

**UNDERSTANDING THE PERCEIVED INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL CAPITAL BY  
HOMELESS PERSONS IN NEWTON, KANSAS**

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

This is an exploratory study investigating: *How those currently experiencing homelessness perceive the influence of bonding and bridging social capital on their future successful residential reintegration.* It is an important consideration in understanding the emotional and intellectual circumstances of residents entering a rural shelter environment, and discovering what types of social capital residents need and have access to.

This research used phenomenography to gain access to the thoughts and opinions of residents of the Harvey County Homeless Shelter, coupled with grounded theory to discover emergent themes in those transcripts. The study topic was explored through direct inquiry of people experiencing homelessness in Newton, Kansas. Through an interview process, five areas of inquiry were studied: demographics, residential history, social connections, community connections, and social connectedness and community belonging. Using grounded theory methodology, the responses were coded and the writing of rich memos determined and explored themes.

Emergent themes; an analysis of their relevancy to the study topic; an examination of the areas the study topic satisfied; and, identification of areas where it failed to satisfy are topics of exploration concerning the findings. Community courtesy, individual personality, healthy relationships, and social connections over address were the four emergent themes to come from the five categories of inquiry. In general, resident's perceptions of social capital were important to their future efforts toward residential reintegration, although in slightly different ways than the study topic assumed.

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## **Dedication**

I humbly dedicate my efforts to earn my Master's Degree to Ronda Ann Rodman-Limón, my mother and cheerleader. Sunrises are your favorite things; not only for of their beauty, but because they remind us that each day brings a new opportunity for adventure, work, and learning. These three things you have taught me throughout my life and these three things I still carry with me. Thank you for always pointing me toward the horizon each morning and encouraging me to move forward. I am grateful.

# **Chapter 1 – Introduction**

## **Overview of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to understand the role social capital plays in the future success of individual efforts to regain residential independence in Newton, Kansas. The best way to do this was to ask the question of people living the experience of homelessness and relay their thoughts and opinions related to social capital. Through interviews with current residents of the Harvey County Homeless Shelter (HCHS), this study gathered those opinions using a methodology called phenomenography to glean themes that reflect their positions regarding the question. Phenomenography seeks to fully and authentically document the experiences of others without relying on the perspective of the researcher to analyze the merits of those experiences. The more thorough the interview, the more rich the experience become. Eventually, themes emerge that become obvious and it is the responsibility of the researcher to add context, giving the narrative its own voice.

The thoughts and opinions of the residents of the HCHS were gathered using a one-on-one interview that was conversational in tone. The interview guide was designed using five categories: demographics, residential history, social connections, community connections, and social relationships and community connectivity. Among these five categories, thirty-five questions were asked giving each resident the opportunity to give their perspectives as they have experienced homelessness.

Finally, the interviews were coded and memos were written concerning the findings in a grounded theory approach. Emergent themes were identified and the strongest of those themes were used to gauge the success of the study topic.

## **Prologue**

In 2012, as a professional architect in private practice, I had the occasion to represent the Harvey County Homeless Shelter in their effort to design and build a new facility in Newton, Kansas. I accepted the commission thinking the job would be both fulfilling and relatively simple to produce. Living and working in this city, I already knew many of the executive board members of the shelter and was able to easily fit into their strategy work-sessions and counsel them on planning and development strategies. Having just stepped out of the seven-year role of

chairman, I understood the inner workings of the Newton City Commission and more importantly, the Newton/North Newton Area Planning Commission.

The shelter was bequeathed a sum of money toward the purchase of a piece of property that was of adequate size and appropriate zoning in a more residential setting, which was entirely different than the downtown setting they inhabited at that time, and we went to work designing for the purpose of creating fund-raising materials.

At the same time, news of the sale of the property was introduced to the historic residential neighborhood that abutted the property and a group of concerned residents from the neighborhood approached the City Commission seeking relief from the shelter development in such close proximity to their homes. The city waded into the question in an effort to maintain peace in the community. For the next year, I spent hours in front of the City Commission and Planning Commission defending the shelter's right to develop the property and responding to the neighbors' seemingly false assumptions about the typical fears associated with homeless populations: an increase in crime, a decrease in property values, an increase in vagrancy and loitering, and decrease in child safety, and a fear that a new homeless shelter would draw people from outside the community rather than help those inside the community.

These were the circumstances that drew me to study the lives of those who suffer homelessness in Newton, Kansas and in other rural, small cities and how they and the shelters that serve them, cope with residential reintegration. That was the basis for this research. From that experience I explored the following topic: *How those currently experiencing homelessness perceive the influence of bonding and bridging social capital on their future successful residential reintegration.*

## **First Efforts**

Upon initial investigation, I found the majority of studies involving people experiencing homeless involve tangible, treatable symptoms, causes, or pathologies that contribute to their circumstances. In my initial literature review, I found far fewer research examples exploring the intangible role of social capital and how it affects bonding and bridging relationships and community connectivity that is omnipresent in each circumstance. Whether in urban or rural settings, experienced by men or women, influenced by pathology or lifestyle, or viewed through the lens of race, ethnicity, or financial wherewithal, this study sought to understand how those

currently experiencing homelessness perceive the influence of bonding and bridging social capital on their future successful residential reintegration in Newton, Kansas.

### **Research Topic**

The research topic, *How those currently experiencing homelessness perceive the influence of bonding and bridging social capital on their future successful residential reintegration*, was explored for the purpose of understanding what type of social capital residents of the Harvey County Homeless Shelter find important in their lives and what types they were able to access. The research seeks their perspective to understand what factors influence individual bonding and bridging social capital opportunities.

### **Significance of Specific Contribution**

This research humbly hopes to contribute to the body of knowledge concerning the role of social capital in rural shelter environments and whether opportunities for bonding and bridging capital help people move out of homelessness. In my experience, small towns seem to share the same dynamic of having a focused group of residents who all know the social inner workings of their community. In terms of social dynamic, it appears on the outside this is a slightly different dynamic than that in larger urban environments, in which homelessness is often studied. This researcher thinks the body of knowledge concerning homelessness in urban environments is much more disclosed because it is easier to study residents of urban shelters. This does not appear to be the case in rural areas. Rarely do smaller, rural communities have dedicated shelters like their urban counterparts. During a preliminary investigation of the number of homeless shelter programs available in the Wichita Metropolitan Statistical Area, only three programs were found in cities larger than 10,000 in population. Yet, people must experience housing difficulties in cities of all sizes, but are largely unseen by those outside the social boundary. The homeless population tends to be more invisible in rural areas for a myriad of reasons.

Because Newton, Kansas, a community of less than 20,000 people, operates its own homeless shelter program, this research has a unique opportunity to gain new perspective on the social networks that builds capital in both the individual and the community, and how a homeless population might access that capital.

## **Limitations**

The first limitation of this research was the amount and quality of responses to the interview process. Every effort was made to engage people but participation was completely voluntary so while the researcher made every effort to be on-site for several days, and at different times of the day, that was the only opportunity for interaction.

The second limitation was the timeframe in which the interviews were conducted. These interviews were conducted during a one-week timespan in October. A different cohort with differing views could be available during different seasons or for a myriad of different reasons.

A third limitation could be the narrow focus of the questions presented. Since they were focused on a single topic with relatively little follow-up, some background information may not be available leaving some responses somewhat hollow.

Another limitation of the study is the sample taken was random and data may change according to completely random circumstances. One week, the older and more chronically homeless may inhabit the shelter; another week the shelter may be caring for families with small children; and a third week perhaps the shelter has only residents involved in a significant weather event like a tornado and have suddenly found themselves without a home. So, while the interview week was typical in terms of noticeable factors, situations in a community change.

## **Definition of Terms**

**Addiction:** Any medical or mental condition, circumstance, or behavior that is chronic, difficult to control or conquer, and has negative consequences on a person's daily life (self defined).

**Bonding Social Capital:** *Exclusive* capital built mostly for the individual and is good for *getting by* (de Souza Briggs).

**Bridging Social Capital:** *Inclusive* capital and is good for *getting ahead* (de Souza Briggs).

**Chronically Homeless:** Those persons most like the stereotypical profile of the skid-row homeless (Kuhn & Culhane).

**Those who Experience Homelessness:** An individual or family who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence (Stuart B. McKinney Act).

**Episodic Homeless:** Those who frequently shuttle in and out of homelessness, or the mediating institutions that house them (Kuhn & Culhane).

**Residents:** Anyone that is currently living in a temporary shelter facility (self defined).

**Residence:** A structure where people live. It may be owned, rented, or leased. It may be single-family, multi-family, mobile, or congregate (self defined).

**Transitionally Homeless:** Those who generally enter the shelter system for only one stay and for a short period (Kuhn & Culhane, 1998).

## Chapter 2 – Background & Literature Review

### Social Capital Defined

In his book *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, Robert Putnam studies social capital as it relates to the types and amounts of community participatory action over the past fifty years. In order to use the concept of social capital theory for his own studies, he defines it as “connections among individuals” and the “social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them” (Putnam, 2000). This study seeks to add to the larger conversation of community social capital by discovering social capital at the individual scale, knowing that inside the larger circle of community social assets rests the capital generated by each individual and the trade of *currency* that capital represents.

Claude S. Fisher notes, “Social networks are important in all our lives, often for finding jobs, more often for finding a helping hand, companionship, or a shoulder to cry on” (as quoted by Putnam, 2000). This individual experience is the type of social capital that each person uses and, what I argue, homeless persons need additional help to generate; filling their accounts for use in trading for employment opportunities, housing opportunities, and companionship.

Social capital, therefore, is further delineated into the concepts of bridging social capital and bonding social capital. Bonding social capital is *exclusive* capital, built mostly for the individual and is good for *getting by*, as described by Xavier de Souza Briggs, whereas bridging social capital is *inclusive* capital and is good for *getting ahead*. Quite simply, social networks are so important that “...our economy, our democracy, and even our health and happiness depend on adequate stocks of social capital” (Putnam, 2000, p.28).

Bhattacharyya (2004) and others note the importance of agency (freedom) and solidarity (inclusivity) when writing about social capital in community development. As homeless individuals, the concepts of freedom and inclusivity, one would think, are paramount to success in community life. To be free to direct one’s own course through steady employment earning a life-sustaining wage; securing safe, affordable, and independent shelter; and being free of health risks and unhealthy lifestyles; is what most of society strives toward. Further, to build relationships that provide inclusiveness to each person in a diverse array of memberships is also a goal. These memberships may include a congregation, an employment opportunity, a self-help group, or a bowling league. To be life-successful, a diverse network of bridging and bonding relationships are a single but important piece of the larger puzzle of self-sustainability.

This study recognizes that social capital alone cannot accomplish all the success required to overcome the problems associated with each individual circumstance. In fact, building social capital at the individual level may not be a shelter program goal in and of itself, but “like other forms of capital, social capital is believed to impact both productivity and well-being for individuals and communities and thus help people reach otherwise unattainable goals” (Irwin, 2008). For those who spend a long time experiencing homelessness, residential independence begins to feel unattainable.

Homeless shelters and homeless programs have developed and implemented a vast array of programs that help individuals with housing, health care, employment, and other key factors related to quality of life. This study is founded on the perspective that social capital should hold the same value on the scale of personal successes, as one would weigh success on any of the other programs listed.

### **Social Capital Networks**

Social exchange theory, as originally theorized by George Homans, which has its roots in economic theory, generally states that interactions and exchanges between two people are weighed as a cost/benefit analysis, similar in nature to the monetary exchange between two people (Social exchange theory, 2014). Each of us, therefore, weighs the costs and benefits associated with the contribution of time and energy related to the desires and requests of our personal relationships. Since this analysis seems important under normal social conditions, one expects life lived within the stressors of homelessness to exacerbate the bonding and bridging linkages between those experiencing homelessness and those they have existing relationships with. The need for building and the eventual use of social capital is what Nan Lin (1999) identifies as *embedded resources*. Embedded resources are those elements that social capital elevates, transforming healthy relationships into mechanisms for change within the individual.

Her first embedded resource element is *information*. The flow of information in a community takes two avenues: human and non-human. Non-human information transfer takes the tangible forms of newspapers, television, radio, and newsletters, for example. Information is presented to no one in particular and is received by everyone desiring the information. In this case, however, the human transfer of information is key to developing social capital. “Social ties located in certain strategic locations and/or hierarchical positions...can provide an individual



with useful information about opportunities and choices otherwise not available” (Lin, 1999). With bridging capital in mind, this information could take the form of educational, training, or employment opportunities.

The second embedded resource element is *influence*. With different social status positions inside a community, influence becomes a tool of power. This manifests itself in a number of ways including having someone in a person’s social network putting in a good word with an employer. Perhaps, it is as subtle as just being a part of a known social network that opens doors not normally open. In the case of homelessness, members of groups can influence the amount and type of help offered and applied.

The third embedded resource element is *social credentials*. Using the last example, being part of a group establishes a social credential for others to rely upon. These credentials give a person *standing* in a community “reflect(ing) the individual’s accessibility to resources through social networks and relations – his/her social capital” (Lin, 1999). This standing creates an account upon which to borrow and spend capital with their inclusion in the group as their collateral.

The last embedded resource is *reinforcement*. Reinforcement is the collective understanding that a person belongs to a particular cohort or network and, ultimately, the community in which they reside. “These reinforcements are essential for the maintenance of mental health and the entitlement to resources” (Lin, 1999). Entitlement to resources is the key to this last element. All members of a community are entitled to the social capital they have banked and, just as in finance, are entitled to trade on the open market of social relationships. They may even go so far as to borrow against social entitlements establishing the credit rating of reputation. Reputation building in a social setting means a person is established enough to lend social favors to, and trustworthy enough to repay social favors.

By defining embedded elements, social capital can be defined “as resources embedded in a social structure which are accessed and/or mobilized in purposive actions” (Lin, 1999). With this definition, Lin determines that social capital has elements embedded in it that are accessible to everyone to put to use in the community. In this way it is important to understand that social capital should be accessible to all and that it should be tangibly useful to individuals. That use may be the generation of an employment opportunity, the status of inclusion, or the trustworthiness of favors.

## Home as a Concept

U.S. Code Title 42, chapter 119, subchapter I, paragraph 11302, defines homelessness as “an individual or family who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence.” Many Americans suffer the stress of finding safe and adequate shelter and rural citizens are no different. Because those who experience homelessness have no fixed address, they are often perceived to live outside the social fabric of the communities in which they find themselves, even if that community has been their hometown. It is one thing to lose the ability to shelter yourself and your family, but another thing altogether to find yourself without the social support structure you once enjoyed as a housed person or family. “Homelessness is not only being without home, but more generally without place” (May, 2000). Research continues to show that social networks strengthen the psychological and emotional health of people. Yet those that find themselves homeless, also find their social support network, which is a part of the larger community social capital, may be depleted over time due to constant use.

The stressors of life without a home can lead to increased levels of depression among those that linger in homelessness for a longer period of time. “These stressors include: the extent of daily hassles encountered in a homeless life, the number of undesirable life events experienced, living on the street, and whether the individual is chronically homeless” (Irwin, et al. 2008). Because of a continual reliance on bridging and bonding social networks, some of those assets are depleted over time, like the draining of a bank account, leading to fewer and fewer opportunities for interaction and help as the relationships become potentially strained. “Like other forms of capital, social capital is believed to impact both productivity and well-being for individuals and communities and thus help people reach otherwise unattainable goals” (Irwin, 2008).

However, building, promoting, or encouraging social connections in rural communities as a strategy for strengthening the individual efforts of those that experience homelessness can be difficult to justify for individual programs. Some research indicates that social capital itself does not support the mental health of the homeless (LaGory, 1990). “If social capital were shown to function effectively among the homeless, then it would suggest to critics its capacity to serve as an asset even in the direst circumstances” (Irwin, 2008). This research, however, is interested more in the *usefulness* of social capital and social connectedness at the rural community level

with respect to homeless person's successes at reintegration into their community, rather than viewing social capital as a panacea for depression among those experiencing homelessness over extended periods of time.

When we begin to examine the idea of *home* at the individual level, we can identify those aspects of home that have nothing to do with being currently housed. Every person can identify characteristics of home. Those qualities that, as May points out in his work, are equated with a *sense* of home: "feelings of belonging, of safety and security, independence, and control over one's interactions with others..." (May, 2000). There is a cognitive disconnect in residents when they try and resolve their new circumstances using the pedagogy of their once *normal* lives. Anything that brings parts of their former lives back helps the cognitive adjustment. Social networks and social relationships are part of the normalcy that bridges the two circumstances. Which is more important, belonging to existing social networks or the act of involving oneself in new social relationships, is yet to be seen.

Another definition of homeless revolves around feelings of *homesickness*. Here, we are talking about the sentimental feelings of having lost not just the physical structure we live in, but everything else that accompanies our memories: social networks, childhood friendships, personal histories and nostalgic landmarks in town. When homeless persons travel to other cities in search of work, stability, shelter, or safety, they often lose that connection with their home community and seek to reestablish those basic hometown comforts. "Although the experience of moving to a new place once homeless may be extremely traumatic, in the longer term it is the feelings of disorientation and isolation that continue even once a person has found shelter that are often harder to cope with" (May, 2000). This is why social networks and rebuilding of social capital are important to the future recovery and success of those experiencing homelessness.

### **Depression and Homelessness**

One of the core indicators that people are destined to stay in a chronic state of homelessness is the length of time they have been homeless. The longer someone stays at a distance from the social norms of housing, employment stability, and social structures, the more chance they have of continued homelessness and economic instability in their lifetimes. This is a hallmark of chronic homelessness.

There are a number of medical and situational circumstances that lead to a life of homelessness that are not directly economic and employment related. For example, “excessive alcohol use as an adult and physical abuse during childhood were the factors most strongly related to length of time homeless” (Winkleby et al., 1992). Yet those factors were not strongly associated as a reason for entering homelessness. In Winkleby’s cross-sectional survey, “forty-eight percent of the men and 63% of the women entered homelessness with no adult medical disorders (alcohol or drug abuse or psychiatric hospitalization); and 80% of the men and 59% of the women entered homelessness with no history of adverse childhood events (placement in foster care or sexual or physical abuse)” (Winkleby et al., 1992, p. 1396). This means the majority of people entering homeless for the first time, suffered none of the pathologies and behaviors that are most commonly recognized and identified as homeless traits. Her research showed that “the prevalence of psychotic disorders was lowest in the newly homeless and increased with length of time homeless” (Winkelby, et al. 1992). Why then are the statistics trending toward illness and behavior over time?

One possible answer is the onset of depression. As we know, depression is caused and exacerbated by many factors. Those factors might include genetics, medications, life events, grief and loss, and substance abuse, for example. It can manifest at any time in a person’s life regardless of age. Depression is exhibited differently in each individual, but feelings of guilt, worthlessness, and/or helplessness along with hopelessness and pessimism are common symptoms. Others include loss of interest in activities or hobbies, persistent sad feelings, and decreased energy (Depression, 2014). Depending upon the type and severity of the depression, there are many treatments including medication, psychotherapy, cognitive behavior therapy, and interpersonal therapy.

“Events surrounding interpersonal relationships do not cause depression...but depression occurs within an interpersonal context and affects relationships and the roles of people within those relationships. By addressing interpersonal issues, interpersonal therapy for depression puts emphasis on the way symptoms are related to a person’s relationships, including family and peers” (Depression, 2014).

In the general population, whether homeless or not, an informal amount of interpersonal therapy takes place daily when individuals reach out to those networks of bridging and bonding capital that we all create in the relationships we build in the community. Those newly homeless or

homeless in new communities lose their opportunity for interpersonal therapy because of their loss of social structure.

The Latin phrase *post hoc, ergo propter hoc* means, after this, therefore because of this. Loosely, this means B happened after A, therefore A must be the cause of B. As social scientists, we know that correlation does not necessarily mean causation. Through this lens, we look at depression in the homeless population and the relationship it has with their disaffiliation from formal society. The definition of disaffiliation is a “detachment from society characterized by the absence or attenuation of the affiliative bonds that link settled persons to a network of interconnected social structures” (Caplow et al., 1968, as quoted by LaGory et al. 1990). Those interconnected social structures are the market in which they build social capital.

George Homans developed a functional model entitled social exchange theory in which the exchange, either tangible or intangible, between two individuals can be based on the value received by each and the relationship and behaviors that induce. Emerson expands on Homan’s exchange theory spotlighting the power differentiation in social structures and the role reciprocity plays in keeping that power equal during those exchanges. When individuals rely on social structures and interpersonal relationships to help weather stressors like homelessness or the circumstances accompanying homelessness, the needs of the stressed weigh heavier than the reciprocity between them can manage. The relationship becomes one-sided and “such one-sided social relationships are extremely fragile” (Emerson, 1962, as quoted by LaGory et al., 1990). As LaGory further points out, “the longer a person remains homeless, the less responsive social networks are likely to be, as resources become overtaxed” (La Gory, et al., 1990).

It is germane to this research that the strength or weakness of the human psyche and the mastery, or lack thereof, of one’s life taxes the social relationships of those involved in the stressors of homelessness. “Persons whose homelessness is recent rather than chronic and persons who are healthier are more likely to have supportive social ties” (LaGory et al., 1990). As depression plays a part in the diminishment of individual spirit and effort and is partially caused by the loss of social support, it becomes an important factor in the success of the person experiencing homelessness. The conclusion of LaGory’s work, it should be noted, is that “mastery (of one’s life) and social supports play the most significant role in mediating depressive symptoms (among the homeless),” but he goes on to note “mastery is the key more so than social support” (LaGory, et al., 1990). This means that having strong, stable, emotional control over

one's circumstances is the basis for wanting mastery of one's life. Once mastery is demonstrated to oneself, then one assumes the avenues for maintaining and building social relationships can be managed successfully.

## **Homelessness and Rural Kansas**

### *Homeless categories*

The literature defines three general types of homeless: transitional, episodic, and chronic (Kuhn & Culhane, 1998). These are divided into subgroups classified by demographics and pathology. The transitionally homeless “consists of those who generally enter the shelter system for only one stay and for a short period” (Kuhn & Culhane, 1998). This demographic tends to be younger and least likely to have pathologies or other medical problems. Most experiencing transitional homelessness are likely to be affected by a precipitating event such as a natural disaster or sudden change in home life, such as divorce or domestic violence. They may also be younger people transitioning between living with their parents or relatives and living independently, and are likely working for minimum wage or slightly above. Once they find stable financial independence, affordable housing accommodations, or resolve their personal issues, they do not typically return to homelessness.

The next classification is the episodic homeless. This population “comprise(s) those who frequently shuttle in and out of homelessness, or the mediating institutions that house them” (Kuhn & Culhane, 1998). While they are generally younger in age, they tend to suffer from pathologies, medical problems, or live alternative lifestyles that cause or allow them to be homeless. They also may have spent time in jail or in detoxification centers and will infrequently, but more often, utilize shelters or homeless programs as transitional housing. Their utilization length varies but is generally less than one year. Typically, their stays can be measured in weeks or months.

The final classification is the chronically homeless. They are “characterized as those persons most like the stereotypical profile of the skid-row homeless” (Kuhn & Culhane, 1998). This demographic is likely entrenched in the system, are older, male, under-educated, and are “hard-core unemployed, often suffering from disabilities and substance abuse problems” (Kuhn & Culhane, 1998). They have fewer episodes of homelessness but each stay is usually longer than the last and some episodes may last years.

These three classifications are the generic lenses society views those experiencing homelessness, and they are standard descriptions used by so many institutions and researchers. Will they match those found in rural environments? This study randomly interviews seven residents living in a shelter of 21 people, in a city with a population of 19,132 people, in an effort to answer that question.

### *Who moves and why?*

In the best of economic circumstances, there are several reasons why people are residentially mobile. Traditionally, individuals and families choose to move their residences because of basic factors such as employment, change in life circumstances, or preference. These reasons are no different from those that suffer homelessness. Jon May suggests, "...most had moved very little over the course of their housing and homeless careers...not because of its night shelters and hostels but because of the wider opportunities for accommodation and work they believed the city had to offer" (May, 2003, p. 30).

However, there is one other factor that may contribute to the mobility of homeless populations and it revolves around the social services that are needed or desired. Jeffrey Henig asks whether "proximity to existing community-based facilities make residents more likely to resist expanding the city's commitment to provide additional facilities" (Henig, 1994)? In essence he is questioning whether shelters should be developed close to the services that support their populations, or whether service providers should locate nearer to shelters. Of course, this makes two assumptions: a) services are clustered around each other and shelters could develop within walking distance, and b) shelters are clustered around each other and services could develop within walking distance. While "low-income individuals who are not proximate to service providers will face greater obstacles to receiving assistance than low-income individuals living near service providers" (Allard, 2004), not all are moving because of services only. In May's research, based on information from Cloke, et al., he "suggest(s) that a significant proportion of movement between places may be better characterized as undertaken by those who have "chosen" a life of mobility rather than a more settled existence" (May, 1999). He is suggesting that services are not necessarily the core reason for mobility.

He goes on to describe a phenomenon studied in Britain called a "hostel circuit"; a series of cities that migrant men visit during the year. Although largely focused on the movements "of

a declining population of older ‘men of the road,’ that same circuit has also been seen as important to (and connected with) other networks, notably those of New Age travellers” (May, 1999). They found that some younger travellers continued to “...move on a regular basis between urban centers and established traveller sites in outlying rural areas” (McKay, 1995, as quoted by May, 1999). While the older population would begin to find it harder and harder to either sleep rough or continue to travel in all seasons because of age or infirmity, the younger group might still find it easy and preferable.

These issues are largely urban issues. In rural communities, the services required by those seeking them may not be available. Either the professional administering the service does not live in the community or can find no economically feasible way to provide the service. There are some self-help group structures such as Alcoholics Anonymous that need no specialized or licensed service provider to operate in any size town. But services such as mental and physical health counseling and care, continuing adult education and training, life coaching and management, and low-income housing assistance may be provided in a regional way, making those services largely unavailable in smaller communities and to smaller populations. As the geographical size of the community shrinks, the question of mobility seeking services becomes the determining factor of moving *between* communities rather than inside them, as may be accomplished in urban environments.

Jon May reveals another possible motivation for being mobile when experiencing homelessness in a rural context: embarrassment. In an example from an interview he performed during research, his interviewee stated, “What the situation is, you’ve gone down hill sort of thing and you don’t really want people to know” (Peter, age 44, as quoted by May, 2000). While they desire support services or networks, sometimes the overriding goal is to pull oneself from their current circumstances without being noticed. In a larger urban area moving from shelter to shelter may accomplish this without much trouble. In more rural areas, this may mean leaving one’s hometown in order to become invisible. “In such a situation the decision of where to move may in turn be shaped not by the desire to access informal networks of support but the opposite – to go to a place where one’s homelessness is rendered less ‘visible’” (Cloke et al, 2000b, as quoted by May, 2000).

And what of rural homeless populations, shelters, and the services associated with them? Most literature and real-life programs have a bias toward understanding the urban homeless



population. Perhaps this is because they appear more visible than those in a rural context. My opinion is that rural homelessness is harder to count due to smaller populations in the communities and the lack of social service programs available to count them. In this context, a regional perspective is more viable in determining whether homelessness exists and how best to approach a solution, even a region one.

The next area of focus becomes individual factors that either lead to homelessness or the propensity of smaller communities to resist shelter development. Most studies view urban homelessness while rural homelessness is acknowledged but largely ignored. The consensus is that younger male populations tend to be more geographically mobile while single mothers tend to stay in the communities they find themselves in. Further, episodically homeless populations tend to stay put in their community while chronically homeless may choose mobility looking for a more permanent homeless network of shelters and services. Networks of this type are usually found in more highly urbanized locations.

