AN ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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Title: Walking a Tightrope Without a Net: Exploring How Rural Homeless Adults Use Information to Solve Problems While Residents at a Northern Midwest Rural Homeless Shelter

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Using Taylor's (1991) Information Use Environment (IUE) theory, this phenomenological study explores the experiences of rural homeless people and the phenomenon of problem solving while living in a 24-hour rural homeless shelter. Through a series of semi-structured interviews, data were collected and analyzed using Moustakas' seven step method of analysis. Findings resulted in an expanded definition of rural homelessness that takes into account the work and effort involved in addressing physical, emotional and/or psychological well-being issues in a rural area. Findings also suggest an expansion to Savolainen's (2006) Everyday Life Information Seeking (ELIS), called *Everyday Life Information Sharing.* This study also shines a light on: specific difficulties with making use of information for needed resources; purposes of personal information sources; and barriers to what Burt (1996) calls "the twin rural traditions of

community and *self help*" (p. 6). Recommendations for how to improve information access and use for rural homeless adults' problem solving are outlined.

Keywords: rural homeless; information use environment; problem solving; descriptive phenomenology

Walking a Tightrope Without a Net: Exploring How Rural Homeless Adults Use Information to Solve Problems While Residents at a Northern Midwest Rural Homeless Shelter

By

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Chapter 1: Introduction

A widespread problem of significant proportion is that homeless people are too often disregarded and the recipients of extreme social disdain. Consequently, without obvious services to assist in problem-solving issues related to basic human needs, many homeless people experience personal hardships, including health ailments, hunger, unemployment and underemployment, lack of access to assistance, and trauma that results from denial of one's being without a home. This is not a problem that only exists in third world countries.

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of rural homeless people and the phenomenon of problem solving in the context of living in a rural homeless shelter and to learn how access to customized information can improve problem solving that will lead to a higher quality of life for people who are at-risk of becoming homeless, or who are homeless. The study was designed to reveal economic, political, technological, and sociocultural factors that contribute to hardships, including health ailments, hunger, unemployment and underemployment, lack of access to assistance, and denial of homelessness. It is my intention that this research will help change what Heflin and Miller (2012) call "a 'one-size-fits-all' approach to human service delivery" (p. 373). Describing the life world and information use of rural homeless people is a research area Americans cannot afford to avoid. Without such in-depth inquiry, policy-makers and service providers may be missing key details necessary to create more effective information delivery systems and services uniquely planned for rural areas and the poorest of the poor who live in rural areas.

Using information theory, particularly Taylor's (1991) Information Use Environment (IUE) theory, this study emphasizes the importance of access to information and its potential for solving problems. The study takes advantage of the researcher's expertise as an information professional with experience gained while working at a rural homeless shelter. The central research question for this study is: ***How do rural homeless adults use information to solve problems in their everyday information world while they are residents at a rural homeless shelter?*** Using Taylor's recommended structure for examining an information use environment that includes people, settings, problems, and problem resolutions, the study answers this question based on the experience of participants who were currently living in a rural homeless shelter. This central question adheres to Taylor's reminder that an overabundance of information is not more beneficial. What is important is how a group of people see their problems, and what they believe can bring solutions. The intention of this study was to generate more questions than answers and encourage further research.

Rural Homeless People in the United States

Every day in communities in the United States (U.S.), thousands of people whose income is at the poverty level face homelessness. Statistics indicating the number of homeless people in the U.S. vary widely, ranging from 564,708 people (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2015) to estimates of 2.5 to 3.5 million people (National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, 2015). As a society, we know little—and some know nothing at all—about this population often considered invisible both to casual outsiders as well as to those living in communities. More understanding

about individual experiences of people who face homelessness is needed to solve the country's problems directly related to extreme poverty, particularly in rural areas.

It is well documented by academics and funded researchers, including Robertson, et al. (2007), Strong, et al., (2005b), First, et al. (1994), and Fitchen (1992), that little research has focused directly on rural homeless people, and as a result, many who are charged with helping, or are in a position to help, do not have necessary knowledge to adequately address the problem. This study will help fill a gap in the current research by focusing from an information science perspective specifically on rural homeless populations and circumstances unique to their survival. It will provide new information that may become knowledge used by future service providers and other community members.

Public Misperception of Rural Homeless People

People who experience rural homelessness reside in small towns, back country roads, in mountainous areas, and remote areas where vacation cabins are found. They are likely not to be seen, or if they are seen, the extreme extent of their living situations are not recognized. They live in abandoned trailers that do not have utility services; their pickup trucks or cars; condemnable houses or other unsuitable structures; crowded into the homes of friends or family members; shelters; low-cost motels; or outdoors. In the northern Midwest, where this research was conducted, homeless people also live during winter months in ice houses on lakes. Others, if they have working cars, pull them into car washes at night where there is safety and warmth. Often rural homeless adults have low-paying jobs, work much of their lives, or have struggled to work. Some are college

students. Many come from situations that are often linked with poverty, such as broken homes, mental illness or other kinds of poor health, or other disadvantages.

Complex series of circumstances eventually lead people to a state of homelessness, but it is incorrect to assume that those who are in a situation of homelessness are there simply as a result of bad choices. According to Vissing (1996), the catastrophe of rural homelessness is caused by a number of factors, including demographic trends, ideologies, failure of social infrastructure, and personal problems. Some rural homeless people are chronically homeless, though many are temporarily homeless, or go in and out of periodic homelessness. Still others are seasonally homeless. No matter their category, the rural homeless are likely in the worst position of all extremely poor people in the United States.

Unlike homelessness in urban areas, the public's image of rural homeless people tends to be vague (Craft-Rosenberg, Powell, & Culp, 2000); rural homeless are almost always an overlooked segment of the homeless population. What is important to know is that many rural homeless people are ordinary people who have fallen on hard times. Vissing (1996), in her extensive research on rural homeless women and children, found that rural homeless people are generally not the stereotyped "lazy, substance-abusing, mentally ill misfits" (p. 8) that some might imagine when hearing the term homeless. Vissing points out that rural homeless people have integrity. To make more clear who people are in rural homeless situations, it is important to discuss differences between rural and urban homelessness, accuracy in the numbers of people who are homeless, and the types of hardships they experience.

Rural Versus Urban Homelessness

Rural homeless people are different from urban or suburban homeless people in a number of ways. Perhaps the most obvious difference is visibility. Rural homeless are often considered hidden in society, while many urban homeless can be seen on city sidewalks, park benches, around library entrances, or under bridges. They are also much more likely to live with friends or relatives, making periods of homelessness brief. According to Post (2002), rural homeless are less educated than urban homeless but may be employed more, albeit often in temporary work situations and in jobs that do not offer health benefits. Post also notes that rural homeless are more likely to accept aid from friends than from government sources. According to Burt (1996), rural homeless are made up of subgroups with no real urban counterpart, including Native Americans and migrant workers. Post (2002) identifies another subgroup, Vietnam veterans, who may live in the mountains or desert.

Related to health and wellness, Post's (2002) research indicates that rural homeless people have greater health problems than urban homeless and less access to healthcare. In addition, First, Toomey, and Rife (1990) found that rural homeless people have fewer problems with drug use or with mental health issues than urban homeless, but they experienced more problems with alcohol. Fewer job opportunities, longer periods of unemployment, and lower wages are also more prevalent among rural homeless people than urban homeless (Bread for the World Institute, 2005; National Coalition for the Homeless, 2009). For both groups, however, according to the National Coalition for the Homeless (2007), the root cause of homelessness is the same: "poverty and the lack of affordable housing" (para. 5).

Defining Rural Homeless People

Title I of the McKinney-Vento Act, formally administered by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), is the most often used source of authority to define a homeless person. The Act defines someone who is homeless as "an individual or family who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence" (The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, 2009, para. 2). Those who inhabit a park bench, a car, an abandoned building, a shelter, a campground or any place not meant for human beings to live are included in this definition.

Using the HUD definition to inform actionable services for rural homeless people, however, can be problematic, and may result in undercounting rural homeless people. Robertson, et al. (2007) addresses this problem by noting that although persons who are living in condemned houses are considered homeless by HUD, many rural communities do not have a consistently enforced policy for condemning houses.

Related to the problem of defining rural homelessness, the National Coalition for the Homeless (2007) notes that understanding rural homelessness requires a more flexible definition. A lack of housing, or "housing distress" (Vissing, 1996, p. 8), is only one part of the problem. The other part is the emotional cost of the state of homelessness. Vissing (1996) suggests that the psychological and social dimensions must not be overlooked when defining rural homelessness. She defines rural homelessness not only as a lack of shelter, but also as "the lack of a consistent, safe, physical structure and the emotional deprivation that occurs as a result" (Vissing, 1996, p. 8). Vissing further asserts that the term "homeless" does not fit the rural situation because it connotes too many urban stereotypes, does not capture the psychological aspects of homelessness, and

does not adequately describe those who are about to lose their home and give up the stability, privacy, and security that it provides.

Counting Rural Homeless People

It is difficult to estimate the number of rural homeless men, women, and children in the U.S. This is because to count them, those who do the counting cannot always locate them, or recognize them, as homeless in the context in which they appear. Therefore, without enough formal sheltered living facilities where people can be counted, determining how many rural homeless people there are is challenging. Often point-in-time counts are conducted in urban areas where volunteers literally count those who are visible outdoors, along with those who are staying in shelters. However, the point-in-time count strategy is not a reliable approach to counting in rural locations.

This problem of visibility with counting rural homeless is documented in the study of rural homeless people in Ohio (Roth, Bean, Lust & Saveanu, 1985), which attempted to count every single homeless person in 21 selected rural Ohio counties. Researchers in this study admitted that this was ambitious and realistically impossible. Five years later the Ohio study was replicated by First, et al. (1990), who also encountered challenges with locating or interviewing rural homeless people. The problem with counting this population has also been identified by rural homeless people themselves. For example, one report (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, as cited in Robertson, et al., 2007) mentioned a rural homeless man who likened "com[ing] out to be counted" (p. 8-4) to the behavior of an obedient dog that comes when called.

Hardships of Rural Homeless People

The hardships that rural homeless people can face are easy to understate and difficult to write about exhaustively. Mild to severe health ailments (including untreated mental health issues); hunger; lack of employment; the struggle to find aid; denial of homelessness, and safety concerns are just some of the trials rural homeless people experience. A discussion of these trials makes clear the extreme extent of hardships for this population.

According to Post (2002) and Craft-Rosenburg, et al. (2000), many circumstances contribute to poor health in rural homeless people, including exposure to the elements, stress in finding shelter and food, living in overcrowded conditions, and exposure to infectious diseases. Lack of access to healthcare can also contribute to poor health. Healthcare may be inaccessible, unaffordable, or there may be too few health care workers to meet the needs of rural residents. In addition, sociocultural factors (Robertson, et al., 2007) may contribute to a delay in seeking care for sensitive health problems. For example, a sociocultural factor that prevents a person from seeking healthcare is the stigma around getting help for mental illness in small communities. According to Strong, et al. (2005a), lack of anonymity in a small community, and fear of discrimination when applying for employment, housing or health insurance, can interfere with seeking professional care.

Another significant hardship is the problem of hunger. Vissing (1996) explains that hunger in particular effects rural homeless people in two ways: not having enough to eat, and eating a diet that lacks nutrition. According to Vissing, difficult choices are often made between eating appropriate food or filling up on cheap, fatty, unhealthy food.

Other devastating choices involve making economic decisions such as staving off hunger or using financial resources for transportation, medicine, or another need. Often options are even more limited when people are without a cooktop or refrigeration.

Finding stable, full-time work that pays a living wage is a major hardship and struggle for the rural homeless, and is often cited as a main cause of homelessness when homeless persons themselves are asked. Burt (1996) tells of one family who lived in their car and traveled the country in search of steady work. Vissing (1996) determined that those who have good jobs in good economies generally do not become homeless, but those who can only find part-time or temporary work with poor wages and no insurance struggle with homelessness. Some rural homeless who have little or no income engage in what is known as "scrapping," where they ask permission to sift through scrap metal (old machinery, etc.) that sits on farms or other pieces of land. This is then taken to a recycling center for cash. The practice of scrapping can be dangerous and result in multiple cuts and scrapes and is not at all lucrative. A day of scrapping may not even yield 20 dollars.

Finding affordable childcare can also be a hardship and a barrier to gaining employment, as childcare centers are scarce or nonexistent in rural areas and people are without personal friends or family members who have the resources to help. Distance to employment is also a hardship, due largely to a lack of transportation. Car repairs, annual registration, costs for fuel and other costs can mean there is no car to drive and no way to reach a job.

Accessing social services can be a hardship when wide distances exist between services and those who need them. If there is no reliable car to drive, most rural residents

cannot fall back on public transportation that likely does not exist. Distances, however, are not the only problem. When addressing barriers to continuum of care (CoC) services (regionally coordinated services for homeless people), Goodfellow and Parish (2000) found that barriers include accessibility, availability, and adequacy of services. In their study on whether all CoC services reach homeless people in nonmetropolitan counties in Pennsylvania, these researchers found that shelters existed in only 26 of the 42 nonmetropolitan counties. In some counties no homeless prevention services existed, and in others, there was inadequate transitional housing.

The obstacles that Goodfellow and Parish (2000) found are unique to rural settings where services are not as specialized as in urban areas, a reflection, according to these researchers, that rural homelessness is not as much of a priority or not as understood. What's more, they found that "homeless people do not know where to go" (p. 37) to seek assistance. According to the researchers, this is because there is no formal linkage between services, a finding also noted by Vissing (1996), who tells of the lack of a "central depository" (p. 134) of information on social programs. This problem of homeless people not knowing where to go to receive services is also expressed in my informal conversations with shelter residents, employees and other aid workers, and seems evident in my own observations. In addition, informal conversations have revealed the problem of internet accessibility in rural areas. When employment or forms for aid are online, many people in rural areas have no way to access them. Libraries or workforce centers provide this access, but there may not be available transportation to reach these agencies.

Additionally, denial of the problem of homelessness in rural areas creates hardships and a barrier to service. Service providers may believe that while there are rural homeless people, they report that there are "no homeless here" (Burt, 1996, p. 27). According to Vissing (1996), even those who are homeless themselves may sometimes be in denial. Self-sufficiency is highly valued by those in rural communities, and rural homeless people, like many rural people, prefer to try to help themselves for as long as possible. If special help is sought because the effects of poverty are too great to bear, the fear is that word would spread about their situation and everyone would know.

Physical safety is also a constant concern for many rural homeless people. Without a home, a person is exposed and vulnerable to threats to their well-being, including crime and harsh weather. Rural homeless people who have working cars will often park them in large 24 hour store parking lots that are well lit. Others will park their cars in a car wash at night for a sense of security, and also to stay warm (the temperature will stay above freezing so the water in the car wash does not freeze). For rural homeless living in abandoned trailers or other shelters, dogs may be present, or there may be other forms of personal protection.

Summary

The intention of this study was to generate more questions than answers, and encourage further research. This study fills the obvious and urgent necessity to improve information for and about the needs of the rural homeless population. Knowledge of rural homeless adults' information environment and use adds to extant knowledge, increases awareness of the world of the rural homeless, and may help mitigate severe

circumstances through improved information transfer uniquely adapted for rural areas and the homeless adults who live there.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This study focuses on the importance of information and its potential for problem solving in the context of living as a rural homeless adult. It uses Taylor's (1991) information use environment theory and model of structure for examining an information use environment that includes people, problems, settings, and problem resolutions. Because providing adequate context of the life of a rural homeless adult is especially important, the description of context of life of rural homeless adults serves as a primary function of this literature review.

A literature review, however, serves multiple purposes. According to Ridley (2012), a literature review should include historical background for the selected topic; offer context for the research; clarify terms; discuss relevant concepts and theories; identify gaps in current research; and demonstrate the significance of the problem being addressed. Following Ridley's recommendations, this literature review provides a brief historical background of rural homelessness in the U. S., and emphasizes difficulties in defining homelessness in general, and particularly in defining homelessness in rural areas. Current research since 1980 is then discussed focusing on several main themes in rural homeless studies. Lastly, a discussion of the lack of theory-based research in rural homeless literature serves to highlight this study's theory-base in Taylor's IUE theory. Taken together, this chapter captures extreme difficulties related to the experience of rural homelessness as it exists today and the context that was used to analyze findings in this study that were collected in a rural area in the northern Midwest.

A Brief History of Rural Homelessness in the United States

Since settlers first arrived in the New World, there have been homeless people living here (Barak, 1992; Abelson, 2003). Those thought of as rural homeless people were described as "wandering" (DePastino, 2003, p. 5) poor in early English settlement court records. According to Kusmer (2002), 18th century farm laborers traveled the countryside looking for higher wages, joined by other mobile itinerates including artisans, clergy, and lawyers. By the latter part of the 19th century, homelessness in rural and outlying towns rose sharply due to the expanse of the railroad system (Kusmer, 2002). According to DePastino (2003), the increase in homeless people across the country near the end of the 19th century was met with fear, disdain, and was believed to represent a moral crisis of men. By the late 19th century, according to Rossi (1989), transient homeless people had barely any respectable place in U.S. society.

Skid row transients, or hobos, making up what is known as the "hobohemia" phenomenon of the early 20th century, were the focus of much of the early investigations on the homeless. This population, made up largely of unmarried men, worked manual labor jobs. These men often lived in boarding houses and occupancy hotels, and technically had a place to call home. But because their home did not fit within the social norms of what constituted proper family life at the time, they were considered homeless (Shlay & Rossi, 1992). Anderson (1998), a preeminent scholar of hobo life and once a homeless person, wrote that a hobo would work wherever convenient, from fields or mines, to shops or mills. They migrated to where the jobs were.

