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Down But Not Out: The Role of Narrative Identity and Resources in Transitioning Through Homelessness

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Abstract

This manuscript describes a qualitative evaluation of a particular non-profit organization that helps veterans experiencing homelessness. We propose that individuals experiencing homelessness need to modify their narrative identity (through restorying), and that four resource domains (economic, material, interpersonal and individual) are needed to help individuals experiencing homelessness to re-identify themselves. To this end, the studied non-profit organization provides a good model for providing individualized services that cover the full range of required resources as well as the opportunity to modify individual narratives.

Introduction

In the United States, 3.5 million people experience homelessness, an indication of its seriousness in society (Nino, Loya, & Cuevas, 2010). Around the world, more than 100 million are experiencing homelessness (Kothari, 2007). Many researchers have examined this social problem, and, while this research does not seek to repeat these studies, it does examine what barriers individuals face when transitioning through homelessness to a more stable living setting. To answer this question, this research focuses on the role of resources in defining a new identity for people experiencing homelessness. Homelessness is more than a state of being simply solved with the provision of a roof. It is a deep narrative identity that might be extremely difficult to escape. Narrative identities are crucial for social development and strength (Boje, 2008). Identities are created by more than experiences and memories, but also include owned or available resources (Fitzpatrick, 2005). For example, helping someone create a new narrative identity of a musician would be difficult to do without an

instrument. Similarly, it is difficult to transition someone out of homelessness without access to basic resources. The resources possessed enable a person to deal with problems in their lives (Furlong & Cartmel, 1997). Consequently, anything causing a depletion of resources would be seen as a source of stress (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007), and even a chronic depletion of resources could even lead to disastrous, out-of-character outbursts (Demerouti et al., 2001; Leiter, 1993). Homeless identity is affiliated with a stereotyped view by people who see homelessness as a character flaw (Hocking & Lawrence, 2000), and might be perpetuated with the chronic lack of resources or access to resources that most find easily accessible (McNaughton, 2008). Thus, ownership and availability of resources is crucial to transitioning from one narrative identity to another.

We had the opportunity to observe a homeless veteran transition center, a part of a non-profit organization helping those who are homeless or nearly homeless, for four months. During this time we observed and participated in weekly meetings with residents and maintained frequent formal and informal communication via phone calls, emails and personal conversations with residents and management. We also had the opportunity to interview four veterans who have experienced/are experiencing homelessness, the director of the non-profit organization, and the manager of the veteran transition center. The story of this veteran transition center success is well known throughout the United States for its provision of an economical and extremely effective solution to homelessness. Hundreds have utilized its resources and have successfully transitioned to a stable living condition. Its success was even presented New York Times (Rojas, 2015). This study is an attempt to research and document why when so many ideas and models are failing, that this organization has been successful in engaging the homelessness experience. Thus, we organized our paper in the following manner: first, a brief overview of the importance of narrative identity. This will be followed by a discussion on the importance of resources and how resources play a role in the narrative identity transitions. This is followed by our methods, findings, discussion and conclusion.

Narrative Identity and Transitioning Narrative Identities

Homelessness is an identity that people either avoid or embrace (McNaughton, 2008). Therefore, identity plays a critical role in the study of homeless people, whereby homelessness has been compared to personal inadequacy, fecklessness, and laziness (McNaughton, 2008). Stigmatized as a failed self—as lacking a role or social status, or being an eyesore to others (McNaughton, 2008)—people who experience homelessness are recognized with identities related to their homelessness, and homelessness slowly becomes an important part of that person's identity (Parsell, 2011). People experiencing homelessness are aware of stigmas attached to them. This stigmatized identity has a deep effect on their identity, which would otherwise be considered “normal” (McNaughton, 2008).

A simple general definition of identity is the “understanding of ourselves and others” (Taylor, 2006, p.95). In other words, identities are essentially different meanings that are assigned to an individual by himself/herself or by others (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010). These meanings could be based upon social roles (i.e., social identity) of the individual or upon his or her personal characteristics (i.e., personal identity) (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010). Therefore, identity is a multifaceted construct in society and, as a result, changes over time, yet, despite such a multifaceted construction, one's identity also manifests itself within the individual as a personal identity (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010).