Of the literature reviewed, the occurrence of mobility is more likely studied in urban areas with populations moving from suburbs to inner cities, or vice versa, in pursuit of services. Incidences of mobility over larger distances are rare and usually attributed to transitional or episodic homeless persons or families. These choices are made primarily made by individuals and are usually driven by prospects for employment or personal relationships and rarely focus on the pursuit of programs or services in other locations. However, there is anecdotal evidence that suggests some outlying social service agencies actively try to move people to different shelters presumably due to a better service fit than their current community can offer, or perhaps it is a personal request by the resident, as well. “Low-income populations eligible for assistance are more mobile than service providers. So, as poor populations become less concentrated in a few central city neighborhoods, it is unlikely that social service provision will follow readily” (Allard, 2004).

The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) pursuant to the McKinney-Vento Homelessness Assistance Act of 1987, listed four criteria for identifying the homeless population in America: 1.) Those who are currently homeless, 2.) Those who will become homeless in the imminent future, 3.) Certain youths and families with children who suffer from home instability caused by a hardship, and 4.) Those who suffer from home instability caused by domestic violence. As can be seen, there are a myriad of explanations for why a person or

persons would be considered homeless. However, there is another definition that is commonly used in America and it is simply, “An individual or family who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence” (Homelessness in the united states, 2013). Of those definitions, there are three groups: homeless without shelter, homeless with shelter, and homeless due to institutional release.

Of all the definitions presented, this study uses the simplest definition: An individual or family who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence. Therefore, they must avail themselves of the shelter system for an extended period of time, to secure safe accommodations for themselves and their families.

### **Newton, Kansas**

Newton, Kansas grew up at the intersection of the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railway and the Chisholm Trail in the latter half of the 1800s. A wild and rowdy frontier cattle town once rivaling Dodge City, it was quickly incorporated and settled itself as the seat of a newly formed Harvey County. As the railroad expanded further west, funding from the deep pockets of the east coast were beginning to become scarce. Easements granted to the railroad by the federal government, which was largely unused after the final survey work and rail construction was completed, were sold to generate revenue.

In the 1870s, posters created by the railroad were sent to Eastern Europe and specifically the steppes region of Russia (modern day Ukraine), an agricultural area much like Kansas in climate and soils, with the hopes of luring people into immigration. They attracted Mennonite farmers and businessmen to this region who practiced a faith based upon four principles:

- Following Jesus in daily life is a central value.
- Belief that it is possible to follow Jesus as Lord above nationalism, racism or materialism.
- Belief that it is possible to follow Jesus as a peacemaker. We believe that we can practice the way of Jesus’ reconciling love in human conflicts and warfare, without having to strike out in fear to defend ourselves.
- Belief that we can live life simply and in service to others as a witness to God’s love for the world (What do mennonites believe?, 2014).

A large German Mennonite population living in the area was under pressure from Tsarina Catherine II (the Great) to serve in the Russian military, a requirement that was first waived

when the land was seized by Russia in a war against the Turkish Ottoman Empire. Mennonites who are devoutly dedicated to peace and are therefore pacifists by a commitment to their faith, decided to immigrate to America instead and take advantage of the railroad's offer. So, many Russian and Russian-German of both the Mennonite and Catholic faiths moved to the Great Plains of south central Kansas, bringing with them their hard red winter wheat berries, their rural agrarian experience, and their desire for peace and service to their fellow man.

From these early immigrant influences, Newton's social compass and cultural legacy was formed. Their influence is still strongly felt in the community today in the charitable organizations (Mennonite Relief Services, Mennonite Mission Network, Mennonite Church USA, Etcetera Shop, Ten Thousand Villages, Harvey County Homeless Shelter, Agape Resource Center), nursing care facilities (Kidron Bethel, Asbury Park, Presbyterian Manor, Bethel Health Care Center, Kansas Christian Home), health care organizations (Prairie View, Mirror, Northview Developmental Services, Newton Medical Center formerly Bethel Deaconess Hospital, Harry Hynes Memorial Hospice), educational institutions (Bethel College) and peace initiatives (Circles of Hope, Ministerial Alliance, Peace Connections). Each of these institutions were either formed by, or are currently being administrated by, or staffed largely by Mennonites. All have a foundation in the Christian faith and practice their most charitable acts in support of the people they serve, and all are vibrant and important parts of Newton.

I think this is important to recognize as all communities have a cultural heritage that may still be strongly felt in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and Newton is no exception. This religious culture of service to mankind influences so many aspects of social life in Newton, Kansas. It would not be surprising if this research found a Mennonite cultural influence in the operation of the Harvey County Homeless Shelter. However, this information is presented only as one of a number of possible factors between the experiences expressed by the residents during the interviews and the community population itself, rather than a direct connection between the two.

## **Community Demographics**

According to the 2010 U.S. Census, Newton, Kansas is a city with 19,132 people. Along with the State of Kansas, it is a young population with a median age of only 36.8 years, compared to a statewide median age of 36.0 years. Figure 1 shows the relative breakdown of age

and sex for the community. Racially it is 88% white with 16% of Hispanic or Latino heritage, and 2% Black or African American. All others define themselves as a mixed race.

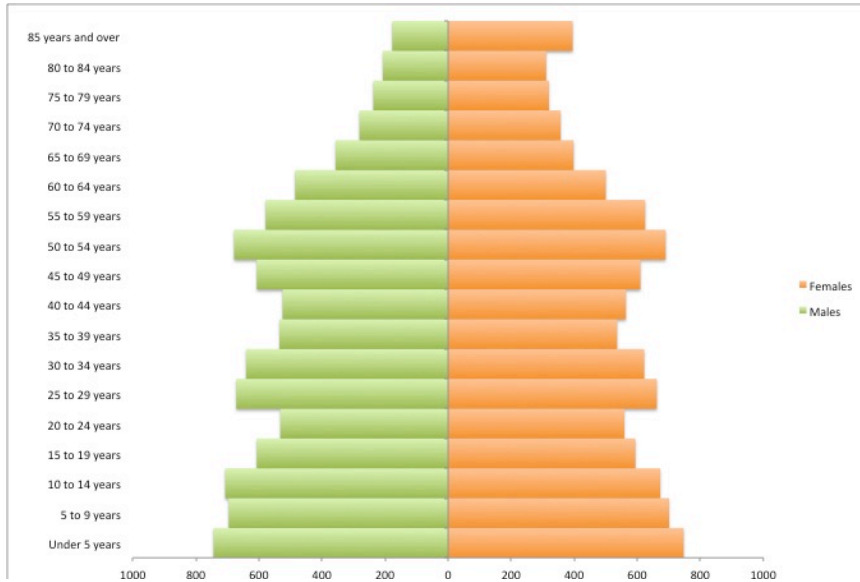


Figure 1 - Newton, Kansas Population Pyramid (US Census Bureau, 2012)

In terms of education, the vast majority (88.8%) of the population is educated above the level of high school with a breakdown comparison with the State shown in Table 1.

Table 1 – Education Demographic Comparison Between Newton, Kans. and the State of Kansas (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012)

Aged 25 yrs & over	Less than 9 <sup>th</sup> Grade	9 <sup>th</sup> to 12 <sup>th</sup> No Diploma	High School Diploma or equivalency	Some College, No Degree	Associates Degree	Bachelors Degree	Graduate or Professional Degree
Newton	4.9%	6.4%	33.9%	22.6%	8%	14.1%	10.2%
Kansas	4.1%	6.2%	27.8%	24.4%	7.5%	19.6%	10.4%

The economic conditions for households in the Newton are relatively consistent with the averages being felt around the Great Plains states. Kansas currently ranks 31<sup>st</sup> in the nation, including the District of Columbia, by household income with 12.5% of its population living below the poverty line (Census, 2014). As can be seen in Table 2, Newton falls lower than the state average.

Table 2 – Employment & Income Comparison Between Newton, Kansas and the State of Kansas (US Census Bureau, 2012)

Statistics	Percent Employed	Percent Unemployed	Median HH Income	Mean HH Income	With Health Insurance	W/O Health Insurance	Fam. Below Poverty Line
Newton	62.6%	4.5%	\$42,630	\$53,580	87.9%	12.1%	10.4%
Kansas	63.2%	4.6%	\$51,273	\$67,564	87.4%	12.6%	12.5%

Therefore, Newton appears an average community in the State of Kansas. There are many similarly homogenous communities surrounding Newton and each has a similar story. The noteworthy aspect of this community context is its rural nature. Many studies of homelessness focus on urban environments, thereby making comparative analysis easier because of the amount of shelters programs available, and the amount of homeless people visible. Rural environments need additional study.

### **Counting the Homeless**

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development uses a point-in-time (PIT) counting method for estimating the number of people experiencing homelessness in America on any given day. According to the 2009 Annual Homelessness Assessment Report to Congress, HUD determined on a single night, 643,000 people were either living on the streets or in temporary shelters (The 2009 annual, 2010). That number included both individuals and families, and has been declining in recent years. In the Midwest, they estimate 12% of the population is without a fixed, permanent address. Extrapolating to Newton, Kansas, this means of the 21,852 people counted in the census, approximately 2,622 people need shelter assistance of some sort.

Drilling further down into the shelter numbers themselves and extrapolating the potential number of shelter residents using the overall number of 538 persons within the Wichita, Kansas shelter network, Newton might yield 28 persons. That is not far off. As of the writing of this report in October of 2014, there are currently 21 residents in the Harvey County Homeless Shelter.

Just as with more urban areas, homelessness occurs in rural populations for a variety of common reasons. There is no cause to think that smaller economies and communities would somehow be immune to the stressors of common life. While farm communities are commonly and even colloquially known for lending a helping hand to those in need, the fact is that urban

neighborhoods behave in the same way. Smaller cohorts of networks work together to ensure members of those groups to experience issues have the help they need to survive. That is the basis of this research. As the extrapolation of the national and state counts show, there is indeed the quantity of those experiencing homelessness in smaller towns that the national numbers project. While the numbers may not be exact and generalizable to every community, the documented number of homeless individuals in Newton, Kansas demonstrate the likelihood of homeless cohorts in rural communities.

### **A Statement of the Question**

Capital, when discussed in an economic setting defines a pool of assets from which the owner may measure his worth and from which he may draw when needed. Social capital, however, when measured by the same definition, becomes more difficult to quantify. Since social capital is less quantifiable than financial capital, is one's social worth measured as it is perceived by the individual, or by members of the social network in which the individual belongs? "The premise behind the notion of social capital is rather simple and straightforward," Nan Lin says, "investment in social relations with expected returns" (Lin, 1999). We will see later that reputation is built on the premise of banked social capital and that is indeed measured by the group and the community-at-large.

Social networks of all types and strengths exist in communities, both great and small. Rural communities are often small enclaves of meticulous social networks based upon family, friends, and significant others, each contributing to the collective pool of social capital available in the community. Unlike their east coast urban counterparts that have many and varied cultural, racial, and ethnic mixes, rural communities of place, especially in the Great Plains, are less than a few generations old and were settled largely by homogenous populations. For example, many towns have the same religious and/or genealogical roots connecting their populations by birth, marriage, or cultural heritage. These are but a few of the factors that define a person's membership in a community. Merely owning a residence or business defines a geographical inclusion in a community, but participating in the social structure of that same geographical area strengthens the inclusion.

Homelessness is generally regarded as the loss of a residence, but it is more than simply the absence of nightly shelter. The loss of a place to stay is one in a series of stressors that wear

on the emotional health and well being of individuals and families. “Homelessness is not simply the absence of a physical domicile, it is often and importantly absent or reduced social ties and the resources that these represent and a diminished sense of connectedness or belonging” (Vandemark, 2007). This diminished sense of self has been documented in other research as a contributing factor for depression among the homeless (Irwin, Vandemark, Winkleby, et al., LaGory, et al.). With depression comes an increased detachment and disaffiliation from society and those social networks that are the very keys to surviving the stressor of homelessness.

When an individual loses his residence and becomes displaced in a rural environment, is his useful social capital retained or drained? “Displacement is an important dimension of homelessness because it influences behaviors that are relevant to re-entry into healthy and meaningful societal roles” (Vandemark, 2007). How do homeless persons regain their social capital, or draw from past assets? How do they re-forge their social networks and *meaningful societal roles*? And what effect does this have on their ability to be successful in their future efforts to reintegrate and re-home into their communities? The answers to all these questions are foundationally rooted in each person’s perception of the importance of social capital in their own daily lives. And by understanding what homeless individuals themselves perceive as the role of social networks in their lives, we can understand the importance of social capital in shelter environments and how that translates to their perception of future success in society.

The topic being explored in this study is: *How those currently experiencing homelessness perceive the influence of bonding and bridging social capital on their future successful residential reintegration*. It will be tested through direct inquiry of the persons themselves. Therefore, this is intended as the foundation of a larger future study of social capital, the lives of those experiencing homelessness, and their reintegration into community life through residential reintegration.

## Chapter 3 – Methodology: Interview and Data Collection Procedure

### Methodological Underpinnings

This research aimed to use two parts of qualitative inquiry to explore the research topic: *How those currently experiencing homelessness perceive the influence of bonding and bridging social capital on their future successful residential reintegration*. These are phenomenography and grounded theory with coding/memo writing. Phenomenography is “an empirically based approach that aims to identify the qualitatively different ways in which different people experience, conceptualize, perceive, and understand various kinds of phenomena” (Richardson, 1999). It is theoretically distinct from phenomenology in that it is a *second order* or *from the inside* perspective rather than a *first order* or *from the outside* perspective. Richardson uses this explanation to illustrate the point that phenomenography seeks to keep the researcher’s interpretation of a resident’s life events out of the evaluation, and whose only motive is to report the resident’s interpretation. This framework is critically important in this research, as it is the desire of this study to understand how much residents value social capital connections. Only then can this research make a generalization about the overall value of social connectedness in Newton, Kansas. In turn, this will provide a theoretical basis upon which to perform future inquiry and study in similar rural communities. Without the *benefit* of living in the state of homelessness in which these residents find themselves, the researcher can only understand their experiences through their eyes.

This illuminates a distinction between the reporting involved in phenomenography and that associated with ethnography. “Traditionally, ethnographers have aimed to provide a descriptive or realistic account of the cultures that they have studied” (Richardson, 1999). Richardson infers that modern ethnographers seek to place the experiences they record in a larger cultural context and therefore decipher their data with a skeptical eye, always seeking to place data within its relevant context. Phenomenographers, on the other hand, take the interview without a jaded or preconceived mindset, seeking only to capture the interviewee’s statement at its face value.

The final value to this method of inquiry is the inclusiveness and importance of experience and conceptual thought. While this report sought to understand, through the interviewee’s own words, what his/her experience is concerning bridging and bonding social capital, it equally sought to understand what the interviewee thought conceptually about the



importance of social capital in future endeavors as they relate to rehousing and community reintegration. Richardson quotes Ference Marton, who is credited with the creation of phenomenography, as saying, "...we try instead to describe relations between the individual and various aspects of the world around them, regardless of whether those relationships are manifested in the forms of immediate experience, conceptual thought, or physical behavior" (Marton, as quoted by Richardson, 1999).

Grounded theory is related to phenomenography through its use of the discursive nature of individual interviews. "Grounded theory methods consist of systematic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analyzing qualitative data to construct theories from the data themselves" (Charmaz, 2014). Its method of inquiry involves using an interview structure and the rich data that generates to move between analysis and collection, to using comparative methods to interact with the research itself. In this way, grounded theory enables the research to evolve and build upon itself in a way that is both dynamic and comprehensive.

During a structured interview process with each participant, grounded theory gives the researcher the flexibility to allow the responses to inform additional questions and even inform the direction of the overall research. While this research remained focused on the question at hand, the constant coding and memo writing methodology provided additional detail for future inquiry, either during another research project, or with current research participants. As previously stated, the aim of this project was to understand the participant's view concerning the importance of social capital in their lives and how it affects their future success. In addition, this process brought together the differing views of each resident into a single conclusion. This theory-building process was made possible through the constant comparative method of data collection, initial coding, focused coding and categorizing, and theory building. Through coding, the comparisons between interviews yielded similarities and differences in perceptions. The memo writing allowed the perceptual analysis of those similarities and differences establishing both topics for further inquiry, and the basis for conclusions.

The steps for this research procedure were:

1. Interview each volunteer using prepared, IRB-approved questionnaire recording the conversation.
2. Prepare a typewritten transcription of each interview.

3. Review the typewritten transcript while listening to original recording and annotate by hand with recollections of non-verbal communications.
4. Reformat transcript into two columns: Right column ruled for memos; left with typed interview responses.
5. Read transcript underlining and circling with margin notes of *procedural memos*.
6. Transcribe procedural memos into typewritten notes.
7. Reformat memo transcript into two columns: Right column ruled for memos; left with typed procedural memos.
8. Code procedural memos for emergent themes and write *analytic memos* with development of themes.
9. Produce matrix and populate with “positive” and “negative” analytic memos from second round of coding.
10. Prepare findings.

### **Setting**

The Harvey County Homeless Shelter was the setting used for this study. It is a dormitory-style, two-story structure with a common day room, dining area, kitchen, offices and janitorial spaces and individual sleeping accommodations on the upper floor. Laundry facilities, a TV room, and storage are on the lower level. The programmatic capacity of the facility is 30 persons, although fire code allows up to 40 occupants. Forty people, however, is much too large for two volunteer overnight staff members to safely and adequately manage. Therefore, through policy, the facility is limited to thirty people. The overnight staff is assigned based on a rotating schedule of volunteers from the twenty-six churches of the Ministerial Alliance that support the shelter with donations of time, service, money, and food. There are 16 churches that belong to the Newton Ministerial Alliance and ten that are engaged from surrounding cities in Harvey County.

The intent of facilitating conversations in the shelter setting, rather than in a neutral location, was two-fold: first, to give the participants the most settled feeling when engaging the interview process; and two, to meet them in their environment, rather than engaging them in an office setting where a perceived power difference may be felt between interviewer and resident. These were assumptions by the researcher built upon comfort in the interview process. The goal was for the interview to be relaxed and conversational in tone.

The physical environment where the interview took place was a small room that is primarily used by the volunteer overnight staff. It was equipped with a private restroom, a bed, a loveseat, and a television. The interviews took place with the resident seated on the loveseat and

the interviewer sitting bedside. Not ideal conditions, but the room was private and distraction-free with soft, comfortable furniture. Being small, it was also ideal for the safety of small children should a resident care for one at the time of the interview.

Finally, the setting was scheduled at a time that was relaxed and convenient for each resident. This fell into two general timeframes: during the day or in the evening. The Harvey County Homeless Shelter has a policy directing residents to leave the shelter during the daytime hours. This is due primarily to lack of supervising staff and programmatic activities. However, an accommodation is made for mothers of infants, toddlers and children under school age. If a resident had children that require care, then a time during the day was made to facilitate the conversation.

Interviews generally took place during the evening hours after the evening meal. Supper is delivered at the same time each evening so was easy to schedule around. Were it possible, two interviews could be executed each evening. However, due to the conversational nature of the interview setting, along with the open-ended nature of the interview questions, plans for one interview each evening was optimal.

### **Format**

The format for this research was semi-structured, one-on-one interviews between the researcher and residents of the shelter. As Esterberg explains, “the goal is to explore a topic more openly and to allow interviewees to express their opinions and ideas in their own words” (Esterberg, 2002). An interview guide of thirty-five questions was prepared and divided into five categories: demographics, residential history, community connections, social connections, and social connections and community belonging (*See Appendix A*).

The first category of questions were straightforward and used to determine the demographics and specific backgrounds of the individual as a context in which to engage the larger question of social capital. The second category of questions were related to social connections and resident’s opinions on relationships as they relate to their current life circumstances. These were much more open ended questions. Many questions ask the resident to expand on their answers by explaining their position and why they might feel that way. It also left the conversation open for the resident to give examples or tell stories of past experiences when social connections were relevant. Again, “we try to move beyond our own experiences and

ideas and to *really* (author's emphasis) understand the other person's point of view" (Esterberg, 2002).

The third set of questions regards past and current social relationships and how they influence their day-to-day interactions with others. It also sought context related to the importance of their relationships and how much weight they give it. The fourth set is looking at community connections and the bond they might have to Newton as a community. And finally, the last set sought more detail concerning the connectivity they have with Newton and how that relates to their future effort toward residential reintegration.

At the beginning of the interview process, a personal introduction was made to allow the interviewer and interviewee the opportunity to get comfortable enough to engage in conversation. The interviewer reviewed the purpose of the research and the nature of the questions being asked. The resident was informed that they could control the pace and tempo of the interview, and that they had the ability to end the interview at any time and for any reason. An Individual Consent Advisory Form accompanied the conversation at which point the interviewer reviewed the document with the resident taking care to explain each part of the form and giving the resident the opportunity to ask questions or seek additional information about any part of the form. At the end of the section, after all reasonable accommodations had been made and all questions answered, the interviewer and resident both signed and dated the document in the presence of each other and a copy was retained by each party for record.

Once individual consent had been given to perform the interview, the resident was asked for permission to record the conversation for accuracy. The reason for recording was that it allowed the interviewer the opportunity to be engaged in the conversations rather than having an ask-and-answer session. It was explained to the resident that the recordings were for the sole purpose of transcription and at the end of the process, will be deleted with no additional copies being made of the vocal recordings. If this was satisfactory to the resident and permission was given, then the recorder was started and the interviewer began the questioning.

Each question was asked in the order that they had been prepared and in the five sections. The interviewer gave the resident the opportunity to fully answer the question in the way they felt most appropriate. The interviewer answered and/or clarified any question asked by the resident. Additional or follow-up questions were allowed only if they were open-ended and the answer would expand on the interviewee's position making the data richer. The premise of

grounded theory is the development of themes from the data so the more comprehensive and explanatory the answer the better.

## Interview Question Mapping

Table 3 – Interview Question Mapping

Area of Inquiry	Literature Section	Interview Category	Question
Demographics	Allard, 2004 <i>Homelessness in the U.S.</i> , 2013 Meghan, et al, 2013 HUD, 2010	Compare cohort against the typical demographic analysis.	What is your gender? How old are you? What is your current marital status? What is your highest level of education? What is your current employment status?
Residential History	Cloke, 2000 Moore, 2000 Pascale, 2005 Sommerville, 1992 Winkleby, 1992	Identify different styles of residences available during adulthood and how those might shape or influence social connections in the past/present.	What types of housing have you lived in? What was the duration in each type? How long have you lived in this shelter? Lived in other temporary shelters? How many and average duration?
Community Connection	Cloke, 2000 Moore, 2000 Pascale, 2005 Putnam, 2000 Sommerville, 1992 Vandemark, 2007	Informs opinion about Newton, its size and opportunities for social connections.	Is this your hometown? No, where? How long have you been away? How long in this community? Why did you move to this community? Do you plan to leave this community? What size communities have you lived in?
Social Connection	Bhattacharyya, 2004 Cloke, 2000 Irwin, 2008 LaGory, 1990 Lin, 1999 Pascale, 2005 Putnam, 2000 Vandemark, 2007	Establishes whether existing social connections have been established or need establishing. Identifies resident's opportunities for social interaction. Desire to make connections or remain isolated.	Do you have family in this community? Yes, who? Do you have friends in this community? Yes, how did you get acquainted? How often do you see your family? How often do you see your friends? Where do you often meet people? How often are you in contact with friends? Regularly attend community activities? Desire/Require support of family/friends? Want other social connections? Anything holding you back?
Connectedness/ Belonging	Irwin, 2008 LaGory, 1990 Pascale, 2005 Vandemark, 2007	Understands how they feel about this community and whether topic is residentially or relationally based.	Do you feel welcome in this community? Do you think contact with others is important to feeling welcome? Kinds of activities do you participate? How do those activities make you feel about the community? More important: residence or relationships? Are strong social relationships important in becoming part of a community?

In order to understand the relevancy of social networks specific to the context of Newton, Kansas, the interview questions were broken down into five areas: demographics, residential history, community connection, social connection, and social connectedness and community belonging.

### *Demographics*

In understanding the condition of homelessness in the United States, often the numbers are broken down by demographics. These generally point to a person's age, their race and ethnicity, their education, and their employment status. The 2013 Point in Time survey conducted by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development stated that Kansas had 1,480 sheltered homeless persons. Nationally, "only 2 percent of homeless individuals were children under the age of 18. More than one in four were between the ages of 18 and 24" (Meghan, Cortes & Morris, 2013). Additionally, the majority of those suffering homeless were white males with a history of substance abuse. They were also most likely to be chronically homeless with the addition of long-term homeless circumstances. Therefore, it is necessary to compare the cohort to establish whether the sample taken during the interview process was consistent or divergent from the national findings and establish if this subset matched the national statistics being distributed.

### *Residential history*

A person's experience with others in a residential environment is important to understand their willingness to interact on a daily basis with others. A number of personal factors aside, potentially if a person grows up in a residentially urban area of high density, then that person may be more comfortable, or at least more experienced, when interacting with a large diversity of people on a daily basis.

Because the prevalence of homeless persons was broken into three subsets: temporary, episodic, and chronic; it was necessary to identify the interview cohort to establish their adult living patterns prior to coming to the Harvey County Homeless Shelter. By understanding whether the resident is experiencing homelessness for the first time, whether they have experienced bouts of residential instability in the past, or whether they have many years of moving from shelter to shelter, helps in understanding their responses to questions of social connectivity and feelings of belonging in communities and society. This, in turn, aided in understanding the emotional and mental state of the person being interviewed, their potential willingness to be engaged in the community, and whether they appeared depressed about their

current circumstances. All these factor into their actual ability to create and maintain social connections, thereby building assets of social capital.

### *Community connections*

Being involved in, and contributing to, the life of a community is important in building social capital. Whether we consider our community to be a community of place like a rural town or an urban neighborhood; or whether it is a community of interest like a church group and coffee club, our solidarity to that community is of greatest concern. Therefore, this set of questions was designed to understand whether any connection had been, or is being, made with the community of Newton.

It also probed whether a resident held a connection to “home,” or in this instance “hometown.” Residential sentimentality, their intention to stay in Newton as a permanent resident, and committing social time and energy to making Newton their preferred home are all factors to consider when inquiring about their perceptions concerning residential reintegration. Those questions and others probe their thoughts about their perceived future in Newton and whether building relationships is a worthwhile endeavor. Perhaps this is something they had not yet considered.

### *Social connections*

On the heels of knowing whether Newton is considered the interviewee’s chosen residential community, the study next examined existing social connections and their strengths. We all have different types of social connections. Bonding capital generally begins with our immediate family and extends outward to close friends and confidants. From there, the social connections with friends, co-workers, and acquaintances stretches capital into the bridging realm with looser ties, but more connections in the web of networks.

An examination of those existing relationships was important to understand whether existing relationships were intact, how close the relationships were, how important they were to the daily life of the interviewee, and how they can be gained or strengthened. This begins the crux of the examination of the study topic. Other factors such as the complexity and strength of existing relationships, avenues of interest that allowed the resident to make positive contact with other people, and the obstacles residents perceive kept them from becoming more socially

connected, are also important to consider. Those questions yielded a resident's perception of social capital in their own lives.

