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How Mentors at Starting Right Now Build Relationships with Homeless Youth: A Qualitative Analysis

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How Mentors at Starting Right Now Build Relationships with Homeless Youth: A Qualitative Analysis

by

Sheena Hera

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Education Specialist
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ABSTRACT

Although research has described mentoring programs to have positive effects with youth, there are few studies that describe how mentors build relationships with homeless youth. In this study, I sought to explore how mentors of a community-based organization, Starting Right Now, built relationships with homeless youth. Starting Right Now is a community-based intervention located in Tampa, Florida that was developed in 2009. This intervention provides services to homeless youth who are no longer living with a parent or guardian. The program provides many services which include residential, educational, and professional development services. It also provides mental and physical health care. Additionally each youth in the program receives a trained mentor. A qualitative approach allowed mentors to share what strategies they used to connect with their mentee and overcome challenges within the relationship. Five female adults were recruited from Starting Right Now to participate in individual semi-structured interviews. Results showed that for some mentor-mentee pairs, the relationship developed easily if they found similar commonalities (e.g. outgoing personalities). Further, mentors discussed the strategies and activities that created a closer relationship and how they overcame challenges with the relationship. Finally mentors discussed the advice they would give to someone else looking to mentor a homeless youth. Overall mentors in this study reported that commitment and patience are major components to being a successful mentor to a homeless youth.
CHAPTER ONE:
INTRODUCTION

There were approximately 1.3 million youth in the U.S. identified as homeless during the 2013-2014 academic year (National Center for Homeless Education, 2015). These youth make up about one third of the homeless population in this country (U.S Department of Housing and Development, 2015). A report from the National Center for Homeless Education (2015) stated that the number of homeless youth (aged 0-18) has increased in the past three years.

Individuals who are lacking a fixed or regular nighttime residence are considered to be homeless (McKinney Vento Homeless Assistance Act, 2002). Children and youth who live in hotels, motels, recreational parks, campgrounds, transitional housing, and those who are awaiting foster care placement are also included in the definition. Similarly, children and youth who live in public spaces, cars, abandoned houses, buses, or similar settings qualify as homeless based on the definition provided by the McKinney Vento Homeless Assistance Act (2002). These youth also are not in the physical care of a guardian and may move to different locations (Sec. 725, McKinney Vento Homelessness Assistance Act, 2002). The Department of Housing and Urban Development (2012) states that homeless individuals are those who are living in a place not meant for human habitation. Examples include locations such as parks, cars, abandoned buildings, bus stations, and camping grounds, public or private shelters and transitional housing. It also includes individuals who are losing their primary nighttime residence, or living in unstable housing.
With no stable residence, homeless youth have a higher risk of being exposed to a variety of negative factors such as mental illness (Folsom, Hawthorne, Lindamer, Gilmer, Bailey, Golshan, & Jeste, 2005), substance abuse (McNiel, Binder, & Robinson, 2005), criminalization (Fichter & Quadflieg, 1999), academic failure (Toro & Goldstein, 2000), and victimization (Edidin, Ganim, Hunter, & Karnik, 2012). Homeless youth must cope with a higher level of stress that takes a toll on their mental and physical well-being.

One coping mechanism to manage stress and hardship in life is by having supportive social relationships (Johnson, Whitbeck, & Hoyt, 2005). Previous research has demonstrated that individuals can be protected against stress when they have social networks and healthy relationships (Steinberg & Morris, 2001; Lee & Goldstein, 2016). Furthermore, when adolescents hail from caring families, they are able to develop healthy relationships with others (Steinberg & Morris, 2001). In contrast, homeless youth with poor social networks are associated with a higher risk for participating in destructive behaviors which includes substance use and unsafe sexual behaviors (Wenzel, Holloway, Golinelli, Ewing, Bowman, & Tucker, 2012). Homeless youth with no social support networks are more likely to engage in adverse behaviors such as using drugs and unsafe sex (Ennet, Bailey, & Federman, 1999). However, these negative have been found to decrease when homeless youth have other individuals for guidance and social support (Unger, Kipke, Simon, Johnson, Montgomery, & Iverson, 1998; Bao, Whitbeck, & Hoyt, 2000).

Starting Right Now (SRN)

Starting Right Now is a community-based, non-profit organization providing wraparound services for unaccompanied homeless adolescents in Hillsborough and Pinellas counties in the Tampa Bay region of Florida. SRN, created in 2009 by Vicki Sokolik, a local resident in Tampa,
has served approximately 220 students since its beginning. If students are accepted into the SRN program, they are paired with a mentor with whom they build a close relationship. They also receive communal housing with a computer, access to physical and mental healthcare, and opportunities to participate in extracurricular activities and social groups. At any given time there are about 40 to 50 homeless students in the program. Girls and boys stay in separate housing.

My goal is to explore mentorship in relation to how adult mentors at Starting Right Now (SRN) build supportive relationships with homeless students. In the current literature, mentorship has many definitions. Broadly, mentorship is defined as a long-term relationship between a more experienced adult and a less experienced adult or youth (Eby & Allen, 2002). Another definition states that mentors support the development of another person through protecting, advising, providing psychological support, teaching, and at times promoting (Zey, 1984). The goal of mentorship in general is to provide guidance and encouragement in developing competence and character (Rhodes, 1994).

In previous research, mentoring relationships have been found to foster positive development and social support outcomes for adolescents (Rhodes, 1994). For example, DuBois and Silverthorn (2005) found that high school students who reported having a natural mentor (extended family members, neighbors, teachers, and coaches) were more likely to display favorable outcomes such as increased attendance in school and graduating high school. Additionally, Dubois and Silverthorn (2005) found a reduction in problematic behavior (e.g., gang membership, violence), improved psychological well-being (e.g., self-confidence) and improved health (e.g., use of contraceptives). Although these findings demonstrate the potential positive impact of mentoring relationships this study examined natural mentor relationships rather than mentors in a formal mentoring program.
Life Circumstances and Resiliency

To understand the life circumstances of homeless youth, Mendez, Dickinson, Esposito, Connolly, and Bonilla (2017) explored the life experiences of homeless youth who continued to attend high school despite not living with a parent or guardian. The authors were in search of the answer to two questions: (1) what themes related to risk and resilience emerge within the experiences of homeless youth in high school and (2) what do the commonalities in their experiences suggest about how to assist homeless youth in an academic setting. Participants included nine students (aged 17 to 20) who were recruited from a community-based organization. Their reasons for homelessness extended from escaping abuse, abandonment, family homelessness, family discord, parent incarceration and inability to pay rent.

The authors found nine themes from the interviews. The risk-related themes shuffled, abused, what is normal, not the priority, and unmet needs were described by the majority of participants. Shuffled was defined as moving frequently, often because a parent was unable to meet basic family needs. These moves created instability in schooling, parenting and friendships. Abused referred to the participants experience of abuse by guardians that was physical, sexual, and/or emotional. This abuse sometimes lead to maladaptive coping strategies. The theme, what is normal described the idea that normal family life involves chaos and abuse. Not the priority described their guardians putting another person’s needs before the youth’s basic needs. Finally, the at-risk theme that was discussed by most participants was named unmet basic needs which described living conditions where basic needs were unmet (e.g., insufficient food, overcrowding in one home).

Researchers used these themes to provide a general idea of the types of relationships and supports homeless youth have in their lives. However, despite their lack of care, these individuals
displayed remarkable levels of resilience. The three themes that emerged were named *shouldering responsibility, saving graces,* and *unexpected wisdom.* Despite the challenges they were up against, participants cared for siblings, earned money, or took on adult-like responsibilities as youth. *Saving graces* referred to the people or activities that allowed the participants to experience relief from the consistent stress they felt in their lives. Often these people were teachers, administrators or coaches. Finally, *unexpected wisdom* came through the interviews of all participants which demonstrated the remarkable ways they responded to their childhood circumstances and/or saw the possibility that they could overcome their challenges and create better opportunities for themselves.

In regard to their second research question, Mendez and colleagues (2017) discovered through participant interviews that it is important for school staff and administration to understand that homeless youth do not often have people in their lives they can depend on for support. The authors recommended that schools should be proactive in providing mental health supports and mentoring programs in schools for this population.

Another study by Randle (2016) examined the stories of nine student participants who were in SRN for at least one year. The goal was to explore how the youth perceived their lives had been impacted by the program in terms of their physical, mental, social, and educational outcomes. Participants’ ages ranged from 17 to 20 years old. There were four female and five male participants. Randle (2016) discovered eight themes as well as an essence of the overall study from the interviews. All participants expressed the following four themes. *Always there on my side* was described the importance of their mentor and SRN staff providing emotional support, advice, and guidance in their lives. The theme *Now my goals seem a lot more achievable* was described as having hope and direction in accomplishing their goals. Participants
described valuing their educations and/or were academically successful prior to joining SRN. The theme didn’t have to worry as much expressed that with the resources provided by SRN, they didn’t worry as much about meeting basic needs (e.g. housing, food, healthcare), which gave them more time to focus on things like college readiness. Participants also described being able to engage in experiences they may have never had without the help of the SRN program. Finally, all participants expressed the theme Better ways to deal which was described as being able to identify poor coping patterns and learning more adaptive coping strategies. Interestingly there was one theme that was described by the male participants only and that was the theme what now? This theme was described the gender differences in relationships with mentors and the type of support participants needed. Males described difficulty bonding with mentors at the beginning of the relationship.

Finally, the majority of participants expressed the following themes. The themes were you learn to trust, the point is getting back up, better friends, and pay it forward. Participants described you learn to trust as initially questioning the intentions of SRN staff and mentors, but over time learning that they could trust the staff and ask for assistance when needed. The point is getting back up described the setbacks they have had since entering SRN and how the support of SRN staff and mentors helped them along the way. Better friends explained that most participants were able to develop friendships that they were never able to develop and/or sustain due to the instability in their living situation prior to SRN. Finally most participants described how SRN motivated them to give back to the community and the program through the theme pay it forward. Randle (2016) entitle the overall essence of her study as lifted which explained that SRN students felt that SRN gave them a better quality of life and moved them to a higher personal level.
Purpose of the Study

With Mendez et al. (2017) and Randle (2016) in mind, the purpose of my study was to understand how mentors at SRN build supportive relationships with high school mentees given that many homeless youth do not have access to healthy, supportive social relationships in their daily lives. This was the first study that allowed participants to speak about their experiences as mentors and how they felt they contributed to the mentor and mentee relationship.

To date, there has been evidence that each relationship between mentor and mentee is unique, where some students build strong, lasting relationships, and others do build fairly strong connections with their mentors (Dr. Raffaele Mendez, personal communication). The purpose of my study was to examine how they built a quality relationship with their mentees. The research question that guided my study was (1) what common themes emerge from mentor narratives that demonstrate how they built trust with their mentees.

I collected qualitative data via individual interviews. I chose this method because it gave mentors the opportunity to share with me their strategies for building relationships, what worked well, what did not work well, and what factors were most important when building a lasting mentoring relationship. Additionally, I gained a better understanding of the barriers mentors encountered when building relationships with their mentees.

A review of Mendez and colleagues (2017) and Randle (2016) justified several reasons for my study. With the overwhelming amount of challenges that homeless youth face, it appears that many go without support unless school faculty are aware of their situations. My proposed study was the first to examine how trust was built with youth who may not have had many reliable and caring adults in their lives.
CHAPTER TWO:
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Homeless youth face a several challenges aside from having a stable location to reside. This group often experience poorer physical and psychological outcomes than their housed peers and have higher incidences of mental illness (Folsom et al., 2005), substance abuse (McNiel, Binder, & Robinson, 2005), criminal behavior (Fichter & Quadflieg, 1999), school failure (Toro & Goldstein, 2000), and victimization (Edidin, Ganim, Hunter, & Karnik, 2012). The purpose of this chapter is to offer an overview of the literature on homeless youth as a backdrop for my study. The chapter begins with a brief overview of homeless youth in the United States. Next, I explore the challenges faced by homeless youth and the impact of social networks on quality of life. The chapter concludes with the frameworks that will guide my study and current research on the variety of mentorship programs offered in the United States.

Homeless Youth in the United States

The homeless youth population in the United States is slowly increasing from year to year (National Center for Homeless Education, 2015). Recent data suggests that 1.3 million youth between the ages of 0-18 were identified as homeless in the 2013-2014 academic year (Data and Statistics for Homelessness, 2015). According to the National Center for Homeless Education, the Data and Statistics Report (2015) found the highest rates of homeless youth to be California, New York, Texas, and Florida respectively. Florida’s population of homeless youth
(5.7%) is higher than the national average (1.91%) (The Department of Children and Families, 2015).

The McKinney Vento Homeless Assistance Act (2002), defined homelessness as people who lack a permanent or regular nighttime residence. This includes children and youth who live in hotels, motels, recreational parks, camp grounds, transitional housing, and those who are awaiting foster care placement. Additionally, children and youth qualify as homeless if they live in public locations. Some of these youth move from location to location and are not in the custody of a guardian (Sec. 725, McKinney Vento Homeless Assistance Act, 2002). Furthermore, individuals are considered homeless if they are living in a place not meant for human occupancy, which includes parks, cars, abandoned buildings, and bus stations (The Department of Housing and Urban Development; 2012).

**Complications of Adolescent Homelessness**

**Mental illness.** After moving from location to location, the cost of this instability is can take a toll on mental health. Whitbeck, Johnson, Hoyt and Cauce (2004) provided a review for 428 adolescent homeless youth and their risks of mental illness. The authors found that homeless youth are six times more likely to have a mental disorder than their counterparts. The authors used The University of Michigan Composite International Diagnostic Interview (UM-CIDI) and The Diagnostic Interview Schedule for Children- Revised (DISC-R) to assess Major Depressive Disorder, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, Conduct Disorder, alcohol abuse, and drug abuse. Based on their findings, 89% of their sample met criteria for at least one of these previously mentioned disorders and 67.3% met criteria for at least two disorders.

In a similar study, Cauce (2000) examined the psychological characteristics and mental health of homeless youth. Their sample consisted of 364 homeless individuals between the ages
of 13 and 21. Participants were assessed using the Diagnostic Interview Schedule for Children-Revised (DISC-R), Youth Self Report (YSR), the Reynolds Adolescent Depression Scale (RADS), Children’s Manifest Anxiety Scale-Revised (RCMAS), and Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES). Based on their findings, 92% of adolescents were sexually active, 66% dropped out of school, 84% had a parent involved with the law, and 55% had a parent with a substance abuse issue. Furthermore, abuse was a concern where 51% of the sample reported physical abuse and 62% were afraid of being abused. Thirty three percent (33%) had been previously placed in foster care. In the author’s sample, there was also a high prevalence of psychiatric disorders. Two thirds of the sample had been identified as having a DSM mental health diagnosis. These diagnoses encompassed Attention-deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder, Major Depression, Conduct Disorder, Mania, Dysthymia, Oppositional Defiant Disorder, Post-traumatic Stress Disorder, and Schizophrenia.

**Victimization.** In addition to mental health disorders, it is common for homeless youth to be victimized. Higher risk of victimization is associated with using drugs or alcohol, engaging in deviant behavior and having a deviant peer group (Tyler, Hoyt, Whitbeck, & Cauce, 2001; Whitbeck & Hoyt, 1999). Whitbeck and Simons (1990) examined how family life and unstable housing may contribute to victimization among this population. To do this, they interviewed 84 homeless youth between the ages of 14 and 18. They examined issues such as deviant peer groups, victimization, frequency of running away, deviancy and physical abuse.

Based on their results, boys were more likely to engage in violence with weapons. Girls were more likely to report being sexually assaulted (42.5%) than boys (9.6%). Further, 50% of boys had been threatened with a weapon compared to 35% of girls. The authors were able to conclude that family abuse directly impacted behavior on the streets for boys only. Similarly,
having deviant peers directly affected victimization for boys only. For girls, the frequency of running away was associated with victimization which meant that the more times a girl ran away from home, she was more at risk for being victimized.

**Substance abuse.** Homeless youth are exposed to a variety of harmful substances while living in unstable conditions (Baer, Ginzler, & Peterson, 2003). Baer, Ginzler, and Peterson (2003) conducted a study that looked at the rates of substance abuse in homeless youth populations. Their sample consisted of 98 homeless youth aged 13 to 19. The participants completed Likert scales which described their alcohol and drug use habits. The study looked at tobacco, alcohol, heroin, marijuana, and amphetamines usage. Of the sample, 95% reported used tobacco in the past year. Roughly 93% of the sample used tobacco in the past month, followed by marijuana (92%) and alcohol (88%). The study sample used other drugs in the past year which included cocaine (51%), amphetamines (68.5%), heroin (34.7%) and other opiates (54.8%).

Additionally, Johnson, Whitbeck, and Hoyt (2005) also surveyed the rate of substance abuse among homeless youth. Their sample consisted of 428 homeless youth between the ages of 16-19 years. The sample was interviewed every three months over the course of one year. The authors used the University of Michigan Composite International Diagnostic Interview (UM-CIDI) to assess alcohol and drug abuse, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and major depressive episodes.