In the early 20th century rural homeless people found their situation worsening. During and after WWI, short-term labor that sustained transient workers began to

diminish. Local railroad crews replaced construction gangs, and mechanization took the place of hundreds of thousands of jobs for unskilled labor forces (DePastino, 2003; Rossi, 1989).

The U.S. joining World War II led to such a drastic decrease of homelessness it "appeared to be on the verge of extinction" (Hopper, 1997, p. 17). The enactment of Serviceman's Readjustment Act of 1944, better recognized as the "GI" bill, helped keep homelessness low due, in part, to its provision to pay unemployed veterans weekly, and provide affordable education, until the economic recession of 1981-1982. The "homeless crisis of the 1980s" (DePastino, 2003, p. 258) due largely to changes in the job market, increased poverty, a lack of affordable housing, and public policy (Burt, 1997) brought with it such large numbers of homeless people that it quickly attracted the attention of society, including local aid groups, and national publications such as Newsweek (1984, January 2), and according to DePastino (2003) rose to the top of our country's social agenda. However, there was very little focus on rural homelessness. According to the Institute of Medicine Committee on Healthcare for Homeless People (1988), since the early 1980s studies published on homelessness have focused almost exclusively on urban homelessness, while "very little [had] been published on the homeless in suburban and rural communities—except in newspapers" (p. 5). Cohen (2005) suggests that the scarcity of published accounts of rural homeless people reflects minimal attention on the phenomenon from social scientists. This trend has continued. According to Jackson & Shannon (2014), rural homelessness remains an understudied area.

Defining Rural Homelessness and Rural Areas

When the rise of rural homelessness was becoming apparent in the 1980s, it was also recognized that no empirical data was available on the extent, or the changing features, of rural homeless people (First, et al., 1990). In *Gimme Shelter: A social history of homelessness in contemporary America*, Barak (1992) describes rural homelessness in the 1980s:

> During the 1980s, a growing number of rural folks joined the ranks of the nation's homeless. Although no one has ever attempted to count the rural homeless, estimates are that the rural areas comprise about 10 to 20 percent of the total homeless population. The rural homeless are generally regarded as being among the most invisible homeless (p. 35).

This invisibility is reflected in a study by Momeni (1989) on homelessness in 15 states, which included states with large rural areas such as Alabama, Colorado, New York, and Florida. In these states, rural homelessness was observed, but not observed enough to sound alarms. In states like New York, it was determined that "homelessness does not appear to be a major problem in rural areas" (Momeni, 1989, p. 135).

The issue of invisibility is also reflected in Hopper's (1997) work on what is home and homelessness. In it, Hopper lists a number of subpopulations of the homeless, including single parents; single women; single men; those with mental disabilities or substance abuse problems; ex-offenders; youth; displaced elderly; immigrants; and victims of domestic violence. Rural homeless people are not mentioned.

Developing a Definition of Rural Homelessness

Descriptions of rural homeless people, and efforts to find them and define them, began in the mid-1980s. The state-wide study from Ohio (Roth, et al., 1985) made up the majority of the modern day studies on rural homelessness, a part of the "new research" (Shlay & Rossi, 1992, p. 130) on homelessness, or homeless research after 1980. The 1985 Ohio Department of Mental Health study allowed for a "wide range of homeless conditions in various geographical areas" (Roth & Bean, 1986, p. 32), including homeless people who did not stay in shelters. The researchers defined homeless people (including rural homeless people) as those who have limited or no shelter for any given length of time, stay in shelters or cheap hotels for 45 days (or intend to stay for that long), or "other unique situations" (Roth, et al., 1985, p. 5). One hundred eighty-nine people were interviewed from non-urban counties. Replicating this study in Ohio in 1990, First, et al., used the same operational definition of rural homelessness and found substantially more rural homeless people: 630 non-urban people were located and interviewed.

Patton's (1988) appendix piece on rural homeless people, in the otherwise urban-focused study on homelessness by the National Institute of Medicine, addresses the need to establish a definition of homelessness, and explains how this is complicated when looking at homelessness in rural areas. Asking what constitutes a situation where a person can be considered homeless, Patton initially recognizes those without shelter, and those in formal shelters, though these were close to nonexistent at the time. Patton argues that people placing added burden on friends or relatives should be included in the definition as well as those in temporary or tentative living situations. This is a critical part of formulating an accurate definition, particularly for those who are homeless in

rural areas. Nevertheless, some services still do not recognize "couch surfers," or those who go from one friend's or relative's residence to the next, as homeless people.

Asserting that homelessness has attracted little attention because there is still not a widely agreed upon definition of rural homelessness, Fitchen (1992) emphasizes, albeit a little differently, what Patton (1988) suggested, indicating that the definition should include poor people with housing insecurity. Looking at rural homeless specifically in the State of New York, Fitchen interviewed service providers and low-income individuals who may not have been homeless at the time but "on the edge of homelessness" (p. 178). This concept of living on the edge of homelessness was also identified by Burt (1996), who noted that rural areas are "woefully short of resources" (p. 6) to identify those who are close to homelessness.

Vissing (1996) interviewed homeless families and children in rural New Hampshire, and like Fitchen (1992) and others, she stresses the importance of expanding the definition of homelessness for rural people. In addition to supporting the need to include those who are living on the edge of homelessness, or who are in "housing distress" (p. 8), Vissing goes further to suggest that the definition of rural homelessness include the emotional toll that is paid by those who experience it. While this is perhaps harder to capture in a definition, the emotional hardships that accompany rural homelessness are evident while working with this population.

Perhaps the most commonly used definition for homelessness comes from the McKinney-Vento Act first enacted in 1987 and amended in 2009 with the Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing (HEARTH) Act. The definition, used by HUD for determining HUD-funded homeless assistance programs

(National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2012), defines a person as homeless if that person: "lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence" (The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, 2009, p. 1) or a nighttime residence that is a shelter, or a place not typically used as sleeping accommodations for people. Those who are losing their regular nighttime residence, families in unstable housing situations, or people who are seeking safety from domestic violence and have nowhere else to go are also included in the definition. All of the participants in this study fit the HEARTH definition and they are living in a shelter.

Defining Rural Areas

There is no one way to define rural. According to Cromartie and Bucholtz (2008), there are over two dozen definitions for rural used by federal agencies, which can lead to an estimation of 17 to 49 percent of the U.S. population qualifying as rural. Bozak and Perlman (1982) sampled 178 different sources in rural sociology and rural mental health and discovered four patterns with regard to how rural is defined: the definition is not stated at all, and the meaning is assumed; a verbal, qualitative description is offered, such as describing villages or small towns; a homemade, quantitative definition is used; or, a quantitative definition is used based on previous works. In a more recent study, Robertson et al. (2007) confirms that government agencies and researchers have not yet come to a consensus on the meaning of rural, noting that "to date, federal agencies and researchers have not settled on a single definition of "rural" but rather construct definitions specific to various uses" (p. 8-2). Reasons for this are often complex and arguably often justifiable. As Cromartie and Bucholtz (2008) explain, there are three ways on which to base urban and rural definitions: jurisdictional boundaries;

population size; or economics (taking into account commuter areas, for instance). According to Cromartie and Bucholtz these differing views can either include or leave out areas that may be in need of different forms of assistance.

This study will use HUD's Rural Housing and Economic Development's (RHED) definition, which defines rural in several ways, including "any place with a population not in excess of 20,000 inhabitants and not located in a Metropolitan Statistical Area" (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2015, para. 4). The county in which this research took place fits this description and was listed as a rural county by HUD in 2010 (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2010).

Themes in the Research

There are several themes in the literature on rural homelessness, including housing issues, employment situations, health and healthcare concerns, and access to help and support systems. All of the topics highlighted below are issues that are not dealt with individually but converge together at the same time, each often worsening the other. This juggling act of mounting crises is what a rural homeless person must balance. An accurate illustration might be a tightrope walker without a net, balancing the heavy weight of multiple unfortunate circumstances on his shoulders while trying to maintain dignity and solve problems in his environment.

Housing. There is simply not enough affordable housing in rural areas to meet the needs of the economically poor. According to the Committee on Healthcare for Homeless People (1988), from the end of the Great Depression until 1980 the federal government was the primary U.S. funding source for subsidized housing, but that support greatly diminished by the latter part of the decade. The decrease in available low-income

housing drove up prices, causing poor people to pay a disproportionate share of their income—sometimes seventy percent or more —on housing (Committee on Healthcare for Homeless People, 1988). This is just one of the many complications. Fitchen (1992), for instance, explains how housing security was diminishing in rural New York. Rural poor locals, formerly able to afford their own homes, though often nothing more than a very old trailer or shack, encountered a number of forces that priced them out of home ownership. Increases in housing prices (due in part to urban vacationers), rising construction costs, stricter building codes, and higher real estate taxes acted as negative convening forces against the poor; over two-thirds of the participants interviewed could not afford their own home (Fitchen, 1992). The local economy is also partly to blame. According to Fitchen (1992), people who move to find affordable housing also find themselves in areas with few employment opportunities.

Vissing (1996) writes that homelessness can be boiled down to the simple fact that there are fewer low-cost homes than there are people who need them. Like Fitchen (1992) pointed out, Vissing states that fewer people in rural areas can now afford to own their own homes. She cites a number of complex factors, including the rising cost of housing, rising rent prices, difficulties in getting loans from banks, less federal money spent on low-income housing, and declining incomes. Participants in Vissing's studies tell of a time when rural poor owned land, and their own homes, so there was a place to go. If that was sold due to financial hardships, finding another place to live could be financially impossible. Low-cost rentals in rural areas are scarce and often too expensive for those with very low incomes (Vissing, 1996).

In a rural southwest Pennsylvania community, Cohen (2005) documents the problem of unemployment and underemployment, and the decline of low-cost and subsidized housing. People became homeless, he writes, because they no longer could afford their homes, or they could not afford the costs associated with a new apartment. This is especially difficult for families. For homeless families, it can take at least four weeks to obtain subsidized housing (Poverty Report on Fayette, as cited in Cohen, 2005).

Rural homeless persons' sheltering options, documented by the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) (2010), describe "characteristics or forms of homelessness" (p. 7). These forms include: visible homeless persons in shelters; less-visible homeless in overcrowded housing (including multi-generational situations); those who live in unacceptable conditions (such as cars, or outdoors); or those who own or rent sub-standard housing, many of which were condemnable. Some homeless persons observed by the authors were living in extremely overcrowded situations as they waited on a list for affordable housing. Others lived in barns, dry river beds, encampments, abandoned buildings, or vehicles. For some, according to the GAO, available affordable housing in the private sector can amount to condemnable structures with no heat or plumbing due to a lack of building code enforcement.

Where this research was conducted, waiting lists for low-income housing can last longer than some are willing to wait, so they return to a less-than-ideal environment, even to a situation they were originally escaping, including very poor or crowded conditions, or a place where safety could be questioned. For others, it means returning to the dangers of living outdoors in wooded areas.

Employment. According to Fitchen (1992) there is a positive spatial correlation between affordable housing and poor employment opportunities; trailer parks and inexpensive apartments are usually found in areas with sagging housing prices, and weak economies. The economic circumstances of homeless persons places them outside the housing market (Shlay & Rossi, 1992). Sometimes a rural homeless person is provided help with finding low income housing or with finding a job, but finding both in the same location is often not attainable. Location is especially critical because transportation options may be limited or at least not always reliable. In other situations, a low income dwelling and a job are both found, but they are at a distance from support networks.

In Cohen's (2005) study, those who could not afford housing suffered from a loss of jobs in the area, high unemployment, and low income levels. A lack of employment opportunities is also discussed by Strong, et al. (2005a), who talk of a once-strong manufacturing presence in rural areas, thanks to firms' ability to pay low wages. Many of these jobs, however, are moving (or have moved) out of the country. According to Strong, et al., underemployment, which describes low-income workers, "involuntary" (p.24) part-time workers, seasonal workers, or "discouraged" (p. 24) workers, is consistently more prevalent in rural areas. Nearly a quarter of all rural workers (over 25 years old), according to Strong, et al., made less than the poverty threshold for a family of four.

Mosley and Miller (2004) write that in rural areas there is a greater dependence on low-wage and less stable jobs than in urban areas; work in manufacturing, as well as a growing reliance on service industry jobs, is growing in nonmetropolitan areas. The authors confirm that underemployment and "informal" (p. 4) work is common in rural

areas, and note that work has been found to be less of a protectant against poverty for rural residents.

The National Alliance to End Homelessness (2013) notes that employment assistance programs must be specialized enough to recognize the differing obstacles that subpopulations face in order to provide targeted service. The organization lists a number of sub-populations, including older adults, families with children, disabled persons, and veterans (many of whom live in rural areas, though this is not mentioned). According to the National Alliance to End Homelessness, "employment programs require specialized components depending on the population(s) being served" (p. 3). The challenges unique to rural homeless should be a part of this conversation.

Health and healthcare. This area of literature on rural homeless people is more developed than other areas of the literature. Homelessness negatively effects the health of individuals (Lipato, 2012; Vissing, 1996), often in very obvious ways.

Vissing (1996) thoroughly discusses healthcare for rural homeless people, explaining that there is almost no part of a homeless existence that does not bring with it health concerns. Sometimes the issues are so simple they can be missed; even a bed for recovery from the flu, for instance, is out of reach for many homeless, including rural homeless (Vissing, 1996). This issue is also addressed by Lipato (2012), who asserts that the first necessary step to improving the health of homeless persons is to identify them, though few healthcare facilities collect this information.

Identifying homeless people can lead to understanding how a lack of housing is likely to damage a person's health (Lipato, 2012; Craft-Rosenburg, 2000), and, as Vissing (1996) points out, can lead to issues with hygiene, inadequate sleep, nutrition and

hunger, and psychological distress, among many others. Also underlying many of these issues is a lack of access to services. Medical care is limited and difficult to access in rural areas, particularly if a rural homeless person is not staying in a shelter where supportive services can be more accessible (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2010). This lack of access to healthcare is nothing new. Craft-Rosenburg (2000) tells of rural homeless people facing difficulties in accessing health services including prejudices and stereotyping, costs associated with getting the care they need, transportation issues, and issues related to a lack of a home address. Craft-Rosenburg's study also found a high amount of stress reported from participants, and participants' reliance on personal support networks, rather than what professional support was available. Also notable, barriers to healthcare, according to Craft-Rosenburg, trumped participants' perceived need for help with health problems.

Post (2002) draws attention to barriers that can come from a lack of cultural competence, explaining that communication barriers with ethnically diverse rural homeless patients include language barriers or cultural understanding of Western medicine. Similarly, The Committee on Healthcare for Homeless People (1988) identifies barriers to accessing healthcare including cultural biases, financial barriers, transportation, and an undersupply of healthcare providers. The report notes that inconvenient hours, long wait times, and few facility comforts can also hinder access. For the homeless, these issues cause "especially severe consequences" (p. 82) and are exacerbated by the rural settings.

An undersupply of healthcare providers and facilities in rural areas is a major concern for rural residents. Burt, et al. (1999) report that rural homeless people have less

access to medical care than urban or suburban homeless people; 47 percent of those living in rural homelessness had a need for medical care within the last year, but they were unable to access a doctor. More than a decade later, according to Gamm, Hutchison, Dabney and Dorsey (2010), access to healthcare is still a major issue and was identified as the number one priority for rural residents. Yet access to healthcare is not always about availability. Robertson, et al. (2007) discuss the issue of privacy and a reluctance to seek outside help, particularly with sensitive issues such as domestic violence, mental health problems, or alcohol abuse. Robertson et al. note that delays in needed services can ultimately make symptoms worse and even more expensive or intrusive

The number and severity of health concerns for rural homeless people are vast and, therefore, difficult to discuss comprehensively. According to Post (2002), among a host of chronic health issues, ailments suffered by both urban and rural homeless, including hypertension and diabetes, cause higher morbidity rates among rural homeless because of prolonged lack of medical care. Post also notes other illnesses going untreated longer among rural homeless people including asthma, Hepatitis C, tuberculosis, and skin problems. Craft-Rosenburg (2000) discusses additional common or growing health ailments include pneumonia, bronchitis, ulcers, headaches, and severe dental issues.

Many health issues faced by rural homeless are preventable (Vissing, 1996). Food insecurity and nutrition in poor rural areas are problems that can contribute to or worsen health issues. In addition to the pain of hunger, food insecurity can make access to healthy food or food appropriate for diseases such as diabetes extremely difficult.

According to Vissing, often food pantries and soup kitchens, uncommon in remote areas, offer selections high in carbohydrates and often run out of or lack fresh fruits, vegetables, milk, juice, and meat. They also have numerous rotating volunteers so it can be difficult to identify who is suffering from chronic ailments (Vissing, 1996).

Controlling what people eat because they do not have the resources necessary to provide what they need for themselves is an unfortunate situation that causes additional suffering for the most in need. These circumstances can lead to ailments that make navigating hard circumstances even more trying. Food is sometimes spoiled but is served for dinner and is eaten because the alternative is to go hungry. There are very few choices when you cannot provide for yourself. Vissing (1996), for instance, poignantly describes how one homeless participant, trying to manage diabetes without health insurance and medical care, inquired about different food options. "Beggars can't be choosers" (Vissing, 1996, p. 58) was the response from the soup kitchen volunteer.