### *Social connectedness and community belonging*

Opinions regarding social connections and the feeling of being welcomed in a community were examined next. The concept of home was once again broached in this set of questions. Feeling welcomed in this community is a factor in staying in a community. If they feel welcomed, are they more likely to pursue meaningful, healthy relationships? Putting aside their own circumstances for the moment, what were their opinions regarding the importance of social connections and an independent address in their lives and the lives of others? Here we looked at how individual personalities, preferences, experiences, and opinions shaped the efforts someone might make forging new networks of bonding and bridging capital.

And finally, residents were asked directly to answer the study topic themselves. Given all the questions they have already answered, what was their perception concerning the influence of bonding and bridging social capital on their future successful residential reintegration?

## **Transcription and Review**

At the end of each interview session, and as immediately as possible following, a typewritten transcription of the interview was produced. Each transcription included the questions in the order they were asked, as well as the correct temporal sequence of the conversation between interviewer and interviewee. A correct verbatim transcript was produced including the use of improper grammar, sentence structure, slang, and colloquialisms. It was important to accurately record the flow and authenticity of the conversation.

As each transcription was produced, the document was read silently by the interviewer while listening to the recording ensuring the transcription is 100% complete and correct. While performing the final check, the transcript was also annotated with vocal inflections, pauses, and emphases, along with non-vocal details as best as can be recalled. These non-vocal details included facial and hand gestures, observable body stance, and general body language. Having no formal training in body language analysis, this step was primarily used to reset the visual stage for the interviewer, providing a richer collection of data. Esterberg reminds us that *how*



someone says something is as important as what they say, especially in qualitative research. This was the first review of the data.

At this stage, the document itself was reformatted into two vertical columns. The right column was left open and available for handwritten comments while the left column contained the single-spaced typewritten transcript.

### **Coding and Memo Writing**

The purpose of coding the transcriptions was to establish a small number of categories or themes. This allowed the researcher to find meaning in the data. In Kristin Esterberg's book *Qualitative Methods in Social Research*, she quotes Amanda Coffey and Paul Atkinson who "suggest that qualitative coding entail three basic procedures: (a) noticing relevant phenomena, (b) collecting examples of those phenomena, and (c) analyzing those phenomena in order to find commonalities, differences, patterns, and structures" (Esterberg, 1996, p.29, quoted in 2002).

The coding procedure will take two distinct steps that begin at the most general level and become more specific toward the end. Depending on the amount of interviews, this analysis of the data was done on several, if not all, transcripts in succession.

The first step in this analysis was using open coding and procedural memo writing to begin the discovery phase. This took place by underlining and circling relevant passages of text and hand-annotating thoughts and emerging categories and ideas in the margins. Procedural memos are dated, recollections of why the researcher felt these particular codes were relevant and what the researcher was thinking at the point something interesting emerged. The purpose was to organize thoughts into an organized, linear, and logical path. The purpose of this first effort was to allow the researcher to immerse himself into the richness of the interview data. This was fundamental to understanding the complexity of the answers.

This step was once again transcribed using only the procedural memos. Reformatting the document into a similar two-column approach as previously described, the second step was focused coding and analytical memo writing. In this operation, each of the initial procedural memos was coded looking for relevant similarities and dissimilarities in the initial coding effort. This took the thoughts and notions of the procedural memos and formed focused themes surrounding the data. This yielded the final thematic elements contributing to the final conclusions.

By writing memos, the researcher was looking for patterns, comparing cases systematically, and building typologies for comparison (Esterberg, 2002). What the researcher was looking for specifically involved manifest content rather than latent content. The goal of phenomenography is the authentic capture of the interviewee’s perceptions, opinions, and feelings, rather than the researcher’s *interpretation* of the underlying meanings of the interview.

### Typology Comparison

The final step in coding the data is organizing the emergent themes into a matrix that stands as a visual representation of all interviews coalesced into a single document. This matrix should graphically represent the salient points for analysis in Chapter 4. In it, the researcher should begin to see what components were in support of and what were in opposition to the study topic stated in Chapter 2. He should also be able to discern the difference between opinions by gender. Each theme and each respondent was ranked by the number of times each respondent mentioned a particular theme. An elementary weighting theme and matrix, Table 4, it provides an easy way to look at what theme might be more important just by the number of times it was mentioned.

Table 4 – Sample Organizational Matrix

Gender	F	F	M	M	F	F	F		
Person	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Total	Rank
Theme 1		•		•	•	•		4	2
Theme 2	•		•	•	•			4	2
Theme 3	•					•		2	3
Theme 4	•	•	•	•	•		•	6	1
Theme 5	•			•				2	3
Total	4	2	2	4	3	2	1		
Rank	1	3	3	1	2	3	4		

## **Chapter 4 – Findings**

### **Setting**

The Harvey County Homeless Shelter is located at 900 W. Broadway Street in Newton, Kansas. They have leased a two-story brick building situated on an 18-acre suburban residential campus originally designed as a children's home. First managed by the State of Kansas and later by United Methodist Youthville, a private social service organization contracted by the State of Kansas providing foster care, parent support and residential treatment for children. Today this campus "is designed to serve girls, ages 10 - 18, who have chronic runaway behaviors and have been adjudicated by the courts as "Children In Need of Care". Budget constraints and a reshuffling of contracts at the state level caused the program to shrink leaving empty buildings on the campus. That is the opportunity the HCHS staff saw when the relationship was made. This allowed the shelter to move out of the basement of an old hospital in the urban core and settle into a residential setting.

The interviews were conducted at the Harvey County Homeless Shelter during the week of October 27 through November 2, 2014. The facility's population was 21 total residents at the beginning of the week, which dropped to 18 by week's-end. The gender breakdown was twelve men and nine women to ten men and eight women. There were six children belonging to three separate families present the entire week. The total interviews conducted were seven.

Interview times for meeting varied over the days. It was determined that the majority of the residents who left the facility daily, usually before 8:00 a.m. and were gone the bulk of the day. Most returned around 4:00 p.m., so more opportunities for interaction presented themselves between 4:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m. Dinner was served between 6:00 p.m. and 7:00 p.m. After dinner, people were usually available after their chores if they did not have evening meetings or appointments. However, unless they worked late, the 8:00 p.m. curfew is everyone had to be back on campus for the night. There were a few residents that had jobs keeping them out slightly later and there were also self-help groups that met in the evenings as well.

Residents were always welcome to sit outside the building in the evening as long as they were on campus. Smoking areas with picnic tables were set up under a tree in the front of the building. Most of the initial interaction with the shelter residents was made in this area. The weather during the interview period was typical for autumn in Kansas. It had cooled off to the mid-seventies during the daytime and the mid-forties overnight. There was no precipitation

during the entire seven-day stretch. The shelter was at capacity for the week. It is believed weather and/or environmental factors were not contributory to the population of the shelter, either in gain or loss.

For the purposes of retaining anonymity and protecting privacy in this study, the residents interviewed were given fictitious names.

### **Participant Response Rate**

Before any contact was made with individual residents, the director made them aware of the research project. They were informed that a person would be asking if they wanted to participate in an anonymous study that involved individual interviews and participation was completely voluntary. The shelter administration had given the researcher permission to be on campus. It was made clear on more than one occasion that the shelter staff did not require participation and the study was in no way associated with the shelter program.

Residents volunteered when asked and while there were twenty-one residents at the time of the first interviews and the population of the shelter held fairly constant during the week, only seven people volunteered to participate despite repeated inquiries. This may be due to several factors, the most common being personality, distrust of the process, distrust of the interviewer, disinterest, or time constraints. However, of those that participated, each was fully interested in taking part in the survey and did not need to be convinced. Some asked that the interview take place at a time other than when they were first approached and asked. That request was always honored. The participants were engaged for this exercise at different times of the day and different days of the week.

The first determining factor in response rate may have been attributed to the shelter's policy regarding community volunteerism. If a resident is not disabled or currently filing for disability, policy dictates they are required to submit seven job applications per week. If they are working 25 hours or less, they are required to volunteer twelve hours of service in the community. These policy directives may have had a peripheral impact on the amount of contacts made during the week. However, without specifically reviewing that information, there is no way of knowing whether that had an affect on participation.

A second determining factor in response rate may have been the location of the initial contact. The smoking area in front of the building was where the initial contact was made with

all but one of the respondents. They were either smoking, visiting with one another, or supervising children's play activity. It was also the easiest place to make unsolicited contact, as people were generally more open to communication and more easily approached. Inside the building people were not in a consolidated area. They tended to be in their individual rooms or in the television room where contact was problematic due to a desire not to interrupt television program viewing or personal leisure time.

A third determining factor in response rate was the business of daily living. Residents were busy in the evenings with the labor of daily life. Children's homework, laundry, reading, bathing and watching television were typical evening activities. These are not unlike the daily lives people have who are not living in a shelter. Individuals and families continue to function. The majority of the folks observed, but not interviewed, appeared as though they were struggling more with their inability to house themselves, rather than with pathologies, as is the stereotype. All the evening routines I witnessed appeared to be typical daily activities.

### **Demographics**

As can be seen in Table 5, there were seven participants that volunteered to be interviewed. The majority is female and the median age for the cohort is 34 years. Recall that the median age for the city of Newton is 36.4 years. Seventy-one percent of the respondents are Caucasian. Two of the seven are currently married with the spouse working and three mentioned children of unknown age. Only two of the individuals, Carol and George, mentioned having a substance abuse problem. Both admitted that their substance abuse issues had a direct influence, among other contributing issues, on their current situation. Betty and George did not have a high school diploma or higher. Of those that graduated high school, Amy and Frances had some college credit and Carol and Erica both had Bachelor's degrees. None of the respondents were currently employed, although Erica was away from work on the Family Medical Leave Act.

With data we will look at later, all but one of the residents is not originally from Newton. It is interesting, however, that the majority of the demographics of this cohort fall in line with the current demographic make-up Newton. Age, race, marital status, and education all fall within the same principal make-up of Newton. Although it says nothing conclusive, it is interesting. Perhaps it speaks to the homogeneity of the Great Plains rather than just the characteristics of

Newton itself. Of course, it is entirely coincidental, as you shall see in the residential history and community connectedness sections.

Table 5 – Interview Participant Demographics Matrix

Participant Demographics	Interview #1 (Amy)	Interview #2 (Betty)	Interview #3 (Carol)	Interview #4 (David)	Interview #5 (Erica)	Interview #6 (Frances)	Interview #7 (George)
Gender	Female	Female	Female	Male	Female	Female	Male
Age	34	21	34	66	35	33	52
Race/Ethnicity	African American	Caucasian	Caucasian	Caucasian	African American	Caucasian	Caucasian
Marital Status	Divorced/ Single	Single	Single	Divorced/ Single	Married	Married	Single
Education	College No Degree	11 <sup>th</sup> grade	Bachelor's Degree	High School Diploma	Bachelor's Degree	College No Degree	12 <sup>th</sup> grade
Employment	Not Currently Employed	Not Currently Employed	Not Currently Employed	Retired	Family Medical Leave Act	Not Currently Employed	Not Currently Employed
Previously Homeless	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes

## Residential History

The line of questioning concerning residential history stems from a curiosity surrounding a person's past residential experiences and the potential social connections that can be made in each type. For example, if a person lives in a single-family residence, their opportunity for social connectedness is likely defined by the block on which they live, which may account for only a dozen households. If they live in an apartment complex in a large metropolitan city, on the other hand, then the opportunity for social contact, if even cursory, on a daily basis might number in the hundreds. These opportunities for social connections are important to understand the skills and opportunities people bring with them to any community, especially when faced with the issue of homelessness.

The experiences people bring from their earlier residential environments may influence their capacities to engage in social situations when living in a shelter, either for the first time or after many times.

Table 6 – Interview Participant Residential History Matrix

	Amy	Betty	Carol	David	Erica	Frances	George	Total
Shelter	•	•		•			•	4
Mobile Home	•	•		•		•	•	5
Apartment	•	•	•	•		•		5
Multi-family	•	•	•	•	•			5
Single-family	•		•	•	•		•	5
Total	5	4	4	5	2	2	3	

The majority of the respondents have lived in both rural and urban areas. Focusing the inquiry solely on adult housing experiences rather than experiences from childhood, five housing types were presented to the interviewees for consideration: temporary shelter, mobile home, apartment, duplex/multi-family home, and single family residence. As is shown in Table 6, while all were experiencing temporary shelter living at the current time, four of the seven had previous shelter living experiences. For the seven residents, they have many shared residential experiences. Only Erica stands as a person who, in her adult life, really has not experienced group living. She has lived in a duplex but during her interview, chose to call it a *twin home*. A duplex is a single home with two living units that share a common wall, but the ownership of the structure is one entity. A twin home is a single building with two living units sharing a common wall with two individual owners and a property line running down the middle of the common wall. There are two separate yards and two separate legal owners. For Erica to make the correction in her answer reveals two assumptions: a) she wants to make sure the interviewer understands that she was once a homeowner, and b) she wants to present herself as once independent with a willingness to return to independence. Erica’s only other housing selection was single-family home. Her home life appears to have been fairly stable.

The only other person to have a limited experience with different housing types was Frances. Prior to residing in the shelter, Frances has lived in the nearby rural town of Peabody. Peabody has only 1,210 people. American Factfinder states that 82.9% of Peabody’s residential structures are single-family dwellings and the second highest category is mobile homes at 8.4%. Apartments of various configurations and unit quantities comprise 7.7% of the remaining stock. Frances stated that apart from living briefly in another small community, she has living exclusively in Peabody, where she has inhabited a mobile home for the past decade.

During their lifetimes, Amy and David have experienced the most diversity in housing. Not surprising for David because of his age; he would have much more time to experience different circumstances and opportunities than someone younger than him. Both have traveled around the country in their living experiences rather than staying in Kansas.

Finally, George is the other unique experience. During the interview George shared that he was lived in and out of shelters for quite a while and spent a little time in a mobile home. However, during another segment of the interview he said that he had owned his own home at one point and his demeanor changed when he mentioned it. He appeared to remember it more as a dream lost than a dream pursued.

### **Community Connections**

The community connection questions inquired about the respondent's hometown. This is an important consideration as to whether social networks exist in Newton for the interviewee or whether new connections and networks need to be established. This also asked about whether Newton was a preferred community move or whether other circumstances brought them to this community. This line of inquiry was designed to understand whether pre-existing relationships could be relied upon to support future efforts, or if efforts by the resident would be needed for future networks. The size of community was also important to understand whether the nature of small town friendships was known to the person, or whether they would have to learn the social networks of rural communities.

Carol was the only resident who considered Newton to be her hometown. She had lived for several years away from Newton and was now living here as part of a larger effort to get her life back on track. She has been battling poor lifestyle choices, both here in Newton and in Kansas City, and now has legal troubles associated with that lifestyle. Some of her family still lives in Newton, as do her children. She has friendships from when she was much younger, but those relationships did not yield the best lifestyle, either. Now, she is has the opportunity to build new relationships in Newton as the terms of her probation dictate she remain in the community for two years.

It was surprising to find the majority of the respondents were from outside the community. I assumed the majority of the residents would be from the Newton community because of its location in a rural setting. It is also an assumption that people moving for services



would move to a larger community where beds would be more available and service networks would be rigorously established. However, as we will see, the variety of explanations for coming to Newton ranged from personal priorities and word-of-mouth, to the appearance of Newton as a safe community and outside agency recommendations.

Even though only one person was from Newton originally, all came to Newton willingly. For example, Amy was from Newburgh, New York originally but has spent most of her adult life in North Carolina. She came to Wichita to live with a friend. When asked why she was living in a shelter Amy said:

Well, I was actually in a desperate situation. I was kinda [*sic*] forced here. Um, I was living with a friend back in Wichita, and she told me to leave and this was the only place I could go at the time. That's how I ended up here in Newton (Amy interview, 2014).

When asked whether she intended to leave Newton once she left the shelter, she explained that the Section 8 program required her to spend a year in Wichita before making any other moves in or out of state. "So, I'm hoping that after a year in Wichita, I can come back to Newton" (Amy interview, 2014).

Betty was also from Wichita. She is currently single with two young children; the older is just now school age. She has recently bounced in and out of the women's shelter in Wichita and during her current experience with homelessness, she moved to Newton. When asked why, she replied, "Uh, smaller town. Seemed more family oriented for me and my children" (Betty interview, 2014). The surprising answer during this exchange is when she was asked about the sizes of communities she has lived in, Betty said, "Well, us, I've always lived in big cities, except for here" (Betty interview, 2014). Betty seems to be prioritizing choices about her residential permanence based on what she thinks is good for her children, rather than herself. She has a perception that small towns offer safer and better environments for child rearing.

Carol is the only one that considered Newton to be her hometown and when asked why she was living in the shelter here in Newton, she responded, "I actually, I was living in Kansas City and I, um, I came back here and I got in trouble for a few things and I'm on probation now for two misdemeanors, and also I have family here" (Carol interview, 2014). She mentions later in the interview that her lifestyle and friendship choices in Kansas City were not good, so she moved back to Newton to be close to her children and her brother. However, she did not leave

her lifestyle behind and her addictive behaviors caught up with her here. She did, however, say that she would likely stay in Newton after her probationary period was over.

David's explanation for coming to Newton was, "Hmm, I was, ah, what is the word? Steered here by, uh, the Veterans Administration, uh, social worker that I'm working with. She suggested that I come here" (David interview, 2014). When asked what the basis of the recommendation was, he said, "Just to get me housing until I can get something better. It's a transient type situation" (David interview, 2014). This could either mean the temporary men's shelters in Wichita were approaching capacity, David's social worker was worried that at his age the larger shelters may pose dangers, or perhaps she knew the Newton location was smaller and David's personality would fit better than in larger institutional settings. When asked if he would go back to Wichita when the housing situation was resolved he said he would like to stay in the Newton area. Later, he said, "I really like small towns, but sometimes you just have to, you know, for working purposes, you need to be in a big city" (David interview, 2014). He is acknowledging the fact that there are potentially more employment opportunities in larger cities; a fact that counters his desire for small town life.

Erica's last residence was in Wichita. What brought her to Newton was a very grave reason:

Um, well, um it...(pause). I wouldn't say that I moved to this community. This is a temporary situation. My husband drug [*sic*] me from a vehicle... So, until he was placed in incarcerated [*sic*], um, I needed to make sure I was well and safe. So, getting out of Sedgwick County, away from familial, familiar things, people, and situations has brought me to a whole 'nother town and shelter (Erica interview, 2014).

When asked whether she would stay in Newton, she said her intention was to move back to Wichita and regain her previous life. She was the most focused on retaining her existing social structures and getting life back to normal. Her parents were caring for her son during her stay in Newton. It is unclear why she was not also staying with her parents, especially given the fact that she stated seeing them twice a week.

Frances considered her hometown to be Peabody, Kansas, a few miles northeast of Newton. Very succinctly, she traced her path since she and her "...first husband and I got married and moved out of our parents house right after we graduated..." as "...Peabody to Hesston and then back to Peabody and then to here" (Frances interview, 2014). She and her

husband moved to Newton about four years ago for work and because her husband's extended family lived here. Together they have two children, one toddler and one school age, and would be considered the working homeless as he works evenings, even though they live in the shelter. Asked about childcare that might allow her to work as well, she said, "I mean, my husband works evenings so he's here in the mornings and then if I applied through SRS I could possibly get it. But I have to work full time, so...and my son's in school so that helps" (Frances interview, 2014).

The final interview was with George. He has lived in the shelter for two months. When asked how he came to call this shelter home, he said:

Uh, that's a good question. Um, I kinda [*sic*] just landed here; not so much planned as, uh, what would the proper way to say that...mm (laughs) spontaneously? I don't know. It was more circumstance...yeah. And someone had told me that this was available here and I decided to check it out and um, it's been a good place. So I...yeah (George interview, 2014).

George expressed a desire to stay in Newton, but also hinted that some future circumstances may dictate whether he gets to stay. When asked, he said, "Yeah, that's to be determined, but...it's possible that I'll have to move on...of circumstances" (George interview, 2014). George was a complex character whose answers seemed to always be a little secretive and very self-reflective. Being in and out of shelters and knowing that often circumstances dictate the direction of life, he seemed fully aware of the tides of fate.

Everyone thought the community was friendly and they felt welcomed. For many, this was the smallest community they had lived in. Most considered cities the size of Wichita to be their experience. The largest cities mentioned were Oklahoma City, Oklahoma; Kansas City, Missouri; Wichita, Kansas; Bellingham, Washington; and Denver, Colorado. The populations range from Bellingham, Washington at 80,885 to Denver, Colorado at 600,158. Rural cities mentioned by name were Newton, Kansas; Great Bend, Kansas; Hesston, Kansas; Peabody, Kansas; and Newburgh, New York; the smallest of these being Peabody, Kansas with a population of only 1,210 people. These numbers show a broad range of city experiences contributing to their opinions about Newton.

While the majority of the responses showed no shared city experience, they all commented on Newton being different than they expected and that experience was positive. When asked, all but one responded that they would like to stay in the community if conditions

allow them to. The primary reasons will become evident in the Social Connectedness and Community Belonging section.

### **Social Connections**

The next series of questions determined the interviewee's existing social networks, either in Newton or outside the community. The intent was to determine if the respondent either continued to rely on existing social structures or whether they were making new contacts in Newton. It was also designed to examine whether there were opportunities for interaction in Newton and whether the residents were taking advantage of those opportunities to build new relationships. The majority of the responses concerning existing relationships were as one might expect. All had family members of one type or another that they had some lingering contact with. Some had past friends that do not live in Newton, but they have regular contact with them either by phone (which was the most common) or through personal visits.

A theme began to emerge regarding the *quality* of relationships that were in their past and the lessons learned. Amy was trying to reinvent her social life here having left all her support. She said:

Yeah, it's hard. It's like I moved into a situation that I'm, you know, was trying to stay away from and to have the family support and, you know, friends, you know, I don't have any friends here. So, all my friends is back in North Carolina (pause) and it's just hard to, you know, find somebody that I can depend on (Amy interview, 2014).

Amy is expressing her desire for support during this time. She is feeling the pressure of her circumstances, having lived in the shelter for five months. It is apparent that her emotional mood is changing and she appeared less positive. Later, when she commented that her desire was to have a better friendship network here in Newton, she hinted that she understood how emotionally taxing these life circumstances are for people in the shelter and how that affects the quality of the communication, thereby affecting the quality of the relationships that can be cultivated.

I would like to develop, you know, close-knit friendship here with somebody (pause, laugh and sigh) but like I said, unfortunately, I haven't found that yet. And, um, the people here in the shelter, you know, I guess we're all here to try to make it, you know, move forward, so we don't really have much time to develop, you know, friendships or relationship here in the shelter, so...People come and go. Um, everybody's busy. Or you might get people in here that's down-and-out,

depressed, you know, and they don't know who to trust, so it's like the communication here is...with well, in my eyes, the communication here is not as open (Amy interview, 2014).

Trust and openness are both factors she explores in this explanation for why others are guarded and relationships are hard to form. She seems to wonder from where others may be responding and how she might break into that somehow. When asked whether she thought it was due to the circumstances or whether people are not as open, she continues:

Um, a little bit of both. Um, it could be...sometimes, it could be circumstances. You know, you might have people that come in here that's [*sic*] might have been in abusive relationships so, they don't know who to trust. Or people that's [*sic*], you know, had relationships with people on the outside, you know, and (pause) they come in here and they still don't know who to trust, you know? So... (Amy interview, 2014).

For her part, she knows herself well enough to understand her reserved personality makes charging forward with new relationships difficult. "Uh, I think I'm more introverted than extroverted, you know, with people. Um, I'm...it's probably because I'm more a one-on-one person when I deal with people instead [*sic*] dealing with big crowds. Um, it's hard for me to show who I am with the crowds than it is with just one individual" (Amy interview, 2014).

Personality and trust among others are the two factors in Amy's life that affect her effort to building bonding relationships, which seem to be what she covets the most at this point in her life. She did not make any comments about needing to make bridging connections to help her move through this period.

Betty had less to say on the subject of social connections. She still had contact with members of her immediate family every couple of weeks. Moving from Wichita that is just 30 miles away, she has lived in Newton's shelter for two months. Bonding connections in the shelter seem cursory from the outside. When asked about friendships, she responded, "The friends I have here (*author's note: she is referencing other residents and volunteers in the shelter*), I see daily; but my other friends from my other city and stuff, I don't ever see them" (Betty interview, 2014). It is unknown why she does not have contact with her recent friendship network. Possibilities include lack of transportation, lack of deep commitment to the friendship, past stresses on the friendships prior to becoming homeless, or an intentional effort to exclude the past group in favor for starting over. In the end, however, she makes the simple statement

regarding building new relationships, “(laughs) Meet new people somehow” (Betty interview, 2014).

Carol’s recent life appears to have been dominated by past addictions and behaviors that damaged not just her ability to maintain an economically independent life, but her bonding and bridging social networks as well. Recall that Carol is originally from Newton. She left after high school, leaving behind the friendships she had from childhood, and the family that still lives in the area. She married and had two children, moved to another state where she received some degree or certification in the health field. Now she is back in Newton, in recovery, and working to resolve legal difficulties. When asked about family she has contact with, she responds, “Um as far as my two kiddos, I see pretty much, throughout the week, all the time. Um, but my brother, I’ll see him maybe once a month, or other family members. Kansas City, I’ll see...it’s been two months. Yeah” (Carol interview, 2014). When later asked about making new connections or bolstering existing relationships, she says, “I’m working on that right now. I haven’t always had a good rapport with all of them. We, uh, kind of went our own way. But recently, we’ve reconnected and we’re working on that” (Carol interview, 2014). This reconnection may be a part of a common twelve-step program that encourages making amends, or it may be an effort to strengthen the family relationships that care for her two children. Either way, Carol is trying to strengthen her bonding capital to cope with the circumstances in her life.

As for Carol’s bridging relationships, she talks candidly about how her choices in the past led to her present difficulties and how important it was to both realize that, and make better choices in the future. “I’ve, like I said, I’ve been in trouble in the past and I am still rehabilitating from that. And showing, I guess, gaining that trust back with those connections” (Carol interview, 2014). When asked whether she wanted to pursue new friendship connections, she said, “Um, more family than friends. Some of the friends that I had, I chose in this area prior to that, got me in trouble, (laugh) so...” (Carol interview, 2014). She obviously has her focus set on developing the strongest bonding capital she can move forward.

David had determined his past friendship connections were not in his best interest and he “broke all ties” because his friends were “either drinking excessively or using drugs” which are all behaviors he did not participate in. When we spoke about making new relationships and what factors might hold him back from that, he said, “Probably, the...when I become too close to someone, or to people, I realize that I probably set my expectations too high. So, its better if I

just avoid people. You don't want to be disappointed in their performance, I guess, as friends, or..." (David interview, 2014).

David concluded that when he was once again residentially independent, he would live a more solitary lifestyle. Speaking about having a place in Newton he said:

David: Because I probably would use this as an address, but I would be traveling quite a bit.

Interviewer: Ah, you like to travel.

David: Oh, I getting [*sic*] from place to place where I like to fish. In March of this year, I went fishing and I fished from March until July, well almost August of this year. Every day I would go to a lake, a different lake in Kansas, and go fishing."

Interviewer: Um, hmm. Sounds nice.

David: Well, it was fine for, you know, for a while. Weather gets kinda [*sic*] hot, but yeah, it was it was fine. I really enjoyed myself. And when I retired, what's a retired person supposed to do?

Interviewer: Travel and fish!

(David interview, 2014).

