Modern-day orphanages: Exploring what it is like to grow up in a stable, long-term residential children's home

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Modern-day orphanages: Exploring what it is like to grow up in a stable, long-term residential children’s home

by

Elizabeth Zimmermann

A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

Major: Human Development and Family Studies

Program of Study Committee:
Brenda Lohman, Co-Major Professor
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ABSTRACT

This study explored the nuances and dynamics of living in a stable, long-term residential home within a Christian community for foster children who (for varying reasons) are unable to reside with their families of origin. In essence, this study examined ‘modern-day orphanages’ (a term used by McKenzie, 2010), a little studied alternative care format for foster youth. Using interviews and participatory observation to form a multi-perspective case study, this research explored the particular and unique care environment provided by Children’s Hope (pseudonym), a modern-day orphanage located in the United States. Results are presented in two manuscripts. Themes from the first manuscript uncover the structural aspects of the organization, the intentionally created environment of the organization, and a typical day experienced by children; findings from this manuscript support the inclusion of modern-day orphanages as a viable alternative care format to the foster care system. Themes from the second manuscript ascertain how Children’s Hope satisfies the child welfare goals of safety, permanency, and well-being. Given that the organization satisfies these goals, findings from this manuscript also support the inclusion of modern-day orphanages as a viable alternative care format to the foster care system. Overall, the findings from this study fill a substantial gap in the literature regarding modern-day orphanages and further inform policy and practice regarding placement for foster children.
CHAPTER 1. GENERAL INTRODUCTION

This research explored the unique environment of modern-day orphanages (a term used by McKenzie, 2010). Modern-day orphanages are an alternative care format that provides stable, long-term residential care to foster youth. For varying reasons, these youth are unable to live with their family of origin. This research is a qualitative, instrumental and collectivist case study about Children’s Hope (pseudonym), a modern-day orphanage located within the United States, which utilized participatory observation and interviews. This study fills a substantial gap in the literature by addressing what it is like for foster children to grow up in a modern-day orphanage and how this unique environment impacts foster children’s safety, permanency, and well-being. Findings from this qualitative study further inform the ongoing need of reforming the current foster care system by providing support for an alternative form of care: the modern-day orphanage.

Thesis Organization

This alternative-format thesis is organized into five main chapters. The first chapter is a general introduction to the topic, which provides background and context to the study, addresses the exact nature of the study, and explains characteristics and experiences of the researcher pertinent to the study. The second chapter is an in-depth literature review of the topic and introduction to theoretical frameworks utilized to frame the study. The third chapter is a manuscript addressing the study’s first research question, entitled “Modern-day orphanages: Exploring what it is like to grow up in a stable, long-term residential children’s home.” The fourth chapter is a manuscript addressing the study’s second, third, and fourth research questions, entitled “Modern-day orphanages: Exploring how a long-term residential
children’s home satisfies the child welfare goals of safety, permanency, and well-being.”

The fifth and final chapter is a general conclusion, summarizing findings, interpreting these findings through different theoretical lenses, and addressing policy implications, strengths, limitations, and future research directions.

Both manuscripts have three authors. The first author, Elizabeth Zimmermann, is a graduate student in the Human Development and Family Studies program (HDFS) at Iowa State University (ISU) and is the primary researcher and author of both manuscripts. The second and third authors (respectively), Dr. Brenda J. Lohman and Dr. Janet N. Melby, are Elizabeth’s co-major professors. Dr. Lohman is an associate professor at ISU in the HDFS department, and Dr. Melby is an adjunct associate professor and Director of the Child Welfare Research and Training Project at ISU in the HDFS department. Both Dr. Lohman and Dr. Melby advised study design, implementation, analysis, and report preparation.

**Background and Context**

Although still fairly common globally, the United States no longer utilizes traditional orphanages. Although at the turn of the 20th century there were approximately 100,000 children living in orphanages within the U.S. (London, 1999), within the past century the nation has shifted to foster care (McKenzie, 1999b), with an estimated 463,000 children in foster care in 2008 (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2010). By definition, traditional orphanages are considered an institution, which can be defined as a facility operated by public or private agency in order to provide 24-hour care and/or treatment to children away from home (Code of Federal Regulations, 1996). However, traditional orphanages were more commonly defined as campus settings which housed large numbers of
children (McKenzie, 1999b), and were founded by citizens, associations, and religious organizations (Hasci, 2009).

The vast majority of these traditional orphanages established prior to the 21st century no longer exist within the U.S.; within the past 60 years many closed their doors or converted into crisis management centers for severely troubled children (McKenzie, 1999b). Therefore, even though the current umbrella term of ‘foster care’ includes any setting of 24-hour substitute care for children outside their own homes (Code of Federal Regulations, 1996), this thesis defines traditional orphanage care as separate from the current definition of foster care. This thesis also depicts modern-day orphanages as separate from both the traditional orphanage care system and the current foster care system, since modern-day orphanages draw upon their historical orphanage roots while combining elements of the current foster care system.

McKenzie (1999b) explains that the shift from orphanage care to foster care has occurred for several reasons. First, many traditional orphanages housed children who either had deceased parents or parents who were financially unable to provide for them. However, after World War II, the country saw medical advances that lowered death rates and the U.S. experienced a robust economy that decreased poverty rates, thereby decreasing the need for orphanages. Second, reports of abuse or inadequate care within orphanages led popular opinion to view orphanage care negatively. This opinion was fueled by inaccurate media portrayals of orphanages and misleading child welfare literature, both of which denounced orphanage care. Third, political policies played a central role in the decline of orphanages. Careful examination of child welfare policies reveals the influence of special interest groups and pressing political forces, whose increase in weighty regulations drove the cost of care up,
making orphanage care less affordable and foster care more affordable (McKenzie, 1999b). In addition, Bourdreaux and Bourdreaux (1999) cite the influence of social workers and other special influence groups, who favored foster care. Lee (1999) writes of overall and specific government centralization, which erodes the necessity of local care, thereby striking the heart of orphanages. According to Lee, orphanages need to be run by people who possess local information and not by remote authorities who utilize standardized care (1999). Finally, London (1999) writes of additional public policies, such as Aid to Families with Dependent Children, which continued to support familial (as opposed to institutional) care.

At the same time that traditional orphanage care was declining throughout the 20th century, foster care was increasing. The reasons behind the increase in foster care mirror the reasons behind the decrease in orphanage care. For example, as the media portrayed impersonal and cruel orphanages, warm family life and parental care was receiving more emphasis and popular attention (McKenzie, 1999b). Psychiatrists such as Anna Freud, John Bowlby, and Rene Spitz gave grave warnings about the detrimental effects of maternal deprivation and thereby denounced orphanage care, even though their opinions were based on selected clinical studies that lacked rigorous methodological design (McCall, 1999). Later researchers questioned the implications of these studies and in their own research failed to replicate findings; indeed, some researchers even found opposing results (McCall, 1999). As such, the dire warnings of maternal deprivation may be unfounded; physical or emotional deterioration may be more closely related to physical and social neglect (McCall, 1999).

Although these basic perceptions of negative orphanage care and positive perceptions of foster care have been shown to contain some theoretical and empirical truth, the reality is that each system has advantages and disadvantages. Properly funded and staffed, orphanages
can provide a loving, safe, and stable community home for children, thereby improving life chances, enhancing development, and providing children with a sense of identity and belonging (McKenzie, 1999b). In contrast, although a well-designed system, foster care can fail at a surprising rate in fulfilling the child welfare goals (Muskie, 2003) for a child’s safety, permanency, and well-being (McKenzie, 1999b). For example, children in foster care experience abuse and neglect (Burgess & Borowsky, 2010; Sigrid, 2004), placement instability that leads to negative outcomes (Newton, Litrownik, & Landsverk, 2000; Webster, Barth, & Needell, 2000), and mixed levels of well-being (Burgess & Borowsky, 2010; Fox, Berrick & Frasch, 2008; Gramkows et. al., 2009).

Because of the potential and real disadvantageous outcomes for children within the foster care system, a movement in the 1980s started to revitalize orphanages as an alternative form of care to the foster care system. London (1999) explains the movement as an effort to prevent youth delinquency. Research continually demonstrated the importance of effective parenting in preventing delinquency, and the importance of the earliest possible intervention if parenting was inadequate to cope with delinquency. Although this could be accomplished with foster care, the number of existing institutions in the 1980s was too few to care for the number of children in need of alternative care. As a result, individuals began to speak of revitalizing orphanages, even though public opinion was overwhelming against such a move.

London (1999) explains that the movement received initial support due to a number of voices that were concerned about the crisis state of the foster care system. The movement itself came to a peak in 1994. However, by 1995 the movement had died due to unfortunate complications involving rhetoric, politics, and economics. Instead of becoming a reality, the revitalization of orphanages became an “unpleasant memory” (p. 93).
Nevertheless, there are still several leading voices that continue to promote modern-day orphanages, which are becoming a viable option for children who lack adequate family care (McKenzie, 2010; McKenzie, 1999b). Although there is variety in emphasis, overall, modern-day orphanages are recognized as community-oriented facilities which provide stable and long-term care to foster children. A majority of these organizations also have a religious emphasis and provide additional services to residency (such as schooling or counseling). A cursory overview conducted by the current researcher found over 40 organizations/campuses that appeared to fit the broad definition of modern-day orphanages within the United States (Gerhart & Gerhart, 2011). It is possible, however unlikely, that a great many more exist. Hyde (2011) cites over 900 facilities within the United States, although this number includes varying types of facilities that are not considered modern-day orphanages (such as group homes, foster care, etc.).

Although few in number, several private orphanages never completely disappeared and have continued in their original mission, becoming modern-day orphanages; in addition, more private modern-day orphanages are being formed by religious and civic groups that are unsatisfied with the current foster care system (McKenzie, 1999c). Little to no research has been conducted on these private and modern-day orphanages. The main purpose of this research, therefore, is to investigate what it is like to grow up and live in a modern-day orphanage, and how this environment addresses the primary goals of the child welfare system (safety, permanency, and well-being; Muskie, 2003). This purpose was addressed through a qualitative study of children residing in Children’s Hope (pseudonym), a modern-day orphanage located in the United States.
Formerly a traditional orphanage, Children’s Hope provides Christian, long-term residential care for children in need (Children’s Home Website, 2010). The main campus contains seven residential homes in addition to other structural buildings (such as a gym, swimming pool, greenhouse, etc.). Each residential home houses between eight to ten children and two live-in adults who function as ‘parents.’ Children’s Hope serves children and siblings from birth through college and structures each day to provide a mix of family, education, work, and fun (Children’s Home Website, 2010).

**Problem Statement and Research Questions**

Although once the primary form of care for foster youth, traditional orphanages no longer exist in the U.S. due to real and perceived limitations of facilities and care (Bourdreaux & Bourdreaux, 1999; Lee, 1999; McCall, 1999; McKenzie, 1999b). Yet despite the negatives and shortcomings associated with the replacement foster care system (Burgess & Borowsky, 2010; Fox, Berrick & Frasch, 2008; Gramkows et. al., 2009; Newton, Litrownik, & Landsverk, 2000; Sigrid, 2004; Webster, Barth, & Needell, 2000), there has been little research addressing viable alternatives to both orphanage and foster care. These alternatives do exist, however, even if fairly unknown and few in number. These alternatives, or modern-day orphanages, combine elements of traditional orphanages and current foster care. What these unique and new environments look like, what experiences children have in these environments, and how they address the safety, permanency, and well-being of children have received little to no attention in scholarly literature.

This study sought to explore the structural elements of the organization and the nuances and dynamics of living in a modern-day orphanage for children who lack adequate
family care. Using interviews and participatory observation to form a multi-perspective case study, the researcher purposed to understand this particular and unique care environment. Specifically, the researcher examined a child’s safety, permanency, and well-being (the three goals of the child welfare system; Muskie, 2003) within the unique environment of Children’s Hope, a modern-day orphanage. The results of this study contribute information to the growing debate regarding foster care and viable alternative forms of care (such as modern-day orphanages). The following research questions, therefore, were addressed:

1. What is the experience of children who lack adequate family to live and grow up in a modern-day orphanage?
2. How is safety addressed within this modern-day orphanage?
3. How is permanency addressed within this modern-day orphanage?
4. How is child well-being addressed within this modern-day orphanage?

Assumptions

There are three primary assumptions underlying this study. First and foremost, it is the assumption of the researcher that all children deserve a safe, stable, and loving environment, and that such elements are necessary for their proper growth and development in all areas of life. Second, it is assumed that biological families-of-origin for children living in the modern-day orphanage are unable to care for their children for varying reasons, either willingly or unwillingly, and may have exposed their children to traumatic experiences, causing unexpected transitions and developments in a child’s life, all of which could potentially influence children’s’ observed behaviors and recorded responses. Third, it is my assumption that one system cannot adequately account for all the diversity of experiences
and needs that children entering foster care require. Although most children may function well within the foster care system, a substantial number of children fall through the cracks because of circumstances beyond their control (Sigrid, 2004; Pollack, 2010; Webster et. al., 2000), and as a result suffer negative consequences after already encountering traumatic life experiences, (Buehler et. al., 2000; Leathers, 2006; Newton et. al., 2000). These realities cause the researcher to believe in the importance of providing alternative care options (such as modern-day orphanages).

**The Researcher**

My interest in this area stems from my personal background, which includes my family upbringing, my academic studies, and my work experience. All of these areas have the potential to bias the collection and interpretation of my data. First, my interest in this topic stems from the positive family upbringing that I experienced. Although both my parents experienced divorce prior to my birth, I was raised within an intact family unit. My father is a family practice physician and my mother recently began substitute teaching (previously she stayed at home to raise my sisters and me). I recognize how my positive family environment has shaped who I am today, and in large part credit my success to this upbringing. Since I value the guidance and mentoring that parents and siblings provide, I therefore value an organization that seeks to (1) provide a home to children who lack adequate family care, (2) keep siblings together, and (3) place children with live-in parents who seek to positively guide a child’s development in order to improve life chances.

Second, my education has focused on poverty and marginalization. Because of internship experiences in Minneapolis, Minnesota with people who were hungry and
homeless, I value community support and empowering individuals to speak for their rights. Because I am working towards my Master of Science in Human Development and Family Studies, I also value the empowerment of education, which encourages critical thinking, problem solving, and progress for society. My hands-on field experience also applies directly to children, as I have worked at and directed childcare programs over several summers. Because of these academic and work experiences, I not only value children, but also realize the importance of speaking out for those who are in need and have limited ways to speak for themselves.

Finally, I was born and raised in a Lutheran home and continue to identify and direct my life primarily through my personal faith and the teachings of the Christian church. I greatly value the work of the church and believe in the transformative power of faith for healing, especially in the face of adversity and pain. At the same time I value diversity of faiths and respect the choices of individuals to remain or remove themselves from the church. However, because of my faith upbringing, I am biased to value and connect with the mission of Children’s Hope. Yet this bias may be an advantage because my understanding of the Christian faith may enable understandings that would be difficult for secular scientists to grasp. Because my life has been directed around faith, family, and those in need, I felt a calling to participate in research that would improve the lives of children (especially children from vulnerable backgrounds), and to research an organization that has similar values and goals.
**Rationale for Study**

Children are a vital and vulnerable part of our society. Those who lack adequate family care are particularly vulnerable and in need of a safe and permanent home that enables them to flourish in multiple areas of well-being (Hasci, 2009; McKenzie, 1999b; Newton et al., 2000). Although the foster care system is the default setting for the vast majority of children in this predicament, the foster care system has failed to adequately and consistently provide care for subsets of this population, such as males, older children, or those who have suffered from abuse (Webster et al., 2000). Although traditional orphanages also face shortcomings (including abuse; Hasci, 2009) they do provide services that foster care settings lack (such as a permanent home; McKenzie, 1999a). Although a detailed discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of both orphanage care and foster care are further explored in the literature review, it is sufficient to say the current child welfare system needs improvement. Specifically, Richard McKenzie (1999b) states the following:

> Many of the more than half a million children in the contemporary government–supported child welfare system will be harmed by the system itself, given that all too often the children in the system will have to cope with the profound insecurity that comes from being shipped from one set of foster parents to another, sometimes dozens of times (p. 1).

It is therefore desirable to examine alternative forms of care, such as modern-day orphanages, that address the shortcomings and advantages of both the current foster care system and traditional orphanages, while fulfilling the goals of the child welfare system (safety, permanency, and child well-being; Muskie, 2003). This study examined the viability
of care provided by modern-day orphanages and the impact of such care on the children who live there.

**Rationale of Design and Methodology**

This study employed an Interpretivist Paradigm to guide the development and implementation of the collectivist and instrumental case study. According to Glesne (2011), the core tenant underlying an Interpretivist Paradigm is the belief that the world cannot exist independently of the mind. This orientation enables researchers to seek to understand how others interpret and act in regards to social phenomenon, while simultaneously acknowledging one’s own interpretations and actions in light of these social phenomena. Because reality is socially constructed (and therefore ever-changing), interpretivist researchers study specific contexts while acknowledging the wider influencing culture. This study is ideally constructed to utilize an Interpretivist Paradigm because it seeks to understand the social construction of reality (the modern-day orphanage) from the perspective of one subpopulation which creates and sustains it (the residents of the organization).

To accomplish the aforementioned goals of understanding, Glesne (2011) explains that Interpretivist researchers employ methods involving interactions and communications regarding opinions and perspectives. Previous interpretivist researchers have therefore utilized case studies; this study continues that tradition. Case studies can vary considerably depending on the definition of a ‘case’ and the boundaries associated with a study. Essentially, a case study must define boundaries that encompass an integrated system while simultaneously isolating a unit of analysis. Since it is left to the discretion of the researcher
to establish the constitution of the case and the boundaries of the system, this study establishes Children’s Hope as the boundary of the integrated system and considers the people within residential homes as units of analyses (or cases). This study is classified as an instrumental case study since it aims to provide insights into the functioning of modern-day orphanages while simultaneously reconceptualizing stereotypes (Glesne, 2011). More specifically, since this study proposes to interview multiple persons, it is classified as a collectivist case study (Glesne, 2011).

This study was ideally situated to be a case study. Case studies traditionally gather in-depth data through participant observation, interviews, and document collection over a prolonged period of time (Glesne, 2011). Due to time constraints, the researcher was unable to conduct this study longitudinally, but was able to conduct the study over a brief period of time (one and a half weeks) to record basic information about the lives of those residing in this particular form of care. This study utilized participant observation and in-depth interviews to gather information, thereby incorporating the concept of triangulation. Triangulation, from an interpretivist perspective, seeks to understand the multiple perspectives available and how those perspectives can illuminate different aspects (or even contrasting aspects) of similar or different stories of what people say, what people do, and why (Glesne, 2011).

**Description of Research Sample**

This study utilized a purposeful sampling procedure, which is consistent with interpretivist researchers (Glesne, 2011). The researcher chose this sampling procedure because each selected participant is capable of providing in-depth information regarding the
research questions; this in-depth and comprehensive information enables the researcher to more fully grasp issues of central importance to the proposed study (Glesne, 2011).

Using theoretical constructs as a guide, the researcher specifically selected organizations based on characteristics associated with the evolving study. This was initially accomplished through the use of the internet, which enabled the researcher to conduct searches locating modern-day orphanages within the U.S that fit study criteria (stable, long term residential homes for foster care children in a campus setting). Over 15 organizations that appeared to fit eligibility criteria were contacted via email and telephone to determine interest in the proposed study. The search ceased after a modern-day orphanage was found that fit eligibility criteria and agreed to participate in the study (Children’s Hope).

The initial sample of a residential home and interviewees (children and live-in parents) was constructed from within the chosen organization and determined by the administrators of Children’s Hope. The researcher asked Children’s Hope social workers and executive director to make this decision based on their knowledge of the residential homes, knowledge of the children within the homes, and the availability of obtaining informed consent documents. Additional participants were selected by the researcher with the permission of Children’s Hope based on availability. In all, the researcher was able to interact with six houseparents, 15 foster children, one adopted child, two biological children, and one executive director during the last two weeks of July, 2011. Out of this larger sample, two houseparents and seven children were interviewed, in addition to the executive director.
Definitions of Key Terminology Used in this Study

_Foster Care_ – Primarily used as an umbrella term, foster care is defined by the Code of Federal Regulations (1996) as 24-hour substitute care for children outside their own homes, which includes a variety of settings such as non-relative foster homes, relative foster homes, group homes, emergency shelters, residential facilities, and pre-adoptive homes.

_Family Foster Care_ – Family foster care is the most common type of foster care, and can be defined as the care of a child or youth in a family setting/home (Buehler, Orme, Post, & Patterson, 2000). Family foster care can take place with relatives or non-relatives. Whereas non-related family foster care must be a licensed home, relative family foster care can be licensed or unlicensed, as long as the State considers a home to be a foster care living arrangement for the child (Code of Federal Regulations, 1996).

_Group Home_ – Group homes provide 24-hour care to a group of children (usually between seven to twelve) who reside in the same setting (Code of Federal Regulations, 1996). Group homes typically provide short-term care, are often for children who struggle with externalizing or internalizing behaviors, and generally are used as treatment facilities (McKenzie, 2010).

_Orphanage_ – By basic definition, orphanages are considered institutions, which can be defined as a facility operated by public or private agency in order to provide 24 hour care and/or treatment to children away from home (Code of Federal Regulations, 1996). However, orphanages were traditionally regarded as campus settings which housed large numbers of children in cottages containing between 20-30 children (McKenzie, 1999b). Campuses contained a central dining area, facilities for conducting various aspects of work
(such as acres for pasturing and herding, print and carpentry shops, etc.) and play, and schools for their residents (McKenzie, 1999b).

