ADOLESCENT PERSPECTIVES OF THE ECOLOGICAL IMPACT
OF A SUMMER YOUTH EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM

A Dissertation by

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Submitted to the Department of Education Leadership
and the faculty of the Graduate School of
Wichita State University
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Education

July 2011
ADOLESCENT PERSPECTIVES OF THE ECOLOGICAL IMPACT OF A SUMMER YOUTH EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM

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DEDICATION

There is no way I could have maintained the level of commitment it has taken to complete the doctoral course load and write a dissertation while working full time and being a mother to three little girls if it were not for some very important people. My dissertation is about building social capital through connections with people that help facilitate one’s abilities to reach their potential. That is exactly what has been done for me.

First I show appreciation for my family. My grandmother, Martha Sorrell, moved from Texas to help us care for our first daughter when I started graduate school in 2000. She never left and I kept going to school. She has helped to care for our three girls and care for my husband and me in much the same way. She was raised in the country and still the most caring, unconditional, insightful, and supportive person I have ever known. She took care of my Grandpa, Richard Hodge, until he passed away in 2010. He wanted me to be the first doctor in his family and I wanted him to see it happen and he sure got close! The two of them have been by my side my whole life and made me understand that I could do anything I wanted in life as long as I did the right thing by others.

My husband Johnny Boy loves me very much. We support each other, he tells me he is proud of me, he makes me coffee and runs me perfectly hot baths. He is a wonderful father and he has put up with me and my goal setting for a very long time. From the day I saw him by the school bus in high school, I knew he was the one. He is beautiful, inside and out, and has shown me acceptance, commitment, and the importance of laughing and having fun.

My friends, my yoga partners, confidants, and workout buddies, have brought sanity to some challenging times. Kele Murdin, my longest friend and partner through adolescence, I truly understand that the power of our friendship, love, and support for one another knows no boundaries. I know the importance of self-care and these ladies remind me when I fall off the wagon. Angie Gritten, Sarah Kephart, Sabrina Perez-Glatt, and Melissa Gronau, thank you for staying my friend through one of the most difficult times of my life, writing a dissertation! You have shown me the beauty that exists within real friendships.

In all of my endeavors, including the doctoral program, special women have emerged that have become guides who are honest in their commitments and have made me truly feel loved and respected. Lisa Foodim told me that you “cannot mess with someone’s dreams, it belongs to them and you can only decide if you can deal with it or not” and I know this is important wisdom.

I cannot forget Linda Sorrell, who is a brilliant woman who has dedicated her life to helping others and is who I have modeled myself after; just wishing I could be more like her. Her daughter Rachel Rutledge has been like my sister and they have always loved me unconditionally and encouraged me to pursue goals. My sister, Stephanie Steinkoenig has been by my side and supported me as well.
We All Belong
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First, my teacher Jo Bennett: She came to WSU just as I entered the doc program and left just as I was finishing. I know she didn’t just come for me, but she made all the difference. Her honesty meant everything and her willingness to allow me into the world of academia from her standpoint was not only educational but inspiring. She is a world traveler and while she moved on, she is totally in my heart and I am appreciative of her encouraging my own creativity and perspective when it comes to research as well as life.

Second, Linnea GlenMaye was the first professor to tell me that I was a good writer; I believed her and it gave me the strength to move forward in academia. When she later became my boss, she was an example of how to navigate the world of academia with pure intelligence and feminine grace.

My dissertation committee was made up of some of the most respected and brilliant women in this community and I feel so thankful to have had their guidance on this research. My chair, Linda Bakken, tried to retire but decided she would “take me on” anyway. She sat with me for days upon days showing encouragement and constructive criticism that helped bring my dissertation together. She was just what I needed.

My other committee members Linnea GlenMaye, Jean Patterson, Susan Norton, and Nancy Snyder are scholars that I deeply respect. They serve as role models for me as I see how the work they do helps people in the community. Their commitment to education, empowerment, and change is inspiring. These are the kinds of institutional agents that one dreams of having and they are truly a blessing in my life.
ABSTRACT

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 provided over a billion dollars to state workforce investment systems for creating employment opportunities for disadvantaged youth and every state was responsible for developing structured programs to connect youth to employers who would not only provide income for the youth, but also aid in their occupational skill development (American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, 2009). The Workforce Alliance of South Central Kansas (WASCK) developed the Area IV Kansas Summer Youth Employment Programs (SYEP), under the direction Congress and the Kansas Department of Commerce, and over two summers created over seven hundred job opportunities for disadvantaged youth.

This study, through ecological qualitative methods, gathered the perspectives of ten adolescents, 18 or older, who participated in the 2010 federally funded SYEP, through the Workforce Alliance of South Central Kansas. These personal stories using the framework of Ecological Systems Theory and the lens of Social Capital, supported the premises that (a) learning the ecosystems of individuals can provide insights into their daily lives, their history, and their lived experiences in a way that provides a window into how services and prevention efforts can be targeted toward them; (b) people make a difference in the lives of others and supportive institutional agents can have a profound effect on one’s ability to gain social capital and work toward goal setting and attainment; and (c) programs, such as the SYEP, make a difference in the lives of youth and help them make connections to positive institutional agents, learn workplace dynamics and dialogue, and provide them with a entrance into areas of the workforce that have historically been preserved for the higher level working class and middle class.
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<td>ARRA</td>
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<td>CETA</td>
<td>Comprehensive Employment and Training Act</td>
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<tr>
<td>CJ</td>
<td>Criminal Justice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CNA</td>
<td>Certified Nurse’s Assistant</td>
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<tr>
<td>DOL</td>
<td>Department of Labor</td>
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<td>GED</td>
<td>General Equivalency Diploma</td>
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<td>JTPA</td>
<td>Job Training Partnership Act</td>
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<td>STWOA</td>
<td>School to Work Opportunities Act</td>
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<td>SYEP</td>
<td>Summer Youth Employment Program</td>
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<td>WBL</td>
<td>Work-Based Learning</td>
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Education, hard work, and personal responsibility are American core values that guide policy formation, program creation, educational planning, and workforce initiatives (Shellenback & Warner, 2009; Yankelovich, 1994). A good education in America is designed to prepare all youth, regardless of their background, for a future in which they can proudly participate. Young people must balance social, emotional, physical, and psychological concerns that absorb time in classrooms and challenge educators to find creative methods for understanding and engaging their students in support of their educational goals (Dika & Singh, 2002; Perry, Liu, & Pabian, 2009). Educating today’s urban adolescents to take ownership for their future is a multifaceted issue that must be addressed individually and collectively through systemic changes within school settings, but also through community partnerships (Benard, 1993; Bennett, in press; Bogenschneider, 1996; Stanton-Salazar, 1997).

With the focus in schools today on academic accountability, fostering a sound character and addressing the social, personal, and socioeconomic concerns of urban students may not find space in the already crowded curriculum (Bennett, in press). Barriers to learning such as dropout rates, pregnancies, incarcerations, mental health issues, changing family structures, and capable adolescents who disconnect from the learning environment are but a few of the challenges that educators, especially urban ones, confront on a daily basis. When these issues overshadow learning, the burden of preparing young people for their future either falls to the community service sector or falls aside completely (Brown, 1996; Dryfoos, 1990, 1998; Dryfoos & Barkin, 2006; Flannery & Wester, 2004; Lerner, 1995; McCord, 1990; Newcomb, Maddaguabm, & Bentler, 1986). As a way to probe into the effects of a student’s individual environment, this
study focused on how community-based workforce preparation programs can affect the environments of urban youth.

Two theories guided this study in terms of providing a lens through which to conceptualize the multiple systems that youth navigate in daily life, as well as a framework for shaping the data-gathering process. Ecological systems theory is the primary lens that can be used to view and analyze the different social settings in which young people function in the world (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The interactions between the youth and these varied and multiple systems influence their attitudes and decisions. The systems of family, school, work, community, sports, and peers are of particular interest. Ecological systems theory is a tool for both assessment and planning; when paired with the theoretical framework of social capital, it is possible to discuss how youth gain capital in society through the interactions of those multiple systems. The social capital framework, as Stanton-Salazar (1997) conceptualized it, provides the structure to assess and evaluate how urban youth manage their participation and interactions between multiple systems, overcome social and institutional obstacles, and develop relationships with adults, who become the agents that facilitate their participation in higher levels of society.

This research integrated the knowledge base of environmental systems, or ecosystems, that youth participants inhabit within a social capital framework. Its purpose is to understand and describe the impact of institutional and educational experiences on adolescents’ ecosystems. The ecological and social capital theories are time honored and are being applied to a social issue in which the research describes if and how interventions can impact this youth environment.

This study gathered the personal perspectives of 10 adolescents, 18 years of age or older, who participated in a federally funded Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) through the Workforce Alliance of South Central Kansas. Through ecological qualitative methods, this study
gathered perspectives on the lives of youth participants and how the SYEP influenced their attitudes and perceptions of their environment, whether it had any positive influences they could carry over into their educational system, and to what degree those experiences influenced their attitudes and perceptions of their own ability to effect change in their lives with specific regard to school and work.

The goal of the inquiry is to advance the conversation about how federally funded youth employment opportunities can create social capital for youth who have been marginalized, and how contact with adult mentors can help youth learn the skills to move forward in work and education and succeed in the mainstream economy.

**Definition of Terms and Abbreviations**

Several key terms and abbreviations are used throughout the study. Defining them will aid in understanding the conception and operation of their use:

**America Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA)**

In 2009, Congress passed the Act in direct response to the economic crisis in America. Its purpose was to create new jobs, strengthen existing jobs, and boost the economy through tax cuts and federal grants for education and health care. Through the Department of Labor, Employment, and Training Administration, and stemming from the Workforce Investment Act, $1.2 billion was allocated for grants to the 50 States for youth activities that included summer employment (Congress, 2009).

**Ecological Systems Theory**

This theoretical perspective refers to the intertwined nature of the human physical and social world and describes the relationships between people and the world around them. The theory is defined through understanding that development takes place through the interactions
one has with various systems (e.g., family, education, employment, community, culture, religion, and the larger society). This theory is the foundation for human ecology studies in which elements of one’s environment play a major role in one’s development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

**Ecology or Ecosystem**

Humans are part of an evolutionary process in which they integrate and communicate with the environment that is defined as their ecology, along with multiple systems such as the family, gender, culture, economic class, and other elements of society (Bookchin, 2005). The formal structures are institutions such as family, school, and social agencies; the less formal structures include peers, neighborhoods, and sports, for example. People bond to the elements in their environment. They are able to shape that environment or ecology based on their intelligence and abilities to communicate effectively and organize their life systems, as well as to experience freedom from instinctive behavior. Bookchin (2005) suggests that, when humans do not achieve the ability to shape their environment, problems are likely to occur, and social development is prevented.

**Institutional Agents**

Agents of the institutions are individuals who occupy one or more hierarchical positions of status and authority. These institutional agents assert themselves on behalf of (or in opposition to) the young person and negotiate the transmission of highly valued information and resources. Their power lies in their willingness not only to share information but also to situate young people in environments that are resource-rich (Stanton-Salazar, 1997, 2001, 2004, 2010).

**Institutional Discourse**

The socially accepted ways of using language, which include beliefs, interests, and vocabulary spoken by the members of the institution, make up the institutional discourse
Members are expected to engage in communicative behavior that is consistent with the norms (Stanton-Salazar, 1997, 2001, 2010).

**Institutional Knowledge**

In order to describe the key elements that foster social integration and school/workforce success, Stanton-Salazar (1997) identified seven principal forms of institutional knowledge: (a) institutionally sanctioned discourses, which are acceptable ways of using language and communicating; (b) academic task-specific knowledge and knowledge of subject areas; (c) organizational or bureaucratic methods of operation, chains of command, and ways resource competition is negotiated; (d) the development of networks, networking skills, and behaviors that include negotiating with gatekeepers or agents in and out of the school/work system, and knowledge of how to develop supportive and cooperative ties with peers; (e) technical knowledge that includes computer literacy, study skills, test taking, time management, and skills for effective decision making; (f) knowledge of labor and educational markets and opportunities, requisites and barriers to entry, how to fill requisites, and how to overcome barriers; and (g) problem solving knowledge and, more specifically, knowing how to integrate the knowledge forms for the purpose of solving school-related problems, making sound decisions, and reaching personal or collective goals (Stanton-Salazar, 1997, 2010).

**Social Capital**

This term consists of networks of resources and key forms of social support embedded in one’s network or associates and accessible through direct or indirect ties with institutional agents (Stanton-Salazar, 1997, 2001, 2004). Pierre Bourdieu (1990) first expressed the idea of social capital when he referred to educational or intellectual assets that support social mobility.
Social Institution

An institution is a complex, integrated system with associated activities and resources that provide stability and meaning (Scott, 2001). Social institutions are related to ecosystems because they are part of the overall environment. Scott indicates that each institution is an element of the ecosystem and is comprised of a formal and informal institutional arrangement. Norms are established and defined within the systems, and people are expected to adhere to the norms. Institutions have organizational characteristics, formal and informal rule structures, and regulations for operation (McLeroy, Bibeau, Steckler, & Glanz, 1988). Family, community, peer groups, and other predominant institutions such as the government, the economy, education, and religion are the primary social institutions of Americans (Stanton-Salazar, 2010).

Summer Youth Employment Programs (SYEP)

SYEP is a summer workforce program funded by Congress and operationalized by state workforce centers to provide disadvantaged youth with summer employment, skill building, and preparation for the workforce or for furthering their education (Bellotti, Rosenberg, Sattar, Esposito, & Ziegler, 2010).

Youth Development

Adolescence is a stage of human development that involves biological, social, and psychological transition and change. It is marked by socialization processes in which youth are engaged in social interactions with people in different elements of the complex ecology of their lives (Lerner, 1995; Lerner & Galambos, 1998; Stanton-Salazar, 2010).

Background

In the past 40 years, the United States has endured six recessions that marked a significant decline in the industrial production of goods, employment opportunities, real income,
and economy-driven consumer spending (Allegretto, Bernstein, & Mishel, 2006; National Bureau of Economic Research, 2008). The Department of Labor (2009) has estimated that over eight million jobs were lost between 2007 and 2009 across a variety of industries that included manufacturing, business services, construction, and local government. The economic downturn the United States faced during the recession of 2008-2009 has had a considerable impact on youth employment, training, and education programs (Johnson, Oliff, & Koulish, 2008; Elsby, Hobijn, & Sahin, 2010). Today over 27% of American teens are not able to secure employment, the part-time workforce has diminished, and hours have decreased with the passage of time (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010; Morisi, 2010). Unemployment for young people today could have lasting effects on their employability in the future (Bellotti et al., 2010). The dearth of workforce opportunities has left youth scrambling to secure employment as they progress through high school and beyond.

Youth who are unable or do not know how to make important social connections with people who can facilitate the transitions between adolescence and adulthood in their families, communities, or neighborhoods will be at a disadvantage in the secondary education system. Such young people may find themselves struggling later in the workforce (Furstenberg & Hughes, 1995; MaCurdy, Keating, & Nagavarapu, 2006).

Researchers have begun to identify the connections between understanding and mastering institutional knowledge; that is, learning the ropes. Recent discussions have connected the dynamics with those who assist youth through mentorship roles and facilitate the building of the social capital necessary to succeed in mainstream society (Stanton-Salazar, 1997). Adults from the community-based resources can act as mentors who facilitate the transmission of institutional knowledge and discuss the effect of this knowledge among the intersecting ecologies of a
youth’s life. This knowledge, which Stanton-Salazar (1997, 2001, and 2010) identified as *social capital*, provides a framework for understanding how social capital can build networks of support that allow youth to learn how institutions function and ways to navigate them. Stanton-Salazar’s framework is applicable in this research and can assist educators, policy makers, program developers, and researchers in perceiving how social capital can be built intentionally for youth through programs that help them succeed in systems that might be outside their home environment or ecology.

If adolescents are afforded opportunities to acquire social capital and develop awareness of institutional knowledge, they can gain valuable skills in ways to communicate in the social-institutional world of secondary education and the workforce. Without this knowledge, youth may miss out on understanding the importance of effective communication on multiple organizational levels, lose the opportunity to develop nuanced skills passed down from one person to another, and fail to learn highly developed problem solving skills (Lerner & Galambos, 1998; Stanton-Salazar, 1997, 2007, 2010). In addition, students might falter due to personal barriers that might keep them from achieving their full potential in school and, subsequently, in the workforce.

One such opportunity to acquire institutional knowledge and build skills for future communication and decision making is a summer employment program for young people. Beginning in 2009 as part of the ARRA, also known as the *stimulus*, the federal government supplied every state with the funding to support a summer youth program aimed at placing low-income adolescents in summer jobs. It also sought to support individual needs that might become barriers to performing successfully at work (e.g., child care, legal issues, transportation, clothing, and/or housing issues). Overall, the Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) was designed
not only to provide work experience but also to foster the development of work behaviors and effective communication with supervisors and people of influence. Another aim was to increase the likelihood that the youth would be more prepared to enter the workforce or further their education after their high school graduation or GED completion (WASCK, 2010).

**Research Problem**

Recessions exert the greatest amount of force on the weakest groups in the labor market (Choudhry, Marelli, & Signorelli, 2010). Youth, by far, have been more affected by this most recent unemployment crisis than their elders (Verick, 2009). Long-term unemployment for young people may have adverse effects that reach beyond the timeline of the recession and into the prospects for their futures. The costs of undeveloped work skills are not only individual; they become collective and weaken the overall economy, educational systems, and social structure (Choudhry et al., 2010; Lerner & Galambos, 1998).

Even from 2006 to 2007, before the recession hit, 426,000 young people nationwide between the ages of 16-19 dropped out of high school; of these, 26.9% were unemployed (Allegretto, Bernstein, & Mishel, 2006; Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2008; Morisi, 2008). Research has suggested that when youth successfully participate in activities that promote bonding with the world around them, they are more likely to comply with family rules and school policies and conform to society’s norms (Hawkins, Catalano, Barnard, Gottfredson, Holmes, & Miller, 1992). When they become detached from those activities, adolescents are more likely to become discouraged with the educational systems and labor force, suffer from lowered lifetime earnings, and experience less stable work histories due to social exclusion than their peers who stayed in school, secured jobs, or both (Brown, 1996; Choudhry et al., 2010). The ability to gain competitiveness in the workforce or pursue higher education diminishes if the
environment does not support the adolescents’ growth. The recession has intensified these issues for youth.

Although extensive literature has been written about youth workforce development and adolescents in schools, less research has been conducted regarding the relationships between young people and adults, which provide opportunities for building social capital. These human connections are central to the teenagers’ ability to navigate their environment and social institutions, especially in school and the work place.

Current educational research has not sufficiently documented the social, emotional, and psychological balance related to navigating social institutions and the work environment as a form of building social capital. Specifically, very little discussion of the impact of work experience on the ecology of their lives has been presented from the adolescents’ perspective. Nor has the impact of social institutions (e.g., the Workforce Development System) and their efforts to intervene on behalf of the student been documented from the youths’ perspective. This research can provide practitioners, teachers, and decision makers with a better understanding of the environments that youth balance and navigate, as well as the social, emotional, educational, and institutional realities of adolescent students in relation to the impact of youth workforce programming.

**Purpose of the Study**

Federally funded youth programs, created from favorable political climates, have contributed to the availability of youth training and work programs over the last 50 years (Anderson & Asselin, 1996; Koehler, 1993; Koehler & Rusch, 1995; Morningstar, 1997; Sum & Khatiwada, 2010; Wehman, 1996). A considerable body of knowledge exists to support the value of work experience as a critical educational intervention (Castellano, Stringfield, & Stone, 2003;
This research focused on the impact of government-funded youth employment programming in an effort to understand the experiences of urban youth in their transition from adolescence to adulthood. By gathering individual adolescent stories from those who have participated in a summer youth employment programming, practitioners, policy makers, and educators can begin to draw conclusions about the effect of a workforce development/mentoring program on youth who might otherwise not have this opportunity. The purpose of this study is three-pronged. First, the study described the ecosystems of a group of urban youth who participated in a summer youth employment program. Second, the study focused specifically on how adults, the institutional agents who were associated with the SYEP, influenced the youth. Third, the study focused on the effect the summer youth program had on this ecosystem.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. How do urban adolescents describe their ecosystem, e.g., family, school, work, friends/peers, institutions, culture, and other activities? (Bronfenbrenner’s 1979 theory)

2. How do urban adolescents describe their relationships with adults (institutional agents), who have the potential to increase or inhibit their building of institutional knowledge/social capital? (Stanton-Salazar’s 1997 theory)

3. How has the Summer Youth Employment Program directly and indirectly impacted the young people’s lives (ecosystem)? (Bronfenbrenner’s 1979 theory)

Significance of the Study

Fulfilling one’s potential through education, hard work, and personal responsibility are values that individuals are expected to embrace and adhere to in society. Although one of the
goals of education is to prepare young people for the 21st century workforce, educators in urban areas face challenges in preparing youth for employment; the adolescents are consumed with meeting educational standards while facing their own social, emotional, and psychological needs.

To be able to compete in the workforce or pursue higher education, young people require support and opportunities to develop knowledge of the social institutions that drive society. Family, teachers, and other support systems that surround young persons’ lives provide guidance and knowledge for advantaged youth. However, families of disadvantaged youth may not have the knowledge, background, and resources to facilitate growth and institutional learning that the adolescents will need in order to compete in the workforce and secondary education systems. Teachers may not have the time to focus on the individual needs of every student, especially if the youth are disconnected from school. Supports may simply not exist for some youth, nor will these adolescents be aware of how to reach out and access support systems.

As the current recession has impacted youth employment more than ever, teenagers have become disconnected from adults who can help them gain the knowledge they need to grow in the workforce (Department of Labor, 2009). The economic and social costs of losing disadvantaged youth within school and workforce systems are great (Castellano et al., 2003; Perry et al., 2009). Additional institutional supports connect youth to programs, opportunities, and adults who can facilitate this crucial development.

This study is significant in that it will contribute to the literature on youth who participate in institutionally driven initiatives such as the Summer Youth Employment Program. By gathering youth-participant perspectives, the study provides insights into young people’s ecological systems, including how the youth interact with employment programs, school, home, adult networks, and peer systems. It can be used to inform practitioners, teachers, and decision
makers with a better understanding of the social, emotional, educational, and workforce realities of adolescent students.

This study may contribute to the awareness that other resources, in addition to schools, are available to help youth attach to workforce development systems. Urban educators can assist this development by infusing workforce development into the curriculum. They can also help the youth affiliate early and efficiently with social institutions that can help the adolescents overcome some of the deficiencies in their environments.

**Organization of the Dissertation**

This dissertation has been organized into five chapters. First, the introduction proposes the research topic, background, and description of the research problem and questions, followed by the objectives and significance of the study. Chapter two is the Literature Review, which describes the theoretical framework of the study in detail along with a thorough review of scholarly works that have been conducted on related topics. Subheadings have been used to organize the text. Chapter three of this dissertation is Methodology, which describes the research design in detail along with the participant selection process. Data collection procedures are also discussed. Chapter four reveals the findings from the individual interviews that were conducted with the SYEP adolescent participants. This chapter includes the dialogue that was created between the researcher and the participants. The dialogues are presented through an ecomap diagram for each participant and summarize their individual stories in accordance with each of the research questions. Finally, chapter five includes a discussion of the conclusions and practical implications of this research. There are recommendations for future actions as well as future research that can be conducted to further examine the impact of youth programs.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter contributes to the discussion of educating adolescents for a 21st century workforce by using theory to frame the conversation and guide the research study. Discussions of the theoretical perspectives are followed with a synthesis of literature related to the themes relevant to the research problem, including governmental efforts to support youth workforce development. The strategy was to search out literature relevant to the study by using key words and themes. By doing so, the literature has been organized by grouping literature under ecological systems theory, social capital, institutional knowledge, governmental youth work program timelines, and youth work programs.