Even though David is experiencing homelessness, he considers himself retired and has found an activity that makes him happy. He has also concluded that he is not particularly good at maintaining relationships and at this point in his life, it seems he is content to keep to himself and enjoy his retirement. This is as important a choice as wanting to form relationships in a community and it is just as valid a way to live life. He does not seem to be suffering from depression nor do his behaviors seem to interfere with a healthy life at the shelter. He made acquaintanceships with other residents and was commonly found sitting in groups chatting with other residents, so he appeared to enjoy the casual conversation, but did not appear to make any efforts toward cultivating long-lasting relationships.

Erica is the newest resident in this cohort, having only moved in four days prior to our conversation. Throughout the conversation it is clear she focused solely on moving out of the shelter at the earliest possible opportunity. Her bonding social connections are still very strong with her parents. They make the trip from Great Bend twice a week, bringing her son with them. So when asked about her desire to make relationship connections in Newton, her response is, "Um, I have no desire to meet other people right now. I need to focus on getting my life reintegrated where it needs to be" (Erica interview, 2014). Erica does not appear to communicate that she thinks badly about her opportunity for meaningful relationships in Newton, nor does she appear to be antisocial in general. It appears that she is freshly detached from the existing life

and the relationships that it holds, that she wants to return to normalcy quickly. She is a self-proclaimed “social bug” so being relational is not a problem she struggles with, as Amy does. In fact when speaking about her friendship contacts she is in regular communication, saying, “I talk to them often by phone” (Erica interview, 2014). Before the occurrence that brought her to Newton, she had regular social engagements. “I have a group of girlfriends I go with, in Wichita, to the Riverside Perk Coffee just, you know, to hang out, so...” (Erica interview, 2014).

Frances has a slightly different set of circumstances than her cohorts. She is married and caring for two children, while her husband works during the day. She is living in Newton because her husband’s family lives here so her bonding capital seemed to be in-laws rather than her own family. Though they have lived in Newton for four years prior to this shelter episode, she did not talk extensively or longingly about friendships. When asked about where she made the friendship she had she said, “Some of ‘em through work and some through, um, high, we graduated high school together” (Frances interview 2014).

George’s social connections seemed to be more acquaintances with fellow residents, volunteers, and people at the Agape Resource Center where he fills his community service quota during the week. The unique aspect of George’s conversation was that he seemed to be concentrating hard on recovery and that was taking the majority of his mental and emotional strength. It was as though he did not have the energy to devote to being social or building networks of either bonding or bridging capital. He said:

Um, you know, where I am in life, that’s really where it’s at for me. You know, I’m in recovery. I’m an alcoholic, so recovery, you know, is very (unintelligible) to a person in my circumstance, situation, so...It’s something, you know, usually something, you go there, then something usually stems from that (George interview, 2014).

While it was hard for George to see himself in a scenario where he would devote time and energy to building new relationships, he was able to look at the question abstractly and apply it to himself. So when asked about what keeps him from gaining new relationships, he said:

Um (pause) that’s a very good question. Probably myself. Um, um, probably the lack...society...lack of status in terms of, um...you know, status quo, so to speak. Um, that I don’t have enough to offer, you know. Um, that’s it. It’s hard for me to answer that one (George interview, 2014).

It appears George is trying to convey the notion that he has slipped below the social level of society and is struggling with the idea that he might be a good friend to someone else. A clue



may come from the next statement he makes when asked to clarify what he meant by saying *I don't have enough to offer*.

Yeah. I, I haven't had my own place in many years. I used to own a home, believe it or not. Um, that really goes a long ways (laughs), not having a permanent residence (George interview, 2014).

We go on to explore that in the next section, but one wonders if, in his mind, not having a residence puts him below the social strata and therefore relationships cannot be made?

These series of conversations really brought to light one of the strongest themes to emerge. They all spoke of the necessity of building strong, healthy relationships; not just relationships that help you find jobs or get a ride to church on Sunday. They all understood the importance of quality connections whether family or friends or both. Most seemed to be search primarily for bonding connections presumably to help them weather their current circumstances, rather than being stable enough in their bonding capital to start working toward bridging capital.

### **Social Connectedness and Community Belonging**

When faced with the stresses of homelessness, the closeness and welcoming nature of a community can support successful efforts. The direction of this inquiry was to determine whether the shelter residents felt they *could* engage members of the community with positive results. Living in hostile, unfriendly, or alien environments does not encourage people to get to know their neighbors. And, just like the social difference between living in a single family house and living in an apartment building offers different types and occurrences for social connections, so too, does the nature and spirit of the community in which someone new resides.

Amy expressed her feelings about being welcomed when explaining community friendliness:

Well, the people I've ran into outside is very friendly. I just, I guess dealing with, you know, the community service, uh, buildings and stuff (*author's note: community service is required by the program*), we run into the...a lot of people there and they make you feel welcome. And, they're very giving, you know? There's a lot of people that give in this community, so it just makes me feel at home (Amy interview, 2014).

She goes on to say that it is important to have that contact:

Because, um, maybe a situation where you may need somebody's help, and if you don't know anybody in the community that can help you, then you're just left out.

It's good to find out the different resources and stuff in a community and (pause), I guess that's basically my answer. You know, just find different resources in a community and people being able to help you (Amy interview, 2014).

For Amy to recognize that the relational element was the key to her feeling welcomed shows that even the smallest bridge of social capital helps build individual confidence and once a person feels established and has social connections, then openings to Nan Lin's embedded resources becomes evident.

At the end, Amy was asked directly about her opinion concerning the prioritization of home or social network and she chose home because of pragmatic reasons. She was concerned about transportation and employment and associated those with having an address rather than having a strong social circle. However, when asked about her opinions concerning creating strong social relationships, she was the first to caution about the quality of the relationships.

It depends...and I say that based off what I know around here...It really depends on, depends on your, uh, your surroundings because, you know, some people come in here because they have drug issues or alcohol issues, and if the friendships that they develop with the people in the community are against those issues they have, then yes, they will be able to make it here. But if there's, you know, some people are like what they were, then, uh...(Amy interview, 2014).

Betty's past experiences in larger cities have left her somewhat jaded about social networks. "More (unintelligible) from other cities I've come from, uh, they're not very friendly. You now, it's really hard to get along with people. Uh, things like that" (Betty interview, 2014). But she also is able to continue taking people at their face value, giving them the opportunity to prove their relational worth. She goes on, "And it seems here, the people are more welcoming. You know, you always see somebody with a smile; someone's always waving at you, or something like that, so you know, it something...it's more positive here. People that are here are more positive" (Betty interview, 2014).

And for Betty, these positive gestures translated into feelings of inclusion for her. She felt that was an important feeling for being part of the community. "Um, because, you know, if you know things about the community and everything else, then you'll feel like you're included in it. And if you're kept left out, then you're not going to feel like you're going to be accepted, I guess" (Betty interview, 2014).

Betty is making the connection between feeling wanted and accepted in the community, presumably regardless of her residential situation, and that makes her want to become more

engaged socially. It is the open door for her to walk through to become a citizen of Newton. So when asked whether an independent residence or a social network was more important to future successes, she said:

(long pause) Well, thinking about my children, things like that, it'd be more important to have an address. A home. Do you know what I mean? Um, but in other words, I'm a very socialable [*sic*] person. You know, I'm pretty big on that, too. So, I can't really pick out of which one cause the most important thing is a home for me and my children (Betty interview, 2014).

When it came do to it, her residential circumstances were of paramount importance for the safety and security of her children. She thought first about them and put her obvious social inclination on a lesser priority, as one thinks all parents would do.

Carol was the first to introduce the notion that the volunteers may have a role to play in the welcoming feeling they are receiving in Newton. She said:

Um, (pause) this is kind of a vulnerable situation living here, and I've, I've been more than, there's (pause) many different volunteers here that have come forward...given their numbers and say, "Hey if you need a ride anytime, if you need just to go get something, here's my number"...and, very helpful. Kind. And just, especially being here without a vehicle, it's, it's nice to see that they're willing to help (Carol interview, 2014).

Carol goes on to say that she has never experienced that in any other community before and that it really made her feel like a part of the community, even though she was living in the shelter. She was equally impressed that one of the volunteers offered to take her to an area nursing home to get the hours needed for Carol to reinstate her CNA license. That is a bridging capital contact in action.

She was also the first person to raise the notion that having strong relationships in a community equated to being a community asset.

Having strong social relationships. Um, (pause) I think it's important for your self esteem, just building confidence and getting you back into the community, being a community asset as far as not just depending on others to help all the time. Just being independent yourself (Carol interview, 2014).

Carol, even though battling addiction, recovery and legal problems, still envisions herself as an asset to the community in which she resides. And she sees that coming directly from strong social networks.

David recognizes the social inclusion and welcoming spirit he experiences in Newton as akin to Christian values and traditions, but does not want to label it as such. He tries to separate the formality of religion and the generosity of kindness as generally practiced by religious individuals.

I, uh...(long pause) probably the religion I've noticed of the people are here...I'm not going to say terribly devout, but they are...they do believe in helping their fellow man. A lot of the communities I've been in, they do not. A fellowship...of, uh, a belonging (David interview, 2014).

That is what makes David feel included in the community. Knowing David's feelings about wanting a more solitary lifestyle for himself, when asked about the prioritization of residence or relationships, he concluded that social networks were important components of the transition into a community structure as can be seen in this conversation:

Interviewer: Do you think other people experiencing homelessness, all age groups, all genders; do you think they would have an easier time becoming independent again if they established strong social relationships with their community, or is that not necessary?

David: Yes, I believe they would.

Interviewer: So, in general?

David: Yes.

Interviewer: Everybody's a little bit different?

David: Yes.

Interviewer: Okay

David: I think that the older people, the adults that are in here, are probably here because of either drugs or alcohol. I really do. I think at one time during their life, they went overboard.

Interviewer: So, do you think that...

David: That's probably what ended them up here.

Interviewer: So, in your opinion then, would a strong relationship maybe help them not do that, or do you think those relationships are what led to it?

David: Well, I think, probably their strong relationships are the reasons that got 'em here.

Interviewer: Um, hmm. The wrong kind of relationships, then?

David: Yep, well the wrong kind of relationships for me. But for them it's probably just fine.  
(David interview, 2014).

Presumably, David is drawing a conclusion based on his experiences and observations (or perhaps even conversations) that strong relationships that are not conducive to a healthy life are not worth having, at least not for his future. At the end of his statement, he makes sure not to judge the others, but wants to offer this as an explanation for his own decisions and actions.

Erica has been in Newton the shortest period of time so her opinions are probably based more on observations than experiences. She makes a statement leading the interviewer to believe she has not spent a great deal of time in Newton prior to moving here four days ago.

And, um, people are nice. People are very welcoming, um. You know, during the day we're required to leave and in the short period of four days that I've been here, people wave, they're friendly, they greet people. Um, it's a very clean, friendly city. I mean, I've been very pleased so far (Erica interview, 2014).

And when asked about whether she feels social community contact is important, she says:

Um, well, it...it helps the social demographic part of it. And just, welcoming. I mean, being able to, ah, feel welcome and meet other people and, um, understand or, you know, learn about other surrounding here in Newton. It's not as big as I thought it was. So, it kind of gives that hometown feel (Erica interview, 2014).

Erica is giving answers based on her understanding of social connectedness as the interview dictates. She is sprinkling in observations based her comments in context, but she is also speaking about Newton in generalities like a tourist or visitor would. This is entirely understandable because she is new to these circumstances and in her mind she truly is just visiting Newton. She does not intend to move to the community nor does she intend to make any serious social connections here. However, her comments concerning the way people treat her out in the community are not the first made during these interviews. Community courtesy is becoming a demonstration of this community's willingness to be open and accepting, a good trait to have for building bridging capital.

If Erica were to become a Newton resident and had to prioritize between residence and relationship, she would choose relationship, "Because, I...um, an address doesn't define who I am or what my character is about; but socially...I'm just a social bug. So, I, to me, that's more of an importance" (Erica interview, 2014). Truly, Erica needs the social connections to keep her focused, as in her present circumstance.

Frances feels the small-town nature of Newton's friendliness, too. She has lived in the community for four years but still had this to say about its convivial nature:

Because it's not too big of a town, and it's not too small. I mean, people generally, when out shopping and things, they're friendly and people smile and hold doors open for you, which you don't get in, (laughing) not every community, so...(Frances interview, 2014).

For Frances, whether she lives in a home or in the shelter, sees the demonstrated nature of community courtesy. When asked about what how that extends to feeling included, and whether it was important to have a home or to have social connections in the community, she says:

Well, since this is the first time I'm actually homeless, and it's, to me it really doesn't matter if you have an address, because, like the people we communicate with here, everybody's like a family, so I don't think it matters as much. I mean, you can use those connections for networking, for a job or, I mean, resources for things that you wouldn't have if you did not know those people (Frances interview, 2014).

Here, Frances uses her own words to convey Putnam's definition of bridging capital. She seems to understand that making connections beyond her bonding relationships will make herself and others open for opportunities that may be personally important.

George has been involved in homelessness seemingly the longest. He appears to have the most mental scars of the cohort and struggles with self-identity. His statements about belonging, feeling welcome, and connecting to the community reveal the extent to which he thinks about the world and his place in it. For instance, when talking about how welcoming Newton feels to him, this is what he says:

Yeah, I'm not used...I'm one of them social outcasts, right? I'm not used to, you know, people embracing me. There's usually a stigma that involves homelessness, so and that just, you know, a general statement. And there's a lot of nice people who don't necessarily look down their nose at you. Obviously, the people that are around here...ah, there's just this stigma. Uh, I found this is one of the better places I've ever been, in terms of the welcoming, you know, uh...what is it? (contemplative) Just kindness (George interview, 2014).

George's response highlights the exclusion he has felt as a homeless person. At the end, he gives Newton credit for not making him feel as bad about being homeless as he has apparently felt in other cities. He goes on to relate why community connections are so important:

To be included in a group or...uh, well. I guess if you've been...If you spent a lot of years being, um, kind of on the periphery or, um, isolated from, kind of, society

or mainstream. It seems like it's difficult to get, you know, back into the mainstream. How you integrate, you know. I'm just learning, I guess, how to do that. (long pause) Being, I guess, honest, you gotta [*sic*] be honest with yourself and understand your mistakes, shortcomings, and once you do admit that, then, you know, the healing begins. Now, there's people who really do care as long as you're not trying to blow smoke up their...you know (laughs) (George interview, 2014).

George is speaking about being genuine with people and about how he thinks he could have integrity in a relationship with other people. He suffers from alcoholism and admits to knowing a thing or two about being manipulative. These realizations all point to having healthy relationships with people when he is clean and sober. He goes on:

George: Which, out of all the great manipulators...Now really, until you hurt anyone, there's [*sic*] manipulation is pretty strong. Yeah, that honest self-examination, honestly, is really important for...to, to move forward.

Interviewer: Right. And I guess that's directly related to making relationships and then building those strong...

George: Yeah, healthy, yeah.

Interviewer: ...connections.

George: 'Cause all 'em, you know, when you're so dysfunctional and drunk you just tear 'em all down and you really don't develop any new ones. And the, you know, you pay the price and consequences through the years is that you start add and plant some good seeds for the future you can turn it around. Absolutely! Healthy relationships down the line. (George interview, 2014)

George understands the need to be authentic in his relationships and he also knows how important a role relationships play in his future success, whatever that effort might be. So when asked about whether those authentic, genuine, honest, healthy relationships were more important or less important than having a residence, he had this opinion:

George: I would hope those things would go together. And, if you've been where I've been, you (pause) it seems selfish, but a roof over my head. That's pretty much where you start. I'm sure the network would be important, you know, in the long run.

Interviewer: But having a roof over your head makes a lot of difference?

George: Yeah, if you haven't been there, it's ah...yeah, that's uh...I don't know, you get...you get jaded, or whatever you want to call it. Yeah, that'd be great, but you kind of forget what that's like. (*author's note: I think George is talking about forgetting what it's like to have a home of his own*) It's really strange, you know? You know, I had a home that I had blood, sweat, and tears into and that's a bitter pill to swallow when you lose, just become angry and things (voice trails off). But that's been many years ago. Like you said, if you have a roof then that social

network would be very important because you can't just stay isolated. You can't do it alone. You have to have healthy relationships (George interview, 2014).

This last section explores how important relationships are for these individuals and how they prioritize them against residences. It also gave them an opportunity to examine the question from the point of view of someone else experiencing homelessness. Every person has a perspective based in rational, learned knowledge and a set of experiences. How we live that perspective is sometimes two-sided. For example, George understands rationally that relationships are important for all people and that bonding and bridging capital, when healthy, are both very positive. So when he talks abstractly about prioritizing the two, he chooses the importance of relationships. So important is the social connection between George and the outside world, when he talks about his sobriety, he says:

When you tap into that (*author's note: "That" is God's power over his addiction and his ability to overcome daily struggles.*), it's amazing. Your life is, you know, has a purpose. It's just not a waste of time, you know (laughs). You're doing this, you just, don't care. It's nice to know that your life counts and be, uh, clear-headed, and don't just let life pass you by. And then, of course, hopefully you get to the point where you help others. They're in the same struggle, you know (George interview, 2014)?

But his experiences with a loss of an individual residence, a long-term experience with homelessness, a constant struggle with the addiction of alcoholism, and the depression that comes with an on-going struggle that seems to take all his energy and leaves him feeling like he has not made positive gains toward independence. These negative feelings lead him to want an independent residence, even though it appears selfish to him when he says it out loud. He finishes talking about wanting the residence first with this statement. "Yeah, that sounded like maybe a little lame, but yeah. I would say that would be a good starting point." (George interview, 2014).

### **Emergent Themes and the Study Topic**

As can be seen Table 7, the largest number of responses came from the inquiry concerning Newton being a "welcoming" community. When the question was asked, the respondents were given the opportunity to define what that word meant to them and overwhelmingly, they used personal acts as descriptors, rather than the look or feel of the community. Words like fellowship and phrases like *a smile* or *a wave* was attributed to the



friendly nature of the community. Acts like holding the door open and greet(ing) people were used to describe how simple acts of courtesy by members of the community made big impacts on people experiencing homelessness who see themselves mostly as strangers in Newton. This is important because, as we shall next see, personality and social attitudes based on circumstances influence, if not dictate, a person's desire to respond positively to social opportunities.

On the heels of that information comes the theme of personality and social contact. While most everyone agreed that a strong social network was important in some way, and all thought making connections in their home community sounded like a good strategy for a myriad of pragmatic reasons; five of the seven acknowledged the influence of individual personality on the forging of relationships. David said he considered himself "self-sufficient" and that it was "better if I just avoid people." Although, at the same time, he stressed the importance of the concept of social connectedness, even going so far as to enjoy the small acts of kindness afforded to him contributing to his feeling of being welcome in Newton. Another similar response came from George who characterized himself as "a social outcast" who was not used to "people embracing me." Finally, Amy knew she was more socially confident in a one-on-one scenario rather than in larger group settings. She said, "...it's hard for me to show who I am with the crowds than it is with just one individual" (George interview, 2014).

On the other side of the coin, Erica referred to the consistency of social relationships even in the midst of a chaotic life, consistently referring to herself as a "social bug," referencing what she saw as a positive personality characteristic she had. Others commented about the desire for more contact and were generally satisfied, at least temporarily, with the daily interaction with volunteers.

The third theme to surface, and even though it tied for second strongest response, came across clearly during multiple interviews and in multiple locations in the interview sequence: the importance of healthy relationships. The format of the questions inquiring about social connections made no distinction between the quality of the relationships or the individual health of relationship, only that they fell into bonding and bridging categories and whether they were personally important to the interviewees. On more than one occasion, residents pointed out the distinction between good and bad relationships and the influence they had on future success, regardless of the endeavor. They consistently drew attention to the idea that bad relationships,

either ones from the past that might be rekindled anew, or new relationships in a new community, will inevitably have ill effects on the personal success experienced by them.

David said, “I broke all connections, because I would say 95% of my friends that I had before are either drinking excessively or using drugs and I do neither and so, you know, a difference of temperament. I’m not going to be around people that do that.” Carol, who made several statements about how her past friendship circle getting her into trouble, still thinks having a strong network is important; she wants to make sure the new group is a healthier group. “Having strong social relationships. Um, I think it’s important for your self-esteem. Just building confidence and getting you back into the community...being a community asset...” While Carol was not familiar with the concept of social capital as being an asset, it was curious she used this word and viewed her contribution to the community in this way. Consciously, she understood that if she was participating in healthy relationships and led a healthy lifestyle, she would be a contributing member of the community and therefore, an asset to groups in the community as well as the community itself.

Listening to and coding the responses of the participants, it became clear that, although they had individual and diverse circumstances that brought them into homelessness and to the Harvey County Homeless Shelter, there were commonalities that emerged as a part of a collective experience. Those four themes are represented in Table 7 and are expressed in the following synopsis:

1. Personality dictates whether a person is comfortable meeting new people and sometimes controls the types of interactions a person chooses to make
2. The community of Newton has a general feeling of welcoming that contributes to a person’s desire to interact positively with those around them.
3. The residents generally thought social relationships and belonging to social networks could be prioritized higher than their living conditions.
4. In order for relationships to be a positive influence on their lives, the health of the relationships and its influence was more important than just making social contact with others.

Table 7 – Thematic Typology Matrix

Themes	Amy	Betty	Carol	David	Erica	Frances	George	Total
Personality Affects Contact	•	•		•	•		•	5
Community Courtesy	•	•		•	•	•	•	6
Connections Over Address		•	•		•	•		4
Healthy Relationships	•		•	•	•		•	5
TOTAL	3	3	2	3	4	2	3	

## Chapter 5 – Conclusions

The topic this research seeks to explore is: *How those currently experiencing homelessness perceive the influence of bonding and bridging social capital on their future successful residential reintegration.*

### Relevant Factors to Consider

#### *Four Elements*

Lin's four social capital network embedded resource elements are information, influence, social credentials, and reinforcement. In the conversations concerning relationships and the ability to see oneself as a part of a new community, which is largely the cohort that participated in this process, these four elements are either diminished or completely non-existent. *Information* exchange initially is between the residents and staff or volunteers. Information is not being shared through social networks in the broader community. This appears to be due to three things: the interpretation of shelter rules regarding freedom of movement, the lack of a trusted and established network of bridging capital (the more loosely connected of the bonding and bridging pair), and the lack of social meeting spaces and activities.

If the residents are to gather information about social events, community events, activities, employment opportunities, or vacant residences, they should be in the community meeting with friends, acquaintances, and contacts. They should also have access to electronic communication linking themselves to their networks without having to be physically proximate to them. Living in a state of homelessness often means having less access to personal or public transportation. In a rural community, public transportation options may not exist at all. Then, as the weather turns seasonally inclement, bicycling and walking as a means of transportation even becomes problematic, reducing a person's opportunity for face-to-face relational contact, making telephonic and internet contact even more vital for information exchange.

The *influence* that relationships have in the broader community, the second element identified by Lin, is mostly non-existent in the homeless. Of the bonding capital relationships most admitted having, few of those contacts were substantially linked with Newton. Therefore,

even though these relationships were the strongest influence in the resident's life, they appeared largely unable to influence any contacts in Newton in any significant way, to benefit the resident.

Without a network of bonding and bridging social capital in the community, either because of lack of history or lack of tenure, the third element *social credentials*, was non-existent for all residents. This element is only banked when bridging relationships are consistent and meaningful. In this case, the network is not available therefore no credibility can be built. The first step most residents have taken to gaining a new network begins with the volunteers who are from the community. They would be the first opportunity for meaningful interaction and who would take the resident's relationship out into the community, thereby building social credentials for the resident.

Finally, *reinforcement* is the element that each person has, but perhaps not in the way that is most beneficial for his or her future. They do belong to a particular cohort, those who live in the shelter, and as such, they can build trusting relationships among each other. For some, this is a useful exercise as they have a need to practice building a social network and have equal need to give and receive trust from other members of the shelter community.

Assessment of these four elements of social capital among the interviewees indicates that they would benefit from building a positive social network if they are staying in Newton. A valid place to start is among themselves, with shelter staff, with outside volunteers, and finally outside the shelter in the community-at-large. And even though they belong predominantly to the shelter cohort, that will not always be the case, so social credentialing is important as people move out of the shelter and gain residential and economic independence.

### *Depression*

Depression among the homeless did not seem to have a large influence on the residents interviewed. However, the majority was new to the Harvey County Homeless Shelter and many had no previous experiences in shelter living. Of the seven, only two had previous time spent in shelters among a homeless population. Recall from the literature, it was found that the longer someone stays in a state of homelessness, the better the propensity to experience depression as a result. Therefore, one might conclude the symptoms of depressions should not be exhibited. However, this study has no way of knowing what circumstances the residents suffered prior to their contact with the study or their stay in the shelter. Statistically the study should be able to

rely on the short-term duration of their stay to state with reasonable accuracy this cohort generally does not suffer from depression, however it is unable to do so.

Therefore, should residents of this cohort, and the shelter in general, find themselves continuing to experience the stressors of living in a state of homelessness with or without a healthy network of bonding capital to relieve the stress, and bridging capital to quickly move through their current circumstance, the more likely they are to experience depression and hopelessness. Further, a symptom of depression is removing oneself from social contact thereby producing a spiral of needing connections and rejecting connections. Therefore, actively building bonding and bridging social capital is an important component to fending off some causes and symptoms of depression in those experiencing homelessness, thereby positively aiding in their ability to become residentially independent and stable once again.

### *Home*

The concept of home often gets used to refer to the structure in which we live. Yet for those that experience homelessness or choose to be migrant, the term can be used to refer to sentimental geographical attachment to a city, region or even a country. *Home* can remind us of childhood memories or the place where the majority of our family now lives, or even the place we grew up. It means so much to so many that an individual definition of home is practically impossible. During the interviews, the term *hometown* was used to evoke a memory. By using this word, it gave let the resident know the intent of the question was to find out where they came from, and if they had returned. The study may never know how they truly defined the term, but it gave the question the best chance of having a universal definition. Sentimentality aside, what came through in answering the question of whether they were going to leave Newton after moving out of the shelter, the predominant answer was no. Therefore, they chose to make Newton their *home*, even though it may not be their hometown.

Understanding that each individual choose the manner in which they define home is how this informs the research conclusion, and each individual has differing criteria they choose to make new situations feel comfortable.

## **Conclusions Concerning the Study Topic**

The first factor to consider is the bias the study topic has concerning the healthy nature of the relationships involved. While the study topic distinguishes between bonding and bridging capital and seeks to understand resident's perceived effects each has on future residential success, it fails to account for the nature of the relationships and the health and personality of the persons participating in those relationships. This examination reveals that the study topic makes the following assumptions: a) all new social capital efforts by shelter residents are made with a desire for healthy, meaningful relationships, b) the nature of bonding relationships are always positive, and c) the primary, daily focus of shelter residents is to utilize bridging relationships to expediently find employment and secure personal independence.

When considering the first assumption, one assumes the most basic desire of anyone experiencing homelessness, especially for the first time, is to move back into mainstream society as quickly as possible. While this may be the case, there are extenuation factors that may preclude this effort and prolong the period of homelessness. There were two examples of this in the interviews. George spent many years battling alcoholism by participating in rehabilitation and continues to do so. While the rational part of his brain agreed with the study topic, he was right to point out that he was not in a place in life to attempt such meaningful connections. He feels it is more important to heal his own wounds, change his behaviors, and secure personal independence prior to attempting new social connections. Without being residentially settled, it seems, he is not going to concern himself with extending his roots into a community social network.