Modern-day Orphanage (or children’s home) – Although considered an institution by proper definition, the author considers modern-day orphanages as community living environments which provide stable, long-term care to residents (as described by McKenzie, 2010). These environments are often campus-like settings, full of various buildings (e.g., chapels, gyms, schools, etc.) and residential homes that house approximately eight to twelve children with live-in adults who act as parents. Although varying in particular emphases, these campuses provide care for children of varying ages and are often tied to religious entities and beliefs. In all, modern-day orphanages draw heavily upon their orphanage heritage (e.g., campus setting and schooling), but also incorporate aspects of foster care (e.g., live-in parents and home settings).

Goals of Child Welfare - As explained by Muskie (2003) the three goals of the child welfare system (safety, permanency, and well-being) were established in 1997 by the Adoption and Safe Families Act, which mandated outcome measures for each specific goal area. Safety outcomes have final goals of reducing the reoccurrence of child abuse and neglect and the incidence of child abuse and neglect in foster care. Permanency outcomes have final goals of increasing permanency for children, reducing time for reunification with family of origin without increasing reentry into the foster care system, reducing time for adoption, increasing placement stability, and reducing the placement of young children in group homes or institutions. Child and family well-being have review performance outcomes in which families are to have the capacity to successfully provide for their children’s needs, including educational, physical, and mental health.
CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

As literature examining the history of orphanage care within the United States has already been covered in chapter one (which is related to the author’s first research question), this literature review will be structured around the three primary goals of the child welfare system (safety, permanency, and child well-being; Muskie, 2003), thereby providing context for the author’s second, third, and fourth research questions. As little to no previously published research was found regarding modern-day orphanages, this literature review will again rely on research concerning traditional orphanage care and foster care, since modern-day orphanages are a unique blend of both care environments. Specifically, since modern-day orphanages seek to mend the deficits found within the foster care system by emphasizing the positives found within traditional orphanages, this literature review is selective in describing deficits found within the foster care system and attributes found within traditional orphanages. Although a large proportion of children find success within the foster care system, a substantial portion do not; hence this literature review focuses on children who do not fare well within the foster care system and who instead may benefit from elements of traditional orphanage care.

For the sake of brevity and argument, this literature review intentionally does not address group homes within the foster care system. Group homes are a segment of the foster care system that differs substantially from modern-day orphanages. Group homes are generally intended for children with behavioral difficulties or children who are in need of treatment, and vary regarding their stability of care (McKenzie, 2010). In contrast, modern-
day orphanages are generally not treatment facilities and are intended for permanent placement (as is the case with Children’s Hope, the organization involved in this study).

After a review of the relevant literature has been completed, four theoretical models which framed the design, implementation, and analysis of findings will be examined. Specifically, this research utilizes Holistic-Interactionism (Magnusson & Stattin, 2006), Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological Theory (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006), Positive Youth Development (Benson, Scales, Hamilton, & Sesma, 2006), and Sacred Theory (Burr, Marks, & Day, 2012) will be detailed. Additionally, the relevancy and applicability of each theory will be briefly discussed.

**Literature Review**

**Safety**

**Foster care**

For children living in insecure or dangerous situations, foster care provides an emergency shelter and temporary respite (Sigrid, 2004). Although close to half of the children exiting foster care in 2008 were in the system for less than a year (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2010), the other half remained within the child welfare system. While a number of these children find success within the system, a substantial portion encounter situations similar to those they are fleeing and find their safety in jeopardy (Burgess & Borowsky, 2010; Fox et al., 2008; Pollack, 2010).

A study conducted by Burgess and Borowsky (2010) revealed that although biological homes investigated by Child Protection Services had the largest proportion of abused children (and non-related family foster care the smallest), relative family foster care
had the largest proportion of neglected children. Although dismaying, the National Runaway Switchboard reports that between 2005-2008 calls identifying child neglect within the foster care system were up 33% and calls reporting abuse were up 54% (a significant increase from previous years; Pollack, 2010). One study, for example, found that 4.3% of cases within its sample consisted of abuse allegations against the foster family (Sigrid, 2004). To escape these unsafe homes, the National Runaway Switchboard reports that between 1.6 million and 2.8 million youth run away each year, jeopardizing the youths’ safety (Pollack, 2010). The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2010) verifies these findings by reporting that two percent of foster care youth were identified as having no placement setting because they had run away.

A study conducted by Fox and colleagues (2008) revealed important details regarding children’s perspectives of their safety in their foster home. Although limited in generalizability, the study found that the majority of children reported feeling safe in their homes (even though 45% reported witnessing domestic violence, 12% reported seeing a gun, and 10% reported seeing drugs within the home), but reported decreased levels of safety in their neighborhoods (72% saw somebody get arrested, 63% saw somebody get beat up, 57% heard gun shots, 50% saw a drug deal, 23% saw somebody get shot and/or stabbed, and 10% saw a dead body outside). In addition, 30% reported getting beat up in or near their home, and 12% reported being lethally threatened in or near their home.

**Orphanages**

Unfortunately, abuse occurs in every system, including that of historical orphanage care. Although in many ways it is difficult to determine the number of abused children within
our nation’s orphanage history (Hasci, 2009), McKenzie provides some insight with his recent survey of orphanage alumni. McKenzie (1999a) found that 13% of respondents reported being abused in some way, which is a similar percentage to the number of respondents who had reported forms of abuse prior to their orphanage experience. Perpetrators of this abuse could have been poorly trained orphanage staff or older residents at the same facility (Hasci, 2009).

Yet overall, orphanages were created to provide safety for children. As explained by Hasci (2009), communities created and sustained orphanages in the early nineteenth century because of the need; it was common to see street children in urban America. Although orphanage creation was sometimes spurred by disasters (such as a cholera epidemic or war), orphanages were built even into the late 19th century because of urban growth, industrialization, and immigration. Although some orphanages only took full orphans (both parents deceased), many provided care for half orphans (one-parent deceased) or destitute children (parents were alive, but unable to provide for their children). While some children were brought to the orphanages because of parental neglect or abuse, many came from loving families who were economically unable to provide for their children, or by parents who were seeking a safe place for their children to reside from external dangers.

**Permanency**

Although both systems of care (foster and orphanage) suffer from similar safety concerns, the two systems of care differ substantially in regards to placement. As will be shown, a substantial number of children in foster care experience placement instability (Webster, 2000), whereas a substantial number of children in orphanage care experience
placement stability (McKenzie, 1999b). This is a vital issue since research has shown the importance of providing continuity of care (Newton et. al., 2000) and a secure physical and emotional base for children to healthily grow and develop (Schofield, 2002).

**Foster care**

There is general agreement across varying domains that multiple placements (or several moves within the foster care system) are not good for children and should therefore be avoided (Newton et. al., 2000; Unrau, Chambers, Seita, & Putney, 2010). Although it is true that most children do not move (and that such moves occur early in care; Wulczyn, Kogan, & Harden, 2003), Webster and colleges (2000) found that close to 30% of children in relative care and a surprising 52% in nonrelative care experience placement instability (defined as three or more moves after the first year in care). Children experience placement moves for several reasons, including system or policy related changes, foster-family related changes, biological family related changes, and behavior related changes (Sigrid, 2004). Sigrid (2004) found that the majority (70%) of these placements (especially first and second moves) occurred because of system and policy related changes (which are generally considered good and for the benefit of the child). Unfortunately, Sigrid (2004) also found that approximately seven percent experienced more than six placement moves in 18 months (with a steady increase in behavior related changes).

Research has shown that changes in placement pose significant risks to children’s well-being. Newton et al. demonstrated that upheavals in placement contribute negatively to children’s internalizing and externalizing behavior (2000). Although it could be argued that many children enter care with such problems, Newton’s study revealed that even children
without problems were vulnerable to developing such issues with increased placement instability (2000). Research has also shown that geographic movement because of placement instability can lead to disruptions in social and educational adjustments that are important for a child’s well-being (Leathers, 2006). In addition, such moves and disruptions are associated with academic difficulties for maltreated children (Eckenrode, Rowe, Laird, & Brathwaite, 1995).

Because of the important repercussions of placement instability and the lack of consensus regarding placement move definitions, Unrau et al. (2010) interviewed foster care alumni. Their results indicated that any and every move counts, regardless of the length of stay (from one hour, to one week, to one month, to one year). Emphasizing both the physical aspect of moving (packing up belongs) and the psychological aspects of moving (cognitive and emotional shifts), participants further added to the growing literature regarding the negative impacts associated with placement instability.

Recognizing the importance of a permanent home for children, legislation was passed in 1997 which aimed to abolish long-term foster care. To accomplish this goal, adoption was facilitated and shorter time frames were mandated to make permanency decisions (even if the permanency decision was to remain within the foster care system; Mapp & Steinberg, 2007). Unfortunately, the legislation was not as successful as some had hoped. Statistics from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services shows that, of those who exited care in 2008, 24% had been in care for 12 to 23 months, 12% had been in care for 24 to 35 months, 10% had been in care for 36 to 59 months, and seven percent had been in care for five or more years (2010). This data demonstrates that many children still ‘languish’ in foster care with little hope of adoption due to individual characteristics, such as age (particularly
children who are older), ethnicity (particularly minorities) or health (psychiatric diagnosis or physical disability; Mapp & Steinberg, 2007).

Consistent with aforementioned research, Webster and colleagues (2000) demonstrated that demographic characteristics (often beyond an individual’s control) affect placement stability. Males, for example, were 33% more likely to experience placement instability, and children entering care as toddlers (as opposed to infants) were more likely to experience unstable care long-term. Wulczyn et al. (2003) also found increased likelihood of placement disruption for older children, but no associations between gender, race, or ethnicity. In addition, Webster et al. found that children who were removed from their homes for reasons other than neglect (such as physical abuse) were significantly more likely to experience placement instability, and that this placement instability (three or more moves after the first year in care) affected placement stability long-term (2000). Finally, problem behaviors and prior placement instability have all been found to be important predictors of later placement instability (Children and Family Research Center, 2004).

Placement stability, however, does differ for different forms of care, mainly between relative care and nonrelative care. In general, placement in relative care is more stable than non-relative care (Webster, et al., 2000; Wulczyn, et al., 2003); yet unfortunately, non-relative care is more common. In 2008, 24% were in relative homes, and 47% were in non-relative homes (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2010). However, as previously mentioned, a high number of children in both environments still experience placement instability (Webster, 2000).

Unfortunately, even among homes where caregivers had discussed their current home as a permanent placement, children are still unsure about permanency. In their work, Fox
and colleagues (2008) found that 12% of children in their study did not know where they would be living next year, even though 77% of respondents indicated they wished their current placement to be their permanent home.

In sum, children who have no hope of obtaining the best options of reunification or adoption are stuck in “permanent temporary care” (McKenzie, 2010). As has been demonstrated, instability is a major disadvantage associated with foster care that can have serious repercussions for children’s well-being. Although long-term care is intended only for those who have limited options (Webster et al., 2000), it is still an option into which many children are forced (eight percent of foster care children had a goal of long-term foster care in 2008; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2010). Because children need a secure base (Schofield & Beek, 2009), whether in a family environment or a community setting, McKenzie (former orphanage alum) advocates for orphanages, which are designed to grant “security, permanency, and a home” (2010).

Orphanages

The primary advantage that orphanages provide over foster care is the aspect of permanency. Previous writing has addressed the importance of providing such stability of care for optimal child development and growth. Although foster parents have the option to “literally dump their problem children on someone else”, children in orphanages always knew they would have a place to stay (McKenzie, 1999b, p. 18). In his survey of orphanage alumni, McKenzie found that 13% of respondents indicated a sense of stability and permanence as an important and positive attribute of their orphanage upbringing (McKenzie, 1999a). In fact, the length of stay in orphanages was positively correlated to reported current
well-being: the longer children stayed in their orphanages, the happier they reported feeling (McKenzie, 1999b). Indeed, this sense of permanency established by orphanages can be empirically demonstrated by tens of thousands of orphanage alumni who annually attend homecomings three to four decades after graduating, even after their homes had closed or changed missions (McKenzie, 1999b). Considering the current state of the child welfare system, McKenzie asks, “doesn’t anyone (other than the orphanage alumni) understand the value of permanence and stability to children?” (1999b, p. 18).

**Child Well-Being**

Although it is well established that children entering the foster care system exhibit or are at risk for behavioral or mental health problems (Newton et al., 2000), it is often assumed that well-being follows after establishment of permanency, yet no research shows this to be the case (Mabry, 2010). This implies that although permanency is a core aspect of well-being, it is not the only component.

**Foster care**

When comparing biological homes investigated by Child Protection Services (CPS), relative foster homes, and non-relative foster homes, a study conducted by Burgess and Borowsky (2010) produced important findings regarding children’s well-being. Although relative and non-relative foster caregivers had mental health scores higher than the general population, a large proportion of these caregivers still suffered from untreated mental illnesses. The study also revealed that both relative and non-relative caregivers had significantly lower physical health than the general population. Perhaps most shockingly, however, the study revealed that home environments of trained foster care providers were not
superior to biological homes in which CPS were originally called to investigate (but did not remove children). This finding implies that a significant number of children are placed in homes that are developmentally inadequate. Relative care provides some advantages, however relative caregivers scored lower than non-relative care caregivers on both mental and physical health. These findings indicate that a substantial proportion of children may be unable to achieve health and well-being restoration due to poor caregiver health and developmentally inadequate environments (both of which have been linked previously to negative child well-being).

Despite these results, a majority of children in foster care describe their caregivers as part of their family; the nature of the relationship, however, suggests complicated structures (Fox et al., 2008). Although approximately a quarter of child-adult relationships were optimal, only one-third were adequate, whereas a tenth were deprived, and one-twentieth were disengaged; the vast majority were simply confused (Fox et al., 2008).

Instead of addressing the caregivers and environments, a study conducted by Gramkows and colleagues (2009) investigated risk behaviors amongst foster care youth. Their work revealed that, although youth in foster care were at a low risk for individual risk behaviors, youth had a higher prevalence of sexual activity (younger debuts and higher number of sexual partners) than the general population. More noteworthy, their study revealed that foster youth were at higher risk for threats to achievement (the majority of which centered upon school behavior). Overall risk behavior, however, was more prevalent among foster youth who had a history of physical or emotional abuse, and among youth who had experienced a parental death. This study emphasized the protective factors that relative
placement might facilitate, since youth placed with relatives experienced less individual risk behaviors than those placed with non-relatives.

Extending the literature on youth risk, Buehler and colleagues (2000) studied long term effects of foster care. They found that adults who had experienced foster care as youth were more at risk in terms of education, economics, marital relations, and drug/alcohol use when compared to a random sample of adults, but were not more at risk when matched with a sample of similar demographic characteristics.

Finally, although little research has addressed religious practices of foster families, it has been proposed that differences in religious beliefs may influence child well-being (Schatz & Horejsi, 1996). Schatz and Horejsi (1996) write of the importance of matching foster care children with foster care parents who can provide similar religious and cultural experiences. Since most foster parents have strong religious beliefs, and these beliefs influence their roles as foster parents, Schatz and Horejsi believe that a matched religious placement or placement with foster parents who have been trained to accept and accommodate religious diversity will decrease placement trauma for children.

**Orphanages**

Research has shown mixed evidence for childrens’ well-being outcomes from institutionalized care. By far, research documenting negative well-being outcomes receives the most attention, and news media in particular describes inadequate orphanage environments. Building upon past literature, Ghera et al. (2009) recently demonstrated improved well-being for children who were placed in foster care as compared to children who remained institutionalized, emphasizing the importance of family-based interventions.
Additionally, Zeanah et al. (2009) demonstrated higher rates of mental health disorders for children living in institutional settings.

Yet these results cannot be taken out of context. Hasci (2009) cited limited funding for orphanages, in addition to poorly trained and transitory staff. Wiik and colleges (2011) challenged whether previously researched negative findings (such as externalizing and internalizing behavior symptoms) were due to institutionalization or international adoption in general, since their work found that although children who are adopted from institutions are at greater risk for ADHD, they are not any more vulnerable than other adopted children (such as children raised in international foster care) to experience behavior problem symptoms. In addition, McCall (1999) largely discredits previous research by demonstrating prevalent and significant methodological flaws. These flaws include utilization of correlational designs to test causational hypotheses, paying insufficient attention to background differences, failure to utilize truly developmental research designs, and a heavy reliance on extremely small sample sizes (which were questionably constructed). Although the conclusions from these studies were not justified by procedures, this inadequate research was still publicized, thereby biasing researchers and the population at large against orphanages. Unfortunately, the quality or type of care in orphanages were almost never systematically observed, leaving a significant gap in the literature.

New research, however, has been conducted with orphanage alumni, and results demonstrated stark contrasts to the negative stereotypes typically associated with orphanages. Surveying 1,589 respondents from nine different institutions (eight of which were sponsored by private religious and charitable groups), McKenzie (1999a) found that orphanage alumni had outpaced their counterparts in the general population by wide margins. These outcomes
included increased educational attainment, receipt of higher income, more positive attitudes towards life, and lower levels of unemployment and poverty. Additionally, 76% rated their orphanage as ‘very favorable’, and a similar percentage indicated they preferred orphanage care (with over 89% of respondents preferring orphanage care over foster care). In fact, 86% of respondents indicated they either never or rarely wanted to be adopted.

The strong preferences of respondents towards orphanages may be explained by the values that respondents accredited to their orphanage upbringing. Without predetermined categories, over half of respondents cited their orphanage as instilling personal values, direction, and a sense of self-worth, along with providing basic amenities. Close to half also cited orphanages as providing education, skill development, and guidance, with over a third referencing the establishment of friendship and sibling ties and nearly a third referencing positive religious and spiritual values (McKenzie, 1999a). Interesting that the advantages cited by orphanage alumni (i.e., discipline, responsibility, work ethic, and religious and moral values) are often ignored or criticized by child care critics (McKenzie, 1999b).

Because of the above results, and perhaps because he is an orphanage alumni himself, Richard McKenzie is a leading voice in the movement to bring orphanages back as a viable option for children to grow and develop within. McKenzie (2010) believes that orphanages were created to improve the life chances for children within the community, and “by and large did just that” (McKenzie, 2010). In fact, functioning through larger religious and charitable communities who cared about the successful development of their children (McKenzie, 1999c), orphanages very consciously worked for their institution to be considered a home (although they varied both in their perceptions and the realities of their success; Hasci, 2009). McKenzie (2010) does not propose that orphanages are the only
option; instead, he advocates orphanages as one of several options for children who lack a home. Good orphanages, which provide long-term care, can be a very healthy environment within which children can grow and develop (McKenzie, 2010). Indeed, for those who believe orphanages to be archaic, McKenzie adds his belief that, due to increased income and knowledge regarding children and child care, orphanages in the 21st century could look remarkably different from previous centuries, and become a viable option for children in need of a home (1999b). Overall, McKenzie (1999c) states that “the evidence is mounting that children’s homes have worked well in the past, are working well now, and can work even better in the future” (p. 301).

**Theoretical Framework**

Four theoretical frameworks were utilized throughout this study: Holistic-Interactionism (Magnusson & Stattin, 2006), Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological Theory (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006), Positive Youth Development (Benson, Scales, Hamilton, & Sesma, 2006), and Sacred Theory (Burr, Marks, & Day, 2012). All four theories were carefully chosen to strengthen study design and implementation; how the theories can be used to interpret findings is detailed in chapter five. A brief review of the four theories and their relevance to the study follows. As discussed below, although in some ways the theories overlap, each individually provides a unique perspective.

**Holistic-Interactionism**

As explained by Magnusson & Stattin (2006), holistic-interactionistic development centers on the individual, considering each aspect of their surrounding environment as a whole unit that functions in totality and interdependently with the other units of the
environment in order to create one unified, whole being. Branching away from unidirectional causality, Holistic-Interactionism emphasizes the continuous interaction between individuals and their environments, and the ongoing process between psychobiology and behavior (the individual is dependent on, not determined by, the environment). Variables affect individuals differently since every piece of an individual’s system is self-organizing, while simultaneously bound in certain respects. Using their mental system as the mediator, individuals actively engage and develop behavior and personality while negotiating biological changes and adaptations. Especially in close proximity (but also in a distant manner), the environment plays a vital role in development as it provides stimulation, information, significant events, etc. that provide opportunities for synchronization.

Holistic-Interactionism is useful for framing this research because of its emphasis on the active individual in strong connection with the surrounding and interacting environment. Children who reside at Children’s Hope come from unique backgrounds that have influentially shaped their being (both mentally and physically), and then they continue to live and develop within Children’s Hope (which also shapes their mental and physically being) for a significant period of their childhood. Because of the theory’s emphasis on engagement with the environment to develop behavior, the theory is useful in examining how the unique environment of Children’s Hope provides stimulation, information, or other significant events that may (or may not) uniquely positively (or negatively) influence a child’s life course, and how the child influences and processes his or her environment in development.

This theory also supports using participatory observation (studying the environment) and interviews (studying a child’s perspective) in creating a unified, whole approach to understand life at Children’s Hope. In addition, this theory is useful for examining safety,
permanency, and well-being, since the theory supports the unification of the three child welfare goals, stressing that each goal would independently yet interconnectedly affect a child’s development. Using a Holistic-Interactionistic approach to understand the actions and interactions between individuals and between individuals and their environment is therefore a vital component in understanding life at Children’s Hope.

**Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological Theory**

As explained by Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006), the Bioecological Theory is fairly similar to the Holistic-Interactionistic framework, but does provide different points of emphasis. The Bioecological Theory stresses the continuity and change within individuals and groups across the life course and through historical time as they interact with varying levels of their environment. The key aspect of the theory is process (or the person-environment interaction grounded in experience), which is strongly and differentially mediated by person, context, and time. Individuals are products and producers of their environment, and the theory details the ways in which individuals shape and are shaped by environment due to person characteristics, varying levels of context, and stability of space and time.

Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological Theory is also useful in framing this research. Because of its emphasis on person-environment interaction, this framework enables the researcher to analyze varying aspects of a participant’s environment at different levels, recognizing the importance and influencing nature of each. For example, the researcher can analyze processes between participants within their residential home, within interactions with other house residents and live-in parents, within the campus setting, and within the
community at large. Since this theory also emphasizes how individuals change throughout the life course because of the continuity of space and time, this theory will be useful in examining how individuals have changed since their arrival at the residential home, and how living at the home influences their life course trajectory; indeed, this theory may be particularly useful for examining the concept of permanency because of the constructs of continuity of space and time. In addition, since this theory also connects experiences to historical time, this will be a useful framework in comparing experiences of modern-day orphanages both to traditional orphanages of the past and the current foster care system. Finally, as this theory emphasizes person-environment interaction grounded in experience, the theory supports the use of participatory observation, a key aspect of the researcher’s methodology.

**Positive Youth Development**

As explained by Benson et al. (2006), although generally referring to adolescents, Positive Youth Development has several core aspects which can be applied to younger age groups. At its core, Positive Youth Development shifts the perspective from viewing children as problems that need correcting to vessels of creativity and energy that can be utilized for social and individual good (when developed in the proper context). Consistent with other theories, Positive Youth Development emphasizes that children do not develop in a vacuum. Instead, they are influenced by the environment surrounding them (including the community and significant adult figures) while simultaneously influencing the environment surrounding them through bidirectional interactions. Understanding risk behavior and
resilience is a vital component to properly constructing and encouraging positive youth development.

Because many foster youths are removed from their family of origin due to negative and unhealthy environments, many are at increased risk for varying problems (including lower achievement, less education, lower economic well-being, and increased risk for substance abuse; Gramkows et al, 2009; Buehler et al., 2000). Utilizing a Positive Youth Development framework is vital in understanding the risks associated with foster youth and recognizing the resilience that can be developed within modern-day orphanages through supportive and caring environments with mentors; this theory can therefore highlight interpretations of children’s well-being. Positive Youth Development recognizes the importance of the surrounding environment in viewing children as positive assets that can contribute to their overall community. Recognizing the importance of the modern-day orphanage in influencing youths positive life trajectories (while recognizing that the modern-day orphanage is influenced by the youth who reside there) will be an important aspect of this research. Previous research on long term foster care (Schofield, 2002) has also utilized this framework.

**Sacred Theory**

Sacred Theory (Burr et al., 2012) explores the helpful and harmful effects of sacred behaviors for individual and family life. The term sacred is an overarching term that is both personal and abstract, covering experiences that transcend the visibly routine reality and transform individuals’ behaviors by affecting both heart and mind. Although behaviors can be harmful, research has shown the positive influences of the sacred, primarily since the
sacred can answer fundamental ‘whys’ of life, giving meaning and purpose to life, and promote ideas of harmony and order.

Burr and colleges (2012) detail the theory’s four propositions. First, experiencing something as sacred gives it a uniquely powerful influence. Second, experiencing something in the family as sacred gives it a uniquely powerful influence in families. Third, it is how people act as a result of their beliefs about the sacred that make a difference in whether the sacred is helpful or harmful. Fourth, the more consistent and cohesive behaviors are with the wider family goals, the more helpful these behaviors are (the opposite is also true).

Children’s Hope emphasizes the Christian faith in both their mission statement and their services (Children’s Hope, 2010). Utilizing a religious framework will be useful in analyzing the structure of the organization, the daily life of residents, and how residents perceive the sacred as guiding development. Depending on a child’s particular history and current stance on sacred matters, this theory will also be useful in interpreting children’s well-being (e.g., they may feel better after going to church, or they may struggle if they do not share the same beliefs as their peers, etc.), and may be useful in interpreting children’s perceptions of their safety (e.g., the chapel is a safe place, or the community of Christians is a safe place, etc.).

In summary, all four theories contribute to a comprehensive model to frame the study. The Holistic-Interactionistic approach provides a needed emphasis on the individual, and how every element in that individual’s environment contributes to their whole being through interactions. Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological Theory provides a needed emphasis on the varying layers of the environment, and how each environment has an impact on development across time. Positive Youth Development provides a necessary orientation towards growth
and creativity, especially for at-risk youth. And finally, Sacred Theory relates to all three theories (the individual is interacting with a faith community which helps positive growth) and provides necessary insight regarding a key aspect of life at Children’s Hope.
CHAPTER 3: MODERN-DAY ORPHANAGES: EXPLORING THE STRUCTURAL DIMENSIONS OF CARE IN A STABLE, LONG-TERM RESIDENTIAL CHILDREN’S HOME

A paper to be submitted to Child and Family Social Work

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Abstract

This study explores structural dimensions of care provided by a stable, long-term residential home for foster children who are unable to reside with their families of origin. The unique care environment provided by Children’s Hope (pseudonym), a modern-day orphanage located in the U.S., was investigated through interviews and participatory observation. Framed within Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological Theory, findings from this case study detail the structure of the organization, the environment of community and family, and typical daily experiences. Positive findings provide preliminary support for the inclusion of modern-day orphanages (children’s homes) as an alternative care format for foster youth.

Introduction

Orphanages were once the primary form of care for children in need within the U.S.; yet within the past century, foster care has almost entirely replaced orphanages (McKenzie, 1999b). Although this shift occurred for varying reasons, little research has been conducted on modern-day orphanages (a term used by McKenzie, 2010), commonly referred to as children’s homes, which combine elements of orphanage care with foster care. Such research is needed, as modern-day orphanages are potential care alternative for foster youth.
This case study explores structural dimensions of care within one such unique care environment: Children’s Hope (pseudonym). Children’s Hope (CH) is a modern-day orphanage located in the U.S., and this research explores the composition, environment, and daily experiences within the organization. In essence, this research aims to provide an overall picture of care while describing what it is like for children to live and grow up at CH. However, before examining CH, it is important to understand the historical roots from which modern-day orphanages developed and the necessity of an alternative care format.

**Background and Context**

At the turn of the 20th century, approximately 100,000 children in the U.S. were in orphanages (London, 1999); by 2008 there was an estimated 463,000 children in foster care (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2010). This shift from orphanages to foster care occurred for several reasons, involving a combination of economics, stereotypes, research, and politics.

As explained by McKenzie (1999b), many orphanages housed children whose parents were deceased or were financially unable to provide for their care. After World War II medical advances lowered death rates and the country experienced a robust economy that decreased poverty; hence the need for orphanages was reduced. Additionally, reports of abuse or inadequate care within orphanages led popular opinion to view orphanage care negatively. This opinion was fueled by inaccurate media portrayals and misleading child welfare literature, both of which condemned orphanage care.

Political policies also played a central role in the decline of orphanages. Bourdreaux and Bourdreaux (1999) cite the influence of social workers and other special influence
groups who favored foster care. Overall and specific government centralization not only produced weighty regulations that drove the cost of care up (making orphanages less affordable and foster care more affordable; McKenzie, 1999b) but also eroded the necessity of local care and struck at the heart of orphanages (Lee, 1999). Finally, London (1999) writes of additional public policies that continued to support familial (as opposed to institutional) care.

While orphanage care was declining, foster care was increasing. As the media depicted impersonal and cruel orphanages, warm family life and parental care was receiving more emphasis and popular attention (McKenzie, 1999b). Psychiatrists such as Anna Freud and John Bowlby gave grave warnings about the detrimental effects of maternal deprivation and denounced orphanage care, even though their opinions were based on selected clinical studies that lacked rigorous methodological design (McCall, 1999). Later researchers have questioned the implications of these studies and have failed to replicate findings; some researchers have even found opposing results (McCall, 1999).

Although these basic perceptions of orphanage and foster care contain some theoretical and empirical truth, the reality is each system has advantages and disadvantages. Properly funded and staffed, orphanages can provide a safe, loving, and stable community home for children, thereby enhancing development, improving life chances, and providing children with a sense of identity and belonging (McKenzie, 1999b). In contrast, although a well-designed system, foster care can fail at a surprising rate in fulfilling a child’s need for safety, permanency, and well-being (Burgess & Borowsky, 2010; Fox, Berrick & Frasch, 2008; McKenzie, 1999b; Webster, Barth, & Needell, 2000). Therefore, converging evidence suggests that an alternative care format to the current foster care system is needed.
Modern-Day Orphanages

Modern-day orphanages are unique, drawing upon their orphanage heritage while combining elements of foster care. To illustrate, orphanages were founded by citizens, associations, and churches (Hasci, 2009) and were commonly campus settings housing large numbers of children (McKenzie, 1999b). Many modern-day orphanages are founded by local citizens through associations with religious organizations and mimic the campus setting. However, modern-day orphanages also combine elements of the foster care system, as many prefer cottages (instead of dormitories), which house fewer children and surrogate parents.

Modern-day orphanages are becoming a viable option for foster youth (McKenzie, 1999b). More modern-day orphanages are continuing to form because of religious and civic groups that are unsatisfied with the current foster care system (McKenzie, 1999c). However, as little to no research has been conducted on these alternative care formats, this study sought to explore the structural and organizational characteristics of such a unique care environment.

Theoretical Perspective

This study utilized Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological framework to guide development, implementation, and analyses. As explained by Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006), the Bioecological model stresses change and continuity within individuals and groups through historical time and across the life course as they interact with varying levels of their environment. The key aspect of the theory is process (or the person-environment interaction grounded in experience), which is strongly and differentially mediated by time, context, and person. Individuals are therefore producers and products of their environment, and this
interaction varies according to person characteristics, levels of context, and stability of space and time.

This study is well positioned to utilize Bioecological Theory, as it examines the unique structural aspects of a care environment while particularly examining a child’s Microsystems. The varying and unique aspects of a modern-day orphanage work through processes to affect children’s development, both on the structural level of the organization and in the proximal processes (or interpersonal relations) between children and staff. Additionally, this development differs for children based on their individual characteristics.

Method

Sample

This study utilized a purposeful sampling procedure, locating long-term, residential care facilities that served foster youth by combining elements of orphanage and foster care. The staff and selected children at CH agreed to participate in the study.

CH has a main campus with administrative and community buildings, as well as residential homes (hereafter referred to as cottages). Each cottage houses between eight to ten children and two married live-in adults who function as ‘parents’ (hereafter described as houseparents). Additionally, CH has one cottage located off the main campus, described as ‘the ranch’ due to its geographic location and the nature of its surroundings (e.g., cattle, horses, etc.).

The specific sample of a cottage(s) and interviewees (children, houseparents, and administrator) was constructed from within the chosen organization and initially determined
by the staff at CH. After introductions via CH staff, subsequent participants were chosen from within the organization and determined by the researcher based on availability.

In all, the researcher was able to interact with six houseparents, 15 foster children, one adopted son, two biological children, and one administrator. Houseparents ranged in age from 23-50 and children ranged in age from 2-20. Of the children, four were in early childhood (ages two to five), three were in middle childhood (ages five to ten), six were in middle adolescence (ages 11 to 16), and five were in late adolescence (ages 17-20). Participants were primarily Caucasian, but other ethnicities (particularly African American) were also represented. Out of this larger sample, two houseparents and seven children from ranch were interviewed, in addition to the executive director.

**Methodology and Data Collection**

This study utilized two aspects of data collection: participatory observation and interviews. Regarding participatory observation, the first author spent six and half days interacting with residents at the ranch home during mid-summer 2011. I participated in daily activities for 11-12 hours each day and recorded observations in a field journal (approximately 30 pages of single-spaced typed field notes were collected). After staying at the ranch, I spent two and a half days on the main campus, spending one full day at each of two different cottages.

In addition, three different semi-structured interview questionnaires were utilized (one each for children, houseparents, and program administrator). These interviews were structured, yet open-ended, with questions that focused on addressing the study’s primary research questions. Digitally recorded audio interviews were conducted after spending two
full days with ranch participants. For children and houseparents, interviews were conducted within the cottage in a quiet room; for the program administrator, the interview was conducted in the administrator’s office. Interviews with children lasted between 10 to 80 minutes; houseparent and administrative interviews lasted between 40 to 75 minutes.

All protocol followed university institutional review board guidelines and requirements, including obtaining informed consent and assent from all participants.

**Data Analysis**

All data analyses were completed by the researcher. Notes from the field journal were transcribed nightly on-site, and the audio recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim shortly after completing fieldwork (transcripts were then immediately re-listened to for accuracy). As recommended by Saldaña (2009), all data were coded via five different methods in two cycles and memos were written throughout the coding process. The first cycle of coding included four different methods: attribute coding (basic descriptive data), structural coding (relating data to specific research questions), descriptive coding (summarizing the basic topic), and in-vivo coding (prioritizing the participants voice). The second cycle of coding utilized the fifth and final coding method, pattern coding (pulling together similarly coded information to describe a pattern). An iterative process, the codebook was rearranged several times to find emerging themes to best represent data. Finally, a member check was conducted with the executive director, who reviewed and provided feedback on his interview transcript, a brief summary of findings, and final manuscripts. Due to protecting confidentially and other external factors, houseparents and children were not asked to complete member checks.
Findings

The overall aim of this paper was to explore the nuances and dynamics of growing up in a modern-day orphanage. Hence both the overarching structural dimensions of the organization were examined along with specific details relating to daily life (including interpersonal interactions). To protect confidentiality, all quotes are de-identified and described only by a fictional name, position title, and age category.

Three themes emerged through data analyses. The first theme, *CH: The Organization*, explores the physical structure of the organization and its purpose as an alternative care format (sub-theme), illustrating the unique blend of orphanages and foster care. This first theme then provides context to two additional themes: *The Environment of CH*, which explores the campus and the cottage milieu, and *A Day in the Life*, which examines a typical day for a child growing up at CH.

**CH: The Organization**

*CH* provides a home for children. The main campus is situated several blocks from the city’s main street, with a small fence separating the historic and beautiful campus from the surrounding neighborhood. Brick buildings enclose playgrounds, a basketball court, a gazebo, and grassy areas interspersed with flowering trees and sidewalks. All cottages face the interior of campus, and other buildings (i.e., dining hall, offices, gym, and pool) are oriented similarly, creating a contained and community oriented campus. The ranch (located off campus) is surrounded by woods, pastures, animals (e.g., cows, horses, etc.) and other cottages not currently in use, and has its own small playground, tree house, flower beds, and amenities.
Cottages on the main campus and the ranch are fairly similar. Although cottages were initially designed to have separate living spaces for the houseparents and foster children, cottages follow this distinction to varying degrees (ranch residents have no distinction). In general, the cottages are designed to look and feel like a home, with decorations such as family pictures, drawings, and religious artifacts. Well furnished, cottages are designed to accommodate large numbers of residents, and children often share bathroom and bedrooms.

The majority of the staff works on the main campus. The executive director is responsible for managing the entire campus (facilities and people) and public relations (both in the immediate and general community). Notably there are two social workers, in addition to several secretaries and other staff members (e.g., cooks, music director, etc.). Houseparents represent the largest group of employees, and relief houseparents take care of children on houseparents’ days off. Unpaid affiliates of CH include work groups (primarily church groups who come and do volunteer work for the campus) and sponsors (prayer, financial, and visiting).

**An alternative care format.** CH is a children’s home, a lesser-known alternative care format. Children’s homes are one of the options available to foster children, including adoption, foster care, and group homes. Each care format has advantages and disadvantages, and each works to fill a niche in the overall system. As such, each care format is able to serve children in a unique and equally needed way:

_I don’t think there’s one answer for the problem of children that need . . . a place to be and become . . . because there’s not enough people to foster, there’s not enough people that will adopt – you’ve gotta have all options available . . . none of them are_
easy and none of them come without their issues. But I firmly believe there is a place for each of the different options (Michael, executive director).

Like the other care formats, CH serves foster children in need of a home. In most cases, parents or other caregivers bring children voluntarily to CH; however judges (but not the Department of Human Services) can also place children at the organization. Each child has their own unique story, but each has a similar ending: caregivers are unable to continue caring for their children. The executive director shared the following two stories (as told to him by the original caregivers) to illustrate why children are placed at CH:

. . . ‘I’m raising my niece, my health is declining, my husband just kicked me out of the house, he’s divorcing me, I’m homeless, I have no job, I can’t take care of my niece anymore, will you take her?’

. . . ‘I’m facing incarceration for 20 years – there’s no father, there’s no family, there’s no friends – I’m just kinda passing through, will you take my baby?’

Yet unlike other care formats, CH has several unique attributes. CH currently houses approximately 80 children, working to keep sibling groups together. CH is also unique in serving children from birth through college, providing permanent and temporary placements:

. . . when we first came, it was a lot of long term, a lot of kids who were pretty much gonna be raised at CH. Now we’re seeing a lot more . . . like a year or two placements...where parents have just either . . . gotten bad luck...lost their job or whatever, and can’t afford to take care of them, and then they kinda get back on their feet and they’re able to take them back again . . . but we still have some, a lot, that are here in permanent placements (Howard, housefather).
CH recognizes, however, who they can and cannot help, and refers children and families when need be to other care formats. In essence CH is a “...place for children...who have no-one else to take care of them but can function in a typical family neighborhood setting” (Michael, executive director).

Unlike some of the other care formats, CH is entirely privately funded (with the exception of educational specialists and tutors who are funded through Title 1 funds). Gifts and donations not only pay for organizational expenses and salaries, but also cover smaller expenses (such as Christmas and birthday gifts for the children). A major advantage of private funding is the elimination of state and federal regulations, which can cause an organization to resemble an institution rather than a home.

**The Environment of CH**

This second theme describes the environment of CH, focusing on individual and interpersonal interactions as opposed to physical structures and organizational policies (as described in theme one). This theme is divided into two sub-themes based on Bronfenbrenner’s microsystems. The first sub-theme/microsystem is the campus community, which children daily live within while experiencing interactions with multiple persons. The second sub-theme/microsystem is the cottage; here children spend the majority of their time as it constitutes their family unit (the perspective of both houseparents and children are provided).

**A campus community.** The main campus is a lively community; children run, play, and enjoy themselves throughout various activities. Some activities, such as choir tour or camp, are pre-planned by the organization, while other activities include outside volunteers
(such as work groups) who plan fun events. Yet most activities are simply part of campus daily routine, such as running to a neighbor’s house to play, swimming in the pool, or playing football and soccer out on the main lawn with other children and adults (including the executive director). Despite the noise and organized chaos, there is an atmosphere of respect and friendliness, even amidst teenage drama or toddler temper tantrums.

CH is loved by both employees and children. CH provides a place for children to be and become by focusing on the unique needs of each child. Most importantly, children at CH know they are loved. Different staff take varying actions to give care and show love to children. Children are referred to as “my kids” or “my babies” and often receive hugs and other forms of physical affection from varying adult staff. As stated by one child, “...the best part is having lots and lots of people around you that love you and care about you...” (Brianna, late adolescent).

The caring community promoted within the campus environment is intentional, as illustrated by the executive director:

_We don’t refer to the children as students . . . we refer to everyone as our CH family, this is our family, these are our children. Even when I travel and um I may speak and have some CH children with me, they’re my children . . . I don’t introduce them as students from CH._

In addition to becoming part of a community, children are placed in an environment which positively nurtures their life course trajectory. The following story illustrates this point:

_Why do I love CH? Because . . . a 14 year old boy . . . he and his siblings . . . came to us this summer . . . the kids have been through abuse, kids have been through you_
know where are we gonna live, whose gonna take care of us, for many years. Couple
weeks after being here he said ‘I know now that my brothers, my sister and I, are
gonna be okay’. That’s why I love CH (Michael, executive director).

Belonging to a nurturing community that fosters growth and development is an
important advantage of CH. As with all environments, however, there are some
disadvantages. In some sense, for example, the amount of activity may be considered a
disadvantage:

... when you’re ... bouncing from one thing to another non-stop and don’t have time
to do, think, don’t have time to spend relating ... I wonder what that’s doing to our
children. Some of our children, because of what they’ve been through, when they do
have some down time it becomes very painful because their mind just immediately
goes to all the pain, so the high level of activity helps keep their mind off of that
(Michael, executive director).

Other disadvantages associated with a privately funded organization include the
amount of material gifts children receive via donations, creating a sense of entitlement in
some children. Staff work to teach children that even though many have suffered great loss,
an attitude of entitlement is “... not gonna help them in their future as mature adults, who
contribute to society if they’re expecting society to bend over backwards for them and give
them anything they want, it’s not going to happen” (Michael, executive director).

Yet perhaps the greatest disadvantage of CH is not a disadvantage associated with the
organization, but instead associated with the circumstances of each child: “... the children ...
. are missing out on a mom and dad ... who will fight for them and love them ...” (Michael,
executive director). Fortunately, CH works to counter this disadvantage in the best way
possible: by providing a substitute family, both within the CH community and within the cottage family.

A cottage family. CH utilizes cottages, which are designed to mimic a family as much as possible:

We want them to have a mom and a dad that loves them and they feel somewhat like a family. We don’t want them to think they’re just part of a big organization . . . We want them to be able to say ‘this is mom and dad, these are my sisters, these are my brothers’ . . . so, we try to create it – the reality is we are an institution, but as much as we can look like a family we want to (Michael, executive director).

CH is fairly successful in mimicking family life. The ranch, for example, exudes a laid back, casual atmosphere, with lots of smiles, laughs, jokes, and bantering. Like any typical family, there are interpersonal annoyances or complaints, chores and responsibilities to complete, and parental supervision. Some children are more reclusive, but others like to play interactive games with each other. For the most part, however, children are left to do what they please, as long as it is safe and appropriate.

The cottage environment at the ranch is reflective of cottages on the main campus, with the primary difference concerning familiarity. Across the campus, children adjust at different rates; some have been at CH for years and are comfortable (like at the ranch), others have newly arrived and are more disengaged, withdrawn, or sad. But for the most part, cottages function like any normal family.