Access to help and support. In small rural communities informal social support networks made up of family members and friends provide a primary source for help and support. Fitchen's (1992) study finds that personal support networks are "the first line of defense" (p. 191) against literal homelessness, and suggests that these close personal ties should be included as an integral part of the overall assistance that includes public or private agencies. First, et al. (1994) also suggest that social agencies work with families who are helping homeless persons in order to prevent an increase in literal homelessness.

Burt (1996) focuses on and describes rural homeless needs, noting that rural homeless persons' "most important assets are the twin rural traditions of *community* and *self help*" (p. 6). Craft-Rosenberg, et al. (2000) note that among the rural homeless

participants in their study, personal support networks made up of family and friends were used more frequently than the professional support available, even though, interestingly, all of the study's participants were living in a shelter at the time. However, Jackson and Shannon (2014) suggest that social support is limited among the rural homeless, especially for women and veterans. For those who are seeking support, the authors note that service providers such as shelters can serve this need. Jackson and Shannon warn, though, that experiences with unfriendly staff can hurt relationships between clients and social service providers, and these experiences can be enough to cause homeless people to go without needed help and support.

Barriers to assistance discussed in the U.S. GAO (2010) report include resistance to building or otherwise establishing affordable housing or shelters in some communities. Other possible barriers include no proof of identification, metal health issues, criminal records, low number of existing services for large geographic areas, and simply determining the extent of rural homelessness (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2010).

Vissing (1996) details some of the problems with using formal, mainstream services. She suggests that an overarching problem is that services are created at a federal or state level with no way of managing them as a complete system at a local level. According to Vissing this creates a web of disconnected services that must be navigated, with rules and treatment of those in need changing at each location. What can result, then, is the barring of access to services by those who need them most. While urban areas have adopted programmatic improvements to help mitigate system failures,

according to Vissing (1996), what might work for urban centers may not be successfully transferable to rural areas.

Theories Used to Study Rural Homelessness

The literature that directly addresses issues pertaining to rural homelessness has been called groundbreaking "first generation" (Robertson, et al., 2007, p. 8-21) research, and it has paved the way for further studies. However, there seems to be a lack of rural homeless studies that apply a theoretical framework, or contribute to theory, with some exceptions. Vissing (1996), for example, discusses her discovery for the use of post-chaos and complexity theory, and uses it as a framework for understanding what she observed and learned while researching homeless children and families in New England. She finds its usefulness in its ability to see "simplicity and order where formerly only the random, the unpredictable—or the chaotic—had been observed" (p. 3). Putting order to chaos, Vissing argues, allows for better understanding of rural homelessness and may lead to greater visibility of the problem.

In their quantitative study of factors related to social support among a rural homeless population, Jackson and Shannon (2014) found that social capital theory helped explain many of the study's results. The research particularly looked at the effectiveness of substance use and mental health services for rural homeless participants. It found that having one kind of social support (such as a partner) can lead to having other kinds (joining a support group), consistent with the suggestion made in social capital theory that "individuals have mutual exchanges to work toward a common goal" (Jackson & Shannon, 2014, p. 65).

Taylor's Information Use Environment

Selection of a theory-base for this study was centered on the urgent situation described in this literature review to address rural homelessness in new and more effective ways. Studying rural homelessness as a problem addressed by the field of information science, a science that examines the flow of information in society and information use environments, is unique to this topic and innovative in its focus on people as users of information and on information use environments. Using an information science perspective allows for asking new questions of those living and experiencing life as a rural homeless person. Chatman (1983) was, according to Fulton (2010), one of the first library and information science scholars to take her research about marginalized populations outside the library emphasizing the importance of context in the examination of everyday life information. Chatman's extensive research and theory building, especially her theory of information poverty (1996), inspired a "new wave of cultural information poverty research" (Thompson & Afzal, 2011, p. 29).

Hersberger, an information science researcher influenced by Chatman (1983, 1996), studied homeless and marginalized people including the information needs and sources of homeless parents (Hersberger, 2001), how homeless people exchange information through social networks (2003), and neglected and abused foster children (Hersberger, 2006). She points out that for researchers to accomplish the goal of conducting research that reveals lived experiences from an information perspective, they should develop a holistic approach to examining everyday life information seeking and use in-context.

Following Hersberger's recommendation, in this study, the use of Taylor's IUE model allows for an in-context, holistic approach to examining everyday life information seeking and use including the daily information world of rural homeless adults. The IUE model is defined as "the set of those elements that (a) affect the flow and use of the information message into, within, and out of any definable entity, and (b) determine the criteria by which the value of information messages will be judged" (Taylor, 1991, p. 218). According to Taylor, it is, in total, about the information behavior of different groups of people, where information behavior is understood as actively searching for information when a problem is recognized, and resolving the problem through acquired information.

Taylor's user-centered approach represents a paradigm shift that look place beginning in the late 1970s that called for an alternative to the traditional system-focused approach to studying information needs and uses. Dervin and Nilan (1986) discuss the shift from the traditional system-focused view to the user-centered view that focuses on the information user and how the user interacts with an information system. According to Dervin and Nilan (1986), the user-centered view sees information as something constructed by people, and is concerned with how information is used given what happens before and after people interact with an information system. Dervin's (1983) empirical finding on information use were influential to Taylor's IUE framework (Taylor, 1991).

There are four components to Taylor's (1991) IUE framework: sets of people, problems, settings, and the resolution of those problems. Taylor states that there are two possibilities for establishing a set of people, either by using a set of determined variables,

or by recognizing what society has already established. Society tells us who a rural homeless adult is through established definitions of the terms rural and homeless and what constitutes an adult (age eighteen and over). Definitions for rural and homeless are clearly articulated in chapter two. Taylor's framework and use of terms, as well as the methodology used in this study, will guide participant selection.

Problems have to do with not only the subject of the problems, but also with the nature of the problem that is considered important by a group of people (Taylor, 1991). When faced with a problem, according to Taylor, a person may take several steps, including drawing on past experiences, seeking new knowledge or using what is already known in a useful way, or facing the possibility that there may be no solution. Taylor has several warnings about investigating problems. First, problems may be better understood by looking at the types of information people seek and use to mitigate a problem. Second, problems—that may sound vague when a person tries to explain them—are constantly changing based on circumstances that are influenced by a person's perceptions or new information acquired. Third, definable information use environments have distinct problems based on a setting, lifestyle, or job. Fourth, there are dimensions to perceived problems that may prove challenging. For instance, MacMullin and Taylor (1984) point out some problems that may be relevant to this study, including the importance of shared assumptions or mutual understanding. Another is the number of problems a person might be encountering and the unknown interactions between them. Taylor (1991) suggests that dimensions such as these may have consequences for the kind of information a person may consider useful.

Settings refer to the environment a group of people live and work within and how information is sought and used. Taylor (1991) identifies four elements within settings that effect information behavior. The first element, importance of organization, refers to how an organization and its structure effects information use among types of people. Second, domain of interest, has to do with what an organization, or a group of people, do. There is some uniqueness to different domains, according to Taylor, with regard to what information is accessible, perhaps reliable, and how it is disseminated. Third, access to information, refers to how a particular setting effects how a person perceives accessing information. Not only is physical access to information important, but informal personal sources are also, where dialog takes place. Fourth, history and experience, effects the impact new information has on an organization, maybe minimalizing it (Taylor, 1991).

Resolution of problems asks what kind of information behavior is seen among different people in certain settings and what ultimately solves a problem. Taylor reminds us that an over-abundance of information is not more beneficial, especially if it is deemed unuseful; what is important is how a group of people see their problems, and what they believe can bring resolution. Taylor puts forth eight classes of information use, influenced by the work of Dervin (1983), and Dervin and Nilan (1986). Perhaps especially relevant to this study are the categories "motivational" (p. 230) and "got out of a bad situation*"* (p. 231). "Motivational" refers to information use for the purpose of moving forward or onward. The category "got out of a bad situation," only briefly mentioned by Taylor, is further explained by Dervin (1983). This use of information

describes a situation for a person that is unfavorable, and the help sought is to get out of the situation (Dervin, 1983).

While this framework has been used to study other marginalized populations including inner-city African American communities (Agada, 1999) and abused and neglected foster children (Hersberger, 2006), it has not been used to study rural homeless populations. Taylor (1991) makes two suggestions that suggest the usefulness of this framework for investigating rural homeless adults' information needs. He notes

> there is a strong need for more studies of differing populations working in varying contexts, and how individuals in those populations describe, in their own words, how specific information is used and how its use (or nonuse) affects their concerns. (p. 231)

Homeless people are from various backgrounds, abilities, ethnicities, religions, etc. and may be considered members of a diverse population. Taylor (1991) suggests using the IUE framework for diverse groups of people. He states that the contexts he uses to describe the IUE framework does not consider "general public" (p. 220) populations such as "the elderly, consumers, or the information poor" (p. 220). Nevertheless, according to Taylor, "it is hoped that the structure presented here can also be used in organizing data about these groups" (p. 220).

The IUE model is squarely situated as a user and context-focused framework (Durrance, Souden, Walker & Fisher, 2006). It was developed to serve as a bridge between users and their environment, and those who in some way manage the information system (Taylor, 1991). Concepts central to the IUE framework have played an influential role in the work of some information science researchers, including

Kuhlthau (2004), Choo and Auster (1993), and Agada (1999). Kuhlthau's (2004) information seeking process (ISP) was informed by a number of researchers including Taylor and his levels of information need (1962) as well as his IUE theory and particularly its emphasis on the cognitive process in information gathering. Choo and Auster (1993) used Taylor's work to help explain specific conditions in the information environment of managers, specifically with regard to "unstructured decisions about unpredictable situations" (p. 202). It is noted that in these situations, information seeking decisions are not always based on obvious determinants, such as physical accessibility.

Agada used the IUE framework to examine African American inner city communities in Milwaukee, looking at day-to-day information needs in situational contexts, unresolved needs, and favored information sources. Agada was the first to use the IUE framework to study inner city African American communities, where a lack of knowledge regarding what this population calls information may contribute to less effective professional services. In this way, Agada's findings include that "traditional information services are not tailored to meet some of the everyday survival needs among this population" (p. 82). This observation, and the study's use of the IUE theory, helps to inform this study of rural homeless people, where a lack of knowledge of their information use may be hindering the development of tailored services for the population. In this study I suggest that our lack of attention and understanding of rural homeless adults and their information behavior in-context could be preventing us from establishing more effective information services.

Chapter 3: Methods

Individuals who are homeless need services and resources, and they also need to be empowered to problem solve and to become independent as they experience stable living. Selecting qualitative research is a philosophical and design choice made by researchers who, according to Creswell, want to "*empower individuals*" [emphasis in original] (p. 48) who are participants in the study allowing their stories to be heard. In the spirit and practice of phenomenology, participants function together with the researcher to study and learn about the phenomena under investigation. A qualitative research approach was therefore proposed for this study. According to Creswell this approach is appropriate for the researcher who wants to "study a group or population, identify variables that cannot be easily measured, or hear silenced voices" (p. 48). Specifically, descriptive phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994) guided the data collection and analysis. First in this chapter there is a discussion of phenomenology and descriptive phenomenology, followed by: a description of the research location and the study's participants; how I prepared for the study; an explanation of data collection methods; strategies for research validation; the role of the researcher and the researcher's background; ethical standards that will be used, and the timeline for the study.

Phenomenology

According to Smith (2013), phenomenology is the study of phenomena, or at its core, the study of appearances. From a first person point-of-view, phenomenology allows the researcher to consider structures of what an individual consciously experiences and the relevant conditions of the experience.

Phenomenology was considered a radical approach to philosophy, pioneered by Edmund Husserl, a German philosopher, in the early twentieth century. A phenomenon itself is what appears in one's consciousness (Moustakas, 1994). A phenomenological study aims to describe and understand a phenomenon experienced by people who have lived through it (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007) rather than the phenomenon being described by someone who has not experienced it. In this study, the phenomenon under investigation is problem solving in the context of living as a rural homeless adult.

Descriptive Phenomenology

Descriptive phenomenology, founded by German philosopher and mathematician Edmond Husserl (1859-1938), holds that "consciousness [is] the condition of all human experience" (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007, p. 173). It utilizes only information that is available to consciousness, or in other words what something appears to be to a person (Moustakas, 1994). Researchers who use descriptive phenomenology stay near to the data that is given to them rather than to interpret or to make assertions based only on what they believe the collected data reveals (Finlay, 2009). Descriptive phenomenology aims to bring to light "essential general meaning structures of a phenomenon" (Finlay, 2009, p. 10) that rise up from the data. The intent in this research is not to *interpret* meaning, but to make known the phenomenon of problem solving in the context of being homeless as it is experienced by participants.

Research Question

The central research question is *How do rural homeless adults use information to solve problems in their everyday information world while they are residents at a rural homeless shelter?* Taking advantage of the researcher's profession in library and

information science, and experience working at a rural homeless shelter, this core research question follows Moustakas' suggestion that a phenomenological research question "grows out of an intense interest in a particular problem or topic" (p. 104).

This study is informed by Taylor's Information Use Environment (IUE) theory, and elements of Savolainen's (2006) Everyday Life Information Seeking (ELIS) theory. The interview questions reflect Taylor's IUE framework, which consists of four components: sets of people, problems, settings, and problem resolutions. Savolainen's theory helps inform the concept of an everyday information world. Both Savolainen's and Taylor's theories are important in my study. Taylor's IUE theory was originally applied to groups of people in their profession roles such as engineers and teachers. Savolainen's ELIS framework, in contrast, focuses on non-work information seeking and how people gain and use information to navigate daily life and solve problems.

This study helped to begin to fill the obvious and urgent necessity to improve information for and about the needs of the rural homeless population. Knowledge of rural homeless adults' information settings and use adds to extant knowledge, increases awareness of the world of the rural homeless, and may help mitigate severe circumstances through improved information transfer uniquely adapted for rural areas.

Research Location

This study took place at rural 24 hour-a-day transitional living shelter for adults located in the northern Midwest. I chose to use a shelter as the research location because of the well-documented problem with finding rural homeless people. I chose this particular shelter because of its rural location, its proximity to my home, and its leadership's approval of this research.

The shelter has a total of ten beds and serves residents in a geographic area of approximately 4,500 square miles with a total population of nearly 200,000 people. It is one of the only 24-hour rural shelter options for adults in the region.

Study Participants

Participants for this study were current residents at the transitional shelter. It was impossible to know for certain who was residing at the shelter during the time I collected data, who was going to be open to being interviewed, and who believed they would be at the shelter long enough for me to schedule an interview and to meet with them. Because of these reasons, purposive sampling (Creswell, 2013) was used when selecting participants to interview for this study. According to Creswell, purposive sampling means that a researcher deliberately chooses places and participants because they can best address the research problem and phenomenon being studied. As Tongco (2007) points out, often key informants are used to help locate participants who might be best for a study. I consulted with the Executive Director of the shelter and the shelter's Case Manager in order to identify potential participants. Because I was a volunteer at the shelter and had contact with shelter residents, I also based my selection on my own observations and experiences with the residents. Participation in this research was completely voluntary. A gift card of $20 was offered to each participant. Through my experience at the shelter, I concluded that this amount of compensation was reasonable. Most residents did work either full or part time, or had other sources of income, such as disability benefits. While coercion is a concern where study participants are especially in need, the amount suggested here was an incentive, but I do not believe it was the only reason for participation by any of the participants.

Preparing for the Study

In preparation for this study, I spent one year volunteering at the transitional shelter. There I was able to interact with residents while working as a front desk attendant. I would also often try to sit where residents congregated, including in the back parking lot where smoking was allowed. Sometimes former residents of the shelter also continue to be affiliated with it, and in this way I took steps to learn how to best go about conducting interviews with individuals who, due to life situations, might have been emotionally or physically fragile. Following Sampson's (2004) suggestions for careful preparation for data collection, I interacted with some former residents of the shelter to discover best terminology to use in interview questions and to learn about the approximate length of time that is reasonable for individuals to talk about their homeless experiences. I also consulted the Executive Director and Case Manager of the shelter to learn how best to phrase questions.

Data Collection Methods

Evidence for phenomenological studies is gathered from first-person accounts of life experiences (Moustakas, 1994), making in-depth interviews the preferred method for phenomenological research. Data collection for this research was in the form of semi-structured, in-depth interviews (Appendix A), using open-ended questions. Participants' responses to my questions were tape-recorded and then transcribed by a professional transcriptionist. Because these interviews were conducted as phenomenological interviews, my goal was to encourage participants to speak freely while keeping the interview focused on the phenomenon under investigation. Moustakas (1994) suggests informing participants of the nature of the study and inviting them to play a co-researcher

role. Following Moustakas's suggestion, I began the interview by reading an opening statement that explained the purpose of the study (Appendix B) and put myself and the participant on equal footing as we together sought knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

In this study, it was the goal to interview approximately 10 individuals. I interviewed ten participants, and I used nine of the interviews for this study (one interview did not record). The number of people who should be interviewed in phenomenological research varies from study-to-study. Polkinghorne (as cited in Finlay, 2009) suggests that researchers should interview between 5 and 25 people who have experienced the phenomenon. What is important, according to Moustakas (1994), is that the participant has experienced the phenomenon; is interested in further understanding it; is interested and willing to participate in a taped interview; and gives permission for the completed research to be published. In addition to these considerations, I was looking for individuals who were willing to schedule an interview time in advance and to be interviewed off-site from the shelter due to privacy concerns. I planned to use the public library for interviews because of its location (one block away from the shelter) and its available private meeting room. Because of weather or other concerns for the participants, the public library was only used for one interview in the study.