Theoretical Framework

Over the past three decades, researchers have dramatically expanded the body of scientific knowledge about youth development as well as career development. However, specific theoretical frameworks for transforming research findings into progressive program structures and more supportive environments for youth have fallen behind (Bogenschneider, 1996; Quinn, 1999). Ecological systems theory, as an overarching theoretical perspective, is paired with a social capital framework to provide the structure to frame the evaluation and discussion of youth’s ecology and for gathering the perspectives of adolescents on the issues they face and their feelings related to their experiences. This pairing of theory allows the researcher to identify elements within adolescent environments that contribute to, or detract from, achievement of the social capital necessary for the transition into the workforce or post-secondary education.

These theories frame the assessment of how youth who live outside the dominant power structures have access to social networks, social capital provided by the dominant culture, and to
institutional settings through contact with their agents (Stanton-Salazar, 1997). Both theories are described in detail, providing an overview of how each has been used in previous research, and conclude with an explanation of how both theories will be applied to the research.

**Ecological Systems Theory**

All humans function within a personal and unique environment, or ecosystem. Human ecology is essentially an interdisciplinary study of human existence and the relationships people enjoy with the surrounding world (Bronfenbrenner, 1951, 1979). Social scientists use ecological systems theory to bridge and describe interactions and communication patterns between humans and their respective environments (Arum, 2000; Bogenschneider, 1996; Bookchin, 2005).

This approach is not as simple as listing environmental variables and correlating them with behavioral variables; it is more about understanding how behaviors change, differ, and derive from natural/ecological life spaces (Thomae & Endo, 1972). Due to the variability of human development within an environmental context, the emphasis of investigation takes on a more comprehensive outlook rather than examining the isolation of single settings for research. The researcher examines the interactions between settings because the impact of each setting cannot be understood without information about how the setting is perceived by its participants.

Ecological systems theory is a general system framework that can inform practice by incorporating human development theories and applying them to a systems analysis of a community or social context (Bogenschneider, 1996). Bronfenbrenner (b.1917–d.2005), a Russian-American psychologist, developed the ecological systems theory that refers to the description of environmental variables. Everyone reacts to the world around them with a unique set of response mechanisms, and people individually interpret their world. Perceptions and insights are related to one’s environment and allow one to create meaning and make sense of
experiences and interactions (Eisner, 1998; Wolf, 1964). From this perspective, the environment is conceived as a nested arrangement of systems or settings, which contains properties of change, growth, and transition. These systems have the ability to “set in motion and sustain patterns of motivation and activity in the developing person that then acquire a momentum of their own” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 284-285).

According to Bronfenbrenner (1951), the individual, family, school, and greater community nest in one another to make up the environment, and this connected whole must be understood in order to explain one part in relation to the other. An advocate for families, Bronfenbrenner (1979) was also the co-founder of the Head Start program in the United States for disadvantaged pre-school children, underscoring the importance of early interventions in the life of a child where a home environment might be found to be lacking in some way. He described how examining the systems of relationships that form a child’s environment was essential for understanding the context of their social, emotional, psychological, and academic growth. Ecological theories draw from theories or perceptions of human behavior where one begins to understand how individuals perceive and frame their world, which in turn influences their behavior and development and bring deeper sociological and psychological material into consideration (Bronfenbrenner, 1976).

Interactions one has with his/her environment, positive or negative, impacts the way he/she perceives the world as well as how he/she manages and reacts to their environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Eisner, 1998). Bronfenbrenner (1979) generated three assumptions used to describe his ecological systems theory as applied to youth:

1. The developing person is a growing, dynamic entity who progressively moves into and restructures the environment in which he/she resides.
2. Since the environment also exerts its influence, there is a mutual accommodating process. Interaction between person and environment is multi-directional whereas each level of the environment interacts with all of the others.

3. Environment relevant to developmental process is not limited to a single setting. It incorporates interconnections between settings as well as external influences from larger surroundings. These assumptions framed the study.

Bronfenbrenner (1976) described that our environments are made up of a set of forces or systems and these systems are illustrated through spheres or levels that nest within one another and interact. This dissertation focuses on four aspects or spheres of the theory: the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem.

**Microsystem.** The Microsystem is an immediate setting or place where learners engage in certain activities for a certain amount of time. Place, role, time, and activity are the elements of the setting. Bronfenbrenner (1979) defines primary settings as the family, the workplace, and the peer group. These settings exist within larger environments, such as neighborhoods, communities, regions, cultures and subcultures, and nations. All of these environments exert influence. When analysis of an environment takes place at this level, an awareness of different microsystems is important. For example, when studying how a student fits into the school setting, it is important to consider not only the social class of the family, but also the family structure, culture, background, and childcare practices in the home. An analysis combining elements of two or more ecological dimensions helps to map interactions across a broad range of ecological contexts. Each microsystem has a structure and a set of rules and norms for behavior. Within this immediate environment, various interactions foster and maintain development in an
individual, but their power to do so depends upon the content and structure of the microsystem itself (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994).

**Mesosystem.** The *Mesosystem* is composed of the interrelations among the major settings at a particular point in a person’s life; examples of such settings include family, school, peers, the influence of television, and work. When two or more microsystems are interrelated, the interactions that connect them form a new sphere, the mesosystem. The mesosystem is made up of the direct relationships that may be positive or negative, and may be unidirectional or reciprocal (Voydanoff, 2001). The mesosystem created by the interface of family with school could be positive or negative depending on specific factors. If a person is from a non-dominant culture, s/he may not find a fit in the institution framed on another cultural perspective. The institution may inadvertently push the student away (Stanton-Salazar, 1997).

Family structure, ethnic culture, and school structure serve as the most powerful influences for developing children. Minuchin (1974) describes the structure of a family from this systems perspective in order to explain power dynamics, boundaries among those in the family unit, and interrelatedness among the individuals in a system, and explaining different levels of functioning within the system. Schools base their culture on a white, middle-class value system that can be culturally incongruent with working-class and ethnic beliefs (Mitra, 2006). These elements of the mesosystem have the potential to create either a positive or negative system of support for the developing adolescent (Stanton-Salazar, 1997, 2010).
**Exosystem.** The *Exosystem* relates to both formal and informal concrete social structures that indirectly affect a person. Neighborhood, mass media, government, distribution of goods and services, communication and transportation facilities, informal social networks, and organizational structures and polices are examples of an exosystem structure. These are systems that influence human development in a global context. Bronfenbrenner (1979) may not have been able to foresee the powerful influence of peers and the mass media in youth culture today, which is based on the premise that the pervasiveness of new media, the continued importance of traditional media, and the influence of peers can penetrate the microsystem and have a stronger influence than family or school (Prinstein, Boegers, & Spirito, 2001; Roberts, 2000; Strasburger, Jordan, & Donnerstein, 2010). The exosystem involves elements of the community, society, and culture that may or may not influence an individual’s development depending on the level of interaction (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

**Macrosystem.** The Macrosystem is composed of the overarching institutions of the culture or subculture (the economic, social, educational, legal, and political systems). This refers to the values, laws, and customs of the culture or social system (Tissington, 2008). They are composed not only of structures, but encompass the ideologies both actively and passively transmitted through the culture (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). One's position in an organization or institution determines outcomes in interactional patterns. If influences from the mesosphere and exosphere are supportive and aligned to the dominant culture, then the interactions with institutions such as school or work will be positive. However, if the home ecology is not aligned with dominant culture and perceived to be different, interactions may not advance a youth or his/her sense of worth (Stanton-Salazar, 1997, 2010).
One of the aims of education is to guide and foster development (Dewey, 1963/2002). That development, by definition, considers that people have the abilities to understand their environments and increase their capacities to navigate their multiple environments, or ecologies (Bronfenbrenner, 1976; Stanton-Salazar, 1997). Development includes learning, in addition to physical growth, and also includes psycho-social-emotional growth (Hamilton, 1984). Educators are charged with the challenge to create optimal school environments for increasingly diverse populations; we need to know how students negotiate boundaries successfully or how they are impeded by barriers that prevent their connection not only with institutional contexts, but also with peers who are different from themselves (Phelan, Davidson, & Cao, 1991).

Explaining phenomena through ecological systems is an approach that provides a guide for assessment and planning. It also helps explain and describe relationships and situations and how these interactions can support, constrain, and shape daily lives (Rothery, 2001). Applied to patterns and experiences of families, ecological systems theory assists in understanding perceptions of participants and the significance they attach to events and situations. Figure 1 provides a graphic description of the Ecosystem Theory.
Social Capital Theory

Whereas ecological systems theory focuses on the interaction between the elements of social systems, social capital is defined as the social groups, networks, and norms that mediate development opportunities and outcomes (Dudwick, Kuehnast, Jones, & Woolcock, 2006). One definition of social capital, conceptualized by Bourdieu (1985), is “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition” (p. 248) and further, “the volume of social capital possessed by a given agent depends on the size of the network of connections that he/she can effectively mobilize” (p. 249). Social capital is seen as cumulative, growing over time, beginning with a level of trust among actors, and built through information sharing. It produces social benefits where these social networks carry potential and embody valuable resources (Coleman, 1988; Dika & Singh, 2002; Stanton-Salazar, 1997). Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998) define social capital as the “sum of the actual or potential resources embedded within or available through the network of relationships possessed by an individual” (p. 243).
The underlying premise of social capital suggests that systems are relational and not solely dependent on individuals but on the relation of individuals to the patterns of interactions between people and other systems (Adler & Kwon, 2002; Lee, Reiche, & Song, 2010). These definitions are useful as a framework for describing relationships that form and develop within organized programs. The relationships function as resources for understanding and advancing in society and the resources become social capital.

**Social capital framework.** As a theoretical framework, social capital pairs with ecological system theory to allow for the evaluation of interactional patterns and their impact in a youth’s ecosystem. This evaluation can help to better understand how individuals and groups are able to gain capital within systems that affords them greater development and progress.

In the ecology of human life, race, ethnicity, gender, and social class influence the interactive processes and social dynamics of resource accumulation and exchange (Kao, 2004; Kao & Tienda, 1998; Lareau, 2002; Stanton-Salazar, 1997; Tienda & Jensen, 1998). Social capital is a multi-dimensional resource that is made up of social mechanisms that occur between people in varying environments that are of value to people in terms of gaining life chances and advancement in society. Coleman (1988) identified that through involvement in social relationships, trust is built, information is shared, and norms are established. These interactions become investments, or social capital, for people to draw upon in order to become resilient and advance (Coleman, 1988; Stanton-Salazar, 1997). Gaining social capital, working through challenges that present themselves and creating success for oneself is not a matter of learning and performing technical skills, Stanton-Salazar (1997) has determined that there is a more fundamental concept at work and people must learn to *decode the systems* they interact with by first making sense of the “cultural logic,” then becoming competent in how to navigate it.
In 1997, Stanton-Salazar introduced a social capital framework for understanding how the mechanisms of mainstream institutions create and exacerbate the difficulties people have in accumulating social capital (Dika and Singh, 2002; Stanton-Salazar, 1997). He tied the development of social capital to institutional agents because these people are consistent and reliable sources with the knowledge to decode both skills and institutional processes. As social capital occurs within all institutional systems, it can be problematic to identify the people or institutional agents who will engage in relationship building with the purpose of transmitting information and facilitating the building of social capital for others.

Adolescents today are moving from dependence to independence and are faced with making decisions about their future, establishing their personal identity, and transitioning with expectations from family as well as society (Austrian, 2008; Lerner & Galambos, 1998). Contemporary society has prolonged adolescence for some while others often have a “fast track” into adulthood and adult responsibilities (Briggs, 2008). They are increasingly more vulnerable due to higher divorce rates, increased homelessness, family mobility patterns, teen pregnancies, competition for schools and jobs, easier access to drugs and alcohol, or may be experiencing an onset of mental illness (Austrian, 2008; Dryfoos, 1990; Garmezy, 1983; Newcomb et al., 1986; Werner, 1990; Werner & Smith, 1982). Some youth have endured financial crises, lived in substandard housing, have a history of homelessness, and have families with limited employment opportunities, insufficient wages, no medical insurance, or inadequate welfare benefits while others have been physically and sexually abused, have strained relationships, and endure illness and addictions of family members (Molino, 2007; Offer, Schonert-Reichl, & Boxer, 1996; Shinn and Weitzman, 1996). Being thrust into adulthood through poverty or through life situations often will lead a young person into marginalization and exclusion (Briggs, 2008; Giddens, 1991;
Some young people are excluded from the opportunities that are available within the complicated routes from school to work. Those who do not reach their potential at school get stuck in low-paid and unrewarding jobs; those who have social difficulties may become long-term unemployed (Briggs, 2008).

Stanton-Salazar (1997, 2010) has discussed how youth who are considered low-status, or otherwise at risk due to life circumstances or experiences are positioned in society to have greater challenges in establishing social capital. He suggests that class, ethnicity, and gender differences, first and foremost, position youth to have differential value in contemporary society. Societal and institutional barriers then become entrapments that make participation in mainstream settings uncomfortable for minority and disadvantaged youth.

Additionally, acquisition of social capital is hindered by the evaluation and recruitment processes by which institutional agents evaluate and select minority youth for sponsorship, largely based on the student’s adoption of standards of the dominant group. Stanton-Salazar (1997, 2010) also discusses the institutionalization of distrust and detachment, institutional engineering of conditions and prescribed roles that are antithetical to the development of social capital. Stanton-Salazar also explains that ideological mechanisms that hinder help-seeking and help-giving behaviors in schools/communities exist and create barriers for development of social capital.

**Fundamentals of institutional support.** First, Stanton-Salazar (1997) identified six key forms of institutional support/knowledge and described them as key ingredients for social integration and mainstream success: (a) the provision of various funds of knowledge that includes implicit and explicit socialization into institutional discourses that regulate communication, interaction, and exchange within mainstream institutional systems; (b) bridging,
(i.e., the process of acting as a human bridge to gatekeepers, social networks, or other mainstream institutions); (c) advocacy; (d) role modeling; (e) the provision of emotional and moral support; and (f) providing evaluative feedback, advice, and guidance.

Second, Stanton-Salazar dissected the first form of institutional support, provision of the various funds of knowledge, as the most powerful component of building social capital. There are seven principle forms of institutionally based funds of knowledge: (a) institutionally sanctioned discourses which are socially acceptable ways of using language and communicating; (b) academic task-specific knowledge; (c) organizational/bureaucratic funds of knowledge that includes understanding chains of command and resource competition; (d) network development including how to network with others, negotiation skills with gatekeepers, and how to build supportive ties with others; (e) technical funds of knowledge that include computer literacy, study skills, test-taking, time management, and decision making skills; (f) knowledge of labor and educational markets including job and educational opportunities, requisites and barriers, how to fulfill requisites, and overcome barriers; and (g) problem-solving knowledge, integrating the former six areas of knowledge, making sound decisions, and reaching personal and collective goals (1997, p.11-12).

Social integration and mainstream success are dependent on learning to participate in power (Stanton-Salazar, 1997, 2010). Children of the dominant white, middle class groups are encoded in the cultural capital and ethos by learning the norms and rules in their early socialization within home and community. Minority and working class youth are equipped with cultural resources gained from their communities and families, and are often master decoders of the systems in which they have been socialized; however these resources are not the same as in mainstream institutions and schools. These youth have been historically and structurally more
dependent on institutions and institutional agents. Stanton-Salazar (1997) posits that, for members of the subordinate groups to fully access the funds of knowledge and use them productively requires them to make sense of the structures and agendas and assume roles that fit the institution’s norms. Transmission of the values and norms, and social ties to institutional agents, being part of an explicit and strategic agenda impacts minority and working-class youth significantly and can be life altering (Stanton-Salazar, 1997, 2010).

**Youth Workforce Programs**

Youth programs, often designed to help disadvantaged youth, offer a structured environment to bring youth together with adults in the community or with other organizations and foster the meaningful relationships where youth can gain social capital (Bogenschneider, 1996; Brown & Thakur, 2005; Stasz & Brewer, 1998). There is a growing body of literature on the relationships between youth programs and educational and workforce development (e.g., Brown and Thakur, 2005), *Workforce development for older youth, preparing youth for the crossing from adolescence to early adulthood*; Fernandes-Alcantara, (2011), *Vulnerable youth: Federal funding for summer job training and employment*; Grossman & Sipe, (1992), *Summer training and education program: Reports on long term impacts*; Wandner, & Wiseman, (2009), *Financial performance incentives for United States government programs: Lessons learned from the Workforce Investment Act, Temporary Assistance to Needy Families, and Food Stamps*.

Some have argued these programs are a fad among those looking for a quick-fix solution to social and economic problems, but it has captured the attention of educational researchers and policy makers aiming to improve education (Dika & Singh, 2002).

There are mentoring programs, service-learning opportunities, after-school programs, as well as youth workforce development programs that contribute to the efforts in building youth
social capital by connecting youth to adults in the community who promote their development of social capital through sharing information and other resources (Jarrett, Sullivan, & Watkins, 2005). Particularly, youth who have opportunities to build workforce knowledge have a greater awareness of potential careers, have had opportunity to foster skills in the workplace, experience earning income, and have improved school outcomes (Carter, Trainor, Ditchman, & Owens, 2011; Staff & Schulenberg, 2010). Workforce programs for youth not only provide knowledge of job skills but also help them to become accustomed to the climate of the workplace, perform according to the expectations of their employer and develop a sense of professional responsibilities.

Work experiences for youth have the potential to contribute to youth building knowledge and connections with adults who substantially improve their career development skills as well as the aspirations they hold for themselves (Carter et al., 2011). In their study, Carter, et al. discussed the value of engaging communities in supporting transitioning youth and that community partnerships that use strategies such as summer focused planning, school-community partnerships, and other community programs improve not only short term employment for youth but their future opportunities. Carter et al. (2011) stressed that employment opportunities in this age group are critical, especially as they are moving from dependence in the high school years to independence in the adult world.

**Youth Contact with Adults who Facilitate Social Capital**

Young people today participate in a variety of systems that include family, school, work, and out of school activities. Within these systems are important people, particularly adults, who teach, mentor, model, and share information that helps, and sometimes hinders, the young person’s participation in society or of gaining social capital (Jarrett et al., 2005). Social capital is
generated within family systems, as well as outside of the family, and this “outside” building of social relationships is key to youth development (Coleman, 1988; Furstenberg & Hughes, 1995). Stanton-Salazar (1997) suggests the most important social systems for youth are extended family, community organizations, and their peer group. These resources foster the youth’s development of resiliency, school success, and social mobility. Today’s world has a lack of contact between youth and adults and few opportunities for facilitating shared interactions between them; thus youth programs can serve as a bridge (Bogenschneider, 1996; Jarrett et al., 2005).

Adult investment in youth not only promotes individual development but also supports the goals of mainstream society. Youth programs focused on meeting the needs of adolescents today connect youth to adults who have knowledge and resources that facilitate their development of social capital (Jarrett et al., 2005; Stasz & Brewer, 1998). Mentoring in this environment is about fostering relationships with people in the workplace who can provide support and help the participant to understand the norms and challenges individuals face, particularly inexperienced and marginalized youth, as they enter into the workforce (Taylor, 1997).

By developing relationships with caring, competent adults, youth actually develop a sense of motivation. When trust is built and appropriate behaviors are modeled by these adults, there is reinforcement, positive feedback for achievements, and vice versa and this encourages a greater sense of accountability (James, 1997/1999, Partee, 2003).

Organized youth programs provide a bridge that links young people to the institutional and social resources that are expected in mainstream society. Through supportive relationships, young people gain the institutional knowledge they need to build a successful life.
Federally Funded Youth Programming

The federal government has had a long-standing commitment to funding opportunities for youth, specifically through summer work experiences (Social Policy Research Associates, 2004). Policy makers recognize that disadvantaged youth may benefit from government-funded workforce initiatives. Studies have shown throughout the past decades of committed youth workforce programming, that youth become better prepared for transition from school to work when they have been engaged in meaningful and creative work in school as well as in the community (Curnan & Hahn, 2010). The assumption is that youth who receive job training and knowledge of institutions will be productive members of society, rather than relying on public assistance, moving into the criminal justice system, or otherwise not contributing to society (Brown & Thakur, 2005; Castellano et al., 2003; Kao, 2004; Stasz & Brewer, 1998). A timeline that outlines the history of federal initiatives that support youth workforce programming follows.

Comprehensive Employment and Training Act

In 1973, the Federal government passed the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA) (Public Law 93-203), which was designed to provide job training for the long-term unemployed, as well as those with low incomes, and summer jobs for low-income high school students with the intent of facilitating participants’ transition to jobs that were not government subsidized. The intent was to provide the states with more control over programming, rather than the federal government. Public service jobs were provided for those who qualified and block grants were provided to states to support job training and youth programs, including Job Corps and Summer Youth Employment (Franklin & Ripley, 1984).
Job Training Partnership Act

In 1982, Congress replaced CETA with the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) (Public Law 97-300) to fund state-administered programs designed to provide job training and skill building for economically disadvantaged youth and unskilled adults facing barriers to employment. This Reagan-era legislation was one effort to reduce the population of a welfare state and the administration believed that states were better equipped to understand community-specific needs and local business structure (Brown & Thakur, 2005). This was also a conservative era where the ideas about the purpose of school changed from a basic skill focus to revamping curriculum standards and assessment in order to create more rigor for students and educators (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Five core categories were created under JTPA to fulfill the overall goal of job training and skill building: adult and youth programs, federally administered programs (Native American and migrant/seasonal farm workers, Job Corps, Veteran’s Employment programs, National Activities, Labor Market Information, National Commission for Employment Policy, training to fulfill affirmative action obligations), Summer Youth Employment and Training programs, and Employment and Training Assistance for Dislocated Workers programs.

Under JTPA, states developed job training plans for youth ages 14 to 21, with priority given to applicants who did not meet established academic achievement levels and who planned to enter the labor force after high school graduation (Bellotti et al., 2010). Although summer youth employment and training programs were to be administered by the states, plans were affected by changes in funding allocations, and collective youth programs all but disappeared within a decade.
Consequently, the decade between the eighties and nineties saw little fiscal and administrative attention from the federal, state, and local governments and summer youth jobs almost became nonexistent (Bellotti et al., 2010; Bloom, Orr, Cave, Bell, & Doolittle, 1993; Social Policy Research Associates, 2004). Program evaluations have shown that potential participants who were difficult to place in the program were essentially screened out, and academically successful youth were more likely to apply for and be accepted into the program. Therefore, the program failed to reach the intended population (Holzer, 2008).

School to Work Opportunities Act

Bill Clinton’s administration took aim at welfare initiatives and employment programming, and his cabinet identified youth programs with poor track records of success that had been created under the JTPA and sought to improve them (Social Policy Research Associates, 2004). Congress passed legislation approving new funding streams in 1994, part of which implemented the School to Work Opportunities Act (STWOA) where new legislation was designed to compensate for the United States’ lack of an institutionalized school-to-work transition system. The STWOA provided funds for states to expand or develop programs that incorporated cooperative education and work-based learning (WBL) components in order to create an integrated system of youth education, job training, and labor market information. The ultimate aim of the STWOA was to provide a faster and more successful transition from school to stable employment (Neumark & Joyce, 2001; Stasz, C., & Brewer, 1998).

The 1990s were a productive time for government planning and programming for young people where internships, service learning, and work-based learning programs were created to contribute to the intellectual and career development of high school students and aid in the transition from school to work (Fraser, Hubbard, Charner, & Weinbaum, 1993). During the
Clinton administration, youth programs focused on linking real-world work experiences to youth academic achievement by determining participants’ basic skills and creating individual service plans (Bellotti et al., 2010).