The main exception of mimicking a family is the segregation of cottages by gender, which was done primarily to protect unrelated adolescents from sexual temptations, “. . . when you’ve got unrelated boys and girls living together it simply doesn’t work . . .”
and the more changes these kids go through sometimes that can be very difficult and hurtful to them” (Michael, executive director). Now main campus cottages are only mixed gender when there is a significant age gap between males and females (the ranch home was an exception to this recent and large segregation).

**Houseparents.** Houseparents play a major role in establishing the cottage environment, and come to the organization at different ages with different temperaments. First and foremost houseparents are parents: “. . . we do everything that any normal parent would do. We do everything. I mean, everything that you would do 24 hours a day for your own child is what we do these children” (Lisa, houseparent). Yet because houseparents are in reality employed substitute parents, they work 28 days and have six days off while receiving “. . . really nice benefits” (Lisa, houseparent). Although most houseparents take relief, others (primarily those at the ranch) knowingly miss their days off: “just doesn’t feel right, feels like we’re leaving home” (Lisa, houseparent).

As substitute, but in essence normal parents, houseparents work towards several goals. Ultimately houseparents do what is best for a child, helping them grow into successful adults, “. . . you don’t have to live your life like what you came from, you can rise above that” (Howard, houseparent). A key aspect of helping children grow is giving and showing love:

> Love them like they’re yours, know that they’re still not, but love them like they are…

(Lisa, houseparent).

> . . . the biggest thing I want to get across to the children is uh, just show them unconditional love . . . hopefully I show them that . . . there are people in the world
you can trust, and that love you in the right way, and that will do . . . what they can
for you . . . (Howard, houseparent).

Being a good and effective houseparent (like being a good and effective parent) is not
an easy task. Having controlled freedom, houseparents at times find their position stressful,
but also very rewarding. For many there is a learning curve, “I tell my grown-up girls I’m a
whole lot better mother now then I was when I first came and, you know, I was 25 and I
didn’t know anything . . .” (Lisa, houseparent). Houseparents need support from family and
friends, even if friends are hard to find since being a houseparent “engulfs your life”
(Howard, houseparent). Letting the job define life, however, is in a sense, a necessity of the
position:

. . . that’s not a bad thing . . . that’s just part of it, it’s a necessity. And some may
view that as negative, that it really takes over your life, but if you don’t let it do that,
then you’re not going to be very successful, you’re not going to last . . . (Howard,
houseparent).

**Children.** Children benefit greatly from good houseparents living at CH. Like any
large group of children, each has their own unique background and personality. Some are
shy while others are talkative and outgoing, some are laid back with a sense of humor while
others are competitive or controlling, some are self-conscious while others are confident,
others are well-behaved while some are still maturing, etc.

Of the children interviewed, the vast majority liked living at CH, giving responses
such as “I love it . . .” (Richard, late adolescent) and “I like it here. It’s the only place I
would call home” (Ariel, middle adolescent). When asked why they liked living there, some
children cited reasons including the outdoors, animals, a controlled freedom, or friends.
Approximately half recognized potential alternatives, including living with original caregivers, not having any place at all, or foster care. Some children had (and continue to have) the opportunity to interact with biological siblings or cousins (which they considered an important advantage CH provided). But by far children most cited their CH family, which provided them with support, care, and love:

... I still call all my family brothers and sisters, mom and dad ... it’s a family, you know it’s not, uh, a institution or anything like that, it’s, uh they care, they’re not here for the money or anything like that, they honestly care about us (Richard, late adolescent).

... it’s a nice little stable family ... environment ... living with a bunch of different people, I mean it’s kinda like having a whole bunch of different brothers and sisters...

... (Ryan, late adolescent).

... I consider this my actual home, my parents, I don’t consider my biological family any of that (Mary, late adolescent).

I think that it’s as normal as it gets to being a family. There’s a lot of people ... but we’re a big family and some people like that some people get very annoyed by that, but either way, we’re all gonna get on each other’s nerves but we still love each other (Brianna, late adolescent).

United by something other than blood, the children develop a family identity and feel like a normal family: “... whenever people say this is not, you know, you don’t get to go through everyday family experiences you know, they’re wrong, because we do ...” (Brianna, late adolescent).
Although children enjoy their current living situation, there are still negatives associated with Children’s Hope. Some children get tired with the mandatory attendance of certain events (like donor appreciation), even though they appreciate the gifts and often have fun upon arrival. As can be expected, some get bored and do not appreciate all the rules, and those who have moved frequently find it tiring. The most frequently cited negative, however, involved people. Some have interpersonal difficulty with “annoying” kids. Those who have experienced moving struggle with adjusting to new people and new roles. Others are shy and do not enjoy interactions with strangers, and others have a hard time finding people their age with whom they can relate. In all, however, the advantages seem to outweigh the negatives.

In sum, the environment of Children’s Home is a positive, welcoming community and family atmosphere. A lively campus, children find identity within the larger organization and within their family cottages, which is strongly influenced by houseparents and other supportive and caring staff.

**A Day in the Life**

Children have a flexible daily routine, with slight variation between the main campus and the ranch cottage. The following sub-themes are derived from the researcher’s field notes and informal conversations while at CH.

**Morning routines.** In the summer, children get up for work and chores, or can sleep till later in the day unless there are activities that need to be attended (such as shopping or church). During the school year, mornings are more structured with early risings (some houseparents attempt to get completely ready before waking up the children). During these
mornings routines, houseparents may check on children, remind them to take medications or comb their hair, and talk to them about plans for the day.

**Meal routines.** Children eat three meals a day. At the ranch, houseparents may make breakfast or set food on the counter, with children filtering in through the morning. Lunch is often sandwiches, with ingredients set out on the counter so everyone can fix their own meal once they get hungry. Dinner is normally cooked by houseparents, and everyone helps themselves after being called to the table. Slightly chaotic, everyone eats as several conversations occur simultaneously, leaving and clearing their plates as soon as they are finished.

Meals on the main campus are different. Like the ranch, breakfast is cooked in the cottage. For lunch, children on the main campus eat in the dining hall. A bell is rung to signal the approaching mealtime, and each cottage group sits at their table. Before children go to get food buffet style, one cottage family leads the recitation of the weekly memory verse and accompanying song. The main dining hall is full of noise and distractions (creating stress for some houseparents) as children eat and then clean up from their meal. Dinner varies, since it can be cooked in the cottage, ordered and picked up from the main dining hall kitchen, or eaten in the main dining hall when workgroups are present.

**Work routines.** Children who clean up the dining hall after mealtime are working on their cottage work program, which includes dishes, gardening, etc. Children are placed on the work program after turning ten, and receive payment from the organization that is put directly into their own account. Children under age ten receive a monthly allowance from the organization. Children who are older may work offsite in addition to or instead of the cottage work program.
All children also complete chores. Some cottages do assigned chores whereas others expect children to complete chores as requested. At a minimum, children make their beds and clean their rooms, and most do their own laundry after reaching a certain age. Many other chores are related to house up-keep, including taking out the trash, loading and unloading the dishwasher, mopping or sweeping, etc. Other chores are related to the outdoors (such as gardening, washing cars, cutting the grass) or to animals, which is particularly relevant to ranch life (such as feeding the animals, grooming the horses, cleaning cages, bathing dogs, etc.). Chores are completed on a frequent basis and more so when the housekeeper is unable to come.

**Play routines.** Even though chores may be done every day, most of the summer day is devoted to self-selected play activities. A good amount of play occurs indoors. Friends come over, girls give each other make-overs, children read books and color, and siblings and friends play board and imagination games. Hobbies children named that can occur indoors include relaxing, arts and crafts, puzzles, music, reading, and playing with the indoor animals.

One primary form of indoor entertainment is electronics. Television is generally on, although it is censored. Some cottages utilize multiple televisions so there is no arguing about who wants to watch what, but the main campus does not allow children to have televisions in their bedrooms. Computers are also used in the cottages (on campus they are password protected to monitor time), which children use to watch You-tube videos, check Facebook, or play computer games. Game consoles and hand-held electronics (such as i-pads or phones) are also played with, in addition to Wii entertainment.
Outdoor play is also a prominent part of children’s lives. Playing outside can involve racing, wrestling, playing on the playgrounds or in the rain, touring the yard, walking in the woods, hunting for birds, fishing, camping, swimming, or any other sort of interactive and physical game between siblings and friends. When children are outside, they are almost always supervised by an adult. Houseparents from one cottage may sit on a porch swing, others may congregate together under the gazebo, and still others may join the children in their play. Hobbies children named that occurred outdoors included animals (particularly horseback riding) and sports (both team and general fun).

**Off-campus routines.** Other daily activities occur off-campus. Cottages will sometimes go out altogether, to dinner or the movies, but cottages also go out in smaller groups (such as to complete shopping). Older children in particular enjoy getting off campus, meeting friends at the mall or other local hang-outs. Most commonly, however, children have appointments (such as tutoring, social workers, doctors, counseling, etc.), work, and school.

**School routines.** After the summer holiday ends, school is a prominent part of any weekday. Children have three different options regarding education: public, private, or homeschooling through the campus office. In essence, children are placed in whatever environment best fits their needs and helps them succeed:

> On [an] educational level we uh want to push the kids . . . to thrive, to do their best and so . . . we will pay the money if our kids excel in different areas academically . . . whatever it takes, whatever that child needs, and each child is different, and needs different things that different schools can provide . . . (Michael, executive director).
After completing mandatory high school education, children are strongly encouraged to attend some sort of post-secondary education:

. . . I try to really talk to them and help them understand that just because you’re 18 doesn’t mean you’re ready to take on the world, that you don’t have any skills to get a job, decent paying job, and it’s gonna be really hard (Howard, housefather).

In addition to verbal support and guidance, CH also offers financial support. CH has policies regarding allowances and stipends for college students that they can use for multiple purposes (such as apartments or transportation). Children continue to receive this financial support “. . . as long as they do right . . . and strive towards some kind of goal” (Howard, housefather).

Post-secondary education is pushed at CH because (more often than not) staff feel it will help children succeed long-term. With pride in their voices, houseparents share stories of children who excelled in their post-secondary education and are now doing extremely well. Yet post-secondary education is not for everyone, and it is more common for children to try, but not complete, their post-secondary education. Regardless, CH wants their children to succeed after leaving the organization, and helps the children in whatever way possible: “. . . we’re gonna put em through college, we’re gonna give em a vehicle, we’re gonna help get them a job, we’re gonna get them established in society as much as we can . . .” (Michael, executive director).

**Occasional Activities.** Throughout summer and the school year, daily routines may be punctuated by irregular activities, such as volunteering or CH events. Most children volunteer at a formal organization, and time spent volunteering can have extremely positive
impacts. As one adolescent said, “. . . it’s life changing when you see all that . . . it changed my outlook on life, it made me a lot happier” (Brianna, late adolescent).

Campus events revolve around camps and donations. Children may participate in campus events sponsored by the organization or by external organizations (such as football or choir camp). Children may also be involved in donor appreciation events, or travel to receive a donated gift (e.g., a trip to Disney World).

In summary, a typical day in the life of a child living at CH largely mirrors the life of any typical child (with the exception of meal time and possibly therapy appointments). For the most part, however, children’s days are a mix of play, work, and school, and time is spent with family and friends.

Discussions and Conclusions

The aim of this research was to explore the structural dimensions of care provided by CH, a modern-day orphanage, as little previous literature has studied such unique environments. Findings from this study reveal CH as a successful modern-day orphanage, combining its orphanage history (campus setting) with foster care advantages (use of cottages). Reinforcing Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological Theory, CH is a beautiful campus with involved and caring staff who work to create a community and family environment. Through this love and support, children at CH find a new family and community identity. Children enjoy their current living situation, with typical daily routines combined with fun extra-curricular activities. Few real disadvantages can be found within CH that are not reflective of the children’s background.
This preliminary research lends support to modern-day orphanages as a viable alternative care format, as previous research has addressed positive impacts associated with this study’s findings. For example, Hicks (2008) discusses the importance of creating and maintaining an effective staff within children’s homes through positive relationships, communication, and monitoring in order to meet the needs of residents; children’s needs were met at CH through the organization and communication between involved and loving staff. Additionally, previous research has addressed the importance of long-term foster care and the role it plays in developing family membership, and how this family membership is important for life success (Schofield, 2002). Community and family identity is an important aspect of life at CH and is largely developed through time spent at the organization. Finally, previous research has shown the vital importance of daily routine and communication in family formation (Bruess & Kudak, 2011); this research detailed the daily routines experienced by children at CH, and such routines can be expected to contribute to family formation. In summary, these findings with their positive implications contribute to the growing number of voices calling for the re-examination of the current foster care system and the revitalization of orphanage care through the alternative care format provided by modern-day orphanages.

However, although yielding promising results, this study does have limitations. Research was conducted at a select period of time at a select institution; results may not be generalizable to other organizations. Indeed, based on observations and informal conversations, it is likely that CH is an ideal combination of factors and an ideal modern-day orphanage. Varying factors which may influence organizations effectiveness could possibly include administration, finances, goals of the organization, and freedom from regulations.
Future research could benefit child welfare policy by making comparisons across children’s homes to determine which organizations are successful and why.
CHAPTER 4: MODERN-DAY ORPHANAGES: EXPLORING HOW A LONG-TERM RESIDENTIAL CHILDREN’S HOME SATISFIES THE CHILD WELFARE GOALS OF SAFETY, PERMANENCY, AND WELL-BEING

A paper to be submitted to Social Service Review

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Abstract

Little to no research has been conducted on modern-day orphanages (or children’s homes), which are a unique blend of traditional orphanage and modern foster care. As such, this case study utilizes participatory observation and semi-structured interviews to explore how one such institution satisfies the child welfare goals of safety, permanency, and well-being (Muskie, 2003). Findings are favorable in all three domains, lending support to children’s homes (or modern-day orphanages) as an alternative care format for foster youth.

Introduction

Children are a vital and vulnerable part of our society; yet an unfortunately high number do not receive the love and care biological families are expected to provide. The problem of children without permanent parents is not a new phenomenon; for centuries society has grappled with the care of children in need of resources, homes, and/or caregivers. Orphanages were once the most common solution, and such institutions are still utilized globally. Yet within the past century, the United States replaced orphanage care with foster care (McKenzie, 1999b), with the United States Department of Health and Human Services (2010) estimating 423,773 children in care in September of 2009.
Much extant research has been conducted on institutional and foster care, yet little to no research has been conducted on modern-day orphanages (an alternative care format to the current foster care system). Such research is necessary since current scholastic literature has demonstrated prevalent flaws in both the previous orphanage system and the current foster care system. As modern-day orphanages (a term used by McKenzie, 2010) offer a unique blend of traditional orphanages and current foster care, they are a potentially viable alternative to the current foster care system.

This case study explores the potential viability of one children’s home within the United States as an alternative care format for foster youth. In order to protect confidentiality, the pseudonym ‘Children’s Hope’ will be used to refer to the organization. Viability as an alternative care format is explored through participatory observation and semi-structured interviews, which are centered on the goals set forth by the child welfare system. Specifically, this study sought to explore how Children’s Hope satisfies the child welfare goals of safety, permanency, and well-being for foster youth within their care.

As explained by Edmund Muskie (2003) safety, permanency, and well-being are the three goals established by the Adoption and Safe Families Act, with each goal associated with final outcomes. Safety has final outcomes of reducing the incidence of child abuse and neglect in foster care and reducing the reoccurrence of child abuse and neglect. Permanency has final outcomes of increasing permanency for foster care children, increasing placement stability, reducing time for reunification with family of origin without increasing reentry into the foster care system, reducing time for adoption, and reducing the placement of young children in group homes or institutions. Child and family well-being has final outcomes in which families are to have the capacity to successfully provide for their children’s needs,
including educational, mental health, and physical. Based on this information, a review of
the literature follows, linking each of these child welfare goals to existing literature on foster
and orphanage care.

**Background and Context**

Because children’s homes are unique blends of traditional orphanages and foster care,
this literature review draws upon research regarding both types of care systems. The term
‘foster care’ is an umbrella term, defined by the Code of Federal Regulations (1996) as 24-
hour substitute care for children outside their own homes, which includes a variety of settings
such as relative foster homes, non-relative foster homes, group homes, emergency shelters,
residential facilities, and pre-adoptive homes. This literature review is selective by
identifying literature specifically related to non-relative and relative foster homes. In
contrast, by basic definition, orphanages are considered institutions, facilities operated by
public or private agency in order to provide 24 hour care and/or treatment to children away
from home (Code of Federal Regulations, 1996). However, orphanages were traditionally
regarded as campus settings housing large numbers of children (20-30 children per cottage);
campuses contained central buildings, had various aspects of work and play, and even
schools for their residents (McKenzie, 1999b).

Much research has been conducted on foster and orphanage care, but little to no
research has been conducted on modern-day orphanages (or children’s homes), specifically
in relation to the child welfare goals. The author considers modern-day orphanages as
community living environments which provide stable, long-term care to residents (as
described by McKenzie, 2010). These environments are often campus-like settings with
residential homes that house eight to twelve children with live-in adults who act as parents. Although varying in particular emphases, campuses provide care for children of varying ages and are often tied to religious entities. In all, modern-day orphanages draw heavily upon their orphanage traditions (e.g., campus setting and schooling), but also incorporate aspects of foster care (e.g., live-in parents and home settings).

Given that modern-day orphanages are a potential alternative care format to the current foster care system, and traditional orphanages within the United States are extraordinarily rare, this review focuses on the shortcomings associated with the current foster care system and the positive characteristics associated within the United States historic orphanage past. The need for an alternative care system will be shown, since substantial portions of children in the United States foster care system do not find success when it comes to satisfying the child welfare goals of safety, permanency, and well-being (Sigrid, 2004; Webster, Barth, & Needell, 2000; Fox, Berrick & Frasch, 2008). Modern-day orphanages can combine the advantages found within both systems of care while attempting to side-step the negatives.

**Foster Care and its Link to Safety, Permanency, and Well-being**

The child welfare system has established goals of safety, permanency, and well-being for foster youth (Muskie, 2003). The following review demonstrates the failure of the current foster care system in adequately meeting these goals for a substantial number of foster youth.

**Safety.** Regarding the first child welfare goal of safety, foster care provides an emergency shelter and respite for children living in insecure or dangerous situations (Sigrid,
An unfortunately high number of children placed in foster care encounter situations similar to those they have left and find their safety in jeopardy (Burgess & Borowsky, 2010; Fox et al., 2008; Pollack, 2010). The National Runaway Switchboard reports that between the years 2005 and 2008, the number of calls identifying child neglect within the foster care system were up 33% and calls reporting abuse were up 54% (a significant increase from previous years; Pollack, 2010). Although a majority of children report feeling safe in their homes, a substantial number have been exposed to violence (e.g., guns, drugs, domestic abuse) and experienced threats and violence in their neighborhood (Fox et al., 2008).

**Permanency.** A substantial number of children in foster care experience placement instability (Webster, 2000); this is an vital issue since research has shown the importance of providing continuity of care (Newton et. al., 2000) and a secure physical and emotional base for children to healthily grow and develop (Schofield, 2002). Although it is true that most children do not move and that such moves occur early in care (Wulczyn, Kogan, & Harden, 2003), Webster and colleges (2000) found that 52% in non-relative care and close to 30% of children in relative care experience placement instability (defined as three or more moves after the first year in care). Webster and colleagues (2000) demonstrated that demographic characteristics (such as age and gender) affect placement stability. In addition, these authors found that children who were removed from their homes for reasons other than neglect (such as physical abuse) were significantly more likely to experience placement instability, and that this instability affected placement stability over the long-term.

**Well-being.** Research has shown that changes in placement pose substantial risks to children’s well-being. Newton and colleges (2000) demonstrated that upheavals in placement contribute negatively to children’s externalizing and internalizing behavior.
Research has also shown that geographic movement (because of placement instability) can lead to disruptions in educational and social adjustments that are important for a child’s well-being (Leathers, 2006).

It is well established that children entering the foster care system exhibit or are at risk for behavioral or mental health problems (Newton et al., 2000). Compounding the issue, a substantial proportion of children are unable to achieve well-being and health restoration due to poor caregiver health and developmentally inadequate environments (both of which have previously been linked to negative child well-being; Burgess & Borowsky, 2010). Despite these results, a majority of children in foster care include their caregivers as part of their family; however, the nature of the relationship is complicated (Fox et al., 2008). Finally, foster youth were at higher risk for threats to achievement, the majority of which centered upon school behavior (Gramkows et al., 2009).

**Orphanage Care and its Link to Safety, Permanency and Well-being**

Although much of the previous research focuses on the flaws of institutionalized care, traditional orphanages have certain advantages over the current foster care system, particularly in regard to permanency and possibly in regards to well-being.

**Safety.** Unfortunately, abuse occurs in every system. Although in many ways it is difficult to determine the number of abused children within our nation’s orphanage history (Hasci, 2009), McKenzie’s recent survey (1999s) of orphanage alumni provides some insight. McKenzie found that 13% of respondents reported being abused in some way (which is a similar percentage to the number of respondents who had reported forms of abuse
prior to their orphanage experience). Perpetrators of this abuse could have been older residents at the same facility or poorly trained orphanage staff (Hasci, 2009).

Yet overall, orphanages were created to provide safety for children. As explained by Hasci (2009), communities created and sustained orphanages in the early nineteenth century because of the need. Although orphanage creation was sometimes spurred by disasters (such as a cholera epidemic or war), orphanages were built even into the late 19th century because of industrialization, urban growth, and immigration. Although some orphanages only took in full orphans (both parents deceased), many provided care for half orphans (one-parent deceased) or destitute children (parents were alive, but unable to provide for their children), or assisted parents who were seeking a safe place for their children to reside from external dangers.