Before beginning the data collection I set aside my personal judgment in what is known as bracketing, or epoche, a Greek term meaning "suspension of judgment" (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2015). Husserl's (2001) development of epoche was influenced by Descartes, and the belief that knowledge derived from intuition precedes empirical knowledge (Moustakas, 1994). When putting this into practice, the researcher

must let go of all that she knows as true about a particular subject in order to proceed through the steps of the method and view a phenomenon "freshly, naively, in a wide open sense" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 33). While gathering data, no position is taken when this first step is approached correctly; only what is made known in the consciousness can bring forth truth and reality (Moustakas, 1994). The real challenge of the epoche, according to Moustakas, is to be transparent to yourself. Epoche is the first part of what is known as transcendental-phenomenological reduction (Schmitt, 1959). As Schmitt explains (1959), after one suspends belief in the object under investigation (the practice of epoche), then the researcher can reduce "the natural world to a world of phenomena" (p. 240).

Data Analysis

I used Moustakas' (1994) systematic steps for analyzing a descriptive phenomenological study, a modification of van Kaam's (1959, 1966) analysis method. Using Moustakas' approach can be a benefit to "novice researchers" (Creswell, 2013, p. 83) because of its clearly laid-out structure (Creswell, 2013). The steps for data analysis are described below.

Horizonalization. During horizonalization, Moustakas (2004) instructs that every expression in the collected data that seems relevant to the experience will be listed. Each horizon, according to Moustakas, is seen as having equal value.

Reduction and elimination. This step was to determine "invariant constituents" (Moustakas, 1994, p.p. 120), or textured meanings of the phenomenon. In order to proceed through this process of elimination, according to Moustakas (2004), two questions must be asked: "Does it contain a moment of the experience that is a necessary

and sufficient constituent for understanding it, [and] is it possible to abstract and label it" (p. 121)? If I answered "yes" to both questions, then it was a "horizon of the experience" (Moustakas, 2004, p. 121). All other expressions were eliminated.

Clusters of meaning. In this stage the invariant experiences were clustered into thematic groupings and labeled. These became the core themes of the experience (Moustakas, 2004).

Final identification of themes. This is a verification step where the invariant constituents and their related themes were checked alongside the record of the participant. According to Moustakas (1994), two question are asked: Are the themes undoubtedly expressed in the transcript? And, are they compatible? If they are not expressed in the transcript or compatible, they are not relevant and should be deleted.

Individual textural description. Using the invariant constituents and themes that were kept, I constructed an individual textural description for each participant. This section includes "verbatim examples from the transcribed interview" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 121).

Individual structural description. Next, for each participant, an individual structural description of the experience was constructed, which addresses "the 'how' that speaks to conditions that illuminate the 'what' of experience" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 98). This is based on a combination of the individual textural description from the previous step and the process of imaginative variation (Moustakas, 1994). In imaginative variation, the phenomenon from different perspectives, frames of reference, or any perspective that enters the consciousness are considered (Moustakas, 1994).

Textural-structural description. Next, for each participant the essence of the experience were constructed bringing in the invariant constituents and themes (see Tables 1-3).

Composite description. Lastly, using the textural-structural descriptions, a composite description of the meaning and essences of the experience, and the common experience of the whole group of participants is described.

Validation of this Research

Validation, according to Creswell (2013), is "an attempt to assess the 'accuracy' of the findings, as best described by the researcher and the participants" (p. 249). Creswell does not believe that one specific validation approach exists for qualitative research, but suggests "validation strategies" (p. 250) that document the veracity of the study. He describes eight of these strategies often used by qualitative researchers and suggests that researchers choose at least two. I selected four strategies that I believed best fit this study: prolonged engagement, reflexivity (clarifying researcher bias), rich, thick description, and maintaining an audit trail.

Prolonged engagement. Prolonged engagement, or spending long periods of time with participants, played a role in this study. The benefits of prolonged engagement can include allowing a researcher to build trust with participants (Krefting, 1991; Creswell, 2013). This familiarity, according to Krefting (1991), may increase rapport and ultimately lead participants to reveal more personal or detailed information. Because of my position as a volunteer at the shelter, I had the advantage of being a familiar face from the start of a person's residency. I saw this familiarity as potentially important and qualifying as prolonged engagement. Krefting suggests the possibility of participants

offering what they see as a "preferred social response" (p. 218) rather than answers based on their personal experience. Through regular contact, the likelihood of a preferred social response was mitigated.

Reflexivity. Creswell (2013) refers to reflexivity as "clarifying researcher bias" (p. 251). It refers to the researcher deliberately revealing assumptions, personal biases, or values that could influence the research process (Curtin & Fossey, 2007). It can be argued that the benefits that come with reflexivity are built into the data analysis process in a phenomenological study. The first step in the data analysis process, epoche, requires the researcher to completely let go of all past experience, biases and views that could in any way influence how the data is seen.

Rich, thick description. Rich, thick description, incorporated into this study, is directly related to transferability. It provides an "understanding of relevance to other settings" (Carlson, 2010, p. 1104) through detailed descriptions of the participants and settings (Creswell, 2013). Through this understanding, over time, findings are to be corroborated or substantiated. In addition to this potential benefit, Creswell and Miller (2000) note that thick, rich description can provide credibility by drawing the reader into the experience and vivid details can allow the reader to feel as though they also experienced what is being described.

Audit trail. Lastly, keeping an audit trail involves maintaining all documents from your study that reflect the research activities of your study (Creswell & Miller, 2000). For this study, recordings taken during the interviews are kept in a secure location in my home office. All typed transcripts, audio taped interviews, and all hand-recorded notes are kept in my home office in a locked, fire-safe box. It is suggested by Carlson

(2010) that these records are often kept for 3 to 5 years. All records will be locked in my home office for three years after the conclusion of the study, after which time all documentation will be destroyed.

Role of the Researcher

Important roles of the researcher in a descriptive phenomenological study include understanding and implementing what Moustakas (1994) refers to as "epoche" (p. 85). Epoche means to look at things free of one's own biases and prejudgments so able to describe in written language what is seen (Moustakas, 1994) and not what is interpreted. This process, which involves bracketing, must begin before data collection commences. According to Finlay (2009), it is important to remember that the act of bracketing is not something that is only done at the outset of a research project, but it is also a process that is continually followed throughout the entire study. Maintaining a focus on the term *descriptive* is also essential. Briefly, it means to stick close to what is given, to what appears before us, and to "suspend all preconceived ideas and explanations of the data" (Tymieniecka, 20003, p. 2). Some researchers hold that it is impossible to completely set aside all experiences, and instead any subjectivity should be placed in the foreground so it can be separated out from the actual research (Finlay, 2009). What follows is a brief description of my own background that influences my presuppositions and bias, which were set aside throughout the study.

Researcher's Background

My life's journey started in a trailer park on the side of a rural highway. While I have never known extreme hunger, or slept outdoors because I had nowhere else to go, I learned early about oppressive worry of not having enough money to pay bills, fix a

broken car, or purchase enough food. I remember the hurt that came from others at school responding to my clothes or dirty hair. As a teen, for a time, I slept on sofas of friends, or relatives, because I did not have a place to call home. I barely graduated from high school. When I was 18 I found a job at a fast food restaurant. An aunt gifted me enough money for an old car so I could get to the fast-food job as well as drive 25 miles each way to the nearest community college. As I saved money, I took classes. This pattern lasted two years until I qualified as a sophomore, could borrow enough subsidized federal student loans, and could afford to attend a state university. I moved to campus, worked two jobs, and lived frugally. All of my clothing was from thrift stores. After college, I immediately borrowed more money, worked part-time jobs, and went to graduate school. After graduation, I deferred all of my student loans, sold everything I had, and joined the Peace Corps. Upon returning home, I obtained my first professional job with a large metropolitan library. The day I began this professional job was one of the proudest days of my life.

The point in sharing this is to illustrate how much my life story and struggle has the potential for influencing my perspective on homeless people. I sacrificed and worked and broke free from a cycle of low-wage jobs, broken homes, and constant worry over basic resources. What's more, my graduate studies have provided rich context in order to help explain and understand so much of what I have observed and experienced. However, my biases, assumptions and perspectives will not, as much as I can deliberately help it following basic premises of quality phenomenological study, interfere with the integrity of this research. As a result of my labor, I have a voice. In this study, I see my voice belonging to my participants.

Ethical Standards

According to Bowen (2005), ethical concerns are greater in qualitative research than in quantitative studies because of the closeness the researcher has to the study and its participants. Every precaution to protect the identity of all participants in this research was taken. Institutional Review Board (IRB) guidelines by Emporia State University were followed as they pertain to human subject research. The required ESU request to conduct research using human subjects was submitted to the IRB committee. In addition, each participant in this study was given an IRB-approved informed consent letter to read and sign. The informed consent letter explained the study, who I am, and that their participation was completely voluntary and they could withdraw at any time. It also assured participants of confidentiality and of my responsibility to keep all interviews strictly confidential. Interview notes, voice recordings, and transcripts are kept in my home office. Transcripts are password-protected on my home computer. Interviews were taped on my personal digital voice recorder and are stored in my home office. All voice recordings, notes, and transcript files will be destroyed after a period of three years at the end of the study.

Timeline for Study

Once this proposal was approved, data collection began and consistently continued until completed based on redundancy, or theoretical saturation of the data. The goal was to collect data during fall 2015, and spring 2016 if necessary. All data was collected during spring semester 2016. Writing findings which included analyzing the data (chapter 4) and writing outcomes of the study (chapter 5) was completed and defended in fall semester, 2016.

Chapter 4: Findings

The findings address the purpose of this study: to explore the experiences of rural homeless people and the phenomenon of problem solving in the context of living in a rural homeless shelter. Further, the purpose was to learn how access to customized information can improve problem solving that will lead to a higher quality of life for people who are at-risk of becoming homeless or who are homeless. For the past two years, I have volunteered at a homeless shelter located in a rural community in the northern Midwest. My connections at the shelter, and with the Executive Director, enabled me to identify and secure participants who were living at the shelter. Rural shelters are very uncommon. When searching for shelters in rural areas within a two hour driving distance from my home, I found only one that was in continual operation and served homeless adults. The weekly drives made to the shelter were approximately 180 miles round-trip, and difficult during the winter months. I traveled to the shelter and spent time with staff, volunteers and different residents for over a year before data collection began. By the time I began interviewing, I was comfortable in the environment and had gained the trust of those associated with the shelter.

This experience as a volunteer, in additional to my personal experiences with rural life and homelessness, made me aware of the need to better understand how rural homeless adults use information to solve problems in their everyday information world while they are residents at a rural homeless shelter. I am especially grateful for the participants in this study. It was not easy for participants to be interviewed and to answer questions in an honest and open way about who they are and about their challenges. Many talked about being at a very low place in their life. Yet I know, based on what I

have learned, that they wanted to help me, the researcher. Some expressed wanting to help further the understanding of rural homelessness.

Studying rural homelessness as a problem addressed by the field of information science, a science that examines the flow of information in society and information use environments, is unique in contrast to other social science studies of homelessness focused not on information but on individual behavior or the nature of homeless groups within society. In this study, the use of Taylor's (1991) Information Use Environment (IUE) model allows for an in-context, holistic approach to examining everyday life information seeking and use, particularly the daily information world of rural homeless adults.

Moustakas' (1994) phenomenological research analysis guidelines were used to analyze 69 pages of transcript data from interviews that were tape-recorded and collected over the course of five months. These interviews present expressions in the collected data about the lived experiences of rural homeless people and their information use. I began by reading, and rereading, the transcripts and marking every expression in the data that seemed relevant. To achieve "reduction and elimination" (p. 120), two questions were asked: "Does [the narrative] contain a moment of the experience that is a necessary and sufficient constituent for understanding it? Is it possible to abstract and label it?" (p. 121). If the answer was yes to both questions, a cluster of meaning was identified. Clusters of meaning were labeled as themes. Themes were checked again by reading the participant transcripts. In phenomenology there is no set number of responses that constitute a theme. However, according to Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) the legitimacy of themes can be increased by counting the number of participants' responses.

I determined that statements from at least three, or one-third of the participants, would constitute a theme.

Narrative textural and structural descriptions of the nine interviews were then written and presented below, highlighting elements that effect the flow and use of information. The narratives also provided opportunity to include rich, thick description of the participants and their settings, the "foundation for qualitative analysis and reporting" (Pattton, 2002, p. 437). The structure of the textural narratives, collected through four open-ended questions, reflects Taylor's (1991) four components of the IUE model: sets of people, settings, problems, and resolution of those problems. The textural descriptions are constructed from the horizons and themes of the experience and include verbatim examples from the interviews. The structural descriptions are based on the textual descriptions and "imaginative variation" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 99) or the "underlying and precipitating factors that account for what is being experienced" (p. 99).

Next, using the themes that I kept, I constructed in Table 1 "individual textural-structural description" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 121) themes of the "meanings and essences of the experience" (p. 121). Textural-structural description themes with brief descriptions of each were formed (Table 2) and illustrated with quotations from the interviews (Table 3). These themes are further discussed, and four are connected back to the themes in the pre-existing literature, discussed in chapter two. To finalize Moustakas' steps for analysis, a "composite description" (p. 121) of the meaning and essences of information use of the whole group of participants is described in the findings chapter summary.

Textural Description of Sam

The person. Sam was a shy man, probably in his early 20s. I came to know him as a Native American who lived at least part of his life on a Native American Reservation in the area near the shelter where I met him. We met for the interview on a cold, blustery day. Because the shelter was busy and full of people, we met at the public library, where we could talk in private. As we started the interview, Sam was shivering from walking in the cold the two block distance from the shelter to the library. His outerwear was modest and not suitable for the low temperature and strong winds that day. I offered to delay the interview for a few moments so he could warm up, but he responded with a smile, "I'm fine." While he self-identified with struggling with sobriety, on this particular day he was sober. Sam described himself as talkative once you get to know him. He said, "I'm pretty talkative and pretty outgoing and not a person to get mad . . . I'm pretty friendly and outgoing and caring and stuff like that." He also described himself as someone who spends time with nieces and nephews and stays close to family. Sam reported that he has feelings of depression because of being "at rock bottom."

Shelter setting. Sam described the shelter as a pretty good place to stay. "It's helping me get on my feet, giving me that motivation, that extra push to get my life on straight by getting a job and finding housing. They really help out with that stuff." He spoke positively about the staff and their availability. He said that "their door is always open."

Problem barriers. Sam talked about his own challenges to staying motivated and sober and getting a place of his own. He said, "that was a big problem I had, a problem with drinking." When discussing motivation, Sam said the staff "help keep

you motivated and help keep your feet moving forward. Because if it wasn't for the staff over there I don't think I would have got as far as I got." He continued, saying "I probably would have just sat there and been a bump on a log and feeling sorry for myself." Sam speculated about the quality of the staff at this rural community shelter in helping to keep him motivated by comparing them to what he'd heard about staff from shelters in larger metropolitan areas. "From what I heard in the cities, they just turn you loose. If you ain't back by a certain time you don't get a bed. But the shelter I'm at now, they're giving you that extra little push and helping you out along the way. It's helped out a lot." Sam mentioned that the staff reminded him that the newspaper could be helpful in helping him to find a job. He said, "the staff will come up to you over at the shelter and say 'Well, there's a paper. What kind of work do you like? What kind of work are you looking for?'"

Problem resolution. When asked about information to overcome the barriers he had described, he did not have much to say. The words he spoke in short, broken sentences were conveyed in a disillusioned tone. For example, he said "No, not really. They gave me well information that I really don't think that." Ending the interview seemed to be a relief to Sam. He wanted to stay at the library where the interview was taking place, and he did.

Structural Description of Sam

This is Sam's first time being homeless. He seemed to appreciate the positive attention, availability, and encouragement the shelter staff offered. He said multiple times, in slightly different ways, how the staff "help you keep your feet moving forward" and "they'll push you to keep wanting." He wants to get back to his relatives, but how to

do that was not clear. He does not talk about what information he needs; he did not seem to be at that point yet. He is simply trying to keep moving forward through positive motivation from the shelter staff.

Textural Description of Donna

The Person. Donna is an articulate, confident woman in her late 50s. She immediately stated that "this is the last place that I thought I would be." Donna described herself as a good person who has worked hard her whole life. She said, "I've had very good, productive jobs. Physically I'm unable to do any of those tasks anymore. I have severe bilateral arthritis . . . It's hard. It really is." Because of the cold weather, rather than meet at the library I chose a space at the shelter. We met for the interview in a spare, windowless room that had been set up for a meeting. At a folding table with drab, blue outdoor chairs that sank when you sat in them, we made sure the door was closed before we began. Donna did not ask for any special accommodations. It was my idea to protect her from the icy weather and slick sidewalks.

Donna expressed frustration with her situation. "I know I'm a good person and I deserve better than what I left. Seeking homes are hard . . . I'm a good mother, very proud of that, of my family." She described herself as loyal and responsible.

Shelter setting. Donna described the rural shelter staff as very helpful and different from what she had seen when she volunteered in a metropolitan area. She said, "they have resources that I was totally unaware of as far as for housing . . . there's just a lot of options here that help us." She further described the rural shelter as "not as full as down in the cities." Donna seemed to appreciate the shelter setting. She said, "I'm socializing with people which I was unable to do . . . before I came here." She continued,

"I think it's a good group of people." Donna expressed care and concern for others. "We all come together and like cooking meals and if I hear of some place that somebody might be interested and the same with jobs. We look in papers and we look online which is really good that we have computers here for us to access so that we can find these resources out there." She said the shelter setting is like a "family."