The concept of narrative identity, one of the three approaches McAdams (1996) suggested for the study of persons, can help one to avoid wrongfully stereotyping people via social categories to which they may belong (May, 2004). Self-narratives bridge the gap among the various identities claimed by society and one's internal sense of identity (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010), and can help in restorying the identity of a person in homelessness. Restorying is based on telling a new story to get away from a dominant old story (Boje, 2008). Life stories can express the identity of the storyteller; however, a life story and one's identity should be never be conflated (May, 2004). McAdam (1999) defined identity as “the internalized and evolving story that results from a person's selective appropriation of past, present and future” (p. 486). Ricoeur (1988) believed that identity is shaped through narrating one's life, creating a sense of unity in the person. Narratives are “speech-acts that brings into existence of social reality that did not exist before their utterance” (Ford & Ford, 1995, p. 544), expressing a particular point of view of the storyteller (Burke, 1945). Given these definitions, a narrative identity refers to an “internal, dynamic life story that an individual constructs to make a sense of his or her life” (Bauer, McAdams, & Pals, 2008, p. 81). This is definitely true for veterans experiencing homelessness. Homeless veterans in transitional living are likely victims of a double-edged “master narrative” (Lyotard, 1979). On one side, they are the veritable “hero of the ages,” and soldiers are openly supported in social media, public transportation hubs, billboards, television, radio, and movies. The other side is not so upbeat. Some veterans return home from missions in need of counseling to deal with the stress symptoms associated with “soldiering” overseas. They experience difficulty with transitioning from active military to a much more

sedentary life style in their sundry social networks like family, friendship circles, and school (Danish & Antonides, 2009; Makin-Byrd, Gifford, McCutcheon, & Glynn 2011).

Narrative could also create a purpose in life (Singer, 2004), and act as a motivator. Life events and experiences might seem to be incomprehensible and unrelated; therefore, people use narratives and make stories of their lives to create a sense of unity (McAdams, 1985). This story-making happens in everyday life when a person communicates with other people, shares experiences with them, and sees their reactions and feedback. Furthermore, without having a chain of related experiences in life, an individual might see life as without purpose. Such narrative construction is not a static approach, but a dynamic one that changes day by day (Bauer et al., 2008). Thus, a narrative identity “provides a subjective sense of self-continuity as it symbolically integrates the events of lived experience in the plot of the story a person tells” (Ezzy, 1998, p. 239).

Individuals must experience new narratives as they strive to redefine their identities in new, possibly more favorably ways. Navigating such paths can be stressful and difficult, as new futures often require discarding old and familiar paths. Linking past stories with our present stories give us a sense of who we are today and help us plot a path for who we want to be tomorrow (Ricoeur, 1991a, 1991b). By storytelling with those who have experienced similar situations as themselves, people experiencing homelessness find the chance to share their stories, make sense of the confusion, and avoid stigmas. Storytelling helps people to come up with a shared meaning and purpose of an event (Zare, 2016). The concept of narrative identity helps to avoid viewing or judging people and identifying them just through social categories (May, 2004).

The idea of shifting someone’s identity would require far more than simple adjustments as such a shift changes their ontological makeup and restorying their past adjusts their present to prepare them for the future (Boje, 2001; McNaughton, 2008). According to Kenyon and Randall (1997), restorying is a “literary process” of recapitulating one’s ontological perceptions of oneself in novel, different ways. This definition of restorying emphasizes one of its goals: to foster a new self-conception through the invention of new stories. The transitioning identities are a far more complex problem that often requires a complex network of resources (Fitzpatrick, 2005). The problem few have pondered is the tremendous amount of resources needed as one transitions from one identity to another. Our consumer society places a great amount of value on economic and material resources as a way of creating or strengthening an identity, while a successful transition process should start from creating a higher sense of self and belonging (Vandemark, 2007).