**Permanency.** Traditional orphanages were designed to grant “security, permanency, and a home” (McKenzie, 2010); at orphanages, children always knew they would have a place to stay (McKenzie, 1999b). Functioning through larger religious and charitable communities (McKenzie, 1999c), orphanages consciously worked for their institution to be considered a home (although they varied both in their perceptions and the realities of their success; Hasci, 2009).

**Well-being.** Although research documenting negative well-being outcomes of children living in orphanages receives the most attention, McCall (1999) largely discredits previous research by demonstrating prevalent and significant methodological flaws, leaving a substantial gap in the literature since orphanages were almost never systematically observed regarding quality or type of care. More recent research that has been conducted with orphanage alumni contrasts the negative stereotypes typically associated with orphanages.
McKenzie (1999a) found that orphanage alumni had outpaced their counterparts in the general population by wide margins, including increased receipt of higher income, educational attainment, lower levels of unemployment and poverty, and more positive attitudes towards life. Additionally, 76% rated their orphanage as ‘very favorable’, and a similar percentage indicated they preferred orphanage care. Interestingly, 86% of respondents indicated they either never or rarely wanted to be adopted.

As such, good orphanages, which provide long-term care, can be healthy environments within which children can grow and develop (McKenzie, 2010). Overall, McKenzie (1999c) states that “the evidence is mounting that children’s homes have worked well in the past, are working well now, and can work even better in the future” (p. 301).

**Modern-day Orphanages and its Link to Safety, Permanency and Well-being**

At the time of this writing, very little published research has been conducted on modern-day orphanages. As evidenced by the literature above, such research is necessary since advantages associated with traditional orphanages may be combined with advantages of the foster care system in order to alleviate negative symptoms of both care formats. The present study works to address a significant gap in the literature by addressing how modern-day orphanages (or children’s homes) satisfy the child welfare goals of safety, permanency, and well-being. This study explores the question through a qualitative, collectivist, and instrumental case study at one modern-day orphanage located within the United States. Findings from this qualitative study will further inform the ever pressing need of reforming the current foster care system by providing support for an alternative form of care: the modern-day orphanage.
Theoretical Framework: Holistic-Interactionism

This study utilizes a Holistic-Interactionistic framework to guide study development, implementation, and interpretation. As explained by Magnusson and Stattin (2006), the Holistic-Interactionistic approach to development centers on the individual, considering each aspect of their surrounding environment as a whole unit that functions in totality and interdependently with the other units of the environment in order to create one unified, whole being. Branching away from unidirectional causality, the holistic approach emphasizes the continuous interaction between individuals and their environment, and the ongoing process between psychobiology and behavior (the individual is dependent on, not determined by, the environment). Variables affect individuals differently since every piece of the individual’s system is self-organizing, while simultaneously bound in certain respects. Using their mental system as the mediator, individuals actively engage and develop behavior and personality while negotiating biological changes and adaptations. Especially in close proximity (but also in a distant manner), the environment plays a vital role in development as it provides stimulation, information, significant events, etc. that provide opportunities for synchronization.

As such, this study is well positioned to utilize Holistic-Interactionism. Children’s safety, permanency, and well-being are strongly impacted by the environment of Children’s Hope. Each child will be differentially impacted by varying aspects of their environment because of the varying development of their mental system, which was influenced by past events and continues to be influenced by current events. As children grow and develop, they will contribute back to their environment, also influencing its safety, permanency, and well-being for others within the organization.
Method

Sample and Setting

This study utilized a purposeful sampling procedure, using theoretical constructs as a guide to specifically locate organizations based on characteristics associated with the study (a long term, residential care facility that served foster children by combining elements of traditional orphanages with modern foster care). Children’s Hope, a modern-day orphanage, agreed to participate in the study.

Historically a traditional orphanage, Children’s Hope has combined elements of its historical roots with the contemporary foster care replacement system. A main campus houses seven residential homes (hereafter referred to as cottages) in addition to other structural buildings (such as a gym, swimming pool, dining hall, etc.). Each cottage houses between eight to ten children and two married live-in adults who function as ‘parents’ (hereafter described as houseparents). In addition, Children’s Hope has one cottage located off the main campus, described as ‘the ranch’ due to the geographic location of the home and the nature of its surroundings (e.g., cattle, horses, etc.). Serving children and siblings from birth through college, Children’s Hope provides a home and a family for children in need.

The initial sample of a cottage and participants (on whom the bulk of the study is based), was constructed from within the chosen organization and determined by the staff of Children’s Hope (the ranch cottage). Children’s Hope made this decision based on their knowledge of the cottages and children within the cottages. After introductions via Children’s Hope staff, later participants were selected from within the chosen organization and determined by the researcher based on availability (the main campus).
In all, the researcher was able to interact with six houseparents, 15 foster children, one adopted son, two biological children, and one administrator over mid-summer. Of the children, four were in early childhood (ages two to five), three were in middle childhood (ages five to ten), six were in middle adolescence (ages 11 to 16), and five were in late adolescence (ages 17-20). Houseparents ranged in age from 23-50 and children ranged in age from 2-20. Participants were primarily Caucasian, but other ethnicities (particularly African Americans) were also represented. Out of this larger sample, two houseparents and seven children from the ranch were interviewed, in addition to the executive director (please see Table 1 and Table 2 for additional information).

**Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Staff**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Time working at Children’s Hope</th>
<th>Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Howard</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>18 years</td>
<td>Ranch Houseparent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>18 years</td>
<td>Ranch Houseparent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>Executive Director</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. This data only represents houseparents who participated in interviews and all names are fictional.*
Table 2. Demographic Characteristics of Children

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Age arrived at Children’s Hope</th>
<th>Years lived at Children’s Hope</th>
<th>Years lived with Howard and Lisa</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Richard</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>10-11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ryan</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jimmy</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brianna</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ariel</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TJ</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1 week</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: This data only represents children who participated in interviews and lived at the ranch; all names are fictional.*

**Methodology and Data Collection**

This study employs an interpretivist paradigm to guide the development, implementation, and interpretation of the collectivist and instrumental case study. According to Glesne (2011), the core tenet underlying an interpretivist paradigm is the belief that the world cannot exist independently of the mind. This orientation encourages researchers to seek to understand how others interpret and act in regards to social phenomenon, and how others socially construct an ever changing reality (hence interpretivist researchers study specific contexts while acknowledging the wider influencing culture).

Interpretivist researchers commonly utilize case study designs. As explained by Glesne (2011), a case study must define boundaries which encompass an integrated system (Children’s Hope) while simultaneously isolating a unit of analysis (residents and staff of Children’s Hope). This study is classified as an instrumental case study since it aims to provide insights into the functioning of modern-day orphanages while simultaneously
reconceptualizing stereotypes (Glesne, 2011). More specifically, since this study proposes to interview multiple persons, it is classified as a collectivist case study (Glesne, 2011).

This study utilizes two aspects of data collection: participatory observation and in-depth interviews. Regarding participatory observation, the researcher spent six and a half days interacting with residents at the ranch home. Generally, the researcher arrived at approximately 8:30 a.m. and stayed between 11 to 12 hours each day, interacting with residents and participating in daily activities while recording observations in a field journal (approximately 30 pages of single-spaced typed field notes were collected). After staying at the ranch, the researcher spent two and a half days on the main campus, spending one full day at one cottage and one full day at a second cottage. In all, six houseparents, 15 foster children, two biological children, and one adopted child agreed to participate in participatory observation.

Three different semi-structured interview questionnaires are utilized: one for children, one for houseparents, and one for a program administrator. These interviews were structured, yet open-ended, with questions that focused on addressing the study’s primary research questions (for example, If you could live anywhere where would it be? Do you feel safe in this house? and What are some of your favorite things about living here?).

Digitally recorded audio interviews were conducted after spending two full days with ranch participants. No more than four interviews were conducted per day, and each was conducted at a time convenient for the participants and within the researcher’s time frame. For the children and houseparents, interviews were conducted within their cottage in a quiet room; for the program administrator, the interview was conducted in the administrator’s office. Interviews with children lasted between 10 to 80 minutes; houseparent and
administrative interviews lasted between 40 to 75 minutes. In all, two houseparents and seven children from the ranch were interviewed, in addition to one program administrator (the executive director).

All protocol followed university institutional review board guidelines and requirements, including obtaining informed consent and assent from all participants.

**Data Analysis**

All data analyses were completed by the researcher. Notes from the field journal were transcribed nightly on-site, and interviews were transcribed verbatim shortly after completing fieldwork (transcripts were then immediately re-listened to for accuracy). As recommended by Saldaña (2009), all data were coded via five different methods in two cycles and memos were written throughout the process. The first cycle of coding included four different methods of coding: attribute coding (basic descriptive data), structural coding (relating data to specific research questions), descriptive coding (summarizing the basic topic), and in-vivo coding (prioritizing the participants voice). The second cycle of coding utilized the fifth and final coding method, pattern coding (pulling together similarly coded information to describe a pattern). A somewhat simultaneous and circular process, the overarching codebook was rearranged several times to find emerging themes which best represented the data. Finally, a member check was also conducted with the executive director, who reviewed and provided feedback on his interview transcript, a brief summary of findings, and the final manuscripts; feedback was then incorporated into findings. In order to protect confidentially and other external factors, houseparents and children were not asked to complete member checks.
Findings

Findings from this case study are primarily categorized according to the child welfare goals of safety, permanency, and well-being, since the main aim of this research was to discover how Children’s Hope satisfies these goals. Two main relationship-related themes emerged for each category (along with several important sub-themes), as will be discussed below. These themes reflect the overall positive findings regarding safety, permanency, and well-being. To protect confidentiality, all quotes are de-identified and described only by a fictional name.

Safety in the Modern-day Orphanage

Two main themes emerged when exploring the first child welfare goal of safety. These themes, *Children’s perception of safety* and *Ensuring safety*, explore how effectively the organization’s efforts to ensure safety are perceived by the children who reside there.

**Children’s perception of safety.** During interviews, all children replied affirmatively when asked if they felt safe at the ranch. When asked where they felt safest (out of everywhere they could think of), six of the seven children replied they felt safest at the ranch. As one adolescent described, “...*I feel safer than I’ve ever felt in any other house actually. This has been the number one house I’ve felt safe in*” (Mary).

Children felt safe for varying reasons. Some children mentioned security (such as an alarm system or dogs) while others mentioned the isolated geographic location of the ranch. A few children also mentioned the number of people combined with their strength: “...*there’s a billion people around, there’s a bunch of people...And, we got some strong people in this house!*” (TJ). Primarily, however, children felt safe because of the people with...
whom they lived. Houseparents were mentioned by several children, since they had been with the children consistently, watched over them, and promised to protect them. “...outside with the horses and animals and mom and dad, if we’re all together, safest place in the world” (Richard).

One adolescent shared a particularly poignant story:

...when I was afraid... really little... dad would sit in between both beds with the closet lights on and he would fall asleep there and he would wait for us to fall asleep because he wanted us to feel safe... (Brianna).

Children’s perception of the main campus, however, was slightly less positive, although most of the children interviewed said they felt safe there. Reasons why children felt safe on campus were similar to the reasons why children felt safe on the ranch: familiarity (growing up there), people (knowing everyone there and the large number of people residing there), and security (alarm systems and police around the area).

On the other hand, almost all had felt unsafe on campus at one point or another. Children primarily felt unsafe on campus because of its location, “It’s a rough neighborhood here” (Michael). The organization has been in place for over 100 years and the surrounding neighborhood has slowly deteriorated. Children shared negative stories from the surrounding neighborhood (such as murders, beatings, drinking, etc.) that made them feel unsafe, although no-one from Children’s Hope campus has ever been hurt. Strangers around or cutting through campus would frighten the children, especially if strangers committed petty theft (such as stealing bikes) or broke into houses (as gang initiations), damaging property both intentionally and accidentally. Most of these occurrences, however, seem to have decreased in more recent years. One adolescent put things into perspective: “...it’s as safe
as anywhere else, I mean it may not be the best neighborhood, but bad things could happen
to somebody that lives in a good neighborhood too . . .” (Brianna).

**Ensuring safety.** Children’s Hope takes several preventative measures to ensure safety. Certain security measures, such as locking doors at night and installing alarms, help keep strangers out and children in. Children’s Hope has regulations in place regarding cottages (no weapons, alcohol, tobacco, etc.), animals, and transportation. Children also have regular medical, dental, and optical visits.

Unable to prevent all unsafe situations, Children’s Hope staff works diligently to be aware of potentially unsafe circumstances and respond appropriately. Houseparents watch their children to assess feelings of safety or uncertainty, and they pay particularly close attention to children who have special issues, taking measures to ensure children do not harm themselves or others.

Being aware of potentially unsafe situations requires constant and diligent supervision, “. . . just, making sure that we’re there, watching em, we’re watching em” (Howard). Children play outside under the supervision of houseparents, swim in the pool with a houseparent and lifeguard present, and let an adult know at all times where they are going. Because houseparents may be watching between 8-10 children at one time “. . . you do a lot of counting . . .” (Howard).

After recognizing a potentially unsafe situation, Children’s Hope takes steps towards action. One houseparent stated “. . . if you could know it beforehand that would be avoided, if you couldn’t then it would be dealt with immediately” (Lisa). For example, in order to reflect normal family life, cottages were previously mixed gender. Yet this cottage composition potentially put unrelated adolescents in tempting situations. To avoid such
potentially unsafe circumstances, children would undergo moves every few years (which was
difficult for them), and even with such precautions an incidence of pregnancy occurred. As a
result, all cottages on the main campus are now segregated by gender (with a few exceptions
of cottages that have males and females who are separated by large age differences).

Perhaps the most challenging unsafe situation that Children’s Hope is aware of and
working to respond to is the surrounding neighborhood. Conversations of moving, hiring 24-
hour security, building better fences, etc. have all been discussed, with a current decision of
renting a house across the street and providing housing for a policeman, whose presence will
be on the Children’s Hope campus.

Finally, to ensure children’s safety, there is a hierarchy of accountability. Children’s
Hope is held accountable to and works with government departments (e.g., the Department of
Health and the Department of Human Services), external organizations (e.g., hospitals,
schools, police departments, etc.), and the community at large. Staff members are held
accountable to each other: the executive director is held accountable to the president and
other superiors; houseparents are accountable to the executive director, social workers, and
each other (houseparents undergo extensive background checks before employment and then
continuous supervision while working on-site from superiors, other houseparents, and
children); children are held accountable to all adult staff, while staff take any concerns a
child has about safety seriously (e.g., social workers have private sessions with children to
make sure they are being kept safe); and visitors are held accountable to Children’s Hope
(e.g., have to undergo a background check or be with a leader who can vouch for character).

As summed up by the executive director,
You know we’re like a big community, but a little different in that we’re, we’re always in each other’s space (laugh) . . . we’re constantly in front of each other, seeing each other, talking to each other, and you just, you find out things when you do that. Kids are gonna talk, they’ll gonna tell you things that are going on, and the staff they talk about what’s going on, or what they think is going on. So there’s kinda a built in accountability there . . . (Michael).

In summary, children perceive their home to be a safe place, and most children perceive the main campus to be a safe place. Reasons for safety primarily centered upon familiarity and family members. Additionally, the organization takes steps to ensure children’s safety, such as preventative care and being aware of and responding to situations that arise.

**Permanency in the Modern-day Orphanage**

Two main themes that emerged when exploring the second child welfare goal of permanency: *Am I gonna stay here* and *Unique forms of stability and instability*. The first theme examines any sort of physical relocation associated with Children’s Hope, whereas the second theme examines pertinent changes in a child’s living situation that are unique to the care format.

**Am I gonna stay here?** Children encounter stability and instability in their physical location while living at Children’s Hope. In terms of stability, Children’s Hope is a long-term residential care facility, and most of the children who come are unable to go back home:

* . . . it is intended to be long-term care for those that need long-term care...in general we’re for those that have no-one else to go to, and their family’s not coming back for
them, this is a place for you to come live, be until you don’t want to be here anymore

(Michael).

Once children arrive at Children’s Hope they are provided for throughout their young life, and even into adult life. Although some children may choose to leave upon turning 18, others utilize the continued support that Children’s Hope wishes to provide. Children’s Hope works to establish their children in society as much as possible before they leave, helping them get a vehicle, a job, and an education. Adult children (such as those who are currently serving in the armed forces) can continue to rely on Children’s Hope: “. . . we have . . . kids who grew up with us who are older and the only home they know is Children’s Hope” (Michael).

Unfortunately, however, there is still physical instability within Children’s Hope, which staff members recognize can be difficult for children. Physical instability occurs when children move from Children’s Hope or within Children’s Hope. Children move from Children’s Hope because the organization also serves children who need a temporary placement; hence some children may be relocated to go live with a sponsor who chooses to foster them or to be reunited with their biological family.

Biological family reunification is rare but possible since Children’s Hope is a voluntary placement facility. Voluntary placement is an agreement, not a contract, between a biological family and Children’s Hope. If the child is voluntarily placed with the organization, Children’s Hope agrees to provide for the child; however, parents do not have to terminate rights and may take the child back when they wish. Children’s Hope continues as a voluntary placement facility because they recognize the value of family (particularly biological families) and are “. . . not here to keep families apart at all . . .” (Michael).
Biological family reunification may be in the best interests of the child, “. . . because then they can reconnect and build a relationship with that biological parent which is very important . . .” (Howard). If biological family reunification is in the best interest of the child, then Children’s Hope supports the decision of that biological parent. Indeed, “. . . most of the families have hope . . . when they place a child with us they think ‘I’m gonna get better one day, it’s gonna get better’ – and we want that . . .” (Michael).

However, there have been situations where a biological parent has wanted his/her child back and Children’s Hope has concerns. If Children’s Hope concerns are great, they will contact the Department of Human Services. If Children’s Hope has concerns, but they do not fear the child will be harmed, Children’s Hope allows the child to go back home with their biological parent. In most of these situations the child is only home temporarily, and then brought back to Children’s Hope. If a flip-flopping pattern of instability occurs, Children’s Hope will make a requirement of the biological parent to give up custody before agreeing to re-take the child.

Children also move within Children’s Hope (although this is perhaps less traumatic than moving from Children’s Hope since children generally remain on the same campus). Sometimes children are moved for their own safety (such as when cottages were segregated by gender). Other times children are moved for their well-being; they may be having too much difficulty with other children in their cottage or they may have issues that younger houseparents feel less capable of handling. Unfortunately, some children have experienced several moves, even if just for logistical reasons. Importantly, however, children do have some say in this process.
For the most part, however, children are pleased with their current living situation. During interviews, children were asked to share where they would live if they could live anywhere. About half the children answered the question geographically, choosing another country or state for personal interest reasons. The other half answered with the ranch, because they enjoyed ranch life and wanted to remain close to their current Children’s Hope family. Similarly, when asked if they could live with anyone, four children responded they wished to live with their current Children’s Hope family. Only one child responded with a wish to live with his biological family.

**Unique forms of stability and instability.** As a residential care organization, children also experience unique forms of stability and instability; children do not physically move locations, yet their living situation nonetheless changes. Although generally a stable organization, Children’s Hope has recently undergone considerable transition in houseparents, with four out of six cottages experiencing new houseparents. As houseparenting is a very demanding job, it has a rather high turnover rate (yet both veteran and novice houseparents reported that they have no intention of leaving anytime soon). However the length of stay for houseparents at Children’s Hope (on average) is almost double that of the national average: “Children’s Hope’s, our turnover is more like about 3 years . . . the national average, the last time I had read anything about it, is like 18 months . . .” (Laura).

Once employed at Children’s Hope, houseparents stay for varying lengths of times, which affects the stability and instability experienced by children. Some children have lived at Children’s Hope for years but have only spent part of their time with their current houseparents; others have lived at Children’s Hope for almost their whole life and never
experienced a transition in houseparents. This stability in houseparents provides an important piece of stability in children’s lives:

. . . I felt like because we’ve been here this long that I could give her that assurance, you know I couldn’t give her a 100% guarantee, cuz I don’t know what might happen, to, to me or Howard, but as best as I could I gave her that assurance that we’d been here this long we’re not planning to leave . . . (Laura).

This stability not only affects the children who reside with stable houseparents, but also the campus at large: “. . . all the children are open to mom and dad, they’ll talk to them, cuz mom and dad have been here for so long” (Mary).

Children may also experience future instability regarding Children’s Hope. Although Children’s Hope does have an alumni association, some alumni do not have the option of revisiting their previous houseparents (if they did not continue to maintain a relationship) because the houseparents no longer work at Children’s Hope. Administration may also undergo changes, which houseparents report makes some alumni less likely to return for visits.

In summary, Children’s Hope is a long term care facility that provides stability in physical location to most of their children; however, some can still experience instability when they move within Children’s Hope or from Children’s Hope (e.g., biological family reunification). Children also may experience unique stability and instability regarding houseparent turnover or future organizational changes. The majority of children, however, enjoyed their current living situation and (if they had the choice) would choose to continue living at Children’s Hope.
Well-being in the Modern-day Orphanage

Two main themes also emerged when exploring the third child welfare goal of well-being, each with several sub-themes (see Figure 1 for a visual model). The first theme, *Transformation: A slowly evolving process*, involves understanding where children come from in order to understand where they are now and the influences that guide the transformative processes (each is detailed as a subtheme in the text below). The second theme, *Christianity: True hope*, explores the circular nature of God’s love and the importance of the Christian faith at Children’s Hope.