**Workforce Investment Act**

In 1998, as President Clinton neared the end of his second term, the United States Congress bridged the Job Training Partnership Act with welfare reform efforts. The Workforce Investment Act (WIA) (Public Law 105-220) shifted the focus from serving the unemployed to also engaging and serving employers. The framework for workforce preparation met the needs of both employers and job seekers (U.S. General Accounting Office, 2003). While Congress was developing the welfare to work system, the Department of Labor (DOL) was evaluating the workforce development system. The Department of Labor had been working during the 1990s to evaluate and restructure youth programs. WIA was designed to create partnerships between public and private industries to create opportunities for at-risk youth, adults with low education levels and who are under- or unemployed, assist those with disabilities to gain workforce skills, provide services for English language learners, and create a solid structure for national workforce programs (DOL, 2000; Holzer, 2008).

WIA used the concept of developing “one-stop” centers to improve delivery of services, including job training, assistance with employment searches, and comprehensive assessment. Seventeen mandated partners were to collaborate with one another, not necessarily under one roof but through electronic means as well. Some of these partner programs included Adult Education, Vocational Rehabilitation, Welfare-to-Work, and Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) (DOL, 2006).
Second, under JTPA participants had to qualify by meeting minimum income standards and under the WIA, it was recognized that poverty level income was not the only barrier people faced to gaining employment. Those who had not succeeded in high school or in other jobs may have been in need to get past previously felt barriers that thwarted progress. The WIA changed the eligibility requirement to state that any adult experiencing difficulty securing employment was qualified to apply for services. Also, participants in the WIA were able to choose their training courses and providers (Holzer, 2008).

Each state was tasked to create local Workforce Investment Boards (WIB), composed of business owners, CEOs, hiring authorities, labor organizations, and individuals with youth experience activity who would oversee the creation and implementation of the local workforce development system that included youth workforce preparation services (Holzer, 2008).

WIA youth programs were intended to prepare young people for post-secondary education and/or employment, and to include linkages between academic and occupational learning (DOL, 2000). Under WIA, a new strategy for youth employment programs encouraged states to use an evidence-based approach to creating comprehensive workforce preparation for youth, specifically summer employment, which reflected the developmental needs of youth (Social Policy Research Associates, 2004). The youth program funding streams that had been separate for year-round and summer programs under JTPA were consolidated under WIA (U.S. General Accounting Office, 2003). This change was very visible to the public as stand-alone large-scale summer youth programs were eliminated and summer programs became one element of youth programming (Social Policy Research Associates, 2004).

WIA mandated a major re-focus of youth programs and outlined ten elements of a comprehensive intervention plan with youth participants. These elements reflect a more
ecological approach to programming and include summer employment opportunities linked to academic and occupational learning, tutoring, study skills training, and instruction leading to secondary school completion, alternative secondary school offerings, paid and unpaid work experiences, occupational skill training, leadership development opportunities, supportive services depending on identified individual needs, adult mentoring for at least 12 months, either during or after participation, comprehensive guidance and counseling, and follow-up activities for at least 12 months (Bellotti et al., 2010). The primary outcome measurement for this Workforce Investment Act had been to provide “some degree” of work readiness for participants (U.S. GAO, 2003). Although the Workforce Investment Act was designed to last for five years, it has been continually reauthorized and is in its eleventh year. This is important because it was designed as an experiment and Congress has not been able to update and modernize the Act for over six years (Social Policy Research Associates, 2004, Wandner & Wiseman, 2009; Isaacs, Bradley, Mulvey, & Topoleski, 2010).

**American Recovery and Reinvestment Act and Youth Employment**

In February 2009, President Obama signed the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) (Public Law 111-5), commonly referred to as the “stimulus package.” Under the stimulus Congress authorized spending for job creation with $1.2 billion provided to state workforce investment systems for youth activities and the goal was to create up to one million summer jobs for youth nationally (ARRA, 2009). The Recovery Act language refers to this funding as the Summer Youth Employment Initiative (Bellotti et al., 2010). This represented a major federal commitment to summer youth programs for the first time in about ten years and the challenge fell on the individual states to provide disconnected youth job with opportunities within a period of about four months (Curnan & Hahn, 2010). One key indicator was to be used
to measure program performance: achievement of work readiness goals that included age-appropriate and meaningful experiences in terms of leading young people to developing goals, interests, and skills they can build on (Bellotti et al., 2010).

Through the Recovery Act, summer youth employment funds were to be used by June 30, 2011 although Congress expressed interest in the funding being used for the 2009 summer. Youth, aged 14-24, were to be placed with employers of non-profit agencies as well as public and private employers and Recovery dollars would pay their wages. Workforce sites throughout the country recruited participants through partner organizations, media campaigns, and by enrolling youth who were already participating in Workforce activities (Bellotti et al., 2010).

Workforce centers were required to assess the participant’s readiness and skill-levels but were free to utilize their own strategies for doing so. Assessments are time-consuming and the sites were forced to balance the time in order to place youth in jobs as quickly as possible. The centers were also faced with preparing youth, many of whom had never worked, with the soft-skills they needed to be successful in the workplace. Communication, interviewing, resume building, and negotiating were of concern for planners and individual Workforce sites chose how to address these needs before placement (Bellotti et al., 2010).

Matching the youth to work sites became the indicator for beginning to determine whether the youth would have a meaningful experience. Bellotti et al. (2010) listed the key considerations for the matching process: (a) the youth’s personal interests as indicated on applications, during orientation sessions, and through meeting with staff members; (b) arranging a formal interview with employers in order to gain feedback; (c) the age of youth, their past experience and skills; and (d) addressing of other needs of the youth including transportation, child care, clothing, etc.
Nearly 314,000 youth across the nation participated in the 2009 Summer Youth Employment Program. The diverse group of disadvantaged youth included high school drop outs, in-school youth, parenting teens, youth with criminal histories and youth with disabilities, who entered the workforce without competing for jobs with adult dislocated workers (Bellotti et al., 2010).

The Department of Labor (2009) calculated the performance measures for each state and produced monthly summaries that included information on the total numbers of participants in the 2009 SYEP. A few individual Workforce sites were studied around the country, in terms of their youth workforce planning, numbers of youth served, and recruitment and youth preparations activities (Bellotti et al., 2010; Curnan & Hahn, 2010). However, little research has been published regarding the personal impact the program has had on the ecology of youth participants, beyond exit interviews and feedback instruments. The perspectives of the youth participants on how the program and the adults within the program provided them with social capital resources, transferrable knowledge, or institutional knowledge has yet to be discussed.

ARRA Funded SYEP in South Central Kansas. In 2009, ARRA provided individual states with the dollars for summer youth programs. The Kansas Department of Commerce received funds from the U.S. Department of Labor and allocated those to the five local workforce investment areas in Kansas. The Workforce Alliance of South Central Kansas (WASCK) (Kansas Local Area IV Workforce Investment Board) was responsible for implementing the ARRA Summer Youth Employment Program.

The Workforce Alliance of South Central Kansas had been responsible for the oversight of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA), which included youth programming that connects young people, aged 14-24, with educational and occupational learning opportunities. The
Alliance planned a comprehensive program to improve educational and employment outcomes by linking disadvantaged youth to educational institutions, youth service organizations, community-based organizations, businesses, economic development agencies, faith-based organizations, and other governmental agencies and initiatives. Summer programming had been a portion of WIA programming but it was not until 2009, that the Workforce Alliance Area IV received funding to operate a stand-alone SYEP for the first time in more than ten years (Bellotti et al., 2010).

The Summer Youth Employment Program was designed to work with individual youth according to their needs and interests, while benefiting the community, and preparing young people for the workforce (Bellotti et al., 2010). The goals of the Summer Youth Employment Program include offering young people opportunities to understand their lives in the context of the larger society and be supported in making improvements to their lives through completing their education, developing work skills, building relationships and communicating with institutional agents or mentors, as well as assisting with everyday needs (e.g., transportation, child-care, housing, and nutrition) (Bellotti et al., 2010; WASCK, 2010).

The Recovery Act allowed states to spend allocated summer dollars though June 2011, although Congress encouraged states to primarily use the funds in 2009. Youth were recruited to the program through their involvement with other social service and criminal justice systems, school systems, and through newspaper public notices, public service announcements, and social media postings (WASCK, 2010).

Youth applicants were required to meet eligibility standards that included permanent residency in one of the counties in the south-central Kansas boundary area (Sedgwick, Sumner, Butler, Cowley, Harper, or Kingman); a minimum age of 16 and maximum age of 24 at the time
of enrollment; eligibility to work in the United States; and low-income guidelines for family size.
Applicants were also required to demonstrate at least one of the following barriers to education
or employment: basic skills deficiency (reading, writing, computing problems, speaking English
below 8.9 grade level); homeless, runaway, or foster care recipient; school dropout; pregnant or
parenting; documented disability; or requiring assistance to complete education (WASCK,
2010).

Adults within the SYEP functioned as worksite supervisors and mentors for the youth
assigned to their workplace. The Alliance determined each employer’s capability of providing a
productive work experience with an appropriate level of supervision. Time sheets were kept for
all participants and staffing agencies were contracted to be the employer of record and disburse
wages to participants.

The Alliance had funding through June 2010 and determined they were able to make their
dollars stretch to serve youth for two summers. In 2009, 250 youth were eligible for the program
and in the following year, more than 300 youth positions had been created through partnerships
with 70 non-profit organizations, government offices, and schools. New in 2010 was the student
completion of pre-employment work readiness training. Participants also received an official
SYEP uniform of khaki pants and a polo shirt.

The goal of the SYEP program was to provide opportunity for the youth to earn income,
gain transferable work-readiness skills, explore occupations, and learn about post-secondary
options through community, school, and government partnerships (Department of Labor
Education Training Administration, 2008).
Summary

While summer youth employment programs have had a long-standing federal commitment, today’s political and economic climates have impacted the availability of employment and workforce development for youth. This literature review began by bringing the fundamentals of two theories, ecological systems and social capital, together in order to provide a framework for viewing the interactions of the elements of youths’ lives and how they may be impacted by a summer youth employment program. Youth workforce programs were also discussed in order to establish that the opportunities that are afforded disadvantaged youth in workforce programs are necessary for advancement of youth in society. These programs facilitate their building of social capital that is crucial for moving beyond poverty and into mainstream work and life. The literature review also provided a timeline of the federal perspectives on youth summer and work programs through the last four decades in order to establish longevity of commitment but also, to include the Workforce Investment Act and American Recovery and Reinvestment Act information as it pertains to the SYEP. These Acts have fueled the most recent opportunities for disadvantaged youth to gain work experience and develop relationships with adults who facilitate their building of social capital. Discussion of the specific background and program elements of the Kansas SYEP completes the literature review.

Federally funded youth workforce programming has been extensively evaluated as to program components and economic outcomes. These evaluations rarely, if ever, use the voice of the youth participants to determine those outcomes. This research described the ecological systems that interact within the lives of a group of youth who have participated in a SYEP experience. The research sought to describe the influence the summer youth employment programs has had on their ecology and if they had opportunities to gain/build social capital.
Additionally, the research sought to identify their connections with influential adults that help them transition to the workforce or into furthering their education.

In the following chapter a detailed description of the design and procedures of the study is discussed. The methods are tied to the research questions as well as the theory used to frame the study.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The qualitative research tradition, which has been described as naturalistic, interpretive, and ecological, is rich in description of people, places, and circumstances and serves multiple data gathering strategies concerned more with process than outcomes (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Merriam, 2002). This study used an ecological qualitative methodology, based in phenomenology, (Bronfenbrenner, 1979/1986; Frisch, 1990; Hycner, 1985; Lincoln, 1995; Lincoln & Guba, 1998; Thompson, 2000) to gather perceptions from ten urban youth who had participated in a federally funded Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP). The research focused on how the youth described their life systems and discussed their feelings about, motivation toward, and preparedness for entering the workforce and for furthering their education after high school.

Because this study gathered the perspectives from the urban youth through an ecological qualitative inquiry, the methodological approach remained flexible in order to allow meaning to evolve regarding their experiences, consistent with qualitative tradition (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Lichtman, 2010). The goal of the inquiry was to advance the conversation about how federally funded youth employment opportunities can create social capital for youth who live in poverty but strive to overcome barriers to employment. Further, this inquiry sought to bring awareness as to how social capital and contact with influential adult mentors can help young people learn to access the information and adapt behaviors that promote success in the mainstream economy.
Practical Use of Theory

Ecological and social capital research can provide practical implications for projects and policies not only by providing a theoretical structure but ultimately offering ways to improve people’s lives and experiences (Dudwick et al., 2006). The ecosystems perspective was used to develop interview questions about relationships, interactions and communication with people and places (e.g., family, peers, school, work), as people and places are considered important elements that influence a participant’s ecosystem (Arum, 2000; Bogenschneider, 1996).

Several elements of social capital formation were investigated in this study: the impact of poverty, the effect of education, how services are utilized, the levels of trust within family systems and with institutional agents, and the effect of formal and informal groups and networks. These elements were all included in the data gathering process and helped build a picture of the participant’s ecosystem (Hartman, 1995).

Stanton-Salazar’s social capital framework (1997) provided a lens for identifying key agents or gatekeepers in an institution (e.g., teachers or work place supervisors) and how interactions between the youth and these agents facilitate the development of institutional knowledge. These interactions create social capital or a wealth of knowledge that allows individuals access to opportunities within workplace or educational systems (Stanton-Salazar, 1997).

The relational aspect of social capital within any system is often unequal and stratified; it thereby works to the advantage of some but to the disadvantage of others. Not having access to social capital or to the gatekeepers or knowledge brokers in an institutional, educational, or workplace setting can prevent youth from developing to their full potential in the social and occupational world. This lack of knowledge becomes a barrier in gaining employment or in
furthering one’s education (Dudwick et al., 2006). The study looked at how these institutional agents facilitate or influence change, positive or negative, in a youth’s environment.

The next sections of this chapter discuss the design of the study, the specific ecological context of the study, site selection, participant selection, data analysis procedures, design limitations, parameters and scope of the design, ethical protections for the participants, and the role of the researcher in the process of data collection and analysis.

**Research Design**

The design of this research is very much linked to policy and practice but also to the theoretical underpinnings. Essentially, this study tested the ecological and social capital theories by discovering the personal impact of the SYEP on the ecology of youth and by learning how important institutional agents influence their ecology and social capital building. Studying the impact of the program on the target population, and hearing the adolescents’ own voices, can inform and improve future programs and interventions. The theories provided a powerful way to understand these youth’s life experiences as they relate to the summer program.

**Ecological Qualitative Process**

In this study, youth from the Kansas Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) were interviewed. Through an Ecological Qualitative research process, using methods common to phenomenology, the researcher captured their out-of-school and community experiences to describe how their time in the program assisted them in occupational communication and relationship building. More importantly, the study described how the experiences of these youth have influenced their attitudes and perceptions about their own ability to impact change in their environmental systems, with specific regard to career/work and schooling.
The study captured personal life experiences and stories of urban youth by illuminating the participant’s ecological system and was interpreted by the researcher in terms of describing their stories to inform the impact of the SYEP. The use of in-depth interviews can help reconstruct an experience or reality (Grele, 1998) and encourages interaction between the researcher and the subjects by creating the possibility of going beyond conventional stories (Gluck & Patai, 1991). This phenomenological-based story telling further gives voice to those who have sometimes been overlooked or remain voiceless in the research process. These stories and inferences also give voice to participants, especially when a new audience hears them (Perks & Thomson, 1998).

This qualitative research gives voice to those most affected by a federal and state initiative intended to provide summer employment to youth. This study contributes to the literature on youth workforce programming as well as to the understanding of the realities that urban youth face. These insights can be used to assist youth workforce program directors and educational planners with developing programs that not only meet basic work needs; in addition, the programs help match youth with opportunities to facilitate the building of the social capital that can better prepare them for the adult workforce or for furthering their education.

**Specific Ecological Context of the Study**

Bogdan and Biklen (2007) discussed how meanings that people attach to their experiences, and how interpretations of those experiences, are central to what people perceive is happening in a particular situation. As such, in this research, the urban youth who participated in this study were empowered to describe their experiences in the Summer Youth Employment program in an individual way; participants interpreted their experiences differently based on their personal ecology. Consistent with ecology research tradition, the research was conducted in the
urban youth’s natural environment. Whereas the students’ background, ecology, and lived experiences, varied widely, the intent of the study was to find patterns and commonalities that could act as a feedback loop to facilitate understanding how programs impact youths’ lives and support modification of these programs.

The youth attended a variety of high schools within this Midwest community with an overall population of about 490,000. Sedgwick County has over 25 rural, suburban, and urban high schools. Over 60,000 youth, ages 15-24, reside in the county; over 10 percent of Sedgwick county families live in poverty (2009 U.S. Census, 2010). As poverty interacts with the environment, it is important to consider how other systems (e.g., employment, housing, transportation, and schools) are influenced by poverty (Tienda & Jensen, 1998). Tables 1 and 2 describe racial distribution and statistics of poverty that the U.S. Census Bureau compiled for Sedgwick County (2009).

**Table 1**

**Sedgwick County Race/Ethnicity Distribution**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Sedgwick County Pop. (Number)</th>
<th>Sedgwick County Pop. (Percentage of total)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>373,579</td>
<td>78.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black/African American</td>
<td>41,470</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino/Hispanic</td>
<td>49,727</td>
<td>10.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>17,863</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian/Alaskan Native</td>
<td>3,944</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multicultural or Other Race</td>
<td>39,059</td>
<td>8.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2 Sedgwick County Poverty Distributions by Race

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Sedgwick County Poverty (Number)</th>
<th>Sedgwick County Poverty (Percentage rate)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>33,945</td>
<td>13.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black/African American</td>
<td>11,441</td>
<td>29.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino/Hispanic</td>
<td>10,159</td>
<td>24.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian/Alaskan Native</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multicultural or Other Race</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Another context that affects the study of and future planning for urban youth is the state of the U.S. economy, and Kansas, in particular. The current economic crisis had profoundly affected youth employment, forced layoffs, and created high unemployment rates, and competition for jobs (Sum & Khatwiada, 2010; Sum, Khatwiada, McLaughlin, & Taggart, 2007). Kansas’s layoffs and unemployment rates have been between 6 and 8% for the last two years (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011). In Sedgwick County the rates have been higher, between 7 and 10%. Table 3 below provides an illustration of unemployment in Sedgwick County during the last six months of the year 2010 (Kansas Department of Labor, 2011).

Table 3 Sedgwick County Employment/Unemployment Rates for 2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Labor force</th>
<th>Employed</th>
<th>Unemployed</th>
<th>Unemployment Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>December</td>
<td>249,124</td>
<td>229,508</td>
<td>19,616</td>
<td>7.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November</td>
<td>250,234</td>
<td>229,079</td>
<td>21,155</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October</td>
<td>248,525</td>
<td>228,260</td>
<td>20,265</td>
<td>8.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September</td>
<td>248,610</td>
<td>228,001</td>
<td>20,609</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August</td>
<td>247,903</td>
<td>227,364</td>
<td>20,667</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July</td>
<td>253,901</td>
<td>231,364</td>
<td>21,677</td>
<td>8.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This economic climate is important to consider in the context of conducting research with the youth population. Fewer youth are obtaining employment due to the labor market, which has weakened over the past years of recessions, along with diminished federal support for youth employment opportunities and adult competition for entry-level work (BLS, 2009; Morisi, 2010).

**Employer Recruitment for SYEP in South Central Kansas**

The Workforce Alliance has maintained longstanding partnerships with community services and public, private, and nonprofit businesses. During the employer recruitment stage for the SYEP, workforce professionals had to recruit employers throughout the area to essentially volunteer to hire youth, although youth participants would be paid through Recovery Act funding. The Workforce Alliance recruited employers who were previously connected with other Workforce programs; it also used media and direct contact to solicit employers. In South Central Kansas, employers included public school systems, Goodwill, city recreation centers, government-funded social service agencies, faith-based organizations and churches, as well as hospitals and health care centers (WASCK, 2010).

**Youth Recruitment for SYEP in South Central Kansas**

Workforce sites were encouraged to use several recruitment strategies for reaching the large population of eligible youth in Kansas. ARRA guidelines for participants stated that youth needed at least one barrier to employment to participate; that is, at least one aspect in their lives could possibly interfere with a positive experience in school or in the work place. All SYEP participants had low incomes and were required to have at least one of these barriers: being homeless, pregnant, acting as a parent, be an ex-offender, be disabled, live in a foster facility, be a runaway, or have deficiencies in basic skill development, each being a significant confounding factor (Bellotti et al., 2010; WASCK, 2010).
In order to recruit youth, Workforce case managers and administrators contacted social services agencies, schools, juvenile justice providers, and other community organizations to inform them of the SYEP opportunities and encourage the referral of at-risk youth on their caseloads, or those who were recipients of agency services. School administrators allowed case managers to present the opportunity to groups of their students. Media campaigns were also utilized (Bellotti et al., 2010; WASCK, 2010).

Workforce sites were overwhelmed with the responses, and large groups of applicants in every workforce site were evaluated for participation (Bellotti et al., 2010). The 4-month preparation time frame from funding to program implementation placed a strain on the sites. It was found that the diversity of applicants was applied not only to race or ethnicity; but also to experience, disability, and complex entanglement with social service providers (WASCK, 2010).

For the summer of 2010, over 250 youth were chosen to participate in the South Central Kansas SYEP program. For those aged 18-24, Table 4 describes the distribution of race among participants. Three youth did not list their race.

Table 4  Youth Eligible to Participate in SYEP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Work Readiness Training

Work readiness training was provided to all SYEP participants in South Central Kansas in order to prepare them for the experience. They completed online assessments that outlined their skills and interests, to help them be more aware of academic and career options. Participants also attended a series of classes that taught the youth about workplace communication, writing a resume, and interviewing skills (WASCK, 2010).

Participant Selection

This study was conducted with urban youth who participated in the federally funded Summer Youth Employment Program through the Workforce Alliance of South Central Kansas. Ten participants, over 18 years of age, were purposively selected (all low income, who resided in Sedgwick county) to share their perspectives and reflections on their experiences not only during the Summer Youth Employment program but also afterwards, as they had time to reflect on what they experienced in their summer employment. The researcher sought a balance of male and female participants, as well as diversity of race. Interviewing ten participants was the goal, as this number provided a range of individuals from whom to gather in-depth information and also represented a diversity of background, thought, and experience.

The researcher systematically narrowed potential participants by first eliminating any that were not 18 years of age or older. Then, the researcher narrowed the pool by race, gender, and county. From that list, every fifth person was to be contacted for interest in participating. Although the Workforce Alliance provided contact information for youth participants, almost a year had passed since their SYEP experience, and the majority of these youth had a relatively transient lifestyle. Almost none of the phone numbers were still in service; most of the
adolescents had moved at least one time in the year, and only two of the first identified round of potential participants had email addresses that were current. Two participants were still receiving services through the Workforce center; they were contacted by their case managers and agreed to participate. The researcher called any phone number that was listed in their files, performed Google and Facebook searches, and was able to make contact with a total of ten participants over a 1-month period.

Potential participants were contacted by email and telephone to arrange interview times. All participants received a fifty dollar gift card for their participation. They were asked to sign a consent form and be willing to commit to a data collection process that consisted of one in-depth interview that lasted between 1 and 2 hours. Participants were allowed to withdraw if they decided to do so for any reason, although no one withdrew. Table 5 describes the demographics of the ten participants selected for the study.

