, many of the laws considered to contribute to the criminalization of homeless persons in Orlando have not been changed. If Orlando really had a “change of heart,” would it

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<sup>4</sup> See <https://www.drphillipscenter.org/explore/about-the-dr-phillips-center/building-the-dr-phillips-center/development-opportunity.stml>

not remove laws that criminalize the homeless, laws that they know are contrary to Housing First goals? I asked Dana, the representative from the Orlando Mayor's Office, if there were any changes being made in this direction:

Well, I've already taken the steps to sensitize [the Orlando Police Department (OPD)]... because we still have to respond to business leaders and citizens, OPD usually just tries to move folks along. But if there's resistance or multiple occurrences, they have to kind of do, you know, their job and enforce those ordinances. I think that's the careful balance that I see City Hall struggle with is they have to respond because everything is about economic development, drawing people to the city of Orlando so we can be the best that we can be.

According to Dana, the ordinances that criminalize homeless persons have not been removed because the city has to balance what they know is the "best practice" with what taxpayers want. What the city has done, however, is "sensitize" OPD by talking to them about the goals of Housing First, and how arresting homeless persons works contrary to those goals. An Urban Anthropology perspective is particularly useful to analyze Orlando's approach to this issue, since it asks who is it that city leaders serve, and who are the desired "users" of the city? In this case, the business leaders and "citizens" of Orlando are who command the city's response. They are who the city policymakers feel they must please. The choice of the word "citizens" is particularly interesting, because it implies that homeless persons are not also citizens. Why are the opinions and demands of one group more powerful than the other, especially when the city is focusing so much of their resources towards ending homeless? Is getting homeless persons into housing and off the streets really to benefit the homeless persons, or is it to benefit those who consider them a nuisance? Dana feels that the desires of the business leaders and "citizens" and the Housing First plans must be balanced since the priority of all cities is economic development and drawing in new people to drive the economy. Thus, it is likely that the planned development surrounding the

new Dr. Philips Center is indeed another factor that finally drove the city of Orlando towards supporting Housing First, albeit not for the reasons of social justice.

However, an alternative counter-narrative has been offered to explain why Orlando and Orange County have recently become the “champions of the homeless.” At CFCH, Andrae and Tim discuss an article that suggests Andrae himself was the change:

Well, actually it’s a funny read that article, if you get a chance it’s online, because when Andrae came on board he had a meeting with Mayor Dyer. Mayor Dyer from the beginning of his initial inaugural administration to 2012-2013 had gotten a pretty bad reputation when it came to the homelessness issue... and by no means was that entirely his fault... So [Andrae] had a meeting, and again it’s in that article, he had a meeting that was supposed to be like a half hour... that half hour meeting turned into a two hour meeting, turned into Mayor Dyer being absolutely the biggest champion on homelessness in this region in this state, probably in the country, for an elected official. So he’s been an unbelievably supportive partner in what we’re doing here and really we could not be doing what we’re doing here without his support.

As they requested, I found the article online. The article, written by Orlando Sentinel reporter George Diaz (2016), echoes Tim’s story of how Andrae Bailey got the “Meanie Mayor” on board:

Now all [Bailey] had to do was crunch those numbers and rally influential leaders in Central Florida. The persuasive push started with Buddy Dyer, the Meanie Mayor of Orlando when it came to homeless people. Put panhandlers in blue boxes. The dust-up with feeding people at Lake Eola. In 2003, Orlando ranked as the ninth-meanest city toward homeless people, according to a study by the National Coalition for the Homeless.

“I was told Mayor Dyer is not going to help you,” Bailey said. “No way.”

First meeting pops up. Bailey had this big presentation set up at the Lake Eola House, when he was going to pitch the “housing first” model. Only that never happened. At the last minute, he decided to pull up slides featuring faces of homeless people in front of Orlando City Hall.

“Let me tell you about Tammy,” Bailey said. “Tammy has been homeless seven years. Tammy was diagnosed with bipolar schizophrenia when she was a teenager. Tammy at one time was a figure skater. That’s her story.”

And so on. Bailey was told he'd be lucky if Dyer stayed 20 minutes. The mayor stuck around two hours. All in.

According to this counter-narrative, this meeting was a turning point in the way that Mayor Dyer viewed homeless persons. Andrae is painted as an inspiring story teller, who won over the Mayor through his compassion. Ultimately, it is proposed that this inspiring meeting is what led to the city's backing of CFCH and the Housing First model. Andrae Bailey can be a very convincing person, and he was even named 2015 Central Floridian of the Year for his ability to gain momentum for Housing First. However, anthropologists are skeptical of theories of social change that revolve around one person, and it was likely that there were other factors that contributed to this change.

Overall, there have been some interesting ethnographic counter-narratives about why Orlando has recently changed to supporting the Housing First model. However, it is important to note that while these are “counter-narratives,” or narratives that go against policymakers’ official narratives (which consisted of “evidenced-based” policymaking and following HUD funding), they are not necessarily any less true. In fact, historically anthropological literature has treated “unofficial” narratives as just as significant, if not more significant, than official ones. In fact, counter narratives relate to what philosopher and social theorist Michel Foucault (1980:81) refers to as “subjugated knowledges,” or “blocks of historical knowledge which were present but disguised within the body of functionalist and systematizing theory and which criticism—which obviously draws upon scholarship—has been able to reveal.” In this case, the knowledges of other motives behind Orlando’s policy changes have been disguised within the functionalist and systematizing “evidenced-based” policy discourse. Instead of only recording official reasons, Foucault (1980:83) argues that anthropologists should “entertain the claims to attention of local,

discontinuous, disqualified, illegitimate knowledges against the claims of a unitary body of theory” which attempts to subjugate them (Foucault 1980:83) Now that I have explored potential reasons why Orlando switched to Housing First, I will examine their plans and strategies to make homelessness “rare, brief, and one time.”