In the second example, David has spent the majority of his recent adult life challenging all his existing social connections with the sole purpose of breaking off ties, either good or bad, in exchange for an individual freedom and the ability to live a solitary life by choice. This research cannot deduce motivation for this decision; it can only speculate that the effort needed to form and nurture meaningful relationships was beyond his will or ability, or that he has been excluded enough times that severing ties is the proactive way of keeping him from being the emotional victim in these circumstances. His stated reason was to protect himself from other's destructive behaviors.

Of those that considered themselves to be socially oriented, they had different motivations when it came to reconstructing their lives. Erica showed that because of her recent

move into the shelter, she was focusing on getting right back into her recent life. Because her social personality may make her the most able to form new relationships with people both in the shelter and in the community, her desire to re-establish her previously stable life leaves her singularly focused on getting out of the shelter, back to her residence, and realigned with her existing social capital network.

The second assumption was that all bonding relationships (*exclusive* capital built mostly for the individual and is good for *getting by*) are positive relationships. We can see from Carol's interview that she was trying to reestablish good relations with her immediate family; the relationships that one assumes to be her bonding relationships. Her response leads us to believe her behaviors led to the loss those relationships over time and presumably she replaced her family with those she was closest to at the time. Unfortunately, those relationships were also unhealthy ones. When she became sober again she found herself without positive, healthy bonding relationships at all. There was no support network available to help her cope with her situation.

The third assumption was that everyone in the shelter was actively seeking employment and housing as quickly as possible. David showed us that is not always the case. While he may benefit from a social network of friends and family in the future, full-time employment and a permanent residence were not at the top of his priority list. He was focused on enjoying his retirement and being independent. This report suspects that with the right balance of social security and disability benefits, this may be possible. Therefore, the assumption does not apply to everyone equally.

One last thing to consider, though not an initial assumption, is the impact of volunteers and volunteer opportunities interacting with the shelter residents. The volunteers are focused on helping and serving people who are experiencing homelessness in Newton, Kansas. This same effort extends to the businesspeople that routinely provide volunteer opportunities and community service hours for shelter residents. All have an inherent bias toward helping those in need. It is presumed all of this positive interaction influences the mental state of the residents giving them the opportunity to pursue positive, healthy relationships of both the bonding and bridging variety. This was also the singularly most expressed evidence of community *welcoming* that the residents mentioned. This constant positive interaction charges social batteries encouraging residents to risk social interactions in the wider community with the expectation



they will be afforded the same response of respect and courtesy they have come to expect in other, earlier relationships. This will lead to the eventual formation of diverse networks of relationships used; the definition of social capital and exchange theory in action.

At the beginning of this study, three categories of homelessness were defined: transitional, episodic, and chronic. At the conclusion of the definitions, the question was asked whether the participants of this rural cohort would fall neatly into those three categories. Although her experience was led by a precipitating event, Erica has not experienced homelessness before and has no known pathologies or behaviors that caused her situation. Therefore, she is transitional. Frances is also transitional in that economics played a role in her current circumstances, but her family has not experienced homelessness before now. Amy, Betty, and Carol are characterized as episodic as have each have spent time in a shelter formerly. They are both living lives that require stabilization before returning to a normal home environment. And, by their admission, both David and George fall into the chronic category having lived in several shelters. George suffered from both a medical condition and battled alcoholism and does not see an immediate end to his homelessness. David is beginning to live a more nomadic lifestyle as he begins his retirement years. So, this cohort does indeed fall neatly into the three classifications with no regard to them being a rural cohort rather than an urban one, challenging the assumption that urban and rural populations are fundamentally different. The expression of homelessness in the two may take different forms, but they generally share similar circumstances and experiences.

The research explored: *How those currently experiencing homelessness perceive the influence of bonding and bridging social capital on their future successful residential reintegration.* The basis for the study was to gather foundational information that might be built-upon when determining whether rural homeless shelter programs should encourage social connections for their residents, just as they would develop program elements that encourage them to seek employment, financial and medical assistance, counseling and treatment, or affordable and safe residential solutions. We will not know, without further study, whether bonding and bridging social capital had a direct effect on each resident's future successful

residential reintegration. We can say with relative certainty through this study that the residents *perceive* social networks to be an important part of their lives.

While the number of mentions for each thematic elements shown in Table 7 depicts the favored theme being Community Courtesy, which is a strong factor in building social capital, especially for a shelter resident new to the city as most of these interviewees were, the larger message being delivered by the tone and tenor of the interviews were *quality* relationships. The importance of the quality of social relationships a person forges and maintains was paramount on almost everyone's mind. Many times during conversations, the residents' tone changed as they described, and sometimes cautioned about, how poor social network choices likely contributed to past problems and would likely contribute to future failures as well.

The single largest phenomena demonstrating the role of quality relationships in the eyes of the residents interviewed was the welcoming gesture made by the volunteers in the facility, with whom they have daily interactions, and by the anonymous members of a community-extended general courtesy exhibited during the course of the day. In this case, simple acts of respect, courtesy, and kindness to each other was not only noticed, but also absorbed by the interviewees. So impactful were these simple gestures that the residents who were likely to struggle with the immediate need to stabilize their lives and regain residential independence would choose to make that struggle in Newton, Kansas. That speaks volumes toward the notion that social capital, both bonding and bridging, is important in the support of future successful efforts toward independence.

Bonding capital (*exclusive capital built mostly for the individual and is good for getting by*) and bridging capital (*inclusive capital and is good for getting ahead*) are compared by looking at the times each were either specifically referred to, or were cursorily alluded to. During the interviews, bonding relationships were most commonly referenced either through familial relationships or by elevating friendships to the level of helping a person cope. All understood the power of these types of relationships now and in the future. Amy and Carol both prioritized the closeness bonding relationships bring to their lives. The importance of this form of capital was clearly stated.

Bridging capital, however, was less emphasized. Acquaintances and relationships that build opportunities for employment and other valuable life-assets were less referenced. The majority of the residents did not see much beyond their immediate social needs, making bridging

capital less important for day-to-day living. Presumably, this asset would become more important as the strength of a resident's daily life stabilized.

Finally, LaGory has stated that the mastery of one's life is more important than social support when mediating depression in homeless populations. When one masters one's life, it leads to an emotional state where social connections can be made. Bonding capital is seen through these interviews to be the first asset mentioned as important to coping with day-to-day living; often more so than securing an individual residence. So, this suggests a chicken-and-egg phenomenon that is unresolved. For the purpose of this study, residents own opinions concerning the importance of social networks, both bonding and bridging (less so) demonstrates that their immediate mental health is of paramount importance.

The conclusion to this investigation is that the importance of building social capital is ultimately up the individual. It is based on their emotional state, their personality, and their circumstances. Knowing that humans are generally social by nature makes having social opportunities available daily for residents to take advantage of an important part of their emotional well being, building their confidence to pursue independence once again. Helping them understand the importance of getting out into the community and interacting, as one would normally do if their circumstances were typical for their individual lives, is paramount. As one individual stated, he had lived on the periphery of society long enough that he did not think he had *enough to offer* in social relationships; perhaps a foreshadowing of his potential future efforts.

Do the opinions and beliefs of the residents of the Harvey County Homeless Shelter support the study topic inquiry that those currently experiencing homelessness perceive the influence of bonding and bridging social capital on their future successful residential reintegration as positive? Generally, yes it does. Conversations with the residents, most of whom were not past residents of the community, stated they believed that relationships are an important part of everyone's life and having the opportunity for interactions with other people was not only beneficial, but preferred. The one important caveat to that belief was that the *quality* of the relationships was more important than the *type* of relationship or the benefits it offered. If relationships did more to damage or derail efforts, then the exercise was not in the best efforts of the resident.

## **Conclusions Regarding Chosen Methodology**

Phenomenography is an interesting and relevant methodology for this type of study. The perceptions of the individual residents are most critical and the lack of interviewer intrusion in documenting, but not analyzing, those conversations are paramount to understanding the topic from the sole perspective of the resident. A careful approach to authentically documenting each conversation is very important. This allows the words of the interviewee to carry the weight of their opinion; not the post-analysis of the researcher.

It is also important to include as much detail as possible when transcribing and using the conversation in the research. Each response is genuine and the researcher needs only to put the conversation in context for the reader. This methodology fit perfectly into this type of study.

Grounded theory brings to this process the critical thoughts of the researcher, allowing an evolutionary thought process to take place. By circling back to the conversations more than once, the nuances in voice tone, body language, pauses and other verbal and non-verbal take more importance in understanding where themes may emerge. Coupled with phenomenography, grounded theory helps to bring richness to both the data and the understanding.

## **Where the Study Topic Fell Short**

What the topic failed to take into consideration were the following: quality of the relationships have to produce a positive result on the person's life; the person's desire to form new, or repair old, relationships are paramount; and there are those in temporary shelter situations that neither have the desire nor the inclination to forge any new relationships, they simply want to correct the reason for their current homelessness and move back into society. These may be structural things like employment, housing assistance, or health care.

### *False assumptions*

Prior to engaging in this research, the topic made a few false assumptions based on the researcher having no previous experience with personal homelessness or those who have experienced homelessness. First, it was assumed all people experiencing homelessness would be looking for employment and housing in order to quickly and efficiently regain their status as a community member and homeowner. That assumption turned out to be false from many perspectives. During the exploration it was found the majority of the residents wanted to first

strengthen their bonding social network prior to any efforts toward financial or residential independence.

Second, it was assumed that the majority of the residents of the Harvey County Homeless Shelter were citizen residents of Newton, Kansas, and that in-migration to Newton was a rarity. This was not the case in all but one of the instances. There were many influencing factors that brought people directly and specifically to the Harvey County Homeless Shelter. Of those, direction by outside agencies was the most surprising, but word-of-mouth was also unexpected.

Third, it was assumed that the only way toward residential reintegration was through new bridging capital opportunities. The expectation was that residents would find opportunities to actively meet new people creating new networks of relationships that might help them in their circumstances. What was found was many residents lack the social confidence or the prioritization to actively pursue new social connection opportunities.

### **Avenues for Further Inquiry**

A longitudinal study following those interviewed to see whether their perceptions about social connections and relationships change over time, would be a good way to see whether their options change over time due to either a prolonged stay in the shelter, or their quick return to residential independence. As has been pointed out throughout this study, the longer one stays in a period of homelessness, the more opportunity there is to develop depression. A long-term study would allow the shelter to implement social community interaction or mentorship programs and study the effects of mental and emotional health changes.

Another avenue is to study the difference between the personalities of men and women as they regard social interaction in their lives. This study discovered the two male subjects were more likely to become solitary or focus their efforts on structural changes rather than relational changes. While this is beyond the scope of this research, it would be interesting to see if gender differences have a direct influence on building social capital while experiencing homelessness.

A third area of inquiry would be to use this study as a template to study other existing rural shelters around Wichita, Kansas, or in the larger area of the State. Finding commonalities and differences among other shelters would bolster the finding of this study and help determine whether any differences exist in rural areas with regard to the five areas of inquiry defined in this study.

And finally, an assessment of other rural shelter's programs in regard to organized or informal opportunities for residents to build social capital in their respective communities. This study would be helpful in understanding how important other shelter or their residents think building social capital networks are in their communities or regions.

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# Appendix A – Interview Questionnaire

## Demographics

**1. What is your Gender?**

**2. How old are you?**

**3. What is Your Current Marital Status?**

- a. Currently Single
- b. Currently Married
- c. Divorced, Currently Single
- d. Widow/Widower, Currently Single

**4. What is Your Highest Level of Education?**

**5. What is Your Current Employment Status?**

- a. Employed, Full time
- b. Employed, Part time
- c. Not currently employed

## Residential History

**1. During your adult life, what types of housing have you lived in?**

- a. Temporary shelter
- b. Mobile Home
- c. Apartment/Condominium
- d. Duplex/Multi-family
- e. Single family home

**2. Of those chosen in number one, what was the duration in each type?**

**3. How long have you lived in this shelter?**

**4. Have you lived in other temporary shelters before this current time?**

**5. If yes, how many occurrences and average duration per stay and where were they?**

## Community Connection (establishes their personal connection to community)

**1. Is this your hometown?**

**2. If not, where is your hometown?**

3. If this is not your hometown, how long have you been away from your hometown?
4. During your adult life, how long have you lived in this community?
5. Why did you move to this community?
6. When you move out of this shelter, do you plan to leave this community? Why or why not?
7. In your adult life, what size communities have you lived in?

### Social Connections

1. Do you have family in this community?
2. If yes, who are they?
4. Do you have friends in this community?
5. If yes, in what circumstances did you get acquainted?
6. How often do you see your family?
7. How often do you see your friends?
8. Other than family or friends, where do you often meet others in this community?
9. Of those selected above, how often are you in contact with that group?
10. Do you regularly attend community activities, other than those selected above?
11. How often do you desire/require the support of your family/friends/social network?
12. Of the possible social connections we've identified, which do you not have that you'd like to have?
13. Of those identified, what do you think holds you back from establishing those connections?

### Opinions about Social Connectedness and Community Belonging

1. Do you feel welcome in this community? Why?
2. Do you think contact with others in the community is important to feeling included? Why?

- 3. What kinds of activities do you participate in with others?**
- 4. How do these activities make you feel about this community?**
- 5. Which do you think more important when considering yourself a part of this community: an independent address or strong social relationships? Why?**
- 6. Do you think others who are homeless would have an easier time becoming independent again if they established strong social relationships within their community?**

## Appendix B – Interview Mapping Matrix

Area of Inquiry	Literature Section	Interview Category	Question
Demographics	Allard, <i>Access to Services Homelessness in the U.S.</i> Meghan, et al, <i>AHAR HUD, Annual Home Assessment.</i>	Compare cohort against the typical demographic analysis.	What is your gender? How old are you? What is your current marital status? What is your highest level of education? What is your current employment status?
Residential History	Cloke, <i>Homelessness and Rurality</i> Moore, <i>Placing home in context.</i> Pascale, <i>There no place...</i> Sommerville, <i>Homelessness..</i> Winkleby, <i>The medical...</i>	Identify different styles of residences available during adulthood and how those might shape or influence social connections in the past/present.	What types of housing have you lived in? What was the duration in each type? How long have you lived in this shelter? Lived in other temporary shelters? How many and average duration?
Community Connection	Cloke, <i>Homelessness and Rurality</i> Moore, <i>Placing home in context.</i> Pascale, <i>There no place...</i> Putnam, <i>Bowling Alone</i> Sommerville, <i>Homelessness</i> Vandemark, <i>Promoting the sense of self, place,...</i>	Informs opinion about Newton, its size and opportunities for social connections.	Is this your hometown? No, where? How long have you been away? How long in this community? Why did you move to this community? Do you plan to leave this community? What size communities have you lived in?
Social Connection	Bhattacharyya, <i>Theorizing Community Development</i> Cloke, <i>Homelessness and rurality.</i> Irwin, <i>Social assets...</i> LaGory, <i>Depression among...</i> Lin, <i>Building a network...</i> Pascale, <i>There's no place...</i> Putnam, <i>Bowling Alone.</i> Vandemark, <i>Promotiong the sense of self, place,...</i>	Establishes whether existing social connections have been established or need establishing. Identifies resident's opportunities for social interaction. Desire to make connections or remain isolated.	Do you have family in this community? Yes, who? Do you have friends in this community? Yes, how did you get acquainted? How often do you see your family? How often do you see your friends? Where do you often meet people? How often are you in contact with friends? Regularly attend community activities? Desire/Require support of family/friends? Want other social connections? Anything holding you back?
Connectedness/ Belonging	Irwin, <i>Social assets...</i> LaGory, <i>Depresion among...</i> Pascale, <i>There's no place...</i> Vandemark, <i>Promotiong the sense of self, place,...</i>	Understands how they feel about this community and whether topic is residentially or relationally based.	Do you feel welcome in this community? Do you think contact with others is important to feeling welcome? Kinds of activities do you participate? How do those activities make you feel about the community? More important: residence or relationships? Are strong social relationships important in becoming part of a community?

## **Appendix C – Coded Interview Transcripts**

## **Interview #1 - Amy**

### **DEMOGRAPHICS**

**What is your Gender?**

Female

**How old are you?**

34

**What is Your Current Marital Status?**

Divorced and currently single

**What is Your Highest Level of Education?**

Some college.

**Some college, okay. Was that community college or four year?**

I've done community college and I've done four-year program.

**Okay.**

**And, what is your current employment status? Are you employed full time, employed part-time, or not currently employed?**

Not currently employed.

### **RESIDENTIAL HISTORY**

**Alright, this next section talks a little bit about residential history, and what I mean by that is places that you've lived, so...Okay, so, during your adult life, what types of housing have you lived in? We're just going to talk about adult life here, and not about your life growing up as a child, but during your adult life, what types of housing have you lived in? Temporary shelter, mobile home, apartment or condominium, multi-family like a duplex, or a single family home?**

I've lived in all (laughing).

**You've live in all of them? (laugh) Okay. (pause)**

**And, of those chosen, what was the duration in each type? Okay, so let's say temporary shelter, how long cumulatively, have you lived in temporary shelters?**

Umm...

**Approximately.**

Probably a year.

**Okay. And mobile home?**

Two years

**And an apartment or condominium?**

Umm...(pause) four years.

**Duplex or multi-family home?**

Duplex, maybe a few months.

**Okay. And what about single-family homes?**

Umm...(long pause) about fifteen years.

**And, how long have you lived in this shelter?**

This is my fifth month.

**Fifth month, okay. Have you lived in other temporary shelters?**

Yeah.

**Okay.**

**How many occurrences?**

Just one, one other...

**One other occurrence, okay. And how long was that stay?**

From November (brief pause) until March.

**Okay.**

## COMMUNITY CONNECTION

**Now let's talk a little bit about communities.**

**Is this, Newton, is this your hometown?**

Yes.

**Okay. During your adult life, how long have you lived in this community.**

I'm sorry. You said hometown?

**Hometown.**

No, this is not my hometown.

**This is not (emphasis) your hometown? Okay.**

**And where is your hometown?**

In Newberg, New York.

**And how, umm, how long have you been away from your hometown? Not just here in Newton, but total length of time away?**

Well, I've gone back to visit several times, but living wise?

**Yes, residential.**

It's been (pause) let's see, I'm 34 now, at least 22 years.

**Okay.**

**And, how long have you lived in this**

**community?**

Here? Five months.

**Five months, okay. (pause) And, uh, why did you move to this community?**

Well, I was actually in a desperate situation. I was kinda forced here. Um, I was living with a friend back in Wichita, and she told me to leave and this was the only place I could go at the time. That's how I ended up here in Newton.

**I see...**

So, I have to go back to Wichita...

**So you can take advantage of that program?**

Um, hum.

**Okay, makes sense.**

**And, when you move out of this shelter, do you plan to leave this community?**

Temporarily.

**Okay. Tell me a little bit why...temporarily.**

Well, um, I'm on the housing program. So I have to live in Wichita for at least a year before I can move out of the city or out of the state.

**Okay.**

So, I'm hoping that after a year in Wichita, I can come back to Newton.

**Okay, so you're just here, um, you're here until you have enough financial resources to move back into Wichita?**

Well, the plan was for me to stay here in Newton until...because I had applied to the Section 8 program, and they sent me a letter in the mail saying that I was approved for it, so that kinda forced me out of living here.

**In your adult life, thinking of all the communities you have lived in, what were the approximate sizes of those communities? So, for example, Newton is just right around 20,000 people.**

Um, I wanna say, one is probably around 100,000. Here, I mean Wichita? I'm not sure how many people live in Wichita.

**About 350,000.**

Okay, and (pause), then here.

**Okay. So, you've had a pretty big range of...**

Yes...

**...urban..**

...yes...

**...and small...rural.**

*This person wants to stay in Newton but it's the opportunity for housing that is drawing her out of the community. Should the Section 8 housing code be a city-wide initiative or should vouchers be regional? How hard would it be to track that money? And why should she stay for a year? I know that's a requirement for the voucher, but if they can track her housing situation in a city of 350k, shouldn't they equally be able to track her in a statistical area of 570k?*

*Even so, she is stating that she wants to move back to Newton after that year is complete. She has no concrete plans, she has no family, and will later admit that she has no close friends in the city, and yet she desires a residence in Newton. Why? She grew up in Newburgh, New York, a city that's part of a metropolitan area, but with a population of 30k. Does this feel like home? What about her experience in North Carolina?*



...yes.

## SOCIAL CONNECTION

**Let's talk a little about social connections. Do you have family in this community?**

No

**Okay. Do you have friends in this community?**

No

**Okay. How often do you see your family?**

Umm, estimating, probably once a month.

**Okay. So, you have some fairly close by, then?**

Well, I have family in Wichita.

**Oh. Um, so do you have friends in Wichita, too?**

No.

**Okay.**

No, I'm new to this, to this state...

**Okay.**

...so I'm still learning people.

**Okay, alright.**

**Other than family or friends, where do you often meet others in this community? When you bump into other people, maybe have conversations with folks...**

Well, I've actually met more people here in the shelter than I have...

**Okay.**

...outside the shelter.

**Alright. So, obviously since you've met more people in the shelter, you're, um, meeting with those folks daily.**

Yes.

**You're building those relationships every day?**

Um, hmm.

**Do you regularly attend any, uh, outside community connection...Do you go to, for example, work or church or civic groups or community activities, or...?**

No. Not...(pause). Since I've been here, there's only one program that I've been to, here in Newton.

**Um, hmm.**

Um, and it was at Norm's...

**Um, hmm. Norm's Coffee Shop?**

Um, hmm. Yes. I've been there one time, and that's it.

**Okay.**

But other than...on a daily basis, no. Well, we have to do community service...12 hours community service.

**Alright.**

So, that's probably the most that I go out of the shelter, is to do the community service, and that's about it.

**How often do you desire or require the support of your family/friends/social network?**

Well, (laughs) probably I would like to have it all the time. But, I get it that often, so... Yeah, it's hard. It's like I moved into a situation that I'm, you know, was trying to stay away from, and to have the family support and, you know, friends, you know, I don't have any friends here. So, all my friends is back in North Carolina (pause) and it's just hard to, you know, find somebody that I can depend on.

**Right, right. Of all of the possible social connections you've identified, which do you have (pause), which to you not have that you'd like to have? Obviously, you've said you'd like to have a closer...**

Yes

**...friend network.**

Yes.

**Um, but to explore that just a little bit, you obviously have some good friends...and I can see by the expression on your face...**

Um hmm

**...you have some good friends back home in North Carolina...**

Um, hmm.

**...that you'd really like to be in contact with.**

Yes.

**Um, is it more that you'd like to get back to that set of friends, or do you think you could develop those same sorts of close networks here?**

I would like to develop, you know, close knit friendship here with somebody...

**Um, hmm.**

...(pause, laugh/sigh) but like I said, unfortunately, I haven't found that yet. And, um,

*She starts off this section saying that she left her social network behind in the Carolinas but would like to find a strong social network here in Newton. However, she also has family in Wichita. Why aren't they included in her recognition of a support network? Does she have a less-than-great relationship with them? Are they less than supportive? So, in this case she's searching for bonding relationships, for which family would be an outsider's obvious choice, yet she isn't including them.*

*She also talks about being able to depend on her network of social connections. This probably stems from her recent experience of being forcibly removed from her housing in Wichita. It was a friend that she now can't depend on for support. There is a trust issue to resolve.*

the people here in the shelter, you know, I guess we're all here to try to make it, you know, move forward, so we don't really have much time to develop, you know, friendships or relationships here in the shelter, so...

**Because of the transitory nature...**

Um, hmm.

**Of people coming and going...**

People come and go, um, everybody's busy. Or you might get people in here that's down-and-out, depressed, you know, and they don't know who to trust, so it's like the communication here is...with well, in my eyes, the communication here is not as open.

**Um, hmm. Circumstances? Do you think it's circumstances, or people? Do you think the people aren't as open or people are just more guarded?**

Um, a little bit of both.

**Yeah.**

Um, it could be...sometimes, it could be circumstances. You know, you might have people that come in here that's might have been in abusive relationships so, they don't know who to trust. Or people that's, you know, had relationships with people on the outside, you know, and (pause) they come in here and they still don't know who to trust, you know? So...

**Okay, so, that falls right into my next question and that is, of those identified, and those are the people that are her in the shelter mostly, what do you think holds you back from establishing those connections?**

Um, hmm...

**Because they may have... ..**

Um, hmm...

**something going on, but what do you think...**

Um, hmm.

**Holds you back the most?**

Uh, I think I'm more introverted than extroverted, you know, with people. Um, I'm...it's probably because I'm more a one on one person...

**Um, hmm...**

...when I deal with people instead dealing with big crowds. Um, it's hard for me to show who I am with the crowds than it is with just one individual...

*She's beginning to wonder if the relationships she has easiest access to, those who are already in the shelter, are stable enough to bond with. Who can she trust? Who has mental instabilities or issues outside the shelter? What if she begins to trust someone and they have to leave? Because of her self-proclaimed introverted personality, each time she musters the courage to chance a new relationship, it may be for naught, and that is emotionally taxing. And, it costs her emotional energy to find out. What is the lesser of two evils? Trying and failing or not trying at all?*

*This is the first look at the **theme** of personality being a contributing factor in the formation and continuation of existing and future relationships. Some personalities, like this one, are less enthusiastic about approaching strangers and striking up conversations or trying to get to know someone without a broader context. I would guess this is true for this individual regardless of her residential circumstances.*

*Compound this with being in a new community that you aren't familiar with and new, strong relationships are even harder to establish. Will she benefit from future strong relationships and their benefit in community integration? I still suspect so. The time factor, however, is a concern. The longer one is homeless, the longer it takes to move out of homelessness, statistics show.*

**THEME**

**Um, hmm.**

...so that'll probably be the biggest thing for me.

**Okay. So just a little shy?**

Um, hmm.

## SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS AND COMMUNITY BELONGING

**Let's talk a little bit about your opinions. These are totally based on your opinions about social connectedness and belonging to a community. So, do you feel welcome in this community?**

Um, hmm. Yes, I do.

**And, why is that? What makes you feel welcome?**

Well, the people I've ran into outside is very friendly. I just, I guess dealing with, you know, he community service, uh, buildings and stuff, we run into the, a lot of people there and they make you feel welcome. And, they're very giving, you know. There's a lot of people that give in this community, so it just makes me feel at home.

**Do you think contact with others in the community is important to feeling included?**

Yes.

**Okay. And, why is that?**

Because, um, maybe a situation where you may need somebody's help, and if you don't know anybody in the community that can help you, then you're just left out. Its good to find out the different resources and stuff in a community and (pause), I guess that's basically my answer. You know, just find different resources in a community and people being able to help you. (long pause for distraction)

**Just about done.**

Um, hum.

**What kinds of activities do you participate in with others?**

Well, in the past I have, I like to go play pool. I like to go to the movies. Um, library. Shopping or probably the most that you can do here in this community...

**Um, hmm.**

... is those things.