![Diagram of Well-being themes]

**Figure 1. Theme three: Well-being**
Transformation: A slowly evolving process. When examining this first theme, several important sub-themes and categories become apparent. First, it is important to understand where children come from (the first sub-theme), which gives greater salience to where children are now (the second sub-theme). Where children are now can be examined in overall well-being, subdomains of well-being (e.g., physical, psychological, etc.), academics, care plans, and future plans for success. Finally, the children’s reasons for change in well-being (the third sub-theme) can be explained through provision of basic needs, and establishment and maintenance of primary and secondary relationships.

Where they came from. Children living at Children’s Hope originally come from a spectrum of broken homes, with each child having their own unique story. As can be expected, some of these stories are heartbreaking. “They’re horrendous. Some are horrendous stories. You know, just rip your heart out, that the child had to go through that” (Howard). Children with these stories often come from homes of neglect or abuse. Most commonly, however, children come to Children’s Hope because biological parents misuse drugs and alcohol and face or are incarcerated.

Unstable parental presence leads to unstable environments: “. . . kids have been through you know, where are we gonna live, who’s gonna take care of us, for many years” (Michael). Unstable parenting also leads to unstable resources, and many children suffered from food insecurity. “. . . I can’t even tell you how many times...that’s a thing that they’ll do: they want to eat a lot” (Lisa).

Other previous environments were comparatively healthier, but still unfit for child rearing. Some children had already been removed from their original environments by kinship caregivers, who then brought the children to Children’s Hope. Others come from
environments with low expectations and generational cycles of destroyed relationships and incompetent parenting.

Because of the varying previous environments, children’s well-being upon arrival varies. Jimmy has a background that illustrates the extreme: “. . . he was almost 3, he didn’t know how to sit up, he could not walk, um he did not talk, he didn’t do anything pretty much – he was what they call a bed baby” (Lisa). At the other end of the spectrum you have Henry (early childhood):

. . . came when he was 2 and he had a foul mouth like a drunken sailor but . . . he was well fed, you know, he was clean . . . but he had been exposed to so many negative things that it had affected him. I mean he would say bad stuff, real bad (laugh), you know and . . . he didn’t know any different (Lisa).

Regardless, all the children come with emotional scarring:

They . . . have a lot of baggage, like a lot of been seeing a lot of stuff . . . I can’t imagine just the aspect of being pretty much rejected by your parents, and you know that I can’t take care of you, I’m not going to take care of you – I don’t know how they deal with that (Howard).

Adding to this emotional scarring, houseparents state that “. . . a lot of times they feel unworthy . . .” (Lisa) and “. . . they don’t have a concept of what real love’s like” (Howard).

Children gave their own recollections of their arrival. Of those interviewed, many came to Children’s Hope at a young age and don’t remember much. Some remember being dropped off, not knowing it was a goodbye. Others remember feelings. “. . . I remember I was crying a lot, and I didn’t have any shoes, and the first time I got shoes I slept with them”
(Ariel) or “. . . I was a little bit excited just cuaz it was a new place. It was the first time to be in a place like this big” (Ryan).

**Where they are now.** Children living at Children’s Hope have a spectrum of well-being, largely based on how long they have lived at Children’s Hope. A difference exists between children who have spent years at Children’s Hope and those who have newly arrived: those who have quite literally grown up within the organization are quite comfortable and happy within their surroundings, whereas those who have newly arrived are more disengaged, withdrawn, and sad. Yet, overall, children improve at Children’s Hope:

. . . *I never really encountered any that didn’t do better, you know, you give them the things that they need and they generally will flourish. I mean they still come with a lot of issues, and baggage, that they have to deal with, but yeah, it’s gonna improve* (Lisa).

For some, especially younger children, the improvement is almost immediate. “*Couple weeks after being here he said ‘I know now that my brothers, my sister and I are gonna be okay’*” (Michael). Others take more time. Although some don’t achieve that appreciation until they are grown, others come to a realization while living at Children’s Hope. “. . . *[Deidra] she made this statement one time, that you have to take the hand that God dealt you, and run with it, you can’t make excuses, you have to go forward, you know you have to go forward*” (Howard).

**Where they are now: Subdomains of well-being.** More specific subdomains of overall well-being (such as psychological, physical, social, and emotional), were also explored. Psychologically, when necessary, children receive specific diagnosis (such as generalized anxiety disorder, bipolar disorder, or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder) and are able to
receive treatment. These psychological diagnoses can be extremely influential. When Brianna’s bipolar surfaced, for example, “. . . things got bad for a long time . . .” Brianna explains that,

. . . my chances were getting really thin with Children’s Hope . . . they weren’t even sure if I was going to be able to come back cuz it was so bad . . . it wasn’t their fault, because we didn’t even know at first, and then we found out . . . they didn’t really know what to do or how to handle it . . .

Yet now, after diagnosis, medication, and effort from all parties involved, “. . . things are better” (Brianna). From Brianna’s perspective, “. . . we made a behavior chart and that’s been working a lot better, we’ve actually been getting, barely any arguments . . .”

Physical well-being has improved for most (if not all) of the children at Children’s Hope. Most basically, children are provided with food. “. . . when they’re here now . . . the thought of going hungry never crossed their mind cuz they know they’re gonna be provided for . . .” (Howard). Others who come with physical developmental delays receive necessary physical therapy and have improved greatly.

Socially, some struggle, some excel, and some continue to improve through counseling; yet almost respondents all have found a family identity within Children’s Hope. In a nuclear sense, most of the children refer to their houseparents as mom and dad (although some use Mr. and Mrs.) and the children they live with as brothers and sisters, creating a unique family that is united by something other than blood:

“It’s a nice little stable family” (Ryan).
“Mrs. Lisa and Mr. Howard . . . they’ve known me since I’ve come to Children’s Hope and they’ve taken care of my brother since he was a little baby, so it’s like, they’re kinda like family I guess” (Ariel).

“Whenever I have a family I want them to know, you know, my parents and where I grew up and, you know, how great they are” (Brianna).

In a broader sense, children also find an identity within the Children’s Hope organization. Many call their cottage their home and find identity within the larger organization, as encouraged by the administration. “We don’t refer to the children as students . . . we refer to everyone as our Children’s Hope family, this is our family, these are our children . . .” (Michael).

Emotionally, many children find fulfillment in their created family. Caring phrases are often exchanged between houseparents and children, such as, “have a good day!” or “I love you. I love you too.” Younger children especially may have higher levels of emotional well-being since “. . . they don’t have to worry about anything anymore like food or whatever, and they have instant playmates, you know, and they have nice play equipment and stuff” (Howard). As children continue to develop, however, new emotions may surface as children may begin to cognitively process old wounds:

. . . I’ve seen they will start thinking, you know, who am I? Why am I here? You know, why? You know why didn’t my parents want me? Why didn’t my mother want me? Why wouldn’t she do what she had to do to keep me? They start questioning. And you know a lot of them . . . get over that, but some don’t, some don’t (Howard).

It is true, however, that children of all ages struggle with emotional hurt. One young child was particularly craving touch as he was coping with a houseparent transition (i.e.,
wanting to hold hands and be held). For some, however, age makes no difference; what matters is the drastic change in circumstances. As one story (told by the executive director) illustrates, “. . . we cried every night in the shelter. We don’t cry anymore.” To help children of all ages, Children’s Hope provides on-site social workers who meet with and counsel the children. Additionally, children also have access to outside community and private counselors.

Children were also asked to give their own perspectives regarding emotional situations. When asked to describe how they would react to a positive experience (and to give an example), most said that they would share the good news with their houseparents, with several also sharing the news with others. When asked to describe how they would handle a disagreement, responses were more variable, and included fighting back, walking away, involving parents as mediators, keeping it to or working it out themselves, compromising, or staying angry and ignoring the other person. For some, it varied depending on who was involved in the disagreement. When asked to describe what they would do if they were worried about something, children’s responses were split between sharing with their houseparents or keeping their concerns to themselves (which some children shared does not go unnoticed by their houseparent).

Where they are now: Academics. At Children’s Hope, children are required to complete secondary education. When asked, children had mixed perceptions regarding school. Some children loved their school environment, some had mixed feelings depending on the day, and others had strong feelings of dislike. People (such as friends, teachers, and adversaries) played a strong role in children’s positive and negative perceptions of school. Other influencing factors were quality and difficulty of education (including teaching
methods and teacher effort) and school as a way to get out of the house. Almost all the
children interviewed had between one and three favorite subjects (including history, theater
arts, bible, literature, and math) and all children had at least one least favorite subject (most
children disliked math, but other subjects included science and English).

Based on varying factors, children have different levels of academic achievement. As
previously mentioned, some children excel academically, whereas others struggle and fall
behind. Although these differences in academic achievement may be attributed to varying
personalities or intellectual ability, some differences may be related to the contexts children
live with: “I think a lot of em don’t achieve academically to their potential, but I think a lot of
that comes from the baggage they’re carrying with them . . .” (Howard).

Where they are now: Care plans. As an organization that prioritizes children,
Children’s Hope takes well-being seriously, and bi-annually creates and reviews
individualized care plans. Administrative staff meets with houseparents to discuss each
child’s needs in all the above mentioned sub-domains:

. . . we talk about . . . what their needs are, how we can improve how they’re doing,
what needs to be improved, what our concerns are, the next step of action . . . so we
provide for them, we assess the need, and then take care of it . . . we focus on every
single area and make a plan, we date the plan, and then we look okay, this is what we
did, did it change anything, if it didn’t what’s the new plan, and we give ourselves
you know 6 months to look at it again (Michael).

Where they are now: Future plans and success. Previous studies (Fox, Berrick, &
Frasch, 2008) have asked children about plans for their future as a potential gauge of overall
well-being. When asked what they wanted to be when they grew up, all responses were
centered on following passions or personal attributes/strengths. For example, “...I love animals, with all my heart...they're beautiful...” (Richard) and “...I care about everybody, I try to help everybody...” (Mary). Several answered with careers that obviously tied into their current housing situation (e.g., a ranch hand, vet tech, or missionary). Others were at the point where they were already pursuing their careers in college (such as welding or auto mechanics). Still others wanted to follow in their Children’s Hope families footsteps: “...mom was a nurse, and Debbie [older CH sister] is a nurse, and...knowing...their hearts and how amazing they are I just think, man I want to be like that” (Brianna). All felt they could be successful in these careers if they worked hard enough, could find the money for it, and capitalize on the available opportunities.

Success of achieving future plans varies; some alumni have met high success and some have not. As stated by a long-standing houseparent, “...overall...we have a lot of kids who are [a] success, I would term successful, uh, maybe not by the world’s view but considering where they came from they’ve come a long way...” Although some alumni have taken a criminal path (and either continue on that path or have turned their lives around) others have extremely successful careers (such as an ER nurse). Some houseparents work hard to instill goals of future success. As one houseparent described “...help them understand that, you know, you don’t have to live your life like what you came from, you can rise above that.”

In addition to having career and material success (such as purchasing homes) alumni have grown to start and care for their own families, spouses and children. This is incredibly rewarding for houseparents:
. . . to be able to see the cycles broken, I’m telling ya, that, that’s probably the
top number one thing – when I look at my grandbabies and I know that they’re parents
are being good parents to them, um, that’s the best feeling in the world, the best
(laughter), the best, the best” (Lisa).

Reasons for change. Children who reside at Children’s Hope undergo a
transformation in well-being, from where they were to where they are now. As previously
mentioned, two primary reasons emerged from data analysis explaining this transformation:
children are provided for and children form life-changing relationships. As summarized by
the executive director, “…the children are nurtured and loved and protected and provided
for…”

Reasons for Change: Basic needs. When a child first arrives at Children’s Hope, there
are a series of events that are set in motion, primarily focusing on providing for the child’s
basic needs. Persons living at Children’s Hope are welcomed to eat three meals a day, in
addition to having access to snacks stored in household pantries. Children are told upon
arrival “. . . you never have to worry about where your next meal’s gonna come from, you
never have to hide half of your food because you’re scarred that you won’t have another
meal” (Michael).

In addition to food, children are provided with other basic necessities, such as clothes
and medical care. “. . . the first thing that Children’s Hope requires that houseparents do is
take them shopping for clothes, within the first two or three days they’re here, buy them new
clothes, uh throw out the bad” (Michael). For some, it’s the first new clothes they’ve ever
had. Within the first month, children also have any medical needs addressed (such as doctor
and dental appointments). Yet these steps are only the beginning, “that’s really the, that’s
the start of the, making sure they’re okay (laughter) that they’re good” (Howard). Lasting change is accomplished via the formation of relationships.

*Reasons for Change: Primary relationships.* Primarily, children form relationships with their houseparents, who can make lasting positive impacts on the children’s well-being. Each houseparent is different, and some are more effective than others in their ability to parent and connect with children. For example, one child stated “I think they do way better job than any other houseparent at Children’s Hope . . . our parents are the parents that everybody at Children’s Hope are like ‘I wish I could live with ya’ll’ . . .” (Brianna).

Overall, children interviewed spoke positively about their houseparents. First and foremost houseparents are parents: their job is to raise the children under their care. Children interviewed appreciated their current houseparents’ parenting style, feeling that there was a good balance between expectations, structure, freedom, and discipline:

*I’ve had a lot of houseparents and I’ve had some pretty strict ones, and I’ve had some ones that are so laid back there’s like no structure, and they’re kinda like in-between – they’re laid back and they’ll be cool with you until you give them a reason not to be, just like any parents* (Ryan).

Discipline matters are handled simply and straightforwardly. Any sort of foul language or disrespect, for example, is immediately corrected with apologies. Accidental issues are addressed without placing unnecessary blame and providing comfort (e.g., accidentally stepping on a new puppy).

As part of being effective and good parents, houseparents work to form caring relationships with their children, and houseparents embody care in multiple ways. All children interviewed said they felt their houseparents took care of them; one adolescent in
particular laughed and said “Oh yeah. Thick and thin” (Mary). Primarily, this embodiment of care can be seen in the family identity that is created between houseparents and children (as previously mentioned). Most residents at the ranch use family language to describe each other, and houseparents fill stereotypical roles associated with biological parenthood. In essence, residents function like a family and consider themselves to be a family.

   . . . every house parent gets, uh, 28 days on 6 days off for relief, you know, to get away from us – that’s what it is, its relief from us. They have to be forced to take it . . . we’re a family . . . families don’t get relief from each other, so why should we? (Richard).

Part of being a family is giving and receiving love. Because of the children’s background, houseparents work hard through words and deeds to teach their children they are lovable and show them “. . . unconditional love . . .” (Howard). Love is given to all children, regardless of race, creed, disability, personality, etc. “. . . I love my children, I do, I love all of em and they’ll tell you . . .” (Lisa). Sometimes love is displayed through physical affections, other times it is explicitly expressed through words. Still other times it’s a small gesture that goes a long way, because houseparents want their children to feel special. Regardless, children know they are loved: “. . . they’re not here for the money, they’re here for us” (Richard).

This deep bond of affection is formed over time through consistent interactions and specifically devoted time. Often family members would spend time together (either baking cookies, talking in the living room, watching a show, cleaning up, etc.) while bantering and laughing with each other. After spending so much time together, houseparents know their
children’s personalities and interact appropriately: stories would be shared, personalities would be mimicked, and guidance would be given.

Both children and houseparents emphasized the importance of reaching out and helping in order to form relationships. Remembering where children come from, houseparents make a strong effort to reach out to the children: “You have to reach out to them cuz they’re not always gonna reach out to you, you gotta reach out and show them that you care and that you’re concerned about what they feel and about what they’re going through . . .” (Howard). Houseparents continually assist their children with difficult decisions, provide guidance with emotional, social, or spiritual issues, and become advocates when their children deeply struggle:

. . . mom started reading all these books on how to, you know, get your kid to calm down, get them under control, and you know, stuff that would help her keep herself in check, so she wouldn’t say anything that would make it worse . . . but just knowing that she did all that for me so that I could come back and live here, and have another chance, that’s amazing (Brianna).

A vital aspect of helping children is listening and understanding, which was demonstrated consistently. Whether it is giving life advice or simply listening to stories from the day, always providing a listening ear does not go unnoticed by the children. As one younger child stated, “. . . they like, understand . . . here you can just come and talk to them . . .” (Ariel).

Some houseparents feel they can connect to their children because of their own past. As such, houseparents work to teach their children that “. . . just cuz you did this thing doesn’t mean you’re bad, it just means you did this thing, and we’re gonna move on from
here, learn from it . . . with our kids, and you just keep on trying” (Lisa). Some good advice goes unheeded, and children at Children’s Hope do make mistakes. Yet one mistake doesn’t mean the end, and children are grateful knowing they receive another chance, “. . . no matter how many times I mess up, I’ll always get another chance. And, other houseparents, don’t do that” (Brianna).

Children receive another chance because houseparents are consistently supportive “. . . when they’re wrong, when they’re right . . . whatever” (Lisa) and houseparents are consistently “. . . here for us” (Brianna). Children are supported and encouraged to follow their dreams within reason. As one houseparent stated, “. . . they need to understand that I’m here for them, no matter what” (Howard). Children felt supported as well: “. . . if you ever need anything you can always come to them no matter what time of the day it is, no matter how busy it is, they will always make time for you” (Richard).

This support continues into adulthood, as houseparents maintain close connections with grown children. Although the amount of communication may vary from every couple of months to every couple of days, adult children continue to contact their houseparents regarding life’s big and small decisions and come home for visits or celebrations. Part of the reason the ranch houseparents have these strong connections is precisely because they have been houseparents for almost two decades, “. . . lot of people haven’t been here as long as us so they don’t have those relationships yet . . . if you stay long enough and you can see them through, then generally you can develop that relationship with them, if you want to” (Lisa). In this way, being a houseparent can be a very rewarding job, “. . . I like seeing them grow, uh, especially when they accomplish goals that they themselves thought they would never,
you know, achieve . . . it’s rewarding to see them finally mature and do things on their own” (Howard).

This stability in houseparenting further emphasizes to children currently residing at the ranch that houseparents legitimately care about them: “. . . if they didn’t love what they do here then pretty sure they wouldn’t been here as long as they have” (Ryan).

Finally, houseparents embody care by sacrificing for their children. Financially, houseparents spend personal money (not just Children’s Hope money) to buy children personal presents and pay for large events (such as weddings). Time and sleep are common sacrifices, as houseparents take hours to sit in medical offices or wake up throughout the night to comfort a frightened or sick child. Because the relationship between houseparents and children is deep and real, houseparents are willing to sacrifice their lives for their children:

. . . one time when we had a tornado and it was really bad and I was really little, I was afraid and we had blankets over our head and I was sitting with mom and dad and I said ‘what if the roof falls in and kills me’ and I said ‘I don’t want to die’ and mom and dad said ‘we would die first before we let anything happen to you’ . . .

(Brianna).

Reasons for Change: Secondary relationships. Having this stability of love, support, sacrifice, and personal interactions with houseparents are hugely influential for a child’s well-being. Yet although relationships with houseparents may be a primarily relationship, they are not the only relationships that contribute to a child’s overall well-being. Children are also influenced by their relationship with their Children Hope siblings, Children’s Hope administrative staff, and their biological families.
Children at the ranch spend a good amount of time interacting with their Children Hope siblings. Many find enjoyment in siblings who are approximately the same age or who share similar interests and hobbies, although some find joy in spending time with much younger siblings. Some children feel quite close to their siblings because they grew up together or because of the situations they’ve been through together. When new children arrive there is a period of adjustment as children interact through living together (most already know each other through Children’s Hope) and negotiate their role and place with others in the house while learning the rules of the ranch. Yet overall, the children interact very positively by playing, sharing, and supporting each other in various ways (as is encouraged by the houseparents). In essence, the siblings love each other and know they can count on their family to have their back.

On a broader level children’s well-being is influenced by the positive interactions they have with Children’s Hope staff; every individual staff member (and other adults on Children’s Hope campus) work to make children feel welcomed and loved. The executive director (to the best of his ability) sets aside time daily for personal interactions throughout campus (including attending campus meal time), and after a full day of work changes into casual clothes to play football with the children out on the lawn. Social workers know (in essence) every child by name, personality, and history, and (like the executive director) refer to the children as “my kids”. Staff genuinely care about the children and want what’s best for them. Why? Because “. . . [we] love them cuz they’re ours” (Michael).

In addition to the above mentioned Children Hope relationships, some children also retain biological connections. One major advantage of Children’s Hope is that it works to keep sibling groups (or cousins) together, whether that be in the same cottage or on the same
campus. Although some siblings choose to live in different cottages because they favor one location over another, of those observed and interviewed, siblings love the opportunity to be able to interact on such a regular basis.

Children vary in their connections with their biological parents. Some children have no contact at all, whereas others have biological parents who may call or even have their children home for visits. Children vary in the degree to which they rely on these biological connections; some have always (and still do) yearn for a strong bond (even if parents are unreliable), and others know where their security lies (with Children’s Hope). Biological parents’ attitudes also affect the children. For the most part, even adversarial biological parents eventually evolve and develop more cohesive relationships with their children and Children’s Hope:

*She was really adversarial with us to begin with and real resentful of, um, our relationship with the children and so that was hard, but over the years you know that has, that has evolved and developed into, you know, we get along just fine… (Lisa).*

In summary, children come from a wide variety of backgrounds and have varying levels of well-being upon arrival. Although at the time of this research children’s well-being varied across domains, interviews revealed the transformation of well-being over time, with well-being related to a child’s duration of stay. Reasons for this change in well-being were associated with having their basic needs met and forming life-changing positive relationships with houseparents and other important persons.

**Christianity: True hope.** The second theme of well-being is explorative of the deep-seated beliefs in the Christian faith, which form the foundation of Children’s Hope. As a Christian organization, Children’s Hope works to embody the Christian faith on varying
levels through circular means. More than providing a home and a family, Children’s Hope works to instill faith: “It’s a place where children can come and those tears can end - they are pointed to Jesus Christ, their true hope . . .” (Michael).