### **Making Homelessness “Rare, Brief, and One Time”**

Many communities’ Ten Year Plans were not showing positive results, and many observers were also criticizing these plans for not being specific enough, and for having an unrealistic goal of completely ending homelessness. Thus, the new trend is to not have an official “Ten Year Plan” and instead to have the goal of making homelessness a “rare, brief, and non-recurring experience,” or as Orlando policymakers say, “rare, brief, and one time.” But how will this plan actually work?

First, the plan will promote the Housing First approach. As opposed to Housing Ready approaches, discussed earlier, Housing First removes barriers that traditionally kept homeless persons from qualifying for housing in transitional housing programs. For example, Housing First programs typically do not require a homeless person to be employed or sober before entering, since it is recognized that some chronically homeless persons might never meet these barriers. Next, homeless persons are split up into chronically homeless and episodically homeless. The City of Orlando is specifically working to end chronic homelessness, the recommended path of which is Permanent Supportive Housing. This housing will provide the client with a permanent case manager. According to Dana, the city will then pay 70% of the unit’s rent, while the formerly homeless person will pay the other 30%. Since in order to qualify as chronically

homeless a person must have a documented disability, the formerly homeless persons will likely be able to pay for this 30% with their SSDI. In contrast to transitional housing, which usually ends after a certain period of time, according to Dana, the city will always pay this portion of their rent. Also, according to Dana, in order to find the most vulnerable chronically homeless individuals to be housed first, homeless persons will be recruited for placement into PSH through the Homeless Registry System. Persons registered as homeless by service agencies will be given a rating called a VI-SPDAT, which refers to a person's ranking of their vulnerability for potential dying on the street. This ranking is considered necessary since units of housing for PSH are limited. As HSN works to find more units, homeless persons are triaged onto a waiting list. According to Tim, as of February 1<sup>st</sup> 2016, Orlando had housed 35 of the proposed 100 chronically homeless persons in this manner. Besides this method, Orlando also plans to use Section 8 vouchers, and housing choice vouchers provided by the Orlando Public Housing Authority to help subsidize units for homeless persons in need of PSH. However, since the availability of affordable units for PSH is very low, the City of Orlando has also contracted out to a developer to build an affordable housing apartment development. However, in compliance with the Olmstead Decision,<sup>5</sup> only 20% of the units can be dedicated to PSH, and the remainder will be affordable housing.

At the same time, Orange County is working to “end” family homelessness. The Housing First method associated with this goal is Rapid Rehousing (CFCH 2015a). Similar to PSH, HSN will also find units to be used for Rapid Rehousing, and placement of families will be based on a system called “coordinated entry.” In coordinated entry, families, defined as parents and children

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<sup>5</sup> The Olmstead Decision is a Supreme Court case that states that individuals with mental disabilities have the right to live in communities, rather than institutions. This means that Orlando cannot build a development specifically for homeless individuals with disabilities.

(CFCH 2015a), have different paths they can take. The first priority for all families is preventing their homelessness in the first place such as through keeping them in their home or quickly finding them a new place while providing rental assistance. If a family does become homeless, they are then moved to temporary shelter until they can be placed in a new home, or if the family has greater needs, they will be placed in PSH. While HSN is in charge of finding units, Orange County will also be building an affordable housing development similar to the City of Orlando's plans.

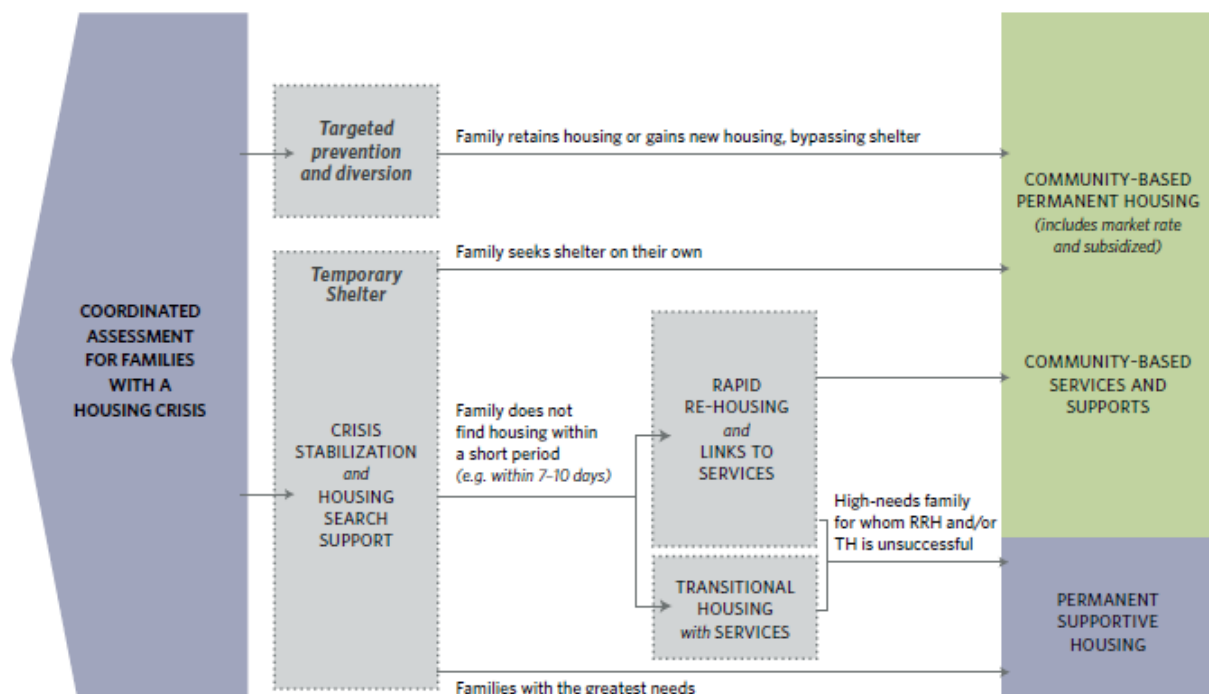


Figure 1: Coordinated Entry Flow Chart (USICH 2015)

In order for non-profits in the area's CoC to get involved, HSN is also working on so-called "capacity building," which involves training non-profit case managers how to input high quality data into HMIS so that they have better data for their HUD application and can receive



more money. This also involves teaching current transitional housing facilities ways in which they can switch to using a Housing First model, such as through removing barriers to entry.