Table 5 Demographics of the Ten Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>G</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Barriers to Employment (All are low income)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>poor work history, CJ involvement, parenting youth, &amp; foster care history</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>poor work history, foster care, &amp; pregnant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Puerto Rican/Cauc.</td>
<td>poor work history, CJ involvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>poor work history, disability (ADHD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>poor work history, parenting youth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>poor work history, parenting youth, CJ involvement, &amp; foster care history</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>poor work history, disability (Autism Spectrum), basic skills deficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>poor work history, mental impairment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>poor work history</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>parenting youth</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

50
The researcher gained approval from the Workforce Alliance and the participants to review files of SYEP participants. Each participant’s confidential record file was reviewed to gather information that would inform the research. The files included a large amount of information for each participant; however, in order not to overwhelm the research process, the researcher used only the demographics, living situation, school status, criminal justice background, career inventory assessment information that assesses their career skills, values, and interests, SYEP placement, and the feedback from the SYEP worksite supervisors for each participant.

Following is a brief description for each participant based solely on the information in the file records when they applied to the program. Pseudonyms are used to protect the youth’s identities.

*Ellen* was a 21-year-old African American female who graduated from high school and she stated she was a parenting youth. She was the sister of Laila who also participated in the program, although they do not have the same address. She had contact with the juvenile justice system and all charges had been expunged. She completed the career inventory assessment and her interests were in business management, law/corrections, and hospitality. Her skills were stated to be in criminal justice, public administration, and marketing.

For the SYEP, Ellen was placed at a state social service agency. She had no exit statements from the supervisor at her placement in her file.

*Gwen* was an 18-year-old Asian American female who stated she was pregnant at the time of SYEP and residing in a foster care placement. She was living at a community-based, non-profit maternity home for young women. She had been arrested for shoplifting and traffic issues but had not been convicted. She did not complete all of the areas of the career inventory
assessment however her case manager at Workforce listed her interests as health science, corrections/ criminal justice, and human services.

Gwen had been placed in the SYEP at the Boys and Girls Club. Upon completion of the SYEP, her supervisor gave her a very high evaluation in all areas, especially in engagement and leadership. He stated that she had a positive attitude, took initiative, and completed her tasks. She was described as an “asset to the program.”

Jacob was a 19-year-old dual ethnicity, Caucasian and Puerto Rican, male. He stated that he lived with a low income family of four and received food stamps. He was in high school and had no work experience. He was born in Colorado and nationalization documents were included in the file to show that his mother had been born in Germany and was an American citizen. He had been arrested for marijuana but was not convicted.

Jacob completed the career inventory assessment, which stated that his interests included science/technology, transportation/logistics, and manufacturing. His skills were listed as information technology and manufacturing. His values were listed as creativity, workplace, and variety.

He was placed with an education and re-training organization. His supervisor evaluated his quality of work, teamwork, communication, and attendance as very poor. She stated that he needed to improve in the quality of his work, his organization, problem solving and initiative. She noted that he “slept on the job.”

Justin was an 18-year-old Caucasian male who reported that he had stable housing and was in the 12th grade. He had never had a job. His family lived in poverty and received state assistance, food stamps and cash assistance. His parents were divorced.
He had an Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) diagnosis that Workforce categorized as a mental impairment. He had an Individual Education Plan (IEP) in school but was in mainstream regular education classes and his general intelligence was considered high average. The file stated that he required stimulation to reduce problem behaviors and inappropriate noises that distracted students. He stated that he was very “hands on and was fine with working outdoors.” He rode his bike to school and planned to ride to work as well,” as he would be placed in his community.

He was placed with a suburban city landscape management department, and there was no written feedback from his supervisor in his file.

*Kanani* was a 23-year-old African American female who was pregnant when she applied for SYEP. She was a high school graduate and had been arrested for traffic issues and trespassing but was not convicted.

Her file stated that transportation was a big issue for her; she was provided bus passes to get to and from work. She received food stamps for herself and Medicaid for her pregnancy. She was registered to vote.

*Kanani* completed the career inventory assessment, which stated that her interests were government/public administration, finance, criminal justice, and human services. Her skills included business, science/math, finance, education and public administration.

Her SYEP placement was at an assisted living facility through a regional medical center. She had no written feedback from her supervisor in her file.

*Laila* was a 20-year-old African American female who stated that she was a parenting youth and a high school graduate. As noted above, her sister Ellen also participated in the program, although they did not have the same address. Laila received cash assistance and food
stamps at the time she entered the program. She stated that she had never been arrested for a crime; however, in another section, she stated she had been “arrested for truancy” but was never convicted of a crime.

Laila did not complete the entire career interest inventory, although the section she completed stated her interest was in healthcare. She reported her strengths as being a strong-minded, positive person with a positive personality.

She told her workforce counselor she had a great interest in health care. She had asthma and reported that she was not able to work outdoors. She was placed at local hospital as a laundry aid.

*Mac* was a 20-year-old Caucasian male who was a senior at suburban high school and had never been employed. The file stated that he lived in stable housing with his father and siblings. His income position was based on the fact that he had a diagnosed disability and, as a family of one, would be considered under the poverty line. He was diagnosed on the Autism spectrum and was considered to be basic skills deficient, which meant that he was below an 8.9 grade level in at least one area of problem solving, reading, writing, or speaking English.

It was stated in his file that he was positive, outspoken and worked well with others, and was excited about an opportunity to work. He was placed with the landscape department of a suburban city. He had no written feedback from his supervisor in his file.

*Magnus* was a 19-year-old African American male, who lived with a low-income family of five that received food stamps. He had completed his junior year of a public high school and had an Individual Education Plan (IEP) for a mental impairment. Magnus was approved for the program based on his low income status and poor work history/being underemployed.
He completed the career inventory assessment, which stated his interests were in agriculture/food/natural resources, arts/technology, and hospitality/tourism. His skills were identified to be related to agriculture/food/natural resources, Government/Public Administration, and manufacturing/finance. His values in the workplace included variety, creativity, and income.

He was placed at a convents as well as the Workforce Alliance center with the Kansas Department of Commerce. He had no written feedback from his supervisor in his file.

*Nicolette* was a 19-year-old African American female, who stated that she lived with her mother and received only food stamps, in terms of welfare benefits. She had no work experience.

The file stated she attended school at an alternative learning center. She had completed 11th grade but left high school due to academic issues. She had been arrested for assault at some point, but was never convicted.

She completed the career inventory assessment, which stated that she showed interest in human services, education, and communication. Her counselor noted that she “exhibited good communication skills” and valued creativity and variety in a workplace.

For SYEP, she was placed at a public high school in the custodial department. After the summer employment experience, Nicolette’s workplace supervisor stated that her quality and quantity of work were exceptional, along with her teamwork, organization, and attitude. The supervisor viewed her communication and problem-solving as good, and her attendance, punctuality, and grooming were satisfactory.

*Ruby* was a 23-year-old Caucasian female, who stated that she was single, not married, had a 3 year old daughter, and was pregnant. She was classified as a parenting youth and had dropped out of high school which made her eligible for the program. The file stated that she received a medical card for her daughter through the State of Kansas.
She had completed her GED through the WIA Youth Program and was attending an area technical college for an Office Technician certification.

She completed the career inventory assessment, and her interests included finance, agriculture/food/natural resources, and government/public administration. Her skills were listed as information technology, agriculture/food/natural resources, and arts/technology/communication. Her values included workplace dynamics, variety, and lifestyle.

She was placed with a private non-profit agency for the SYEP. Her supervisor gave her high marks on her evaluations and stated that she was “flexible, dependable, and committed to her job.” He felt that her self-confidence had grown during her employment and offered her a part-time position upon completion of SYEP.

Site Selection

The selection of the interview site was flexible as the researcher met the scheduling needs and preferences of the participants. No limitations were place on the interview sites, which included the following: Wichita Workforce Center, where the youth attended work preparation classes and were oriented to the SYEP; the participant’s homes, the mall, and a billiards hall. These sites allowed the interviews to occur in a setting that was natural to the participants and already a part of their ecological system.

Data Collection

Consistent with ecological research, the qualitative data were obtained in a variety of contexts, in which in-depth interviews occurred with ten youth, over 18 years of age, who completed the federally funded Summer Youth Employment Program, SYEP. The researcher also conducted a document review of case files and Workforce materials used in the SYEP in order to support and triangulate and support data gathered from interviews.
Interviews

Dudwick et al. (2006) have described that the importance of qualitative methods lies in the researcher’s ability to explore the views of different groups and unpack differing perspectives that exist within groups. This unpacking occurred with individuals that shared the SYEP experience. Participants took part in a semi-structured interview that lasted between 1 and 2 hours. A series of open-ended questions formed prior to the interviews were asked in order to encourage the adolescents to produce their own accounts and stories (see Appendix A). Open-ended questions were also used to guide the participants and encourage them to expand on their initial responses, provide rationale for their responses, and yet be free from the researcher’s restrictions and assumptions (Dudwick et al., 2006; Lincoln & Guba, 1998). The interview questions were developed after an extensive review of the literature on adolescent employment, the history of federally funded youth employment initiatives, social capital frameworks, and ecological systems theory.

The interviews consisted of rapport building and soliciting the youths’ perceptions and feelings related to the SYEP, their ecology/environment, and their motivation and future planning. More specifically, the interviews gathered perspectives and stories on whom the participants have connected with in school/work/SYEP settings; what they enjoyed doing; what growing up was like for them, descriptions of their family structure; how they felt about their relationships; how they felt about teachers, administrators, mentors, and work supervisors; and how they interacted with these institutional agents. Emergent questions were also used when appropriate, including how they understood and described their behaviors when their life systems interacted (Walker & Greene, 2009). These questions assisted the researcher in understanding how the adolescents interacted with family, work, and school systems; and the answers
illustrated how the SYEP has impacted or changed those perceptions, interactions, or attitudes. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed.

Ideally, the interviews were scheduled at the Workforce downtown center; however, several of the young adults had transportation, childcare, and employment issues, so the researcher agreed to meet them in public places or their home.

Every interview began by the researcher establishing a level of rapport with the interviewees by clearly identifying herself, providing an overview of why they were asked to participate, and describing what the study was about. The researcher provided all participants with a consent form, allowed them time to read it, and explained the form in detail before they signed.

The interviews were somewhat task related, as each participant was asked to create an ecomap with the researcher. She provided them with a template and an example of an ecomap that had already been completed to show the youth the types of areas that might be included. The ecomap essentially became a way to code the data; it provided a framework for the coding that allowed the data to be analyzed systematically.

**Ecomapping**

During the interview process, the researcher built a graphic representation of the youth’s ecological system by constructing an ecomap (See Figure 2 for an ecomap).
Professionals in many fields have used ecomaps to document, diagram, and organize an individual’s relationships and communication patterns with family, peers, relevant social institutions, and other environmental influences (Barker, 2003; Ray & Street, 2005).

Ecomaps are useful for gaining insight into complex lives and encouraging empathetic understanding by depicting individuals or families in their life space, identifying the various people and places that influence them and vice versa (Hartman, 1995). Ecomaps are used to “depict a variety of reciprocal influences between the individual and people around them, relevant social institutions, and environmental influences” (Barker, 2003, p.136). The ecomap is
a graphic representation that helps the youth and the researcher better understand how those connections influence attitudes and perceptions. (See Appendix B for a detailed description of creating an Ecomap). The ecomap construction, for this study, guided the researcher’s questions and assisted the participants in producing their stories.

As ecology is the study of the interaction of people with their environment, the ecomap is a tool for describing an individual or family’s ecology graphically (Kennedy, 2010). The idea is not only to conduct research that is ecologically sound, but also to show the adolescents a tool for visualizing patterns in their lives related to the many relationships they must balance on a daily basis. This tool assisted the researcher in understanding the elements of the participants’ lives and how they interacted and communicated with each element. In addition, the ecomap assisted both the researcher and the participants in identification of emerging themes and patterns related to the participant’s reflections on the impact of adults who influenced their life, as well as the impact of the SYEP experience.

**Document Review**

The Workforce Alliance of South Central Kansas documented all communication and progress of each young person in the Summer Youth Employment Program. Detailed case files were kept that provided documentation of their application to the program, income level, disability status, Individual Education Plan information from the school system, and copies of the interest/career inventories each student completed, as well as the location of their job placements in the summer and how they progressed through the summer. Workforce Alliance provided written permission to grant the researcher access to program information and personal records of all participants in the SYEP. The researcher conducted a document review that included creating a data sheet using demographic information of race and income status, along
with the barriers to employment that each participant faced (see participant descriptions). The documents were reviewed at the Workforce Alliance site to further inform the study and support information gathered through interviewing.

**Researcher’s Stance**

As a teacher, practitioner, social worker, student, parent, and educational researcher, there is an awareness of my personal worldview. As Buehl and Alexander (2005) discussed, worldview guides how people relate to the world around them and is created through personal and professional experiences. As the instrument of gathering data, credibility is established by being a licensed social work practitioner and instructor in higher education. However, as Peshkin (1991) described, this worldview is a “garment that cannot be removed” and the researcher is responsible to self-observe during the research process to understand how personal qualities and biases are drawn out during interactions with participants. One’s own sensitivity to the environment must also be maximized in order to realize the emerging phenomena and comprehend the contrasts of multiple environments. The researcher’s subjectivity can shape interpretation of the events and interviews.

Peshkin (1991) also described the process of becoming a qualitative researcher and began by explaining that the value of qualitative research rests on the fact that the goals and outcomes are about describing processes, relationships, settings, situations, and people. People can then interpret that information to begin to change behaviors, identify problems, and most importantly, understand the complexity of the human connection to the world. Through this recognition, evaluation, policies, practices, and innovations can be created (Peshkin, 1991). Such a view of the process allows the researcher to be present during the research on several levels and interact with it in ways that support interpretation and sharing.
When I was an adolescent, I personally experienced an adolescent transition in which I felt powerless, afraid, and trapped in a system where I saw no possibility for change. As a ninth grader, I attended a high school in a very affluent Southern community where I was a newcomer. I did not have a history in the community; my family did not have the material wealth to which the majority of students were entitled. As an adolescent trying to understand myself, and feeling isolated and defeated by my environment, I retreated into rebellion, risky behavior, and a disconnection from the school and family.

Because my parents were divorced, I felt that I could use the choice of living with the other parent as an opportunity to change. Entering into a Midwestern community, where my family was successful in the community and was able to introduce me to new ideas and people to help me facilitate change, I was transformed. I felt that I could participate in activities and create prospects for myself that had not previously been within reach. Over a short period of time, my confidence was rekindled, my experience of high school changed, I began working, and I understood that I was intelligent and could have a successful future.

As I progressed through college, I had intended to work with teens but I lost sight of that at some point. I became a social worker and first worked in the university environment advising students; then I worked with adults with mental illness. Later, as an instructor of Social Work, my interest in adolescent ecological and developmental processes was rekindled as I saw young people entering college with a lack of motivation and understanding of how their experiences had shaped their decision-making. It seemed that the young people’s environments had inhibited their growth in many ways; they had become disconnected from their own talents and skills and were having to find themselves again. Seeing this experience happen to other people helped me to understand that a process occurs in which people interact with elements of their environment;
it shapes how they see the world and what they think they are capable of accomplishing. The more they felt supported by their environment, and had healthy interactions within it, the more they were able to engage and achieve. These personal and professional experiences have intrigued me and have become part of the basis for this research.

As a researcher, I kept my attention to boundary issues. Although I expected to learn a great deal about the true experiences of the individual lives of youth participants, I had to prepare to learn more than anticipated. I understood that my presence in any given situation skewed reality somewhat for the participants as well as myself. The disengagement that I personally experienced as an adolescent also influenced my perspective and had the potential to create transference of my own experiences to this present day situation. Flannery and Wester (2004) described this issue and stated that although researchers may empathetically identify with research participants, our work is to remain goal-directed and rather concrete. I addressed these boundary issues by not sharing my personal experiences with the youth unless the need became evident in terms of rapport building. Even then, I carefully timed and limited the use of my own history. I was very conscious of my own use of self and documented, through reflective field notes, my reasoning for any disclosure and the intended result.

However, as an educator and social work practitioner, I am passionate about working with and helping people. This passion is relevant to the research and has assisted in my own engagement in the process.

**Research Quality**

The quality of this research is determined by describing the validity, reliability, and trustworthiness of the study. The next sections will explain each of these areas in detail.
Validity

In ecological research, several validity concerns must be taken into consideration. Bronfenbrenner (1976) considered research ecologically valid when the research is conducted in settings that are natural to the participants. The requirement of ecological validity applies to the elements and interactions within those settings, which include the place, time, roles, and activities. In order to preserve the integrity of the environment, contextual validity was maintained by meeting the adolescents where they were currently and where they normally functioned such as home, work, or the community.

There understanding prevails that the research does not focus solely on the behaviors of the participants, but maintains phenomenological validity by assessing the participants’ definitions of the settings/systems and how they perceive the elements and activities, as well as an observation of how they interact with, and within, these settings. Ecological research is consistent with research in the natural world, in which validity is evidenced when the pieces of evidence fit together and make sense (Eisner, 1979; McLeroy et al., 1988). Participants were not asked to enter into any ecologically ambiguous situation or engage in any activity that they did not already engage in or experience. This practice was also consistent with Bronfenbrenner’s parameters of ecological research.

Reliability

The researcher transcribed and analyzed the data gathered. Scrutiny was welcomed in the process and the researcher worked closely with advisors, peers, and committee members to allow assumptions to be challenged and make room for the strengthening of the arguments (Shenton, 2004). The ecomaps were shown to the participants to determine accuracy as well, which; let them make changes or additions themselves, if needed. Such data checking allowed the
researcher to feel confident that the interviews and observations were trustworthy representations of how the individuals felt about their ecological systems.

The Workforce Alliance of South Central Kansas documented all communication and progress of each young person in the Summer Youth Employment Program. This information complemented the interviews and triangulated whether the information that emerged during the interviews was consistent with the documentation or whether the interviews revealed information that could have better supported the youth in the job placement process and through the overall SYEP experience.

This research is significant for the educational community because it provides information about the experiences of young people and the ecology of their existence as they transition from a Summer Youth Employment Program. The adolescent experiences are not intended to be generalized to all youth; they are used to better understand this age group, provide improved programs and services for them, and tailor educational and workforce communities to meet their changing and growing needs.

Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, intellectual rigor is often questioned in terms of the research process including a systematic approach to data gathering and analysis. Trustworthiness in work that is naturalistic and qualitative differs from the concept of validity in quantitative research (Shenton, 2004). Guba (1981) suggested that qualitative studies be used for comparison rather than replication, as qualitative investigations may not be entirely consistent; he identified criteria to maintain trustworthiness in qualitative research that is helpful for this study. The first criterion for maintaining credibility is that the methods chosen in qualitative research should be well
established. Interviewing participants and reviewing documents have widely been utilized in comparative studies.

Before data collection occurred, the researcher visited the Workforce Alliance organization several times and spoke at length with program administrators. The researcher was given appropriate documents to inform the research and provide her with the information on both the background program of the program and organizational processes. The researcher also attended a celebration for the participants of the Summer Youth Employment Program to engage with the organization and gain a better understanding of the population served.

The sampling of participants was purposeful in terms of assuring that a diverse sample of the larger group was created, with enough variation to produce an analysis process that could provide the whole picture of many individual’s lives, which could then be used to address the research questions (Hycner, 1985). This representative sample allowed the researcher to analyze the data that was received through interviews and document review and provided a richer description of the attitudes, feelings, and behaviors of participants (Shenton, 2004).

Research Ethics

Working with adolescents requires the researcher to fully understand the implications associated with safety and ethics. Ethical considerations are crucial when working with people from vulnerable populations, and their vulnerability cannot be underestimated. Physical, mental, and emotional harm was avoided, and safety was assured in the process by communicating that although some personal topics may have created uncomfortable emotions for the adolescents, they could choose not to answer questions, share only what they were comfortable with, and had the freedom to retract participation in the study if they wished. The youth in the SYEP were accustomed to being asked personal questions and being evaluated in programs in which they
themselves and their family members participated, such as Social and Rehabilitation Services, special education or school services, and a variety of need-based community services.

Knowledge was co-constructed with the researcher and the adolescents to ensure consistency and allow for feedback during the process. As an ambiguous theoretical divide exists between therapy and education (Bosacki, 2005), the researcher maintained the stance of a researcher, rather than a practitioner or educator, and activities that involved self-disclosure were used only to promote healthy self-regulation techniques for working through adolescent issues. These activities were sensitive in nature and ethical considerations were identified and addressed. The researcher was sensitive to the fact that people sometimes relived stories as they shared them, and she was willing to change the subjects within the questions if the youth experienced discomfort and wished to move on to other questions.

**Written Consent**

The researcher secured written approval to conduct research and view participant files from the ethics committee at the Kansas Workforce Alliance, as well as the University Institutional Review Board. Both required an application to be viewed by an ethics committee, and the Executive Director of the Alliance provided written permission to access SYEP information. Adolescent participants, all over 18, were provided with a consent form (see Appendix C for consent form). The consent form was in English and used language adequate for comprehension. All participants had the right to withdraw from the study at any time. The process was audio recorded and transcribed.

Risk was minimal, and the only discomforts anticipated due to participation in this study were those encountered in daily life, as attention was called to the fact participants would reflect on elements of their lives that might be emotional. Certain mental health risks could arise if
participants in the interviews had negative reactions to describing family relationships or past experiences. The mental health risks were minimized by administering the informed consent in a sensitive manner and fully explaining the process. The researcher monitored the interview process and reminded participants of their right to withdraw from the study. If participants made negative statements about their experiences in the summer youth employment program, they ran no risk of losing any benefits. They had already completed the SYEP program and although the information would be shared with the Workforce Alliance, the results would not be presented with personal identifiers; pseudonyms were used, as well.

There was little to no probability of physical, psychological, or social harm or injury occurring as a result of participation. As the youth were already integrated with services provided by the Workforce Alliance, if they experienced any discomfort from the research, they already had resources and services available to them. These services included professionals from the Workforce Alliance, their case managers, school personnel that helped them with school services, or counselors.

Participants retained all appeal rights and were removed from the study if they requested, although no participants requested to be removed from the study. The integrity of this research was maintained by thorough and logical explanation of the steps of the research as well as the connections between the concepts. Youth are a vulnerable group, and as an adult, the researcher represented an authority figure; she was aware of this ethical consideration at all times. Youth participation was directly related to the study of the ecology of adolescents in transition after a Summer Youth Employment Program, and the researcher weighed the risks against the benefits regarding research decisions. Anonymity was also assured, and the participants were debriefed after their participation.
Confidentiality and Anonymity

The researcher assured confidentiality in terms of protecting the rights and interests of participants, and by changing their names and specific affiliations to any group that would reveal their identity during researcher presentations, write-ups, or discussions. The researcher protected the anonymity and confidentiality of those who were interviewed by using pseudonyms. The data that were collected will be protected and kept in a safe, locked location. The data will be disposed of through waste facilities for confidential data.
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Qualitative data analysis has been termed as complex, and sometimes even mysterious, as researchers have agreed upon few standardized rules or statistical measures (Thorne, 2000). Nonetheless, data analysis is the process of systematically organizing and evaluating the information gathered during the research process; the researcher then creates a system of analysis and synthesizes the information with literature and broader concepts related to the study (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). The voices of the interviewees can also be heard in this analysis. This type of research stands in contrast to traditional research, in which participants are viewed as samples. The analysis of this data is meant to capture the stories of the realities of urban youth in this context.

Data Analysis

The qualitative ecological inquiry that was conducted in this study lends itself to phenomenological analysis, in which gathering a sense of the whole picture is the first goal. Each of the transcribed interviews have been read and captured as its own story. This process was followed by the critical phase of phenomenological analysis, as the researcher addressed each research question by using the interview data as the response (Hycner, 1985). This section on results will follow these phenomenological guidelines while incorporating ecological analysis.