*I'm sure somewhere, someone has written about what makes a community feel welcoming, but this is the start of many comments that talks about small courtesies that contribute positively to the feeling of welcome the interviewees have in Newton. Here, the word "give" is the descriptor.*

*Of course, if we examine that deeper, perhaps the idea that someone is "giving" to someone who's so obviously in "need" makes sense. I wonder if I'd feel welcome if I was in need and someone was willing to help. Would I feel the same way if I was raking leaves in my front yard and a stranger asked to help me rake? Would I think that was a welcoming gesture as a new resident in Newton? Perhaps, especially if someone acted that way to get to know me more and welcome me to the neighborhood.*

*However, how many times are new families welcomed into the neighborhood? How many residents are welcomed into the apartment complex?*

*This section on activities shows that she's been involved in larger social circles with plenty of outside opportunities for engagement. Mentioning the library and shopping are what she can immediately think of, in terms of things to do in Newton. But, I think it also reveals that she's lived in cities that have more to do; Wichita, for example.*

*The other revealing thing she says here is the acknowledgment that, even though Newton is smaller and less overt things to participate in socially, she doesn't mind leaving those opportunities behind to stay in a community this size. She uses the word*

**So, if there was a larger community, you'd do more things?**

Yeah. But, I enjoy the small community. It's not a busy...so.

**Right.**

Yeah. I can appreciate it.

**How do these activities make you feel about this community?**

Great! You know, happy moments. (laughs)

**Uh, huh. Those are good!**

Um, hmm.

**Which do you think, I'm going to give you two choices; which do you think is more important when considering yourself a part of this community: an independent address, meaning you could live here on your own, you're not in a shelter but you have your own place, or strong social relationships and why? Which of those would you consider more important when you would consider yourself a part of this community?**

(long pause) If I'm answering the question correctly, I would say (pause), hmm...

**I can rephrase it.**

Independent...you said independent access...

**Independent address.**

...address. Well, I would see that as the better answer because with this being a small community the, uh, like, I guess, the public resources like public transportation and stuff, you have to be, you have to have the necessary, you know, needs to make it here in this community. With, you know, with lack of transportation um, the lack of, I guess, public services...

**okay...**

so, I hope I answered that correctly.

**You're right, I think, what I...I very much appreciate that answer um I guess as I thought about it, when I wrote the question, I was thinking "could I feel like a part of the community, and build relationships and live at the shelter" and would that be okay, or "do I feel like it's more necessary for me to feel like a part of the community if I have my own place." So, that's kinda what I was thinking**

*"appreciate," which to me means that she recognizes the community's value in her life even though it's smaller. And, it's giving her "happy moments."*

*So, her lens is access to independent movement in the community when a person lives at the shelter...I think. I think she is equating "independent address" to independence (rightfully so, given her circumstances), but I think she missed the point of the question. I recognized that at the time, but I think I would be embarrassed if I pressed the question thinking it might embarrass her or upset her. I didn't want to give the impression that I was trying to be smarter than she was.*

*I think her statement about answering the question correctly was the catalyst. Since there is no right or wrong answer, because it is subjective, I felt to press for a different answer would make her feel like she'd gotten it wrong somehow.*

**about.**

I, I think it would be...to have more access to the community when you have your own place. That's a great way to put it.

**Do you think...this is my last question...do you think others who are homeless would have an easier time becoming independent again if they established strong social relationships within their community?**

It depends...and I say that based off what I know around here...

**Um, hmm.**

...it really depends on, depends on your, uh, your surroundings because, you know, some people come in here because they have drug issues or alcohol issues, and if the friendships that they develop with the people in the community are against those issues they have, then yes, they will be able to make it here. But if there's, you know, some people are like what they were, then, uh...

*This is the first of many times I would get the impression that I made a mistake in not differentiating between healthy and unhealthy relationships. I am reminded that, while the study topic speaks to the strength of a relationship contributing to future success, it doesn't distinguish between good or bad; nor does it define what measures of a relationship are best to have for reintegration.*

*This might be the first step in another study topic and theme for future inquiry.*

**THEME**

## **Interview #2 - Betty**

### **DEMOGRAPHICS**

**What is your Gender?**

Female

**And, how old are you?**

21

**And, using these four, what is your current marital status: currently single; currently married; divorced, currently single; or a widow, currently single?**

I am...I've never been married.

**Okay, so you're just currently single?**

Um, hmm.

**Alrighty.**

**What is Your Highest Level of Education?**

Uh, 11th grade.

**Okay.**

That's my last grade completed, anyway.

**Okay. No GED?**

No.

**Okay.**

**What is Your Current Employment Status: employed, full time; employed, part time, or not currently employed?**

Not currently employed.

**Okay.**

### **RESIDENTIAL HISTORY**

**That was demographics. That's how easy that was. Next let's talk about residential history.**

**Um, and in this context we're only talking about your adult life; so we're not talking about your childhood. So, anything less than 18, we're just going to not consider. (child in the background)**

That's my son.

**Okay.**

**(interviewee leaves the room to attend to her child; long pause)**

Okay, sorry about that.

**S'all right. Mine used to be little, too. Wait 'til he's fifteen.**

Yeah (laughs)

**Alright, uh, during your adult life, what types of these housing components have you ever lived in: temporary shelter; mobile home; apartment or condominium; duplex or multi-family; or single family home?**

I've lived in a duplex, apartment, um, shelter...obviously...um, mobile home...and, what else?

**Single family...home.**

No, huh uh.

**Of those four that you've identified, what was the duration in each one of those? So, for example, in the temporary shelter, how long have you lived in the shelter?**

About two months now.

**And mobile home?**

Um, I lived in a mobile home for a year.

**Okay, and apartment?**

Um, six months.

**And a duplex?**

Uh, (pause) three months.

**Okay. And, so your two months was in this shelter? "How long have you lived in the shelter," that was the two months that you said, right?**

Um, hmm.

**Have you lived in any other temporary shelters other than this one?**

Uh, yes, uh the uh women's shelter in Wichita.

**Okay, and how long were you there?**

I was only there for about a week.

**Okay.**

## COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

**So, let's talk about community connections. We're going to talk about, in your past, what kind of community connections you've had. What I mean is relationships. Um, is this your hometown?**

No, I'm from Wichita.

**Okay, you're from Wichita. That was my next question.**



**Since this isn't your hometown, how long have you been away from your hometown? Living away.**

Um, it'd be...like all together?

**Yes, in your adult life.**

Uh, about a year...

**Okay.**

...on and off.

**Um, hmm.**

**So how long have you lived in this community?**

Um, two months?

**Alrighty.**

**And, uh, why did you move here?**

Uh, smaller town. Seemed more family oriented for me and my children.

**Okay.**

**And when you move out of this shelter, do you plan to stay in this community?**

Um, hmm.

**Okay.**

**And in your adult life, what size communities have you lived in, in terms of population; so Newton's about 20,000; Wichita's about 325,000?**

Well, uh, I've always lived in big cities, except for here.

**Okay, this is your first time in a small community? So, do you have family in this community?**

No.

**Alright.**

## SOCIAL CONNECTIONS

**Do you have friends in this community?**

Just the people I've met here.

**Alright. So, is "yes" okay with that?**

Yeah.

**Okay. (laughs) And, so, uh, the circumstances, I suppose, that you met folks because you moved into the shelter here, and so they're here, and so that's how you got to know these folks.**

*This is a little perplexing. She's from Wichita and has been gone from there, on and off, for a year, with children in tow. Did she come by herself? Did she come with a mate or friend? In and out of women's shelter either means she's had children in tow when she's been homeless before, or she was escaping an abusive relationship, perhaps?*

*There's the notion that small towns are friendly, or in this case, "family oriented." It's disheartening to think that people wouldn't allow their children to be raised in an urban environment, but I think that's because the parents haven't been raised in an urban environment. When I visit large cities (Milan, London, Edinburgh, Belfast, New York, Chicago, Washington, D.C., San Francisco, Los Angeles, Tokyo) I see children being raised in those environments. I see them riding the subway alone going to or from school. There's nothing that makes children safer in either environment, other than education and awareness. I'm grateful that people think small towns are safer, but I'm disappointed that's all they consider.*

Yep.  
**Okay.**

**How often do you see your family?**

I would say, every couple of weeks.

**Okay. But you see them monthly?**

Yeah.

**Or, or weekly?**

I would say, I see my Mom weekly.

**Okay. That's okay. Is monthly...I have daily, weekly, monthly...**

Monthly is fine? Okay.

**Uh, okay, how often do you see your friends? And it can be these friends or friends you had in Wichtia, too.**

I haven't seen none of my friends since I moved.

So...

**Okay, so the friends that you have here, obviously, you're seeing daily.**

Yeah.

**Okay.**

The friends I have here, I see daily; but my other friends from my other city and stuff, I don't ever see them.

**Okay.**

**Other than family or friends, where do you often meet others in this community?**

I think the library.

**Okay.**

And the volunteers here...stuff like that.

**Oh yeah. The volunteers! And, so, you're having contact with those folks on a daily basis?**

Yeah; more than once; I'm sorry.

(phone call)

Hey, I'm kinda talking to this guy.

**Do you regularly attend community activities?**

No, not really.

**Okay.**

**Now, I have a word "desire" and "require" in this one, so you can exchange them however you'd like. How often do you desire or require**

*I wish I'd have pressed a little harder here. I wonder if they never interact because of distance or if something happened? I wonder how that plays into her thoughts and feelings about making social connections? In the age of mobile phones, you'd think she'd still have contact if she (or they) chose to. What about access to electronic forms of communication in shelters? Perhaps each might have iChat or Skype stations to allow personal, long distance contacts to stay strong, helping people maintain the bonding capital they desire.*

**the support of your family, friends, or your social network?**

I don't really understand...

**Um, let me see if I can rephrase it. Family and friends, um, some of those relationships, you might want to talk to those folks on a daily basis just to say, "hey, boy, you'll never guess what happened to me today." So you just like to have that social contact. Um, other times, uh, you may have had a really stressful day and you'd really like to just, you have a close friend or a close family member and just tell them, "hey, this happened to me today, and it was a really tough thing." So, there's different levels of connections you have with different relationships, so, would you say that, um, that you desire or require those kinds of contacts with people on a daily basis or a weekly basis...**

Weekly.

**Weekly basis?**

**So, of the connections we've identified, that your friends are generally here and the volunteers are people you see here too, um, of those connections that you don't have, would you like to have? Which ones would you like to have? For example, if you were employed; if you went to church regularly; if you went to social groups, or had other activities that you attended; are there connections that you haven't made in this community that you'd like?**

Yep.

**Okay. And what kinds of connections would you like to make in this community?**

Um, church.

**Okay. Alright.**

(laughs) Meet new people somehow.

**How would you go about meeting new people, if that was a priority, here in Newton?**

Um, I don't know. I just trying to figure out like, little social events or something. Churches. You know, stuff like that.

*This piece was really tough to pull out of her. I wonder if the stress of being in a shelter in a different town for the past two months, along with caring for a child, makes her socially or emotionally unavailable to forge relationships. She seems to want find opportunities so maybe having a child makes it harder to be mobile and seek out those opportunities.*

*However, I think that, especially with this group, if you asked for a ride to church on Wednesday night or Sunday morning, you'd have more than one offer. If it were important to you, then you'd prioritize it.*

**SOCIAL CONNECTIONS AND  
COMMUNITY BELONGING**

**Um, hmm. Okay. Do you feel welcome in this community?**

Yeah, for the most part.

**Why? What makes you feel welcome?**

More (unintelligible) from other cities I've come from, uh, they're not very friendly. You know, it's really hard to get along with people. Uh, things like that. And it seems here, the people are more welcoming. You know, you always see somebody with a smile; someone's always waving at you, or something like that, so you know, it's something...it's more positive here. People that are here are more positive.

**Okay. Do you think, out of curiosity, do you think that's because the town is smaller, or there's something about this town that makes it more friendly?**

Probably, a little bit of both.

**Okay.**

You can't pinpoint just one. Probably both.

**Alright.**

**Do you think contact with others in the community is important to feeling included?**

Sorry, what?

**Do you think that having contact with other people in this community is important for you to feel included in the community?**

Yeah.

**Okay, and why to you think that would be?**

Um, because, you know, if you know things about the community and everything else, then you'll feel like you're included in it. And if you're kept left out, then you're not going to feel like you're going to be accepted, I guess?

**Right. Right.**

**What kinds of activities do you participate in with others? So, if your life, whether here or back in Wichita, what activities do you like to do...**

Um...

**...with people?**

Rock climbing, biking, mostly athletic things.

**Hmm, okay.**

**And how do these activities make you feel about this community? Do you have those same opportunities here?**

*Okay, here's that part about common courtesy again. She uses descriptors like "smile" and "waving." On the other side of the coin, she starts her comment with "it's really hard to get along with people." So, she identifies with strangers, but doesn't really want to have contact with them. Yet, she seems intrigued by the "positive" nature of the town. I wonder what other dichotomies she wrestles with?*

*This feels a little like a canned answer. She doesn't really seem connected to the conversation. However, this notion of being kept out, being on the periphery, is something that a homeless person would think a lot about. This might be about being unconnected. When you move into a shelter in a different town, do you feel unplugged? Is this part of the earlier notion I had about the importance of staying in your hometown when you experience homelessness? The literature referred to it as "disaffiliation."*

*Will you feel less unplugged if you stay in your residential community rather than moving out? What's more individually important: staying plugged into your community even though you're living in the shelter, or avoiding the stigma of homelessness by moving to another community to become invisible?*

*So, maybe the strong HEALTHY social connections are part of a larger question about plugging into the community you've chosen, whether you chose it before or after your homeless episode.*

**THEME**

Not rock climbing

**(laughing) True.**

You know, biking and stuff is, and things are pretty walking distance...

**Um, hmm...**

...I'm a very active person so I like to walk and ride bikes. Things like that. Things are not that far here so you can pretty much get everywhere on foot or on a bike or something like that, so...and I like going to the parks and doing things like that with my kids. So, it's all...they have a nice athletic park that I take them to, and...

**Um, hmm.**

...different types of, you know, jungle gyms, I guess is what you'd call it.

**Yeah.**

And, you know, so it's pretty interesting.

**Hm, good.**

**Okay this is a, uh; this is an opinion question, so if I need to rephrase this I can. I'm going to give you two things to compare and you can select one or the other. Which do you think more important when considering yourself a part of this community...So, for you to say "hey, I'm a part of this community; I'm a part of Newton now. Or "I'm a resident" or "I'm a part of whatever I think community means here in Newton," is it more important for you to have an address or social relationships?**

(long pause) Well, thinking about my children, things like that, it'd be more important to have an address. A home. Do you know what I mean? Um, but in other words, I'm a very social-able person. You know, I'm pretty big on that, too. So I can't really pick out of which one cause the most important thing is a home for me and my children.

**Okay. Okay, so having that home...having an address for your kids, would make you feel more a part of this community than the other.**

(head nod)

**Okay.**

**Do you think others...Okay now so let's, let's just think about homeless people in general, whether it's here in Newton or in Wichita, or**

*She is missing the social aspect of her life, but she recognizes the need for a stable home for her children. I think she desires that for herself, too, but couches it in the context of her motherly concerns. Ultimately, it's her devotion that wins. However, as I stated earlier, is that another reason holding her back and will she come to resent her children?*

anywhere in the nation. Do you think that other people that experience homelessness would have an easier time becoming independent in the future if they established strong social relationships within their communities; wherever they find themselves? Do you think it would be easier for them to be successful...

Um...

...or not?

I mean, you can be as social-able as you want and get, as many, um, as many connections to get you know, you know, food or, you know, shelter, or whatever, but really its up to that person. So, I guess, it really just depends on the person, if they're going to be successful in the future or not. Because, some people (pause) they, some homeless people that I've met in Wichita, and things like that, they don't want to have a home. They want to on the streets and doing whatever they want to do, so they just use the community. And that's it. And I know some other homeless people that are just like, you know, I'm in a bad rut right now. I'm just trying to get myself to be more successful. So, I guess it just depends on the person.

Um, hmm. Okay.

*Here, she's saying that the only person that can answer this is the people themselves. Again, personality or personal desires dictate what is more important in each individual life. Choice is dictated by needs, desires, circumstances, personalities, attitudes, and obligations. Whether having relationships solves them or a home solves them is entirely an individual call. What does this say about the nature of homeless programs? Does one give them equal weight? Does one support one over the other? Should each individual be given a custom program based on all the various inputs and their prioritization?*

### **Interview #3 - Carol**

#### DEMOGRAPHICS

**What is your Gender?**

Female.

**That was an easy one.**

(laughs)

**How old are you?**

Um, 34.

**I'm going to give you four categories, let me know which one you fall into.**

Okay.

**Currently single; currently married; divorced, currently single, or a widow, currently single?**

Currently single.

Okay.

**What's your highest level of education?**

I actually have a Bachelor's degree.

Okay.

**What's your current employment status? Are you employed full time, employed part-time, or not currently employed?**

Not currently employed.

**I'm at the end of the demographics. Now, the next section is called residential history. I just want to get a little bit of background. In this section, we're only going to talk about your adult residential history, not your childhood residential history.**

Okay.

#### RESIDENTIAL HISTORY

**During your adult life, what types of housing have you lived in: temporary shelter, mobile home, apartment or a condominium, duplex or multi-family, or a single family home?**

Uh, single family home, duplex, as well as apartment complex.

**Okay. (pause) And obviously shelter, right now.**

Yes.

**Okay, we're going to go through those four selections and I'd like for you to tell me how much time you spent in each one of those.**

Okay.

**So, uh, the shelter.**

Um, two months.

**And these are cumulative times; so over the length of your adult life. Apartment?**

Oh, gosh, uh, a lot. Um, I'd say ten years.

**Okay. Duplex?**

Two years.

**And single family?**

Uh, two, twooooo...three years maybe.

**Okay.**

**And you said that you've lived in this shelter for two months?**

Um, hmm. I haven't lived in any other shelter.

**Okay. And that was my next question (laugh).**

## COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

**Let's talk about community connections. Is this your hometown?**

Yes, it is.

**During your adult life, how long have you lived in this community, cumulatively?**

Um, (long pause), five years?

**Okay.**

**This is going to seem like a little bit of an odd question since this is your hometown, but maybe you can think about it in terms of having left and come back, or those kinds of things. So, why did you move to this community?**

I actually, I was living in Kansas City and I, um, I come back here and I got in trouble for a few things and I'm on probation now for two misdemeanors, and also I have family here.

**Okay.**

**When you move out of this shelter, do you plan to leave this community?**

No, I'll probably stick around.

**Okay.**

*So, here's someone that considers Newton to be her hometown and she's currently 34, yet she's only lived here for five years as an adult? So, from 18 to 29 she lived somewhere else?*

*Living in KC is the first answer to the question above. And, this is the first time we hear of trouble with lifestyle and the law. With her probationary requirements, that determines the length of her stay here. Were her past relationships good or bad? Will she reconnect with past relationships? Will it be harder to comply with her probation living in a small, rural community where new relationships are sometimes hard to find, while keeping away from the people you bump into every day? Does the probation put an unnecessary risk on the person? Is a probation transferable?*



**So you mentioned Kansas City, but thinking of all the communities you've lived in, in terms of population, what are the different sizes of communities you've lived in?**

I've lived in this city. Um, (long pause). Like, what, what...I'm sorry. Like, uh, just going from city to town, or...?

**Yeah, I'm trying to understand the size of cities you've lived in. So, Newton's about 20,000, Kansas City is, you know...**

I've lived in Florida for a summer. Lived in Michigan for a summer while I was going through college and just during the summers I would go places.

**Okay. You've lived in all different size cities?**

Yeah.

**Okay. Both urban and rural.**

Yeah.

**Okay.**

## SOCIAL CONNECTIONS

**Let's talk a little bit about your social connections. You mentioned that you have family in this community and uh, what family? Parents? Grandparents?**

My kids both live here...

**Okay.**

...and my brother lives here.

**Okay.**

**And, um, do you have friends in this community?**

Un, yeah, I...going away I lost those connections. Coming back, I do have some that still live around here.

**Okay. And, um, so, tell me about how you made those connections with those friends. Some were childhood friends?**

Yeah. Just growing up and going to school.

**Okay. And what about adult friendships? Did you meet them through work, perhaps, or social connections through church or activities?**

Most of 'em are just familiar from school.

**Okay.**

In this area. Now when I went to Kansas City, it was different. You meet all sorts of people...

**Um, hmm. And tell me what context you...**

*Here are some of the answers to where this person has been for the past several years. It looks as if she's traveled to several areas in her adult life.*

*Children (presumably living with someone else; I wonder if it's the brother?) and a sibling living in town. The childhood friends are confirmed here. Now she's adding a cohort of relationships in KC. I wonder if her experiences away from Newton contributed to her troubling lifestyle, or if those behaviors were developed here and taken on the road?*

Most work, or just like where I was living.  
Meeting people...

**Like apartment complex?**

...apartment complex.

**Okay.**

**How often do you see your family? I have here daily, week, monthly, regularly...**

Um, as far as my two kiddos, I see pretty much, throughout the week, all the time. Um, but my brother, I'll see him maybe once a month, or other family members, Kansas City, I'll see...it's been two months. Yeah.

**Okay.**

**How often do you see friends?**

Umm...

**Either here or Kansas City...**

...yeah. Rarely now. We do have curfews and it's really kinda hard to have any kind of social life outside of here. We have to be here by 5:45 and we have to be back by 8:00. So, as far as activities other than church, it's really difficult to do that.

**Um, if you didn't have those curfews, just out of curiosity, would it be easier or would you find yourself making those connections more often?**

Probably.

**Okay.**

**Other than family or friends, where do you meet other people in this community?**

Church.

**And, how often are you in contact with that group?**

Um, I'll, I don't go every Sunday. I should go every Sunday, but every other, like, every other weekend.

**Okay.**

**So, you do...Oh, about. Let's talk about community activities: fairs, festivals, parades. Those kinds of things. Do you attend those here in Newton?**

Yes.

**Okay.**

*Apart from the honesty and embarrassment factors, I wonder why she hasn't brought up a 12 step groups or therapy groups as a social circle? Perhaps these aren't the people she wants to have long-term relationships with or maybe she's not actively participating in groups that offer support for addictions and lifestyle choices. If she's not, she's missing out on an opportunity not only for emotional support, but also for possible friendships. Does she have biases against other people with addictions? I would think about myself that if I had a problem with alcohol and decided to go to an AA meeting, that I'd be looking for the quick support, but wouldn't necessarily hang out with anyone else there. Why? I'm better than that and only have a small issue that I'm concerned with rather than a life-altering and debilitating illness. There's my bias. That may also be lie that all people with addictions start with. Perhaps that's why you must first admit to the powerlessness you have over the addiction. Humility is the only path toward breaking down the bias.*

*Once you have become humble in the presence of your Higher Power and the men and women in the group, then you can start to build healthy relationships. Could the NEWLY homeless benefit from the same brush with humility, or am I making too much of this?*

**How often do you desire or require the support of your family, friends, your social network?**

I'm working on that right now. I haven't always had a good report with all of them. We, uh, kind of went our own way. But recently, we've reconnected and we're working on that.

**Hmm. Obviously a desire of yours?**

Yes, it is a desire. It's very important, so...

**Of the possible social connections that we've identified, which do you not have that you'd like to have? And maybe that goes back to your...**

Probably, more family...

...connections.

...connections.

**And, what do you think holds you back from establishing those connections?**

I've, like I said, I've been in trouble in the past and I am still rehabilitating from that. And, showing, I guess, gaining that trust back with those connections.

**You think that you would also pursue, we mentioned the time constraint, but do you think you would pursue friendship connections...**

Yes.

**...again, too, as well, or just family?**

Um, more family than friends. Some of the friends that I had I chose in this area prior to that got me in trouble, (laughs) so...

**Okay.**

(laughs)

**That's a good strategy.**

(laughs)

SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS AND  
COMMUNITY BELONGING

**Do you feel welcome in this community? Why?**

Yes.

**And, why do you feel welcome in this community?**

Um, actually, prior to living here, I didn't realize how (pause) um, through living here, the

*Not knowing how long she's been back in town, but knowing that her stay in the shelter has been for two months, I assume her reconnection with her family is new as is evidenced by her response. That being said, I see that her focus is family connection (bonding). She is looking first for support that will help her get through her troubles. Whether that's wisdom or fear, searching for bonding capital is a logical first step in rebuilding social relationships that a person might want to keep. Otherwise, they'd go back into the community of social relationships that continue their lifestyle without judgment or retribution.*

*She's burned some trust bridges here in town, probably before she left for KC or other areas. Now that she's back and is going to be here for a couple of years, she sees the importance of rebuilding. She doesn't seem as concerned about forging relationships to aid in her residential or employment plight, but just to get her life back in order.*

*Here is confirmation that her past friendships here in Newton were a problem with her decisions and lifestyle choices. Now, what to do about the nature of the friendships she moves forward with. How will she find new bridging relationships and stay away from past influences since can't or won't leave this community? Strengthening the bonding relationships is a good start, but beyond that, how will she capitalize on these to be successful? Is it only through some measure of internal growth and wisdom does the experience of building anew positively change the future? And can this be said about all of us? We learn from the past. We can forge positive futures partially by learning from, shedding, and avoiding past mistakes.*

churches that come in, volunteer and the time that they, they um, volunteer here, I had no idea. And they're all very, very nice and we do have a lot...we have a lot of vol...volunteers that come through here.

**Do you find yourself making friends with volunteers as well?**

Yes. They're very nice. Very helpful and they do care. You can definitely tell they care.

**Do you think contact with others in the community is important to feeling included?**

Yes.

**And, why would you think that?**

Um, (pause). This is kind of a vulnerable situation living here, and I've, I've been more than, there's (pause) many different volunteers here that have come forward...given their numbers and say, "Hey, if you need a ride anytime, if you need just to go get something, here's my number"...and, very helpful. Kind. And just, especially being here without a vehicle, it's, it's nice to see that they're willing to help.

**Right.**

I've even had one who volunteered here and she offered me, um, she told me I could come out to Kansas Christian Home and do 40 hours and then get my CNA's so I could reinstate my license, so...

**Wow.**

Yeah, it makes you feel part of the community. I didn't...I never...I didn't see that prior to living in the shelter. So...

**That's an interesting, um, I guess a different lens to look at the community through.**

Um, hmm.

**Right. Wow.**

**What kinds of activities do you participate in with other people? It doesn't need to be here. For example, when you lived in KC you had friends...what kinds of things did you do?**

Well, see that's where, um, things are different now. Like, uh, when I was living in Kansas City, I was, kind of, getting in trouble and some of the things that we would partake in...

**Um, hmm.**

...weren't in my best interest, so...

**Um, hmm.**

*I think this is a particularly nice sentiment. With experience and maturing comes wisdom. I think wisdom is a nice way of saying we've screwed up a lot, in both big and little ways, but we've learned something about those failures and we carry the lessons forward. Now, that doesn't mean we use our wisdom to make BETTER choices, just DIFFERENT choices. We hope they're better. If not, they're fodder for more wisdom-building.*

*It's also nice to know that a community has hidden potential for all of us, depending on what we're looking for. She left as a young person not really looking for what she's found upon her return. A fast lifestyle is what she wanted and now that she's back and looking for something slower, she's finding the community can offer that experience as well.*

*What she really finds remarkable is the volunteer's capacity to just "give" without payment. Perhaps this is something she's not experienced before in her lifetime, at least not with any great amount of generosity or regularity. She also seems surprised to be the recipient of the offer to help. Like maybe she's not worthy of the help.*

*So, is the observation here that volunteers are naturally giving people to start with and it should be no surprise this is the observation by the residents, or is the observation that **simple acts of courtesy** that we all give one another on a daily basis, something new and out of the normal experience of homeless people and shelter residents? Because it's uncommon or unbelievable, it's more powerful when experienced by the residents?*

**THEME**

*Now here something tricky. The essence of the question was to determine what kinds of social activities do they like and are they available in Newton? What I'm finding, and*

Being back here, just learning to kinda live sober...