Resources

The idea of resources as valuable commodities to be held and preserved has long been researched. Organizations are able to employ them as a competitive advantage (Barney, 2001; Wernerfelt, 1995), and employees use them to meet their demands (Bakker, Demerouti, De Boer, & Schaufeli, 2003; Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001). We identify resources in much the same way as Fitzpatrick (2005). In his work with individuals experiencing homelessness, Fitzpatrick identified four resource categories that are required for transitioning identities and maintaining a balanced life. First, economic resources refer to structures such as education and employment through which a balanced life can be gained. Second, material resources refer to items or services and how to access them. Third, interpersonal resources refer to the social network of friends, families, colleagues, and acquaintances that a person possesses. Fourth, individual resources include the personal abilities and actions taken to cope with stressful situations including mental illness, drug misuse, and human capital. We believe that a combination of these resources—minus the detrimental use of certain individual resources (e.g., alcohol abuse)—will have the greatest effect on helping a person overcome homelessness.

Several studies (e.g., Bauman, 1998) have examined providing material or economic resources to individuals experiencing homelessness, a common first place to look to help. Such studies have determined that providing housing to individuals experiencing homelessness is highly unlikely to help them remain off the streets (Franklin, 1999). In fact, focusing on the provision of a single source of resources, such as housing, could lead to negative results (Fitzpatrick, 2000; Hutson, 1999) as other important factors and resources might be neglected. Few studies have looked at providing interpersonal or individual resources, and even fewer studies have examined what it might take to provide an abundance of all four resources to assisting individuals working to transition to a new and hopefully better narrative identity.

Case Study

We gathered data from a non-profit organization helping those that are homeless or nearly homeless. Fifteen employees and several volunteers help individuals experiencing homelessness. One of their key highlights in their program is their transition facility for homeless veterans. The executive director of the non-profit organization invited us to participate in classes with the veterans at their veteran transition facility. More than forty veterans are in the process of transitioning out

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of homelessness. We were instructed to be patient with the residents as those that have experienced/are experiencing homelessness tend to be reserved and guarded. Therefore, our initial purpose of the classes was to build relationships of trust. We were allowed to engage with the other participants in the classes, but we were not privy to the additional residents in the facility. Five researchers met with the veterans a minimum of once a week for sixty minutes. Classes were semi-structured with a loosely followed agenda that was abandoned if other topics were found to be more interesting. The purpose of the classes was to share stories and engage our pasts in the present to better direct our futures. Some classes focused on meditating and story sharing while others included special presentations of interest. We took turns in the class, and everyone was provided an opportunity to share. One particularly powerful class included show-and-tell where each participant brought an item that was of significant personal value.

Our exploratory case study began with us as co-facilitators. Initial attendance ranged between three and six participant residents, but grew to between six and ten as we persisted in our classes with them. Of these, six were regulars while others would visit irregularly. In total, more than twenty residents of transition center attended our classes at least once. After only a few weeks, we became active participants in the class activities as well. A typical class began with a welcome and brief introduction. This was followed by a small message from the veteran transition center manager, and sometimes a poem from one of the regular participants. From there, the classes varied. Topics were agreed upon in the previous class so the presenters had one week to prepare. We all took turns leading the class, sharing topics that were important to us, and listening to others as they shared. Many of the sessions were recorded with the permission of all the participants. The five researchers took notes and met weekly to discuss what we had observed. Our observations and research discussions would help guide our observations and participation in the next meetings.

Data Collection

A phenomenological approach was used given the goals of the study since this approach could help us to have a better understanding about homelessness experience through the way homelessness has been perceived by veterans experiencing homelessness. The phenomenological methods used for this paper include participants' observations, conversations, and interviews that took place between February 2014 and May 2014. Sessions and interviews were voice-recorded with participants' permission and then transcribed.

Participants shared their stories and discussed their view as a part of several restorying sessions held in the housing premises, particularly, in the "day room" in which the housing residents received their transitional training. We were assured by both the participants and the management staff that the stories shared in the "day room" were typical of most of the residents in the facility. The day room was actually seen as a "step" in the transition out of homelessness. Many new transition center residents started as very private individuals, spending most of their time in their new apartments. After time and slowly testing their new residential safe boundaries, residents would eventually end up visiting the "day room" for conversations, snacks, DVD rentals and other benefits. Most of those participating with us were more experienced transition center residents though new residents frequented the meetings as well.