Analysis of Interviews

Data were gathered through the in-depth interviewing of ten urban youth who participated in the federally funded Summer Youth Employment Program. The interviews created an ecological understanding of how their work experience impacted these young adult’s building of social capital, or whether the influence of elements within their life’s ecosystem
prevented or slowed them from moving toward furthering their education or entering the workforce.

**Analysis of Documents**

The Workforce Alliance maintains files for each of the SYEP participants. The information the researcher gathered from these files was used to support the data collected through interviews. This information was placed into an Excel spreadsheet; the information drawn to complete the data sheet included demographics of race, gender, age, and income status, along with the barriers regarding employment that each participant faced. This information helped the researcher identify and describe the universals, demographics, and patterns of participants, and it also supported the information that was gathered in the interview process.

**Findings**

The ten participants varied in their abilities to articulate the elements of their ecologies and the impact of the SYEP on specific areas of their ecologies or their lives, in general. The group ranged from those who experienced disabilities such as ADHD or Autism, and had received special education services throughout school, to those who were currently in college and doing well. During the interviews, the researcher wanted to hear their stories, and they often related anecdotes that expanded on the list of questions. The researcher encouraged those expansions, nonetheless, because those expansions would afford greater opportunity for insight into how they understood their ecosystems and how they worked through their everyday lives.

The researcher followed a common interview protocol with each participant to ensure that responses could be compared, but some questions were adapted to give further details about each individual’s ecosystem. During the question and answer sessions with the researcher, all
participants were asked to describe the elements of their lives that made up their ecosystems. The findings were organized and discussed based on each research question.

1. How do urban adolescents describe their ecosystem, e.g., family, school, work, friends/peers, institutions, culture, and other activities? (Bronfenbrenner’s 1979 theory)

2. How do urban adolescents describe their relationships with adults (institutional agents), who have the potential to increase or inhibit their building of institutional knowledge/social capital? (Stanton-Salazar’s 1997 theory)

3. How has the Summer Youth Employment Program directly and indirectly influenced the young people’s lives (ecosystem)? (Bronfenbrenner’s 1979 theory)

**Research Question 1**

To address research question one, ecomaps will be presented for each participant. The maps were constructed during the interviews and depict how the participants described their life system. The elements of the ecomap create the individual ecosystems; and the lines and arrows represent the flow of communication and relationships.

**Ecomaps and Participant Stories.** The stories of each participant follow each ecomap to describe in detail some of the key elements that interact within the participants’ lives. The key for understanding the nature of the relationships among the different systems of the ecomap is as follows:

- Strong relationship
- Tenuous, weak, little investment
- Stressful relationship
- Arrows to signify major flows of energy, communication, or resources.
Figure 3. Ellen’s Ecomap
Ellen’s parents were not married when she was born, and because her mother did not feel that she was able to care for her daughter, she decided to send Ellen live in Texas with her paternal grandparents. Ellen’s mother and father had 17 children between them, and Ellen had one biological sister, Laila. She did not know of her parents’ whereabouts until she was about 8 years old. She stated that she never wanted for anything as she grew up in Texas. Her grandparents’ home was in a middle-class neighborhood with good schools and safe surroundings. She felt that her grandmother raised her to be “intelligent, respectful, and active.” Ellen said they “lived at the church,” and she knew that she was in better surroundings than her siblings. However, she felt “confused and angry at my parents for not keeping me,” but for keeping her one biological sister.

When she was 16, Ellen demanded to come to Wichita to be with her siblings. She was rebellious during this time but was ready to get to know her family. Her family was not what she expected; her entire family lived in deep poverty. Her father was addicted to drugs, and her mother was into fast money. Ellen stated that her whole family was just about “making fast money,” and that there was a great deal of conflict with everyone in the family. She had never witnessed people on drugs, stealing, or committing forgery until she came to Wichita.

Ellen works full time to provide for herself and her daughter; she receives only food stamps and Medicaid for her daughter from the State of Kansas. She struggles with paying for everything. “We’ve had a couple of rough spots; sometimes this or that gets turned off. I’d rather be struggling than not be here at all. I know my checks aren’t big, but the rent people are very nice, and they see I’m trying; I bring them my whole check. I only have 40 dollars to my name.” She is the sister of Laila, who was also part of the study. They live about a block away from one another on one of Wichita’s busiest streets.
Participant Eco Map-Gwen

Mother: had a total of 8 children. The 4 younger brothers are still young and mother is not really able to care for the older ones. Grandmother cared for kids when mom worked.

Father: sees him a couple of times a year; very little contact, does not help family

Boyfriend: father of her son, quit school in 7th grade. When she was home she was most often at home with him. He wants to get GED and become a welder

SYEP Boys & Girls Club loved working with kids and love the $ she made working. Supervisor said she was an “asset to the program.”

Gwen
18 years old
Lives with her 1 year old son, Grandmother (90), sister & sister’s 3 children. Dream of being a Pharmacist

Sent to maternity home for twinning. Very glad now as she reflects back. Social worker connected her to SYEP. She “loved” the people there.

Peers: very important to Gwen. Peers jipped school all the time, that is where it began for her. She began smoking weed with peers early in High school.

School: Dropped out of high school, finished 11th grade. Feels that no one in school took particular interest in her since she was so truant.

Key:
Indicate nature of connection with a descriptive word or by drawing a different kind line:

strong relationship

---tenuous, weak, little investment

stressful relationship

Arrows to signify major flows of energy, communication, or resources:

Figure 4. Gwen’s Ecomap
Gwen grew up in a very large family with seven brothers and sisters. Her father is “in and out, visiting a few times a year” and she has not had significant contact with him throughout her life. Her mother has always worked two jobs to “make ends meet” and the older children have been responsible for caring for the younger ones. Her grandmother often helped take care of the children as she lives with the family.

Gwen felt that she had “raised herself” and never felt like she had anyone watching out for her. She reported that she became rebellious as a teenager and wanted to “hang out with friends” more than anything else. She described that when she got to high school, she left the friends she had in middle school because she wanted to “be cool” with a new group that “jipped” school most of the time.

Gwen met her current boyfriend when she was almost 16. He had dropped out of school in the seventh grade, and she spent her time out of school with him. She stated that they would just “hang out” and by the age of 17, Gwen was pregnant.

Due to her truancy from school, she was placed in foster care and ultimately spent her pregnancy in a maternity home. Since giving birth to her son, she stated that it has become increasingly difficult to be a single mother, try to work, and go to school.

She has not completed her high school diploma, her boyfriend is preparing to take his GED and she helps him with studying. She wants to complete high school and go to college; but she is currently her 78-year-old grandmother’s caretaker and is disconnected from work and school.
Figure 5. Jacob’s Ecomap
Jacob lives in the basement of his 28-year-old cousin’s house with his cousin’s girlfriend and the seven children they share between them. He has not gotten along with his mother and step-father for many years and feels he “never really had a good childhood.” “My step-dad be trippin’ on the little minor stuff, and my mom just sits there in the back.” He stated that he acts like he is 13 years old rather than going on 19.

Jacob has been expelled from school every year since the sixth grade, often for fighting. “I would be mad on my way to school, and someone would mess with me, and I would just go off.” He was on medication for anger at some point but stated that he did not have insurance and could not get the medication. He has had significant legal issues since 2008. He has been on probation for assault and battery on a law enforcement officer and possession of an illegal substance.

Marijuana is very important to Jacob as he feels that it helps him be more creative, helps him to feel that “all is right with the world,” calms him down, and helps him connect to others. While his legal issues have included marijuana, he stated he is not smoking currently but plans to when he has a job and is more comfortable in his life.

His greatest passion is drawing and painting graffiti art. He has never taken any art classes because his parents have never supported his art. His step-father told him, “This shit ain’t going to get you nowhere but in trouble…if I threw paint on walls, my ass would end up in jail.” When Jacob talked about art, his tone of voice changed, and his language became more eloquent. He stated that he “enjoyed documentaries and tutorials about artists and art.” He recently watched a documentary about underground graffiti and stated he would love to live the way life was portrayed in the movie.
Participant Eco Map-Justin

Figure 6. Justin’s Ecomap
Justin currently lives at home with his mother, stepfather, and one brother. His biological father had custody of him and his brother but passed away from a heart attack at the age of 38. His mother was given custody of the children after her husband’s death, but the boys were removed from the home within a year due to her drug use and neglect. Jacob said that at home, everyone is disconnected from one another. “At my house, we don’t play games; it is like everyone is in different rooms. It is hard to spend time together.”

He stated he wants to help his mother out as she often tells the family how difficult her life is. He wants to buy gifts for her to show her that he loves her. He stated his mother does not really interact with the family and his step-father is a “pretty angry person” who does not interact with the children often.

Justin was a very pale, immature young man. He resembled a child that had been neglected for a very long time. He was very eager to talk, mostly to have someone to interact with, and it was apparent that he did not often have opportunities to interact with others.

He dreams of being a lawyer. His mother says that would be a good profession for him because he “likes to argue.” Justin connects to the shows on television and spends a great deal of time alone. He spends most of his time watching “Criminal Minds” and “Law and Order” on television. At the end of the interview, he stated that he recently watched a show on MTV called “If You Really Knew Me.” He said, “Every school should have that. It was really touching to see what everyone had been through; I think that show says a lot.” He wished more people knew him.
Figure 7. Kanani’s Ecomap

Key:
Indicate nature of connection with a descriptive word or by drawing a different kind line:
- Strong relationship
- Tenacious, weak, little investment
- Stressful relationship

Arrows to signify major flows of energy, communication, or resources:
Kanani lives in between her grandmother and her auntie’s houses with her 1-year-old daughter. She has never had contact with her biological mother; her father had custody of her and her biological brother before he was sent to prison when she was in the third grade. He was supposed to be out of jail by the time she reached sixth grade, but he found out that he had cancer and passed away during her third grade year. Kanani and her younger brother were sent to live with one of her father’s sister. Although it was not the sister her father wanted them to go to.

They did not want for anything growing up, but when she got older and “started hearing the stories,” her resentment toward her auntie grew. They fought a lot when she was a teenager because she felt that her auntie lied about her and acted as though she were doing wrong, even though Kanani knew the truth about their lives. When she was 16, the final incident occurred when her auntie threw her and her brother out; they went to live with their uncle.

She moved out at age 19 and lived with a friend for over a year before moving to Chicago with her boyfriend. She realized that she could not make it there because she found herself dependent on her boyfriend. Kanani came home to Wichita planning to live with her best friend again. A few weeks after returning from Chicago, when she was 21, she found out that she was pregnant. Her boyfriend cut off communication with her when she left Chicago and although he knew he baby’s father, he decided not help or visit his child. She had envisioned her relationship with her boyfriend to be very different than how it ended up.

Kanani was very positive about her life despite the challenges she shared. She stated she is a “dreamer” and sees the positive in everything because she did not want to “waste time being negative.”
Figure 8. Laila’s Ecomap
Laila was raised in the Wichita community, but her parents were never married. Her mother was into the “fast life” that included selling drugs and committing check fraud. Her father was addicted to crack cocaine, and once his heart became affected by the drugs, he had a pacemaker put in. He became ill when Laila was in high school, and her mother was incarcerated for forgery during this time. “My freshman year, my dad got sick. I took care of him, my mom was incarcerated, and my sister was incarcerated; so it was just me and my daddy, and I had to help get him to appointments on the bus and stuff.” She feels that she tried to go to school but missed a lot and after being labeled *truant*, she became entangled with the juvenile justice system and was placed in foster care.

Her father was murdered in 2010 during a drug deal, and her mother left the state less than a week after she saw him get shot. Laila felt alone and confused when her father was shot and her mother left town. “When he died, it took a big part away from me. He raised me; I’ve never been the same.”

Laila is Ellen’s sister, who is another participant in this study. Laila described the major areas of her life as being her son and soon-to-be new baby, her boyfriend, her part-time job at the Dollar Tree, and taking care of her home in terms of paying the bills, cleaning, and preparing meals.

Laila’s father wanted her to be successful in school and work and be “different than him.” Laila is currently 4 months pregnant with her second child, and her first son is just over a year old. She feels somewhat powerless “since I have a baby, I threw my life away, and it’s like I can’t do it. Now I’m pregnant; I’m struggling with this one.”
Participant Eco Map-Mac

Father: Air Force Master Sergeant 21 years, now retired, taught Mac about mechanic work, his mentor, but ready for Mac to move out on his own. He has a new wife he met online.

Mother: Left family after meeting a man in online gaming site World of Warcraft. He is very angry with his mother and now has no contact.

Anger & Stress play a big part in his life, he stated his birthmark on his nose is a gauge for his stress.

SYEP Fleet management job, connected to supervisor: He is wanting to work there, waiting to hear from them. Worked from Workforce recruited at his school for kids to come to SYEP.

Connected with several men at Fleet Mgmt, says they are now his Facebook friends.

ROTC & Summer Leadership school: Attended all 4 years of high school. "Pretty much my life."

Fencing class: Fencing is a stress reliever “makes him happy” and the coaches help and support him to meet his goals.

School: "rough times" people picked on him a lot, his anger problem also disconnected him from the mainstream.

Siblings: Sister: pregnant teen. Family is angry with her. Brother: currently in military receiving medical discharge & will live with Mac.

Peers: Connected with security guards at school after being bullied throughout school.

Figure 9. Mac’s Ecomap
Mac’s parents divorced when he was a junior in high school, and he described high school in general as being “rough times.” He explained that he was picked on in school and had an “anger problem” that disconnected him from the mainstream. He said that a “birthmark on the side of my nose turns purple when I black out from anger.” He felt that his anger problem came from both of his parents, who told him that his being born was a mistake. He was the second of three children, and both of his siblings have experienced issues while growing up. His brother is about to be medically discharged from the military, and his sister is currently a pregnant teen. Mac felt that his brother failed to help him get through high school, and he was angry with his sister for “acting like my mom.”

He was reluctant to talk about his parents’ divorce because it made him feel angry, but he shared that his entire family played the World of Warcraft game on the Internet, and that the game “breaks up families.” While playing this virtual game, his mother met a man who moved in with the family and eventually broke up Mac’s parents’ marriage. Mac currently lives at home with his father and new stepmother, who “met on an Internet dating site.”

Mac has found an outlet for his anger and stated that “fencing gets my stress out. When I come back from fencing, I am happy.” He took the time to show his fencing card that lists his accomplishments and the levels of fencing instruction he has completed. Mac also enjoys playing Lego’s and competing online with others who build large Lego models.
Participant Eco Map-Magnus

**Magnus**
18 years old
Lives with mother & 4 sisters. Dreams of getting a degree in computers and being middle-class.

- **Mother:** Disabled with SPMI, Bipolar diagnosis, works part-time, angry moods, gives her money to her boyfriend in prison. She takes care of herself, he wants to move out & go to college.
- **Father:** Divorced mother, sees him and talks on phone. Father is extremely critical, treats him differently than his sisters. Feels that he pretends to care about him.
- **Maternal grandmother:** Family matriarch. Meddles in family matters, feels she was partially responsible for his parent's divorce.
- **STEP Workforce Center & Dept. of Commerce:** Supervisor taught him to drive, treated him like he worked there a long time, gave him a computer.
- **Low income status and image play a big role in his life. He wanted to portray a middle class life so people would not judge him & treat him as "low income"**
- **Feels:** one best friend, has never had any friend visit his home or do anything outside of school, one best friend since middle school
- **Peers:** one best friend, his never had any friend visit his home or do anything outside of school, one best friend since middle school
- **School:** Graduated 2011 proudest moment of his life. Elementary & middle school were full of turmoil and he felt very judged by others
- **One teacher in high school pretended to care about him and talked with him "that is better than nothing"**

**Key:**

Indicate nature of connection with a descriptive word or by drawing a different kind line:

- **strong relationship**
- **tenacious, weak, little investment**
- **stressful relationship**

Arrows to signify major flows of energy, communication, or resources:

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**Figure 10. Magnus’s Ecomap**
Magnus currently lives with his mother and four sisters, two of whom are older and two of whom are twins, younger than he. He quickly stated that they live in low-income housing, and that his mother is on disability for being bipolar. He said that his mother has behaved the same way all of his life, and that she often has “angry moods.” His parents divorced when he was 14, which was “the most stressful time of my life.” He felt that the reason his mother wanted to keep the children was for the child support money and half of his father’s 401K retirement money. He felt that his mother got a boyfriend as soon as she could “out of spite.” His mother gives money to a boyfriend she met through the prison, although Mac’s family cannot afford necessities for themselves. His oldest sister also has a boyfriend in prison.

Magnus has never had any friends come to his house to play throughout his childhood. He stated that he spent his whole life hiding the fact that his mother was ill, and that they lived in low-income housing. He wondered whether in order to call someone a “friend,” he would have had to disclose his “secret,” or the fact that his family was of low income. He wanted an image that did not portray “low income,” not out of embarrassment, because it “is who we are;” but he believed that “some things are better left unsaid, and in high school, it is difficult to just be yourself without someone judging you.”

Magnus has many women in his life and very few male role models. He stated that his mother, sisters, grandmother, female best friend, job supervisors, and teachers have instructed him on how to think and behave for his entire life. He recently graduated high school and is making plans for himself without being so heavily influenced by those around him.
Participant Eco Map-Nicolette

Nicolette
19 years old
Lives in college apartment. Dreams of being a social worker & art therapist

Mother: disabled with severe seizures, does not work. Nicolette became her mother's caretaker when she was 11. Mother supports her working on her education

Father: never married mother, broke up when mother's disability became too much

Boyfriend: 21 years old, dropped out of HS-Has a heart condition and is considering applying for disability

Peers: Wide range of friends- some in college, some not in school, some are struggling

Community College: completed first year successfully, now enrolled in 15 hours

Teacher & tutors at junior college have been very supportive and helped her navigate programs & resources

Counselor: helps her find techniques for working on social anxiety, very supportive

Grandfather: lived with family for a long time but was recently forced to leave due to addiction, he gave a lot of stress

SVEP High school Custodial work- female supervisor had huge impact on her giving her confidence to go to college & move out

Strongly identifies with being a “Child of Disabled Parent”

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Key:
Indicate nature of connection with a descriptive word or by drawing a different kind line:

- strong relationship
- tenacious, weak, little investment
- stressful relationship

Arrows to signify major flows of energy, communication, or resources:

Figure 11. Nicolette’s Ecomap
Nicolette stated that she was an only child. Her mother began to have severe seizures when Nicolette was in middle school, and from that time onwards, she has been her mother’s primary caretaker. She stated that being the child of a disabled parent has dominated her choices and experiences in life. Nicolette’s parents were never married, but they are still friends. “My dad kind of cares about my mom, but her disability and medication made her into a different person. She used to be independent, but now she is co-dependent…co-dependent on me; she has no other family here.”

Nicolette has other family issues that influence her feelings and decisions. Her uncle, with whom she had a good relationship while she was growing up, recently began abusing her elderly grandmother. He is on disability, has an alcohol problem, and suffers from “some sort of personality disorder.” Her grandfather, who used to live with her and her mother, also has a drug and alcohol problem. Nicolette remembers his drug problem throughout her whole life and recalls “finding burnt spoons and watching him pick the ground.” She “kicked him out” recently because he kept stealing from her mother and bringing “suspicious people” into their home. She feels that her mother is “hyper-sensitive to these kinds of things,” and that she has to protect her mother. “I have to take care of her, babysit her in a way, because I am always afraid that something will happen.”

Nicolette did not have high grades in high school, as she was taking care of her mother. At one point, she had an anxiety attack at school and refused to return due to embarrassment. “I was in such a vulnerable state that I didn’t want to be picked at.” She changed schools altogether that year and went to an alternative learning center.
Figure 12. Ruby’s Ecomap
Ruby is a young mother of two daughters, 5 years old and 7 months old. She also has a 7-year-old stepson with her fiancé, who is father to both daughters. She grew up in a white, middle-class community. Her father owned his own business, which went bankrupt, and her mother worked two jobs to make ends meet for the family. Ruby was left to take care of her little brother because her mom was working all the time. Her brother was 7 years younger, so in her early teens, it was Ruby’s responsibility to cook his meals, see that he was in bed on time, and make sure that he got to school.

Her father was overprotective of her and allowed her older brother to experience life, while he “kept her in.” School was the time when she could be with her friends and began “jipping.” She stated that she “fell into the wrong crowd in ninth grade.” This was the same year that she began cutting her arms, burning herself, and using alcohol and methamphetamine. When she hurt herself, it felt good. “Pain was pleasure. They didn’t know who I was; it was like an escape. It was a different life.”

By Ruby’s junior year, she was pregnant and dropped out of high school. She credits having her daughter to saving her life from a world of drugs. “I didn’t want to be an addicted parent.” She quit using drugs and alcohol and focused on her pregnancy. Transitioning into parenthood at 17 was somewhat natural for her because she had cared for her younger brother for so long. She feels that her life is much more on track now and stated that she “takes advantage of every opportunity that comes her way.”

**Research Question 2**

The adults or institutional agents that interact with participants within their life systems have the potential either to promote or inhibit growth and social capital building. All of the
participants were surrounded by institutional agents that had a profound impact on their lives, whether their influence was positive or negative.

In order to address research question two, the researcher systematically drew out elements of the ecosystem to focus on the institutional agents that influenced the youth. Family, school, community, and SYEP workforce categories formed the broader categories; details about the positive and negative influences were described under each category (see Appendix D for tables that list the positive and negative influences of institutional agents).

**Family.** As the nearest and most influential element of the ecosystem (microsystem), the family extends to all areas of the youths’ lives. Families today are not as traditional as they once were, and modern families require a complex system of support and intervention (Stanton-Salazar, 2010). The family contains institutional agents that socialize youth, transmit values, and set the rules and norms for behavior (Bronfenbrenner & Cici, 1994; Stanton-Salazar, 1997).

**Positives.** Six participants described positive interactions with family members that have helped them build knowledge, strength, and social capital.

Ellen’s grandmother raised her when her parents were not able to do so and provided her with a safe and stable home life. She described her grandmother as “her strength” and stated that her middle-class, faith-oriented, focused upbringing gave her a peace that her sister does not have. “I want my daughter to have what my grandma gave me growing up.”

Jacob’s 28-year-old cousin, with whom he lives, is very supportive of him. He provides a home for Jacob that is not volatile, and they “play X-box together.” His cousin shares Jacob’s interest in art and supports his ideas and creativity. He allows him to decorate the walls in his basement as he wishes with drawings and graffiti. “He knows how my stepdad is, and he’s been more influential in my life than my mom and stepdad combined. He is the one who got me
started playing games. He influences my art, and he draws, too. He does characters. I’ll draw my name, and he’ll put a character with it. It will just come together.”

Laila has two adults who have impacted her in a positive way. Although her father may have been addicted to crack cocaine, she feels that she was closer to him than to any other adult she has known. After his death, she became more connected to him, in a sense, and wants to do well in her life to make him proud. In addition, her sister, Ellen, who came from Texas to be able to get to know her, is her role model. Laila feels that Ellen is smarter than she is and shows her new things. When Ellen encouraged her younger sister to go to the Workforce center, Laila thought at first that “working was not really for her.” She did not understand what the jobs would be about, and she did not feel as motivated as her sister. Her father was murdered while she was working at the SYEP, but “Ellen would not let me quit. She would come here and tell me we were going on that bus and going to our jobs. ‘Don’t give up, girl,’ Ellen says; ‘let’s go’—and that’s what I do.”

Magnus had one male role model, his uncle, who was respectful of him and acted concerned about him and his future. “He always asks me what I’m going to do after high school. He was the one who “got me into computers.” His uncle was the only male in his family who took an interest in him, but his influence was very powerful. Magnus decided to take his uncle’s advice and pursue a career in computers.