Meanwhile, CFCH strategizes through finding public and private resources to add to current resources. For example, they were able to convince the Florida Hospital to donate \$7 million to the fund, which according to Dana will be used to pay for case managers, since the city's money is only allocated towards rental assistance.

All policymakers have admitted that switching to Housing First is a slow process, since a lot of the infrastructure, such as sufficient HMIS training to take full advantage of HUD funds and availability of affordable housing units, was not previously present and will have to be built. While I argue that Housing First is an improvement over transitional housing, in the next section I will examine weaknesses and limitations of Orlando and Orange County's plans, and of Housing First in general.

## **Plan Limitations**

One of the biggest limitations of the area's plans, is the availability of affordable housing units. According to CFCH's report, HUD's 2014 Fair Market Rent for the Orlando-Kissimmee Metropolitan area is "\$697/month for a studio, \$825/month for a one-bedroom and \$983/month for a two-bedroom apartment" (CFCH 2014:10). In order to designate a unit for PSH or in order to use housing vouchers, the unit must be at or below the designated Fair Market Rent. However, as Dana has mentioned, there are not many units available at Fair Market Rent. In order to encourage units to be listed at Fair Market Rent, the city or county generally has to put an "RFP" bid contract for developers to build them. However, the building process takes a very long time.

Currently the city and county are both planning on building an affordable housing development. The city already has a contractor and location, but Dana says the project will not “break ground” until November of this year, and will likely take another year to finish. Yet, these two buildings are still not likely to provide all of the PSH, Rapid Rehousing, and affordable housing units necessary to effectively “end” homelessness, at least as far as the operationalized definition is concerned.

Another issue is that Central Florida does not really have an official plan document other than the plan specifically for ending Veteran homelessness. CFCH has released reports that recommend what the State, Counties, and City of Orlando should do to end chronic and family homelessness. However, besides the fact that the city, county, and CoC has said that they are following these reports, and that the Mayor has committed to housing 100 homeless persons, there is no official “10 Year Plan to End Homelessness” that the area can be held accountable to. While these types of plans may have been criticized for creating unrealistic expectations, not having an official plan to end chronic or family homelessness raises questions of how the public will be able to hold the city, county, or CoC accountable in the future. When Orlando succeeds in housing 100 chronically homeless persons, and Orange County makes some progress in reducing family homelessness, there is no official plan showing that they are committed to continuing to try to completely end homelessness by any specific time.

In general, while Housing First appears to be more promising than transitional housing towards reducing homelessness, it is still a way around political change. For example, rather than making sure all full time jobs or SSI/SSDI payments provide income that is equivalent to a “living wage,” or regulating the housing market to make sure there is more affordable housing available, Housing First allows policymakers to keep the status quo while also making sure that

homeless persons are off the street. Businesses will still be able to pay minimum and low-wage wages, on which employees cannot afford their own housing. Meanwhile the county or city would be subsidizing these employees' rents so that businesses can continue to not pay them enough. This is similar to the way in which Walmart reportedly encourages their employees to apply for food stamps, rather than paying them enough to be able to afford to live without government assistance. Further, it is not likely that cities and counties can or would be willing to subsidize the rent of all minimum wage employees so that they can reasonably afford housing. Again, according to the ALICE study (United Way 2014), an individual has to make \$9.32 an hour in order to barely afford housing, and in the case of an emergency financial situation, they will likely end up homeless. CFCH (2015b:6) reports that "a Florida resident who works 40 hours per week, 52 weeks per year, would need to earn \$19.39 per hour to afford a 2-bedroom apartment at Fair Market Rent." Florida minimum wage is \$8.02 per hour. Thus, Housing First alone does not solve the issues that make up the root causes of homelessness. So while the city and county will be able to house some of the most vulnerable homeless persons, many individuals and families will still have difficulty maintaining housing and will continue to experience episodic homelessness. Meanwhile, the city and county can justify the approach through references to "evidenced-based best practices."

Overall, I believe that Housing First is a better approach than transitional housing and/or criminalizing or medicalizing homelessness. However, Housing First falls short in addressing the root causes of homelessness which affect low-income individuals and families at a rate that the city and county cannot house through PSH or Rapid Rehousing. However, since most episodically homeless persons are not as visible as the most vulnerable chronically homeless, the

question that remains is, would the city and county governments take further steps to address these causes when upscale “economic development” is their main concern?

## CONCLUSIONS

In conclusions, the “vertical slice” approach (Nader 1972) was useful in order to show strategies affecting homelessness from multiple levels and perspectives. This research shows that homeless persons themselves, staff at non-profit organizations, and policymakers, all strategize to resolve homelessness in their own ways. Comparing across multiple levels has also shown how strategies intersect, or affect each other, as opposed to being isolated to a particular group or level. This research has also demonstrated structural and social causes of homelessness that have affected participants, and how discourse has contributed to the hegemony of neoliberal ideology of “self-responsibility” that affects the strategies of all three groups and hinders collective solutions and working towards structural change. Orlando, specifically, has been an enlightening case study, considering the extent of homelessness in Central Florida and the area’s recent policy shift towards the Housing First approach by policymakers and non-profits in the CoC.