Problem barriers. Donna did not hesitate to say that her biggest problem to overcome is housing, made particularly difficult because of her age (less than 62), and the lack of available, affordable housing in the local rural area. She looked at options in a metropolitan area and found that "there's like 285 people for one apartment." She again expressed care for others, stating that "It's sad that I am not the only one, there's that many people on these lists that in the same position that I am trying to get into something that they can afford." Donna describes her financial situation, saying, "I am a limited income. So only able to apply for public housing, subsidized housing."

Problem resolution. Donna states that she does not need any more information. She said, "they're so helpful here with the resources available. They have every program out there that we're able to tap into to try to get what we need to do." Once again, Donna expressed care and concern for others when she described a housing situation involving the emergency need for people to vacate their housing. She said, "that's bad for them . . . it might be good for me. That's kind of sad to hear." She continued, describing the competitive nature of securing permanent housing because multiple people apply for the same vacancy. "But if the landlord picks me I definitely want to go." Donna indicated that once she is settled again, she intends to volunteer more. "There's so many people

that need help." As the interview ended, Donna retuned to the main living area in the shelter.

Structural Description of Donna

Donna seemed confident and capable. She described coming from what sounded like a generally stable home and a lifetime of blue-collar work, ,which afforded her opportunities to volunteer at shelters before she herself turned to the help of a shelter. She did not seem to have as many complicated problems as some residents, and she seemed to have a handle on where her income is coming from. She was anxious to move forward, but she also enjoyed the fellowship and support the shelter provided.

Textural description of Hal

The person. Hal is in his early 60s and Native American. He has a "bad knee" and other health issues. The day of the interview was cold and icy, and fortunately the make-shift conference room in the shelter was available. After Hal finished his lunch, we met in the conference room to talk, bringing with him his briefcase full of journals and loose papers. He joked that his chili lunch wasn't good for him. It is what was available at the shelter. He started off describing himself as a butterfly. "I'm very social. I love people, people love me. I don't know. I'm like a magnet," he said. He continued, "everywhere I go, people are attracted to me and I'm attracted to people and I think, myself, that I'm very social, like a butterfly." Hal has been homeless for nearly two years, and homelessness makes him feel vulnerable. "I don't like the feeling. It makes me feel vulnerable." He said that "sometimes you gotta hold your shield up so people don't think the wrong thing about you or you give them the wrong impression." He

shows concern for others in homeless situations. "I don't want anybody to be homeless and not having a place to call your own."

Shelter setting. Hal has mixed reviews of the shelter. He said that he loves the people at the shelter. "They're all care and concerned. If they're not they're putting on a good damn act." He also said that some people at the shelter might be "fake." "It's lonely" he said, "it has its ups and downs." He likes that there are staff that he can talk to. "I met three so far that that I've been here that I can actually talk to that they listen. They could look at you and say, 'hey, what's wrong?' I like that, when somebody can look at me and say, 'hey, something ain't right, wanna talk about it?'" He said about the shelter, "I don't wanna go nowhere else." Without any prompting, Hal also said he likes the library, his "favorite hangout."

Problem barriers. Hal quickly said that "housing and health" is what he is working on right now. He was waiting for a place to open up in a nearby town. "I'm 13 on the waiting list now. I was 34 last month." He said that finding housing is "hard" and told of when he had a stable home. "I had my own house, a couple cars, I had a nice job I had been in for 12 years and then people started passing away." He mentioned his efforts to problem solve his own situation, saying, "So my mom passed away . . . I was living with her and we were doing it because she said I could do it so I could save enough money to get a car." Hal also lost three other family members. When asked if he lost his support network, he said "no." When talking about overcoming barriers, such as gaining transportation, he frequently mentioned family members and friends in his life, including people he encounters at church and though social services.

Hal joked about the lunch he had right before this interview, laughing before the conversation turned serious about his health. "Yeah, this is a big issue for me." When talking about his health, while he didn't mention his serious physical health concerns he had previously made known, he did talk about his knee, which limits his mobility.

Problem resolution. When asked about whether Hal had all of the information he needed, he said he is "like a computer." He also said, "give me all the information you can so I can pass it on and tell somebody else." About information sources, he said "keeping in touch with my ARMHS worker, believing in the man upstairs all the time, not just when something bad goes wrong but when something good happens, too." He mentioned his faith, again saying, "I feel that if you don't have the Great Creator in your life, nothings gonna work." He went on to say, "I journal everything." Hal describes the importance of his journals, some of which were spread out on the table as the interview progressed, as essential to staying on track with ARHMS (adult rehabilitative mental health services) workers and others. The interview ended when he took out his mobile phone and asked for help with making it work for him.

Structural Description of Hal

Hal revealed in the interview that he had been homeless for nearly two years. It made him feel guarded, not liking the feeling of vulnerability that homelessness brings. He has found ways to problem solve what he describes as possible memory issues with his journals he keeps with him. Hal's journals seem to make sense to him, and seem important to him. Hal is motivated, but seems to not get the traction he desires in achieving what he's working on. His friendly personality, this faith, and his optimism

seem to keep him going. While he always wants more information, how he finds it and uses it is unclear.

Textural description of Denise

The person. Denise began by describing her childhood as isolating. "I spent a lot of time in my bedroom . . . when I was a teenager I rebelled against my mother, of course. My father I didn't know very much until a few years before he died . . . even though he was with the family but he was always working." The interview with Denise took place in the small, make-shift conference room at the shelter. It was a cold day, and a quiet day in the shelter, ideal for the interview. Although there were chores to get done and it was also lunchtime, Denise was willing to take the time to be interviewed. When prompted to talk more about herself, she said she was glad to be less depressed. "I'm so very glad that my depression has gotten so much better." She said "four people have died in my life that were very close to me that I felt like committing suicide." Denise also shared that she likes to work, and to keep busy. She also likes helping others. "What makes me happy is helping somebody else. That's what makes me happy. Even if it's down and out with me, if I put a smile on somebody else's face, it's better for me." Denise described helping one person in the shelter get a job, and "getting out and doing stuff." She said "I saw a big improvement in her attitude."

Shelter setting. Denise was not happy about the rules in the shelter. She said "there's some certain rules here that I don't agree with like me stepping into another female's room while she was in there while she was on the phone." She said that when you're "down and out" and you break a rule, "there's more important things in the world

than that going on." Denise continued, "there's a lot of stressors already in my life and everybody else's life that's in here that we don't need add that sort of things on top of it."

Denise also said that she thought the food at the shelter was "very good," and she appreciated her bed. "I especially like my bed to sleep in. I mean I've slept in my car. I've slept on floors before and whatever before I came in here. Yes, it's nice to sleep in a bed."

Problem barriers. Denise talked about employment. She said she found a full-time job that she was to start the beginning of the week, but she was concerned whether she could "meet their quota in order to stay there for a while." She also talked about housing. At the time of the interview Denise had eighteen days left at the shelter before her 90 day limit was up, and was finding it difficult to find housing. She said, "I've only got 18 days left myself. Now I've got bad credit hanging over my head . . . it's like I have five felonies and I'm being treated the same way." She explained that her "bad credit" came from living with a family member who passed away, so she moved into her own residence. Unable to find employment, Denise was evicted and this is now part of her record. She said, "nobody wants to rent to me now. So I've that battle to, or that brick wall to somehow climb over or get through somehow."

Problem resolution. Denise feels that information for housing and other assistance is not shared equally at the shelter. "One particular person has gotten so much information from each individual staff member about housing and that it hasn't been shared with the rest of us where it should have been. That shouldn't be happening." She continues, "It should be brought out to everybody at one time, the same time where everybody should be given a chance at the same opportunity." Denise expressed concern

that she does not know all of her options, and is concerned that others don't either. She believes there are more "programs" to be made aware of. "There's Section 8. There's this. There's that . . . I don't know what much about that stuff and neither does a lot of other people." She adds, "I haven't got a clue on how subsidized works, Section 8 works, whatever that works or any of that." Denise ended the interview there, with nothing else to add. She went into the kitchen to make herself lunch.

Structural Description of Denise

Denise described a difficult and lonely time early on in her life, and suffered tremendous loss, yet she is motivated and cares for others, and her drive and the desire to help others seems to keep her going. She talks about the rules in the shelter and based on what she said, she does not like the rules that hinder her helping someone else. She is motivated to find permanent housing but is not satisfied with what information she has, and also has bad credit that is keeping her from being eligible for housing. She seems sure there is more information out there that would help her circumstances.

Textural Description of Kyle

The person. Kyle is a man in his mid-60s who describes himself as a bit unusual. The day of the interview he was in the common area of the men's quarters, where he could most often be found either watching television or reading, or sometimes just sitting. Because of the snowy weather, and because his only shoes were a pair of sandals, the interview took place in the conference room at the shelter. Originally from the Midwest, he spent much of his adult life in the northwest part of the United States. Kyle enjoys the outdoors. He said, "I enjoy . . . fishing, hunting trapping, that sort of thing." He said he is now on disability, but is a retired machinist. "I've done tool and die work, I've done

design work, prototypes, I've worked on airplanes, extensive machinery." Kyle said that he "is a bit of a recluse." He added "I don't enjoy being around the big cities and traffic, a lot of people, a lot of the time."

Shelter setting. Kyle described the shelter as "strictly very rigid." He also described it as "adequate" and said that "it's better than being outdoors." He expressed concern for others who he had gotten to know at the shelter, and who he said are still homeless. He said, "I know people what have been here that their time has expired, they're all living in their cars." He continues, "there's people out there now that are, I don't know, it's tough, especially for, there's older women and stuff." Kyle expressed frustration with some of the rules at the shelter. He says, "the thing exists between fraternizing with the women and the men, which I don't know why that is." He continues, "it's difficult for me to get around . . . people are in tough situations and oftentimes rely on who you live with . . . women can't give the men rides and men can't give the women rides. It leaves a person with a disability, like me, pretty well, getting away."

Problem barriers. Kyle said that he is working on getting his car back, and obtaining identification. He said, "my car was stranded…and I attempted to go back and it snowed right after my car got stranded, so I was unable to get it." He also said that "I lost my driver's license . . . I came . . . with no identification." Kyle said he wanted to move into subsidized housing "but with no identification, it was just a nightmare." He has since obtained his birth certificate he said, and is "working right now on getting an ID." He reiterated "it's been a nightmare." Kyle said that the shelter has been "somewhat" helpful. "They helped me with this application, with this Section 8 housing.

It's a lot to wade through and I know that if you have questions, you can talk to the manager." He expressed appreciation for help with an application that needed filled out and submitted. "I got one worker here to review a thing . . . they faxed the application just yesterday for me that was a help because otherwise, I'd have to schlep around, how do I get around?"

Problem resolution. When asked what information would help Kyle change his circumstances, Kyle again said that he needed identification and his car. "Having identification would greatly help." He also said, "I checked the weather conditions, the snow, there's a lot of snow . . . where my vehicle is." Kyle shared that he is "pretty computer illiterate. I can't navigate and I become easily frustrated on those things." Relying on information through phone calls, Kyle expressed frustration being told to go to a website. He said he was told "where to go and I looked at the sites, I spent about a half hour yesterday looking at the sites, trying to find out." He continued, "she asked me about if I've got an iPhone or whatever. So that's what I'm faced with today." Kyle also added, unprompted, "most of the librarians are pretty nice, they'll assist you and maybe I can get that done." Kyle seemed glad when the interview was over, and returned to the men's common area.

Structural Description of Kyle

Kyle is very independent and does not prefer to rely too much on others. Being at a shelter does not seem ideal for him. In spite of his private personality, he has empathy for those who are homeless, especially those who seem more vulnerable than himself. He did not like the rules at the shelter that hindered independent problem solving. He knows

what he needs to gain independence, but struggles with obtaining those things by navigating bureaucratic channels or using technology to access information.

Textural Description of Megan

The person. Megan is a friendly woman in her early 20s. She began by talking about the passing away of both of her birth parents, one of them passing away recently. She has an adopted mother she is still in contact with. The interview with Megan took place in the make-shift conference room at the shelter. The weather was cold but dry enough to meet at the library; however, Megan had just gotten back from an appointment, and I did not want to ask her to return to the outdoors. Megan described herself as a good student in high school. With the passing of a parent before the start of college, things became difficult for Megan. She said, "I was like, I'll be fine, I can go to college, I can do this . . . and I did very poor, very bad. I ended up dropping out halfway through my second semester, started doing drugs, drinking, pushing the rest of my family out of my life." She talked about becoming depressed and suicidal. Megan described herself as very kind. "I'm very kind. I know that I am, sometimes too kind or too nice." She also expressed concern for others. "I always told myself that I didn't want others to feel the way I felt because of how much pain that I had and how much hurt that I kept suppressing down, down, down. So I was extremely nice and extremely outgoing to other people."

Shelter setting. Megan liked the shelter, though it was different from living on her own, or with her peers, or with her mom. Talking about the size of the shelter, she said, "It's kind of like relaxing." And adds, "I actually like it. It's nice." She said that while she is usually a motivated person, because of drugs and depression "I lost all

motivation." She said that she is slowly "gaining it back" and that a staff member at the shelter "really pushes" her.

Problem barriers. Megan is looking for housing. She said, "I am working on finding an apartment . . . but I don't know where I should live." She expressed concern over the various assistance programs she is currently enrolled in, and their distances from each other. "It's just all over the board, so I don't know exactly where I wanna go, but I think I'll figure something out one step at a time. So I'll get there." Megan also expressed how important it is for her to travel to a memorial event for one of her late parents.

Problem resolution. Megan said she doesn't know of any information that would help her. She said, "I don't know if any information would help me like right now. I think it could've helped me like three months ago when I was falling into a hole, to get me up. I feel like I've been at the bottom. I've been at a zero and then coming here, I've been given so many resources and so much help and all of that to kind of get my life moving again." Megan likens the help from the shelter to leaving a hospital. "Yep, like the hospital, they give you a discharge plan." She said, "So they push me to get to where I need to go and do what I have to do and to make sure I stay on the right path." The interview ended and Megan was able to have some down time from her appointments.

Structural Description of Megan

Megan is young and smart, and in spite of her current circumstances, seems optimistic of the future. She has goals and she is receiving help to achieve those through various services in addition to the shelter, and these seem to play an important role in

rebuilding her future, and likely serve as additional information sources, which may be why she said she does not need any more information.

Textural Description of Matt

The person. Matt is a man in his late 30s who said he is known as a "funny man" because he "shows humor." He likes music, and his dog, a large, sweet, intimidating-looking animal who came along for the interview. We met in the make-shift conference room in the shelter, which worked out well, so that Matt's dog could be there too. Matt talked about his struggles with coping with anxiety. He said, "I have like, high anxiety, and I have major depression disorder. And when you put those together, it kinda, it's like, and then, all of a sudden, one small thing can happen, and it feels like somebody gave you the lottery and took it away. And it's very hard to cope with that." He added, "Plus, I have a learning disorder." He said that he received "poor grades" in school, and "by the time I got to a certain level in school, it was already too late for me."

The shelter. Matt talked about the shelter throughout the interview. He does not like some of the rules at the shelter, including the curfew time on the weekends, or the rules around when the television can be on, or when the kitchen is open, or that there are breathalyzer tests. Matt said, "so if they're gonna have like, limitations on TV, they should just not have any at all if they're worried about people not filing for apartments or filing for jobs, or trying to get the help they need." Nevertheless, he said, "I kinda understand where, why they have them kind of rules, schedules."

Problem barriers. Matt said that a big barrier for him is "poor education." He said that his parents were very young when he was born, and did not finish school until much later in life. "So, it was kind of like a repetitive role" he said. "It's kind of like a

cycle. Whatever kind of environment you grow up in is kind of what is a learned behavior." He added that learned behaviors are "hard to break." Matt also identifies "medical problems" and "cost of living" as barriers. He said, "so, I guess the biggest thing holding me back not even is the education process, it's the cost of living. The cost of living is so high, I can't afford anything. It's hard to even afford a roll of toilet paper sometimes." He said he is trying to "break that barrier" by finding work that he is physically able to do. "I've been working fast food my whole life and then trying to find another job on the side." He also said he is trying to find jobs that do not require a lot of education. "I don't have the time to go to school to finish my schooling because I'm so busy working." Matt also talks about a lack of information about the resources he needs.

Problem resolution. Before being asked about what information might help him, Matt said that that it can be "frustrating here trying to get things done because, trying to accomplish, but they don't have enough information for you. They don't have updated information." However, he does not blame the shelter for this. "There's places out here that I've found on my own that are like, rooms or whatever. The problem is, they don't advertise them anywhere. You just find out by word of mouth. So I mean, there's not really anything they can do about that." When asked about what information he might need, he has a long and complex example of how the right information could have helped regarding child support payments. Again, however, he found the answers he was looking for through word of mouth. "I found out through somebody else who found out through somebody else, word of mouth." He continued, "so if we could find out what programs are available to help people in my situation and get the word out to those people who, like, say, in a shelter situation." Matt said that "people who are actually going to get

help, they're not getting it" and that because of "rules and regulations . . . it just pushes them out the door and doesn't give them any help."

Matt also said he needs more information about "apartments, jobs, schooling, different kinds of training, it would make it a lot easier for me." He talks about going to the "government building" for help but is unsatisfied with the information he is given. He said, "it is hard for me to go to the government building, and then they give you this information, but it is all the same information every time you go there." He said when he goes for help he finds that he does not qualify. Matt said that "if they . . . give you the technologies and give you the tools you need, and the information you need, and information is the biggest tool. If you don't have information, you're stuck at ground zero." Matt said, "if we could get that information out to people, there would be a lot more success rate in this country. You don't want to sweep the poor under the rug." At the end of the interview Matt left the shelter for the weekend, but not before stopping me to say that he was very glad to have done the interview. He said that if his doing this helped someone else, it was worth it.