Based on the results, the authors were able to determine that roughly 60% of the sample met lifetime criteria for at least one substance abuse disorder. Forty eight percent of the sample met 12-month diagnostic criteria for at least one substance abuse disorder. Finally, the authors found that across their sample, the most used drug was marijuana.
In another study examining a broader set of variables, Slesnick and Prestopnik (2005) examined the multiple diagnoses of 226 homeless youth between the ages of 13 to 17 who were residing at one of two runaway shelters. Of this sample, 62% reported being arrested and running away from home an average of five times. The authors assessed three main areas which were family functioning, substance abuse, and related problematic behaviors. Once participants met the preliminary eligibility requirements, they completed several measures including the Diagnostic Interview Schedule for Children (DISC) sections for alcohol, marijuana, and other substance use, the Shaffer’s Computerized Diagnostic Interview Schedule for Children (CDISC) for DSM-IV diagnoses, demographic measures, family measures, and substance use measures.

Of the 226 participants, 90 (40%) had one substance-use diagnosis. In regard to mental illness, 77 (34%) participants had one mental health diagnosis as well as a substance-use diagnosis. Of those with substance-use disorders, 64% were diagnosed with an alcohol use disorder, 81% were diagnosed with marijuana use disorder, and 25% were diagnosed with another substance-use disorder. The most common mental illness diagnoses were Major Depression, Conduct Disorder, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder and Oppositional Defiant Disorder.

Academic failure. Another area in which homeless youth have been shown to be at risk is academic achievement. Compared to their housed peers, homeless youth have lower academic achievement (Commander, Davis, McCabe & Stanyer, 2002). Rafferty (1998) conducted 277 family interviews to examine what factors may affect the ability of homeless youth to succeed in school. Several factors were identified as increasing the risk for low attendance. These factors included inconsistent transportation, lack of school supplies, food, and clean clothing, and health concerns.
Similarly, Rafferty, Shinn, and Weitzman (2004) conducted a study to understand school experiences and adolescent academic achievement. Their sample consisted of youth aged 11-17 years. Participants included 46 homeless youth and 87 permanently housed adolescents who were identified as living in poverty. To understand students’ attitudes toward school, the Department of Education provided student academic records. Youth interviews were also conducted. Additionally, the Similarities subtest of the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children-Revised (WISC-R; Wechsler, 1974) was administered to gain a sense of adolescents’ cognitive abilities. Reading achievement was evaluated using the annual Degrees of Reading Power Reading Test (DRP) and mathematics achievement was evaluated using the Metropolitan Achievement Test (MAT). The findings of this study indicated that homeless students repeated more grades than housed peers who were poor. Additionally, homeless students appeared to move around more and had attended 4.2 schools since kindergarten, whereas housed peers attended 3.1 schools. When students had a higher rate of school mobility, their chances of grade retention increased.

When examining student perceptions toward school, 85% of homeless students and 96% of housed students wanted to attain higher education. On average, 20% the homeless youth in their sample were at or above grade level for reading and 28% were at or above grade level for math. Thirty one percent of the housed counterparts were at or above grade level for reading and 44% were at or above grade level for math. The citywide average was 54% for reading and 55% for math which indicate both samples were performing below these standards. Finally, their performance on the WISC-R indicated that both groups scored roughly 1 standard deviation below the mean for the normative group. This study indicates that although both samples were
disadvantaged, being homeless was associated with more negative effects on the student’s educational outcomes.

**Criminalization.** To law enforcement, homeless youth might be viewed as an inconvenience rather than children who need help. A survey conducted by Bernstein and Foster (2008) of the California Research Bureau examined the experiences of homeless youth and the law. The authors interviewed 208 current and formerly homeless individuals between the ages of 13 and 25. What the authors found was that interactions with the law can often create a challenging cycle. For example, these individuals might be tickets and fined for various offenses (e.g. sleeping in public areas) and required to pay off these fines with money they do not have. To make matters worse, this can result in criminal records which limit the chances for future employment or finding a secure residence (Bernstein & Foster, 2008).

In another study, McCarthy and Hagan (1992) explored the experiences of 360 (230 male; 130 female) homeless youth between the ages of 13 and 19 years old. Descriptive data was collected using a 26-page questionnaire that measured demographic information, street experiences, and behaviors. Nearly half of their sample (47%) admitted to stealing food since leaving home. Furthermore, 80% of their sample admitted to using illicit drugs like marijuana, hallucinogens (55%), cocaine (42%), or amphetamines (34%) and almost 30% of their sample engaged in prostitution.

**The Role of Social Support**

It is well known that social supports have a significant part in mental health (Cobb, 1976; Thoits, 2011; Umberson & Karas Montez, 2010) and psychological well-being (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Cohen, 2004). For instance, people who receive family and friend support use approach-coping, such as positive appraisal and seeking guidance and support. Those without family and
friend support rely more on avoidance-coping which can lead to anxiety and depression (Calvete & Connor-Smith, 2006; Tao, Dong, Pratt, Hunsberger, & Pancer, 2000). Research also suggests that individuals who are more optimistic also report having greater social support, reflecting perhaps a higher quality of friendships (Brissette, Scheier, & Carver, 2002). Research indicates that compassionate parents and friends are essential for healthy emotional growth (Boutelle, Eisenberg, Gregory, & Neumark-Sztainer, 2009).

In more recent literature, Oberle, Schonert-Reichl, Guhn, Zumbo, and Hertzman (2014) conducted a study with fourth grade students to examine how supportive adults impact student emotional well-being. Specifically, the authors examined the extent to which family, school, and neighborhood support related to the children’s’ self-reported emotional well-being. Indicators of emotional well-being included optimism, satisfaction with life, and holding a positive self-view (Oberle et al., 2015). Participants were from 72 urban public elementary schools in Vancouver, Canada. The Middle Years Development Instrument (MDI) survey was used to collect data. The results of this study indicated that emotional well-being was positively associated with adult support in all three ecological contexts. School support was the most important adult support influence, followed by home and neighborhood. This study sheds light that the familial relationship, while significant, is not the only relationship that can provide benefits for emotional well-being for youth.

Additionally, Olivia, Jimenez and Parra (2008) used a longitudinal design to study the buffering effect of family relationships on the linkage between stressful life events and adolescent internalizing and externalizing symptoms. The sample consisted of 513 Caucasian adolescents aged 13 to 19 years. Within the sample, 88% of the participants lived with their
biological parents, 7% with their mother only, and 3% with their father only and one individual who lived in a restructured family.

The next step of the study was to follow boys and girls who were at the beginning of their adolescence. The participants were followed for over five years, until they reached approximately 18 years old. Approximately two years elapsed between each data collection. Parents completed a 24-item instrument which explored their child’s perception of the educational or disciplinary style used by his/her parents. These classifications were either considered accepted/involved or supervised/monitored (Lamborn, Mounts, Steinberg, & Dornbush, 1991).

The authors discovered that high quality parent-youth relationships protected boys and girls against the negative consequences of stressful life events on externalizing symptoms, but not on internalizing symptoms. The youth who held close relationships with their parents during mid-adolescence did not increase their externalizing symptoms later in adolescence when experiencing stressful live events. However, for families with middle quality or low quality, these stressful life events lead to an increase in the number of externalizing symptoms. Although this study is focused on familial support, the authors found that higher quality relationships were a stronger buffer of stress. Based on the research conducted by Olivia, Jimenez and Parra (2008) and Oberle et al. (2013), it appears that adults who provide youth with high quality support can have positive impacts on their emotional and behavioral well-being. Positive social relationships have also been shown to increase physical health benefits for youth.

Cohen (2004) states that individuals who have social relationships are influenced by social peer pressures which can affect the choice of healthy behaviors. They suggested that relationships can influence exercise habits, diet, and decisions to engage with drugs for example.
In addition, the more variety of social relationships also provides multiple sources of information and thereby increases the likelihood of having access to several sources of information. This information could influence behaviors or help one avoid high-risk behaviors/situations (Cohen, 2004). When considering Cohen’s (2004) study, homeless youth could benefit by having positive social supports to influence healthy behaviors. Furthermore, homeless youth have been shown to not have easy access to healthy supportive relationships with adults due to unstable living conditions (Mendez, Dickinson, Esposito, Connolly & Bonilla, 2017). Like housed youth, it’s important for homeless youth to have social supports to promote healthy emotional development and well-being. As Calvete and Connor-Smith (2006) and Tao, Dong, Pratt, Hunsberger and Pancer (2000) found, individuals who receive support from close relationships rely more on approach-coping and less on avoidance-coping which can lead to anxiety and depression. Since homeless youth may not have access to familial relationships or friendships, mentor programs can provide a level of care for those who have limited social supports.

**Gender and Social Support Differences**

One of the research questions in my study look to examine what themes are gender specific to building trust within the mentoring relationship. Gender identity refers to a person’s sense of self as male, female, or transgender (American Psychological Association, 2011). Sexual identity is defined as a person's biological position and is typically categorized as male, female or intersex (American Psychological Association, 2011).

When examining recent literature, there is slim research that focuses on the differences between the social behaviors and relationships of men and women. However, there is some research that has indicated that men and women manage the consequences of stress differently. Umberson, Chen, House, Hopkins, and Slaten (1996) conducted a study to understand gendered
social experiences and gendered expressions of psychological distress. They posed four questions: (1) Are there consistent gender differences across measures of social integration, support, relationship tension, and provision of care? (2) Are women more psychologically sensitive than men to the form and content of their relationships, and do gender differences in the psychological effects of relationships depend on gender-typed expressions of psychological distress? (3) Do gender differences explain some of the differences in alcohol consumption and depression? (4) Does relationship quality have long-term effects on psychological functioning, and do such effects differ in relation to gender?

The data were from a national two-wave panel survey ("Americans' Changing Lives") conducted in the United States. The researchers led face-to-face interviews with 3,617 individuals aged 24 and older in 1986. The measures of formal and informal social integration were derived from work by Veroff et al. (1981). Social support measures were based on work from House and Kahn (1985), which obtained information on relationships with one's spouse, children over the age of 16, mothers, fathers, and friends and relatives (other than spouse, child, or parent). In regard to relevant findings, women reported greater formal and informal social integration, more intimate and informal social ties (e.g., having a confidant) and received more social support from friends and family. Although men report less social support from most relationships (excluding marriage), they reported having more people to call if they needed any advice or held with something. The authors concluded that men received more of the instrumental or practical aspects of relationships while women perceived to benefit more from intimate, conversational aspects of relationships.
The Role of Mentorship

When youth do not have access to familial relationships or need additional support and guidance, mentoring programs can provide a level of care for children and adolescents who have limited social supports. Langhout, Rhodes, and Osborne (2003) conducted an exploratory study to understand the range of mentor relationships and to evaluate their influence on youth outcomes. Eight Big Brother Big Sister agencies were selected to participate in the study. The researchers conducted analyses with data from 378 experimental group participants who were paired with a mentor and 472 control group participants. The mentees ranged in age from 10 through 16. Eighty three percent of the sample were from families with annual incomes of less than $25,000 and over 40% were receiving public assistance. Nine hundred and fifty nine youth or 84.3% of the sample completed baseline and 18-month follow-up interviews. The average length of the relationships was 11.4 months, with pairs meeting roughly 3 times per month, 4 hours each time.

Pairs typically engaged in a wide variety of activities and discussions with the overall objective of building positive development. The authors measured areas to determine if the mentoring program influenced these areas. The areas included social, psychological, academic and behavioral functioning. In regard to relevant findings, the authors found that mentees who perceived their relationships as supportive, organized, and high in activity appeared to fair the best in regard to psychological, school, parent, and peer outcomes. Those who considered their relationships in terms of a high activity level were also doing well in the area of school and peer outcomes. The group that experienced their mentor relationships as high support and structure but low in activity reported less peer conflict at follow-up which was also perceived as a benefit.
However, the unconditionally supportive group who characterized their mentors as providing unconditional support experienced more parent alienation at follow-up.

Furthermore, Karcher (2005) studied how mentor attendance affected their mentees’ outcomes after six months of developmental mentoring. Karcher (2005) defined developmental mentoring as an organized mentoring program intended to support child development through facilitating connectedness and develop stronger self-esteem, individuality, and school perceptions. School staff or university student coordinators trained and supervised the mentors. Program coordinators carefully monitored mentor–mentee meetings and parents were involved through take-home activities and weekend events.

Seventy-three children were randomly placed in a mentoring ($N=33$) or an alternative treatment group ($n=40$). Karcher (2005) administered several measures to gather data on self-esteem, connectedness, individuality, and school perceptions. Attendance was calculated as the percentage of days that the mentors and mentees attended meetings together. Mentoring occurred after school for six months. There were 48 after-school sessions and six Saturday events for a total of 144 possible hours of contact. Results of this study displayed that when mentors have increased attendance, mentees’ self-management, social skills, connectedness, and self-esteem, are positively affected. Furthermore, mentor attendance was a better predictor of positive mentee change than mentee attendance, suggesting it was the experience with the mentor that best accounted for changes in the areas previously listed. Finally, when mentors had inconsistent attendance, there was an adverse impact on their mentees. This study provides evidence that mentoring can have numerous positive effects when mentors are consistent with their mentees.

Along with strong attendance, there are several other personal qualities that have shown to benefit the quality of the youth mentoring relationship. For instance, Sale, Bellamy, Springer,
and Wang (2008) examined the relationships between prevention service providers and youth. The Youth Mentoring Initiative from the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention in the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration chose the participants from seven of their funded prevention programs. The sample consisted of 1,165 participants between the ages of 8 to 18. The experimental group had 603 and the control group had 562.

The researchers collected data at baseline, and at 6 month follow-up. The findings from their study suggested that when participants perceived a more trusting, mutual and empathetic relationship with their prevention providers, they experienced greater improvement in social skills (i.e., cooperation, empathy, self-control) than youth who also participated in the interventions but did not have the same positive perceptions.

Finally, Pryce (2012) led a qualitative study that looked at the concept of mentor attunement between volunteer mentors and adolescents. “Attunement’’ was described as the relationship between therapist and client that ‘‘goes beyond empathy to provide a unity of interpersonal contact and the facilitation of psychological healing’’ (Erskine, 1998). Relationships with empathic attunement allow for exploration, genuineness, and openness within the relationship (Pryce, 2012). Pryce (2012) study examined new matches in school-based mentoring programs operated by a Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS) organization. The school-based mentoring program was in partnership with three public elementary schools where teachers and counselors identified 10–15 students in third, fourth or fifth grade who experienced family crisis or displayed emotional behavioral difficulties. Based on teacher feedback, those students were matched with a mentor for the entire school year and met each week. All three schools were in their first year of implementing the program and each relationship was observed from the start. The study included 33 students and 39 mentors however data was collected and
used from 26 relationships, both the mentor and mentee. The students mean age was 9.9 years and the mentors mean age was 53.9 years.

Through the interviews, highly attuned mentors tended to describe the relationship as a give and take. Highly attuned mentors expressed hope that being genuinely interested in their mentee would assist their mentee in gaining comfort and creating a closer bond overtime. In contrast, the minimally attuned mentors who were not very attuned tended to not be aware of their mentees verbal and/or nonverbal cues in what they wanted. Despite the evidence from the mentee’s disinterest in some aspects of the relationship, mentors who were minimally attuned found it difficult to adapt to this. Mentors who were minimally attuned were able to adapt only after receiving help from a program facilitator rather than youth cues. Mentors who were minimally attuned tended to enter the relationship with expectations of their role, as well attention to how the relationship met their own needs rather than the needs of their mentee.

Based on the studies mentioned in this section, qualities such as reliable, trustworthy, empathetic, mutualistic, authentic, supportive, attuned, and activity involved helped increase youth social skills, connectedness, self-esteem and more.

Liang, Spencer, Brogan, and Corral (2008) led a qualitative study which compared perceptions of natural mentoring relationships among middle school, high school, and emerging adults. Specifically, the two-fold purpose of their study was: (1) to examine significant characteristics reported by their participants when sharing about the relationships, and (2) to compare characteristics across three developmental phases within adolescence. The sample consisted of 56 students aged 11–22 and were drawn from 6th grade, 9th grade and college. After completing the focus group interviews, the authors yielded four categories of themes: (1) mentor characteristics; (2) relationship characteristics; (3) key functions, and (4) outcomes. Three out of
the four themes were similar across the different age groups. These themes were (a) the importance of spending time together and engaging in shared activities, (b) trust and fidelity, and (c) role modeling and identification. The themes balancing connection and autonomy and empowerment were discussed in all groups, but were described differently based on ways consistent with the developmental needs of each age group.

Highlights of their study indicated participants in all three age groups described the mentoring support they received occurred during (or was enhanced by) fun activities. Middle school students described sharing field trips to the movies or the local mall. The college participants also stated that fun activities with their mentor were important. These various activities were described as facilitating the mentoring process. Similarly, all three age groups cited mutual trust and fidelity as distinctive features of an adult mentor. The college participants felt that they could confide in their mentors about personal problems that could not be trusted to other people in their lives. Participants also talked about importance of mutuality in self-disclosures; they felt trusted when mentors also shared personal stories or past failures. High school and college youth also described appreciating the nonjudgement their mentors gave them.

Participants reported that good mentors provide support without judgment, stating that this distinguished mentors from other adults.