One of the significant findings of this research that underscores the perpetuation of homelessness is that it is difficult for people living on fixed incomes, such as SSI/SSDI, to afford housing, since monthly payments are low and housing prices are not affordable enough. Moreover, many of the programs designed to help people with this issue do not provide real solutions. One such program, Section 8 housing, can subsidize rent for this population. However, it takes years of waiting to get into the Section 8 program. If homeless persons do get in, they may not be able to find housing at “fair market rate,” a requirement of the program, or be able to find a landlord that will accept a Section 8 tenant, since poor and homeless persons are often criminalized and often have records that include multiple evictions due to not being able to afford housing on their own. Similarly, it will be difficult for the City of Orlando and Orange County, through HSN, to find enough units at “fair market rate” to be used for PSH and rapid

rehousing. Hope Helps has also seen low fixed incomes as a significant issue, expressing that their food pantry can help people with limited income through supplying them with food so that they can spend their money on rent or bills instead. Case managers at Hope Helps can also help people on fixed incomes through teaching better budgeting skills. These services are not actual solutions that address the root causes of their clients' homelessness, however, they may be able to reduce homelessness in individual cases.

Another finding that emerged in this research is that while interviewees often saw their own causes of homelessness as due to economic or other unfortunate circumstances, many thought that *other* people were homeless due to individual, or a diversity of individual reasons, reflecting both diversity and individualized discourses. Since many interviewees did not believe that others were homeless for similar reasons to them, there was a lack of realized common ground and a shared sense of interest, which hindered their ability to collectivize in order to support each other, form protests, or work towards policy change.

Further, while homeless persons do not necessarily blame themselves for their homelessness, many do believe that it is still their own responsibility to get themselves back into a home, and do not blame policies that have helped lead to their homelessness nor those that make it more difficult for them to get back into a home, such as lack of a living wage, affordable housing, and/or a sufficient social safety net. Thus, even becoming homeless was not enough to break the lens of neoliberal ideology, through which participants viewed life. This research suggests that another potential reason why homeless persons do not realize their common ground or collectivize, is the neoliberal rhetoric that pits poor persons against each other in competition for assistance services and jobs. This rhetoric is used to cover up cuts in services and policies

that contribute to unemployment through instead blaming immigrants, minorities, and other poor persons described as “greedy,” for taking services they “do not need” or “do not deserve.”

Hope Helps staff and the policymakers I talked to also repeated neoliberal discourse and perpetuated it through their services and policies. While Hope Helps staff had good intentions and believed that many of their clients may become homeless due to a crisis such as the loss of a job or a large unexpected expense, they did not question policy related to lack of government safety net. Instead, they often focused on helping homeless or low-income persons through helping them find a job, a better paying job, or helping them budget their money better. In his research on homeless shelters in Michigan, Lyon-Callo (2000a) had similar findings in that staff felt that the best and only way they could help homeless persons was through helping them “fix themselves” (Lyon-Callo 2000a). Due to the hegemony of neoliberal ideology, perhaps staff felt that this was the only way they could help as well.

While Hope Helps’s services may be useful to homeless persons, they often perpetuate the idea that it is the individual’s responsibility to find a job that can support them, or to be able to budget their very limited income better—an often unrealistic expectation when the monthly earnings are simply insufficient to cover the basic needs. Lyon-Callo (2000a) found similar discourses of self responsibility in the context of medicalization, arguing that staff encouraged homeless persons to “self-blame” and “self-govern,” or place the responsibility to work on themselves to better their own situations. While participants in my research did not necessarily “self-blame,” instead recognizing economic circumstances related to their homelessness, many still felt they were responsible for getting themselves back into housing. This discourse of self-responsibility importantly represents homeless persons’ feelings of agency, that they have the ability to better their own lives and are not just passive receivers of assistance services. However,

discourses of self-responsibility reinforce neoliberalism through redirecting responsibility for providing assistance away from the government and onto individuals who become responsible for helping themselves.

Similarly, while policymakers in Orlando are beginning to realize that criminalization and transitional housing do not work to reduce homelessness, and have pledged a significant amount of their resources towards reducing homelessness, their current approach is still much in line with neoliberalism. One of the reasons that policymakers report supporting the Housing First model in Orlando is that it will end up costing the community less money. Rather than discussing the moral, political, and social justice aspects of assisting homeless persons, they often discuss the “numbers” related to Housing First, such as the amount of money saved or the percentage of people who stay in housing, as if the “neutral” numbers speak for themselves. This is in line with the neoliberal idea of the free market as a fair, neutral force, as well as a measure of presumed success with regard to all problems, including social ones.

However, while it appears “neutral” the idea of Housing First is actually highly political, since it supports the current political system by working with its status quo and around it. Housing First allows policymakers to get homeless persons off of the streets and into housing without fighting for increased wages or regulating the housing market. Instead, the approach calls for subsidizing the rent of participants and providing increased services around housing for individuals with the highest needs. However, this approach is short-sighted and limited in reach: while it helps the people that they are able to house, subsidizing rents allows either their employers or Social Security to continue to pay too low of an amount to live on. Further, since the minimum wage in Florida, as well as many other states, is below the wage reported as necessary to afford housing, theoretically everyone on minimum wage may end up needing



Housing First assistance if the situation does not improve. However, I am not sure any local governments or the federal government would be willing to subsidize the rents of everyone whose wages fall below being able to afford housing.

Thus, many of the strategies employed at Hope Helps and other non-profits, and by policymakers through the support of Housing First, can be considered “buffering” behavior. Anthropologist Nancy L Nelson (2008), in the context of New Mexico’s switch to Medicaid Managed Care, describes how people in health care worked around the system in order to help patients, acting as a buffer to make the system appear to work. She compares this to economic development, and the ways in which “foreign” models are negotiated and contested by institutions and people to make them fit within current models and agendas. She argues that “the pervasive buffering behavior on behalf of patients when the system was not functioning as planned ultimately made it appear to function as planned” which reinforced the power structures (Nelson 2008:116). Similarly, services such as food pantries and Housing First that help people who do not earn enough money to live on essentially buffer neoliberalism, making the system somewhat appear to work even though it is not working for the majority of the population. Nelson (2008:116) also recognized that buffering behavior is “most often not done with overt political intentions.” Similarly, I know that Hope Helps staff have the best intentions in helping clients, and do not do so with the purpose of perpetuating neoliberalism. However, Nelson (2008) argues that buffering still reinforces the system through appearing to conform/agree with the system, and making it appear to work while it is not. Thus, while non-profits and policymakers may be providing needed assistance, this assistance also allows a system that is harmful to homeless and low-income persons to be reproduced. While they should not necessarily stop providing assistance, services should be accompanied with advocacy for

meaningful policy changes and efforts to hold policy makers accountable for the results, or lack of results, of their plans.