Um, hmm. Okay.

**So, thinking about, now that you're living sober...**

(laughs)

**...how do think your new activities make you feel about this community? I guess, maybe another way to ask that would be...do you think this community will sup...is going to support your new activities; your activities that are healthy and...**

Yes. Very much. Church.

Um, hmm.

(long pause, laughs)

Okay.

There's a lady that comes in here and volunteers her time, Michelle, and she's offered NA groups on Thursdays and she'll actually come here and do them. It's nice.

Good.

**This is an opinion question so I'm going to pick your brain. Which do you think is more important when considering yourself a part of this community: having an independent address or having strong social relationships and why?**

Having strong social relationships. Um, (pause) I think it's important for your self esteem, just building confidence and getting you back into the community, being a community asset as far as not just depending on others to help all the time. Just being independent yourself.

**Um, hmm. So, just to clarify or expand a little bit, it's not...you can be a community member and still live at the shelter, if have strong social networks. Strong social connections.**

Yes.

Okay.

**Now, taking yourself out of your own circumstance and thinking about folks that are experiencing homelessness, do you think others who are homeless would have an easier time becoming independent again if they established strong social relationships within**

*what I didn't anticipate, is that the kinds of past social activities could have had a detrimental effect on resident's past lives and even contributed to their current circumstances.*

*So what happens when my favorite past activity was getting drunk with my friends to the point that is caused, or contributed to, my homelessness. What kinds of things should I now look for to engage in? It's hard enough to reinvent just one item in my life, but to totally invent myself may cause me to look back years. It's no wonder some homeless choose to just disconnect from all social links because they can find no avenue to "generate" new interests in order to find new friends.*

*I love this line here. She talks about being a "**community asset**" when she's a whole and complete citizen again. By normalize healthy relationships and good lifestyle choices she will consider herself an asset to the community! This single statement affirms my study topic. It is also important to say out loud to communities: having healthy citizens builds human capital and enhances all but natural capital in a community.*

**THEME**

**their community?**

Yes. And I think that's part of why, here we're required to do 12 hours of community service a week, if we're not working. And it's to get us out there and build those connections.

**So, that's a good thing?**

Yes.

**That's a good program for this...**

It is.

**...this shelter. Good.**

**Do you find it easy to find those opportunities for community service?**

I do. I mean, I...I...sometimes it's annoying to have to come up with 12 (laughs), but it's a good program. It does get you out there and you do meet people.

**Is it hard to find those opportunities though, or do they have a list to call?**

They have a...there's always a few places that you can always go to, so.

**Good.**

So, it shouldn't be a problem to get 12 in.

**Cool.**

*It's interesting that she gets all this now but made so many bad choices in the past. I wonder what her background is like? Did she choose all this behavior? Did she suffer some trauma as a child that contributed to her lifestyle choices? What caused all this, because she seems smart and able to understand the practicality of leading a good and stable life.*

*She even sees the value of making residents get out into the community again, forging ties to individual people and the community-at-large.*

## **Interview #4 - David**

### **DEMOGRAPHICS**

**What is your Gender?**

Well, I'm a male! (snicker)  
Okay.

**And how old are you?**

I am 66 years old.

**I am going to give you four categories and you can choose from one. What is Your current marital status: Currently single; currently married, divorced, currently single, or widower, currently single?**

I am divorced, currently single.

**And what is Your Highest Level of Education?**

I am a high school graduate with some university subjects.

**Okay. Alright.**

**And using one of these three categories, what is your current employment status? Are you employed full time, employed part-time, or not currently employed?**

Does, uh, retired fit in there somewhere?

**Oh!, Well, there you go. We can do retired.**

Whole new...

**Whole new category (laugh).**

### **RESIDENTIAL HISTORY**

**I'd like to talk a little bit about your past residential history. So, I want you to think about all the places you've lived as an adult; we're not going to talk about your childhood.**

Okay.

**During your adult life, what types of housing have you lived in and I'm going to give you five selections and you choose all them you've lived in: temporary shelter, mobile home, apartment or condominium, duplex, or single family home?**

All of the above.

**All of the above.**

**Now, this is going to get a little more tricky. We're going through each one of these and I would like you to tell me how much cumulative time you've spent in each one of those.** So, temporary shelter; this one and any other. Total time.

I'd say, about one year.

**Okay.**

All together.

**Mobile homes?**

Ah, probably 3-5 years.

**Alright. How about apartments or condominiums?**

Hmmm. Four years.

**Duplex or Multi-family?**

Hmmm. (long pause). I'll do ten years.

**And what about single family homes?**

(long pause) Three, three years.

**And how long have you lived in this particular shelter?**

(long pause) About six weeks.

**And, other temporary shelters before this one. You said, you mentioned, uh, one year total time, so...six weeks. A year minus six weeks?**

Uh, yea. I, uh. Denver, temporary shelter there.

And, uh, one in Bellingham, Washington.

**Okay.**

## COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

**Now we'll talk a little bit about the community. Is this your hometown?**

No

**And where is your hometown?**

I would consider Wichita, Kansas to be my hometown.

**And considering living, and not visiting, how long have you been away from your hometown?**

(long pause) I left there in December of last year.

**So about 11 months, 10 months?**

10 months. Something like that, yes, sir.

**During your adult life, how long have you lived in this community?**



Approximately, 4 months. Approximately.

**Okay.**

**And, why did you move to this community?**

Hmm, I was, ah, what is the word, steered here by uh, the Veterans Administration, uh, social worker that I'm working with.

**Okay.**

She suggested that I come here.

**Ah, for retirement? For work? For benefits?**

**What was the basis for her recommendation, I'm curious.**

Just to get me housing until I can get something better.

**I see.**

It's a transient type situation.

**Okay.**

**And, so, when you move out of this shelter, will you move out of this community?**

I think so, but I will talk to Dawn if she comes in during the day, today. I like this community.

**Do you?**

Yes, I do. I'm really surprised at the fellowship and the way that the people from this community treat other people. Treat themselves and treat other people. I really like it.

**Okay.**

**Thinking about all of the communities you've lived in, in your adult life, little to big, um, what range have you lived in. Have you always been in big cities, lived in small towns, rural villages?**

A mix.

**A mix?**

Yes. I really like small towns, but sometimes you just have to, you know, for working purposes, you need to be in a big city.

**Right.**

## SOCIAL CONNECTIONS

**So let's talk about social connections. Do you have family in this community?**

No, sir, I do not.

**Do you have friends in this community?**

**People you consider friends.**

*During previous experiences with the homeless shelter in Newton, I have heard public comments about how if we built a nice, new shelter that people would come here, either of their own volition or at the encouragement of other agencies and programs. I was sure of the former but scoffed at the latter. Well, I was wrong. Here is someone that was encouraged to move here by an outside agency. Why? I won't know for sure, but I suspect for two reasons: one, that the shelters in Wichita are mostly full and finding good, quality, safe accommodations are hard to find, and two, that the reputation of the Newton shelter is such that agencies are willing to recommend this as a good fit for some clients.*

*Of course, all of it is personally based and I still don't believe agencies are actively pushing people toward Newton as a matter of policy or common practice, but I don't know that for sure.*

*I think the first part of this answer is about the "system" of finding residences for homeless persons. This person has the aid of the federal government in finding accommodations, both through the VA and social security.*

*The second part of the answer is the first glimpse of the concept of the community as ambassador. Simple courtesy shows in a community and it's being pick up by more than one outsider. It's also interesting to see that someone feels the community takes care of itself as well as those new to the community. Fellowship is a nice word.*

Yes. Although they're here in this building.

**In this shelter? And that was my next question. Where did you meet these friends?**

Yep.

**And how often, then, do you see your family, since they're not here in this community?**

I think probably once a month.

**Once a month? Okay. And who are your family that are close enough to visit?**

Two brothers and two sisters.

**Alright. They're both in Wichita, I presume, or somewhere close?**

Yes.

**Okay.**

**And then, you mentioned that your friends are here in the shelter you're probably seeing them daily.**

Yes.

**But, do you have other friends that you see, that...**

No.

**No.**

I broke all connections, because I would say 95% of my friends that I had before are either drinking excessively or using drugs and I do neither...

**Okay.**

...and so, you know, a difference of temperament. I'm not going to be around people that do that.

**Alright.**

**So, other than family or friends, where do you often meet other people in this community?**

(long pause) on a daily basis, I rub shoulders with them when I around the community.

**Okay.**

Now, where would anyone meet anyone?

**Sure. Well, um, and I guess what I was looking for was, um, maybe church or shopping or library.**

Shopping, library, things like that.

**Okay. Alright.**

**Do you regularly attend, or have you attended while you've lived here, um, community activities like fairs or festivals or parades?**

*I'm interested in this metamorphosis. What factors caused him to make such a blanket diagnosis about his past relationships? Is he over reacting to an event or series of events? To sever all ties to your history is to have a bad reaction to something.*

*How will people like this find the will, energy, motivation and determination to forge new, healthy relationships? Or will they simply live in the periphery and find their way slowly and without the network of social connections that my thesis says is important to future success?*

**Those things.**

No. I have not because I do not like large crowds.

**Okay.**

I, uh, avoid them.

**Alright.**

If possible.

**And, um, how often, would you say, and the categories I have are “some” or “frequently” or “all the time,” how often do you desire or require the support of your family or friends?**

(pause)

**And I said desire and require. So sometimes you feel like you maybe need to have some support but other times you’d just like to.**

Not very often.

**Not very often, okay. Pretty independent, then.**

Yes.

**Okay.**

**So, of the possible social connections we’ve identified, we talked about the friends here in shelter and then you have some family that lives in Wichita, um, what connections do you not have that you’d like to have? Would you like to have more contact with...**

No. Not really.

**You’ve got the connections you like?**

I’m pretty self-sufficient.

**Alright.**

**Do you think there’s anything that holds you back from making more connections?**

Probably the...when I become too close to someone, or to people, I realize that I probably set my expectations too high.

**Okay.**

So, it’s better if I just avoid people.

**Alright.**

You don’t want to be disappointed in their performance, I guess, as friends, or...

**Yes.**

I understand.

SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS AND  
COMMUNITY BELONGING

*Again, these three segments reinforce the notion that he has no real desire to be social. At 66 years old, that may be because he’s less tolerant than a young person would be, or he’s more comfortable being alone than someone else might. Studies indicate that the longer you are in homelessness, the more difficult it is to emerge from it. Could the same be true for traumatic relationships? And would that necessarily have a detrimental effect on a future successful outcome? Just because it’s not the outcome I define as successful, doesn’t mean it won’t be a successful outcome for this gentleman. Perhaps having days without the stress of relationships are all good days.*

*Again, I think my bias and preconceptions about social relationships and success have steered my questions. I’m finding through this process that it’s important to listen carefully to what’s being said and not allow my own assumptions creep into the answer. I can assume things to think about them, but as I’m being reminded, it’s important to allow the residents to tell their own story and accept it as truth.*

*So, how does this statement relate to the study topic? Here is someone that is discouraged (my word; based on assumption and giving the benefit of the doubt; don’t want to label as antisocial or pathological in some way) about his ability to relate to other people and possibly even eschews social contact altogether. These people exist in the world, whether homeless or not. He is comfortable being alone in terms of close relationships, but is equally comfortable engaging one-on-one conversations, which is evidenced by his volunteering to engage this interview.*

*How this concerns my study topic is whether this person thinks the idea of social connectedness either supports or doesn’t support the notion of future success. Why? Because he’s got the*

**So let's go back to your feelings about this community. Do you feel welcome?**

Yes.

**And, why do you feel welcome in this community?**

I, uh...(long pause) probably the religion I've noticed of the people are here...I'm not going to say terribly devout, but they are...they do believe in helping their fellow man. A lot of the communities I've been in, they do not.

**So there's, um...a human element...**

A fellowship...

**Oh.**

...of, uh, a belonging.

**Great.**

**And, do you think contact with others in the community is important to feeling included?**

I do. For personally, yes.

**When you, just in your daily life, all throughout your adulthood, what kinds of activities do you participate in, social activities?**

Hmm. (long pause)

**For example, folks might like to go bowling, or card games, or shoot pool, or...**

One time, I really enjoyed playing bingo...

**Bingo!**

...with, uh, I'd go with my stepdad and my mother.

**Um, hmm.**

And, we like to go to the dog track. (long pause)

I really, one time, enjoyed playing basketball.

Hmm.

**Well, you mentioned that you're a pretty self-sufficient guy so you probably just spend a lot of time hanging out?**

Well, I spend a LOT of time fishing..

**Fishing?**

...or hunting.

**Great! And how do you think those, obviously...**

But those, are, you know, personal. I mean, you do those...

**Solitary.**

...individual. Yeah, solitary. And I really enjoy doing them.

*experience of homelessness and the researcher (me) does not, and as long as he no mental pathology that precludes him giving a good opinion, then his opinion should take into consideration the experience with the opinion.*

*There is an important distinction being made here. The difference between religion (being devout) and the practice of being kind to your fellow man, a principle espoused by the church. While some may see the **common courtesy** as being "Christian," he's saying that the behavior is more important than the faith in this instance.*

### **THEME**

*Here is his proclamation that being solitary is his intentional lifestyle. He enjoys being on the road by himself, hunting and fishing. Outdoorsmen are usually solitary people, but that doesn't mean they're antisocial or they will always be homeless. Nor does it mean they will fail in their future housing endeavors; It simply means that they enjoy time to themselves. In PCM, Imaginers get their batteries recharged by spending time alone without the distraction of outside influences.*

**Okay.**

I don't include a lot of people when I do those.

**Okay. That's fair.**

And you were asking about, you know, interaction.

**I did. You're right. And I, sort of, clouded that question, didn't I, when I said social types of things, and so...**

**So, how do these activities, and let's talk about fishing, how's that make you feel about this community?**

(long pause) Inside the community, there's not too many chances to go hunting or fishing here, but around there area there are.

**Uh, huh. Good.**

**Which do you think more important when considering yourself a part of this community. If you had to choose between...If you wanted to say, "I'm a part of this community" and I had to choose between one of these two options, which would be the most important: having an independent address, which means having your own place, or strong social relationships? And you don't need to have a lot of them, but maybe have one close friend, or...**

Neither!

**Alright. Can you explain that?**

Because I probably would use this as an address, but I would be traveling quite a bit.

**Ah, you like to travel.**

Oh, I getting from place to place where I like to fish.

**Um, hmm.**

In March of this year, I went fishing and I fished from March until July, well almost August of this year...

**Wow.**

...every day I would go to a lake, a different lake in Kansas, and go fishing.

**Um, hmm. Sounds nice.**

Well, it was fine...

**(laugh)**

...for, you know, for a while. Weather gets kinda hot, but yeah, it was, it was fine. I really enjoyed myself. And when I retired, what's a retired person supposed to do?

**(laugh) Travel and fish!**

Yep.

**Sounds good.**

**Do you think other people experiencing homelessness, all age groups, all genders; do you think they would have an easier time becoming independent again if they established strong social relationships within their community, or is that not necess...?**

Yes, I believe they would.

**So, in general...**

Yes.

**...everybody's a little bit different.**

Yes.

**Okay.**

I think that the older people, the adults that are in here, are probably here because of either drugs or alcohol.

**Un, hmm.**

I really do. I think at one time during their life, they went overboard.

**So do you think that...**

That's probably what ended them up here.

**So, in your opinion then, would a strong relationship maybe help them not do that, or do you think those relationships are what led to it?**

Well, I think, probably there strong relationships are the reasons that got 'em here.

**Um, hmm. The wrong kind of relationships, then.**

Yep, well the wrong kind of relationship for me, but for them it's probably just fine.

**Right.**

But that probably what (pause).

**Good.**

*Okay, so his conclusion is that having an address is inconsequential, especially for a person like him who travels quite a bit and doesn't really like to have much contact anyway. Further, he's concluded through his own experiences, that the social network people involve themselves in are possibly the root of their problems.*

*Chicken or egg? A potential follow-up question for this person would have been to understand whether "settling down" in a final community is a priority or whether freedom is the ultimate goal.*

## Interview #5 - Erica

### DEMOGRAPHICS

**What is your gender?**

Um, I am Female.

**And, how old are you?**

I am 35 years of age.

**I have four categories for marital status...**

Okay, marr...

**...choose one of these, if you would please: currently single; currently married; divorced and currently single; widowed, currently single.**

Married.

**You're married.**

**And what is your highest level of education?**

Bachelors.

**Bachelors degree.**

**And, using one of these three, what is your current employment status: Employed full time, employed part time, or not currently employed?**

FMLA. Family medical leave act.

**Okay. (pause) That's my first one...of those.**

Uh, huh. PRN subbing. But I'm from Sedgwick County.

**Okay.**

So...

**Okay, so that's all I have for demographics.**

Okay.

### RESIDENTIAL HISTORY

**Okay. Um, this next sec, uh, section is talking about residential history, so I want to only think about your adult residential history...**

Sure.

**...not your childhood.**

Sure.

**Okay. So, during your adult life, what types of housing have you lived in. And, each one of these that applies, let me know. Temporary shelter?**

*These are very specific answers, but they come from a very specific lady. Her desire was to make me understand that this situation is not at all normal. This was paramount from the beginning. Embarrassed? Perhaps. I probably would be, too, during my first few days of living homeless. And technically, she's not homeless; she's in a protected environment until the drama in her personal life has resolved itself. In so many instances, women are the ones forced from the home in abusive situations. They're the ones that need to leave the home and hide, making them a homeless class. Men, on the other hand, are rarely in an unsafe home environment. So, how are women and children, the two groups most likely to be homeless when involved with domestic violence, the least likely to end up chronically homeless? Men, by and large, are the largest gender cohort in shelters in the US.*

Never.

**Mobile home?**

Never.

**Apartment or condominium?**

No.

**Duplex or multi-family?**

Twin home.

**Okay. Single family home?**

Ah, myself, my husband, and son.

**Okay, but in single family?**

Yes.

**Okay. Good**

**And, uh, so duplex or, uh...what did you call it?**

Twin home.

**Twin home...**

Um, hmm.

**Uh, how long, in duration, would you say...**

Nine years.

**...you lived there? And, single family home?**

Okay.

**And how long have you lived here?**

Uh, four days.

**Oh, okay. Have you lived in any other temporary shelters before this one?**

No, sir.

**Okay.**

## COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

**Now we'll talk a little about community connections.**

Okay.

**Um, is this your home town? Newton?**

It is not.

**Okay. And if it is not, where is your hometown?**

Sedgwick County.

**Okay. Is it Wichita?**

It is.

**Okay. And, um, if this is not your hometown, how long have you been away from your hometown?**

Four days.

**Okay. And, um, so (laugh), this is redundant so I apologize, but during your adult life, how long have you lived in this community?**

Uh, four days.



**Four days.**

Yes. (laughs)

**That's why it's redundant for you. I apologize. Uh, why did you move to this community?**

Um, well, um it...(pause). I wouldn't say that I moved to this community. This is a temporary situation. My husband drug me from a vehicle on Nine Second. So, until he was placed in incarcerated, um, I needed to make sure I was well and safe. So, getting out of Sedgwick County away from familial, familiar things, people, and situations has brought me to a whole 'nother town and shelter.

**Okay. Um, and so when you move out of this shelter, do you plan to leave this community?**

And, go back to Wichita?

**Or anywhere else.**

Yes, sir.

**Okay.**

**Um, in your adult life, what size communities have you lived in?**

Um, I...

**In terms of population.**

I am originally from Great Bend, Kansas. So, population's over thirty thousand.

**Okay. So, you've lived in Great Bend, which is thirty-thousand-ish and Wichita would be the only other...**

That is correct.

**...location?**

## SOCIAL CONNECTIONS

**Now, I want to talk a little bit about social connections.**

Sure.

**Do you have family in this community?**

Um, I do not.

**Okay. And, do you have friends in this community?**

Um, I do not. (laughs)

**(laughs) How often do you see your family?**

Uh, very often. Twice a week. They come down.

**Okay.**

Or they were coming to Wichita. I'm an only child, so. And my Mom and Dad have my son, who's an only child as well.

*I am not sure what's going on here, but it seems to me that she's escaping her environment for safety reasons. Is that why she left Wichita for Newton? Why not go to her parents where her son is? Is her husband so vengeful that her moving to Great Bend puts her son at risk? If that's the case, he's not safe anywhere and neither is she. This situation is so new that these questions may be premature.*

**And how, okay, how often do you see friends?**

Um, in Wichita?

**Sure.**

I talk to them often by phone. So, all the time.

I'm kind of a social bug.

**Okay.**

**Other than family or friends...**

Um, hmm.

**...and I know you've only been here four days...**

Correct.

**...where do you most often meet other people in this community?**

Um, I have no desire to meet other people right now. I need to focus on getting my life reintegrated where it needs to be.

**Okay. Um, so you don't attend any regularly scheduled community activities here.**

**Obviously, you've only been here for...**

Right. For four days.

**...four days.**

Not in Newton.

**Okay.**

No.

**Alright. Uh, well then let's go ahead and talk about Wichita. What regular community activities...**

Uh, I have done volunteerism through the YWCA there, um helped and have served on a committee that helps write grants or Child Start.

Um, I'm trying to think of some other things that I've done prior to Nine Second. Everything's kind of a blur. Um, that's pretty much all I can think of, because this year, uh, I've had some other medical issues so I PRN'ed a lot for Enders Elementary, which is where my son was attending prior to the accident.

**Um, how often do you either desire or require...**

Um, hmm.

**...or you can answer those separately, if you'd like, but how often do either desire or require the support of your family or your friends or your social network?**

Uh, my Mom and Dad, um...require or want and

*She is a "social bug" meaning she needs that constant contact for all sorts of reasons. I'm sure they are both bonding and bridging.*

*Although, she has her priorities and she knows that. Her goal is to get herself out of the shelter as quick as possible. This action is consistent with someone who experiences episodic homelessness. If she gets her personal drama resolved, she may never again experience homelessness.*

need, um, quite often.

**Okay. And how about friends network?**

Um, I'm pretty much a social bug, but everybody's still...everybody's similar and the same in my circle.

**Okay.**

So...

**Same level of connectedness.**

Yep.

**Alright, great.**

**Um, of all the possible social connections that you've talked about, are there any that you do not have that you'd like to have?**

Um, well, for the duration of the time I'm here, I suppose, um, a church family.

**Okay.**

I'm Catholic, um, but I can't really think of anything else, 'cause this is a temporary...

**Such a temporary...**

Yeah.

**...situation.**

Yeah.

**Sure.**

**Um, do you think, I guess maybe temporary...the temporary nature of this is going to answer the question, but do you think that anything is holding you back from making connections in this community?**

No.

**Okay.**

COMMUNITY CONNECTEDNESS AND SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

**Alright, this is the final section...**

Okay.

**...we're in the final stretch now. Um, I'm really thin...I just want your thoughts or opinions on this.**

Sure.

**Um, do you feel welcome in this community?**

Um, in Newton?

**Um, hmm.**

I do.

**And, what makes you feel welcome, about Newton?**

Well, it's a lot different than Wichita, um, upper

*I think it's interesting that she's put virtually all her bonding social contacts on the same priority level. There doesn't seem to be any hierarchy between family and close friends. This also seems to be a fairly good-sized group. Of course, she says she's an only child and her son is an only child, so having more friends to fill her social bowl is reasonable.*

*I'm not sure why proclaiming her Catholicism was important in this context. In fact, Catholics tend to be somewhat quieter about their faith than do evangelical denominations. But, people experience and live their faiths differently.*

west side Wichita, um, is where our home resides. And, um, people are nice. People are very welcoming, um. You know, during the day we're required to leave and in the short period of four days that I've been here, people wave, they're friendly, they greet people. Um, it's a very clean, friendly city. I mean, I've been very pleased so far.

**Good.**

**Do you think contact with others in this community is important to feeling included?**

Sure.

**Okay. And, why do you think that?**

Um, well, it, it helps the social demographic part of it, and just, welcoming. I mean, being able to, ah, feel welcome and meet other people and, um, understand or, you know, learn about other surroundings here in Newton. It's not as big as I thought it was.

**Um, hmm.**

So, it kind of gives that hometown feel.

**Okay.**

**What kind of activities do you, in general, do you participate in with others?**

Uh, reading and lots of, I ah, kind of interested in theology and reading and just, I don't know, the... I have a group of girlfriends I go with, in Wichita, to the Riverside Perk coffee...

**Um, hmm.**

...just, you know, hang out, so...

**Great.**

**And, how do those...how do...this is going to be a hard question, I suppose, but the question was, how do these activities make you feel about this community. So, if you were to make social connections, I suppose, to change the question a little bit, would you look for those same kinds of activities here?**

Sure.

**Okay.**

Most definitely.

**Alright, now this is an opinion question.**

Okay.

**Which do you think more important when considering yourself a part of this**

*She grows up in Great Bend, a city of 30k. She lives in the west side of Wichita, a city of 325k. By her appearance meter, Newton is a hometown scale. People are friendly; they wave at her and greet her when she's around town. These contribute to her feeling of being welcomed and to the city having a "hometown feel." This is attributed to **common courtesy** again.*

**THEME**

**community? Having an independent address...**

Um, hmm.

**...or having strong social relationships?**

Strong social relationships.

**And why did you choose that one over the other?**

Because, I...um, an address doesn't define who I am or what my character is about; but socially...I'm just a social bug. So, I, to me, that's more of an importance.

**Okay.**

**And, do you, this is the last question...**

Sure.

**Do you think others that experience homelessness, for whatever reason...**

Um, hmm.

**...and for whatever duration...**

um, hmm.

**...do you think they would have an easier time becoming independent again if they established strong social relationships in their communities?**

(pause) I do as long as their supportive, um social relationships and entities. Uh, my situation is so not everybody else's...

**um, hmm.**

...um, however, in speaking on behalf of myself, I can say, yes, um, I think those things are important as long as you don't go back out into society and try to rebuild again, um with the same type of issues at bay and people and situational issues. Mine is a mere safety situational issue. Temporarily, but I've understand that that's not everybody's. Most people's placement is not because of those two things. So, it's kind of on the social behavioral spectrum versus safety risks and issues and those things. So...

*Another reminder that **healthy relationships** are the best relationships to pursue. If you continue to exist in those circumstances that got you into difficulties in the first place, then you're going to pay for it in the long run.*

*In this case, her issue is safety, but she's already taking steps to ensure her safety and that of her son, so she's relying heavily on her bonding social network to pull her through. In terms of bridging capital, I don't think changing her mix of friendships will be necessary for her future success.*

*However, it goes back to the researcher's inability to see the situation from more than just his own perspective. Having done the interviews, I now understand there are as many paths into and out of homelessness as there are people and situations. I'm not biased; just inexperienced.*

**THEME**

## **Interview #6 - Frances**

### DEMOGRAPHICS

**What is your gender?**

Female

**And, how old are you?**

33

**And, uh, what is your currently marital status? Are you currently single, currently married, divorced and currently single, or widow and currently single?**

Married.

**Okay.**

**And what is your highest level of education?**

Um, college but no degree. Two years of college.

**Okay.**

**And what is your currently employment status?**

Unemployed.

**Unemployed.**

### RESIDENTIAL HISTORY

**So, residential history. We want to just talk about those places you've lived as an adult.**

Okay.

**During your adult life, what types of housing have you lived in? Temporary shelter?**

No.

**Mobile home?**

Yes.

**Apartment or condominium?**

Yes.

**A duplex or multifamily?**

No.

**A single family home.**

No.

**Okay.**

**So, what is...**

What is temporary housing, it'd be this, right?