What is more, all youth felt empowered because of their mentoring relationship. For the high school and college-age students, mentors were actively involved in guiding their futures at a time when their decisions were more significant. Additionally, the older participants described how mentors provided information, guidance, and support as they moved down the path into higher education and careers. While their study does focus on natural mentoring relationships, this study shares insight on what youth find valuable within a mentoring relationship.
Current literature behind the effectiveness of formal mentoring programs with homeless youth is relatively scarce. When specifically looking at how mentors build relationships with this population, the research base was even more limited. With Mendez et al. (2017)’s findings in mind, the goal of my study was to discover a different perspective of the mentor/mentee relationship with homeless youth and identify what mechanisms helped build trust.

**Theoretical Frameworks**

**Mentorship theory.** The main theoretical perspective that guided my study was the model of mentorship, which is thoroughly discussed in Rhodes (2006). This model proposes that mentoring affects youth through three interrelated processes: (1) it enhances their social skill, relationships and emotional well-being, (2) it improves their cognitive skills through teaching and discussion and (3) it supports positive identity development by their mentor serving as a role model (Rhodes, 2005). The first process suggests that having a mentoring relationship gives them chances for fun and to distract them from stress. It also serves as a corrective emotional experience where they are able to see that positive relationships with others are possible. (Rhodes, Spencer, Keller, Liang, & Noam, 2006). Moreover, mentors can demonstrate that positive relationships with adults are possible if not with their parents (Olds, Kitzman, Cole, & Robinson, 1997). The second process includes introduction to new experiences which increase learning, and provide guidance in many areas of their lives including education (Rhodes, Spencer, Keller, Liang, & Noam, 2006). Finally, the third process contributes to their identity development by helping them think about who they are and who they want to be in the future.

**Attachment theory.** My study was also guided by attachment theory. Attachment theory describes the potential impact of positive relationships on youth’s socioemotional growth
Attachment is seen across the life cycle (Bowlby, 2005). According to attachment theory, a person desires and maintains proximity to someone they value. Normally it is a person who is more able to cope with their environment. This is how we as people find value and want to continue the relationship (Bowlby, 2005). From those relationships we receive protection, ease, and refuge (Bowlby, 2005). In adolescence, youth who have experienced guardians as inaccessible or unreliable may be less likely to want to turn to other people in their lives when stressful life events occur (Belsky & Cassidy, 1994). However, when mentors provide consistency and sensitivity in the relationship, youth become more likely to seek out emotional support to deal with stressful events, which helps shield against stress (Rutter, 1990).

Furthermore, Ainsworth (1989) elaborates that attachment seeking relationships include secure-based behavior. Secure-based behavior is related to the security and comfort one feels from the relationship. When adults provide protection and support for youth, this sense of security allows youth to safely interact with their environment, building knowledge and skills overtime (Ainsworth, 1989). Some researchers have found that mentors can supplement close attachments which give youth the safety to make important social and cognitive growth (Rhodes, Spencer, Keller, Liang, Noam, 2006).

To support both of these frameworks, Ahrens, DuBois, Garrison, Spencer, Richardson, and Lozano (2011) led a qualitative study that looked to discover what factors that influence the formation, quality, and duration of relationships. The researchers conducted interviews with 23 young adults (ages 18-25) who were previously in the foster care system and had relationships with supportive non-parental adults or mentor. Many of the young adults reported that they met this mentor through the foster care system and may have been a caseworker, law enforcement officer, or job supervisor. Of the sample, only 2 young adults reported relationships with a
mentor from a formal mentoring program. When discussing important relationships, youth described many barriers that caused their relationships to be disrupted such as changing foster care placements, going to jail, losing contact information, or the adult moving out of the area.

Additionally, youth described several themes that discussed the characteristics of their relationships with their mentors. These characteristics were being reliable, authentic, and treating youth with respect which all heightened the quality of their bond. Additional adult characteristics that were perceived as assisting the relationships included being adaptable to their mentees changing needs and demonstrating accountability. Many of the young adult participants in this study also shared that they appreciated when their mentors kept them informed on things to expect, especially when the relationship was going to come to an end (“He prepared me [for the relationship to end] about a year ahead of time.”). Most youth also identified a location or place that allowed them to maintain a regular routine when getting together with their mentor. This may have been a job site for example. Each relationship was unique so the frequency and type of contact (phone vs in-person) varied. Participants also shared that their mentor’s regularly planned activities that the youth's was interested in.

Participants also discussed themes that related to how their mentors supported their development through adolescence especially related to social emotional development and social skills.

Their mentors helped them be more organized, problem solve, or learn independent living skills, and helped them understand their own potential which supported their cognitive and personal development.

The authors also explored in what ways these mentors contributed to these impacts on the participants. The participants responded that their mentees provided guidance and support on various issues that came up in their lives. Some participants also shared that they received help
when applying for college and finding a place to live. Furthermore, these important adults provided the participants with fun activities and new exposures that they may have not had otherwise, such as camping or having someone be there for them at their graduation. Some participants felt that their mentors were like supplemental parent figures. The authors also noted that participants expressed many areas in their lives where they was an unmet need. However, their mentor was often able to fill that need. For example, several participants expressed that they lacked the necessary skills to develop positive relationships in their adult lives but their mentor was able to teach them those skills.

Finally, an interesting theme was discovered during the coding process. Two of the investigators noted that for youth who presented as confident and sure of themselves during the interviews tended to form relationships with their mentors much quicker and easier. In contrast, participants who had nonverbal cues (e.g. body language) or speech that suggested mistrust of the interviewer tended to report that it took them a lot longer to develop the relationship with their mentor.

Ahrens et al. (2011) revealed many perceptions of how youth may feel when establishing a relationship with a non-parental adult. Aspects of Rhodes (2006) came through this study in that youth felt their non-parental relationship served as a corrective experience, allowing them to engage in activities that they wanted to, and improved their cognitive and socioemotional capacity. Their themes also displayed that some adolescents and young adults do have reservations when trusting new people. However, over time those relationships were built and allowed the participant to improve their own life and other relationships within their lives.

Moreover, Thomson and Zand (2010) examined whether the quality of a mentoring relationship predicted other relationship-based results using Rhodes (2006) theoretical
framework. Their sample consisted of 205 youth between the ages of 9 and 16. The researchers collected follow up data at 8 months and 16 months.

The quality of the relationship was measured using the Mentor-Youth Alliance Scale (MYAS), a 10-item scale that measures authenticity, empathy, and companionship. Additionally, the authors examined youth perceptions of parent attachment (Thornberry, Huizinga, & Loeber, 1995), and youth perceptions of the relationship, (Zand et al., 2009). Finally, the Mentor/Mentee Youth Alliance Workgroup created the measures of self-disclosure and friendship with adults. Their study concluded that when youth perceive their mentors as authentic and empathic, companions, they are able to develop psychological benefits from the high quality relationship.

Through their research, Thomson and Zand (2010) concluded that they did not know if Rhodes (2006) model alone contributed to their findings. Thomson and Zand (2010) reported that both the processes of attachment and the development of interpersonal relationships and may work together to support youths’ socioemotional development and their interpersonal relationships with others and that more researcher needed to be done in order to determine this.

The research that I have done will add to the literature by revealing the perceptions of how mentors build those trusting relationships with homeless SRN students. In order to do this, I believed that both Rhodes (2006) theory of mentorship and Bowby (1988) theory of attachment will interact in order to develop a trusting mentor-mentee relationship.

**Intervention Options for Homeless Youth**

**Drop-in centers.** Drop- in centers in the United States offer immediate services to homeless individuals, such as food, clothing, showers, laundry, and coins for transportation (Joniak, 2005). Furthermore, drop in centers provide youth with additional and more intensive services if they choose (Slesnick, Kang, Bonomi, & Prestopink, 2008). Currently, there is little
research on the success of drop-in centers, although one study did indicate that drop-in centers provided a stride toward reducing homelessness for homeless youth. Slesnick and colleagues (2008) examined the impact of drop-in center case management and individual therapy for homeless youth. The drop-in centers provided education on mental health, education, housing, employment, substance use and medical care. The study sample included 172 participants aged (14–24) who accessed services at a southwestern drop-in center. Youth were administered semi-structured and self-report questionnaires at baseline, 6 months, and 12 months post baseline. The authors discovered that although most youth did not find permanent housing, youth made significant improvements in the areas of substance abuse, mental health, and percent of days housed up to 12 months post baseline. Unfortunately education, employment, and use of medical services didn’t considerably change over the 12 month period.

Runaway shelters. Runway shelters provide immediate services for runaway youth (Slesnick, Dashora, Letcher, Erdem, & Serovich, 2009). For shelters funded by the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act’s Basic Centers Program, the shelters efforts are focused on reunifying families (Slesnick, Dashora, Letcher, Erdem, & Serovich, 2009). Some studies suggest that when families are reunited after youth staying in a shelter, youth experience better outcomes than youth who are released on their own or to other locations (Teare, Furst, Peterson, & Authier, 1992; Thompson, Pollio, & Bitner, 2000). However, many homeless youth return to shelters after being discharged. Baker, McKay, Lynn, Schlange, and Auville (2003) examined the correlations of returning to a runaway shelter after being cleared, for first time and repeat runaways. They discovered that 18% of first time runaways and 34% of repeat runaways returned to the shelter within a year of being cleared to leave. Additionally, De Rosa et al. (1999) found that more youth (78%) reach out to drop-in centers for service rather than runaway shelters (40%).
Community-based agencies. Community-based agencies often provide youth with immediate healthcare, mental or social services. Darbyshire, MuirCochrane, Fereday, Jureidini, and Drummond (2006) conducted a qualitative study to understand the perspectives of homeless youth and accessing health and social services in Australia. After interviewing the participants, the authors discovered that access to health and social services wasn’t the main concern but rather the quality of services. Youth described experiences such as lack of explanations, labeling, and having a lack of personal control when attempting to receive services. However, when asked about what factors influenced youth to seek out services, youth described having a person to make them feel like they mattered and who listened made them want to engage with the services. Furthermore, Altena, Beijersbergen and Wolf (2014) administered measures homeless youth to understand their perceptions of community services. Their sample consisted of 308 individuals. Results indicated that homeless youth perceived the living conditions and service results as the worst aspect of community services whereas the client-worker relationship was the best. This study allows research to understand how youth are perceiving community-based agencies and what areas need improvement to better support these populations.

Child welfare system. The goal of the child welfare system is to provide stable homes through adoption for children who cannot be cared for by their biological parents. In 2014, the state of Florida had 3,267 adoptions of children between the ages of 0-18 (Children’s Bureau, 2015). Of all 50 states, Florida was third in the greatest number of adoptions. With that being said, there were still 5,558 children waiting to be adopted in Florida (Children’s Bureau, 2015). The statistics for being adopted are low for adolescent youth. In 2014, the average age of a child that is adopted in Florida was 5.1 with 51.5% of adoptions of children between 1-5 years of
age (Children’s Bureau, 2015). For adolescents in 2014, those who were 11-15 years of age made up 13.8% of the population adopted and 16-18 made up 4.9% of the population adopted (Children’s Bureau, 2015). Kortenkamp (2002) presented an overview of the well-being of children involved with the child welfare system based pulled from the 1997 and 1999 National Survey of America’s Families (NSAF). Using this data, she examined the mental health and social characteristics of students in the child welfare system (n=819) and children in parent care (n=67,865). In the domain of mental health, 27% of 6 to 17 year olds involved with the child welfare system were found to have behavioral and social-emotional difficulties compared to 7% of children cared for by their biological parents. However, it was also found that one quarter of children in the welfare system were more inclined to access mental health services than children cared for by their biological parents (6%).

In regard to education, 32% of children involved with the child welfare system had been expelled from school than children in parent care (13%) within the last year. This trend was also seen in the area of school engagement where 39% of children in the welfare system displayed low levels of engagement compared to 20% of students in parent care. Lastly, 28% of children in the welfare system were not engaged in an extracurricular activity whereas for their counterparts, only 17% were not engaged in an extracurricular activity. Overall, their findings suggested that children in parent care faired significantly better that children in the welfare system in areas of behavioral/emotional health and education.

**Mentoring Programs**

Currently there are many formal programs like Big Brothers/ Big Sisters and the Boys and Girls Club of America that connect youth to a caring adult, but it is important to highlight the difference between these programs. Many of these programs are for youth who are not
homeless and/or need a place to go after school while their parents are at work. Starting Right Now is a program specific for homeless youth that provides many other services which are discussed in further detail below.

When considering what community-based mentoring programs are doing in order to support youth, DuBois, Holloway, Valentine, and Cooper (2002) conducted a meta-analysis to (a) assess the effects of mentoring programs on youth and (b) to investigate program variations and their impact. These variations are related to program design, implementation, youth demographics, mentor–mentee relationships, and youth outcomes. This meta-analysis included 55 evaluations of mentoring programs. The larger goal was to identify promising directions for enhancing program effectiveness. Overall, their research provided support for mentoring programs although program effects had been modest. However, based on their analyses, program effects were enhanced significantly when a set of “best practices” were used that incorporated both theory based and empirically based research. The programs that highlighted these practices for their mentoring programs had the highest desired effects. Programs that were the most successful included continuous mentor training, structured activities when mentors engage with youth, guidelines for the frequency of contact, parental involvement, and continuous monitoring of the program’s implementation.

**Big Brothers Big Sisters of America.** Big Brothers Big Sisters of America is a nationwide mentoring program that has been matching youth with a caring adult (called a Big) for over a century. Since its creation in New York in 1902, Big Brothers Big Sisters of America can be found in all 50 states and 12 other countries around the world. Today, their national headquarters is located in Tampa, Florida. Their organization has several programs including community-based programs, school-based programs, and programs for youth whose parents are
incarcerated. Additionally, they provide programs that connect youth with police to build bonds between law enforcement and the families they serve. In order to become a mentor, an adult must fill out an inquiry form and a staff member would be in contact. It is recommended that the mentor and mentee spend consistent time together doing different activities with parent permission. Mentors are also provided with a Match Support Specialist who is there to help with activity ideas and expectations, guidance for managing unexpected or challenging situations, and mentor feedback.

**Boys and Girls Club of America.** Boys and Girls Club of America is a nationwide program for children 5-18 years of age. Boys and Girls Club of America serves over 11,000 children annually in the Tampa Bay area. The program allows youth to have a safe environment outside of school hours rather than be out on the streets or home alone. They also have programs specific for engaging teenagers and empowering young women. Staff offer guidance and support to youth through structured programming related to academic success and health, engaging activities, and interest-based experiences. In order to be a part of Boys and Girls club of America, adults can apply for employment or volunteer to work with you at a designated club. Volunteers are able to work with the directors and program directors at a designated club to organize field trips, provide mentoring, and other services to support youth. In order to become a volunteer, individuals must be 18 years or older, undergo a background check, attend a volunteer orientation, and training.

**Across Ages.** Across Ages is a mentoring program is a nation-wide program for adults 55 and over looking to mentor youth between the ages of 9-13. Mentors are paired with youth and meet at least twice a week over about a year. After school, mentors engage in a variety of activities, such as helping with homework or attending sporting or cultural events. The program
also encourages interaction between youth, parents, and mentors by attending program events on weekends which include meals, entertainment, and gift certificates. In order to become a mentor, adults must undergo a background check, attend training and agree to be a mentor for 12 months and spend at least 2 hours per week with their mentee.

**Starting Right Now.** Starting Right Now (SRN) is a boundary spanning intervention that cares for the whole student. In 2009, Tampa resident, Vicki Sokolik founded the community-based organization. Approximately 220 homeless students have received services since its beginning. Students are referred to SRN by high school personnel such as counselors or social worker. Students must currently be considered as homeless in order to qualify for the program. Sokolik stated that in order to be accepted, SRN has to be a last resort. If students have extended family they can live with, they most likely won’t be accepted into the program. About one in four students who apply are accepted. Potential applicants must then attend two interviews. During the first interview, SRN leaders meet with the student determine if SRN will be able to meet their needs. SRN looks at many factors such as the student’s health needs, motivation to succeed in the program, and overall fit with the programs requirements. During the second interview, new students learn about the expectations they need to meet in order to stay in the program. Entry into the program is voluntary and student may leave if they choose. Students live in communal housing with members of the same sex and an adult house guardian. At any given time there are about 40 to 50 homeless students in the program.

There are several requirements in order for students to stay in the program. Those who are accepted must maintain a part-time job, attend school regularly, earn grades of a C or higher, join one extracurricular activity a year, and attend all SRN trainings/meetings. Participants in SRN also receive an adult mentor, a computer, physical and mental healthcare, and are given the
opportunity to participate in extracurricular activities and social groups in which they could not participate previously due to the prohibitive expenses associated with such participation. Mentors volunteer from the community and assist with advice, accountability, guidance, and other supports. SRN students often attend social events sponsored by SRN, such as holiday parties or free sporting events. Because SRN students are also moving into college in the coming years, they receive personal and professional development workshops, which focus on leadership skills and personal empowerment.

In regard to becoming a mentor, Vicki Sokolik shared via interview that her mentors find her organization through an advertisement that ran on TV or in a news article about SRN. To apply, potential mentors fill out an application on the SRN website. Based on their application, two SRN board members interview each candidate to determine two things: (1) does the candidate have enough time to dedicate to the SRN student and (2) are they becoming a mentor for the right reasons. About 85% of applicants get accepted to become a mentor. Furthermore, Sokolik stated that she carefully places mentors with mentees, which she bases on the student’s individual needs and personalities.