Another goal of the research, besides storytelling and sharing experience, was to conduct interviews with the more experienced transition center residents to see how they were able to successfully transition from homelessness to stable living. When we found they had enough trust in us to share their stories without hesitation, we began soliciting the idea of one-on-one interviews. The trust relationship increased participants' capability to remember the homelessness experience (Witzel, 2000). Even though we guaranteed the anonymity of interviews, not all of them were ready to share, as they were afraid they could be tracked by telling their stories. Four male veterans volunteered to share their stories. The director of the non-profit organization and the manager of transition center volunteered as well. The four veterans spoke willingly about their life stories and about the significant events in leading to their entrance into and their exit from homelessness. The manager and direction spoke of their experience with hundreds of homeless in the city. We realize the importance of reaching saturation (Morse, 1995). Six interviews would hardly be considered saturation in most cases. In this case, however, we do feel like the six interviews combined with the four months of observations, notes as participant observers and the contact we made with approximately half of the residents gives us a solid foundation for our discoveries as it relates resources and transitioning through the narrative identity process.

Results

In conducting our interviews and in subsequent analysis, we discovered that every veteran had similar stories regarding homelessness. Each veteran had his own resource needs to find his way out of homelessness. Because of this individuality, we decided to show specific examples of what a veteran lacked and how the transition center provides that resource. Each

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section discusses the needs of a few individuals experiencing homelessness and what the transition center provided these individuals. In this way, we also utilized the spirit of Kristeva's (1967) intertextuality to show how the participants' stories from the past currently interact to form a story of the future. We also show how the various resources within the present study overlap as once-separate texts begin to interact as a grand narrative, only to be attenuated as Muir's (1991) microhistories point to the various marginalizations perpetuated by the grand narrative. Our findings reveal that all four areas of resources—economic, interpersonal, material and individual—can be applied to each veteran differently. In the following section, we provide examples of veterans' stories/statements that are related to discussion of each resource provided in the transitional support organization.

Economic Resources

Economic resources either provide or create the path leading to financial benefits. For many homeless, the lack of economic resources hinders the narrative identity transition out of homelessness, but it is not just lacking the financial means that prevents the transition. For many, it is navigating the processes to gain such financial means that causes the hindrances. Many individuals experiencing homelessness were very good at acquiring money before being homeless; they now need some help getting back to their successful selves.

Veteran 1: We had a very comfortable living. Her and I put together, we were in the six-figure range. Had a nice home, nice dogs, step kids, my kids visit all the time. Beautiful land and everything, so two cars, trucks, two motorcycles. We had a good life.

It looks like the veteran 1 has been productive in his life, contributing to the society, living American Dream and had valuable assets before becoming homeless. This goes against what many believe about individuals experiencing homelessness in America: they do not know how to work (Culhane, 2010). In fact, "working" and "money" were two very commonly used words throughout the interviews. Every person interviewed mentioned something about work, whether it was about a job they had in the past, looking for work while homeless, or needing a job to transition out of transitional housing. As one of our interviewees put it:

Veteran 2: I had a vision of homelessness where you're sitting' there, huddling, and you got this blanket over you and you're uncomfortable.

It seems that this veteran had a previous misconceptions of homelessness that is different from his current experience. That is interesting because it supports the claim that people might have a general stereotyping about homelessness and never think it might happen to them and they might experience it one day. In fact, many people experiencing homelessness take care of themselves quite well, and some even have jobs while they're homeless.

Veteran 2: I abandoned the rescue mission and fell in with this crew of guys. And like I said we'd go to work or we'd find extra work or some of them even had full time jobs so there was plenty of money, especially when you're not paying rent, you know, so it was all good. So we all lived in a drainage tunnel that had been built in 1950.