**Yeah, a shelter would be temporary housing.**

Okay, yeah.

**So, the temporary shelter, then, how long have you been in the temporary shelter?**

One week.

**And how about mobile home? Cumulatively, how many, how long have you lived in mobile homes?**

3 years.

**Okay. And the other one was apartment or condominium. How long did you live in apartments?**

10 years?

**Okay.**

**And how long have you lived in this shelter?**

**A week?**

Just a week.

**Okay.**

**And, um, you've never lived in any other shelters prior to this one?**

No.

**Okay.**

#### COMMUNITY CONNECTION

**Now we'll talk about community connections.**

**Now, is Newton your hometown?**

No, Peabody is.

**Okay.**

**And, um, since this isn't your hometown, how long have you been away from your hometown.**

Well, as of right now, just the week.

**Just the week, okay. But, let me expand on that. Have you gone to live other places and then come back to Peabody, and then...that kind of thing?**

Well, yeah. (pause) 'Cause like seven years I lived, I went from Peabody to Hesston...

**Okay.**

...and then back to Peabody and then to here.

**Okay.**

So...

**So, um, cumulative time away from your hometown, not living there...did you say seven years?**

Yeah.

**Okay.**

**And um, why did you...oh, during your adult life, how long have you lived in this community?**

(pause) Four years?

**And, why did you move to Newton?**

Um, my first husband and I got married and moved out of our parents house right after we graduated, so...

**Okay.**

**And then when you move out of this shelter, do you plan to move out of this community?**

No.

**Okay.**

**Um, and so during your adult life, what size communities have you lived in? You mentioned Peabody, which is a small town.**

Yeah, and, I mean, Hesston is smaller than Newton, so...

**Right. Okay**

And I don't know how many people, but...

It's about 20,000.

**Anything bigger than Newton?**

No.

**Okay.**

## SOCIAL CONNECTIONS

**Do you have family in this community?**

Yeah.

**Alright.**

**And, uh, who...how are they related to you?**

Through my husband.

**Okay.**

They're his aunts and uncles.

**Alright.**

**And, do you have friends in this community?**

Yes.

**And, um, where did you get acquainted with these friends that you have in this community?**

Um...

**For example, through work or church...**

*Peabody and Hesston are very small communities near Newton. While they are similar in size, Peabody has a very depressed economy while Hesston enjoys a multi-national and international manufacturing employer. So, it's no surprise that someone from Peabody might become homeless.*

*This person, while only 33, appeared to be much older. I assume by her answers that this is her first bout of homelessness. It also sounds like she might have come back to Newton to be close to family, or her husband's family, but that didn't work out.*

*She also has a very young child (toddler) and appears to have not been working. Her education is a high school diploma with some college work. I wonder if she was working toward*

*Being in the shelter for one week, this feels like her first time with homelessness.*



Some of 'em through work and some through, um high, we graduated high school together.

**Okay.**

**How often do you see your family?**

Right now?

**Well, on average.**

My immediate family?

**Uh, your family here in town, family that is here in town.**

Oh, I would say...monthly, at least.

**Okay.**

**And, uh, how often do you see your friends?**

Probably every other week.

**Um, and then other than family or friends, where do often meet people in this community? People that you don't know. Shopping...?**

I mean, I guess it would be here.

**Okay. Alright.**

**And so, you're obviously coming into contact with these folks every day.**

Right.

**So that's a daily occurrence.**

**Do you regularly attend any community activities or functions?**

No.

**Okay.**

**And, how do you...how often do you think you would either, uh, desire or require support, and you can define that however you'd like, um, the support of your family or your friend network?**

I would say daily.

**Okay.**

**Out of all the possible social connections we've identified, you know, some of your husband's family and friends and things, um...which, which do you not have that you'd like to have? So, for example, would you like to be able to have connections in a church environment? Or would you like social gatherings that you would go to where you**

*She doesn't feel terribly connected to Newton, which I find a little strange. People living in Peabody generally do a lot of shopping inside Newton. They also tend to go to church here, socialize here, eat out here, and watch movies here. Newton is the largest town within immediate reach.*

*For her to have no connections here, even though she has family here, feels a little strange, although I can't put my finger on it. So what could this mean? It could mean that she was truly a homebody in Peabody and made all her social connections there.*

*She says she's seeing friends every other week, so I would assume that she's been away from Peabody for some time now, even though her stay at the shelter is only one week old. To me, this says they may have moved away some time ago and either have been living with family or had a place of their own that they recently lost.*

*Very small, rural homelessness is such a different animal. Did he lose his job when Hesston recently laid off workers? Where is he working now? Why move to Newton to work? Gas?*

**might meet people, or are there any, are there any opportunities for social interaction that you don't have right now that you'd like to have?**

Well, I think in a workplace would be fine.

**Okay.**

And, probably church.

**Okay. All right.**

**And, um, church and work, those are the two that you identified. Do you think there's anything holding you back at this point from making connections in those locations?**

I would say, probably, right now, childcare would be one, so...

**Right.**

**And can I ask, how do you deal with childcare in this scenario.**

Um, well...

**Or is it just there is no opportunity for childcare for you right now?**

Well, there...there would be. I mean, my husband works evenings so he's here in the mornings and then if I applied through SRS I could possibly get it. But I have to work full time, so...

**Okay.**

And my son's in school so that helps.

**Ah, okay.**

**SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS AND COMMUNITY BELONGING**

**Now, I'm going to talk a little bit about social connectedness and community belonging. Do you feel welcome here in Newton?**

Um, hmm. Yes.

**And why do you feel welcome?**

Because it's not too big of a town, and it's not too small. I mean, people generally, when out shopping and things, they're friendly and people smile and hold doors open for you, which you don't get in, (laughing) not every community, so...

**Right.**

**And why...and do you think contact with other people in the community is important to**

*I wrote an earlier memo about the role lack of child care plays in homelessness and residential resiliency. In this case, there are many hoops that you just jump through with SRS to get a child care voucher to allow yourself the opportunity to get back to work. SRS also controls welfare and housing. While this is a one-stop attempt at providing all the services needed, childcare is a difficult nut to crack. Will small cities have adequate childcare facilities? Will centers have openings in their licensed classrooms to care for a child on a temporary basis? Is there enough money in the voucher? What about flexibility of care to allow a parent or parents to work strange or odd hours?*

*All these issues are present in normal lives, but must be exacerbated when families are homeless or teetering on the edge of financial failure.*

*Another vote of **common courtesy**. This is such a resounding theme in this process that there must be something here. Could you get similar responses in larger cities? How big would a city become before it lost it's ability to be friendly? Is this cultural? Could this work at a neighborhood level in larger cities?*

*If all shelters are located downtown in larger urban areas (usually because of zoning regulations or because of a conglomeration of services) would you ever have the opportunity to be in contact with people who exhibit courtesy behaviors?*

**THEME**

**feeling like you belong?**

Yes.

**And why do you think that?**

Because if you don't have contact with people around your, um, community, then you're just by yourself and you don't belong when you're alone! I mean...

**Right.**

...that's...

**When you're alone, that's not really community, is it?**

Right.

**Okay.**

**Uh, what kind of activities in your adult life do you participate with other people in? For example, some people might...might do book club. Or some people might go dancing.**

I don't know. A lot of times we go watch football together...

**Okay.**

...on Sundays. Um, probably really it.

**Okay.**

**And do you...uh, when you're out in those instances, like when you're going out to watch football, how does that make you feel about the community itself? Are there enough opportunities for...**

...Yeah, there's enough opportunities. I just don't (background noise)...

**Okay.**

**What do you think is more important when considering yourself part of a community: having an address, or having strong social relationships?**

(very long pause) Well, since this is the first time I'm actually homeless, and it's, to me it really doesn't matter if you have an address, because, like the people we communicate with here, everybody's like a family, so I don't think it matters as much.

**Okay, great answer.**

**Do you think that others who are homeless, who experience homelessness would have an easier time becoming independent again if they established strong social relationships in**

*Even with only one week in the shelter, she feels close enough to some or all of the residents to begin to think of them as a family. Is that a family of necessity, convenience, like circumstance, or proximity? Is it easy for her to include people than it might be for others? Or is it just easier to form nearby relationships with other who need those social networks, than it is to go out into the community looking for companionship?*

**THEME**

**their community?**

Oh, yes.

**Okay. And why would it make it easier in your opinion?**

I mean, you can use those connections for networking, for a job or, I mean, resources for things that you wouldn't have if you did not know those people.

**Right. Okay. Great!**

## Interview #7 - George

### DEMOGRAPHICS

**What is your gender? Male or female?**

Uh, male.

**And how old are you?**

52

**I have four categories and may choose one of these. What is your current marital status?**

**Are you currently single; currently married...**

Single.

**...divorced, currently single; or a widower, currently single?**

I'm just single.

**Just single.**

**What is your highest level of education?**

12<sup>th</sup>

**Okay. Do you have a high school diploma though?**

No.

**No. No diploma. GED?**

No.

**Okay.**

**What is your current employment status? Are you employed full time, part time, or not currently employed?**

Not currently.

**Okay.**

### RESIDENTIAL HISTORY

**That was all the demographics. Now, (clears throat) we want to talk a little about residential history. Now, I want you to think about, during these questions, all the places you've lived as an adult. We're going to exclude your childhood. So, 18 years old and above.**

**I'm going to describe some different housing types and you tell me each one that you've lived in.**

All right.

**All right. So during you're adult life, which of**

*First, I have to say this was easily the most memorable interview I had. He seemed to have the most experience and showed the most wisdom. He also seemed to have lived this life long enough that it has become difficult for him to see his life as anything different than this; at least not monumentally different. I think he's genuine in his intentions to seek change, but those changes are likely only incremental. I think he can see the path and understands the importance of the path, but doesn't seem to think the path is for him.*

**these types of housing have you lived in?**

**Temporary shelter or homeless shelter?**

Yes.

**Mobile home?**

Yes.

**An apartment or condominium?**

No.

**A duplex or multifamily home?**

No.

**And a single family home?**

Yes.

**Okay.**

**Now, we're going to go back and, each of those, I want you to think about the total time you've lived in those different types.**

Okay.

**So, temporary shelter. Total time in your adult life.**

mmm...

**Here or other places.**

...well, oh, I would say probably a couple of years.

**Okay.**

Altogether.

**And mobile home?**

A year.

**And, uh, single family home?**

It would be more like, uh, ten.

**Okay.**

**And how long have you lived in this shelter?**

Two months, approximately.

**Okay.**

**And you've lived in other temporary shelters before this one?**

Yes.

**Okay. And how many separate occurrences of, of living in different shelters?**

Separate occurrences?

**Yes.**

I'd say, um, probably a half dozen.

**Okay.**

**And the average stay each time?**

Um, 30 to 60 days.

**Okay.**

*He is my second resident to have been involved in shelter life for more than one visit. He will provide insight that I haven't gotten yet about reintegration into community life and how challenging that might be.*

## COMMUNITY CONNECTION

**Now we'll talk a bit community connections or relationships within the community. Is this your hometown?**

No.

**Where is your hometown?**

Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

**And how long have you been away from your hometown?**

mm...well, I've come back and forth, ah...this time (laugh). Uh, six months.

**All right. But, cumulatively, if you counted them all up, ho long do you think it'd be?**

It would be quite a bit...Let's see...probably close to seven years. Yeah, seven.

**Okay.**

At least seven to eight.

**So, during your adult life, how long have you lived in this community...community, this community of Newton.**

Two months

**Just those two months.**

Um, hmm.

**Okay.**

**And why did you come to Newton?**

Uh, that's a good question. Um, I kinda just landed here; not so much planned as, uh, what would the proper way to say that...mm (laughs) spontaneously? I don't know.

**Okay. It was a choice versus circumstance?**

It was more circumstance, yeah.

**All right.**

And someone had told me that this was available here and I decided to check it out and um, it's been a good place. So I...yeah.

**Okay. Good.**

**And so when you move out of this shelter, and get back on your feet, do you plan to leave this community?**

Um, not unless I have to.

**Okay.**

Yeah, that's to be determined, but...

*I'm not sure who told him about Newton or where he was before (I suspect Wichita). It's interesting that the majority of people interviewed are from somewhere else. When I began this thesis, I assumed the shelter took care of residents in Newton and Harvey County, but I'm seeing that's not necessarily true. Now, if they're coming to get out the urban landscape into what they perceive to be a safer, more gentle environment, how will Newton receive them?*

*The cynical answer is to say they won't because not many other communities have embraced "homeless tourism." But, I've said before that Americans have the right to move from place to place; where ever they feel the most secure or safe or welcome is where they want to be regardless of income or means. Shouldn't that be the same for anyone? We don't get to "pre-approve" people before they move to our community.*

**Sure.**

...it's possible that I'll have to move on...of circumstances.

**But it's not in your plans, necessarily. It's not like, "Boy as soon as I get out of here I'm moving back to Oklahoma City."**

Oh...no. Not at all.

**Okay. All right.**

**So, thinking about all the different places you've lived, the different cities you've lived, um, what sizes of communities, in terms of population.**

50,000 is about...50,000

**Okay. But have you lived in...**

Even smaller.

**Is this your smallest community?**

Uh, yeah, pretty much.

**Okay. And your largest is probably Oklahoma City, then?**

Yeah.

**Okay.**

## SOCIAL CONNECTIONS

**Now we'll talk about social connections, or those relationships. And we're going to talk mostly about friends and family. Those are the two distinctions. Do you have family in this community?**

No.

**Okay.**

**Do you have friends? People you consider friends, in this community?**

Yes.

**Okay.**

**And under what circumstances did you get acquainted with those friends here? Where did you meet those people? Where did you form those relationships?**

Uh, some in the community was volunteers. Some that way.

**Okay.**

You know, just a few.

**All right.**

And, of course, a few here at the shelter.

**Okay.**

*I don't know if it's okay to say that he's "embraced" being in the community, but it surely sounds as though working in a volunteer capacity has allowed him to have social contacts in the community he wouldn't otherwise.*

*He also sees the value as it's been explained to him by James, so he understanding the intention of the program requirement. He also may desire a chance to get out of the shelter during the day and, with his recovery, yearns for more social contact than he's recently had.*



Maybe James explaining he invites people out to do community services that way you get out and meet people in the community.

**Okay.**

**And have you found that to be successful?**

You know, it's...seems to be a good way to maybe integrate, you know, into the community.

**Okay.**

**Uh, how often do you see your family?**

I really don't have any family.

**Okay. All right.**

**And, uh, how often do you see your friends?**

Uh...daily basis.

**All right.**

**Other than family and friends, where have you met other people in the community, even if it's just casual conversation, or...**

Um, at the library, I have, and where I do community service. And I met people in passing.

**Can I ask where your community service...**

Agape Resource Center.

**Oh. Okay. All right.**

They have free clothes.

**All right.**

We sort clothing...

**Um, hmm.**

...and make it available to low income people.

**So, um, the folks that you do have the, the friends that you do have outside the community, how often are you in contact with those people.**

Usually...two or three times a week.

**All right**

**And do you regularly attend any, uh, activities out in the community? Obviously, you're doing some, um, volunteer work, so that would be something that you regularly do.**

Um, hmm.

**Um, is there other, are there other places that you do regularly go?**

Uh...

**Are there activities that you're regularly**

**engaged in?**

Not, uh...I used to go to Celebrate Recovery in another community. I haven't yet in this one. It's just been...It's kind of at the time, and it happens each week kind of not a good time for me. I would hope to do that...

**Are those Wednesday nights? Is that when they do that?**

Tuesdays.

**Tuesdays.**

At Riverpoint.

**Right. Right.**

So...I, uh, like I said, I was involved in that in the past and it's a good, uh, good program.

**All right.**

**How often would you say you either desire or require support from your friends? And you can define in your head what "support" means.**

Hm...How often?

**Yeah. How often do you either desire it or require it?**

Okay. Um, that's a good question. Um (pause) some of the time? (laughs)

**Um, hmm.**

Some of the time, but not...not...

**But not regularly or maybe once a week...once a month, maybe?**

Yeah. I wouldn't say on a regular basis.

**All right. Okay.**

**Of all the possible social connections that we've identified, and we've talked about volunteer work, folks that you know here, the volunteers that come in here. Um, what do you, what social connections would you like to have that you don't have. You talked a little bit about Celebrate Recovery. You thought that was maybe a good social connection that maybe you'd like to get back to, but other, other...are there other opportunities that you don't have that you'd like?**

Um, you know, in a social setting...

**Right.**

...Um, You know, where I am in life, that's really where it's at for me. You know, I'm in recovery. I'm an alcoholic, so recovery, you know, is very (unintelligible) to a person in my

*He's been in the shelter now for a couple of months but hasn't re-attended the Celebrate Recovery program yet. Is that due to time constraints? Motivation? Transportation? I know others who have embraced that program and found it to be helpful and uplifting. It was also much closer to the shelter before they moved to their current location. This person has a physical disability that makes walking and riding a bicycle problematic, so I wonder if that holds him back. I'm sure someone would make the arrangement to take him once a week.*

*This is obviously not his first time at recovery and alcoholism, so I'm guessing social situations are maybe part of his issue. Are those situations triggers for his behaviors or reminders to drink? Does he avoid it absentmindedly or purposefully?*

*Then, when he's reminded about the role of a sponsor and how that might be a social connection, it turns on the light. However, he moves more into accountability for his daily life than he does concerning the need for social contact. That's the difference between desire and requirement.*

circumstance, situation, so. It's something, you know, usually something, you go there, then something usually stems from that.

**Um, hmm.**

**Do you have a, and this might be too personal, but do you have a sponsor?**

No, I don't. That's one of the things...

**Okay, is that something that you'd like to pursue...**

Yeah.

**...is having that one-on-one...**

That would be good to have that accountability that a person needs.

**Right.**

Uh, huh.

**So that could be one...**

That could be something. Yeah, for sure.

**Okay.**

**What do you think holds you back, maybe from, or maybe you're not being held back; maybe it's a choice. But, what do you think holds you back from making relationships that you do want to have?**

Um (pause) that's a very good question. Probably myself. Um, um, probably the lack...society...lack of status in terms of, um...you know status quo, so to speak. Um, that I don't have enough to offer, you know. Um, that's it. It's hard for me to answer that one.

**I'm intrigued by the phrase, "I don't have enough to offer." Do you think that...do you think that stems from being an alcoholic or do you think stems from not having a residence, or a place of your own? The shelter.**

Yeah. I, I haven't had my own place in many years. I used to own a home, believe it or not. Um, that really goes a long ways (laughs), not having a permanent residence.

**Okay. 'Cause we're going to come back...I've got another question in here, and we're going to come back to that. And I'm curious about what your opinion is on that, so...**

**SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS AND COMMUNITY BELONGING**

*I think this is really the essence of the problem with long-term homelessness. Eventually, you find yourself on the periphery of social long enough that you convince yourself that's where you belong. You're either not worthy of notice or you've been told over and over that you have not real place among the living anymore and you should just face the fact that you're a ghost.*

*When he talks about societal status, he's not talking about being lower income versus middle income, I think he's talking about being human versus less-than-human. That should be a sobering thought.*

*His inability to independently satisfy his need for shelter weighs heavily on his mind. He knows that the ability to take care of ones needs is part of being a "grown up." It's not about controlling his addiction or social behaviors; it's really about being independent.*

*He wants me to believe that at some point in his life he was a stable adult citizen, capable of taking care of himself. He doesn't want me to see him today, an alcoholic living in a homeless shelter in a town that isn't even his. He wants me to see him as a man. All men want that, especially among peers. We don't allow ourselves to be vulnerable or to succumb to vulnerable situations or circumstances. Yet, here he is, vulnerable and defeated. Or is he?*

**But now let's talk about social connectedness and community belonging. So, first question is, do you feel welcome in this community?**

I'd say yes.

**And what makes you feel welcome? Can you describe what makes you feel welcome?**

Um, well certainly the hospitality, um (chuckle). People are very open in terms of hospitable and that.

**Um, hmm.**

Uh, I'm really not used to, uh,...Would you phrase that again? What makes people...what makes you feel...

**What makes you feel welcome in the community?**

Yeah, I'm not used...I'm one of them social outcasts, right? I'm not used to, you know, people embracing me. There's usually a stigma that involves homelessness, so, and that just, you know, a general statement. And there's a lot of nice people who don't necessarily look down their nose at you. Obviously, the people that are around here...ah, there's just this stigma. Uh, I found this is one of the better places I've ever been in terms of the welcoming, you know, uh. What is it? Just kindness.

**Um, hmm.**

Basic human decency.

**That's a great answer.**

**Do you think that contact with other people in the community is important to feeling included?**

Yeah, it would have to be.

Okay.

**And why would it HAVE to be?**

To be included...

**Um, hmm.**

...in a group or...uh, well. I guess if you've been...If you spent a lot of years being, um, kind of on the periphery or, um, isolated from, kind of, society or mainstream. It's seems like it's difficult to get, you know, back into the mainstream. How you integrate, you know. I'm just learning, I guess, how to do that. (long pause) Being, I guess, honest, you gotta be honest with yourself and understand your mistakes, shortcomings, and once you do admit that, then, you know, the healing begins. Now,

*Once again, he reiterates that he's been a social outcast, a ghost living on the edge of humanity for a while now. It surprises him that, while out in the community, he's treated like a human being, capable and worthy of being treated with common respect and **courtesy**.*

*He understands both intellectually and experientially, that being homeless carries with it a societal stigma that he lives with. Yet, he's amazed when people here decide that's not important and he becomes the recipient of small gestures of kindness.*

## **THEME**

*That phrase, "I'm just learning" means that he's beginning the road to social interaction without alcohol. My hypothesis assumes that someone is healthy enough to find and secure healthy social relationships. This interview is showing me that people have different abilities to form relationships and that just saying, "social capital solves the problem," is naive and misguided. This person is telling me that, even if that were the solution to all his problems, he's going to have to relearn how to do that. **My study topic assumes too much.***

## **THEME**

there's people who really do care as long as you're not trying to blow smoke up there, you know (laughs).

Yeah.

Which, out of all the great manipulators...now really, until you hurt anyone, there's manipulation is pretty strong. Yeah, that honest self examination, honestly, is really important for...to, to move forward.

**Right. And I guess that directly related to making relationships and then building those strong...**

Yeah, healthy, yeah.

**...connections.**

'Cause all 'em, you know, when you're so dysfunctional and drunk you just tear 'em all down...

**Yup.**

...and you really don't develop any new ones. And then, you know, you pay the price and consequences through the years is that you start add and plant some good seeds for the future you can turn it around. Absolutely. Healthy relationships down the line. If you rule that, that addiction out that dependency, you're a lot stronger. It's stronger than...this is what I've learned in just the past few months. I've known about, you know, IA, AA, Recovery, but I just didn't want to take a really close look at it. Last few months I have and, it's a lot powerful...more powerful...the dependency's a lot more powerful than I am. So, God can agree with that, you know? He, just like today, for example, I was helping (clears throat) or he had to help me resist that temptation. But He just, know,...it bounced off of me and that was...that gives you a lot of encouragement to keep moving forward. You build momentum as you, as you, but that's the tricky thing. You don't wanna, you have to continually be humble because you can't have that over confidence, thinking "Hey, I'm good." It doesn't work like that.

**Right.**

You have to constantly understand that. The dependency and the addiction is more powerful than you are. With God's power, you can continually overcome, so...That's, yeah just that's a daily thing, you know?

A powerful thing.

*Here's the "healthy relationships" reminder again. I can see this is the major theme of this inquiry! I can't believe I didn't make that distinction; but again, that is my bias toward people who are ready and willing to make social connections. I never thought that someone would have to work at it.*

*And in this case, he's working at understanding his role as a social person. That's not an easy job as he's finding out.*

Yes.

When you tap into that, it's amazing. Your life is, you know, has a purpose. Its just not a waste of time, you know. (laughs) You're doing this, you just, don't care. It's nice to know that your life counts and be, uh, clear headed, and don't just let life pass you by. And then, of course, hopefully you get to the point where you help others. They're in the same struggle, you know?

**Right.**

Be an example down the road. Make your life count for something.

**Fantastic.**

I hope so, guy. (laugh) Thanks for your listening. (laugh)

**Absolutely.**

I'm usually one of those clam-up kinda guys.

**(laugh) No, you're doing great. These are great.**

**Um, what kind of social activities have you, in the past, and now even, what do you like to do with other people. What kinds of things do you participate in?**

I used to enjoy rodeos and uh, you know, animals. I love dogs. Bowling. Simple things.

**Um, hmm.**

Going to a sporting event.

**Do you have those opportunities here in this community yet?**

No, I don't...not so much. Of course, I haven't really,...my social life consists of being here and volunteering for the most part.

**Yeah, Yeah.**

And just..but I really haven't branched out, you know? Yet, so.

**One thing at a time, right?**

Yeah. Great.

**Which do you think...Oh, this is going to get back to that question that we talked about earlier. Which do you think, just in your opinion, is more important when you consider yourself part of a community? Having your own address; having your own place? Or, having a strong social network? Or some strong social connections?**

I would hope those things would go together. And, if you've been where I've been, you...it

seems selfish, but a roof over my head. That pretty much where you start.

**Right.**

Um, you said “connectedness?”

**What makes, when you would consider yourself part of a community. So which one of these things would you have to have, and when you achieved it you’d say, “Okay, now I’m a part of this community.”**

Uh, huh.

**So, an address or a good social network?**

Network, yeah. I’m sure the network would be important, you know, in the long run.

**But having a roof over your head makes a lot of difference.**

Yeah, if you haven’t been there, it’s uh...yeah, that’s uh... I don’t know, you get, you get jaded, or whatever you want to call it. Yeah, that’d be great, but you kind of forget what that’s like.

**Yeah.**

It’s really strange, you know? You know, I had a home that I had blood, sweat, and tears into and that’s a bitter pill to swallow when you lose, just become angry and things (trails off). But that’s been many years ago.

**Right.**

You have to let it go, so...And then, you know, it’s all like, “well fuck it, this isn’t going to be near as nice (laughs) but you get to the point, “well I’m desperate.” (laughs) Tell you whatever...and I had a severe leg injury and I used to be a construction worker and that’s one of the things. I haven’t been able to earn a living. I’m not, if I’m fortunate, I might be able to get on disability check but that would probably just be only enough to have a roof.

**Um, hmm.**

Hey, I don’t need a lot

**Maybe have a...go ahead.**

Like you said, if you have a roof then that social network would be very important because you can’t just stay isolated. You do it alone. You have to have healthy relationships.

**So, if we were going to say it was a chicken-and-an-egg question, for you, if I’m hearing you right, for you you’d say “well, I’d rather have that roof over my head then I could be strong enough to get out and start making relationships.**

*He thinks he’s being selfish for wanting a home of his own. That’s a measure of how long he’s been on the periphery of society. It’s also sad to know that he’s almost ashamed to want something for him first. He still understands the intricacies of social interaction, yet feels he’s on the edge, not totally able to take advantage of it.*

*This is another good statement. He’s expressing how exasperating it can be to be unable to take care of himself. He uses the word “jaded,” which is good. It says that after a period of time, your attitude changes and everything is viewed through that lens.*

*I like how he prioritizes them but ultimately accepts that both are important. He’s just decided that independence takes precedence in his life over everything else. It shows that independence will give him the confidence to move forward in other areas, including social networks, and I presume, continual sobriety.*

Yeah, that sounded like maybe a little lame, but yeah. I would say that would be a good starting point.

**Okay. Good. That was it.**