Once the candidate is approved, they must be fingerprinted and attend a four hour mentor training. Sokolik reported that there is not a formal manual for the four-hour training but they discuss topics such as what will be required of them as mentors and what experiences they may have along the journey. It is required that mentors talk to their mentees daily, meet with them at least once a week, and attend mentor support meetings which occur monthly. At this monthly meeting, mentors are able to meet with other mentors and the regional program director to problem solve issues such as a mentee not being in contact with their mentor. Mentors are also contacted once a week by the regional program director to see what activities were done during
the week and to answer any questions. Only three mentors have not worked out since the program’s beginning (Vicki Sokolik, personal communication). However, an import aspect of the mentoring process is how the relationship is built between the mentor and the student. Sokolik shared that the mentoring relationship is one of the most important aspects of her organization.

A review of the literature suggests that year after year, the homeless youth population in the United States is rising (National Center for Homeless Education, 2015). These homeless youth face a number of daily challenges which result in poor physical and mental health, substance abuse, criminalization, academic failure, and victimization. In order to combat the negative effects, there are many current interventions for homeless youth such as drop-in centers, runaway shelters, and child welfare that are aimed at improving their current circumstances and hopefully altering their life outcomes. However, based on the literature there is still room for growth. Research has also shown that mentor/mentee relationships do make a significant impact on social, academic, and behavioral outcomes, however there is limited research on how these relationships impact homeless youth. The proposed study will explore the mentor’s perspective on how they build and sustain a successful relationship with their mentee.
CHAPTER THREE:

METHOD

Purpose

The purpose of my study was to examine how mentors at SRN build relationships with homeless youth. Specifically, my study provided insight into how SRN mentors establish trust with their mentees, the factors they see as important in building relationships with their mentees, and the hurdles they faced with building these relationships. The vision for my study was to understand how people connect with a population of youth who may not readily trust people due to their life circumstances (Randle, 2016). I conducted individual, semi-structured interviews with SRN mentors to achieve this goal. I collected the interview data during May through August. I conducted the analysis during July through September. Data saturation refers to the point in the research process when no new information is revealed during the analysis. I discontinued the interviews once participant interviews no longer shared new information. My study used a traditional interview method in order to analyze the interview data collected during the interview with participants. The USF Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved my study on 4/19/18 (Appendix A).

Research Question

1. What common themes emerge from mentor narratives that demonstrate how they built trust with their mentees?
**Participants**

The participants in my study were adults within the Tampa Bay community who were currently mentoring a student in SRN. I attempted to recruit mentors who had mentored a student for at least 6 months to one year to allow mentors to have sufficient time to develop a relationship. I originally set this time limit to allow mentors to recall their experiences with relative ease. However, during the recruitment process, all mentors who chose to participate knew their mentee for longer than one year. Furthermore, all participants mentored at least one student in the SRN program. Originally I had the mentor choose one mentee relationship to discuss during the interview. However during some of the interviews, the participant desired to share their experiences about another mentees as well. I allowed this because the participant felt comfortable enough to share more information and they felt it was important for me to know. This information along with mentor age and reason for becoming a mentor were included in order to describe mentor demographics. The demographic features of participants is listed in Table 1 (See page 39). Additionally, Vicki Sokolik shared that there are approximately 50 adults who are current mentors in the program.

**Participant Recruitment**

I recruited participants for my study through a flyer sent to them via email by Vicki Sokolik, the founder of the organization. I did not have access to the email list of mentors due to protection of privacy purposes. A copy of the flyer was included in Appendix B. The flyer requested participation in a 30-45 minute interview designed to gather information on how mentors establish relationships with homeless youth and how they attempt to facilitate their positive development. Mentors were asked to respond to me via e-mail if they would like to
participate. Once participants responded, I scheduled the interview time and location based on the participant’s preferences.

Table 1. Participant Demographic Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Participant Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Mentee Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Years in Mentorship</th>
<th>Why they became a mentor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Allison</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Bree</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>Attended SRN Luncheon</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cindy</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Daisy</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>Attended SRN Luncheon</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ella</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Faith</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>Wanted to help student reach their potential</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gina</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Henry</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>Prior teacher; Enjoys working with youth</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Kyle</td>
<td>21; 22</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Enjoys helping kids</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Interview Setting

I conducted interviews based on the preferences of the participant. I recommended the offices at SRN and the School Psychology observation labs at the University of South Florida as possible locations for the interview. I chose these locations in order to provide participants with a familiar environment or one that is close to their home/work. However, all participants chose to do the interviews at either their home or local coffee shop.

Interview Training

I utilized a romantic conception of interviewing which entails establishing rapport and empathic connection with the interviewee (Roulson, 2010). This type of interview style provides in-depth information and understanding concerning the beliefs, perceptions, experiences and opinions of the authentic self (Roulson, 2010).

Procedures

Interviews were held at a prior agreed upon location. Each interview was held at a time based on the preferences of the individual. I served as the lead interviewer for each interview. I audiotaped each interview and then later transcribed them. Questions that were asked to participants at each interview are shown in Appendix C.

I gave participants the IRB consent form (shown in Appendix D) and asked them to read and sign the document if they agree to participate after they arrive for the interview. Once that was completed, participants completed the demographics form (shown in Appendix E). I used the demographics form to gather information including the mentor’s gender, age, and reasons for mentoring. Once participants completed the demographics form, the interview began. I started each interview with the participants with the prompt found in Appendix C. All interviews were completed within 30-38 minutes.
Ethical Considerations

I took several precautions in order to protect the rights of the participants in my study. First, the USF Institutional Review Board reviewed and approved my study before interviews were conducted. I gave consent forms to all participants prior to beginning the interview, and also used pseudonyms to protect the identity of study participants. If a participant’s real name was mentioned in the interview, I replaced the name with a pseudonym during the transcription process. Audio recordings will be destroyed after 5 years from when this study is submitted in order to remain in compliance with IRB data retention specifications. Transcripts with pseudonyms were retained to comply with IRB records requirements. Each participant was made aware that they could withdraw from the study at any point, and that withdrawal would not affect their connection in SRN. Finally, all data that I collected and transcribed were kept in a locked compartment at one of the University of South Florida’s private research labs.

Overview of Analyses

In this interview study, the research question was answered by analyzing the interview data collected during the interview with participants. Initial data analysis included an auditory review of the of the interview recordings in order to determine that the interviewer adequately addressed the areas of investigation. Further, I informed participants that a follow up email may be sent to clarify any questions if necessary. I did not have further questions after completing the interview transcriptions.

Analysis of Interviews

I used Saldaña’s (2009) Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers in order to analyze the data. Saldaña’s (2009) coding manual states that the coding process is more cyclical, using two cycle methods. I chose this manual for analyzing my data because Saldana’s manual
includes a wide range of coding types based on the appropriate theories. For my study, Initial Coding and Focused Coding were two coding types that were appropriate for my research paradigm. In regard to First Cycle coding, I chose the Initial Coding method which Saldana (2009) refers to as an open-ended approach to coding where all codes are tentative and provisional. Codes might be reworded as the analysis progresses. I created codes based on the content, meaning, and relevance to the research question.

The primary goal during Second Cycle coding is to develop a sense of categorical or thematic organization from the assortment of First Cycle codes (Saldaña, 2009). For this process, I chose the Focused Coding method which searches for the most frequent and significant initial codes. I read through each interview again and identified which codes were the most frequent, significant, and answered the proposed research phenomenon. Transcriptions received a code if the meaning or content related to the theoretical frameworks that guided my study and/or related to the interview questions. The codebook consisted of definitions of the content discussed by participants that were considered to be a part of the theme. I coded each interview independently. Next, I named and defined the themes. The final phase of the interview data analysis was producing the report of results. The results included vivid examples and excerpts to represent the essence of the themes. Appendix F includes the excel spreadsheets that were used to organize codes and determine themes.

I brought the interpretivist paradigm when analyzing my data. The interpretivist paradigm suggests that reality is subjective and constructed (Sipe & Constable, 1996). Each person constructs the world according to a set of subjective principals (Sipe & Constable, 1996). I chose this paradigm because the participants in my study were the only ones who could speak about and validate their experiences. Each mentoring relationship is unique and there is no ideal
template that mentors could use to measure that. Therefore the interpretivist paradigm was chosen because their experiences and stories were their truths. In epistemological terms and sources of knowledge, the interpretivist paradigm believes there are many truths. Therefore in my research, I understood that all of their stories are valid and I attempted to understand the participants’ experiences through their point of view.

**Trustworthiness and Credibility of Thematic Analyses**

Lather (1986) stated that new paradigm investigators need to be more systematic in creating methods for trustworthy data in order to check their credibility and guard against investigator biases misleading the evidence. I used construct validity and reflection upon my own subjectivity in order to establish credibility and trustworthiness in my study. I reviewed the literature on attachment and mentorship theory and examined other studies that supported these theories. Then I examined the data shared from my participants to see if there were similar findings.

**Reflexivity**

Reflexivity is viewed as the continual internal dialogue and self-evaluation of the researcher’s position in the research as well as acknowledgement that this position may affect the research process and conclusion (Bradbury-Jones, 2007; Guillemin & Gillam, 2004; Pillow, 2003; Stronach, Garratt, Pearce, & Piper; 2007). Being self-reflective helps the researcher become aware of own reactions to thoughts, emotions, and interviews (Berger, 2015). I used a reflexivity journal to write various thoughts, emotions and reactions before or after interviews were conducted. This helped me acknowledge my own thoughts and feelings about the research before and/or after each interview. Additionally, I believe it helped me connect much easier with the participants because the interviews brought positive memories and discussion. Furthermore, I
brought my own experiences of working with foster care youth and youth whose parents have been incarcerated. I also brought experiences of working in the public school system and the internal drive to support students and their well-being. Therefore, I felt that I did share some understanding of the challenges and motivations of working with at-risk youth.
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

This chapter presents the themes that developed across the participants in my study. Each theme includes direct quotes that reflect the meaning of the theme to ensure the participants’ voices are represented. I used thematic analysis (Saldaña, 2009) to analyze the five interview transcripts in order to explore the proposed research question: What common themes emerge from mentor narratives that demonstrate how they built trust with their mentees? I analyzed the interviews through the lens of mentorship theory, attachment theory, and natural themes that emerged from the content that the participants chose to discuss. Results included six themes and subthemes. Table 2 (See page 61) summarizes the themes and the participants who discussed each theme. It is also noted in the table that Gina and Lisa had two mentee relationships they felt compelled to share about. Therefore, their stories for each mentee was also included in the analysis.

Theme One: Finding Commonalities

In the beginning of the relationship, participants generally felt that it was much faster to form a relationship with mentees with whom they shared commonalities. Specifically, participants described how with some students, they “clicked” immediately. Gina explained in more detail her experiences with one of her mentees Henry,
Table 2. Summary of Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Theme Description</th>
<th>Participants who Expressed Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Finding Commonalities</td>
<td>Participants described that for mentee’s who shared a commonality with themselves, it was much faster to form a relationship.</td>
<td>All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Strategies for Establishing Relationships</td>
<td>Activities or strategies used by participants to build a closer bond and relationship with their mentee.</td>
<td>All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Taking on Parental Responsibilities</td>
<td>Activities or actions taken by participants that a parent or guardian may do such as helping them move, keeping them safe, picking them up from college or job/college prep.</td>
<td>Allison, Cindy, Ella Lisa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Meeting Mentee’s Family or Friends</td>
<td>Having contact with the mentee’s family, friends, or anyone in their social circle unrelated to SRN. This added a new dynamic to the relationship by getting to know other important relationships in the mentees life.</td>
<td>Allison, Cindy, Lisa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 2. Continued</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>C. Educational /Entertainment Activities</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spending time together in a formal manner. Mentors may have purchased tickets for these activities or they were pre-planned events or outings.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>D. Spending Quality Time</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free time spent at the mentor’s home, taking walks together, or other activities that were of an informal, relaxed manner.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allison, Cindy, Ella, Gina</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>E. Sharing Personal Stories</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Either the mentor or mentee sharing personal information or stories about their past in order to build trust and communication.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cindy, Gina, Lisa</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3. Text Daily/ Together Weekly</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency in which participants kept contact with their mentees. As mentees moved into college, contact was less frequent.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4. Differences in Life Experiences</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific examples of challenges mentors faced with the relationship. These challenges were mainly due to life experiences from either the mentor’s or mentee’s position.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allison, Cindy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2. Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>5. Relationship Benefits</th>
<th>This theme was defined in closer detail. Participants shared that the benefits of the relationship provided the mentees with someone they could share personal information with, someone to consistently rely on, and someone to assist them with life and career decisions.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Someone to Confide</td>
<td>Participants sharing that their mentee’s could tell them details of their lives and their mentor would not judge them or use it against them. Cindy, Ella, Lisa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Being There</td>
<td>Mentors stated they were reliable, committed and there for their mentees. Allison, Ella, Gina, Lisa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Assistance with Decision Making</td>
<td>Mentors providing advice or guidance on life decisions, career options, and things to consider as they move into college and beyond. All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Be Patient and Stay Committed</td>
<td>Advice that current SRN mentors would like future SRN mentors to know before mentoring an SRN student. Cindy, Ella, Gina, Lisa</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Uh, well, the first time we met, um, honestly it was just love at first sight. [...] [Henry’s] just, he's very open with his feelings and, you know, he said, “I don't just want somebody to do activities with, I want somebody to guide me in life.” And I thought, well, Bingo, you know, I love to give advice and I love, you know, teenagers. And I thought, that'll be great. So our first meeting was a big success and we just clicked immediately and you know, both. I um, I told SRN and he did too, that we just were a great match.

Similarly, Lisa shared commonalities with both of her mentees, Kyle and Marcus. She noted, When I first started to get to know [Kyle] it was very easy because he has like a very gentle spirit. He's very happy. He's really like real chilled out. He, he's very talkative so he loves to talk and so that made it very easy. He likes to talk, I like to talk, so we just, you know. With Marcus, he's a little bit quieter, but Vicky does a good job of matching the mentors up with the mentees. So like one of the things that Marcus and I have in common is football and we both love football so I'm sure we started talking about football a lot at the beginning and it was football season when I met him. And so in the same way he's, he, Marcus is also very, very easy to get along with and talk to.

Finally through Ella’s interview, Ella felt that her connection with Faith was established easily, almost as if she was her own daughter or best friend. Ella stated,

It was easy from the beginning. [...] I just told her this story. I met her the very first time. Literally I met her, she was outside smoking, came up to the Starting Right Now office and I pulled up and she said, “Are you my mentor?” And it was like, “Are you my mother?” Like the Dr. Seuss Book! And I said, “Are you Faith?” And she said, “Yes”, I said that I’m her mentor. And we went inside [the SRN office] and then I took her home. I took her back and she had already moved into the house because she was living in
[redacted] and it was really easy. Then the next time I had an extra ticket to the theater, so I invited her and so she went with my husband, my daughter and I and when we dropped her off after I walked her in and my daughter who’s only a couple of years younger, she said, “Mom, how long have you known her?” I said, “This is only my second time.” She goes, “Oh my God, you guys are like BFF’s.” So the one thing that I think that [SRN has] done a great job and a part of is matching and I think that's really important because I'm not the sweet little sing-song. I'm like that, you know, I'm the toughest and so is she. So it just works.

Like some participants shared, SRN does a good job at matching the mentee with the mentor. But for some pairs, it took a little more time for them to develop a bond and figure out their commonalities. Allison shared about her experience with her mentee Bree,

    Um, my mentee is, was very quiet. She was very reserved when I met her, she was very shy but [personal identifying information redacted] she gave off like sort of, I would say like a little bit of a gruff exterior. Because I'm such a talker, I just wasn't sure with her, I had mentored someone else before and she was a real talker back and so I was trying to judge, you know, what [Bree’s] comfort level was with someone who is trying to get to know her but without being invasive. […] For my personality it was really nice, but I also was trying to be considered the fact that she, um, seemed like, you know, more cautious obviously and also just quieter about things.

Like Allison, Cindy also appeared to notice that her mentee may have been more reserved in the beginning. Cindy reported,

    I think for [mentees] it seems that it’s hard to open up at first until they get comfortable. […] At first, you know, [Daisy] wasn't maybe opening up a lot? Then I would just talk
about, you know, I grew up in [country redacted], what it was like to grow up in [country redacted], it's different here and just where she grew up, what it was like. And actually she, she had a lot of questions. So that's how I think the conversation started. She’d ask me a million questions, so that's the way you know…her to listen and then for me to talk. Gina, noticed that with her other mentee, Jenna, it was more difficult for her to open up due to the fact that Jenna had been let down multiple times in her life. Gina said,

My first young lady, Jenna, she's from [country redacted] and unlike Henry, she was and still is to a somewhat lesser extent, a very quiet reserved young lady and I'm like most of these kids, she had had a lot of people let her down in life and claim that they would be there for her and then they bailed and so she was not nearly as forthcoming and outgoing when we first met. We liked each other right away and I tend to be a very, um, openly affectionate, warm person and I think she liked that and, but you know, it was obvious to me she wasn't going to trust me immediately. So it was very different first meeting then it was with Henry.

All participants noted later on that they did create a secure, trusting bond with their mentees whether participants connected right away or took more time to establish the relationship.