In a consumer-based economy, simply having money can do a lot for a person's ontological security and narrative identity. Economic resources thus play important roles in narrative identities as they help the person identify himself/herself again. However, economic resources are more than just money; they are also the means to facilitate the path to get money. This requires navigating the unsure waters of the government, acquiring the right documents, filling out and understanding the right paperwork, and applying for disability which means going to many appointments, interviews and checkups. The studied non-profit organization provides a host of economic resources. For many, the transition center is a very valuable training ground for gathering economic resources. While providing a host of economic resources, the studied non-profit organization also understands that they cannot stop there. To fully respond to each individual's needs, the studied non-profit organization needs to have a way to prepare everyone to enter the workforce:

Veteran 1: I've got to find a place, and renew my CDL. I should have done it years ago. I was a little upset because I was a truck driver when she was sick and so I missed a lot of her radiations and chemo, and a couple of her surgeries, so I blamed trucking for not being there for her and doing the things.

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The Manager: There are people who I'm really working with intensively so they can get a job. There are people that need medical help ... there are people that define their own productivity as getting more access to their benefits. There are people who define their productivity as being able to go back to school.

Material Resources

The most obvious lack of material resources for homeless is the lack of a structured, permanent shelter. This arose as a major topic in all the interviews and observations concerning the transition through homelessness.

Veteran 2: The homeless (people) are looking for... for housing.... I want to go get a place to stay.

Certainly, the lack of a shelter is a big cause of homelessness, but the structure is not the only requirement when exiting from homelessness. Other material resources (e.g., clothing, haircuts, bus passes, laundry facilities, water, food, medical help, birth certificates and other important documentation) should also be considered. Housing is just one of the material resources provided by the studied non-profit organization. Through a network of donations and connections, all needed material resources are provided through the organization.

The Director: Specifically clients [homeless veterans] will come in and access resources like shelter from the wind and the rain, the heat...bathrooms, water, drinking fountains. We have mail services ... phone services, internet and many of them will sign in to a case manager to obtain an ID, birth certificate, bus passes... showers, clothing, they can do their laundry on site, obtain donations that we have.... we are also trained in what landlords out there that have housing that's affordable, where to refer them. There are also those enrolled for Medicaid.

The Manager: We ... help veterans with housing and direct services: bus passes, medications, services like that...They [homeless veterans] will typically need showers, clothing, they can do their laundry on site.

Without these resources, those experiencing homelessness might experience social deprivation or difficulty in finding a place to live. The transition center has experienced social workers on hand to help acquire all of these resources. They are especially trained to be sensitive to the needs of currently homeless individuals. Being homeless often leads to isolationism (McNaughton, 2008). Navigating the system of applying for benefits, filling out paperwork, making the connections, etc. can be a daunting task for someone not used to the structure or to being accepted by a larger society. As one man put it:

Veteran 2: They [social workers] facilitate, hold your hand through the process so that you...they pay your deposit and if you have the means to pay the rent then you will be able to secure housing here.

Material resources are often included in the narrative web of stories that a person weaves throughout his or her life. In order to exit a traumatic situation, one must feel that he or she is exiting that situation by mirroring those in the new identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Providing material resources that help those looking to transition identities is crucial in helping them feel that they are succeeding in the transition.

Interpersonal Resources

Interpersonal resources, or the interaction and strength of their social networks, were seen as the primary resource both for helping people through homelessness and as one of the primary factors in causing people to stay homeless (McNaughton, 2008). The word-frequency analysis identified "people" as the most commonly used in all of the interviews and observation showing the importance of interpersonal resources in transitioning. The individuals experiencing homelessness are definitely aware of the people around them, but the usage of the word "people" reflected actors in their own world, playing roles in the narratives of the individuals experiencing homelessness and shaping their narrative identities for better or worse (Ricoeur, 1991a, 1991b) These homeless men were very aware of their position in the world and how the people viewed them. They were also very aware of the people who were there as positive resources and even pointed out that being able to

talk to people was a major resource in transitioning through homelessness. The interpersonal resources are extremely important in creating a new narrative for oneself. It enables them to look around and see others like them.