For example, the City of Orlando should be working to change laws related to the criminalization of homelessness, such as banning camping in public spaces. A representative from the Mayor's office explained that the city instead focused on "sensitizing" the police force to the goals of Housing First and the costs of arresting homeless persons for these ordinances, reasoning that the city has to balance the goals of Housing First with the concerns of business leaders and "citizens." However, changing these ordinances can be an important point of advocacy for homeless persons, since these ordinances regard them as nuisances or criminals rather than as people or fellow citizens that just currently have nowhere else to go.

The fact that the city has not changed these ordinances provides some insight into their reasons for finally supporting Housing First. As discussed earlier, Orlando released its plan to end homelessness in 2008, eight years after the first plan, and five years after USICH urged cities to do so. Additionally, Housing First still did not gain traction until 2013. City and County officials reason that the change occurred when the new CFCH CEO was able to show substantive data that Housing First would work, and were further encouraged by HUD's switch to funding only Housing First as opposed to transitional housing. However, Housing First has been around for over 20 years and produced data that showed its success by at least 2000 (NAEH 2000). Further, HUD had already been supporting Housing First, especially since the release of the Opening Doors Federal plan to end homelessness released in 2010. Thus, unofficial narratives that suggest that Orlando government began supporting Housing First in order to support economic development, specifically the new Dr. Phillips Center and following upscale hotels, likely have a semblance of truth. Keeping criminalization ordinances in place makes sense in this

context, since until Orlando can house all homeless persons, or even if they are never able to, these ordinances will still allow homeless persons to be forced to move out of public spaces. Another counter-narrative posits that Andrae Bailey, the new CEO of CFCH was so convincingly passionate about homeless persons in his meeting with Mayor Dyer, that Mayor Dyer was convinced to become a “champion of the homeless,” soon followed by other politicians and leaders. While there are likely other reasons, Andrae’s ability to use discourse related to “best practices” and “evidenced-based” policymaking, as well as his presence as a leader, likely did contribute to the ability of the non-profit CFCH to command more political force than the former “non-entity” commission ran by former CEO Ray Larson.

Analysis of HUD’s funding documents, as well as statements from interviewees and participant observation at CoC meetings, demonstrate that HUD’s financial support of Housing First over Housing Ready approaches did indeed help convince Orlando, Orange County, and the CoC to begin pushing for Housing First. This was likely HUD’s goal in order to support USICH’s (2010) Opening Doors plan, since while many providers have been hesitant to switch to Housing First, most non-profit organizations must follow the same trends as the funding they use. However, some non-profits can work around government requirements for funding through using private funding instead. Hope Helps, for example, uses private donations and grant money to raise the majority of its budget, and purposefully avoids applying for government money in order to be able to provide services in the way they feel is best.

However, private donations can come with restrictions as well. Narratives of staff members at Hope Helps demonstrate that funds that are given with stipulations can hinder the efficiency of their use. For example, donations and grants that can only go to the programs themselves and not other expenses, can cause non-profits to struggle to pay expenses such as the

salaries of their employees, which are necessary for running the organization. This stipulation is likely made in order to prevent non-profits from hiring more staff than necessary or from paying higher-up employees too much money, since this would reduce the amount going towards the programs and towards the population they should be serving. For example, such misuse of the funds was evident when the CFCH spent the majority of their funding on former CEO Larson's salary. While non-profits should be held accountable for the ways in which they spend their money, paying staff members and other expenses not directly related to programs are still necessary parts of running non-profit organizations, and thus should not be completely excluded from grants and donations.

Overall though, when discussing Hope Helps's funding strategies, it is useful to consider Schuller's (2012) ethnographic comparison of two different NGOs following an earthquake in Haiti. One of the NGOs, Sove Lavi, received the majority of their funding from one major donor, set goals and plans from the top-down, and was not very effective in delivering aid to those suffering from the earthquake. Fanm Tet Ansanm, on the other hand, was a grassroots organization, founded from the bottom-up, got their funding from a variety of donors, was closer to the population that they were serving, and was more successful in providing aid. Since Sove Lavi got the majority of their funding from one major donor, they did not have much autonomy from their donor agency, which sometimes had conflicting goals. Fanm Tet Ansanm, on the other hand, was able to have more autonomy due to the diversity of its funders, and was thus able to receive feedback from the population they served and adjust their services how they saw fit. Similarly, Hope Helps was built on the discovery of a need and the founder's ability and desire to meet that need, and thus was founded in a grassroots fashion from the bottom-up. Since they have a diversity of private funds, Hope Helps is not beholden to the goals of a single donor

agency. While donor agency goals are not necessarily all bad, they are often designed by people very distanced from the issue and the population the organization is trying to serve. Thus, they can hinder an organizations ability to provide aid in a way that they know is better. With diversified private funding, Hope Helps is able to continue to discover new needs and adjust or provide new services if needed.

This concept also relates to Easterly's (2006) theory of "planners" versus "searchers." "Planners" are distanced from the issue and plan from the top-down, while "searchers" are on the ground, searching for observed needs, and thus plan from the bottom-up, which allows them to be more successful and have closer relationships with their clients. Since Hope Helps is close to the population they serve and is able to base their services on the feedback from clients and on-the-ground case managers, the organization can be described as a "searcher." On the other hand, policymakers in Orlando and Orange County are more similar to "planners," since they are more distanced from the homeless persons they are attempting to help and are setting policies from the top-down without the first-hand knowledge of this population.