Theme Two: Strategies for Establishing the Relationship

Through all of the interviews, participants shared a variety of methods which helped them build the relationship with their mentee(s). These strategies included: taking on parental responsibilities, meeting other important people in their mentee’s life, doing activities or eating together, spending free quality time together, and sharing personal stories.

**Taking on parental responsibilities.** The subtheme Taking on Parental Responsibilities emerged from mentors often engaging in activities that a parent likely would have done, such as
helping them move to a new location, buying hygiene essentials or picking them up from a college that is hours away. For example Allison shared,

What you find as a mentor is like [mentees] need to go to appointments like an OBGYN or like some of those kinds of things because they often haven't had healthcare so sometimes you're going like literally to doctor's appointments or just kind of things like that. In my specific mentees case she had super bad acne and she was very self-conscious about that. And so the program helped find a dermatologist who donated his time to at least see us. […] Every once while I'll get our nails done. […] When she comes home now she wants to be up with her dad and she has a boyfriend and you know, she's busy so I'll see her, like I'll drive down to [city redacted], pick her up and we visit for the ride back, but then I don't see her much while she's here for the week or whatever.

Additionally, when interviewing Cindy, Cindy happened to mention that she was helping her mentee prepare for college. She stated that,

Um, [Daisy] is going to be living at [school name redacted] as of tomorrow. I'm helping her move tomorrow at 4:00.

Other mentees appeared to need more help than they realized and their mentor was there to assist. Ella described what actions she took in order to assist Faith,

Once I took her entire load of laundry and I washed all her clothes for her because it was just killing me. […] I remember once, I think she came over and we cleaned out her car because it was so disgusting. I'm like, we're cleaning out your car, vacuuming it out and throwing stuff away. We work. I’ve taken her, she was working at [redacted] and you have to wear [redacted] and I took her shopping and I looked at her and I go “do you own a black bra?” and she goes “No” and so I said we are going to buy you a bra and she was
like “wow these are nice!” So you know. Anyway, just things like that. […] Just the other
day, a couple months ago she sent me her resume and I marked it up for her and sent it
back to change and everything. And there's times that I'll say, I'll be kind of tough and I'll
say, this is something I would say to my own daughter. And so you know, I just want
them to know that I'm not treating them any differently. I would say this to my daughter
too. And even in high school, I was the one, I showed up there for the pictures at
someone else's house, so I kind of played mom there and showed up for that.

Ella also provided for Faith when it came to her safety. She shared,

We're talking about what she was going to do over the break and I talked about her
staying with her mother who she goes, yeah, but she's over the bridge and I'm not sure if I
want to drive that car back and forth with my tires on their last tread. And I thought-that’s
it. I literally, I said, where can you get tires? Because she was trying to get used tires
from a friend and I had her meet me at the tire place and we got her new tires. So again,
I'm there to save the day, but she never ever, asks. Never. But I'm just, like I said, this is
your safety. This is not a luxury. You need good tires. I once picked her up from an
emergency. I can’t remember what it was, so I picked her up once for that.

Similarly, Lisa shared that for her two boy mentees, they had their own needs that she assisted
with. In Lisa’s words,

I take them to get haircuts a lot of times because that's important because they want to
look good. Sometimes they told me, look, I need deodorant or I need a razor, things like
that, and I'd buy them self-care things if I knew that they needed. Overall, most
participants seemed to have felt a sense of responsibility for their mentee and took action
in order to ensure their mentee’s needs were being met. These tasks were often related to what parent’s might do for their own children.

**Meeting mentee’s family or friends.** The next subtheme came about as a strategy for developing the relationship between the participant and their mentee. As one participant mentioned, meeting other’s in the social circle added a different dynamic to the relationship. In Allison’s words,

[Bree’s] dad…he lives up in [city redacted] and so she actually enjoyed seeing her dad, like unlike a lot of the kids in the program, like her dad, overall he cares a lot about her. He's made some bad decisions and so has she, but they, he hasn't abused her in like sexually or anything which happens to a lot of the kids. So he, she really wants to be with him, like see him. So we would make a point of kind of stopping by sometimes or stuff like that. [...] I had her and her brother over recently because she was leaving for [country retracted]. And so her brother came over who I'd only met the graduation day for like five minutes and I just thought, you know, sitting around talking with her and her brother added this whole dynamic even though I've known her for a year and a half.

Furthermore, Cindy shared,

When [Daisy] graduated, her dad came to the graduation so she introduced me to him. He was the one family member that was there.

In Ella’s relationship with Faith, Ella made the effort to even assist Faith’s college roommate and eventually met Faith’s family. Ella stated,

Her roommate graduated so I took her roommate, as her graduation gift I took her [shopping]. She said she doesn't have any clothes and apparently her teacher that she worked with made a comment that she needs to dress better. So I took her shopping for
some clothes and then we’re in Macy's and I said, what are you wearing to graduation? “Oh I’m not there yet, my mom wants me to wear a white dress” which her mother’s in Michigan, but I think her mom just wanted her to fulfill all these dreams. So I said come on. So we bought her, a dress but then shoes ha-ha. So then Faith texted me after “that’s so great, she’s going to love it.” So her childhood-- It's almost not believable. Her mother- she kind of rekindled the relationship. And Faith is the most forgiving person I've ever met. So sweet. There's no evidence, but what's weird is her last birthday she invited me to join them for dinner. I go to dinner, her mom, the mom's boyfriend, Faith, her boyfriend, her brother, his girlfriend and me. And I'm looking around the table and I'm listening to the conversation and even talking about like the old days and I'm shaking my head going--- this isn't the family that I expected! I mean totally normal. Totally. I mean, she was living in her car when we got her in the program because she had left her mother and her mother wasn’t nice to her.

**Educational/entertainment activities.** As a method for building the relationship and getting to know each other better, mentors often gave new experiences to their mentees or took them to places they really enjoyed. For instance, Allison shared,

> I would also would do Panera and go for a walk or we’d go down to the Riverwalk and I just walk her into a museum or something. Just ideas like that that aren't too daunting but take about an hour.

Allison noted in her interview that her mentee had to wake up very early for school so when they would spend time together, Allison tried to make sure she wasn’t picking activities that tired her out. In Allison’s words,
But she didn't seem to mind spending like a couple of hours. So I just kind of gauge it from her, like, well, hey, we could do this thing also, or I could take you back to SRN if you're tired. You know, I let her gauge it.

Cindy also shared some of the activities that she and her mentee Daisy did together:

We went to, um, she liked to go to the pottery place where you paint your own pottery.

That's one in Hyde Park we went to, we did that a few times. [We’d] go for lunch or for some breakfast. Uh, we went to the beach at first also.

Gina shared that she really enjoyed having a girl mentees because she didn’t have a daughter.

She shared some of the things she did with Jenna by saying:

I was very loyal and I stuck to it with Jenna being a girl especially. And you know, we, we would go to like Cinderella and Beauty and the Beast movies and things like that.

And I’d always say, now remember, this isn't the way real life works, but nobody told me that when I was growing up, I kind of had the idea for way too long that that was so real life might be. And it sure wasn't. One of the first things we did was we went to an arts and crafts festival on Harbor Island. We had lunch outside. Um, we went shopping when she needed clothes or stuff. I would take her shopping, as a [racial identity redacted] girl, I would go with her to the place in west Tampa where she got [her hair done]. I mean, it was quite an education for me. I did a lot of things like that. […] With Jenna you kind of had to do some more activities and kind of get her warmed up to build that relationship.

Gina also shared that she had only mentored Henry for six months and they had not done a lot of activities together yet. However she did share that they spent more quality time together which is described further in the subtheme below. Finally, Lisa shared that she and her boy mentees did a variety of things.
Well we would go out to eat a lot. And we'd go to movies, football games, sometimes there's things going on downtown in downtown Tampa like outdoor concerts or outdoor activities they were doing stuff like that. Those kind of things.

**Spending quality time.** The next subtheme came through when mentors described how they spent time with their mentee in an informal way, taking time to connect with them at their own home or without spending money. Allison shared how she spent quality time with Bree by saying,

Well, I think the good thing with teenagers is that if you drive in a car with them, like what I've found is like, that's such a nice time to visit with teenagers because they might be on their phone kind of, but they're listening to you because they're not totally distracted.

Cindy shared that Daisy liked to go on walks and enjoys the silence. In her own words,

[Daisy] likes to go for walks. So we went to Ballast point a lot to just walk out on the pier and talk and I think what's good about it, she's okay with silence a lot. That can be uncomfortable sometimes. So she's okay. I'd just walk and just look around and ask questions actually. She asked A LOT of questions. [...] She comes home [from college] and in one other interesting thing is that she is very content to...if ask what do you want to do this week, she wants to come to my house, and just sit with the dogs, walk the dogs, and I thought if it, she probably never had a home where, there's a kitchen with food in the refrigerator and you know, it's like a home and everybody gets along and so she wants to just come and hang out at the house. Yes. And if you've never had that without a lot of dysfunction, it must feel really good. So she's just really content with that. So I have to take her along sometimes “Come on, let's go to do something.”
Similarly, Ella shared that she spent time with Faith at her home. She noted,

I never had an issue. I really, um. Oh, I adore her. Obviously cause I kept her, she's been in my house for like for Jewish holidays and for Thanksgiving and whatever boyfriend she's dating at the time has come, I’ve taken her out for birthday dinners and in fact it was really where when she turned 21 and both of us got a sangria. I go, I can't believe I'm having a drink with you.

Gina shared that because Henry was already in the program as someone else’s mentee prior to becoming hers, he was able to visit at her home right away. For Jenna, she had two wait the required 90 days to visit a mentor’s home. Gina shared,

Um, it was different and yet in some ways, not so much because with, with Henry, he's so verbal and open with his feelings and affectionate and um, he wanted to come over to the house right away and um, meet my husband and meet my two dogs and get to know me and tell me about his background. With Jenna, it was frustrating for both of us because, you know, she was slowly beginning to like and trust me even though it wasn't always easy to tell that because she was so, so quiet. And so it was frustrating for us to have to wait 90 days until she could come to our house. And it was really great when she finally could and you know, hanging out with the dogs and you know, we would have dinner and then she would often stretch out on the sofa with the dogs and fall asleep. And it was just, it was really sweet. She and I are still pretty close.

**Sharing personal stories.** Finally, the last subtheme was called Sharing Personal Stories which was a strategy used to build trust and understanding with their mentee. Cindy shared that by her opening up first, this allowed Daisy to do the same. When Cindy was asked how she thinks she created a trusting bond with Daisy, she shared,
By listening and if she at first, wasn't maybe opening up a lot, then I would just talk about, you know, I grew up in [country redacted], what it was like to grow up in [country redacted], it's different here and just where she grew up, how it was like, she grew up in [city redacted]. And actually she, she had a lot of questions. So that's how I think the conversation started. She’d ask me a million questions, so that's the way you know, her to listen and then for me to talk. […] I think when she opened up about her family background…Like before I didn't ask, you know, somebody wants to share that with me. It's great. I shared with them, you know, about my family, but for them it's, you know, for her it was a little bit harder probably I would think about six months when she started telling me a little bit more about, um, about her family.

For Gina, Henry opened up to her right away. By Henry sharing his own personal stories, he was able to understand Gina’s position and commitment to him. She stated that,

When he would talk about people in his fairly recent past who had said they would be there for him, like his mother's boyfriends and one or two husbands who had been, you know, they had started out really being good to him and then for whatever reason they just kind of dropped him and I assured him that I would not do that and wasn't that kind of person and that when I made a commitment, I, you know, I was very loyal and I stuck to it.

Lisa also shared that her genuine interest and curiosity about Kyle and Marcus helped the boys see that she did genuinely care for them. She said,

I'm curious about them, you know, I really care. I want to know who's your mom and your dad and your, you know, or did you grow up and all that kind of stuff. […] I think just by getting to know them first, because I care, I honestly do care about them. And so,
um, you know, asking questions, getting to know who they are, understanding about their family and also about school, you know, where they were going to school, who they have relationships with. I was interested in what their high schools were like, you know, the classes they took and their teacher. […] I think by getting to know them, by asking questions about them and also by sharing about me being very open to the extent that it's responsible, but you know, telling them things that have happened in my life, sharing the mistakes I've made or bad things that have happened, but how I dealt with them and then how it came through things. Yeah. And just in spending time, it just takes time. Just being, you know, just hanging out like you do with a family, you know, just do stuff together.

Overall, these five subthemes were strategies that the participants used in order to build the relationship with their mentee. Some mentees needed more time in order to open up as seen by the participant’s interviews.

**Theme Three: Text Daily, Together Weekly**

The participants shared in their interviews that the SRN program encouraged them to talk daily with their mentee and visit with them at least once a week. The participants shared their words below about how frequently they were in contact with their mentee and how things have changed overtime as their mentees finished high school and pursued other goals. Through Allison’s words, she shared,

So the ideal would be that you text every day, um, you text every day, you sort of agreed to do that. She's not a big phone talker, I have to say. A lot of the teenagers aren't anymore, you know, I would try that just because you get a lot more information on the phone than texting of course. But I seldom got her to open up on the phone. So really it
was once a day texting like, “hey, how was your day?” “Good.” “Hope you had a fine
day.” “Hope you did too.” Like it know that kind of often correspondence. Very simple.
[…]
So SRN does give you ideas for little adventures. So once a week you're supposed to
do an adventure with them. So you're supposed to text them every day or just “hey, how
are you?” You know? Um, so I'd kind of do that and then I try and plan something for our
one or two hour adventure like per week.

Cindy shared that since Daisy finished high school, they haven’t seen each other as much,
however Daisy is spending her time in productive ways. She said,

Usually [we] text daily. […] Well at first, because she was still in high school….she did
have more time. Let’s say we saw each other say twice a week. Now, I probably see her
once every two weeks because she's busier with school, and she’s trying to find work so
she has interviews lined up. And also I've been a bit busier at work, so it’s been about
every two weeks.

Ella shared that Faith was on an internship in college. She stated that currently,

It's really as needed or sometimes just “how you doing.” But I know she's busy.

When asked about how frequently the saw each other, Ella reported,

Not anymore, you know, in the program it’s once a week that they like you to do. And I
think as we moved on, I'd say once a month, now it's less than that.

Gina stated that for her and Jenna, the frequency of their contact has changed as well. Henry,
who recently graduated from high school is also seemingly busier. Gina noted that,

Yeah, I mean now that Jenna is in college, we're not in nearly as close touch. Henry and I
do [get together], although now he graduated from [high school name redacted] week
before last and the kids are all required to either work or volunteer in the summer. So he has two different jobs now.

Finally, Lisa shared that with Kyle and Marcus, she texted with them “pretty much every day.” In her words,

Yep. Phone and text. So both of them are now in college at [college name redacted], but when each of them were in high school, I would see them usually once a week. Okay. I tried for once a week. There might be, you know, I might see them twice in a week, but at least once a week in general there might be times like if I was traveling that I missed, I always tried to stay in touch with them.

However, when asked about their contact since they left for college, she shared that it was less frequent for both of her mentors. A specific example Lisa talked about was how she wishes she had been more involved with Kyle once he left for college. In her words,

And so I wasn’t as in touch with [Kyle] in hindsight. I think I should have stayed more in touch with him because he didn't do good with his grades, failed classes in that first semester while he was [in college].

**Theme Four: Differences in Life Experiences**

Of all of the barriers or challenges of building the relationship discussed by the participants, the main theme that came through were the differences in life experiences. This section does not necessarily mean that the participant had challenges specifically with their mentee, but that there were situations where the mentor may have become aware of her own challenges when mentoring an SRN student. For example, Allison reflected on the differences she noticed when meeting Bree and how she perceived those challenges. She shared,
Well, I think one of the challenges with someone coming out of a very different background is to be sensitive enough that you come across as caring and yet not be too nosy. Do you know what I mean? Like I was trying, not that I did it well, but it's always a balance of trying to say, so what was that like for you? You know, just to get to know them better and also to be respectful of the fact that there's some stuff they don't want to share or you know.

Allison also noticed other differences when meeting Bree’s father and helping her move to college. She said,

Just like when I first went to take her [to college], I had my Toyota highlander, we know we could load a lot of stuff and [her dad] was like, wow, is that your car? And I was like, yeah. And he's like, wow, you know, I just really appreciate you taking her. Like I'd never be able to take my car and afford the gas to [city redacted] and back and he does have like a much older tiny, little car and I think he rides to work on a bike sometimes too because it's not always working and I just, I mean, you know. That's pretty humbling. So I try to always be sensitive to that. Like, you know, I'm not sure his comfort level even driving to [city redacted], I'm sure if maybe he is comfortable but I don't know. I don't know the last time he's gone anywhere, you know. So it's just sort of, it's an interesting dynamic.

Speaking more generally, Cindy shared that in the beginning the process is also a bit challenging. She shared,

It seems to be a pattern, you know, like with most of the kids that at first it's a little hard because, you know, we come from two different worlds between not just our age but how we grew up, how I grew up, she grew up. So I would say this time around it went…The first couple of times it's a little awkward anyway. Especially I think for them it seems that it's hard to open up at first until they get comfortable.
When interviewing Lisa, Lisa shared that Marcus had experienced traumatic losses in his life due to substance abuse. In her word she explained further,

So it was around, it was the anniversary of when his mother passed away and so me and my husband decided to take him out with us and go out. There was some friends that we know that we're having a little birthday party over at the mall and it was a restaurant, you know, they did serve alcohol, but it was a restaurant and there were other people there that had a drink. And um, and then some later that evening he, he seemed to start to get kind of like, I didn't know if he was upset or what, he was just got kind of quiet and withdrawn.