Many adults involved with the organization (particularly houseparents, but also including volunteers or donors) see themselves as serving Christ:

That’s ultimately what we want these kids to see, that it’s because of what God has done for us that we do this for you . . . as He has loved us, we want to love you and provide for you and care for you (Michael).

Many adults feel strongly that God has called them to this work, and rely on Him for strength: “. . . you have to have God to do this ...say a lot of prayers, lot of prayers, lot of prayers (laughter), and I know a lot of people praying for me...” (Howard).

Serving and loving others is a circular pattern. Administrative staff shepherd, nurture, provide, and care for the houseparent staff; houseparents in turn shepherd, nurture, provide and care for the children; children in turn are expected to shepherd, nurture, provide and care for each other and for others in their community and abroad (such as volunteer work).

Throughout their stay at Children’s Hope, children are taught about God, either formally/informally or in a group/privately. Often, considering where the children have come from, teaching about God’s love can be quite challenging:

. . . they weren’t cared for like they should . . . a lot of times they feel unworthy . . . you have to make sure a child knows that they’re lovable before they can understand the love of God, and . . . Jesus . . . that’s a concept they can’t grab until they realize that they are special and that they are worthy of someone to love them . . . (Lisa).
For the most part, staff at the main campus use more formal methods in group settings to teach about God, whereas the staff at the ranch tend to focus more on teachable moments. There is a Children’s Hope curriculum that teaches catechism, and prayers are said before every meal on campus, in addition to singing a song and reciting the scripture memory verse for the week. At the cottage level, there can be both formal and informal teachings. Some cottages do daily devotions together, while many others do devotions privately. Informally, children can go to their houseparents with any questions about spirituality, and there is often a Christian radio station playing in the background.

Formally, church is a visible and influential factor in teaching the Christian faith. Families are required to attend a Christian church in the community and have children participate in the youth group. Although some youth chose to no longer attend church (or would choose to attend less frequently) after turning 18, others have regretted leaving the church and have come back after making some bad decisions: “. . . after everything in [city of school] I needed to get back to church, I did” (Richard). Houseparents are also involved in church, teaching Sunday school or leading vacation bible school.

Yet even though church attendance is mandatory (until age 18) all of the children interviewed had positive perceptions of church, with few (if any) dislikes. “. . . our church is like a big huge family, like going to the family reunion, you know everybody you want to see everybody . . .” (Mary). Church was described as a friendly place that does a lot for everybody and a non-judgmental place where children could grow and be themselves; children generally enjoyed attending, learning, and interacting with others. At church, children learn messages that are consistent with the Christian faith, including both basic
beliefs taught by the church and real life applications. Children particularly enjoyed youth group, although some disliked how Children’s Hope youth represented the majority of group.

Although Christian faith is strongly encouraged, the personal acceptance of the Christian faith is never forced. Church attendance which encourages the Christian faith, however, is mandatory until a children turn 18. Although some houseparents may be more insistent than others regarding the personal acceptance of the Christian faith, most are there to listen and help children come to faith if that is what the children want:

“. . . we think it’s gonna help their well-being . . . if they know Jesus Christ, and uh, learn about him . . . there’s nothing that we force on our children, um, we let them know what the Gospel of Jesus Christ is, but whether they accept that or not, we love them just the same, because they are created in God’s image and um it doesn’t matter, know we’d love for them to love and worship Jesus Christ, but if they don’t we’re still gonna love them cuz they’re ours” (Michael).

In summary, as a Christian organization, Children’s Hope models the Christian faith through love and service and creates an environment where such values continue to spread. Children are taught about faith formally and informally and have positive perceptions regarding church and their spirituality.

**Discussion and Conclusions**

Framed by a Holistic-Interactionistic approach, the purpose of this paper was to explore how a specific modern-day orphanage (Children’s Hope) satisfies the child welfare goals of safety, permanency, and well-being. Findings from this research illustrate that Children’s Hope effectively satisfies these requirements, primarily through the establishment
of relationships. At Children’s Hope, children are provided a place to live where they feel and are kept safe. For those who need it, children are provided a permanent home, long term care, and support; however children still experience some placement instability (either because of biological family reunification or movement within Children’s Hope). The vast majority of children experience a transformation of well-being, slowly evolving and growing into healthy and faithful children, and finding identity in their community and family as they are surrounded by positive, loving, and life-changing relationships. As such, most children go on to live successful, well-adjusted lives.

Previous research has addressed the importance of fulfilling the child welfare goals of safety, permanency, and well-being (as discussed earlier); however Children’s Hope has several unique attributes that may provide advantages over the foster care system. For example, the instability children experience at Children’s Hope appears to be less than that experienced in foster care. For children who move within the Children’s Hope campus, movement does not imply changes in school and therefore academic and social adjustment (as is the case in foster care; Leathers, 2006) nor does it always imply changes in family composition, since sometimes whole families move together to a new cottage (unlike in foster care, where placement moves may occur for foster-family related changes; Sigrid, 2004). Additionally, children of all ages and races are served within Children’s Hope; meaning Children’s Hope can provide a more permanent place for older, minority children who are less likely to be adopted within foster care and ‘languish’ in care (Mapp & Steinberg, 2007). Since children can expect support from Children’s Hope through college, adolescents are less likely to experience the disadvantages that accompany ‘aging out’ of the foster care system (Sherman, 2004). Finally, as Children’s Hope is a faith based community,
faith development and involvement across staff and children can help foster healthy lifestyle choices (especially in relation to religious service attendance; Oman & Thoresen, 2005) while decreasing risk taking behaviors (Smith & Faris, 2003), decreasing depression (Pearce, Little, & Perez, 2003) while increasing life satisfaction (Varon & Riley, 1999), and positively affecting sense of personal meaning (Chamberlain & Zika, 1992).

Because Children’s Hope satisfies the child welfare goals while providing additional benefits to foster youth, this research supports the consideration of modern-day orphanages (children’s homes) as a viable alternative care format. Policy makers, social workers, and other persons making placement decisions for foster youth need to carefully consider modern-day orphanages (children’s homes) when deciding which care environments best fit the needs of the children they are serving. The inclusion of modern-day orphanages as a care format could provide stability and belonging for those who do not find success within the foster care system.

As research on modern-day orphanages thus far has been limited, these unique organizations require further and more in-depth study; yet these initial results appear promising. Future research should more specifically study each goal of the child welfare system, utilizing established standards of safety, permanency, and well-being, with both permanency and well-being needing more research to establish such standardized measures (Fox, Berrick, & Frasch, 2008).

Although yielding promising results, this study does have limitations. Research was conducted for a short period of time at one institution, and results may not be generalizable to other organizations, especially since (based on observations and informal conversations) it is likely that Children’s Hope is an ideal combination of factors and one of the best residential
care organizations for children in the United States. Varying factors which may influence the effectiveness of modern-day orphanages may include goals of the organization, finances, administration, and freedom from regulations. Future research could benefit policy by utilizing standardized measures and making comparisons across children’s homes to effectively determine which organizations are successful and why.
CHAPTER 5. GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

The final chapter of this thesis seeks to summarize the findings from both Chapter 3 and Chapter 4, and then interpret these findings through the theoretical lenses discussed in Chapter 2. As this research was conducted as an instrumental case study (which aims to provide insight to the functioning of an organization while re-conceptualizing stereotypes, Glesne 2011), policy and practice implications are also examined. Finally, strengths, limitations of this study and future research directions are discussed.

Summary of Findings

Children are a vital and vulnerable part of our society, deserving a loving, stable, and safe home to grow and develop within. Unfortunately many children lose their home as they are unable to live with their families of origins for various reasons, and are instead placed with the foster care system. As evidenced by the literature review in Chapter 2, the current foster care system is unable to satisfy the child welfare goals of safety, permanency, and well-being for a substantial number of children. As such, it has been shown that alternative care formats are needed and necessary. Modern-day orphanages, or children’s homes, are one type of alternative care format. This collectivist and instrumental case study sought to examine in-depth what it is like to grow-up and live in such a unique care environment (Children’s Hope), and how such an environment satisfies the child-welfare goals of safety, permanency, and well-being (Muskie, 2003).

Children’s Hope is a privately funded children’s home that focuses on the children. Knowing who they can help, Children’s Hope provides both temporary and permanent care to individuals and siblings who (for varying reasons) are in need of a home. A campus style
facility, Children’s Hope works to create a sense of community within the campus and a sense of family within the cottage, and children find love and identity within each setting. With daily routines including responsibilities and fun, children grow and develop over time, often changing their life course to a positive and productive trajectory.

Children’s Hope also works to satisfy the child-welfare goals (safety, permanency, and well-being; Muskie, 2003). For the most part, children feel safe on Children’s Hope property because of the people and the familiarity, but feel unsafe because of the surrounding neighborhood. Children’s Hope works to ensure safety by utilizing preventative measures (such as security, health, and regulations), being aware of and responding to situations, and holding themselves and others accountable.

Although Children’s Hope does provide temporary care, it also provides long-term and permanent care. Children enjoy their current living situation, and many would choose to continue living at Children’s Hope if they had the choice. Instability does exist, however, when children move from or within Children’s Hope or experience houseparent turnover.

In regard to well-being, children experience a slow evolution. Coming from negative backgrounds, many have lower levels of well-being upon arrival. Yet after spending time at Children’s Hope, their psychological, physical, social, and emotional well-being begins to improve, and for some even changes drastically for the better (as reported by program staff and children). This transformation occurs not only because basic needs are being met, but also because of the deep and lasting relationships children form with houseparents, siblings, and administration. Children also experience transformation through spiritual growth and development, as Children’s Hope is a Christian organization whose actions embody the faith ideals of service and love.
Theoretical Interpretations of Findings

The above findings can be interpreted according to the theories outlined in Chapter 2, specifically Holistic-Interactionism (Magnusson & Stattin, 2006), Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological Theory (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006), Positive Youth Development (Benson, Scales, Hamilton, & Sesma, 2006), and Sacred Theory (Burr, Marks, & Day, 2012).

Holistic-Interactionism

As described by Magnusson & Stattin (2006), Holistic-Interactionism is a general theoretical framework examining how a whole, integrated person (who is more than a sum of their parts) functions and develops dynamically with their person environment. Development occurs when the individual actively interacts through their existing (yet simultaneously developing) mental, behavioral, and biological components within their immediate environment and within the wider sociocultural physical environment. Holistic-Interactionism aims to contribute to the larger scientific goal of why individuals act, think, feel, and react in a particular way; hence it is particularly relevant for analyzing findings from this qualitative study.

Similar to the Bioecological Theory (described below), Holistic-Interactionism emphasizes the process of interaction between a person and the surrounding layers of the environment (Magnusson & Stattin, 2006). Yet Holistic-Interactionism differs from the Bioecological approach by emphasizing organized wholes that function in totality within an organized hierarchy of systems, in addition to emphasizing the mental, behavior, and biological components of a person (Magnusson & Stattin, 2006).
Utilizing the diachronic perspective of Holistic-Interactionism is useful in discussing the variability amongst the successful or unsuccessful adaptation of children at Children’s Hope. As described by Magnusson & Stattin, (2006), the diachronic perspective analyzes an individuals’ current functioning in terms of their developmental history. Each child at Children’s Hope has a unique background, and arrived at Children’s Hope at varying stages of development based on their previous living environment. The level at which each individual currently functions cannot be separated from the environment in which the person initially developed.

Indeed, Holistic-Interactionism speaks of optimal environments, which provide proper stimulation for development (Magnusson & Stattin, 2006). Formative events, particularly if these events are negative, can have strong influences on infancy development, since the brain is forming foundational mental processes through its interactions with the proximal environment. Yet the plasticity of brain development allows for adaptation, which can overcome early deficits, when exposed to positive developmental proximal environment (Magnusson & Stattin, 2006). Hence even though children may have negative early experiences, brain plasticity and adaption allows survival of these experiences and development and growth when placed in a new environment designed for optimal growth (such as Children’s Hope).

Holistic-Interactionism emphasizes that the person is actively and intentionally engaged, meaning persons are dependent upon, but not determined by their environment (Magnusson & Stattin, 2006). Children’s Hope focuses on the needs of each child, allowing each child to take part in their development by actively participating and having some control of their life-course trajectory and decisions surrounding them (e.g., school choice or living
situation). As was demonstrated by observations and interviews, most children learn to thrive in this environment, despite their past experiences, and continue to make positive life-choices. Some individuals, however, falter within and after leaving the organization, even though provided with a new environment that encourages success. These results emphasize the Holistic-Interactionistic perspective that persons are dependent, but not determined, but their environment.

The environment of Children’s Hope and the environment of each cottage are considered proximal environments according to the holistic-interactionistic theory (Magnusson & Stattin, 2006). These proximal environments, particularly the persons with whom children interact, have strong influences on development (Magnusson & Stattin, 2006). For these reasons, Children’s Hope takes great care and detailed effort in hiring staff, as these persons set the tone for the overarching feel of the campus and cottages. It is the goal of the staff to embody an environment of community and family filled with support, sacrifice, and love, since the effect of such positive environments is the formation of strong bonds between persons, which then results in the positive identity development and well-being of children.

**Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological Theory**

The Bioecological Theory of development, as explained by Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006), can be defined as psychobiological continuity and change within individuals and groups across the lifespan and historical past and future. The core aspect of the theory, proximal processes, can be defined as interactions between the human and the (immediate) environment which produce development over time. The strength and impact of processes
on development vary according to the person (a psychobiological being), context (both immediate and remote environments), and time (both immediate and generational).

Bronfenbrenner’s theory can be used to illuminate several findings, including the key finding that the transformation of well-being is largely related to a child’s interactions (or proximal process) with other individuals (primarily their caregivers) in their immediate environment or contexts. Children also experienced this positive transformation because they had regular interaction over time (the fourth core piece of the Bioecological theory). Indeed, as surrogate parents, houseparents time is fully available in assisting children to grow and develop. Additionally, since Children’s Hope provides long-term and permanent care, children have access to this support and love throughout their entire young life and into their young adult life. Unfortunately however, due to houseparent turnover, there is no guarantee that these relationships are limitless and enduring (which is necessary to develop the most powerful relationship according to Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006).

Children who were able to develop strong bonds with their caregivers continued to develop positively. The ability to develop this bond is partially based on person characteristics; not only of the child, but also on the characteristics of the person with whom the child is interacting. Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) explain that person characteristics include dispositions (which can set and sustain processes in motion), resources (ability, experience, knowledge, and skill that enable proximal processes to take effect) and demand (positive or negative interactions with the social environment which can help or hinder proximal processes). For example, children who are thriving at Children’s Hope may have developmentally generative person characteristics (a term used by Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006) with a greater biological propensity to develop resources, in addition having
positive interactions with their houseparents. On the converse side, children who struggle may have a developmentally disruptive person characteristics (a term used by Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006) and limited resources (perhaps even due to biological limitations developed prenatally) which can lead to negative interactions with the surrounding environment, especially if the houseparent also has developmentally disruptive person characteristics.

Yet, according to Bronfenbrenner, individuals interact not only with the people in their immediate environment, but also with the symbols and objects. The environment of Children’s Hope strongly contributes to a child’s development, and the overall design and structure of the campus is therefore important. Cottages and campuses are designed to be open and inviting, encouraging interaction, and decorating interiors with symbols of hope, faith, and family.

**Positive Youth Development**

As explained by Benson et al. (2006), Positive Youth Development views all youth (not just at risk-youth) from a strength based approach. Those who utilize this theory view youth as creative vessels capable of positive contributions (when placed in contexts designed for optimum growth and development) as opposed to problems that need to be solved. As many of the youth at Children’s Hope typically would be considered at-risk due to their background, this framework is a useful lens in further interpreting findings.

Benson et al. (2006) explains the comprehensive theory in six main elements. First, the theory posits that every youth has the ability to grow and develop positively. Children’s Hope embodies this position by providing a healthy environment in which children can grow.
and develop positively, thereby also providing hope to children. Children Hope knows who they can help, however, and refers children to other organizations with environments more suited to the children’s needs when necessary.

Second, the theory posits that positive development is enabled via healthy relationships and contexts, and third the theory posits this development is further enhanced by multiple relationships and contexts (Benson et al., 2006). The positive impacts of relationships and contexts has already been discussed from Bioecological and Holistic-Interactionistic approaches. However, Positive Youth Development emphasizes the importance of multiplicity. Children’s Hope encourages multiple relationships across varying domains. Although children may primarily form relationships with houseparents, they also form close relationships with Children’s Hope siblings, Children’s Hope administration, and (when such relationships are for the good of the child) form and maintain biological relations with parents, siblings, or extended family.

Fourth, the theory posits that strategies for promoting positive development vary across social setting (Benson et al., 2006). Children’s Hope is a unique social setting. The findings from this study show that, contrary to negative stereotypes, campus and cottage style living can positively benefit children. As such, their strategies for promoting positive development may vary from a state-run foster care or a private home, but that does not make the strategies or the results any less valid.

Fifth, the theory posits that community is a critical aspect of development. As a campus style children’s home, Children’s Hope develops its own, internal community (Benson et al., 2006). As previously discussed, this community has a sense of warmth and welcoming, providing a safe-haven for children. In addition to its own personal community,
however, Children’s Hope also encourages other community involvement, such as with the city community, the church community, and the school community.

Finally, the theory posits that youth are creative vessels capable of paving their own development when giving the opportunity to do so (Benson et al., 2006). Children’s Hope works to provide opportunities for their children to excel. This is perhaps most easily illustrated in school selection: children are sent to whatever school most directly draws upon that child’s strengths (e.g., arts, sports, academics, etc.), regardless of the cost of the education. As such, children are given the opportunity to excel.

Several other elements of the theory can be used to illuminate findings. Positive Youth Development utilizes the concept of resiliency, in which internal characteristics, family characteristics, or external social contexts can help promote resiliency (Benson et al., 2006). Internal characteristics of children vary, and not all have contact with their biological families. However, for many children, their Children’s Hope family becomes their family, and relationships with adults and positive community environments helps foster resiliency.

Positive Youth Development also utilizes the concept of assets, believing more assets lead to more success, and that these assets are enhanced by specially designed contexts (Benson et al., 2006). Children’s Hope works to encourage the development of assets by providing and finding opportunities for children (such as music and sports camp) in addition to specifically designing their campus structure to further children’s success (e.g., Children’s Hope has on-site social workers who provide guidance to children and staff whenever necessary).

Finally, Positive Youth Development identifies values, morals, and beliefs (including religious beliefs) as constructive. As will be discussed in the following section, Children’s
Hope is a Christian based organization that encourages (but does not force) the Christian faith.

**Sacred Theory**

Sacred Theory (Burr et al., 2012) explores the harmful and helpful effects of sacred behaviors for individual and family life. The term sacred is an overarching term that is both abstract and personal, covering experiences that transcend the visibly routine reality and transform individuals' behaviors by affecting both mind and heart. Although behaviors can be harmful, research has shown the positive influences of the sacred, primarily since the sacred can answer fundamental ‘whys’ of life, giving purpose and meaning to life, while promoting ideas of harmony and order.

Although Sacred Theory has several main tenants, a select few are particularly useful for this research. Many staff spoke of their work as a calling, and Sacred Theory (Burr et al., 2012) speaks of this spiritual communication as expressing itself through one’s soul or heart. This communication with the sacred (e.g., prayer) plays an important role for Children’s Hope staff for guidance, strength, and comfort. The executive director, for example, takes time for morning reflections and communication with the sacred. Houseparents rely on prayer to successfully raise and develop relationships with their children. These actions relate to one of Sacred Theory’s main principles that “…wisely asking and seeking help from spiritual sources helps families find successes and avoid failures…” (Burr et al., 2012, p. 54). This communication can bring insight, calming effects, and help individuals and families cope (Burr et al., 2012), as was demonstrated by interview responses.
Sacrificing is an important principle in Sacred Theory and also plays an important role in life at Children’s Hope. Sacred Theory states that “…variation in the amount of sacrificing in families influences the amount families flourish…” (Burr et al., 2012, p. 71). Non-excessive sacrifice is helpful because it encourages reciprocity, helps solve problems, creates trust and cooperation, communicates commitment, and physically embodies words with deeds (Burr et al., 2012). Findings from the study revealed that sacrifice (financial, personal, time, etc.) was a core demonstration of how caregivers embody care to their children. The sacrifices houseparents make for their children helps foster family relationships between individuals who are not connected by blood. Daily and life sacrifices that houseparents make communicate to children their commitment not only to their job but also to their children. As one child stated, “…they’re not here for the money, they’re here for us”.

Additionally, sacrifice is a main tenant of the Christian faith (Burr et al., 2012) and Children’s Hope is a Christian based organization. Sacred Theory explains that the more connection sacrifice has to the sacred, the more meaning and power the action has (Burr et al., 2012). Additionally, the meaning of sacrifice doesn’t come from the act itself, but instead from the motivation creating and sustaining sacrifice. Since many staff perceive their position as a calling from God, their sacrifices have a deep and salient meaning.

Finally, Sacred Theory speaks of loving relationships, a broad category to which many subcategories follow (almost all of which can coincide and overlap). Although many of these sub-categories could also be applied to this research, for the sake of brevity, only the overarching category of love will be addressed. Sacred Theory states that “…loving relationships in families increase the probability of successes and unloving relationships
increase the probability of failures” (Burr et al., 2012, p. 87). Love is described not just as a noun but a verb, and like sacrifice has more meaning when connected to the sacred (Burr et al., 2012).

Love is a central theme in life at Children’s Hope. This love not only connects houseparents and their children, but the campus in general. Houseparents work to show their children through word and deed that they are lovable and that they are loved. Additionally, since houseparents and administrators at Children’s Hope are Christian, many connect the love they give as an extension of the love of Christ, thereby giving their love a deep meaning and significance.