Also similar to Easterly's (2006) "planners," policymakers often make lofty goals, such as in their 10 Year Plans to End Homelessness. 10 Year Plans to End Homelessness began in the early 2000s, around the time that the Millennium Development Goals<sup>6</sup> were set by the United Nations, which similarly were lofty goals related to ending poverty and suffering in developing nations. Recently, however, it seems that governments have learned not to set such grand goals with vague plans of how to reach them. Public administration efforts now encourage the use of action steps and operationalized goals, for example, as incorporated in the new Opening Doors plan (2010). After the swift failure of Orlando's own Ten2End plan, Orlando now has no official

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<sup>6</sup>See <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>

timeline for “ending” all homelessness, and it is unlikely that CFCH, Orlando, or the County will set one. This is likely due to backlash that ensues when policymakers do not reach lofty stated goals in their specified amount of time. However, not stating a timeline for ending homelessness can also keep the public from being able to hold policymakers accountable for results.

Schuller and Easterly both conduct research in international development. It is interesting that research associated with “developing nations” such as Haiti are so easily applied in the context of the United States, which is considered a “developed nation” and holds a lot of power in the realm of international development. We are considered different and separate from “developing nations,” yet our poor similarly rely on NGOs. Additionally, the concepts of “institutionalization” and “professionalization,” used by anthropologist Arturo Escobar (1999:385) in order to explain development’s hegemonic spread throughout underdeveloped countries, is also useful to this research. In many ways, professionalization and institutionalization also explain how non-profits such as Hope Helps and policymakers are both influenced by, and reproduce hegemonic neoliberal ideology. Professionalization refers to the “process that brings the third world into the politics of expert knowledge and western science in general” in which “certain forms of knowledge are given the status of truth” (Escobar 1999:385). Similarly, professionalization of non-profit workers as “experts” on homelessness, often through using the medicalized discourse, brings homelessness into the world of expert knowledge, which holds more authoritative force than the knowledge of homeless persons themselves. According to Escobar (1999:385), professionalization made it possible for issues of politics and cultural relativism in development to be recast “in terms of the apparently more neutral realm of science.” Similarly, discourse surrounding “evidenced based” policymaking turns policymakers

into professionals, and allows policies to be taken out of their political and cultural context to be recast as neutral, as if the scientific evidence “speaks for itself.”

Similarly, since at Hope Helps, and other non-profits, case managers are usually professionalized, degree-holding social workers that are “experts” in their fields, their status as experts gives their knowledge and methods the status of “truth.” Due to this authoritative power, when non-profit organizations use particular discourses to describe homeless persons, these discourses are often quickly taken up by the public, and even homeless persons themselves. While their professionalism makes their work seem politically neutral, it is not. For example, non-profits may reproduce individualizing and medicalizing discourses that support neoliberalism through redirecting responsibility for issues such as homelessness, and further, they may act as “buffers” to make the system appear like it is working (Nelson 2008). Non-profits are also institutions, which serve as points of authority in networks of power. Overall, Escobar (1999:386) argues that, in development, “the forms of power that have appeared act not so much by repression but by normalization; not by ignorance but by controlled knowledge; not by humanitarian concern but by the bureaucratization of social action.” Through non-profits, as professional institutions, and “evidenced based” policymaking, knowledge is controlled, social action is bureaucratized and made to appear politically neutral, and the system of neoliberalism is normalized.

Overall, this research shows the importance of a “vertical slice” approach through showing the ways in which strategies at three different levels intersect and affect each other. For example, both service providers and policymakers base their strategies on how they define homeless persons. At the same time, homeless persons navigate services and laws in order to form their coping strategies and to try to get back into housing. Policymakers may contract out to

non-profits, and/or sit on their advisory boards. At the same time, non-profits may also act as advocacy and advising organizations that lead the plans that City, County, and State government follows. Strategies at different levels may also purposefully divert from each other or remain parallel. For example, while service providers and policymakers sometimes work together, other times non-profits may use private funding to avoid regulations for government policies. Other times, politicians may ignore non-profits that they do not feel meet their standards or ways of doing things. Similarly, when the stipulations put on assistance services hinder homeless persons' coping strategies, homeless persons may avoid, or "opt out" of those programs (Young 2014). While homeless persons are affected by the services offered and policies created, they are not passive, and actively choose resources based on their decisions and needs. Ultimately, neoliberal discourse affects strategies at all three levels, and is in turn reproduced by those strategies. However, neoliberalism may not always remain unquestioned. The rise of the Living Wage and 99 Percent Movements, and the increasingly popular campaign of Presidential candidate Bernie Sanders, are examples that show that social, political, and economic change may be on its way.

## **Significance**

Results of this research have the potential to improve the ways in which social services for homeless and low income persons are structured, and to inform policy relevant to homeless persons in Florida. Further, this research cautions against the use of discourses such as medicalization, individualization, and criminalization, which contribute to the de-politicization of homelessness. Specifically, this research aims to re-politicize the issue of homelessness as an



urgent problem in need of social and political action through the deconstruction of neoliberal discourse used at three different levels: by policymakers, staff at a local non-profit, and homeless persons themselves. As anthropologist Donna Goldstein (2001:238) suggests, “it appears to be all but impossible at the moment to call for large-scale ‘safety-net’ social programs, because the discursive space for such a discussion has largely closed.” She reasons that we need to deconstruct neoliberal discourse in order to see how it has become so successfully embedded as common-sense, and how we can effectively suggest alternatives. Thus, I urge other researchers to continue to deconstruct neoliberal discourse in order to shed light on the processes through which neoliberalization becomes common sense, allowing us and the public to be more critical of these policies. Applied Anthropology in particular can help through spreading this type of research to the public. I plan to at least present my findings to Hope Helps staff, and if possible, to share them with policymakers in Orlando as well.

This research is also significant in that it took place during a time in which Orlando’s policies on homelessness were beginning to change from criminalization and Housing Ready to Housing First. Thus, I was able to explore the motivations of city leaders and aspects that led to this change. This can contribute to urban anthropological theory which often explores the motivations and strategies of city leaders, and how those strategies affect people living in those cities. It is also an important case study in other ways. Since Orlando is now implementing Federal recommendations, as laid out in the Opening Doors plan (2010), it also shows the influence that the federal government’s policies have on the rest of the United States, and how policies and strategies can be influenced through funding, such as through HUD’s competitive grants. Further, in contrast to policymakers in Orlando and others that support Housing First and think that this is *the* solution to homelessness, this research offers the alternative view, that while

it is an improvement, it is ultimately another buffer that does not lead to meaningful political changes without incorporating advocacy.