And then even when after we dropped him off, he sent me a text that said something along the lines of being around alcohol is a horrible thing to do to me, something like that. And so I was very upset because I was, you know...why have I done this, I caused him... I hurt his feelings and made him feel bad and all that. But the way he had said it was not nice at all because, me and my husband had really tried to bring him out. And because I kept going back over on my mind and like me and my husband never drank that night, nobody around us was drunk or anything like that. [...] So the next time I saw him I did talk to him about it and it's funny because I was so worried to talk to him about it and literally he was like, I know, I know. I'm sorry. And I know. And so after that, you know, it taught me a lot of things because it taught me that even that night I could have just understood it was overwhelming just because it was the anniversary and it doesn't matter what I had done that night. He was probably still going to be upset and it just helps, you know, because initially I was like, oh, I'm not going to be able to have, I can't be his mentor. He's not, you don't treat people like this, you don't do, you know, I'm
doing all this stuff in my head. And then once he said, no, I know you're right. And that was it. And not only that, I think that that just might have been, obviously it was him putting up a wall, putting this defense mechanisms and just pushing back and trying to protect himself. But once we had that little engagement with each other, we've never had any issues like that ever again.

Lisa, Allison and Cindy experienced different challenges within their relationship. In the end, they didn’t choose to let these challenges get in the way of the relationship. For Cindy, it was giving her mentees more time to become comfortable, rather than thinking the concern was within. For Lisa, it was making the decision to talk through the conflict with Marcus which turned out for the best. Lastly, for Allison it was reflecting inward and trying to make sure she was being sensitive enough to her mentee’s needs.

**Theme Five: Benefits of the Relationship**

**Someone to confide in.** The first subtheme called Someone to Confide In described how some participants felt their mentees benefitted by having someone they could confide and share information with. Cindy shares her experiences and the advantages her mentee receives for having someone to talk to about life’s challenges. Cindy shared,

> I would say within the, within the first few months, I would say within the first six months let me put it that way… I think where she, that's when she opened up about her family background. Like before I didn't ask if, you know, somebody wants to share that with me. It's great. I shared with them, you know, about my family, but for them it's, you know, for her it was a little bit harder probably. I would think about six months when she started telling me a little bit more about her family. […] [I know she trusts me because she’s] sharing more about her mental health, telling me that, you know, seeing someone
that she's taking medicine to help her mood or you know, whatever. I don't know what medicine she’s taking but she's seeking psychological help and help with, you know, anger management and things like that. So that's, that's pretty personal. So she would also tell me that certain therapists that you worked with did absolutely nothing for her until she met this one lady that you really, really liked, trusted, and that should get rid of her I guess, or the other way around. So when she would share that, that's pretty important. I think by being part of a team, they know they should feel comfortable enough to come to us with any problems that they have either, you know, living, living in a house environment with other people that originally they really don't even know, school, they have to deal with their families, they have to find work, they have to volunteer. They have a lot on their plate. So I think for us to listen and help and validate that they're doing great and come a long way, I think it's, I think helps them knowing that somebody believes in them and trust them and somebody really cares for them and uh, tries to be a role model which is something they never had, most of them anyway.

Ella further explained what components made a trusting relationship for her and Faith by saying,

I think that you can say anything to each other and not feel like it's going to be thrown back at you. I think that's the key. So I think just being honest and showing up is probably… for them to feel that whatever they say, isn’t going to be held against them. I think it’s important.

Additionally, Lisa shared that it’s important for her mentees to know they can come to her if they need to vent about issues that are bothering them. She said,

I think the mentors are very important because when the kids are in the program, some of them see it as a program and I think being having a mentor that's separate just allows
them to someone that for instance, they can come and talk to me, oh the curfew or oh the
house manager, to talk to me about problems that they're having within the program. Oh
they want me to go to tutoring too much or I have too many afterschool things that I have
to do. Things like that.

**Being there.** The participants also shared that being there for their mentee has been an
important aspect of their relationship because many of their mentee’s have been let down in the
past. Allison shared that by being there for Bree, it allowed Bree to trust others. She stated,

I think one of her big growth patterns in the last year and a half, two years since I've
known her is that she trusts people more and she particularly trust women more. She had
seemingly very few women in her life. I think she didn't really have a lot of relationships
with women, especially older women. She says she's never really had anyone help her out
for no reason. Um, she was like, you know, I just never met people like you or Ms. Vicky
who just help people out because they just want to help people out. [...] So what I'm
hoping is a lot of it is just being there. You know, I think a lot of these kids have very few
people who've just stuck around. And so what I'm hoping is that just kind of being in it
for the long haul.

Ella shared that during the four-hour mentor training, the trainers shared about things to expect
as a mentor. Ella said that part of relationship building was proving that she was going to be
there for Faith. Specifically Ella said,

We kind of started with the program and the best [generalization] was that [mentees] are
not going to expect you to show up the second time. So when you meet with them, this is
your mentor and everything and it’s like [is my mentor] really going to stick with this? I
think that's more about establishing the relationship-is knowing that they're really going
to show up the next time that they're really going to be there for you. I think when you proved that, look, I'm here for you. I'm not judging, you know.

Gina shared that with her mentee’s, being consistent is important especially when things aren’t easy. In her words,

I think that the mentor is more of a one on one consistent, you know, almost a pseudo parent. I know from attending a lot of the events and knowing several other mentors that the kids get really most of the time they get really, really attached to their mentors and really loved them and vice versa. You know, reassuring them often that I will be there for them, that, you know, I'm doing this kind of time consuming mentoring and emotional and energy-consuming mentoring because I really care and I want them to be successful and I want whatever's best for them in the long run, even if it's not easy for them in the short term.

Similarly, Lisa shared that being reliable and having her mentors know that she is there is a significant piece of their relationship. She reported,

Just being able to talk openly about what's bothering you and having trust to know that… for them to trust me emotionally, to help let them know that they can count on me. You know, that I'm reliable, that I'm someone who's always going to be there. I think like reliability is very important because the student has to know that that mentor is there for them. So I think being, you know, being like a family member that's there for them.

**Assistance with decision making.** Another subtheme that arose from all interviews was the importance of guiding their mentees and helping them make smart, healthy decisions for their future. In Allison’s interview she shared,
Well, I think the mentoring at its best is really like an important sounding board for their decision making process. [...] I do think like the mentorship program really lets them in on like, “oh, well, gosh, this is what someone who got a graduate degree, maybe this is, this is like a possibility for me” you know, because I mean [Bree] and I've even talked, I said, you know, even me, a lot of my ideas of jobs or from TV shows like, you know, how do you learn about a job until you do it, right? Or you have like the sort of silly notion from, you know, I don't know, I watch some TV show and like well maybe I'd be a doctor and that looks interesting. I'd be a lawyer... because there's so many jobs out there. How do you go about thinking about it? And so, um, I do think for most of them, the mentorship program really gives them sort of just like a real life view of working people...Some ideas of what that would look like. [...] I try not to be, even though she can be very specific about ideas, I'm afraid like anything I say might be taken like, “oh well Allison said I should go be a lawyer” or something. And like I don't know if that is the right call. So I was trying to say, “Well that can be cool. And if you did an internship it could help you understand if that is for you.” Like that's what I try and think of this like what's a really practical way to help them be successful is through internships or opportunities to see it like to make for all of us sort of these pipe dreams. Like well what does that actually really look like? What does that work look like? And will it really interests me or am I basing it on a TV show or something, you know. [...] The other practical thing is like don’t get pregnant. So like for her, like, you know, that will be a game changer if she goes that route, you know, no matter what you think having a kid is like, it's so much harder than you imagined. And she doesn't have the family support to
step in and some grandma basically be the mom. So then you're really, you'll never get, you'll never finished college, man. I don't scared [her] to death, but I scare.

Cindy shared that she tries to encourage Daisy to have better eating habits and teaches her about what’s healthy. Cindy said,

I try to eat healthier. So that's another thing we talk about a lot is about food and what's good, what's not good because she wants to know, yes. So my refrigerator-she go open it and say “too healthy there’s nothing in there I eat.”

Ella shared that her life experiences were useful to Faith because she didn’t have anyone in her life who was a business owner. When it came to things such as budgeting, Faith gained valuable experiences from Ella and encouragement to keep going even when thing are hard. In Ella’s words,

[Faith] said “you're a good role model” because I am a business woman. I owned a company, I am a very successful business woman. [...] We’ve sat down and we’ve done a budget, in fact she wants to not work her last semester. This summer she's taking her three classes, which is huge for her at a time and they're all online which drives me nuts. [...] So I said, look, I'll sit down with you and make a budget and figure out how much you need to get through these four months. [...] I think it's the support. Even Faith said “I never thought I was going to finish high school” and she’s certainly capable, totally capable of doing and which by the way, that's part of the program. These are kids who have the ability. They just need either a push support and Vicky always uses the line: You know that you don't give them a fish, you teach them to fish. It’s exactly that. You teach them a skill set, you teach them survival skills.
For Gina, an important aspect of mentorship was the guidance and bond shared between mentor and mentee. Gina stated,

Oh, I think mentoring is very, very important for the kids. It gives them, one non-staff person who is doing this on a purely volunteer basis. Um, just because we want to help and be kind of a companion, a pseudo parent to guide them. I think the mentor for them is in a completely different category than all the classes that they take and the staff relationships and the relationship they all have with Vicky and, you know, even their health managers.

Finally, during the interview with Lisa, she shared that because of the traumatic history of her mentees, she felt that it was her role to help support them, guide them, and give them hope. She said,

And so that's when it hit me. Like, okay, listen, I've got to figure out a way to get [Marcus] some hope, that there's an exciting life for him and so I managed to help him get a job with the [sports team name redacted] and it's only a part time job, but it's working on game day as a [job title redacted] and I got him introduced to a lot of the people who worked there and hopefully we know it's all up to him, but that's where his passion, his passion to work in the sports field, he wants to be in like either management, sports management or sports marketing and so now he's all amped up and example of school and he's got that and so. And so that's the same thing too that I'm working on with Kyle. Kyle is very creative, although he's a very hard worker. He's got a strong work ethic. He's very creative and he likes music and he likes rapping and he likes that kind of stuff. And so I was thinking, Gosh, where could he work at that would give him a taste of what's out there. And so I think Vicky is working on trying to get him an internship with
one of the local, like a TV station. So at least it's something, even if it's filmmaking, that kind of movie production, you know. [...] We are outside the structure, so we're just here to do fun stuff, builds relationships, but you know, be a sounding board to help them figure out how, you know, like let's say they have that, you know, something with Ms. Vicky that’s bothering them. Then we talk about it. Remember Vicky is doing it because of this and this and this and helping them understand things like, you know.

The theme, Relationship Benefits helped describe the three main ways in which participants shared they felt the mentoring component was supporting their mentee. Whether it was having someone they could rely on no matter what, having someone they could openly share personal information with or have someone to assist with life decisions, participants felt that their relationship with their mentee was making a positive impact on their lives and brought them closer together.

**Theme Six: Be Patient and Stay Committed**

The last theme that came through the interviews was the advice that current mentors would want future mentors to know before mentoring an SRN student. Cindy thought that future mentors need to be patient and non-judgmental, as their mentees have often experienced things in their lives that a mentor might not fully understand yet. In Cindy’s words,

Be patient and understanding, because at first, it's very different. Somebody that is sort of from a completely different background…and do not expect gratitude right away. We do a lot of things for our students and they don’t really say thank you or they don't show any appreciation. It's just because they really don't know what to do with it at first because nobody ever really does anything for them except for wanting something back. So they are very apprehensive at first to open up because I think a lot of the kids seemed like they
had abandonment issues. People come in and out of their lives all the time, so why should all of a sudden somebody they don't know that looks nothing like them that comes from a different background. Why should they stick with them? So just I would tell them just to be very, very patient and very understanding and it's a process that eventually falls into place. It’s very, very foreign to kids who, I mean, whose most of their own parents never, never helped and never looked after them. A lot of them were abandoned and lived elsewhere with no family members, friends or on the street. So to them, someone willing to help is very foreign to them. [...] And I would just tell them I have two hands, one to help myself and another one that helps somebody else and that's it actually… And they really don't realize how much you know, I have learned and how much it really it changes you and, and your perspective on, you know, to not be judgmental. That's another thing, I would definitely tell somebody that's new to it and wants to become a mentor. Don't be judgmental.

Ella provided several pieces of advice for future mentors. She said,

Show up. [...] I think it's treating them like normal people. I think it's letting them know what's appropriate, what's not appropriate. [...] I think establishing that and I think being genuine, and I think for people who are parents-do what you can do to your own child.

For Gina, she felt that it’s important for other mentors to be patient and not give up. Gina said,

Be patient, I think in capital letters is what I would say. I expect that there will be some obstacles that you'll have to work together with your student to overcome. Um, don't give up on them because all of these kids without exception have just been through hellacious living circumstances, abandonment, um, difficulties that we can't even imagine. And it's just so important not to get discouraged too quickly and stick with them. I just seen so
many cases with other mentors and mentees where the, the kids were just so angry and resistant and mistrustful and closed at first and with patience and affection and time together, um, the mentors got through to them and now they have, you know, really close loving relationships. You know, I've heard these kids say over and over, I love my mentor, I really love this person. And um, you know, I know many of them like I do with Jenna, you know, stick with them into college. I honestly wish she worked closer than [location redacted]. I had hoped she might go to [location redacted] because it's just a couple hours away, but she loves where she is.

Lisa felt that people who are considering being a mentor need to be careful and honest with themselves when making the commitment to become a mentor. In Lisa’s words,

Make your commitment and don't waver from your commitment. If you can't do it, be honest about that. Tell them up front. Because to make it work you have to be able to create a solid relationship with your student. [...] Especially with Marcus, sticking in there through that little rough patch and then because, you know, we've gotten closer over the past years than I ever thought at the beginning I didn't because now I realize he was just holding back a lot and kind of being withdrawn even though I couldn't tell because he would talk about stuff. But by me just sticking in there with him, it's allowed us to become, you know, he's a part of my family, you know, he knows my parents, you know, as my son and my husband, my step kids, he's like part of the family. It's awesome.

Overall, the results of the interviews shed light on how SRN mentors build relationships with their mentees. For some mentors, it was easy from the beginning. For others, it took time and patience to build a relationship. All of the mentors in this study shared various strategies that helped them connect with their mentee. Some mentors faced challenges within their relationship
but overcame those challenges and grew closer to their mentees. Finally, mentors shared the biggest piece of advice which was to be patient and stay committed to being a mentor.
The purpose of my study was to gain a better understanding of how mentors build successful trusting relationships with homeless youth. I used a qualitative design to allow participants to reflect on how they built a trusting relationship with their mentee in their own words. Specifically, mentors shared about whether or not they felt there was initial trust within the relationship or whether it took time for the mentee to fully trust and open up to them. Participants used many strategies and activities that helped them build the relationship with their mentee. Specifically, participants took on parental duties, met important people in their mentees life, spent quality time with them, shared personal stories, and engaged in fun outings together. Although some participants faced relationship challenges along their journey, they often worked through these challenges with their mentee and grew closer. When participants shared about the benefits of the relationship for their mentee, the benefits clearly outweighed the challenges. Specifically, mentors shared that their mentees found someone they could confide in, rely on consistently, and help guide them with important decisions. My study is the first to provide insight into how mentors of SRN create a healthy, trusting relationship with homeless youth. In the limited body of research, my study is also beneficial because it shows how mentors in a formal mentoring program built a successful, healthy relationship with their mentee.

In this chapter, I describe the major findings of my study, including how the six theme
were derived through the data analysis and connect to the theoretical frameworks, mentorship and attachment theory. Below I describe each of these themes and how they fit with previous literature. Finally, I describe the implications of my study for research, practice, limitations, and directions for future research.

**The Importance of Time and Patience**

The first theme identified, Finding Commonalities, represents participants’ reflections of initially meeting their mentees and trying to figure out shared commonalities. This was foundational for participants when getting to know their mentee. It appeared that the relationship developed at a faster rate for participants who were able to identify commonalities with their mentee quickly or shared similar personalities. Similarly it seemed to take time and patience for the participants who described their mentee as reserved or quiet to figure out what strategies they would use to help their mentee open up and feel more comfortable. One participant in particular described the initial meetings in general as awkward and it simply takes time for mentees to get comfortable.

This finding appeared to be consistent with Belsky and Cassidy (1994) in that youth who have experienced guardians as inaccessible or inconsistent are less likely to see the purpose of turning to others in times of stress. The participants in my study may have been feeling the effects of this on their new relationships. While there are a variety of factors that might contribute to why mentees might be less likely to turn to their mentor, my study found that for some mentees, it may have been their past experiences that lead them to initially be more reserved with their mentor. For example, Gina shared that Jenna had many people claim that they would be there for her but let her down in her life.
Additionally, the current theme is consistent with the challenge of creating a relationship with an unfamiliar adult when considering the findings of Mendez and colleagues (2017) and their research to understand the life circumstances of homeless youth. To reiterate, the authors discussed their youth participants’ experiences with abuse, not being prioritized by their caregivers and the normalization of turmoil in family life. However, the authors also found that their participants had other adults or activities that allowed them to experience relief from the overwhelming stresses of life. In my study, all mentors felt that they eventually built a trusting relationship with their mentee, regardless of whether their mentee was reserved or more open to the relationship.