Structural Description of Matt

Matt is independent, but like all of the participants, seems to be looking for comfort. He does not like shelter rules that interfere with his own coping and problem solving preferences. He is not particularly close with personnel. He does rely on his dog, and writing songs. Matt seems capable of gathering information but does not see most of it as useful in helping with what he is working on. He desires more information that government services, from his perspective, might be holding back.

Textual Description of Karen

The person. Karen is a woman in her 60s who is originally from a major metropolitan area. She describes herself as an intellectual, and said "my intellect makes me tick. Intellectual curiosity." Karen and I met for the interview in the shelter. It was a wet and cold day, and because of what I came to know of Karen's health, I did not ask her to meet me at the library. We held the interview in a staff member's office because the make-shift meeting room was in use. The office was a quiet, private space. Karen said she enjoys writing and talking about things that bore other people. She also likes dogs. She had nothing else to add about herself.

Shelter setting. Karen described the shelter as "communal sort of living" that she said "most of us aren't used to." She added, "it's sort of hard to adapt." Karen talked about struggling with the living arrangements and close quarters. She said she tries "to be careful not to intrude on anyone's privacy while still having some kind of interchange, which can make it very superficial and very odd. Not like normal human interaction where there's some other basis or connection." Karen had physical ailments when she first arrived at the shelter. She said, "because I was ill when I first came here, I sort of feel like I am playing catch up." She also added, "it's helpful just to have a place to be. I mean, I'd rather be inside than out in the rain today."

Problem barriers. Karen is looking for housing, and said she feels like she is running out of time because she had been ill. "I'll sometimes wake up in the middle of the night going oh, I've gotta find housing in just kind of a panic because I feel like I've lost time." She said that finding affordable housing is "huge." She is looking for apartments but finds the remote locations a challenge. Talking about housing, she said,

"many of them are fairly remote, which would make doing anything else difficult. And problems like phone and internet, you know, connections and that sort of thing, sometimes in our rural areas, because of the lack of internet, and lack of cell phone coverage, you can be really disconnected." She also added, in the context of limited access, "I love our little local library." And added, "but I wish they were open more." Karen also talked about rural areas and other problems that can come from being at a distance. She said she would prefer to be in a large town some 30 miles way. She said that this makes "trying to find something . . . that much harder, especially if it's not posted on the internet somewhere." Despite her circumstances, Karen showed concern for others. She said she would like to be given more time to find housing, but is concerned for other people. "They have other people who also need the space every bit as much as I do, and have every bit as much right to it in terms of, you know, I don't feel like I should be given extra privileges or anything."

Karen also continues to have health concerns, which "kinda want to dominate." She said about housing and health, "they're always in conflict about which time do you spend on what?" Karen is also looking for "financial resources." She said her health issues affect whether she will return to work. She does not see a lot of options for herself. She mentions social security. "There isn't a lot of other financial support for people in my situation."

Problem resolutions. Karen talked a lot about available resources and finding resources to address problems. She said she has not been given a lot of help at the shelter with "navigating the system," and has received more help from other sources, such as "a social services person." She also said, however, that there is not a lot of help for her.

"There isn't a lot of resources for a person in my particular situation. So I'm not sure how much they could help even if they were trying to be more proactive." Karen said she is "good at finding things," and again shows concern for others. "Figure if I'm having that difficulty, other people who aren't used to digging for things and researching, and perhaps don't have the patience or the computer skills or, just, it's not their area of expertise at all. They've never done very much of it." She continued, "I think there's a very big gap between what people, the people who need the services and the services there are." Karen said she would like Wi-Fi at the shelter. She said, "And I think if this shelter had Wi-Fi for the residents, it would make an enormous difference." She continued, "for people who work during the day, the library closes at 6:00. You have to choose between dinner or the library for an hour." After the interview Karen got out her laptop and returned to the women's common area.

Structural Description of Karen

Karen does not really talk about her past or where she came from. She seems bright, and is concerned about access to technology in rural areas, and relies on the library. She would like the shelter staff to provide more guidance on how to independently look for information. She seems to be at odds with some of the shelter staff. Karen seems determined, and believes that persistence can pay off. She said, "you kinda have to learn that there is success at the end of the tunnel. It just might be a longer tunnel than you want."

Textural Description of Liz

The person. Liz is a woman likely in her mid to late 20s. A former college student, she is talkative and friendly. Liz described herself as a "do it yourself" person,

and said that she learns from her mistakes, and they make her who she is. The interview with Liz was held in a staff person's office, because the make-shift meeting room was in use, and Liz had a full day so we could not wait for it to become available. We took our seats, shut the door, and began. According to Liz, her friends describe her as too kind for her own good. "They always tell me I have too big of a heart for my own good which is probably true. I would let anyone sleep on my couch with no questions asked if it meant that they weren't on the street. I just try to help because I put myself in their place." She also describes herself as a private person, because she said she has "learned that people really just don't care. They'll ask you 'Are you OK?' . . . But really deep down they don't want to know. They're too busy, a lot of people are."

Shelter setting. Liz likes how "structured" the shelter is. She said, "I have a routine. I know there are things I've got to do. I like that there are chores. It makes me responsible. I like it. The people here are great too. It's like another home. I'm going to be sad when it's time to go." She also describes the staff at the shelter as very helpful and welcoming, and they can get her resources she didn't know about. She said, "I like that you have people that care. They really do care." She talked about one staff member as "motherly." Liz said that when she first arrived at the shelter she was nervous. "It just seemed like the worst thing ever . . . Who wants to say I was homeless and living in a shelter. Who wants to say that?"

Problem barriers. Liz is working on her health and on finding housing, including "staying sober" from an addiction, and finding a place to live. She said "It's very daunting sometimes." Liz specifically said that having enough fuel for her car can be a barrier to addressing what she is working on. "Sometimes the troubles I face are not

having enough gas to make it to my therapy appointment or my treatment and not being able to get a gas card or anything like that." Liz said that if her children were in her custody, she could get a gas card from a social services agency, but she does not have her children with her, so she cannot get assistance for gas. Liz explains, "I could take the bus but when you don't have money for gas, how are you going to pay for the bus? When you don't have gas? You know?" She said she had to stop going to one of her appointments because they are too far away, in a different town. Liz is missing another meeting on Friday because of the rules at the shelter. She seems resigned to this. Liz said, "I get up Friday mornings. I can't start laundry until 9:00. I have to work at 2:00. My meetings were around 10:00. I could get my clothes in the dryer but by the time I get back here, a little after 1:00, the clothes won't be dry enough for me to go to work. I tried switching days but nope. So, it's kind of a bummer." Liz said she loves the meetings, which are for mothers in recovery. "But" she said, "I've got to follow the rules."

Liz also talked about applying for emergency assistance. She said when she first applied she was told she was not working enough hours. Now, she is told, according to Liz, that she is working too many hours. Liz works a part-time job but works full-time hours.

Problem resolution. When asked what kind of information would help change her circumstances, she said it "would all come down to the law, the way things are run." She explained problems she has had in the past with seeking assistance when she lost her place of residence. She tried several avenues including emergency assistance, and going to legal aid. She said, "You feel very hindered when you're trying to help yourself." Liz further said that it seemed to her that to get assistance, she would need to go back to

being in a worse place in her life. "When I first started getting treatment and was working with [assistance] right away, they were all willing to help me . . . I've been sober almost a year now . . . I've got nothing now. No one wants to help. I feel hindered. It feels backwards." We ended the interview and Liz went back to her busy schedule without missing a beat.

Structural Description of Liz

Liz seems smart and determined, and describes herself as being sensitive and empathetic to the needs of others in homeless situations. She seems to get along easily with people. Liz is a problem solver and works hard to overcome difficult circumstances. She does not seem to be a complainer. Liz may be seeking information from the sources she knows of, which are not a good fit for her once she is improving. She may need new sources but may not be aware of this need, or does not know where to look.

Themes

A total of 10 themes (Table 1) emerged from the interview data. Each participant revealed her/his own unique combination of themes (Table 2). Four of the themes reflect those discussed in chapter three: housing, employment, health, and access to help and support. Although healthcare was part of the health theme reviewed in chapter three, it was not specifically discussed enough in the interviews to be a part of the themes in this research. In addition to these four themes, six others emerged: concern for others; rules at the shelter; technology; cost of living; personal loss; and hitting bottom**.** An important detail to remember with these 10 themes is that there is overlap that is evident in illustrative quotations of each theme (Table 3). This overlap is also what was noted in chapter two; the themes in the existing literature are not issues that are dealt with

individually, but converge together, each often worsening the other. In the same way, the 10 themes identified below are issues that are not dealt with individually, but they affect multiple areas of the participants' lives.

Housing. Access to housing was the most discussed kind of help being sought. Similar to the findings of Cohen (2005) and Vissing (1996), there was not enough affordable housing in the area according to the participants. The importance of community or proximity to services is sometimes directly mentioned. The stress of losing their temporary home is also directly mentioned by some participants. When asked about barriers she is facing, Karen said "housing and financial resources to pay for housing is pretty much it." She also said, "they definitely could use more housing in rural areas." Denise also said that "there's just not enough places out there that is for low-income. It's going up and up and up." In addition to housing affordability, many participants said they would like to find housing in a particular location near a support network. This could be family, counselors, or others. Megan said, "I am working on finding an apartment . . . but I don't know where I should live." She describes sources of aid in different locations spread out among small towns. "It's just all over the board, so I don't know exactly where I wanna go." Donna said about her housing search, "I prefer this area. My son lives up here." Donna also addressed the importance of a sense of community with regard to housing locations. "I do like this area and the people are so friendly and everybody kind of knows everybody." Hal, too, spoke of the importance of community. He said, "I wanna be in [town X], I love [town X]." He continued to talk about the people in the town. "You say hi to 'em and they say hi back . . . I like that and all the cops in [town X] know me." Because the physical context of this study is in a

rural homeless shelter, participants are counting down days before they must leave the shelter and take up residence somewhere else. Kyle said, "I'm with this shelter, I think, about 60 more days." Denise was also counting down. "I've only got 18 days left myself." Hal talks about having 60 days to stay instead of 90 because it was his second time as a resident at the shelter. He cites the exact date when his time is up. "That's when they want me to leave. 'Cause I was here the last time."

Employment. When employment was addressed in the interviews it meant having work and a paycheck resulting in some kind of income. It also meant the condition of having a place to go and feel better about life. Participants describe finding a place to work as difficult because it becomes necessary to find work and a permanent residence in close proximity, and often jobs and affordable housing are not in the same area. This is similar to the findings from Fitchen (1992), Shlay and Rossi (1992), Cohen (2005), and Strong, et al. (2005a). Among the participants, Denise describes this kind of dilemma. "This place in . . . rented to us and was $650.00 a month. I couldn't find a job for nothing." Karen said regarding housing and access to other resources, "many of them are fairly remote, which would make doing anything else difficult." Participants also describe barriers to employment including education or health barriers. Matt said, "so what I'm trying to do is find something that I can do that doesn't require much education or doesn't require much training." Karen said, "medical issues are affecting whether or not I would go back to work." Employment can also mean having a place to go and feel better about life. Denise talks about helping another resident find employment. Denise said, "she was liking it. She liked getting out and doing stuff." What was not evident in the interviews was the misconception noted by Vissing (1996) that homeless people are

"lazy" (p. 8). For instance, when asked to describe who she is, Denise said, "I like to work. I like to keep busy." And Donna said, "I worked hard all my life."

Health. Health is treated in this study as an umbrella topic for one's physical, mental or emotional well-being. Health-related concerns were common among participants, a reflection of Vissing's (1996) conclusion that there is no part of a homeless existence that does not bring with it health concerns. Health issues can create barriers to being successful, including taking up time that could be spent on finding housing. Karen said regarding her housing search and health issues, "I'm hoping they might give me a little extra time just because I was so very sick right after coming here." Health concerns can also limit employment, or limit the ability to accomplish daily tasks. Donna said, "I worked hard all my life . . . Physically I'm unable to do any of those tasks anymore." And Kyle said, "I'm disabled . . . I've got . . . a severe impairment to my lower extremities." Health concerns also include mental or emotional well-being. Sam said, when asked what keeps him from being motivated, "depression because you're at rock-bottom." Denise also talks about depression, and said "I'm so very glad that my depression has gotten so much better." In addition, one health concern may interrupt services for another health issue. For example, Liz said, "I did go to treatment . . . I got kicked out because I got sick and missed too many days. I tried to get back in. They said no. You're insurance company won't allow that because you haven't relapsed."

Access to Information and Support. The interviews reveal that gaining access to information and support in rural areas is time-consuming, logistically difficult, and may not result in a change in circumstances. The first part of this theme, access, is often challenging. Transportation is difficult if a person does not have a car, does not have bus

money (provided there is a bus, which is not the norm), or does not have a friend, family member or acquaintance who can take them to and from an appointment or other errand. Liz said, "sometimes the troubles I face are not having enough gas to make it to my therapy appointment or my treatment." Access to information is also challenging because participants indicated that they do not know where to go or who to ask. Karen expressed a need for "some guidance in how to do basic research in places to look" for needed resources. Help and support needs to be able to meet an immediate need such as housing, employment or another source of income. It can also be some other immediate need such as a gesture of genuine interest and support. Help that that keeps a person on a favorable course can come from a counselor or a shelter staff member. This kind of help is noted in Jackson and Shannon's (2014) study, which suggests that the need for social support can be met through service providers. Sam said of the shelter staff, "the encouragement they give you does keep you motivated." The source of the information being accessed is also important. The participants talked favorably about accessing information through people, mostly at the shelter. Liz said regarding shelter staff, "if you have questions, they're more than willing to answer it. . . . knows how to get into things that I don't even know how. Where do you get funding for this? Here are some of your options. Some of them I didn't even know how. I like that you have people that care." With regard to information sharing among residents, Donna said, "we all come together and like cooking meals and if I hear of some place that somebody might be interested and the same with jobs." Liz also expressed a sense of community. "It's like another home."

Care for Others. Next to housing, concern for others was the most common theme in this study. Literature on rural culture mentions a similar care for one another in

small communities (Patton, 1988) or in shelters (Hilton & DeJong, 2010). Participants, without prompting, discussed their concern and empathy for others in similar situations as their own. Some described how helping others is enjoyable. Denise said, "What makes me happy is helping somebody else." Still others discussed how they worry about others who they perceive as being more vulnerable than themselves. Kyle said, with regard to homeless adults, "I don't know, it's tough, especially for, there's older women and stuff." Karen expressed concern for others as well. Though she needs a place to live, she said, "they have other people who also need the space every bit as much as I do." Beyond caring for others, most participants described themselves as kind, or talked about how much they like people. Megan said, "I'm very kind." Donna described herself as "a good person." Sam said, "I'm pretty friendly and outgoing and caring." Participants expressed that they were nice, good, or kind people, or they expressed care and concern for others, or both. Much of the time it was both. Participants also seemed to be seeking that same kindness they talked of extending, discussed in the Housing and the Access to Help and Support themes.

Rules at the Shelter. Shelter rules were described in two ways: either hindering success, or promoting it. Some participants described how the rules were limiting areas of their progress by interrupting access to help and support. In other instances, rules were seen as barring self-help decisions. In addition, rules were seen as added difficulties to an already challenging existence. Still, others enjoyed the rules, where they positively viewed the provided structure and routine in their daily living. Liz talked about missing a resource meeting because of the laundry schedule at the shelter. Liz said "I get up Friday mornings. I can't start laundry until 9:00. I have to work at 2:00. My meetings were

around 10:00. I could get my clothes in the dryer but by the time I get back here, a little after 1:00, the clothes won't be dry enough for me to go to work. I tried switching days but nope. So, it's kind of a bummer." Kyle did not agree with some of the rules regarding who could offer rides. He said, "it's difficult for me to get around…people are in tough situations and oftentimes rely on who you live with . . . women can't give the men rides and men can't give the women rides. It leaves a person with a disability, like me, pretty well, getting away." Some saw the rules as adding more difficulties to an already challenging existence. Denise said, when you are "down and out" and you break a rule, "there's more important things in the world than that going on." Denise continued, "there's a lot of stressors already in my life and everybody else's life that's in here that we don't need add that sort of things on top of it." Even though Liz found the rules to hinder access to some sources of help, she also expressed appreciation for the rules. "I have a routine. I know there are things I've got to do. I like that there are chores. It makes me responsible."

Technology. Technology, which may include looking up information on a website, can be frustrating and defeating for some rural homeless adults. For others, it's a necessary cost that cannot be avoided. Still others recognize the limited access to technology that can come from living in a rural area. Kyle said he is "pretty computer illiterate. I can't navigate and I become easily frustrated on those things." Matt talked about the need for his cell phone. "I have to figure out a way to make money to have a phone. Because if I don't have a phone, I can't contact [family members]. I can't get information from places that are either hiring or anything to do with that." Karen talked about limited internet access. She said, "problems like phone and internet, you know,

connections and that sort of thing, sometimes in our rural areas, because of the lack of internet, and lack of cell phone coverage, you can be really disconnected." Karen also added, in the context of limited access, "I love our little local library." Then added, "but I wish they were open more." Kyle also mentioned the library in the context of figuring out technological sources. He said, "most of the librarians are pretty nice, they'll assist you."