Veteran 3: When you are homeless, you kind of ignore people, you don't really associate with other people. So, for them [homeless veterans] to come in here [meetings] and talk and treated with respect, that's make their day and that's bring them closer to back to society.

Formerly homeless people felt that structure programs and training courses were very important for them. However, these features were helpful not due to the acquisition of new skills, but because they were a source for socialization (McNaughton, 2008). People experiencing homelessness experience a decrease in self-esteem and try to avoid socializing with other people. Hence, disaffiliation is a main reason of homelessness (Main, 1998). The studied non-profit organization provides interpersonal opportunities for participants in a couple of different ways. At the transition center, we participated in group sessions and listened as the formerly homeless veterans shared stories, poems, jokes and favorite books and just enjoyed each other's company:

Veteran 3: I am getting more social, friendlier, I am talking with people more. I am more open there is several years ... I did not even come out of my house or did not socialize with people forgot about even going to church and if I did got to church, I sat in the vary back of the room with a quick escape if somebody talked to me.

As people seek a new identity, one of the first things they do is associate themselves with those already possessing that identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). The studied non-profit organization provides safe, clean environments for individuals experiencing homelessness to share among each other, but also with those who have made the transition through homelessness and with volunteers who are willing to help the individuals experiencing homelessness continue their transition. The new actors in the stories of the individuals experiencing homelessness help add color and create new, different stories to their webs of narratives already created helping in the transition from the current narrative identity to the next. The transition center director paints the picture beautifully:

The Manager: it's a restorying thing ...it is more colorful the more actors you have in here.... I can see the staff and the people they meet in the camp and in places like this really give them all of these different faces and colors to add to their own stories.

According to Bloom and Kessler (1994), supportive relationships can act as a resource for individuals who have experienced stressful situations. Support from family and friends help people to cope with stressful life situations (Lin, Woelfel, & Light, 1985). Such social support has several aspects including emotional support, appraisal support, informational support and instrumental support (House, 1981; Schaeffer, Coyne, & Lazarus, 1981). Emotional support is the "perceived availability of thoughtful caring individuals with whom to share one's innermost thoughts and feelings" (Bloom & Kessler, 1994, p.118). This support could come from family/friend or related organization such as the transition center. The lack of a stable support system was found to harm the transition process from street back to home (Dworsky & Courtney, 2009). While family is often perceived as a source of strength, not everyone has family to rely upon. Families might not possess the skills or objectivity to deal with specific challenges. Furthermore, some families refuse to help homeless members because of their intolerance of the individual's sometimes problematic behavior (Goodman, 1991). This can be a major lack of interpersonal resources and has frequently been found to be a contributing cause to homelessness (Crane & Warnes, 2006; Mallett, Rosenthal & Keys, 2005; Martijn & Sharpe, 2006). Many studies have emphasized the importance of support systems such as family and friends as engaging in relationships and drawing upon them to boost the feelings of trust and of self-worth (Thompson et al., 2004).

Researcher: You didn't have any family to support you, to help you?

Veteran 3: Oh, I'm not close to my family. That's why I'm in a social program to child protect services because we were very mistreat, my father was a very mean person. There is no family for me to call. My brothers doing their own things, embarrass them, I didn't want call them.

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The homeless often experience extreme levels of social isolation and loneliness (Lemos, 2000). One of those reasons could be traumatic experience like losing a loved one (Buhrich, Hodder & Teesson, 2000). The bonds formed between loved ones are powerful and the sudden loss of a loved one often leaves some feeling alone. We found this to be a catalyst of at least three occurrences of homelessness. Here are two examples:

Veteran 1: It is very much like losing something ... a part of your extension of yourself... I would race to get home from work. I hated going to work. I'd rather be with her [my wife] than with anybody else. She was my best friend.

Veteran 3: I was in a car accident, and my fiancé died in my arms on the side of the road, I didn't handle that well, and when I got out of hospital instead of going back to work... I just locked myself in a motel room and start drinking.