Additionally, Ahrens and colleagues (2011) found a few similarities to themes one, two, three, and four, which will be discussed further in the sections below. In regard to theme one specifically, a finding from their study related to the youth’s style of communication. For example, youth who presented as confident and secure with themselves during the interviewing tended to report forming relationships with adults much easier. In contrast, some youth displayed nonverbal cues (e.g. body language) and/or language that indicated an initial distrust of the interviewer.

These participants reported that it took them a long time to develop important relationships with adults (“Automatically my mind is pretty much set and don't get close to nobody, let nobody in”) but more secure youths tended to report noteworthy impacts of the relationships once they finally formed. With this study in mind, it may be beneficial for individuals who want to be a mentor to be aware of findings such as this. This will allow individuals to understand that the pacing the relationship is not the primary responsibility of the
mentor. Rather, being patient and giving the relationship time to develop will assist the mentee to also feel comfortable and respond positively to the mentoring relationship.

**Building Positive Relationships**

The second theme identified, “Strategies for Establishing Relationships” included activities and strategies used by participants that positively impacted the relationship. These included subthemes that were identified by some or all of the participants. Participants engaged in activities such as taking on parental responsibilities, meeting important people in their mentee’s life, spending quality down time together, engaging in entertaining or educational activities, and sharing personal stories. These subthemes were highly important because each one described how mentors got closer to their mentees. For example by taking on parental responsibilities, participants demonstrated for their mentees that they were willing to do things that a caregiver would most likely do for child. Some participants in this study also had the opportunity to meet their mentee’s friends or family that added another layer to their mentor-mentee relationship. Participants were able to have a more personal understanding of their mentee’s life and who they find important after meeting their mentee’s friends or family.

Additionally, participants shared about quality time they spent at their homes with their mentee. While going out to the theatre, sporting events, or museums were more formal ways to have fun and share new experiences, spending time at the participant’s home was an experience that was more personal for the mentee and an opportunity for them to meet the participant’s family or pets. Finally, sharing personal stories appeared to help disarm mentees, offer guidance, and help build trust within the relationship.

My study found consistencies with Liang, Spencer, Brogan and Corral (2008) when examining salient characteristics about mentor-mentee relationships for adolescent and early
adult aged students. The authors also found important findings related to the benefits of the mentor-mentee relationship that will further be discussed in relation to theme 4.

Highlights of their study indicated participants in all three groups (middle, high, college age students) described the mentoring support they received occurred during (or was enhanced by) fun activities. Middle school students described sharing field trips with mentors such as the movies, the mall or the park. To the college participants, sharing fun activities with mentors continued to be important. Whether spending an afternoon together outdoors or a multi-day trip, these activities facilitated the mentoring process. Moreover, participants expressed the importance of self-disclosures; they felt “special and trusted” when mentors also shared their own successes and failures. High school and college youth also described valuing a nonjudgmental approach that encouraged their own independence. In my study, mentors also found it important to engage in fun activities and share personal stories to make a connection.

Additionally, my study found similarities with Ahrens and colleagues (2011) who sought to identify factors that influence the formation, quality, and duration of mentoring relationships. The participants in their study indicated that mentors tended to provide a lot of emotional support guidance and advice on various issues and concerns. Other youth from their study reported that these adults provided normal experiences that otherwise they may have not had, such as camping or attending an important graduation. Some also indicated that non-parental adults had taken on a parental role in their lives. My study found similar findings in that mentors felt they were sometimes a pseudo-parent for their mentees and were willing to do things to take care of their mentees much like what a caregiver would do.

Additional adult characteristics that were perceived as facilitating ongoing relationships include adaptability to the youth's changing needs and demonstrating accountability. Many
participants indicated that they tended to maintain relationships with adults who incorporated the participant’s interests. In my study, the basis for choosing various activities was also related to each individual relationship. For example, mentors chose activities that aligned with the interests of their mentee which was discovered through communication.

Finally, Rhodes (2006) mentorship theory played an important role when making connections to my study, current theory and the effects of the mentoring relationship. Mentorship theory poses three processes, two of which will be discussed in this section and the third in a section below. Rhodes (2006) mentorship theory proposes the idea that mentoring affects youth through three interrelated processes: The first process suggests that mentoring relationships provide youth with opportunities for fun and escape from stresses. It also provides a corrective emotional experience that may improve youths’ other social relationships. Moreover, mentors help validate that positive relationships with adults are possible. In my study, the participants’ strategies appear to align with this process in that the corrective experiences that were shared between mentor and mentee allowed each mentor to develop a secured relationship. Spending time with their mentee provided exposure and opportunities to learn prosocial skills that may have generalized to other social relationships. For example, one of the participants, Allison, shared that Bree was able to open up to other women in her life. Mentors demonstrated that positive relationships are possible with other non-parental adults through sharing stories, engaging in parental duties, spending quality time together at the mentor’s home, meeting their friends and family and doing fun activities. It can be argued that mentees did receive corrective emotional experiences that assisted with emotional regulation and social skills through the relationship. In some instances these skills came from overcoming challenges and learning from their mentor-mentee relationship.
The second process of mentorship theory involves engaging in new opportunities for learning, intellectual challenge, and promoting educational success. In my study, this process was observed when participants exposed their mentee to new activities or facilitated learning through those activities. For example, dining out provided exposure to new foods and opened up the conversation of healthy eating habits. Other examples include taking their mentees to a museum or pottery class. These are examples of how mentors taught new skills or introduced new information to their mentees to expand their knowledge. Other mentors discussed taking interest in their mentee’s academics and school life. Mentors also provided guidance on a wide range of topics in their mentees life such as pregnancy, career options, and family concerns. Mentors provided guidance on these topics at a crucial period in their mentees’ lives as they moved into college. Having someone to challenge their thinking and provide opinions on careers, family, health, and pregnancy to influenced healthy behaviors. Mentors also provided support and advice on academic goals. For example, Allison and Ella discussed internship and career ideas with their mentees to give them an idea of what careers they might want to pursue. Finally, Lisa shared that looking back she wished that she had continued to support her one of her mentees when he started college because he did not do well academically. Although only one participant noted this, it’s important to state that even though mentees were becoming more independent, it may be necessary to continue to support them.

**Consistent Involvement**

The third theme “Text Daily, Together Weekly” summarizes the frequency in which participants had contact with their mentees. While the SRN program does give guidelines for having regular contact via text/phone and weekly meetings, some mentors and mentees saw each other more frequently than that. Ahrens and colleagues (2011) found similar findings when
referring back to the literature. Specifically, most of the youth they interviewed in their study had some instrument in place that allowed them to keep regular contact with their adults. These included regular contact attempts by the adult and/or the youth. The frequency and type of contact (e.g., in-person, texting,) varied from relationship to relationship. In my study, all of the participants discussed that they had more contact with their mentees while they were in high school, but as they moved into college, the contact was less frequent. A salient point that one participant stated was that even though her mentees went off to college, in hindsight she wished she had kept more contact with them to guide them academically. Furthermore, Karcher (2005) examined the effect of mentors’ attendance on their mentees. Karcher (2005) supported my study because mentors who were consistent with their attendance had higher connectedness scores than mentors who did not consistently meet with their mentees. A clear finding was that when mentors were inconsistent, their inconsistency had a negative effects on their mentees. This supports the guideline and frequency set forth by SRN and the mentors to keep in contact regularly.

**Overcoming Obstacles**

The fourth theme Differences in Life Experiences described the challenges that the participants faced with their mentees due to having different life experiences. The ways the participants overcame these obstacles were of course different because each problem was unique but regardless of the hurdles, mentors described how they approached the issue to move the journey forward with their mentee. The importance of this theme is that the pairs seemed to become closer after the problem and mentees learned better ways to handle conflict-resolution. This attention to the relationship and motivation to work through the hurdles might be considered to be similar to the attunement that Pryce (2012) discusses in her study. To reiterate, the term
attunement was identified as describing “the connection between “therapist” and “client” that goes further than empathy to provide a unity of interpersonal contact and the facilitation of psychological healing” (Erskine, 1998). Pryce (2012) stated that having a higher sense of attunement facilitated exploration, genuineness, and openness in the relationship. In my study, the mentors reflected on how to solve the relationship challenges and their genuine care for their mentees may be considered as attunement. Based on Pryce’s (2012) study, attunement represented a strategy that required mentors to be willing to adapt their expectations and aims for the relationship based on youth needs.

Mentors expressed hope that such interest would assist the youth in gaining comfort with the mentor and engaging more fully in the relationship. In my study, participants cared deeply about their mentees and persevered when challenges came up. Each challenge was unique depending on the relationship. Allison needed to reflect on herself and ensure she was being sensitive enough for Bree’s needs. In Lisa’s case, she may have had to take a different approach to work things out with Kyle because he had lost a parent due to alcoholism. Lastly, Cindy mentioned that she needed to be aware of her mentee’s comfort level in order to continue to build a close relationship. The participants in my study demonstrated attunement by being sensitive, aware, and willing to adapt to their mentee’s needs. Mentors took a personal interested in their mentees and this helped them establish a lasting relationship.

**The Benefits of a Trusting Mentor**

The fifth theme, Benefits of the Relationship, described how participants felt that their mentees benefitted from the mentoring relationship. The three main subthemes that came through this theme were having someone to confide in, being reliable, and assisting with decision making. This theme was valuable in seeing what mentors thought about their relationship with
their mentee and how their mentee was benefitting from the relationship. Participants shared that their mentee’s could tell them details of their lives and they would not judge them or use it against them. It was important to the participants to a relationship where mentee’s felt safe to be themselves and share who they were. Additionally, participants shared that they demonstrated with action and communication about their commitments to their mentee. For one participant, their dedication to their mentee even allowed their mentee to develop better relationship with other women. Finally, participants discussed that they provided advice or guidance on life decisions, career options, and other things to consider as their mentees moved on into college.

In my study, participant reflections aligned well with Mendez and colleagues (2017) and Randle’s (2016) findings which were both from the perspectives of SRN youth. In Mendez’s study, one of the themes that revealed itself through the interviews was, saving graces, which referred to the people or activities that allowed the participants to feel relief from the pressure in their lives. This theme shared similarities to my study participants because mentors discussed that having someone to confide in allowed them to destress and engage in fun activities.

Likewise, Randle’s (2016) study had four themes that were consistent with the findings in my study. The theme, always there on my side, described the support system that was created by the SRN staff and mentors. The theme, you learn to trust, was seen as being initially unsure of the intentions of SRN staff and mentors, but over time learning to trust them and ask for assistance. The theme, the point is getting back up, was seen as managing the setbacks they have had since entering SRN and how the ongoing support of SRN staff and mentors helped them. Finally the last theme that was consistent was, better ways to deal, which was described as learning more adaptive coping strategies.
These four themes discovered by Randle (2016) clearly aligned with my study because they describe how SRN youth benefit from the mentoring relationship. Participants in my study described how again and again, they demonstrated their reliability and commitment to their mentees. This was demonstrated by having conversations about being there for them and what that means and through actions. Mentees who were initially reserved were able to open up and be accepting to learning new things and other viewpoints through mentor commitment. Participants were emotional support systems who listened and allowed their mentees to confide in them. Participants also described providing guidance for their mentors in order to motivate and push them to make positive and healthy decisions.

My study findings align with Sale, Bellamy, Springer, and Wang (2008) who examined the relationships between prevention service providers and youth. What they found was that youth experienced greater improvement in social skills when youth perceived adult providers to be more trusting and empathetic. This appears to be related to my study findings in that when mentors provided a relationship with guidance, reliability and confidentiality, mentees were able to develop better coping and social skills.

Furthermore, DuBois and Silverthorn (2005) found that high school students who reported having a natural mentor (extended family members, neighbors, teachers, and coaches) were more likely to display favorable outcomes such as increased attendance in school and graduating high school, improved psychological well-being and health. Although these findings demonstrate the potential of natural mentoring relationships and the positive impact they have on youth, my study helped support the idea that a formal mentoring program can be highly beneficial as well. Specifically, the participants in my study also discussed how they assisted their mentees with making healthy choices related to food, pregnancy, financial budgeting and
conflict-resolution. Mentors also showed interest in their mentees academics and supported them with their career goals.

In regard to mentorship theory, Rhodes (2006) third and final process discussed that mentoring affects youth by encouraging positive identity development by serving as role models and contributing to their identity by shifting their conceptualizations of who they are and who they want to be in the future. The participants in my study discussed how they were good sounding boards for important decision making. Additionally, mentors went above and beyond to ensure they were providing their mentee with the best advice and skills that they needed when looking into potential career options, internships and financial budgeting for college. Mentors also had their own successful experiences with graduate school or owning a business for example and having someone with these experiences was a valuable resource for mentees to ask questions and consider what they wanted to do for their futures. Having a mentor with these experience will continue to benefit mentees in the future if they consider opening their own businesses or continue their education. Furthermore, the findings of my study are also supported by Bowlby (2005) and Ainsworth’s (1989) attachment theory in that mentors were able to establish a secure-based relationship allowing mentees to find protection, comfort and security with their mentors. By being dependable, supportive, and understanding, mentee were able to develop further knowledge, skills and motivations to succeed.

**Tips for Future Mentors**

The sixth and final theme was termed, Be Patient and Stay Committed, as the main piece of advice that current SRN mentors would give to future SRN mentors. The mentors who participated in this study have been mentors for at least 1.5 years. Participants shared that it’s important for people to know that students in the SRN program have been through experiences
that most people haven’t had to experience in their lives. For homeless youth, mentors also discussed the importance of making the commitment and sticking to it. Randle (2016) found that homeless youth have often been without consistent adults. However, participants found that when they stayed committed and patient with their mentee, their mentee was able to develop a close and lasting bond with them, allowing them to benefit in many ways from the relationship.

Implications for Future Research

My study is the first to provide insight into how mentors of SRN create a healthy, trusting relationship with homeless students. In the limited body of research, my study add to the literature that formal mentoring programs can be healthy and successful programs that have a positive social, emotional and cognitive impact. Prior to conducting my study, there was limited research that looked at how mentors of a formal mentoring program build relationships with homeless youth. Many studies examined natural mentoring relationships (e.g., family, coaches, teachers, etc.) or students who are not homeless. My study extends the literature by demonstrating a variety of strategies mentors used to build connections with this population and how they overcame challenges together. My research also gave a voice to formal mentors who shared important advice for those who work or mentor homeless youth. Mentors in my study were valued by their mentees and had deep connections that continued to last even as their mentees moved on into college or job positions.

Implications for School Psychology

My study provided insight into how school psychologists and other members of the student services team can create and maintain supportive relationships with homeless students. First, finding commonalities with students who are homeless may help them feel that they are not as different from the students and adults around them. Furthermore, school staff may want to
consider strategies such as sharing personal stories, assisting with personal needs and/or providing guidance on different topics may help build stronger connections with homeless youth on campus. Finally, having a regular routine to say hello and acknowledge students who are at-risk and homeless may help them feel that they are valued and an important part of the student body.

Limitations

Several limitations of my study must be discussed. First, with the approval of Vicki Sokolik, the study recruitment flyer was sent out to current SRN mentors a total of four times over the course of four months. Within that time frame, six individuals reached out for interviews for the study. One participant moved and was unable to participate in the study. Additionally, there were certain inclusion criteria that were going to be used for the study (e.g., must have 6-month to one-year relationship with mentee). However, because of the small sample of mentors who followed up from the flyer, there was no specific inclusion criteria used. Another limitation that I noted was that I purposely asked open-ended questions and permitted participants to share their stories. I asked clarifying questions as needed but participants had the permission to share as much or as little as they liked. This meant that some mentors spoke for much longer periods of time than other mentors. Finally, to strength the credibility of my study, member checking could have been done with the participants in my study once interviews were completed to verify the transcripts and confirm that their statements were answered to the best of their ability and that there was no further information that they wanted to share.

Directions for Future Research

The results of my study provide evidence of how mentors built successful and trusting relationships with homeless youth. It also provides support that formal mentoring programs can
be successful with dedicated mentors and students in need of a caring adult in their lives. However, much remains to be learned about the differences between building successful relationships between boys and girls in formal mentoring programs. Additionally, my study was the first to look at the relationship with formal mentors and homeless youth mentees. Future research may want to consider looking at how the mentoring relationship with this population develops and changes over time. Further research can examine what other supports there are for homeless youth, such as school-based services. While formal mentoring programs in the community are valuable, having these programs in school may reach a wider range of students. However, programs may need to be tailored for school settings as certain aspects of a community program may not be feasible for a school setting (e.g. having students at school staff’s house). This would help understand the benefits and supports that are offered for homeless youth in schools.