**Negatives.** Eight of the participants listed at least one family member who had a profoundly negative impact on their lives and their ability to gain social capital.

Ellen’s auntie was a powerful negative force in her life, a relationship that ended when Ellen entered the juvenile justice system and was ultimately placed in foster care. After Ellen’s mother was incarcerated, Ellen went to live with her auntie because she had “nowhere else to
go...my auntie did some of the craziest stuff to me. She would burn me with cigarettes, jump on me, and beat me up. So one night, I got fed up and fought back.” The aunt called the police on Ellen, who was arrested for domestic violence; thus began her pattern of interaction with juvenile facilities.

Gwen’s grandmother had no intention of negatively impacting her granddaughter’s ability to gain social capital, but she was an immigrant from Laos who did not value education as American citizens do. The grandmother’s main values were family and work. She did not speak English, and when Gwen’s mother worked so much that she could not care for her children, the grandmother did not know how to raise them to go to school every day.

Jacob’s stepfather has had a very negative influence on him from his elementary school days until the present. Since Jacob was in the third grade, he was subject to his stepfather’s verbal abuse. Jacob remembers walking to school angry in the mornings, and he began fighting before school in the sixth grade. These incidents began his record of being suspended and expelled from school. Jacob stated, “I have a problem with authority figures because of my stepdad.” His stepfather is a veteran of Operation Desert Storm, and “he got all that messed-up random crap in his head from doing that.” The man has never accepted Jacob’s interest in art, and Jacob felt that he no longer fit into the family picture when his stepdad married his mother. He stated that he was a “space-filler that took up too much of the background of the portrait.”

Although Laila’s mother was “around me as I was growing up,” Laila stated that her mother never actually raised her. She was raised by siblings and an auntie, as her mother was into the “fast life and fast money; my mama was never there. She was in and out, always goin’ to jail, too busy writing checks and sellin’ drugs to make sure I was going to school or helping with homework.” Her mother left for good after Laila’s father was murdered in 2010. She left Laila
with many bills in the house she currently rents. Laila does not understand why her mother left her with the bills when she has no income.

Justin’s mother took custody of him after his father passed away at 38 years of age. Within a year, Justin was removed from his mother’s home due to her neglect and drug use, but she was able to regain custody after 2 years. Justin shared that his mother spoke of the process of getting him and his siblings back as a “nightmare because she had to go to court a lot and get drug tests.” She is on disability for issues with her back. “She has a needle in her back; we have a bone disease that runs through our family.” Justin’s mother does not work, and he stated that they do not do things as a family. From his descriptions, it appears that his mother controls Justin through anger. Justin does not receive support from his mother to move forward or further his education; she has encouraged him to apply for disability.

Kanani’s aunt also had a very negative impact on her after her father passed away. Her father wanted Kanani and her brother to live with his other sister, who already had children. However, the custodial aunt insisted that she wanted the kids because she had no children, and it would be easier for her to manage with fewer kids. Kanani knows that it could have been worse, but her auntie “lied about things that did not need to be lied about.” This aunt talked to family and people in the community about Kanani and often made situations out to be something they weren’t. Her auntie “treated me and my brother differently than she did her own children…On her son’s birthday, he didn’t have to go to school, but we did, and we didn’t even get our gifts on our birthday. She would get us something weeks later and say it was for our birthday. Now I know she was even using our own money for that stuff.” Kanani realized that her aunt wanted them to live with her because of the significant amount of money she received each month for being their guardian. She received a lump sum that enabled them to get a new house and
furniture. Each child received $500 month in the aunt’s name, money that supported the family. Kanani feels that the money was the only reason the aunt cared for her. She is thankful that she has seen how greedy people can be when it comes to money, and she realizes that money is not the most important thing.

Magnus’ mother has been bipolar for his entire life, and “outside of the house, she is a different person than how she talks to us…her dating situation also makes me mad.” His mother dates a man who is incarcerated, whom she met in prison while she was visiting her daughter’s boyfriend. “She gives him our money that the family does not have.” Magnus remembers that his mother did not attend his fifth grade graduation, although she attended his four sisters’. On the morning of his high school graduation, his mother picked a fight with him, and he was afraid that she was not going to come. He did not know until the end of the ceremony that she was there. He stated that she likes to “bring drama” to the family.

Through verbal and emotional abuse, Magnus’ father has also inhibited his son’s opportunities to gain social capital. Magnus’s father told him that his overdeveloped chest was due his “laziness.” Once his father took him to the gym and “forced weights on him” that he could barely lift; he did not go back for many years. His father “clearly favors my male cousins, as they are more athletic.” Magnus gave up on sports when he broke his arm in seventh grade. “I think he cares; I hope he does…at graduation, he was paying attention to me like a totally different person. I enjoyed it for the day because I knew it would end after that day.”

Mac was very angry with his mother for leaving the family. His mother told him that he “was a mistake and not meant to be born.” He carried a lot of resentment toward her for changing the family structure and leaving the family with a pile of bills, only to have the
electricity, gas, and water shut off. She left the family after meeting a man through an online virtual gaming world.

**School.** Bronfenbrenner (1979) has discussed that school is a critical element of the ecosystem (mesosystem) and he noted that the relationships with institutional agents within school environments are critical to youths’ development, building of social capital, and the establishment of more complex relationships.

**Positives.** Four youth described positive experiences in school and connections with teachers or other institutional agents. However, only one of the participants described that positive connection with an adult in high school. The others have found more support and encouragement from teachers and school counselors at the junior college and technical college level.

Ellen had one history teacher in high school that became a strong support for her. “She was the only teacher who tried to understand me. She kept up with me when I went into foster care; she wrote me letters, called me, and sent me money.” They still have contact with one another, and Ellen has now become a support for her former teacher, who has lost her spouse and is aging.

Teachers always liked Kanani because she was “smart.” She felt supported by teachers even when she was “jipping” school. They would encourage her to maintain attendance. Her teachers also helped her see the bigger picture about the drama that can occur in high school. Kanani believes that her teachers wanted her to finish school, even when people in her family “wanted her to become a statistic” by getting pregnant early and dropping out of high school “in order to make themselves feel like they had not failed in life.” Teachers at her technical college also care for and support Kanani, who is currently completing her second nursing certification.
For Nicolette, the counselors and tutors at junior college have become part of her support system. They aid in her acquisition of social capital by closely advising her and providing her support services with the school. She has shared her issues with anxiety and has gained the support of the staff at college. They encourage her to “calm down, just breathe; you are going to get it done.”

After Ruby dropped out of high school, she entered an alternative learning school that helped her complete her GED while parenting. Alternative school teachers and staff have provided her with resources and information for gaining capital. They also referred her to Workforce, and she said, “I take full advantage of everything I can.” Her counselor told her about students who had started in the programs but would not go and later lost their funding. She decided that she did not want to be like them.

Negatives. Eight of the ten youth described serious issues at school that eventually led some of them to become disconnected and drop out, but others finished high school through alternative programs or GEDs.

Whereas Ellen had one supportive teacher, her other teachers did not believe she would graduate because she had gotten pregnant and was behind in school. When she came to her final public high school after her foster care experience, her records indicated that she had been disconnected from her schooling. She had to initiate the transfer of all of her credits from the multiple schools she had attended while in foster care.

Gwen stated that she was very disconnected from school due to truancy, and that no teachers ever took a particular interest in her. “They would try and encourage me to go to school, but some of them were kind of mean. They couldn’t help me, since I hadn’t been there. They were just being real…but I needed their support.”
Jacob felt that he never fit into school life. “School is whack.” He had been suspended every year since sixth grade. He tried to talk about his record like a badge of honor, but it was easy to tell that he was just hoping someone would help him. “All schools are whack, man; school is just not for me.” He stated that only one teacher in high school accepted him or even liked him a little. His science teacher would let him come to class high on marijuana: “At least he felt it was important to be in the classroom rather than on the streets.”

When Laila was in high school, she stated that the teachers “were not interested in me,” although she was able to graduate. She felt that the teachers at some of her high schools cared more for her, but at her final high school she felt “invisible.” When she was placed in foster care, she changed schools often but was expelled for fighting. At one point, she dropped out. She stated that she jipped school a lot beginning in her sophomore year. “It was so much easier jippin,’ and you didn’t have to worry about going to school to get your education. It wasn’t like they cared; either you come, or you don’t. That was their motto.”

Magnus stated that he never connected with any teachers. He was “tormented” in middle school and developed only one close friendship. He considered dropping out of school due to the bullying. “When I was younger, I had a chest like a woman; people asked me if I was a boy or girl, so I never went to summer camps or Sunday school.” He isolated himself during his years in elementary school through high school. However, one teacher in high school “pretended that she knew me and cared about me.” He said that “that was better than nothing…she didn’t know me, but she acted like we were the best of friends. I didn’t mind it because that was the first teacher that actually acted that way toward me; it was nice.” Magnus’s use of the word pretend indicated that he did not trust the institutional agent.
Nicolette felt that the teachers in her high school only noticed her issues when she fell asleep in classes. She was taking care of her mother, and her grades were slipping. She started seeing a counselor at school when her mother was hospitalized, but after a major anxiety attack at school, she changed to an alternative school completion program.

Ruby has felt very disconnected from school ever since middle school. At that time, she transitioned from a magnet school into a regular public school, where she was ahead of the other children. “I was bored, and then I found an out when my parents didn’t know what I was doing at school.” This was the time her father also lost his business and fell deep into an alcohol addiction. She began caring for her younger brother as well. In order to work through her issues on her own, she began to cut and burn her skin. “There was only one time when teachers had any idea about my activities because I burned my wrists.”

**Community.** The community, as another element of the ecosystem (exosystem), gives structure for youth whose families may not provide for their physical and social needs, transmit healthy values, or support development of social capital. Government and social service agencies exist within communities. Stanton-Salazar (2010) stated that the community socializes youth into a particular discourse and worldview and can greatly affect their potential for success.

**Positives.** Seven youth described the community systems that had a positive impact on their lives and aided in their building of social capital.

During her senior year of high school, the juvenile justice system placed Ellen in an independent living program. This program “treated me like a grownup…they put you in your own place and give you a grocery allowance, but you have to go to school or have a job; you can’t just sit there and reap the rewards of the program.” When she turned 18, an independent living program facilitated Ellen’s transition into community living. “After I got put into
independent living, I stopped going to jail. I felt better, I stopped getting into trouble, and I haven’t been to jail since my junior year.” The juvenile justice system and independent living facility’s case workers helped her to live independently and made sure she was safe when she transitioned out of care. Ellen credited her counselors and experiences at an independent living group home through the juvenile justice system as part of what started her on a better track. Her independent living counselor suggested the Workforce SYEP program to her.

When Gwen became truant, the district attorney’s office placed her in foster care. The judge ordered her to be placed at a community-based maternity home, because she became pregnant at 17. The staff at the maternity home had a big impact on Gwen. They “made me feel more independent and safe.” She cried a lot when she was pregnant and away from her family, but they “helped me with school and baby supplies, and transported me.” Gwen viewed this help as a blessing and said that the combined staff acted “like a mother” for her. She felt very close to the staff at the maternity home and noted that they talked with her and taught her how to manage her appointments, school, and preparing for her baby. The social worker at the maternity home was the person who suggested that Gwen apply for the SYEP. “It was like the whole staff was my mom.”

Jacob was required to enter substance abuse treatment at community based treatment center for youth when he became involved with the juvenile justice system. He stated that one counselor, who “actually listened to me and made me feel that my art was not stupid.” He said that he went three times and was proud that he completed treatment—“all three times, too.” She was the first person to encourage Jacob’s art and give him “constructive criticism” instead of yelling at him.
Although Mac struggles with the challenges of an Autism spectrum disability, he articulated two community resources that have made him feel more comfortable in the community and helped him gain a better sense of who he is. First, he feels very connected to his home community. He was not able to make friends at school and relied heavily on his communications with school security guards and city police officers. As his father is a military retiree, he trusts men in uniform. He stated that he feels “very much a part of the community.” Second, Mac uses the sport of fencing to reduce stress. He connected to his fencing coaches and to the sport itself. The process of learning to fence and progressing through levels of fencing resembles the activities in which he engages online in the World of Warcraft. His coaches are very supportive of him.

In 2010, Magnus grew tired of working out at home and felt a bit more confident to go to the gym to develop his chest muscles. He met with a trainer at the YMCA for four free sessions, and then the trainer “saw something in me, some kind of determination, I guess,” and offered to train him for free when he came to the gym and she was there. “I said to her that I could not have done it without her. When you work out, you forget everything that has happened.” Magnus soon became more willing to get out into the world. He felt that his senior year was his best year ever because he had finally gained confidence due to the influence of his trainer.

Ruby and her fiancé were once arrested for domestic violence. They were required to attend therapy together, and she credited their improved relationship to this help. She stayed connected to the therapist, who continues to make herself available to Ruby regardless of her ability to pay. Ruby feels that this resource has significantly helped her to work on planning her life and managing her life stressors.
**Negatives:** Four of the youth had severe entanglement with community social service and criminal justice systems, which they regarded as negative influences on their life systems.

When Ellen was placed in foster care due to her issues with truancy and her aunt, she felt “removed, afraid, abused, and disconnected from her family.” This time was very difficult for her, as she became aware of another side of the system that she had never known. She stated that in several of the homes where she was assigned around the state, the foster parents were not appropriate. She felt that many “were in it for money,” and others allowed the abuse of children to occur. Ellen continued to fight the system until she was able to come back to Wichita for placement in a community based, state-funded, independent living program, where she finally received the help she needed to get on track for independent living.

As Gwen’s truancy issues intensified over a period of 2 years, her case was reported to the district attorney’s office. She was eventually removed from her mother’s custody and stated that she was not really “conscious” of what would happen to her if she continued to be truant. She completed 11th grade at a local public high school.

By the time Jacob was in high school, he had become entangled with the law. Although his interest in art was positive, he painted graffiti on public places and began hanging out with people who used drugs. He was 14 the first time he used drugs, and was arrested at 17 for assault on a police officer and possession of an illegal substance. He violated probation several times and finally spent 4 months in an adult jail. During these years, he had significant contact with police, judges, and people who worked at treatment centers. Of these, he did not feel that anyone took a real interest in him. He spoke of the processes in the criminal justice system as if he were a long-time criminal. He went to jail for 4 months and stated that it felt like he was “getting sick and dying from not having sunlight.”
Laila began a pattern of running away when she was in foster care. She was in a variety of group and family homes and stated that she ran because “it wasn’t my home. It was their home, they were my family; that was the way they took care of children and their families. That wasn’t me. I felt like I didn’t do anything wrong; yeah, school, OK, but maybe school is not for everybody. It was important for me to be with my family.” She said that homes around the state were not clean, and she was afraid for her safety much of the time.

Mac’s level of distrust for community workers was heavily influenced by his mother’s statements that “they play games” and “take children away.” When his father passed away and custody was given to his mother, who in turn was neglectful, Justin felt thrown around and confused. Many professionals who came in seemed to have high expectations for him, as well as his mother. He stated that he had to go to therapy “every day” and was sent to several foster homes in a 2-year period. His mother blamed the system and the professionals for their issues, and Mac repeated her sentiments.

**SYEP/Workforce.** The Summer Youth Employment Program through the Workforce Alliance is a specific agency or community resource that aims to provide social capital building through structured programming, along with educational and workforce skill development. Stanton-Salazar (2010) discussed that the use of community interventions can help youth build trusting relationships and gain institutional support.

**Positives:** Nine of the ten participants shared positive experiences about their connections with institutional agents at SYEP and the Workforce center.

Ellen connected on several levels with a group of institutional agents from her placement. “Once, the human resource people took me out to lunch, sat me down, and told me they saw good things in my future. They told me stories about how they had been there forever. They told
me to open up more and be more outspoken and spontaneous. They told me that talking to people would open more doors for me. They would use big words, and they always told me to ‘look it up.’ I am more social today because of that advice.”

Mac connected with his SYEP supervisor through their mutual love of mechanic work. He worked in the fleet maintenance department for a suburban community and thoroughly enjoyed getting to know the people who worked there. He thought his supervisors were funny, and they showed him many useful skills. He wished he could continue working there.

When Kanani called the Workforce Center for information on how to apply for the SYEP, the receptionist stated that she liked Kanani’s voice and thought she would do a great job as a receptionist. “Since I called them and took the initiative without waiting for them to get back with me, she said she would pass my information on to someone…so it just kind of worked out.” That was the first time someone had complimented Kanani on her work skills, and the story was very important to her. In addition, her SYEP supervisors and co-workers at the assisted living center strongly encouraged her to get her CNA and apply for a position there.

Although Laila was placed at a local hospital within a regional medical center in the housekeeping department, she connected with Susan Ann, who worked in the kitchen. She said that early on in her employment, a woman kept yelling out, “Mary, Mary!” Finally Laila replied, “Ma’am, I am not Mary, but I will tell you who she is to me…she is my mother.” Susan Ann had known Laila’s mother for many years and recognized that the daughter looked just like her mother. Laila remembered that Susan Ann gave her frequent advice while she was employed there. She told Laila things that she felt she did not understand yet, but would someday. One particular statement was that “God will not give you any more than you can handle.” At the time, Laila did not know why Susan Ann had said that, but when her father was murdered and she got
pregnant before she was ready, she remembered this statement. Laila said that Susan Ann was the person she turned to when her father died. “I came to work just sad, ‘cause I was sad every day.” Susan Ann talked with her and helped her grieve the loss of her father.

Magnus felt very supported and encouraged by the adults in his job placement. Through the summer, his supervisor actually taught him how to drive. He was encouraged to save the money for a car he purchased by saving his SYEP money. Because he was interested in pursuing a career in computers, his supervisor also gave him a computer when his summer experience was over. She wanted to help support his goal of working with them. She made him feel “like he had worked there a long time.” She was also supportive when his grandfather passed away, and she told him to take the time he needed. Although he decided that he would not like to work in an office, he did enjoy the help he received and was thankful for the job and the kindness of his supervisor. In addition, the receptionist at Workforce helped Magnus understand that he only needed .25 credits to graduate as he went into his senior year. He had thought about dropping out, but her encouragement made him change his mind.

Nicolette stated that the Workforce receptionist made a difference in her life. She liked “how they (Workforce) reach out to people; the girl at the front desk always reaches out to me, and she also reached out to my boyfriend. They give people a chance, and I like that.” Her cousin also works for Workforce and has “always been a positive influence on my life, telling me I need to get into these programs. She says, ‘I know you are scared because it is something new and different, but you’ve got to try it out. Try it for me, try it for you.’ She gave me that push.” Nicolette’s SYEP female supervisor “was like a guide; she taught me to be more responsible. We had deep conversations about life, and she had similar problems to mine, aside from being a drug addict. We had a connection.” Her supervisor motivated her to enter college. “They were
strangers to me at first, and then in the end they were all supportive.” Her supervisor also helped her work through some of her anxiety. Nicolette moved to the dorms so she could leave her mother’s home. Her supervisor used herself as an example and said, “Do not do this kind of work forever.” Nicolette found the courage to make a change.

Ruby reported that her case manager at Workforce has kept her connected and would call her when opportunities arose for school and work. She took advantage of all his advice and was surprised that he was even willing to help a pregnant woman get a job. She said that her SYEP supervisor “talks to her.” She saw how connected to his work he was and said, “He taught me to be a better me. He got me out of my shell, talking on the phone, and he taught me how to do research. I have met politicians and gotten more familiar with the community.”

**Negatives:** Only one of the participants became completely disconnected to his SYEP experience. One other participant was simply not engaged in frequent interaction with institutional agents but still enjoyed her job immensely.

Gwen did not connect with other workers or supervisors at the Boys and Girls Club but stated that she focused on her job and loved the kids. “I did not really talk to other workers because they didn’t focus on work. They would just talk and hang out. I focused on work, and I didn’t do anything sloppy.”

Jacob’s probation officer “signed him up” for SYEP. “I didn’t want to do it, but they were signing me up for shit, and I thought it would be the only time I could get out of the house.” He felt that he had endured enough of his stepfather’s attitude; he did not fit into their “picture of family life.” He left his mother’s home the same week that he quit his SYEP job. “She wouldn’t let me hang out with anybody. I was stuck and said ‘fuck it,’ quit the job, and went to live with my cousin.” His behaviors at the job placement were a direct result of the issues he faced at
home. He lasted about 3 weeks, which he felt “was pretty good, considering I felt like I was doing someone else’s work.” He did not get to build any relationships or knowledge, and he also felt out of place because he did not speak Spanish. Jacob questioned why he was placed there for work. Once again, he felt like he did not fit in. SYEP did not place Jacob in a new position due to his disconnection from the program as well as his family.

Research Question 3

The third research question addresses the direct and indirect impact SYEP has made on the ecosystem of the individual youths. It also looks at how these influences may have carried over into their future planning and decision making. First, the direct impact will be discussed for several participants followed by the indirect impact.

Direct Impact. The direct impact addresses tangible results from the SYEP experience (e.g., skills, particular experiences, successes, or failures). These are the results that outsiders might see as program outcomes.

Positives. Eight of the ten participants shared stories about the direct impact the SYEP had on their lives. They made connections, built their resumes through direct work experience, and were allowed access to work environments that they had previously only heard about in stories. The participants’ histories reveal the power of their SYEP placements on their skill and institutional knowledge building.

Ellen was placed in the human resources department of a large social services state agency. “I got to work overtime. It was so cool! I got recommendation letters from the supervisor and regional director, did filing and faxing, and talked to other agencies. I got to sit up front. I helped battered women, cash assistance cases, and child care cases. They encouraged me to keep trying, so I put in applications, but the hiring freeze happened. After the SYEP, I had a really
hard time finding a job. My friend told me about jobs at a manufacturing company, so I just walked in there, gave them my resume, and talked to them. They were surprised that I had worked at SRS, so they let me pick where I wanted to work at.” She has remained connected through the program, and her Workforce counselor is helping her with an Internet math tutoring program. “After that, they are going to help me pay for college.” Ellen plans to pursue a degree in criminal justice and may become a lawyer. Ellen used the SYEP experience on her resume and was hired at her current job due to that experience. She finished her GED at an alternative learning center when she was 19 years old and began attending college at an area technical college.

Justin met adults and youth of his own age at his job placement and stated, “I want to do it again. I met cool people, and it gave me the opportunity to work with different people and learn about them. I met two kids that actually went to my school.” When asked if those peers would have been his friends before this experience, he said “no.” These connections with peers created an opportunity for him to return to school with a stronger peer support system.

Kanani worked as a receptionist for a rehabilitation unit of a regional medical center, an assisted living center. She had already thought about becoming a CNA, and this position “pushed her to go back to school.” People at her placement encouraged her to complete her CNA, which she did the following year. She gained connections in the healthcare system that she was able to use as references for her next position. She is now working as a CNA, attending school to earn the next level certificate in health care, and is planning to pursue a nursing degree.

Laila had never had an opportunity to understand the world of work. Her family did not provide any modeling for working in a steady, legal job, and she had no sense or awareness of why anyone would want to work. While working at a large hospital in the housekeeping
department, she learned that “she really does want to work.” She hoped that the program would continue, but she has not been able to access employment in a setting comparable to the hospital since that time.

Mac’s father taught him everything he knew about being a mechanic, or “grease monkey,” as he described both himself and his father. His placement with the automobile fleet management of a suburban community allowed him to put his mechanic skills to work and gain experience that built his resume. He submitted his interest in becoming employed with this employer and is waiting for the manager to contact him. He connected with several people and stated that they were now his “Facebook friends.” He could name every employee he worked with by name and had a little story to tell about each of them.