### **Reflections on “Studying Up”**

“Studying up,” a concept developed by anthropologist Laura Nadar (1972) to describe studying people in power as opposed to the vulnerable and the marginalized, has proved challenging as I pursued research with policy makers. It was difficult to contact politicians and get them to meet with me. I originally contacted the City and County Mayors, and all six District Commissioners from Orlando. None of them were able to meet with me, and instead suggested someone else (or did not respond at all). Instead of talking to the Mayors, I was able to speak with a representative from each of their offices who worked in the area of homelessness. Most of the District Commissioners who responded referred me to Andrae Bailey, since they felt he was leading the city’s plans. Andrae Bailey agreed to meet with me, however, he was still not easy to talk to.

When I emailed Andrae to ask him to participate in my research, he agreed to meet with me, but requested that I read all of the reports CFCH published first, and then re-contact his assistant. After reading the reports over the weekend, I set up an appointment to talk to Andrae through his assistant for the following week. The weekend before the meeting, I heard Andrae speak at the Central Florida Poverty Conference, and introduced myself. He told me, again, to set up an appointment. I looked at Dr. Amy Donley, who was also attending the conference, with a horrified look on my face. How did he not realize I was already scheduled to meet with him on Monday morning? I arrived Monday wearing dress pants and a blouse, a little under-dressed

considering Andrae was wearing a designer suit. He was dressed much differently than at the poverty conference, to which he wore skinny jeans, converse, and a sweater-vest (he said he thought it was the “cool” conference). We walked into the conference room where another man was sitting, in a slightly less impressive suit. He introduced himself as the project manager. After giving me a very commanding speech on how there is nothing wrong with homeless people, just our society, Andrae interrogated me about who I knew/who had sent me to speak to him. I was so intimidated that I almost cried. He then exited the room, telling me to speak to the project manager instead, and to come back to speak to him when I prepared questions. However, I had already prepared questions. In fact, I was holding them in my hands. I was confused and surprised that he seemed to believe I did not prepare. Perhaps he just wanted to get out of speaking to me? Either way, I decided that I would much rather interview the project manager.

Similar to my experience with Andrae, the representatives at the Mayors’ offices did not take me as seriously as I would have hoped. However, they were at least nicer and more helpful. After I had gained informed consent and turned the audio recorder on, both immediately began discussing the plans, rather than allowing me to ask my questions. In order to be polite, I would try to wait them out, resulting in ten or more straight minutes of them talking. They even defined homelessness for me, in case I did not already know. However, I greatly appreciated them taking the time to talk to me. They had good intentions and were very helpful when I was able to start my questions. As someone who is just there to conduct research and listen during this phase of my work, it was not a problem that I was not viewed as an expert, or as the person in charge in the situation. However, I image it will be much more difficult to share my findings with policymakers, and to have them take my findings seriously, since it was clear that they saw themselves as “experts.” While they have experience working on policy related to homelessness,

I would argue that I am just a different kind of expert, however these challenging interactions suggest to me that policy makers work according to their own agendas and might have limited interest in sources of knowledge that could potentially destabilize their plans..

In comparison, I never had these types of issues when interviewing persons experiencing homelessness at Hope Helps. I certainly was never referred to their assistant, or told to come back later after doing more research, and I felt more at ease when talking to them. As Nadar (1972) argues, it is easier for anthropologists to work with more vulnerable populations, since the anthropologist holds more power in those situations. However, she argues that as anthropologists we need to “study up” as well as “down” in order to understand aspects of power in society. She also argues that we should “study sideways,” with populations that are on the same power level as us. I felt this way about talking to the staff at Hope Helps. For example, Allison, and one of the former case managers who left during this research to go to school for her Social Work MA, were fellow UCF graduates. I felt they better understood what a thesis was and the purpose of my research.

Overall, while “studying up” was difficult and stressful at times, I felt that it was worth my efforts. I do not think that my research would have been as strong if it did not include the perspectives and strategies of policymakers. On the same note, I do not think my research would have been as strong without studying “down” and “sideways” as well.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

Limitations of this study include time, since it was difficult to conduct in-depth, ethnographic research with all three groups of participants as part of a two year Master’s

program. However, previous research that focused on one of the groups (homeless persons) was able to supplement the data and findings. It was also difficult to get appointments to speak with politicians, as discussed in the reflections section below.

Future research could potentially compare Orlando and other cities in terms of policy and policymakers' strategies. Since Orlando began their plans to "end" homelessness relatively late, other cities are further along in their plans and are either experiencing success or realizing that their plan has not worked. When I talked with Dr. Matthew Marr, a Sociologist who researches homelessness in Miami, he observed that Miami had tried Housing First, but that business leaders were not happy with the results, and were once again trying to pass policies and ordinances that criminalized the homeless. Comparing Orlando to other cities will help explore potential paths Orlando may take, and potential pitfalls Orlando may experience as policymakers and business leaders make plans and react to results. It would also be useful to conduct further ethnographic research with homeless persons in Orlando and/or other cities in order to get their perspectives on the Housing First model.

Future research could also focus on specific categories of persons experiencing homelessness, such as women, or persons living on fixed income, who may have different experiences and strategies in dealing with homelessness. Moreover, it could examine divorce, and how it contributes to homelessness, especially among women and children. This type of research is under-explored in anthropological literature, despite the fact that it has long been realized that homelessness affects a wide variety of people.