Summary

The objective of my study was to understand how mentors of a formal mentoring program (Starting Right, Now) build relationship with homeless youth. Participants were asked to share their experiences in individual interviews that described the initial meetings, the strategies used to connect, the challenges, the benefits and the advice they would give to future mentors. Their stories offered many insights into how a caring and genuine adult can work with students who have experienced many hardships and create a trusting and loving relationship. Although the findings of my study will not generalize to other formal mentoring programs, my study demonstrates that when homeless youth have someone they can trust and count on, they can develop positive relationships moving forward, find hope in having a positive future and know they have someone looking out for them.
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Appendix A: IRB Approval Letter

4/19/2018

Sheena Hera
Educational and Psychological Studies
10409 goshawk drive
Riverview, FL 33578

RE: Expedited Approval for Initial Review
IRB#: Pro00034343
Title: How Mentors at Starting Right Now Build Relationships with Homeless Youth: A Qualitative Analysis

Study Approval Period: 4/18/2018 to 4/18/2019

Dear Ms. Hera:

On 4/18/2018, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed and APPROVED the above application and all documents contained within, including those outlined below.

Approved Item(s):
Protocol Document(s):
USF Protocol

Consent/Assent Document(s)*:
Updated Consent Form 4.18.docx.pdf

*Please use only the official IRB stamped informed consent/assent document(s) found under the "Attachments" tab. Please note, these consent/assent documents are valid until the consent document is amended and approved.

It was the determination of the IRB that your study qualified for expedited review which includes activities that (1) present no more than minimal risk to human subjects, and (2) involve only procedures listed in one or more of the categories outlined below. The IRB may review research through the expedited review procedure authorized by 45CFR46.110 and 21 CFR 56.110. The research proposed in this study is categorized under the following expedited review
(6) Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.

(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

As the principal investigator of this study, it is your responsibility to conduct this study in accordance with IRB policies and procedures and as approved by the IRB. Any changes to the approved research must be submitted to the IRB for review and approval via an amendment. Additionally, all unanticipated problems must be reported to the USF IRB within five (5) calendar days.

We appreciate your dedication to the ethical conduct of human subject research at the University of South Florida and your continued commitment to human research protections. If you have any questions regarding this matter, please call 813-974-5638.

Sincerely,

John Schinka, Ph.D., Chairperson
USF Institutional Review Board
Appendix B: Invitation Flyer for Participation in Study

Volunteers Wanted to Participate in Research Study

Are you a mentor at SRN?

Have you mentored a student for six months to one year?

The purpose of the study is to examine how mentors at Starting Right Now build relationships with homeless youth. This study is being conducted by a graduate student at the University of South Florida. If you have any questions about the research, please feel free to contact the student's supervisor, Dr. Linda Raffaele Mendez, Associate Professor, School Psychology Program, at raffaele@usf.edu or 813-695-0541.

Text or Email: Sheenahera@mail.usf.edu (813) 326-8707
Appendix C: Interview Questions

1. Let’s think back to the beginning of your relationship with your mentee. What was it like when you were first getting to know each other?
   a. How did you attempt to establish a relationship?
   b. What kinds of activities did you do together?
   c. How often did you see each other, email, or talk by phone?
   d. What barriers or challenges did you perceive? Why were there barriers?

2. How long did it take you to establish a trusting relationship with your mentee? What does a trusting relationship look like with a mentee? How do you think you created that?

3. What were the biggest hurdles you faced when building trust in the relationship with your student? How did you attempt to overcome those hurdles?

4. Many SRN students go on to accomplish things that most people could never imagine that a formerly homeless student could accomplish. How do you see the mentoring component of SRN contributing to the positive outcomes of the program?
   a. How do mentors foster success?
   b. What advice would you give to someone who was just beginning to mentor a new SRN student?
Appendix D: IRB Consent Form

Informed Consent to Participate in Minimum Risk Research

Study Title: How Mentors at Starting Right Now Build Relationships with Homeless Youth: A Qualitative Analysis

Overview: You are being asked to take part in a research study. The information in this document should help you to decide. The sections in this Overview provide the basic information about the study. More detailed information may be provided in the remainder of the document.

Study Staff: This study is being led by Sheena Hera, who is a graduate student at the University of South Florida. This person is called the Principal Investigator. She is being guided in this research by Linda Raffaele Mendez, Ph.D. Other approved research staff may act on behalf of the Principal Investigator.

Study Details: This study is being conducted at the participants home or an agreed upon location. The purpose of the study is to examine how mentors at Starting Right Now build relationships with homeless youth. Findings may inform school districts, educators and organizations of how to better support students who are homeless in meaningful ways. Your
participation will require one session lasting between 30-45 minutes of your time in which you will answered semi-structured interview questions posed by the primary investigator.

Participants: You are being asked to take part because you are a mentor at Starting Right, Now and have mentored a student in the program between sixmonths and 1 year. There will be 12 participants.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation is voluntary. You do not have to participate and may stop your participation at any time. There will be no penalties or loss of benefits or opportunities if you do not participate or decide to stop once you start.

Benefits, Compensation, and Risk: We do not know if you will receive any benefit from your participation. There is no cost to participate. This research is considered minimal risk. Minimum risk means that study risks are the same as the risks you face in daily life.

Confidentiality: Even if we publish the findings from this study, we will keep your study information private and confidential. Anyone with the authority to look at your records must keep them confidential.

Why are you being asked to take part?

We are asking you to take part in this research study because you are a mentor at the organization, Starting Right Now.

Study Procedures:

If you take part in this study, you will be asked to meet with the principal investigator for one interview session. In this session, you will be asked to read and sign the IRB consent form and complete a demographics questionnaire before beginning the interview. Once the interview is
completed, follow-up clarifying questions may be asked via phone call or email if necessary. No new questions will be posed to you.

The interview session will take between 30 minutes to 45 minutes to complete. The interview location will be a location agreed upon between you and the primary investigator. Interviews will be held during April, May or June.

An audio recording device will be used to record the interviews. The principal investigator will listen and transcribe the interviews alone. The principal investigator and the thesis director will have access to the recordings. Research assistants will have access to the interview transcriptions with the pseudonym names to protect the identity of all participants. The recordings will be maintained for 5 years from when the final report is submitted according to IRB policy. At that time, the interviews will be deleted off the audio recording device.

**Total Number of Participants**

About 12 individuals will take part in this study at USF.

**Risks or Discomfort**

This research is considered to be minimal risk. That means that the risks associated with this study are the same as what you face every day. There are no known additional risks to those who take part in this study.

**Compensation**

Participants will not be compensated.

**Costs**

It will not cost you anything to take part in the study.

**Privacy and Confidentiality**

We will keep your study records private and confidential. Certain people may need to see
your study records. Anyone who looks at your records must keep them confidential. These individuals include:

- The research team, including the Principal Investigator, study coordinator, and all other research staff.
- Certain government and university people who need to know more about the study, and individuals who provide oversight to ensure that we are doing the study in the right way.
- Any agency of the federal, state, or local government that regulates this research.
- The USF Institutional Review Board (IRB) and related staff who have oversight responsibilities for this study, including staff in USF Research Integrity and Compliance.
- The sponsors of this study and contract research organization

Your information collected as part of the research, even if identifiers are removed, will NOT be used or distributed for future research studies.

We may publish what we learn from this study. If we do, we will not include your name. We will not publish anything that would let people know who you are.

**You can get the answers to your questions, concerns, or complaints**

If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about this study, or experience an unanticipated problem, call Sheena Hera at (813) 326-8707.

If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this study, or have complaints, concerns or issues you want to discuss with someone outside the research, contact the USF IRB at (813) 974-5638 or by email at RSC-H-IRB@usf.edu.
While we are conducting the research study, we cannot let you see or copy the research information we have about you. After the research is completed, you have a right to see the information about you, as allowed by USF policies. You will receive a signed copy of this form.

Consent to Take Part in this Research Study

I freely give my consent to take part in this study. I understand that by signing this form I am agreeing to take part in research. I have received a copy of this form to take with me.

________________________________________________________________________

Signature of Person Taking Part in Study       Date

________________________________________________________________________

Printed Name of Person Taking Part in Study

Statement of Person Obtaining Informed Consent

I have carefully explained to the person taking part in the study what he or she can expect from their participation. I confirm that this research subject speaks the language that was used to explain this research and is receiving an informed consent form in their primary language. This research subject has provided legally effective informed consent.
Signature of Person obtaining Informed Consent       Date

Printed Name of Person Obtaining Informed Consent
Appendix E: Participant Demographic Information Form

Please complete the following questions so I may describe the demographic characteristics of the Mentors in my sample.

1. Pseudonym you prefer ______________________________________________________

2. Pseudonym for your mentee ________________________________________________

3. What is your age? __________

4. What is the age of your mentee? __________

5. What is the gender of your mentee? __________

6. How would you describe your ethnicity? _________________________________

7. Is this the first time mentoring a student at Starting Right Now? ____________
   If no, how many other students have you mentored? ________________

8. How long have you been a mentor at Starting Right Now?

9. What made you choose to become a mentor?
   ___________________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________________

If further information is needed, what is the best way to contact you?

Phone:

Email:
# Appendix F: Excel Coding and Theme Process

## A Initial Meeting

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<td>Interview 1: Um, my mentee is, was very quiet. She was very reserved when I met her, her um, she was very shy and she had to, like a lot of things in her nose and she gave off like sort of, I would say like a little bit of a gruff exterior. Um, and so, um, because I'm such a talker, like I just wasn't sure. With her, I had mentored someone else before and she was an even talker and so I was trying to judge, you know, whether comfort level was with someone who, you know, is trying to get to know her but without being invasive. ... For my personality it was really nice, but also was trying to be considered the fact that she, um, seemed like, you know, more cautious obviously and also just quieter about things.</td>
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<td>Interview 2: Especially when I think of them it seems that it's hard to open up at first and then get comfortable. But then overall it went well, you know, we've been pretty fast, I would say like a month. At all, you know, she wasn't maybe opening up until then I would just talk about, you know, how I grew up in Europe, what it was like to grow up in Europe. It's different here and just where</td>
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<tr>
<td>Self-Care/Parental Duties</td>
<td>Dining</td>
<td>Educational/Entertainment and Dining</td>
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<td>Interview 1: I'm trying to think of some of the stuff we do... Um... some of the stuff, what you find as a mentor, like they need to go to appointments like an OB/GYN.</td>
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<td>Interview 1: Um, so we did some of those, appointments and then we would just go mane, like run an errand and just, you know, it just was just kind of random, but I would also do some stuff on the side, like, you know, go to the library or go to the gym or, you know, hang out with my friends.</td>
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<td>Interview 1: So I'm trying to think of some of the stuff we do... Um, some of the stuff, what you find as a mentor, like they need to go to appointments like an OB/GYN.</td>
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<td>Interview 2: She likes to go for walks. So we went to Bailey Park and to play soccer. What's good about it, she's got a Silence at 8.</td>
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<td>Interview 3: Once I took her entire load of laundry and I washed all her clothes for her.</td>
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<td>Interview 3: Usually it's eating and it's usually easy. It's favorite meal, I was like, can we go out?</td>
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<td>Interview 3: Then I had an extra ticket to the theater, so I invited her to go to the theater.</td>
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<td>Interview 3: Like I said, her roommate graduated so and</td>
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<td>Interview 3: She likes to go for walks. So we went to Bailey Park and to play soccer. What's good about it, she's got a Silence at 8.</td>
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<td>Interview 4: It's more having him over here for dinner, watch a movie, hang out with the dogs, go to a restaurant. Um, so you know, it's just really been taking him to establish the relationship.</td>
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<td>Interview 4: I was very casual and stuck to the script, kind of with Jenna being a girl especially. And you know, we've gone to Bailey Park and to play soccer. What's good about it, she's got a Silence at 8.</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Interview 5: Well, we would go out to eat a lot. We would sometimes take them to get hairstyles at the times because that's important.</td>
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### Daily (via text/phone)

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<th>A</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Usually text, daily</td>
<td>Bree in college</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Yeah. And it's really as needed or sometimes just how you doing. But I know she's busy</td>
<td>Bree in college</td>
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### Weekly (in person)

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<tr>
<td>Well at first, cause she was still in high school. So she did have more time, but it's always busy. Let's say we started that day. Well, once a week is perfect. Now, I probably see her a couple times a week because she's busier now with school, and not anymore, you know, in the program it's once a week that they see you. But that once a week, we still, sometimes we'll talk for a bit. And I think as we moved on, I'd say once a week.</td>
<td>Daisy in college</td>
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<td>Um, we're pretty much required to do something with them at least once a week and it's not to be in touch by text or phone or email or whatever. Listen to her. Yeah, I mean, now that Jenna was in college, we're not in nearly as close touch. I mean, now that Jenna was in college, we're not in nearly as close touch.</td>
<td>Henry and Jenna in college</td>
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### Other

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<td>Yes, phone and text. So both of them are now in college at HCC, but when they were at their college, they would meet us once a week. Okay, I tried to do that. Sometimes not a lot. There might be, you know, they meet twice a week, at least twice a week in general. Sometimes there might be times like if it's an interview.</td>
<td>Kyle and Marcus in college</td>
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</table>
**Category: Overcoming Relationship Challenges**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>B</th>
<th>Communication misunderstandings due to Technology</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>Within Child Characteristics</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>Cultural Differences</th>
<th>E</th>
<th>Food Preferences</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Not using pivotal advice</th>
<th>G</th>
<th>Becoming a pseudo-parent when bio-parent is in prison</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>N/A</td>
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<td>N/A</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>N/A</td>
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<td>N/A</td>
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<td>N/A</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Interview 2: I love the kid, he's very friendly and always asks for me. When I got to their afterpart, and put her up to take her to the college. And it's also that thing where I'm taking her daughter off to college. Do you know what I mean?</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>N/A</td>
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<td>Interview 2: Another thing that I had to do was to talk about what our make plans, where we went on the weekend and stuff I've learned on the. And that's essentially gotten by my own experience.</td>
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<td>N/A</td>
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<td>Interview 3: I'm not sure about Counseling and it's not a big deal, big deal, but it's</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>N/A</td>
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<td>N/A</td>
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<td>N/A</td>
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<td>Interview 4: I would say that it's different because everyone's different and we're different. With Jena, I would say that's the right decision because you know, she's been with a plane and her mother as a 10 year old and her mother died.</td>
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**Category: Relationship Benefits**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Someone to confide in</th>
<th>Someone who is there for them</th>
<th>Asset with decision-making/self-building</th>
<th>Accountability for Mentee</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Interview 1: I think one of her big growth patterns in last year was a half, two years since I've known her that she trusts people more and she particularly trust women more. She had seemingly very, very women in her life. She didn't really have a close relationship with anyone, especially older.</td>
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<td>Interview 2: I would say that, within the first few months, I would say within the first six months let me put it that way. I think where she's, that's where she opened up about her family's background. I like... So I think, I think, I think, I think just...</td>
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<td>Interview 3: I think that you can say anything to each other and not feel like it's going to be thrown back at you. I think that's the key. So I think, I think, I think just...</td>
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<td>Interview 4: I think the mentors are very important because when the kids are in the program, some of them see it as a program and I think being having a mentor that's separate just allows them to...</td>
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<td>Interview 5: I think mentoring is very, very important for the kids. It gives them, some people who are doing it on a purely voluntary basis. Um, just... You're an orphan at [redacted] years old. And so when that happens, that's when it becomes important for the kids, and I think mentoring, it's very, very important.</td>
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<td>Interview 6: I think mentoring is very, very important for the kids. And it's a way to get some hope that there's an exciting life for him and so I managed to help him get a job with the Tampa Bay... And so quickly she brought him back into Tampa and let him move back in the house and then let him enrolled in [college redacted]. So since she did that, I realized that I needed to be even more in touch with them because I feel like he...</td>
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<tr>
<td>Be Committed/Patient</td>
<td>Keep Initial Mtgs Short</td>
<td>Follow Program Rules</td>
<td>Do Things they Enjoy</td>
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<td>Interview 2: To be patient and um, and understanding, um, because at first, it's very different. Somebody that is sort of a completely different background and to also not expect a gratitude right away. Like, you know, I've heard that before. We do a lot of things for your students and they don't really say thank you or they don't show any appreciation. It's just because they really don't know what to do.</td>
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<td>Interview 3: Show up. I think it's treating them like normal people. I think it's letting them know what's appropriate, what's not appropriate. [...] I think establishing that and I think being genuine, you really kind of pulled it out, but it is to be a mentor and I think for people who are parents: do what you can do to your own child.</td>
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<td>Be Patient. I think in capital letters. what I would say for expect. Um. I don't want to use the word problems. Um, I expect that there will be some obstacles and um, glitches along the way that you'll have to work together with your student to overcome. Um, don't give up on them because all of these kids without exception have just been through hellacious living circumstances, abandonment, um, difficulties that we can't even imagine. And it's just so important not to get discouraged too quickly and stick with them. I just seen so many cases with other mentors and mentees where the, the kids were just so angry and resistant and mistrustful and closed at first and with patience and affection and time together,</td>
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<td>Make your commitment and don't waver from your commitment. If you can't do it, be honest about that. Tell them up front. Because to make it work you have to be able to create a solid relationship with your student. [...] I don't think so. I think I talked about the important pieces, you know, especially with Marcus sticking in there through that little rough patch and then because you know, we've gotten closer over the past years than I ever thought at the beginning I didn't because</td>
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