Cost of Living. The cost of living affects access to a home, transportation, education, addressing health concerns, and even the ability to buy small personal items such as toiletries. Donna said the "financial" barriers are "definitely a big issue." She said, "I am a limited income. So only able to apply for public housing, subsidized housing." Liz talked about the cost of transportation to necessary appointments. "Sometimes the troubles I face are not having enough gas." She continued, "I could take the bus but when you don't have money for gas, how are you going to pay for the bus?" Matt said, "the biggest thing holding me back. . . [is] the cost of living. The cost of living is so high, I can't afford anything. I can't even afford a role of toilet paper sometimes." Matt continues, I don't have time to go to school and finish my schooling because I'm too busy working." Matt added, "If I could find a way where I could go to school and do something that I could get a discount on cost of living and a discount on the schooling . . . But that's not really an option very much." Food, though mentioned in chapter one as a main concern for homeless people, was not mentioned as a cost-related concern. Residents have dinners provided daily, and donations to the shelter result in shelves and freezers always stocked with food for morning and afternoon meals.

Personal Loss. Personal loss refers to, in this study, the loss of family members or significant others in a person's life. The loss of important people in the lives of some of the participants played a role in the decline of their well-being. The loss of a family member for some also meant that the participant became homeless, because they were living with that family member, and that family member owned or otherwise provided the home. Megan talked about the loss of her parents. "Both my parents died when I was little." She said, "My mom passing away didn't really faze me . . . but now that I'm unraveling things, a lot more stuff makes sense but my dad was always that person." Megan said when she went to college, "I was like, I'll be fine, I can go to college, I can do this, this is what he wanted me to do and I did very poor, very bad." Hal talked about losing many of his immediate family members. "My dad was 101. He just passed away . . . then my mom passed away, then my sister, then my little brother." Hal was living with his mother when she passed away. Denise was living with her grandmother when she passed away. "My grandmother had passed away and the house went into, back to the bank. Me and my daughter were living with her and so we had to find a place to live, scramble." Denise shared additional loss. "Four people have died in my life that were very close to me that I felt like committing suicide."

Hitting Bottom. Hitting bottom, or as some expressed it, hitting 'rock' bottom, is being at a lowest point, suicidal, or having a loss of hope. This theme overlaps with the theme personal loss. Sam describes "depression" and being at "rock bottom." He said, "you're looking up going through, asking yourself why you're here and what happened to your life." Megan said, "I feel like I've been at the bottom. I've been at a zero." Denise talked about being "down and out." She said, "I felt like committing suicide. That was

another point in my life that I was in another . . . shelter." Liz, who is recovering from a drug addiction, said, "I've got nothing now. No one wants to help."

Composite Description of the Meaning and Essences of Problem Solving While Living in a Rural Homelessness Shelter

Through the data analysis process, 10 themes were uncovered regarding problem solving while living as a rural homeless adult in a rural homeless shelter. The 10 themes ultimately reveal that rural homeless adults are trying to solve for two main themes: physically surviving, and pursuing wellness. In addition, three underlying themes are suggested: the ticking clock, the importance of personal information sources, and staying motivated. The importance of personal information sources may help to shed light on the complicated needs below the surface of the more obvious ones, such as housing.

Physically surviving. The concern for physical survival in many ways is relieved upon entering the shelter because immediately there is a roof, a bed, food, and staff to help. However, it is temporary, and some participants mentioned exactly how many days they had left. This time limit, the *ticking clock*, is an underlying theme, and is a stressor added to all of the problems discussed above. Employment, for those who can work and are not relying on another source of income, such as disability assistance, can be difficult to find, and the job may not pay enough to provide for housing and other needs or responsibilities. Likewise, those on disability also struggle with the affordability of housing. The cost of living, discussed directly or indirectly, is a broad, financial barrier to reaching up and out of extreme poverty and away from many of the problems that come with it. Moreover, physical health concerns can take up time needed for apartment and income searching.

Pursuing wellness. Pursing wellness is a second main theme that seemed to be reflected in many of the interviews. It can mean multiple things, including pursing help for specific issues, looking for a sense or a feeling of belongingness, or it can mean helping someone else, which can provide a sense of personal satisfaction. Many participants needed to coordinate multiple appointments, reach multiple destinations, maintain multiple relationships with those from the shelter, healthcare, or social services, balance time, and coordinate rides or find other transportation. Participants also needed to address their physical, mental and/or emotional well-being or ailments, including serious health issues that can interfere with daily living. In the context of this study, the participants have immediate assistance with some problems in their life because they are at a shelter; however, some soon find that their developed ability to problem solve for some immediate needs must be done within the rules of the shelter. Participants also found that, when reaching out for help, it was recommended that some assistance should come from technological sources that were sometimes unfamiliar or confusing to the person who needed the help. From the theme of access and support, it seems that personal information sharing through word of mouth sources seemed favored, provided information in a dialogue, and provided encouragement. This source for encouragement and a sense of belonging seemed to be meaningful to participants. It is discussed more in chapter five.

Sometimes problems were being faced while struggling with a very low emotional well-being, in some cases caused at least in part through personal loss. Emotional well-being, and working to stay motivated and to keep moving forward was mentioned specifically by several participants, and through the process of imaginative

variation, it could be considered a third underlying theme in this study, applying to nearly all participants. It may be related to the preference for personal information sources where encouragement may be found.

While participants described difficult, complex problems in a world that puts up barriers consisting of costs, rules, health challenges, technological advances, devastating losses, and limited opportunities, most also sounded as concerned for others as they were for themselves. An assertion from Denise, a women who described her difficult personal situation at the time of the interview, was telling. "What makes me happy is helping somebody else. That's what makes me happy. Even if it's down and out with me, if I put a smile on somebody else's face, it's better for me." As mentioned previously in this chapter, some literature on rural communities and on rural homeless people in shelters talk about care for one another (Patton, 1988; Hilton & DeJong, 2010). It might be said that participants in this study communicated a care for humanity. Matt, for instance, said, "You don't want to sweep the poor under the rug, because when you do that, all that does is bring down the property values." Hal said, "I love people and people love me. I don't care what they're about." Moreover, when participants had schedules to balance, work to go to, chores to do, and other responsibilities and tasks, and were working through difficult situations or struggling with motivation, and were doing all of these things under the pressure of a time limit, they took time to be interviewed, and to help me.

Rural homeless adults in rural homeless shelters are looking for information that will lead them to inexpensive, stable housing where there is not enough, and find employment they can physically do, or use other financial resources or aid in order to afford and maintain that housing. They are, at the same time, addressing a variety of

health-related issues, and are looking for emotional support and encouragement. While working towards trying to find housing, adequate income, good health, and genuine caring, they are also working at staying motivated. Moreover, they are pursuing these endeavors under a time limit. Rural homeless adults are trying to accomplish nothing short of a miracle, and they must believe that they can.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusions

In this study I used a holistic design and approach that allowed me to explore how rural homeless adults use information to solve problems in-context. Specifically, I explored the phenomenon of problem solving in the context of living as a rural homeless adult in a 24-hour rural homeless shelter in the northern Midwest, and I investigated how information was used to solve problems that the study's participants faced. My study shines a bright light on an environment occupied by rural homeless people with access to little information or skills to overcome or improve their own situations. It reveals that without personal, customized information, people living in rural homelessness remain invisible and disadvantaged in solving their own problems.

A qualitative approach was appropriate for pointing out the experience of rural homelessness, identifying what could not be easily measured, and, as Creswell (2013) said, to "hear silent voices" (p. 48). Specifically, descriptive phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994) guided the data collection and analysis. Taylor's (1991) Information Use Environment (IUE) model provided the theoretical framework that binds this study together and allowed for an in-context approach to examine everyday life information seeking and use, particularly the daily information world of rural homeless adults.

A widespread problem of significant proportion, addressed by this study, is the invisibility that homeless people experience in today's society. My interviews with participants revealed that each individual is aware that homeless people are disrespected and she/he exists beneath a life of basic human comfort and respect. Without services to meet basic human needs including permanent shelter, income, and a means for problem-solving, the individuals in my study experienced personal hardships setting them apart

from most people in their community. The interviews revealed economic, political, technological, and sociocultural factors that contributed to personnel hardships including health ailments, unemployment and underemployment, and struggles to access assistance. Interviews did not reveal issues of hunger, likely because of the 24-hour shelter environment that offered food, or denial of homelessness, as mentioned in chapter one. This study, designed to reveal new understandings of everyday life of rural homeless people, can be used to help meet the obvious and urgent necessity to improve information for and about the needs of the rural homeless population. Without this kind of in-depth inquiry, policy-makers and service providers may be missing key details necessary to create more effective information delivery systems and services uniquely planned for rural areas, and the poorest of the poor who live in rural areas.

The findings in this study that are outlined in chapter four contribute to answering the central question as presented in chapters one and three: ***How do rural homeless adults use information to solve problems in their everyday information world while they are residents at a rural homeless shelter?*** To answer this question it is necessary to describe concepts and terms taken directly from the question, first by briefly discussing how each was understood before this study, then how this study's findings may expand our understanding of each.

Rural Homeless Adults

In chapter one, I use Title I of the McKinney-Vento Act (2009) and Vissing's (1996) work in order to define rural homelessness. The Act defines someone who is homeless as "an individual or family who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence" (The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, 2009, para. 2), including

those who inhabit a park bench, a car, an abandoned building, a shelter, a campground or any place not meant for human beings to live. Vissing (1996) said that a lack of housing, or "housing distress" (Vissing, 1996, p. 8) is only one part of the problem. The other part is the emotional cost of the state of homelessness. She suggests that the psychological and social dimensions must not be overlooked when defining rural homelessness, and she defines rural homelessness not only as a lack of shelter, but "the lack of a consistent, safe, physical structure and the emotional deprivation that occurs as a result" (p. 8).

Taking Vissing's additions further, based on what was learned in this study in the context of living in a rural homeless shelter, the concept of *pursuing wellness* should also be included in the definition of rural homelessness, reflecting the actions taken in response to multiple challenges faced by individuals at the shelter in this study. Participants expressed a number of physical, emotional and/or psychological well-being issues and described how they worked to address these issues. Some participants in this study strived to keep multiple appointments, reach multiple destinations, maintain multiple relationships related to health and other issues, balance time, coordinate transportation, and look for employment and housing. Directly related to these tasks, participants worked at staying motivated and moving forward. They positively talked about the encouragement and support from others, primarily at the shelter from staff and resident, and also from other social services providers, or other sources. These endeavors were a regular part of life while living at the shelter, and were in addition to the physical loss of a home, and the emotional strain that comes with the loss of a home. Therefore, I submit that a definition for a rural homeless adult should state: An individual who lacks a safe, consistent, adequate residence, who endures physical and emotional hardships that

result from the lack of a residence, and who endeavors to persevere in order to try to improve and overcome their situation.

Information

The term 'information' was treated in this study using Bateson's broad definition of "differences that make a difference" (Bateson, 1979, p. 99) to a person's mind. Information is also considered information if, according to Taylor (1991), "it responds, and is perceived as— and is intended to be— relevant to a particular problem" (p. 220). Most studies on information use, according to Taylor (1991), show a dependence on personal sources for information, and these sources, which include friends, family, peers, or one's own memory, are considered more accessible than other, more official sources. Taylor states, "it seems to have something to do with the perceived validity and utility of information and, perhaps above all, with a sense that personal dialogue will help to clarify both need and response, and hence provide more useful information" (p. 228).

The participants in this study seemed to prefer personal information sources, often talking positively about their interactions with shelter personnel, other shelter residents, or other social services providers. Information use for its intended purpose, however, was not altogether evident, or use did not appear to be possible. Some participants expressed satisfaction with the information they were receiving, but whether or not it was going to result in alleviating their homeless state was uncertain. This could be for at least two possible reasons. One, some participants did not seem ready, based on their interview, to use information that would lead to taking on the full responsibility of a residence, employment, and other responsibilities that are a part of independent living. Sam, in his interview, for example, focused on staying motivated and moving forward.

Sam shared that the staff "help keep you motivated and help keep your feet moving forward. Because if it wasn't for the staff over there I don't think I would have got as far as I got." He continued, saying "I probably would have just sat there and been a bump on a log and feeling sorry for myself." When asked what additional information would help him, he didn't know how to answer the question. Hal, too, may not have been prepared to move forward with independent living. He noted that this was his second time in the shelter. When asked what more information he needed, he said that he was always looking for more information. "Give me all the information you can so I can pass it on and tell somebody else." Hal's journals, which he talked about and had on the table during the interview, made sense to him and kept him "on track." I noted in Hal's structural description that while Hal always wants more information, how he finds and uses information is unclear.

Another reason information that participants received may not have served to alleviate their homeless state is because the information received, such as information about housing, did not lead to what was needed. Donna, for instance, talked about the shelter staff being very helpful. She said "they're so helpful here with the resources available. They have every program out there that we're able to tap into to try to get what we need to do." However, Donna also said that her biggest problem to overcome is housing, and that because of her age (less than 62), she does not qualify for senior housing which, apparently, is the only thing available and/or affordable. Donna said, "I am a limited income. So only able to apply for public housing, subsidized housing." During the data analysis, I noted how confident and capable Donna was in responding to me. It is highly likely that lack of available housing for her income level is a barrier,

rather than Donna being homeless due to inability to effectively find and use information for housing. Denise is a second example of how information in the hands of a seemingly capable person may not be useful to solve a problem. In Denise's situation, she has "bad credit," due to an eviction that stemmed from a family member's death, and her inability to find employment to pay rent. Denise expressed concern that she does not know all of her options. She believes there are more "programs" to learn about. "There's Section 8. There's this. There's that . . . I don't know what much about that stuff and neither does a lot of other people." It is unknown based on the interview whether, in Denise's situation, more information would make a difference.

Having information on housing when you are homeless and living in a shelter, which cannot be put to use to solve your homeless situation, is like being given a great recipe that you need to cook immediately, but the main ingredient is too expensive, and what you can afford is in very low supply, or you might not be allowed to purchase at all. So what good is the recipe? This unfair dilemma for homeless people is also created according to Hilton & DeJong (2010) when social services workers encourage homeless people to "keep their work skills sharp" (p. 27) when there are no jobs, or recommend to homeless people to meet with housing representatives when there is no available housing.

Problems

Problems that rural homeless adults face were first detailed in chapters one and two, and included housing, health ailments, hunger, lack of employment, the struggle to find aid, denial of homelessness, and safety concerns. Not all of these problems emerged in the interviews in this study such as the topic of hunger. However, in the interviews, participants described myriad problems, reflected and described in detail in nine of the 10

identified themes. They reflect the devastating hardships that rural homeless people endure, and they describe economic, political, technological, and sociocultural problems. They are economic and political because of the lack of affordable housing, the costs associated with basic necessary goods, and because of the 'red tape' described in accessing help and support. They are technological because of a lack of technological resources, or the ability to make use of these resources, and they are sociocultural because of the often inaccurate social stigmas that comes with homelessness.

To solve problems, information is needed that can be used to solve for the problem (Wersig, 1971; Wilson, 1981). Taylor (1991) said problems cannot always be clearly identified, but "may be more easily examined in the kinds of information sought and in the uses made of that information, than in the statement of the problem itself" (p. 225). In my study, participants' information seeking was limited and vague making problems sometimes difficult to explain.

Some urgent problems were made clear by participants as they stated what problems they were working on. For example, participants noted that housing, health, and employment are areas they were occupied with solving, with housing being the primary problem. Other problems were made known through the kind of information they were seeking, or through expressing what information sources they spoke of highly valuing. Taylor (1991) suggests eight classes of information use, influenced by the work of Dervin (1983), and Dervin and Nilan (1986). Perhaps especially relevant to this study is the category "motivational" (p. 230), referring to information use for the purpose of moving forward or onward. Participants very favorably discussed positive relationships and personal information sources, the encouraging support that they receive, and the

value of offering support to others. Many participants noted the kindness of others from shelter personnel, other residents at the shelter, social service counselors, or others who help to encourage, support, and provide a sense of belonging. To this point, I have stated in this study that a widespread problem of significant proportion is the way that homeless people are regarded in today's society. This poor regard, or lack of regard, is described by Liz when she said, "I've learned that people really just don't care. They'll ask you are you ok? Are you having a good day? But really deep down they don't want to know." Matt identifies himself as part of "the poor" who some people are liable to "sweep under the rug." Hal said about the state of homelessness, "it's lonely." For the participants in this study, the problem of being disregarded is mitigated through information behavior that seeks personal information sources that may provide positive support. This kind of support, expressed as valuable by the participants, is identified by Jackson and Shannon (2014) who assert that social support, while it will not end homelessness, "may be one way of supplying homeless individuals with the motivation and resources needed to secure housing" (p. 66). Genuine concern, and making oneself available to talk and listen, is highly beneficial to individuals who are homeless because it informs them that they do not have to suffer social disdain alone. In this way, the homeless shelter served as a social mechanism to enable them to possibility secure housing, a source of income, or other necessities which otherwise might be impossible.

Everyday Information World

Savolainen's (1995) theory of Everyday Life Information Seeking (ELIS) helps inform the concept of an everyday information world. ELIS focuses on non-work information seeking, and is made up of two main concepts, "way of life" (p. 262) and

"mastery of life" (p. 262), where way of life is based on choices made throughout the day, creating a natural order, and mastery of life is a broader view of life itself and the act of taking care of it as a whole. A person's model for his mastery of life, according to Savolainen, is first developed in the culture and the social class in which he is born and influences information seeking. "Active Mastery of Life" (p. 264) refers to problem solving in cases where ordinary life has been disrupted. Sources of information, according to Savolainen, often direct ELIS.