The transition center also provides a location for a gathering. For many, this is the first time where homeless can gather in a safe environment and share feelings and experiences without feelings of ridicule. The transition center administration has seen some very positive outcomes from the participants in transition center. Thus, providing interpersonal resources is extremely important as the director of the studied non-profit organization expressed:

The Director: the community here is essentially built around the idea of having group work and class work and things like that ... we have... a more personal space where it's just like one-on-one interaction where we could work together on these goals... We continue to have the great conversations every Tuesday so they have a place to talk, umm, and hash out ideas and problems. Come up with solutions. And again, they become social. They take on responsibilities, so those are the first steps to getting back to the bigger society, knowing how to respond to your neighbors, the landlord, paying your rent.

Individual Resources

We noticed “military” and “veteran” are among the most frequently used words in the text. These were naturally brought up as most of our questions did not mention military experience; however, as a significant part of their narrative identities, these were mentioned frequently as they told their stories. Further investigation showed that no one mentioned how the military, or being a veteran contributed to their experience of homelessness. A few did mention how having served in the military was an individual resource to help them to survive while homeless, and even helped them to get out of homelessness. Among these reasons is training which provide individuals with skills that can be used later in civilian life. However, it raises this question that “what experience in military can be used in civilian life?” That is the question that one of the veterans answered that. He said in military they train you to survive in tough situations. These tough situations could be in civilian life but in a different shape. Therefore, the military experience helps veterans to cope with hard circumstances in their life by applying the training they received during their service in military.

Veteran 3: The military teaches you 'drive on', what happens you get up and keep going because somebody shoot you ... That's what they taught me and helped me to get out of it [homelessness] because military taught me no matter what happens in life, you gotta move on.

Veteran 4: I personally felt a great affinity for the discipline and the dedication of the teamwork in the military. I loved that part. I liked working with a group and uh and I liked everything about that aspect of it.

Veteran 2: having like been in the Army I knew how to like make a latrine, make a hole, dig a trench, you know, and ummm, take care of those necessities without having a just a filthy area.

Although military experience is valuable individual resource that helps veterans to survive and transition from homelessness, the experience of homelessness is a unique and unpleasant experience which is always with people who have experienced homelessness. Thinking about unpleasant homeless experience and the reason that led to homelessness keeps the mind busy and prevents people from focusing on daily life and plans for the future. Helping individuals focus on the present and the future provides relief from the past, acceptance in the present, and hope in the future. As with all the other

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resources, personal resources can only grow by starting first with the person's willingness to grow. The studied non-profit organization provides homeless people with meditation classes to help them free their mind. It also provides classes to help them quit addiction to drugs/alcohol.

Another internal resource is motivation. Homeless people need the drive to come out of a homelessness situation. Without such motivation, all the activities at the transition center to help homeless people to transition from their homeless identity to 'normal' (Bauman, 1998) would be ineffective. As discussed, narratives can create a purpose and motivation in life. Restorying sessions provide those transitioning out of homelessness at the transition center with the opportunity of listening to successful stories of people who were homeless at one time, but could successfully transition from that situation to normal life. Such successful stories offer motivation that they could come out of homeless situation if they want and get help. It is important to realize that we do not know the level of people's internal resources. This is the only resource that really doesn't have prevalent external clues. We learned that traumatic events happen to most everyone, but some are unable to handle it as others do. It is important to be ready to assist those that show the motivation to learn and grow to the level they feel comfortable obtaining.

Veteran 3: I was in a car accident, and my fiancé died in my arms on the side of the road, I didn't handle that well, and when I got out of hospital instead of going back to work, I had money because I owned my own business, I just locked myself in a motel room and start drinking, I blame God for her being dead but I didn't understand why he didn't take her away from me, started drinking and well, you know I started running out of money, that's what lead me to being homeless ... I'm doing great now, I've got a girlfriend, nice car, I'm in school, I got a great job with [names removed], I sit with bunch of graduate students, so my story is the story of how you can change the way of your life... Honestly when I told my story other day, I told for people here. A success story, someone who used to be homeless, then made it, out of it. That's the only reason I told my story.