Magnus first worked for SYEP with a local convent, troubleshooting computers for the nuns. He later had a position with the Department of Commerce. He stated that his coworkers showed him trust, taught him how to drive, and actually gave him a computer when he completed his summer job. “They treated me like I had worked there for a long time.” They were also very nice to him when his grandfather passed away that summer. They talked to him and encouraged him to take the time he needed to grieve. The program “made him appreciate things more and understand the value of working.” He was able to buy a car with the money he earned in SYEP. As a result of this program, Magnus received a scholarship to a community college. By being connected in this system, his case managers at Workforce had him on the radar and knew he could do well with support. He wants to go to college to study computers and said that his Workforce counselors have helped him to secure funding.

Nicolette was very surprised at what her SYEP position provided her. She wondered what a janitorial job would do for her and found that it showed her another side of people. Going in,
Nicolette was thinking about becoming a social worker; this placement solidified that choice for her. “This experience gave me another side to people. It showed me how to relate to people. I got to talk to people who got their GED and decided to get some kind of work. I talked with high school students and saw how they were dealing with high school. I got to talk to other people about their dreams and goals, and it was interesting for me from a people perspective. I tested myself to overcome some of my anxiety.”

Ruby is the only participant in the study who is currently employed at her SYEP position. “I took advantage of anything I could to help me get ahead. This program taught me interview skills, and I am no longer afraid to go out there and seek opportunities. The connection they have had to me has saved me. When I have had something happen in my life, like losing one job or getting pregnant again, the program came up and offered me a new opportunity. I have learned how to get jobs, keep jobs, and be successful at a job.”

Negatives. Two participants described the impact of the SYEP as negative, not because the program itself negatively impacted them, but because the life they were coming from was not positioned to support their connection to work. Both participants needed stronger supports in the work world in order to maintain their commitment and interest, as both had been extremely disconnected from mainstream society for a very long time—most of their lives, in fact.

Gwen had her baby just as she was entering into the SYEP soft-skills classes. She stated that she was very self-conscious at this time due to her weight and being a teen mother. She was uncomfortable in the classroom setting, even though there were other teen mothers in the room. She said she felt “judged by the kids” in the SYEP program: “It just gave me a bad vibe.” She was placed in a position taking care of young children at the Boys and Girls Club and noted that she did not have opportunities to connect with adults very often. Her job was “very easy,” so she
felt that she was just working for a paycheck and waiting for the end. When she left the program, she became disconnected once again as she returned home from her stay at the maternity home. She has not had further Workforce counselor contact and does not know how to write her resume despite the SYEP training. “It was hard to cram all that in my head. It was a lot of stuff to talk about, and I didn’t want to ask questions.”

Jacob felt discouraged by his supervisor at his job placement. “It was cool for a second, but then it was like, ‘What the hell am I doing here?’ I was doing other people’s work. While I was doing my supervisor’s work, she was on the phone talking to her little chick friends. When I would do something wrong, she would yell at me in Spanish. I might be Puerto Rican, but I didn’t know what she was saying.” He quit after 3 weeks and continued to feel disconnected. He said that he did not understand how to seek other opportunities from Workforce or get another job through SYEP. He stated that the way he was paid was also confusing, and he did not understand why he would miss pay dates and not get paid when he did not understand the process. He said he wanted cash and was confused by the debit card, as he would have to pay $1.50 to get cash. Still, Jacob said that the SYEP program is a “really good program. If you go and pay attention and not go high, you will learn a lot.”

**Indirect Impact.** The second aspect of research question three asks what indirect impact the SYEP program had on the participants, and in what ways the program and agents indirectly influenced the participants. Indirect influences are the feelings, levels of motivation, and goal setting, or essentially, how the participants see the world. Bronfenbrenner (1979) described this result as a change in worldview.

**Positives.** Five of the participants had very significant stories related to the indirect impact of their SYEP experience. Although Ellen had been in “so many programs in the last few
years” and was “tired” coming into SYEP, she took the advice of her independent living worker and became very interested when she heard she “might get a good job.” Ellen had actually received services from the social service agency, the worksite where she was placed, and was ultimately able to contribute to the agency on which she had depended for survival. This role reversal made her feel special, like an insider: “I got to sit up front.” She was rewarded for her hard work by being offered a position for a second summer. She was able to work in human resources, where “we handled all the big problems.” Getting her next job was “easy-peasy” because of her work experiences and the references of well-respected people in the community appeared on her resume. This experience contributed to her optimism about the world around her.

Kanani was able to access the world of healthcare that had been her ideal career. Once she realized how well she fit in and was encouraged by everyone around her in the work setting, she “knew it was her place and felt blessed.”

Laila learned that “in the hospital, people get really sick and do not always stay for a short time.” Her family had only state healthcare and used the hospital emergency room as a doctor’s office. “It was a good experience; I never knew how many people in the hospital could get sick and actually need full attention. I’ve never seen that. I’d get sick and go to the hospital for 4 hours, leave, come home, and continue what I was doing. People actually go to the hospital, and they are sick or hurt, Lord knows—they are actually sick!”

Magnus stated that when he first began to prepare for working at the convent, a place where his grandmother had worked in housekeeping, his grandmother told him he would not like it because the nuns were not nice to people like him. He found out differently. In addition, when he began his SYEP position at the Department of Commerce, he had been warned that his
supervisor was “sort of aggressive, and to be careful.” Again, he found that advice to be untrue. Magnus learned the valuable lesson that when people discouraged or warned him, it was better to wait and form his own impressions before jumping to conclusions and not following through.

Nicolette struggles with managing an anxiety disorder and has been seeing a counselor, who is helping her with techniques for working through episodes of anxiety. At her SYEP placement, she learned that “you do not have to run away when others see your problems or challenges.” She left high school after she had an anxiety attack because she was afraid other students would ridicule her. When she had an anxiety attack at work, she learned that people were concerned about her and wanted her to go home that day to rest, but to come back the next day. “It wasn’t as bad as I was making it out to be.”

Negatives. The indirect negative experiences with the SYEP seemed to have more to do with the environment that the youth navigated on a daily basis and less about the experiences they had in the workplace. However, the interviews showed that the youth who lead the most troubled lives and are the most marginalized. They also have trouble connecting and difficulty in sustaining commitment and interest. Four youth shared their perspectives on how their feelings, motivation, and worldview were left relatively unchanged.

Gwen has lived a disconnected life since she was a small child. Although she was glad to be in the SYEP program, she had just had a baby and felt self-conscious of her body and what people thought about her as a teen mother. Gwen continued to be isolated even at her worksite. She did not want to engage with peers at the worksite “because they didn’t really focus on work; they would just talk and hang out. I focused on work, and I didn’t do anything sloppy.” When her position ended, she had not gained any motivation to keep herself connected to Workforce. Likewise, she stated that they did not reach out to her, either. When asked about her interest in
getting her GED through Workforce, she said, “I don’t know what they offer.” Although she dreams of being a pharmacist, she has not learned how to seek resources or even look into finishing her GED.

Jacob really wants to work. However, the SYEP experience made him feel that “there was no point in my being there.” He values his creativity most of all and wants to enjoy his work. His job placement failed to identify the role he was to play in the workplace, and as a result, he stated that he “did not fit in” and never understood what he was expected to do. The conflicts with his supervisor disconnected him from the SYEP and Workforce programming altogether. He felt unchanged by the experience and began looking toward the military to fulfill his needs. He plans to use the military experience to travel and pay for his college, so he can pursue an art/business degree. “It is not like I have never seen anybody get shot. I am going on active duty so I can shoot somebody, so I can physically and legally hurt somebody without going to jail. This is just the animosity and anger that has built in me for 13 years. It’s almost to the top, right here in the chest region.”

Justin experienced a disconnection from the program as well. His father had passed away at a young age. When Justin was placed with a group of men to work outside and maintain the grounds, he hoped for greater connections. For most of his life, being removed from his mother’s home and living in four foster homes, Justin has simply been neglected. He has not continued with any Workforce services, although he stated that he wanted to do so.

Each of the urban youths’ stories provided a whole picture of the realities of their ecological systems. While the SYEP program had a positive impact on the majority of the participants, some negative issues emerged but did not overshadow the positives of the program (See appendix E for a table summarizing status and outcomes for each participant).
CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

This chapter includes a discussion of the conclusions, implications, and suggestions for further research.

Research Problem Revisited

Over 27% of American teens today are not able to secure employment. The part-time workforce has diminished, and the hours available to work have decreased with the passage of time (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010; Morisi, 2010). Unemployment for young people now could have lasting effects on their employability in the future (Bellotti et al., 2010). Long-term unemployment and underdeveloped work skills for youth are not only individual problems, but collective ones that affect the overall economy, educational systems, and social systems (Choudhry et al., 2010). Disconnected, discouraged youth who have endured poverty, abuse, neglect, and the impact of social service and criminal justice systems must struggle to gain competitiveness in the workforce and secondary education systems (MaCurdy et al., 2006; Magdol, 2003; Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003).

Researchers (e.g., Jarrett et al., 2005; Stanton-Salazar, 2007, 2010) have illustrated how important it is for young people to form the social connections that build their capacity to create social capital in the workforce and educational environments. The connections with people who can facilitate communication and interactions, or institutional knowledge, with workforce and secondary education systems then become institutional agents (Stanton-Salazar, 1997, 2010). Without this knowledge, youth may never understand the importance of effective communication on multiple organizational levels. They could lose the opportunity to develop nuanced skills
passed down from one person to another and fail to learn highly developed problem solving skills (Stanton-Salazar, 1997, 2007, 2010).

These concepts provide a useful framework for learning about the impact that youth programs have on the individual lives of youth participants. The ARRA federally funded Summer Youth Employment Program was designed to foster the ecological development of youth to help them gain social capital and build productive adult lives. The study gathered stories that were produced from ten urban youth who participated in the SYEP. The researcher then filtered the phenomenological stories through two theories to describe the impact of ecological systems on the young people’s ability to access the adults and opportunities that could facilitate the building of social capital.

Conclusions

Given the framework of Ecological Systems Theory and the lens of social capital, this research supports the premises that (a) learning the ecosystems of individuals can lend insight into their daily lives, histories, and lived experiences to show how services and prevention efforts can be targeted toward them; (b) people make a difference in the lives of others, and supportive institutional agents can profoundly impact youths’ ability to gain social capital and work toward goal setting and attainment; and (c) programs such as the SYEP deeply affect the lives of youth and help them make connections to positive institutional agents, learn workplace dynamics and dialogue, and enter into areas of the workforce that have historically been preserved for the higher level working and middle class.

Learning the ecosystems of individuals can provide insights into their daily lives, their history, and their lived experiences in a way that provides a window into how services and prevention efforts can be targeted toward them.
Consistent with Ecological Systems Theory, we know that lives are complex systems that show some similarities but are often very diverse in terms of the elements that exist within them, and especially in how individuals interact with those systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). No two people interpret a single experience in the same way. Those who have positive interactions with people and resources will be more likely to perceive the world to be a positive place. The more the world around them has been negative, and if they have experienced different forms of negativity with enough duration and frequency, their outlook and worldview will be skewed and more negative (Voydanoff, 2001).

This study provided a comprehensive look into the lives of ten urban youth. The way they perceived their world dictated much of their outlook and behaviors. For instance, two participants, Ellen and Jacob, described lives that were worlds apart. Their living situations were one of independence for Ellen, who lives on her own with her daughter, and dependence for Jacob, who lives in his cousin’s basement. Their historical interactions with their family ranged from positive to very physically and emotionally abusive.

Most of Ellen’s relationships were strong with two-way communication, even if she experienced stress. Her connection to a middle-class upbringing with her grandparents set the tone for the way she viewed the world. Jacob’s stepfather had emotionally abused him since he was in the third grade, and his mother never stood up for him. The only positive two-way communication he has now is with his graffiti art, marijuana, and playing the XBOX.

Both participants left home early: Ellen wanted to be a part of her biological family, but Jacob wanted to escape. They both have family members who are very close to them today. For Ellen, her younger sister is everything. Ellen feels that she needs to protect her, especially since she was the lucky one who was raised outside of the life of poverty and crime in which their
biological parents were involved. Ellen also feels somewhat guilty for having a different life, but that life equipped her with a sense of responsibility and the belief that she can make a difference for her sister. Jacob has latched onto the only person he can find who will give him a safe haven. He has no sense of responsibility or self-efficacy.

Ellen completed the SYEP and began working at a stable, full-time job. She has friends and a continued connection with one high school teacher, who saw something special in her. As Ellen has matured, she has reversed the roles and become a source of support for that teacher. Jacob has none of these types of connections. Several areas within his ecosystem have inhibited his ability to move to the next level in life; in contrast, Ellen has found support and positive interactions from several sources. These two participants are examples of the full spectrum of all the youth. Primary settings in the microsystem set the rules and norms for behavior. When these positive connections are absent, the ability to take advantage of opportunities and gain social capital is diminished.

People make a difference in the lives of others and supportive institutional agents can have a profound effect on one’s ability to gain social capital and work toward goal setting and attainment.

Consistent with social capital theory, connections with adults and institutional agents can make all the difference in the world. Two participants in the study have had institutional agents come forward throughout their lives that have given them the capital to move forward and seek opportunities for themselves. Nicolette and Kanani both have six people in their lives that function as supportive agents to facilitate their building of social capital. Their capital has grown over time as they gain access to new knowledge, resources, and navigation techniques. These young women are learning to decode the systems of which Stanton-Salazar (2010) wrote.
Nicolette first had access to mental health services through her mother’s disability. She has a therapist who helps her with techniques and life planning. She connected with a supervisor during the SYEP who encouraged her to go to college, where she immediately sought support services through counselors and tutors. Nicolette also maintains a relationship and has a peer support network of people from all walks of life.

People always liked Kanani in school due to her natural intelligence and charisma. She never felt marginalized at school; rather, she was a high achiever who used school as an escape from the chaos of her home life. Her father was always a motivational agent for her, although he passed away when she was in the third grade. She never wanted to let him down. Kanani’s connections with teachers and school made her feel safe, so she learned to seek resources. She found the SYEP through her own research, and in that experience also connected with everyone around her. Those supportive people encouraged her to go to the technical college to complete her CNA. Kanani was connected to instructors and support staff there, as well. This network serves as capital through which she can navigate the social, health care, and school systems, as well as interact freely with agents within all of these systems.

Those youth who have not had significant contact with positive institutional agents have been left to flounder in the world. Gwen and Justin, who have essentially been on their own in the world since they were children, are clear examples of this fact. Gwen’s absent parents gave her no examples or boundaries, and she did not develop a sense of herself in relation to the world. She did not even connect with any aspect of school. Justin’s father died, and his mother was neglectful to the point that Justin went into foster care for 2 years. He has been thrown around between systems and interacted with people who have done nothing to foster any sort of resilience in him.
Programs, such as the SYEP, make a difference in the lives of youth and help them make connections to positive institutional agents, learn workplace dynamics and dialogue, and provide them with a entrance into areas of the workforce that have historically been preserved for the higher level working class and middle class.

**Grouping the participants.** As the stories of the participants emerged, it became apparent that groups could be formed based on ecological background. The experiences of these youth placed them on a continuum that reflected their abilities to produce positive outcomes, depending on where they began. The results show that their starting point, from a social capital standpoint, determined the difference in their abilities to take full advantage of opportunities, fully engage, and gain social capital in a short-term experience such as the Summer Youth Employment Program.

**Group I.** Ellen and Ruby were both raised in middle-class environments, had two-parent households, and entered into poverty only later in life. One young woman was African American and the other was Caucasian, but each one brought to the picture a fund of knowledge, resources, a history of support, and the ability to take advantage of resources. Their cases were success stories because Ellen and Ruby came equipped with middle-class values, responded to the efforts of others, and were able to enter into any situation with ease.

**Group II.** Kanani, Nicolette, and Magnus were raised in poverty and had significant challenges to overcome in their families. Kanani’s mother was absent, and her father died when she was in the third grade. Nicolette’s mother was disabled from seizures, so Nicolette became her caretaker at the young age of 11. Similarly, Magnus’ mother was disabled from a mental illness. All of these participants developed a sense of resiliency that allowed them to graduate from high school on time and enter into secondary education. Each had strong institutional
agents that facilitated their development of social capital. In workforce developmental systems, as well as in the educational systems, services are needed to support youth with these types of backgrounds. These three young adults responded easily to such services and connections with others and made progress quickly.

**Group III.** Gwen, Jacob, and Laila were raised in poverty and did not have the opportunities to build social capital or the contact with adults to facilitate it. Gwen raised herself with absent parents; Jacob was rejected from a very young age by his stepfather and eventually left home; and Laila’s mother sold drugs and forged checks for a living, while her father was murdered in a drug deal. Youth with these backgrounds require a formula of services based on the needs that emerge from their ecological systems. All three youth had experienced legal entanglement from birth in terms of custody issues, divorce of parents, child support, and even the incarceration of their parents. These kids were bright, but they were victimized by those in authority, such as family and caretakers, and then again by the systems with which they interacted.

**Group IV.** Justin and Mac were raised in different environments, but both faced the management of their disabilities, ADHD and Autism Spectrum. Grouping the youth with disabilities advances the conversation about services to help them gain the social capital needed to be successful in the workforce. Certain students with disabilities are not clearly understood; as the workforce documents merely state that they have a mental impairment. It is difficult to gauge how this impairment will affect their communication and relationship building in the workplace and school settings. The question is how workforce programming for youth with disabilities might interact with the issues that arise from their diagnoses, and whether supervisors will be well enough informed to understand.
All of the youth who participated in the study had positive things to say about the Summer Youth Employment Program. Only two youth who described negative experiences: one dropped out of the program due to personal issues, and the second participant worked only with children and was not able to form any adult relationships that would continue to help her. The other eight participants learned about themselves and gained the valuable soft skills needed for the workplace environment. They also developed relationships with adults who became mentors, guides, confidantes, counselors, and general support systems for them. These youth were all able to reflect back on the people they connected with and could articulate what those connections provided for them.

The young adults often continued to work in positions to which they would not have had access without the SYEP experience. Ellen shared her story about using the advice that her supervisor at SRS gave her: “Just be assertive,” go to the new workplace and talk with a human resources person. The employer was not receptive to Ellen initially; however, when Ellen presented her resume and talked about her SRS position, the woman remarked how great it was that she had worked for the government. She then allowed Ellen to look at the list of available jobs and choose one; she started the next week in her new job.

Kanani is working as a CNA at another assisted living center and loves her position. Similarly, Nicolette is going to college full time, Ruby is working and attending college, and Magnus is heading to college this fall on a scholarship. All of these achievements are evidence of the social capital these participants built through the SYEP experience, and how the program provided them with the institutional knowledge they needed to make decisions about their futures.
Implications

Several implications surfaced from the analysis of the data because evaluating the ecological systems of individuals opened up a broad spectrum of issues. With the youth in this study, several broad issues that significantly impacted the young people’s lives are worth discussing. In addition, they offer implications for educators and policymakers in designing and implementing policies and programs to assist youth in building social capital. Impediments to social capital development for youth are the results of poverty, lack of education, parental unemployment, lack of parental education, and insufficient access to community-based services and programs (Hair, Moore, Ling, McPhee-Baker, & Brown, 2009). All of the implications reflect the need for practitioners, educators, and social service workers, as institutional agents, to be aware of the elements that might prevent youth from gaining social capital.

Impact of Poverty

Poverty plays a pivotal role in the development of social capital. Youth whose families of origin live in poverty will lack the essential keys and access to programs and services designed to aid in their development. With few exceptions, people who have lived in poverty for generations have been marginalized in society and prevented from attaining high levels of social capital (Tienda & Jensen, 1998). For every student’s success, many other students will be forgotten or marginalized further. Community support structures are important for poor families, who rely on extended family and formal organizations in order to survive. Social capital does not alleviate poverty directly; however, scholars have shown interest in how social organization, norms of cooperation, and relationships to institutions can advance public policy and work toward combating poverty (Tienda & Jensen, 1998; Warren, Thompson, & Saegert, 2001). Building social capital is a complicated process that is imbedded in many systems and processes
because poverty is a fundamental issue of American culture: “Perhaps there is a deep tension between diversity and connectedness, or between having a community of people who are likely to express very divergent viewpoints, and having a community of people who are likely to participate effectively in shared democratic decision making” (Hero, 2003, p. 120).

**Abuse and Neglect**

Social systems and institutions give authority and importance to adults, often with no questions asked. Abusive authoritarians leave youth with no voice. These authoritarians can be either people or systems. Abusive agents who misuse their power leave deep emotional scars that young people must struggle to overcome in order to move on to their next settings. These issues have to be surmounted if the youth are to take full advantage of the next setting and feel safe enough to develop healthy relationships.

When abuse and neglect occur, the consequences and influences continue throughout the victim’s lifespan. Abuse and neglect can affect people’s ability to gain self-efficacy and the ability to envision and make plans for their futures, invest themselves in healthy and appropriate relationships, and achieve their desired goals (Elder, 1994; Macmillan, 2001). Implications of abuse and neglect can include challenges with cognition and decision making, which are key developmental elements of childhood and adolescence. During this period, individuals gather the human and social capital that shapes their lives (Hagen, 1998).

**Anger**

Boys and girls process anger differently. In addition, anger’s effect on boys that come from dysfunctional families or life situations hinders their ability to communicate effectively about their lives and the impact of their experiences. Jacob has the ability to just walk away from any situation; one would wonder if anger fuels this disconnection. As someone who has already
left the “safety” of home, he can turn his back on anything. He has already been to jail, been sent away, and was forced to learn the “hard way” that he is alone in the world. The way he copes is through violent video games, smoking marijuana, and carrying with him an attitude that says he does not care about anything or anyone. The documentary *Exit through the Gift Shop* became a dream for his own life. He seeks the freedom of an “urban graffiti artist,” free to run in the night, paint to his heart’s content, and show others in secret how wonderful he is—because today, no one sees his talent or how wonderful he can be. This need for expression has been buried for a long time. In his mind, the military seems to be the only way out. This young man has already felt what it was like to be institutionalized. He remarked that when he was locked up, “I thought I was getting sick; I thought I was dying.” What was dying was his spirit. What emerged from the lockup was an even angrier boy, a boy who was more discouraged with his world and had a greater mistrust of the people in it.

Ruby processed her anger through burning and cutting herself. She used methamphetamines at a very young age, and all but one of the females in the study had children when they were still teenagers. The issue imbedded here is about how girls deal with anger.

Anger has been the focus of many studies. It has been determined to be a result of blaming other people or systems for one’s issues, feeling injured in some way, and wanting to retaliate. Anger actually lowers a person’s inhibitions (Sigfusdottir, Farkas, & Silver, 2004). Family conflict and violence in the home contribute to delinquency; in contrast, socially supportive relationships function to support social capital (Coleman, 1988).

**School and Community Involvement**

Several of the youth entered foster care services when they became truant from school and reported a greater detachment from it during that time. Education, social clubs, and sports
activities are the breeding grounds of successful social capital development. Through these conduits, social capital is introduced outside of the home and family. Participation in extracurricular activities offers role models and social interactions within the peer networks, as well as engagement and involvement with natural helpers (Stanton-Salazar, 2010; Terrion, 2006). Education and community involvement introduce responsive adults into the fold of the youths’ environment. Teachers, coaches, advisors, supervisors, and mentors enter the young people’s lives at the time when they are developing values and morals.

Education plays a key role in the development of social capital. In the formal classroom setting, as well as through extracurricular activities, youth learn self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills (O’Brien, Shriver, & Weissberg, 2003). When youth learn at an early age how to recognize their emotions and how to handle these feelings, they become empowered to apply these skills to all aspects of their lives. Motivation is a key element in the development of social capital because it teaches youth how to set and attain goals. Social skills are also key factors that are learned and developed in the educational setting (O’Brien et al., 2003; Terrion, 2006). Peers teach their peers the skills, whether positive or negative, of how to conduct themselves in social groups and gatherings. These social and emotional learning skills are introduced and developed through peer and adult interactions. Such skills are the foundation of the development of social capital.