Finally, it would be interesting to see how homelessness changes when a new President is elected. Under the Affordable Care Act, the Barack Obama Administration was able to get record numbers of low-income persons registered for health care. Lack of health care can

contribute to homelessness, since low-income persons often do not have savings in case of medical emergencies. The Obama administration also released the Opening Doors plan, in which Obama pledged to end veteran homelessness, and to plan to end chronic, family, and youth homelessness in the future. Bernie Sanders is proposing further structural changes, such as implementing a “living wage,” a single-payer health care for all, and even free college education. If everyone had health care, people would get health care they need before it becomes an emergency, or at least not end up bankrupt if they do have a medical issue. Free college would also help Americans that typically would not be able to go to college for financial reasons to have the potential to earn a degree, and thus, have a better earning potential. If persons were ensured a living wage, everyone would be able to afford basic housing and expenses. A candidate such as Donald Trump, however, would likely promote very different policies, such as further cutting assistance services. Either way, homelessness could be greatly affected under a new President, and it would be useful to study how these policy changes are experienced on the ground.

## **APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL LETTER**



University of Central Florida Institutional Review Board  
Office of Research & Commercialization  
12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501  
Orlando, Florida 32826-3246  
Telephone: 407-823-2901 or 407-882-2276  
[www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html](http://www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html)

## Approval of Exempt Human Research

From: **UCF Institutional Review Board #1**  
**FWA00000351, IRB00001138**

To: **Rebecca L. Young and Co-PIs: Joanna Zofia Mishtal & Ty S. Matejowsky**

Date: **June 08, 2015**

Dear Researcher:

On 06/08/2015, the IRB approved the following activity as human participant research that is exempt from regulation:

Type of Review:	Exempt Determination
Project Title:	Strategies, Policies, and Agency: Addressing Homelessness in Orlando Florida
Investigator:	Rebecca L. Young
IRB Number:	SBE-15-11289
Funding Agency:	
Grant Title:	
Research ID:	N/A

This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these changes affect the exempt status of the human research, please contact the IRB. When you have completed your research, please submit a Study Closure request in iRIS so that IRB records will be accurate.

In the conduct of this research, you are responsible to follow the requirements of the [Investigator Manual](#).

On behalf of Sophia Dziegielewski, Ph.D., L.C.S.W., UCF IRB Chair, this letter is signed by:

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kanielle Chay" followed by a horizontal line.

IRB Coordinator



**APPENDIX B: RECRUITMENT SURVEY TO DETERMINE ELIGIBILITY  
OF HOMELESS PERSONS AT HOPE HELPS**

## Living Situations Survey at Hope Helps - 2015

**Researcher:** Rebecca Young,  
University of Central Florida  
**Appointment time:** \_\_\_\_\_

Hello, my name is Rebecca Young. I am a graduate student at UCF's Department of Anthropology. I am looking for research participants that qualify for my research study about homelessness. Would you mind answering four short questions to see if you qualify? If you are eligible, it is then your decision to participate in this study.

1. Have you ever stayed in a shelter for one or more nights?

☐ Yes

☐ No

2. Have you ever lived in a hotel for one or more nights?

☐ Yes

☐ No

3. Have you ever had to stay in someone else's home (such as friend, acquaintance, or relative) due to financial reasons or eviction? (Also known as doubling-up).

☐ Yes

☐ No

4. Have you ever spent the night in your car or in a public space?

☐ Yes

☐ No

**Eligible:** It looks like you are eligible to participate in my research study. If you are interested I can give you the full explanation of the project. Would you be interested in participating?

**Not eligible:** Unfortunately it does not look like you are eligible for this study, but thank you for your time.

## **APPENDIX C: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR HOMELESS PERSONS**

### **Semi-structured Interview Questions for Homeless Persons**

1. What assistance programs and services do you use?
2. What do you think caused you to be without a home?
3. Do you think others are homeless for similar reasons?
4. Have you ever been asked what the cause of your homelessness was in an interview to receive services? What did you say and why?
  - a. If you said you believed it was problems with yourself as an individual, is it what you truly believed at the time, or did you choose to go along with their view in order to receive the service?
5. Have you ever gone to a program that taught you new skills or tried to fix something with yourself as an individual? Why?
6. Do you attend self-help programs in order to receive necessary services?
7. What do you believe is the best thing you can do to get back into a home?
8. What are some services that you think would help people get back into a home or help prevent people from becoming homeless?
9. What were some things that made it difficult for you to get back into a home?
10. Who do you think should take on the responsibility of helping homelessness in the area?

## **APPENDIX D: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR HOPE HELPS STAFF**

### **Semi-structured Interview Questions for Hope Helps Staff**

1. What do you think are the causes of homelessness?
2. What do you think are the major causes here in Orlando/Oviedo, Florida?
3. Do the people you work with have similar views?
4. What types of services does Hope Helps offer to reduce or prevent homelessness?
5. What does your job at Hope Helps involve?
6. How did you prepare for this job? Was there any training involved?
7. How does Hope Helps make decisions on what services to offer?
8. What are some other services that you think are needed to help homelessness?
9. Who do you think is best equipped to reduce the issue of homelessness? (For example:  
non-profit organizations, the homeless themselves, the city/state/federal government)
10. Who do you think should take on the responsibility of helping the homeless?

\*Questions were adjusted depending on what the person's job was and what department or organization they were working for.

## **APPENDIX E: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR POLICYMAKERS**

### **Semi-structured Interview Questions for Policymakers**

1. What does your job here involve?
2. How did you prepare for this job? What is your background?
3. What do you think are the causes of homelessness?
4. What do you think are the major causes here in Orlando/Orange County, Florida?
5. What are Orlando/Orange County's plans to reduce homelessness?
6. Out of those plans, what has already been accomplished so far and what is currently being worked on?
7. Does anyone else here work on policies related to homelessness?
8. What other agencies or non-profits do you work closely with? (for example, CFCH, HSN, United Way, the County/City)
9. Who do you think is best equipped to reduce the issue of homelessness? (For example: non-profit organizations, the homeless themselves, the city/state/federal government)
10. Who do you think should take on the responsibility of helping the homeless?

\*Questions were adjusted depending on what the person's job was and what department or organization they were working for.



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