The studied non-profit organization has great team of program leads to help their clients continue to transition their identities by adding positive narratives as frequently as the person it motivated to receive them. The transition center manager shared with us some of her initial plans to help everyone at the transition center and shared how her plans changed when she realized that everyone's motivation was different. We cannot expect everyone's motivation to immediately be back to fully employed and on their own as soon as possible, but it is important that some sort of motivation does exist. As one of the formerly homeless put it:

Researcher: I want your opinion as a veteran who were homeless at some time and get out of that situation.

Veteran 3: They [homeless people] need motivation and maybe talking to people like you, motivate them ... they need to have a drive, a will, a motivation. If they don't, it doesn't matter what we do.

Discussion and Implications

The research identifies vital resources during the transition through homelessness, verifying Fitzpatrick's (2005) supposition and furthering his research by showing how such resources could be applied and the impact they have on the individuals experiencing homelessness. The present study identifies ways that an organization can help with this goal. Every person is an individual case, entering into organizational care while already having some resources and perhaps needing a few others. It is important that the organization be prepared to meet the individual needs of those individuals, understanding that, given the participants' consumer society, economic and material resources are not the only resources required to make a successful transition. In fact, based on our time as participant observers, we feel that McNaughton's (2008) study on homeless in the United Kingdom is verified in our conclusion that interpersonal and individual resources seem to be the most important in assisting in narrative identity transition.

The topics discussed in this paper are not only for the homeless, but rather for anyone who has traversed through a traumatic narrative and is hoping to transition to a new and better one. Not everyone that experiences traumatic experiences ends up homeless because homelessness might be an extreme circumstance, but there are many people who still struggle to re-identify themselves through narrative. There are many consequences for traumatic incidents such as depression, attempts

to commit suicide, poor performance in education or job, family problems and divorce, involvement in deviant behaviors in society, and a host of others. All of these consequences could be prevented if sufficient resources are provided for those people who face post-trauma problems. For example, providing sufficient resources for an employee who is facing an incident in his/her life not only helps the employee to return to normal life, but it helps the organization prevent poor performance of its employee. Organizations need to do a better job in providing such resources for people before they get in trouble. There is a saying that “prevention is better than a cure”, and from an economic perspective, it is also cheaper.

Conclusion

In point of fact, a lack of resources is not a reason for being homeless, but it is certainly among the major facilitators in being homeless. In other words, if a person who encounters a traumatic incident has enough resources, he or she will be able to overcome that incident and prevent becoming homeless. Otherwise, if he or she has a lack of resources, that incident can certainly lead to homelessness. We propose that effective interventions for homeless need to address four resource domains (economic, material, interpersonal and individual) and that change comes through modifying the individual’s narrative identity (through restorying). “Homeless identity” is attached with stigmas, and the people experiencing homelessness are aware of these stigmas. Society might perceive a person experiencing homelessness as lazy, an eyesore, mentally ill, alcoholic or drug addict. Therefore, those who are homeless try to avoid socializing with other people. This isolation will have an effect on their self-confidence and self-esteem, limiting their capacity to network and to return to a normal lifestyle.

The present study also emphasizes the role of non-profit organizations in providing all four of these resources for homeless people and in helping them to transition to normal life. Such organizations not only provide a place for people experiencing homelessness to live during their transitional phase to normal life, but they also provide other resources for them to re-build their identity and to return to a more normal life. The main goal of such non-profit organizations is to help homeless veterans transition back to ‘normal’ life by providing them with the necessary resources. However, many organizations focus on housing as a solution to homelessness. By providing individualized resources that focus on social, material, economic and personal needs, the studied non-profit organization offers consultations and helps them build themselves internally and externally, a far more effective process in building a person up permanently from the inside out than merely providing shelter. It also should be noted that providing these resources could help homeless people in their transitional phase only when they have sufficient motivation to exit homelessness. These motivations could be internal or external. Internal motivations, such as shedding the shame of possessing the homeless identity, are stronger than external motivations such as finding a place to live. Accordingly, providing individual resources for homeless, giving them consultations, and helping them build themselves internally is more important than only providing them with a place to live.

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