Using Savolainen's view, participants in this study have an "active mastery of life" (p. 264) model that they have perhaps unconsciously come to know as a natural order for their lives. The mastery of life model of many of the participants seems to reflect their rural environment, and their preference for relying on the community around them, and self-help strategies, two assets noted by Burt (1996). Where information for problem solving is needed such as housing, employment, health concerns, technology, emotional support, or a specific immediate need, participants favorably talk about sources of information that are from people such as shelter staff, or social services counselors. When barriers prevent self-help problem solving from happening, frustration is communicated. For instance, Kyle learned that at least one woman at the shelter had a car and could provide him transportation, but expressed frustration that the rules at the shelter prohibited him from using this resource to help solve a problem. Also, Denise mentioned that since shelter residents' problems are "out in the open" it should not make a difference if they are talked about with a female or a male. Though there is a rule about co-mingling at the shelter, conversations between women and men might be seen as opportunities to share information, and contribute to social support. For the participants

in this study, everyday life information seeking was disrupted in their way of life as daily active mastery of life. Participants described disruptions that came from rules at the shelter, and also from other sources such as social services' rules, and technological barriers. These disruptions to participants' learned information behavior suggest the need for the proposed concept of *everyday life information sharing.* Within the context of sharing, participants' can take part in personal interactions that will lead to genuine information use that can be immediately applied to urgent basic human problems. Moreover, participants' daily active mastery of life as way of life can continue through community and self-help sources.

Chapter Summary

Rural homeless adults suffer due to a lack of basic human needs, including a secure, consistent place to call home. The severe emotional toll that this lack of a home places on a person is documented in the literature. Based on participant interviews in this study an expanded definition, closely reflecting the existence of people who experience rural homelessness, should include the concept of *pursuing wellness*, reflecting the actions taken in response to multiple challenges including physical, emotional and/or psychological well-being issues and how participants worked to address these issues.

It is evident that information in its limited scope and form for the most commonly cited problem, finding housing, was not always used, or was not always useful for its intended purpose. Some participants did not appear ready for independent living, or for using information for this purpose. Others had information they could not use to better their circumstances because it was simply not usable, evidenced in Donna's interview where the housing available was for seniors, and she did not qualify. Other barriers also

disturbed information utility, such as a poor rental record. Personal information sources were communicated as the preferred source for information, which Taylor (1991) also notes generally. In this study, benefits of personal information sources seemed to help participants navigate a range of problems, including the widespread problem of the way homeless people are regarded in society. Personal information sources aided in encouraging or motivating participants, fitting with Taylor's "motivational" (p. 230) class of information use. The value of personal social support is also noted by Jackson and Shannon (2014). Savolainen's (1995) ELIS, and particularly the concepts of way of life and active mastery of life, are useful in explaining how participants prefer to solve problems and the frustration that is communicated if a barrier prevents or limits their self-help strategies. *Everyday life information sharing* is suggested as a way to describe how participants' daily active mastery of life relies on sharing and personal interaction that will lead to genuine information use that can be immediately applied to urgent basic human problems.

In summary, while some participants living in rural homelessness are not able, or ready, to use information to solve their homelessness, most are. The utility of available information, however, depends on its usability relevant to the needs and circumstances of the individual living in rural homelessness. For housing problems, and for problems other than housing, participant information behavior indicates a preference, perhaps a necessity, for personal information sources. While personal information sources are a generally noted preference among people (Taylor, 1991), a usefulness for personal information sources among people who experience rural homelessness is likely to mitigate the devastating problem of extreme social disdain and isolation.

Limitations

There are limitations in this study that affect generalizability of the results of this study. Participants, though homeless, were not living in conditions unsuitable for human habitation such as a car or in the woods at the time of the study. This study was conducted in a 24 hour transitional rural homeless shelter, and the results may be impacted by the continuousness of the shelter. Participants did not have to leave and come back at a certain time; their beds, meals, and other essential resources were theirs for as long as they were residents. In addition, the study took place in a northern Midwest area of the United States, using a small sample size. If this study were conducted in another part of the country, or in a different country, the results could be different. Factors not directly considered in this study include age (other than being at least 18 years old), gender, ethnicity or heritage, or other demographic variables, or participants' children. Other variables not directly considered include how long participants have been homeless, or how long they had been residents at the shelter at the time of the interview.

Nevertheless, this study provides necessary information on the realities of rural homelessness, the phenomenon of problem solving, the nature of the problems themselves, and how information is used, or is unable to be used, to solve for problems.

Recommendations

In chapter two I talk about how the problems rural homeless adults face converge together at the same time, each often worsening the other, and a juggling act of mounting crises ensues. To illustrate, I describe a tightrope walker without a net, balancing the heavy weight of multiple unfortunate circumstances on his shoulders while trying to

maintain dignity and solve problems in his environment. The findings in this study seem to reflect this illustration. To this end, it is imperative that improvements are continually made to services for rural homeless adults. The recommendations that follow (Table 4) are based on what was revealed in this study, and address economic, political, technological, and sociocultural problems that I have identified most specifically as cost of living, access to help and support, technological barriers, and social disdain.

Increase opportunities to afford housing. The cost of living is described, based on this study, as financial costs that can act as a barrier to obtaining resources such as basic items, support, housing, and education. The problem of affordable housing, the most noted problem by participants, is well-documented in the literature (Fitchen, 1992; Vissing, 1996; Cohen, 2005) and reflected in this study. Participants talk specifically about high costs. For example, Matt said "the biggest thing holding me back. . . [is] the cost of living. The cost of living is so high, I can't afford anything. I can't even afford a role of toilet paper sometimes." One way to address the costs of living for rural homeless adults in a rural 24-hour shelter is to explore additional education and/or skills opportunities, incentives for achievement (also addressing motivation), additional partnerships with area businesses and industry for employment opportunities, additional opportunities for landlords to advertise available housing units or rooms for rent, and finally, asking, "is every stone being unturned?"

Revise rules and increase training to improve information sharing. Political problems discussed in this study involve access to help and support, the frustrations that participants expressed when talking about shelter rules, and their experiences at local government offices. Rules at the shelter, which could act as potential stressors and create

obstacles to problem-solving and managing responsibilities, may have been viewed as an information or self-help barrier for some participants. Liz, for instance, described having to miss resource meetings because of the laundry schedule at the shelter, and Kyle expressed frustration over not being able to find a ride from a female shelter resident. While shelter rules are put in place for well-intentioned reasons, shelters should consider routinely assessing the necessity and impact of set rules for residents. Experiences at local government offices can also affect access to help and support. For example, Kyle, who was in pursuit of a new I.D., said "it's been a nightmare." He also said "it was just a maze of frustration and several attempts, a whole bunch of phone calls to government centers." He also said about applying for Section 8 housing, "it is unclear as to what you gotta answer and how to answer these questions." While Post (2002) draws attention to barriers to healthcare that can come from a lack of cultural competence, a similar lack of cultural competence might help explain the reason for the miscommunications between Kyle and government employees. Cultural or sensitivity training for government personnel who work with rural low income or homeless individuals may help communication, lessen confusion, and increase the success of some problem solving by rural poor and homeless people.

Improve computer technology access and the digital divide. Technology is described based on this study as potential sources for information that may work for some people, and seem inadequate, out of reach, or difficult to make work to improve a situation for others. Technological problems include access to online resources, and also knowledge on how to find and make use of the information available through these resources. Karen, for instance, said she would like "some guidance in how to do basic

research in places to look." She also expressed concern over connectivity. "Because of the lack of internet, the lack of cell phone coverage, you can be really disconnected." Jackson and Shannon (2014) recommend economic development policies that focus on needed rural services including "improving technology" (p. 66). An increase in internet carriers in rural service areas could help. Providing additional public spaces for technology access and for personal assistance with technology, including workforce centers and public library branches, could also significantly lessen technological problems.

Use research-based evidence to reduce social stigma. Sociocultural factors, including the social stigma that comes with homelessness, are issues that rural homeless people must endure on top of multiple other problems. Additional research and attention on the issues surrounding the hardships and realities of rural homelessness is needed in order to educate communities on who rural homeless people are, and how help can be extended, including temporary funding to enable people to have housing and work opportunities. Vissing (1996) said that "the term *homeless* has no positive attributes. Yet the rural displaced have integrity. They are generally not lazy, substance-abusing, mentally-ill misfits. The rural homeless are folks who, largely, have fallen upon hard times that got the better of them" (p. 8). The participants in this study describe themselves as kind, helpful, and friendly. Donna said "I'm a good person. I worked hard all my life." Megan said, "I'm very kind." Liz said, "I have too big a heart for my own good." The theme Care for Others, described based on this study as a genuine concern for others' safety and overall well-being, and a source of pride and purpose when help is extended to others, was one of the most common themes in this study. It is imperative

that social science researchers, including those from the field of information science, continue to bring attention to rural homeless people.

Final Thoughts

Many talk about goals of eradicating homelessness, but I do not believe that this should be our immediate goal. Not because homelessness is acceptable in any way; it is truly a terrible crime of humanity that it can occur at all. I believe that approaching the problem of homelessness must be done with the goal of understanding, holistically, what is needed to mitigate problems that lead to a homeless existence. This is an enormous feat, because, as evidenced in the literature and in this study, the problems are numerous and complex, and addressing them, particularly in rural areas, is challenging with distances, and a lack of affordable housing and other needed resources. The recommendations discussed above are suggested in order to help tackle the deviating problem of rural homelessness.

Lastly, there is an unintended finding that needs recognition. Some residents of the shelter knew that I was a librarian, and others did not. I do not know which participants were aware of my profession, but it was not something that was discussed as a part of the research. Unprompted comments about libraries were recorded in the interviews, mostly (but not always) about the library not far from the shelter. Three participants talked about the public library or the helpfulness of librarians, and one more participant stayed at the library after the interview. It is encouraging to hear these comments. Rural public libraries, partnered with other social service providers, are positioned and equipped to provide personal assistance and other services that can help address some of the problems described in this study.

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Appendix A

Interview Questions

1. Tell me about yourself. If I were going to draw a picture of you based on your words, what would it look like? A picture of who _____ is? What makes you tick?
2. Tell me about the place where you live now. How do you see it?
3. What are you working on? What barriers are you facing that are preventing you from being successful?
4. What information would help you change your circumstances? Where, or how, do you feel like you can get that information?

Appendix B

Informed Consent Document

The School of Library and Information Management at Emporia State University supports the practice of protection for human subjects participating in research and related activities. The following information in provided so that you can decide whether you wish to participate in the present study. There is no penalty of any kind if you choose not to participate. You should be aware that if you agree to participate, you are free to stop participating at any time. If you stop participating in the study, there will be no penalty of any kind.

The purpose of this research is to help better understand rural homelessness, and specifically how those who are experiencing homelessness in rural areas solve problems or issues they are facing while living in a transitional shelter. The information shared by participants may help to improve, or create better services uniquely planned for those who are homeless in rural areas.

This study involves conducting interviews with adults who are residents at [shelter name]. Interviews may take approximately 1 hour or longer to complete, depending on how much information the participant chooses to share.

Participant confidentiality is important, and the identity of the participants will not be revealed. Participants can choose their own aliases for the study.

No injury is expected to occur as a result of taking part in this study. Participants will be compensated $20 in the form of a grocery gift card that can be used locally.

Any questions about this research can be directed to the researcher, Tracie Kreighbaum, at tkreighb@g.emporia.edu. If there are any questions presently, they can be addressed now.

"I have read the above statement and have been full advised of the procedures to be used in this project. I have been given enough opportunity to ask any questions I had concerning the procedures and any possible risks involved. I understand the potential risks involved and I assume them voluntarily. I likewise understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time without penalty."

_____ _____

Name Date

Table 1.

Textural-structural Descriptions from Study Participants by Name

Name	Access to Info. and Support	Employment	Health	Housing	Care for Others	Rules at the Shelter	Tech.	Cost of Living	Personal Loss	Hitting Bottom
Sam	x	x	x	x						x
Donna	x		x	x	x			x		
Hal	x		x	x	x		x		x	
Denise	x	x		x	x	x			x	x
Kyle	x		x	x	x	x	x			
Megan	x			x	x				x	x
Matt	x	x	x	x	x	x		x		
Karen	x		x	x	x		x			
Liz	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x

Table 2.

Textual-structural Description Themes

Themes	Brief Description
Access to Info. and Support	The ability to obtain information and assistance that makes sense, is accessible without causing additional hardships, and can be used to address immediate need or to stay on an upward path.
Employment	A place to go, and a way to physically and/or skillfully be able to earn enough income to provide for basic needs.
Health	Physical, mental, and/or emotional issues that create barriers to improving circumstance and can demand time, attention, assistance, and resources to resolve or manage.
Housing	An affordable place to live in, return to, and count on, preferably in a location where access to support, employment and/or assistance is possible.
Care for Others	A genuine concern for others' safety and overall well-being, and a source of pride and purpose when help is extended to others.
Rules at the Shelter	Potential stressors that can create obstacles to problem-solving and managing responsibilities, or a provided structure that offers stability and encourages responsibility.
Technology	Potential sources for information that may work for some people, and seem inadequate, out of reach, or difficult to make work to improve a situation for others.
Cost of Living	Financial costs that can act as a barrier to obtaining resources such as basic items, support, housing, and education.
Personal Loss	The loss of a family member or other important person or people who provided or helped to provide a home and/or helped to provide a stable existence
Hitting Bottom	A feeling of hopelessness and an inability to move forward without help.

Table 3.

Illustrative Quotes for Textural-structural Description Themes

Themes	Illustrative Quotes	
Access to Info. and Support	Matt	"You just find out by word of mouth."
	Megan	"So I have the day program, therapist is in . . . my doctor's in . . . my chemical dependency is here and it's just all over the board."
Employment	Donna	"I worked hard all my life . . . Physically I'm unable to do any of those tasks anymore."
	Matt	" So what I'm trying to do is find something that I can do that doesn't require much education or doesn't require much training."
Health	Sam	"Stay sober and not fall of the path I'm on and go back to drinking. That was a big problem I had, a problem with drinking."
	Donna	" I have severe bilateral arthritis."
Housing	Karen	"Finding affordable housing is huge . . . But again, many of them are fairly remote, which would make doing anything else difficult."
	Denise	"There's just not enough places out there that is for low-income. It's going up and up."
Concern for Others	Denise	"What makes me happy is helping somebody else. That's what makes me happy."
	Liz	"I would let anyone sleep on my couch with no questions asked if it meant that they weren't on the street.
Rules at the Shelter	Denise	"There's a lot of stressors already in my life and everybody else's life that's in here that we don't need add that sort of things on top of it."
	Liz	"I have a routine. I know there are things I've got to do. I like that there are chores. It makes me responsible."
Technology	Karen	"Problems like phone and internet you know, connections and that sort of thing, sometimes in our rural areas, because of the lack of internet, and lack of cell phone coverage, you can be really disconnected."
	Kyle	"I'm pretty computer illiterate. I can't navigate and I've become easily frustrated on those things."
Cost of Living	Liz	"Sometimes the troubles I face are not having enough gas to make it to my therapy appointment or my treatment."
	Matt	"The cost of living is so high, I can't afford anything. It's hard to even afford a role of toilet paper sometimes."
Personal Loss	Denise	"Four people have died in my life that were very close to me that I felt like committing suicide."
	Hal	"So my mom passed away and when my mom passed away, I was living with her."
Hitting Bottom	Megan	"I feel like I've just been at the bottom, I've been at zero."
	Sam	"You're at rock bottom . . . and you're looking up . . . asking yourself why you're here and what happened in your life."

Table 4.

Participant Factors Contributing to Hardship, Textural-structural Description Themes, and Recommendations

Factors that Contribute to Hardships	Textural-Structural Description Themes	Recommendations
Economic (Cost of Living)	Housing; Employment; Cost of Living	Provide additional education and/or skills opportunities. Provide incentives for achievement. Increase partnerships with area businesses and industry for employment opportunities. Support additional opportunities for landlords to advertise available housing and rooms for rent. Provide funding and information about temporary funding for housing costs and utilities.
Political (Access to Help/ Support)	Access to Help and Support; Health; Rules at the Shelter	Routinely assess the necessity and impact of set rules for residents at shelters. Increase cultural and/or sensitivity training for government personnel who work with low income or homeless people.
Technological (Tech. Barriers)	Technology	Increase internet carriers in rural service areas. Provide additional public spaces for technology access and for personal assistance with technology (workforce centers, public libraries, etc.).
Sociocultural (Social Disdain)	Personal Loss; Hitting Bottom	Increase research and attention on the issues surrounding the hardships and realities of rural homelessness and rural homeless people.

Note: Caring for Others is also a textural-structural description theme in this study. It is not listed here because Caring for Others is a theme that the respondents do not describe as a hardship.

I, Tracie M. Kreighbaum, hereby submit this dissertation to Emporia State University as partial fulfillment for the requirements for a doctoral degree. I agree that the Library of the University may make it available for use in accordance with its regulations governing materials of this type. I further agree that quoting, photocopying, or other reproduction of this document is allowed for private study, scholarship (including teaching) and research purposes of a nonprofit nature. No copying which involves potential financial gain will be allowed without written permission of the author. I also agree to permit the Graduate School at Emporia State University to digitize and place this dissertation in the ESU institutional repository.

Tracie M. Kreighbaum

Signature of Author

November 18, 2016

Date

Walking a Tightrope Without a Net: Exploring How Rural Homeless Adults Use Information to Solve Problems While Residents at a Northern Midwest Rural

Title of Dissertation

Signature of Graduate School Staff

Date Received