**Absent Fathers and the Role of Family**

Most of the youth in the study had families that were dysfunctional. Family plays a crucial role in the development of social capital in youth. In most situations, home and family life are the basic building foundations for young people as they experience their first exposure to values, morals, and belief systems within the function of the family. This speaks directly to
Coleman’s (1988/1992) theory of social capital where intact, two-parent, middle-class families have more social capital opportunities than any other types of families. Parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins either directly or indirectly teach these value systems. Through modeling, parents teach the systemic function of their role within both the family unit and the community (Terrion, 2006). Parents teach the values and ethics of work, money management, household management, self-care, and care for the family unit through role modeling. The time families spend together as a whole contributes to the development of social capital for the youth. Time spent together teaches and reinforces the values of family cohesiveness and helps youth understand the concept of networks (Terrion, 2006). Within the network of the nuclear family and its extended members, youth share a wealth of history and, in most cases, support. Family time reinforces the social skills learned and gives the young people an opportunity to practice them. The fundamental social skills of sharing, helping, and taking turns are learned in the familial environment.

Youth for whom parental role modeling is counterproductive to the development of social capital run a greater risk of disconnection. Youth whose parents lack an education or place a lower value on it run a greater risk of following their parents’ example than their peers whose parents value education (Hair et al., 2009).

Blaming the Victim

This study has clearly illuminated that one system is the never sole cause of a problem. The root is not simply that the schools, parents, or the social services do not perform thorough enough investigations. McInerney (2006) discussed that reform and interventions must place relationships first in education and community interventions. Freire’s (1972/2000) philosophy on alienation and oppression of vulnerable groups is that people are marginalized in society and
blamed for their ills. School does not work for every student, as dropout and truancy rates attest. Blame is often the next reaction to serious issues; as a culture, we search for someone or something to blame. All too often, the blame is placed on the deficits and pathologies of youth, their families, communities, schools, or politics (Hursh, 2006; McInerney, 2006).

Blame is about releasing one’s sense of responsibility. If we blame something or someone, we are released from feeling responsible for helping them, creating services, or reacting as a collective society. If the notion of blame is rejected, we are released into a process of collective thought and action to combat the issues that hurt our people. We can redirect our orientation from further victimizing our most vulnerable populations.

**Resiliency**

Despite the many challenges that these youth face, they all exhibit a spirit of resiliency with which many middle class people could never empathize. During what stage of development does this ability to gain resiliency arise? On what age can parents, caregivers, or practitioners focus to help develop this sense and target services or developmental encouragers, so that children can overcome barriers to work and resist the temptation or need to connect with others who provide negative developmental stimuli? How long can it take them to work backward to return to the place where they feel supported, confident, resilient, and have real dreams and goals for themselves?

In education and social work, resilience is a process by which the protective factors imbedded within people’s ecological systems help them overcome negative experiences and exposures (Bernard, 1993; Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005). Positive and protective factors come from a variety of sources and include healthy coping mechanisms, competence in particular areas, and a level of self-efficacy. In addition, external resources might include supportive
parents, mentors, and community organizations that promote resilience (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005). Urban youth who find support through natural mentors (e.g., teachers, extended family, community service professionals, or other institutional agents) experience a greater resiliency to negative life experiences (Zimmerman, Bingenheimer, & Notaro, 2002).

**Limitations**

The sample of ten youth who participated in the Summer Youth Employment Program was small compared to the almost 250 youth who participated in the program during the 2010 summer. However, as with the qualitative research tradition, the number of participants needed to remain relatively small in order to gather in-depth material about their worlds.

The timing of the interviews 1 year after summer placement may be viewed as a relatively short follow-up interval after summer job placement. Consequently, it may have limited the youths’ ability to establish the contributions of their job placements conclusively in creating long-term plans for themselves. Although the study was limited to the effects of summer employment programs on these youth, as well as their subjective assessments of the likelihood of future work prospects, behavior, and future schooling, it did lay the foundation for future analyses with this population (Neumark & Joyce, 2001). It may be viewed as difficult to gauge changes in motivation or predict employment success only 1 year out of the summer program participation. However, Rothery (2001) discussed that the simultaneous goals of this type of research are to respect the capacities of adolescents and to recognize the importance of their environments (physical, social, emotional contexts) that support, limit, and shape their lives. It was important to meet the participants at their current levels and positions. There could have been a bias in the findings because those who agreed to participate were more likely to fins the SYEP program favorable.
Other limitations within the study were more closely related to the research design. Due to the transient lifestyles of many of the youth and their families, it proved to be somewhat challenging to create a cohort of participants who were willing to share detailed private information. Gathering the perspectives of ten adolescents does not provide a general depiction of young people everywhere, and the findings are not proposed to be generalizable. However, the study does suggest findings from which decision makers and practitioners can learn how to better relate to this developmental age group and aid in adolescent transitions. By conducting in-depth interviews with adolescents in their natural ecologies, several findings emerged that can help create awareness of adolescent experiences. In addition, the findings suggest that supports are needed to aid in the youths’ developmental and transitional experiences in a variety of settings, including schools and the workforce.

**Suggestions for Future Research**

Several suggestions for further research emerged from the findings of the study and illustrated that many areas within the ecological systems of individuals can be targeted for research. The implications section discussed that the impact of poverty cannot be underestimated when it comes to helping youth build social capital. Research on poverty and class is needed to understand the division and exclusion of those in poverty due to their lower levels of social capital (Hero, 2003; Tienda & Jensen, 1998). Specific social capital studies with populations who experience poverty would be helpful to advance the conversation about the widening income gap in America and recovery efforts after long recessions.

The other subjects discussed in the implications section (abuse and neglect, anger, school truancy, absent fathers, blaming the victim) can also be paired with the social capital theory to
discover the deeper implications of those issues for building social capital and advancement in society.

Resiliency was the final area of interest in the implications section. The concept takes an approach that is not based on a deficit model, yet looks to identify strengths and assets that individuals have acquired to attain their present positions (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005). The idea of the strengths perspective is a more contemporary thought and seeks to help the participants facilitate ideas that build on what they are already doing right. Research in this area could identify the strengths of participants and follow the implementation of positive changes and their impact.

As for this particular subject of research, it would be beneficial to repeat interviews over a longer period of time. The idea would be to create a systemic inquiry that followed participants for 5 or 10 years to identify the longevity of interventions. If youths’ barriers to employment and furthering their education surfaced during these longer time periods, a researcher might be able to identify the patterns of issues that arise for participants to see how they overcome some issues, but not others. This type of study would yield an understanding of whether these programs’ interventions lead to certain skills for working through life and work issues over time.

It would also be helpful to survey larger groups and interview more people to gain a broader perspective. The idea of saturation is an interesting one with the ecological systems model, as all individuals would have different worlds. However, a larger group would inevitably provide a larger pool of information from which to draw conclusions. In addition, it would be important to investigate how a series of interventions would impact youth, rather than one single short-term intervention (e.g., summer work). This institutional impact cannot be a one-time opportunity. The young adults need multiple opportunities to address their fragmented needs, and
a support system that has a thorough understanding of higher education resources and workforce knowledge.

The ecological and social capital models could be used to aid Workforce programming professionals in the assessment and placement of youth in work experiences that would meet their ecological needs. For some youth, such as Gwen and Justin, this program was not enough. The matching of the job was very important, along with the opportunities to connect with key adults. These two participants needed strong, engaged adults to serve as mentors and role models to meet their ecological needs. Interventions could be created in which the work experience would fit the ecological and social capital needs of the individual. By using such a tool, intervention models could easily be implemented. An intervention is only as effective as its assessment of the target population. In order to maximize program effectiveness, this program would need to assess participants with ecological methods such as those in this study in order to easily identify particular unmet needs that the program has the potential to address.

This study provided the foundation to build a cost benefit projection for future policy development. By comparing the costs of the SYEP and other youth workforce programming, it is possible to determine the saving of government dollars in relation to welfare and criminal justice systems. When individuals are attached to work and people who support healthy work behaviors they are less likely to be entangled with these systems and in turn, will positively contribute to society.

**Concluding Remarks**

The participants’ individual stories describe their experiences, relationships, communication patterns with adults or institutional agents, and feelings about the world in which they live. They provide rich descriptions about how they are connected with others who facilitate
social capital and the impact of the Summer Youth Employment Program on their lives. The descriptions also helped the researcher understand how the SYEP program goals have translated into the participants’ lives, how they feel about their experiences, and the way these experiences have prepared them for their future. This information would have been difficult to gather through quantitative methods; in contrast, the qualitative nature of this study has recognized that human emotions and feelings related to experiences are not easily quantified (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Lichtman, 2010).

This was the first work experience for most of these youth; although they were older, they had been rejected by much of the work community and had not had the chance to build workforce capital. The SYEP program was their first foot in the door. Mainstream society, or middle class youth have opportunities all around them for gaining work experience. They begin by volunteering early on, they “shadow” for school projects, they have mentors come to them, and they walk into a store or restaurant and actually get the job for which they apply. In other words, they already have funds of knowledge or the social capital needed to secure work and effectively communicate with adults. The youth in this study were not able to secure that first job experience on their own, despite their efforts, nor were they able to gain the social capital necessary for success before they entered the SYEP.

Programs such as the SYEP go beyond trying to reduce poverty through workforce development. They engage young people during a crucial stage in their development and help them overcome barriers to work and higher education (e.g., abuse or neglect, parents’ physical or mental illness, and factors such as drug or alcohol use, running away from home, or having children early). The programs have the potential to set the tone for the future of these youth.
To date, the stimulus funds have been exhausted. State and local governments lack the dollars to maintain youth summer employment programming as stand-alone programs because the stimulus dollars were a one-time endeavor. Through the Workforce Alliance, the Summer Youth Employment Program provided youth with the opportunities to gain and build social capital when they returned to school after a summer employment experience. In addition, they create a leg up in the youth work force in community-based workplace settings that provide education and services for others. These programs also provide youth with the institutional knowledge that is critical for gaining social capital in society, and the participants give back while earning. These programs are the epitome of “social services.” They have the potential to reduce dependency on welfare services through the life span and instill a work ethic that provides valuable institutional knowledge.

Much of the success of this project depended on the willingness of participants to discuss aspects of their lives that felt very personal to them, but their openness was clearly evident. The intent was to understand and describe the lives of the participants as adolescents, students, community members, persons of color, persons affected by poverty, and individuals in relation to the world around them. Their stories offer a rich source of insight to those who work to help young people. Building a 21st century workforce is not only complicated, but it requires assessment and intervention techniques that go far beyond creating funding for programs.

The method of this research was very innovative bringing together knowledge from multiple disciplines and using a systematic method for building a picture of program recipients. By creating the picture and telling the stories, policy makers have the ability to understand the multiple issues of today’s youth and target programs with an understanding that even small efforts can make a big difference.
Gaining knowledge about the lived experiences of young people can assist policy makers and educational leaders by equipping them with information about how youth navigate and interact with the complex ecological systems composed of their family, school, work, faith systems, community, and culture. This knowledge describes dynamic phenomena that take place within a particular context. If research is to serve education, this linguistic transaction should be studied above all, as it is part of the ongoing life of the individual in relation to a particular educational, social, and cultural environment (Rosenblatt, 1988). As young people transition into adult roles in the workforce and secondary educational systems, their voices can advance the conversation about student perspectives and the impact of community and government interventions and programming.

Federal policy that created youth workforce programming has shown four decades of promise and this study has uncovered that while eligibility for such programs is met with one barrier, these youth faced multiple barriers, and demonstrated very positive outcomes. Whether funding comes from the federal, state, or local government systems, there is a need for these programs. Youth programs must be a priority.
REFERENCES


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APPENDIX A

QUESTIONS FOR INTERVIEWS

From Stanton-Salazar’s Social Capital Framework, questions will be asked to frame six areas of social capital:

Developing relationship with adult supervisor/mentor

- Do you remember the people who worked with you in the youth program?
- Who was your favorite?

Interacting & connecting with adults

- Can you describe him or her? How did you interact with him/her?
- What made them special?

Access to information not previously known

- What did you learn during these summers?
- Can you think of something you learned that surprise you or that you had not heard about before?

Assistance

- How did the people in the program help you?
- Can you think of a time a story when someone helped you?

Exposure to adult worlds

- What did you learn about working that you did not know before?
- What surprised you about working world?

Support and encouragement

- In the program, how did they support you or encourage you?
- Do you feel you can do things you had not thought about before?
Questions will continue that help to create the Ecomap (Sample Question)s:

Adolescent Regarding Self:

What do you consider to be your strengths?
What types of plans/hopes/dreams do you have for the future?
Whom do you admire? What do you admire about them?
What do you enjoy doing in your free time? Activities?
Identify aspects of the environment that are important to you
What behaviors do you have that you like/do not like?
Can you describe some of the challenges you have of being you?

Regarding Peers:

Describe the importance of your peers
What influence(s) do your peers have?
What are some of the thoughts you have about your peers?
Do you trust people in your peer group?
How do you behave when you are with your peers?
Do your behaviors change when you are with your peers?
What are your peers’ attitudes toward school?

Regarding Family:

How would you describe your family?
What are your thoughts about your family?
How do you feel about your family?
What behaviors do you have when you are with your family?
APPENDIX A (continued)

How would you describe a typical day in your home?

Who is the primary caretaker in your family?

What types of challenges has/does your family face?

What customs/holidays does your family celebrate or not celebrate?

What are your parents’ attitudes toward school/work?

Regarding School:

How would you describe how school is for you?

What are your perceptions of classrooms at your school?

Describe your teacher’s attitudes/behaviors

Do you trust your teachers or a particular teacher?

What is teacher instruction like at your school? (Pedagogy)

Do you have a certain type of teacher that you learn better/worse from?

What are your thoughts about school?

How do you feel about school?

How do you behave at school? Is it different compared to other places?

Describe your involvement with school

What kind of student are you? How do you see yourself?

Regarding Summer Youth Employment Program:

- What was the impact of the “soft skills” classes the youth took at Workforce before starting work?

- What did you think you wanted to do before this? Has it changed because of this summer program? (old career goals, today’s career goals)
- The SYEP tried to match you with what you thought you wanted to do…did this confirm that choice for you or did it help you figure out what you do not want to do?
- Where were you placed?
- Did the summer employment program have an impact on what classes you took this year in school?
- What links have you found between occupational learning and your high school learning?
- Have you ever thought about dropping out of school? Has this experience affected that?
- Are you more interested in getting tutoring when you need it or improving your study skills while in high school? What steps have you taken to improve your studying?
- What goals are you setting for yourself this academic year?
- What needs do you have that are not being met by the school?
- How did your summer work integrate work and learning for you?
- What made your summer work meaningful for high school education?
- What surprised you about your summer work placement?
- What skills did you gain at work that helps you in school?
- What behaviors/attitudes have changed or improved for you since the summer?
- Did your work supervisor help you in a way that has improved your schooling?
- How has the responsibility of summer work helped you become more responsible in school?
- Have you changed your plans for after high school?
- Did you connect with your supervisor? Build trust?
Three elements comprise the ecomap: relationships, social networks, and support. Collectively, these elements demonstrate how current relationships interact with cultural and ecological systems (Hodge, 2000; Ray & Street, 2005). The ecomap offers a graphic organizing tool to document and understand how the elements of a person’s life connect and form the systems that support or create conflict with the individual.

Creating an ecomap requires the researcher or interviewer to engage the participant in a collaborative process during which the ecomap is created on paper and will allow for semi-structured open-ended interview questions to be asked and documented in a visual way (Hartman, 1995). A pre-formed worksheet will be used in the process that will allow the researcher and participant to fill the worksheet together based on the individual’s depiction of their life.

First, the research participant writes his or her first name in a circle in the middle of the paper. In dialogue with the researcher, the participant identifies outside systems of influence, which are then drawn into circles that radiate from the center. These systems include work, family, church, school, health care, social welfare, recreation, peers, sports, and spiritual influences. These elements map the individual’s connections to social support systems, to their community, and to their culture.

Next, the interviewer and participant discuss each relationship, and the interviewer uses coded lines to document the responses. A double line represents a strong relationship, a dotted line represents a tenuous relationship, and a single line represents a weak relationship. A
APPENDIX B (continued)

zigzagged line indicates a stressful relationship. If no current relationship exists, there should not be a line.

Lastly, the interviewer asks the participant to describe communication patterns between the individual and each element in the ecosystem. The researcher then uses arrows to indicate if communication is unidirectional or mutually occurring. For example, if a best friend is a part of the adolescent’s life, is considered to be very supportive and able to talk to about anything, and also reciprocates the friendship, the researcher would write the friend’s name in one of the circles and draw a solid line between the participant and their best friend, and place arrows on both ends of the line showing that the communication is two-way.

Once all circles are drawn and each is connected to the center by lines that accurately reflect existing relationships, the researcher is able analyze the document, identifying gaps and describing communication patterns. In doing so, the researcher begins to describe the individual’s relationships within their overall environment (Ray & Street, 2005; Kennedy, 2010).
APPENDIX C

CONSENT FORM

**Purpose:** You are invited to participate in a study to gather student perceptions and descriptions of their school, family, peer, and summer work environments and the interrelationships between them. In particular, to describe how meanings and understandings combine to affect student’s engagement with learning. We hope to learn what can be done to assist adolescents in the transitions they experience during and after high school.

**Participant Selection:** You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you participated in the Summer Youth Employment Program through the Workforce Alliance of South Central Kansas. Adolescents were selected based on grade level and ability to address complex issues through verbal communication as well as your own willingness to participate. A total of ten participants will be chosen for interviewing.

**Explanation of Procedures:** If you decide to participate, you will be asked to participate in an interview conducted by a doctoral student from Wichita State University. One interview will take place and you may be asked to communicate after an interview for clarification if needed.

**Discomfort/Risks:** As your identity will not be revealed and there is no anticipation of any adverse consequences resulting from your participation. You may be slightly inconvenienced due to the time and location constraints affecting participation. If you choose to, you can participate in a presentation to the school community and the researcher will support you in this effort.

**Benefits:** You will help the Workforce Alliance to improve their relationships with adolescents and opportunities they provide to help adolescents transition during and after high school. Good relationships with communities, schools, and adolescents have been shown to improve student achievement. Also, we feel that you will learn more about the community and you can feel free to ask us questions.

**Confidentiality:** Any information that reveals your identity will not be shared with third parties. The interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed. The transcriptions will not reveal identifying information. All information related to your identity will remain confidential and will only be disclosed with your written permission.

**Refusal/Withdrawal:** Your participation in this research is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect you or your family’s future relations with Wichita State University, The Workforce Alliance of South Central Kansas, and/or the USD 259/260 school district. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.
APPENDIX C (continued)

**Contact:** If you have any questions about this research, you can contact us at: Natalie Grant, Doctoral Student, Educational Leadership Department, 104 Hubbard Hall, 316-978-6996. If you have questions pertaining to your rights as a research subject, or about research-related injury, you can contact the Office of Research Administration at Wichita State University, Wichita, KS 67260-0007, and telephone (316) 978-3285.

You are under no obligation to participate in this study. Your signature indicates that you have read the information provided above, agree to allow the researcher to view your Workforce file records, and have voluntarily decided to participate.

You will be provided a copy of this consent form.

______________________________________________  _____________________
Signature of Subject                                    Date

______________________________________________  _____________________
Witness Signature                                     Date
APPENDIX D

TABLES OF POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE INFLUENCES OF INSTITUTIONAL AGENTS

Table 1

Participants’ Perceptions of Positive and Negative Aspects of Family

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family Positive</th>
<th>Family Negative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ellen’s Grandmother</td>
<td>Ellen's Mother &amp; Father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacob Cousin</td>
<td>Ellen's Auntie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laila's Sister (Ellen)</td>
<td>Gwen's Mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laila's Father</td>
<td>Gwen's Grandmother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mac's Father</td>
<td>Jacob's Step-father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magnus' Uncle</td>
<td>Jacob's Mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicolette's Mother</td>
<td>Justin's Mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kanani's Auntie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Magnus' Mother &amp; Father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Magnus' Grandmother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mac's Mother</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2

Participants’ Perceptions of Positive and Negative Aspects of Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Positive</th>
<th>School Negative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ellen's History Teacher</td>
<td>Gwen Truant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kanani’s High school teachers</td>
<td>Jacob never fit in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicolette’s Junior College teachers/advisors/counselors</td>
<td>Justin's disability disconnected him from school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruby’s Alternative School staff</td>
<td>Justin's foster care stays disconnected him</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Laila was disconnected after foster care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Laila was disconnected after fighting at school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mac was &quot;tortured&quot; at school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Magnus was &quot;tormented&quot; in school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nicolette was disconnected due to mother's disability needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ruby dropped out of HS, pregnancy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3
Participants’ Perceptions of SYEP’s Positive and Negative Aspects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SYEP/Workforce Positive</th>
<th>SYEP/Workforce Negative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ellen social service agency connected to people &amp; resources, got a job in manufacturing after</td>
<td>Gwen was only around children &amp; did not connect with adults</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justin loved his SYEP supervisors</td>
<td>Jacob's family problems were too severe, he was angry &amp; quit SYEP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kanani was encouraged by SYEP receptionist Kanani excelled at Rehab clinic &amp; was encouraged to get CNA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laila worked for large hospital, connected to adult female, helped through grief, learned about healthcare</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mac in city mechanic fleet &quot;changed his life&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruby felt supported by SYEP counselor, excelled in her job, learned to &quot;take advantage of everything, offered job afterward</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1  Summary of Status and Outcomes for Each Participant

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Barriers to Employment</th>
<th>Parent</th>
<th>SYEP Job Placement</th>
<th>Living Arrangement</th>
<th>Current Employment</th>
<th>Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ellen</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Poor work history, CJ involvement, Parenting youth, Foster care history</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>State social service agency</td>
<td>Alone with 3-yr. old daughter</td>
<td>Manufacturing company</td>
<td>HS Grad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gwen</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>Poor work history, Foster care, Pregnant</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Boys and Girls Club</td>
<td>Grandmother, sister, sister’s children, and son</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>Completed 11th grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacob</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Puerto Rican/Caucasian</td>
<td>Poor work history, CJ involvement</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Education retraining organization</td>
<td>28-year-old cousin, girlfriend, and 7 children</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>Working on GED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justin</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Poor work history, Disability (ADHD)</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Suburban parks department</td>
<td>Mother, stepfather, and younger brother</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>HS Grad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kanani</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Poor work history, Parenting youth</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Rehab of regional medical center</td>
<td>Between auntie and grandmother with 1-yr-old daughter</td>
<td>Assisted Living home</td>
<td>HS Grad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laila</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Poor work history, Parenting youth, CJ involvement, Foster care history</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Laundry aid at regional medical center</td>
<td>Alone with 1-yr-old son; 4 mos. pregnant</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>HS Grad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mac</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Poor work history, Disability (Autism spectrum) Basic Skills Deficient</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Suburban fleet management</td>
<td>Father and stepmother</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>HS Grad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magnus</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Poor work history, Mental impairment</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Convent and Department of Commerce</td>
<td>Mother and 4 sisters</td>
<td>Unemployed, going to school</td>
<td>HS Grad, Attend comm.. college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicolette</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Poor work history</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Public high school custodial department</td>
<td>College dorm</td>
<td>Unemployed, going to school</td>
<td>HS Grad, Attend comm.. college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruby</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Parenting youth</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Private non-profit org.</td>
<td>Boyfriend, 2 children, and 1 stepchild</td>
<td>Non-profit org, Going to school</td>
<td>HS Grad, Attend tech. college</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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