Practice and Policy Implications

This research was conducted for two primary reasons: (1) because little scholarly information was found regarding modern-day orphanages/children’s homes and (2) because the foster care system was found to be imperfect (Burgess & Borowsky, 2010; Fox, Berrick & Frasch, 2008; McKenzie, 1999b; Webster, Barth, & Needell, 2000) and in need of alternative care formats. Because of the positive implications of these findings, this research has both practice and policy implications.

Through observations, interviews, and informal conversations, it appears that Children’s Hope is an ideal children’s home based on a variety of factors. Relationally, Children’s Hope employs an involved, well-educated, and caring staff. Many came to work at Children’s Hope because they felt called to do so (not because of a financial incentive) and enjoy working with children. However, upon coming to Children’s Hope, staff are well provided for, both financially and socially (e.g., staff receive their own living space, benefits,
and have opportunities to interact with other adults). Varying levels of administration work to be involved and supportive of houseparent staff in addition to providing access to resources (e.g., on-site social workers). This interaction and support across varying levels of the employment hierarchy creates an interdependent and healthy communicative environment that extends to providing quality care to children.

Encouraging interactive administration and staff are vital to ensuring well-being for children. Having the opportunity to develop deep personal relationship with surrogate parents and non-related siblings fosters healthy development and well-being for children. Houseparents do not have other career responsibilities, as their job is the primary care of the children within their homes; hence they are able to devote the time and care necessary to establish relationships. Because of the deep bonds established between children and parents, all possible attempts should be made to reduce staff turnover.

Connections with adult figures other than houseparents are also important. Interviews and observations revealed that maintaining biological connections with family (when appropriate and well managed) can boost children’s’ well-being. Various levels of staff (executive director and social workers) at Children’s Hope take a personal and committed interest in a child’s wellbeing, knowing children’s names and stories, and fostering additional positive relationships while also being positive role models.

The importance of interpersonal relationships is an important practice implication, but Children’s Hope also provides important structural and organizational implications. For example, one reason that children were able to develop such close interpersonal relationships with houseparents was the design of the cottage. Children had homes which they shared with no more than nine other children; hence they had the opportunity for personal interaction
with houseparents. Indoors, the design of the cottage allowed personal space (i.e., a bedroom) but also allowed room for collaborative exchanges (i.e., a large kitchen and living room), while integrating the space of the foster youth and the houseparent family (although cottages distributed this space to varying degrees). Outdoor structural design was also important. Wide open outdoor spaces (accompanied by play equipment) encouraged active physical play and connections with other adults and children. Additionally, ranch children had access to animals that appear to serve as sources of healing; observations and interviews validated this as children spent time providing for, playing with, and seeking comfort from both horses and dogs.

Structural and organizational practices can also be related to the child welfare goals. Children need to feel safe, both within their home and within their community, which is accomplished via relationships, organizational policies, and physical locations of facilities. Care needs to be taken not only in hiring staff who provide safe contexts on the micro level, but also locating facilities in communities that provide safe contexts on the macro level. If the broader community is considered unsafe, policies need to be put in place to ensure the safety of children within the campus grounds. Children also need a sense of stability, a physical location which they can call a home with a minimization of physical relocation. This includes not only relocation from the campus, but also relocation within the campus.

Accountability and balance is another key aspect of Children’s Hope success. Privately funded, the organization is not bound by governmental regulations and rules. Instead, Children’s Hope is bound to state departments regarding safety regulations (such as the Department of Health) and from there has the flexibility to make the best decisions out of the available options for the children. Additionally, because of the interconnectedness and
close proximity of the staff (both physically and social) there is built in accountability amongst the employment hierarchy.

Because the availability of care formats for children in need of homes is helped or hindered by policy, this research also has important policy implications. Specifically, this research has shown that modern-day orphanages/children’s homes can be a viable care alternative to foster care, while effectively satisfying the child welfare goals of safety, permanency, and well-being. As such, policy encouraging the development of children’s homes should, at the very least, be discussed at more than the local level. State and federal policies that work hand-in-hand with local organizations (in order to best fit the needs of particular organizations with particular goals) could encourage the growth and development of modern-day orphanages/children’s home through grant and funding opportunities, in addition to providing more opportunities to find the best fit for children in need of a home.

An additional policy implication relates to child placement. Interviewees shared that the Department of Human Services (DHS) cannot at this time place foster youth in children’s homes. Because of the positive findings from this research, it is the recommendation of this researcher to re-examine this policy decision. This researcher encourages future researchers, policymakers, and practitioners to take care in distinguishing between varying care formats which on the surface may appear to be similar (i.e., house groups of children together) but in reality serve quite different purposes (i.e., treatment facilities, emergency shelters, or long-term care placement). Distinctions also need to be made regarding the population that is being served, as different care formats are geared at serving different populations. This distinction between care formats and their potential populations will help policymakers and practitioners avoid excluding alternative care formats that are potential positive environments.
for foster youth (on the assumption that they are the same as similar care formats that foster negative outcomes for foster youth) and assist decision making regarding which care formats best fit the needs of which foster youth population.

Policy decisions promoting modern-day orphanages could have effects spanning varying domains which are important to policymakers. For example, modern-day orphanages may be more expensive than foster care, but if modern-day orphanages assist more foster youth than foster care in developing positive life course trajectories (i.e., increased educational attainment and decreased levels of criminal activity), modern-day orphanages may be less expensive than foster care when considering long-term costs to society (e.g., health care costs, incarceration costs, productivity costs, etc.). Additional research using standardized measures or conducting research longitudinally with modern-day orphanage alumni would be necessary in order to achieve such findings while partnering with varying research experts (i.e., economists).

Even if policies are not enacted that support the creation and sustainment of modern-day orphanages, policies could be enacted that support the practical implications of well-functioning modern-day orphanages that could be applied to other domains. For example, this research found that multiple supportive and positive relationships are important for youth development and wellbeing. Policies that support varying levels of relational support and interactions could assist development, such as supporting community resources and leaders that could positively interact and shape youth development.

In summary, findings from this research begin to sketch a potential model for well-functioning modern-day orphanages that can be used to guide future organizational development and policy decisions, while also providing an additional placement option for
children in need of care and a home. This research has shown the viability and the importance of an alternative care format, and this author supports the inclusion of modern-day orphanages in the foster care system. However, it is not the recommendation of the researcher to eliminate the foster care system or return to orphanages. All systems have both positive and negative features and are imperfect in nature (including modern-day orphanages). As such, eliminating the foster care system would only exacerbate the current problems within the system, primarily that children do not have enough available and healthy options in which to grow and develop. A return to orphanages would also not be recommended by this author, as this research has shown the utmost importance of relationship development (particularly with parental figures), which would be difficult to accomplish in dormitories or houses containing 20-30 children (more typical of orphanages). It is, however, the recommendation of this author that future research explore these initial findings by studying the viability of modern-day orphanages, a unique combination of both foster care and orphanages, thereby continuing to refine and improve the foster care system and providing the best possible options for children in need.

Challenges

I encountered several challenges throughout the planning, implementation, analyses, and reporting of this study. Initially there was difficulty finding organizations that fit study criteria, and then there was difficulty finding organizations that were interested in participating in the study. I was close to giving up when Children’s Hope returned my phone call and agreed to participate. After making all the necessary arrangements with Children’s Hope, I arrived at the organization to find plans different than my expectations due to
miscommunications: I was scheduled to spend the majority of my stay at a cottage located off campus, even though experiencing campus life was an important element to my study. This surprise led to a series of phone calls and paperwork with the Institutional Review Board in order to incorporate all elements of the originally designed study within the new parameters available for conducting the study.

Going to an unfamiliar location and interacting with people I had never met (and was terrified would not like me) was very challenging and far outside of my comfort zone. Yet after overcoming my initial fears (thanks largely to the kindness and generosity of the people on-site), I soon found myself in a worse predicament: I now had to leave the people I felt attached to at Children’s Hope. Because I spent so much time with the family every day, and because they were so open to having me and inviting me into their lives, I very quickly developed relationships with both the houseparents and several of the children. Leaving was very difficult, not only for me, but also for some of the children. I still often think about the people I met and my time spent at Children’s Hope.

Returning to Iowa State University, it was difficult to navigate my role as a researcher and my role as a friend as I was analyzing data and writing up my study. Faculty helped guide me through this transition, although it is one with which I still struggle today. While analyzing and writing, I encountered additional complications due to unexpected (and surprising) changes in Children’s Hope staff, which interfered with plans for member checks and study validity. Despite these challenges, however, conducting this research was rewarding and fulfilling; I feel privileged to have experienced such a unique organization and connect with such wonderful people.
Strengths, Limitations and Future Directions

This research was a collectivist and instrumental case study and has several strengths. Most importantly, the researcher was able to establish strong rapport with participants through participatory observation. Ranch houseparents kindly and quickly accepted me into their home and life, and I was able to develop close relationships with several of the children. Even though some relationships took longer to form than others, I was able to spend quality time with most children by the end of my stay. Importantly, by the time interviews were conducted, participants were familiar with who I was and we felt comfortable around each other, which then strengthened the quality of the interviews. Through participatory observation, I was also able to spend time at varying cottages and interact with varying persons, thereby providing a more holistic picture of life at a modern-day orphanage. Finally, through continued communication with the executive director, findings were validated at several time points, increasing the overall validity of the study.

On the converse side, this research also has several limitations. There might have been sample bias in participants who were willing to be interviewed, since there were some children with whom I was unable to establish a relationship and also children who I did establish a relationship with but who did not wish to be interviewed. Of those who did participate in interviews, although I felt I was able to establish trust via my relationship with them, it is still possible that interviewees were not completely honest during interviews (intentionally or not). Although the interview was not extremely personal in nature, it is always possible that interviewees chose to reveal only select pieces of information while concealing or distorting others. Although multiple interviews across varying levels of the hierarchy and participatory observations help guard against this limitation, it is nonetheless
possible. Alternative and additional research methodologies may be of future benefit, such as card sorting (i.e., asking a question and asking interviewees to choose from varying pictures which best represents their answers). Alternative methodologies may have also drawn out more information from participants who gave less information in their interviews. For example, an adolescent with mental retardation or with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder may have felt more comfortable and participated more readily with formats other than the traditional verbal interview.

On a broader scale, case studies by nature are limited in their generalizability. Results from this modern-day orphanage/children’s home may not apply to other modern-day orphanages/children’s homes based on differences including staff, finances, children, location, goals, etc. Additionally, case studies are conducted at a specific time in history and within a specific culture. Research was conducted over the summer and results may have varied if research was conducted during the school year. Results may have also differed if the culture of the organization shifted over a particular time frame, such as a change in in administration or other staff. Finally, this research was limited by time and resources. Results were based on weeks, instead of months or years, of interviews and observations. More in-depth time in the field may have led to different interpretations or findings.

To correct for these limitations, future researchers should attempt to study multiple modern-day orphanages across varying cultures, contexts, and geographic locations over extended periods of time. Studying multiple and diverse organizations would allow comparisons and contrasts. Both positive and negative findings could then be used to develop a model which represents effective functioning for an organization seeking to provide homes for children in conjunction with both traditional orphanages and the foster
care system. Extended periods of study time are also necessary, as some results may have differed based on timing of interviews and observations. For example, approximately two months after completing fieldwork, the ranch houseparents left their position. Previous findings of familial closeness and wellbeing may not have been observed if research was conducted shortly after ranch residents were experiencing new houseparents. Studying organizations for longer periods of time (e.g., a month) and at varying time points (e.g., quarterly) would provide a much more detailed picture of life at a modern-day orphanages while capturing transitions over time and effects of organizational policies and relationships (particularly in relation to safety, permanency, and wellbeing).

Future research could also conduct more in-depth research regarding each research question developed for this study and could elaborate on important findings from this research. For example, one key finding from this research was the importance of relationships. Future qualitative work could delve into the varying relationship levels (houseparents, staff, and biological families) and how these relationships were important in which ways to which aspects of development. Future qualitative research could also examine the unique forms of stability and instability within modern-day orphanages (e.g., houseparent turnover or physical relocation within a campus) and how this affects youth development.

As little to no research on such an organization has been previously conducted, the researcher’s primary goal was to an overarching and general qualitative study. Yet future studies could develop and utilize more standardized questionnaires to assess safety, permanency, and well-being within modern-day orphanages and then make comparisons across the varying care alternatives (such as foster care, group homes, etc.). Findings could then be used to develop a model regarding which care environments best suits the needs of
which children; this model could then be used by practitioners in the field to make decisions about best-fit care environments for children.
APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRES

Modern-Day Orphanages: Exploring What it is Like to Grow Up in a Stable, Long-Term Residential Children’s Home

Investigator: Elizabeth Zimmermann

Note: Interviews will be semi-structured. Other questions will emerge in context.

Interview with residential children

Demographics
- Name
- Gender
- Race or ethnicity
- When is your birthday/ how old are you?

Permanency (addressing research questions one and three)
- How long have you lived here?
- What do you remember about coming here for the first time?
- *If you could live anywhere, where would it be? Why?
- *If you could live with anyone, with who would it be? Why?

Safety (addressing research questions one and two)
- Do you feel safe in this house?
  - If yes, what makes you feel safe?
  - If no, what makes you feel unsafe?
- Do you feel safe on campus?
  - If yes, what makes you feel safe?
  - If no, what makes you feel unsafe?
- Out of everywhere you can think of, where do you feel most safe?

Well-being (addressing research questions one and four)
- How do you feel about living here (do you like it)? Why is that?
- What are some of your favorite things about living here?
- What are some of your least favorite things about living here?
- Do you have any hobbies you like to do? (e.g., sports, video-games, music, art, etc.)
  - What are they?
  - How often do you get to do them?
- Do you have any chores or responsibilities you have to do?
  - What are they?
  - How often do you have to do them?
- Do you volunteer (do you spend time inside or outside of campus doing specific activities that help other people)? Where and doing what?
• What do you do on a typical day?
• What do you like most about your caregivers?
• What do you like least about your caregivers?
• Do you think your caregivers take care of you? Why or why not?
• What are some ways that your caregivers show they care about you?
• Who do you spend the most time with when living here? Which adult(s)? Which child(ren)?
  o Why?
  o What do you like doing with this person / these people?
  o Do you spend a lot of time with them, or a little?
• If something really good happened, what would be the first thing you would do?
  o Is there someone in particular you would share the good news with?
  o Give an example of sometime you shared good news with someone.
• If you were having a disagreement with someone, what do you do?
• If you were worried about something, what would you do?
• What do you want to be when you grow up? Why?
  o Do you think you’ll be able to do this? Why or why not?
• Do you go to school? If yes:
  o Do you like school? Why or why not?
  o How do you do in school?
  o What is the subject you like the most?
  o What is the subject you like the least?
• Do you go to church/chapel?
  o What do you like about church/chapel?
  o What do you dislike about church/chapel?
  o What is something important you’ve learned from church/chapel?
  o Do your residential parents talk to you about church/chapel?
• Do you do anything ‘church like’ here at home? For example, do you say prayers before bed, read bible stories, etc.?


Interview with residential caregivers

Demographics (addressing research question one)
• Name
• Gender
• Race or ethnicity
• Age
• Highest level of education
• How long have you worked here?
  o Is that different from how long you have worked in this kind of environment?
• Please describe the nature of your position here (e.g., what is the definition of a residential parent, what are your job duties or expectations of a residential parent, do you receive payment, do you get any time off, etc.).
• Did you receive training before working here?
• What does your typical day look like?
• What is the nature of your relationship with other adults who work here (e.g., spouse works here also, etc.)?
• What would you say is the overall purpose or function of a residential parent?

Safety (addressing research question one and two)
• What steps are taken to ensure a child’s safety, both here within the home and throughout campus?
• Has there ever been a problem regarding a child’s safety in the past?
• Do children, overall, perceive or feel they are safe here?
  o How is that accomplished?
  o What cues do you look for to assess children’s feelings of safety?

Permanency (addressing research question one and three)
• Do you ever talk with the children about their living situation? If so, how and when?
• How long are children allowed to stay here?
• Are children encouraged to stay the maximum amount of time?
• Is it common for children to stay the maximum amount of time?
• Generally, at what age do children come and how long do children stay here?
• What kinds of connections are maintained if children leave the home? How is this done?
• What feelings are displayed when children leave the home?

Well-being (addressing research question one and four)
• What are some of the positives about working here? What do you like most?
• What are some of the negatives about working here? What do you like least?
• Why did you choose to work here? In particular, why did you choose this environment as opposed to foster care, or group homes?
• Did you have new children arrive since you’ve been working here? If yes:
  o Do you remember what living environment they were coming from?
  o Can you describe their well-being upon arrival here?
  o Can you describe how their well-being has changed since they’ve been here?
  o What do you think caused those changes?
• Have you noticed any well-being changes (positive as well as negative) in children throughout their stay here?
  o If yes, what do you think has helped cause some of those changes?
• What steps does this home and Children’s Hope in general take to improve children’s well-being?
• In general, what is the level of satisfaction for the children who live here?
• What kind of relationships do you try to establish with the children? How do you go about doing this? Share examples of your more successful and less successful attempts to establish relationships with the children?
• What steps do you take to show the children you care about them?
• What does a typical day look like for children who live here?
• In general, how do the children fare academically? Socially? Emotionally?
  o Is that in comparison to other children in general, or is that a reflection of personal growth and/or change?
• Do you have any connections with alumni?
  o If yes, can you tell me about how they are faring?
• What are some religious practices (such as attending chapel, saying prayers, etc.) that occur commonly in this home and throughout Children’s Hope?
  o To what extent do you participate in these practices? Why or why not?
  o If yes, what is meaningful for you about these practices?
• Can you tell me about how your own spirituality impacts your life and work here?

Interview with program administrator
Demographics (addressing research question one)
• Name
• Gender
• Race or ethnicity
• Age
• Highest level of education
• Please describe the nature of your position here
• How long have you worked here?
• What, if any, experience have you had working with other forms (types) of foster and/or alternative care?
• How is your time in this position at PHC divided among activities such as contact with children, staff, contact funders, etc? What does your typical day look like?

Environment (addressing research question one)
• Please describe your overall feelings regarding Children’s Hope (CH)?
• What are the primary advantages of CH?
• What are the primary disadvantages of CH?
• How does CH differ from foster care?
• How does CH differ from other forms of alternative care?
• To your knowledge, are there any other organizations like CH in the U.S.?
  o Do you have any sort of network with these organizations?
• Why is it important to have organizations such as CH?
• How is the Christian mission of CH embodied in administrative decisions and daily life here at CH?
• Why did you choose to work here?
• What do you like most about your job?
• What do you like least about your job?
• What do you sense that staff members like most about their jobs at CH? Least?

Safety (addressing research questions one and two)
• What steps are taken to ensure a child’s safety, both within residential homes and throughout campus?
• Have there ever been any problems regarding a child’s safety in the past? If so, please describe.
• Have you or CH done anything differently (within homes and throughout campus) because of these experiences?

Permanency (addressing research questions one and three)
• How long are children allowed to stay here?
• Are children encouraged to stay the maximum amount of time?
• Is it common for children to stay the maximum amount of time? Why or why not?
• Generally, at what age do children come and how long do children stay here?
• What kinds of connections are maintained if children leave the home? How is this done?
• What feelings are displayed when children leave the home? By children? By staff?

Well-being (addressing research questions one and four)
• What steps does CH take in general to improve children’s well-being?
• In general, what is the level of satisfaction for the children who live here? How is this assessed?
• In general, how do the children fare academically? Socially? Emotionally? How is this assessed?
• Do you have any connections with alumni?
  o If yes, what is the nature of this connection?
  o If yes, can you tell me generally how alumni are faring?

Other (addressing research question one)
• Where do funds come from to support the work of CH?
• Who or what do you look to for supporting the mission of CH? For your personal well being in this position?
APPENDIX B: CODEBOOK

RQ 1: WHAT IS IT LIKE FOR CHILDREN WHO LACK ADEQUATE FAMILY CARE TO LIVE AND GROW UP IN A MODERN DAY ORPHANAGE?

Children's Hope

Alternative Care Format
Privately Funded
Focus on the Child
Who CH Serves
  Know who we can help
  Age Group and Siblings
  Permanent/Temporary
  Reasons for Placement
Location Entities and Description
  Central Campus
    Geographic Locale
    Grounds and Facilities
    Interior Buildings
  Ranch
    Outdoor
    Indoor
On-site Staff
  Executive Director
    Job Description
  Social Workers
  Houseparents
  Relief Houseparents
  Work Groups
  Sponsors

A Community and Family: cottages and campus

The Cottage: A family
  Environment
  CH mimics a family
Composition
  Central Campus Cottages
  Ranch Cottages
Houseparent
  Job Description (technical definitions and details)
  Relief
Purpose: Normal Parent
  Unconditional love
  Education
  What's Best for the Child
  Help them grow
What it's like:
  Learning Curve
  Engulfs your life
  Controlled Freedom
Caregiver Personality
Children
  Personalities
Living situation
  Positives:
    Alternative Responsibilities
    Outdoors Freedom
    Animals Games
    CH Family Biological Family
    Support/Care Food
    Friends
    Everyday family experiences
Negatives:
  CH Events
  Moving
  Boredom
  People

The Campus: A community
  Environment
  Advantages
  Disadvantages

A Day in the Life

Daily Routine
Get up and ready
   Ranch
   Central Campus
Meals
   Ranch
   Central Campus
Work/Jobs
   Ranch
   Central Campus
Play
   (inside)
   Ranch
   Central Campus
Play (outside)
   Ranch
   Central Campus
Chores
   Directed
   House
   Outdoor
   Animals
   Frequency
Hobbies
   Career
   Puzzles
   Relaxed
   Music
   Physical Activity/Sports
   Read
   Puzzles
   Arts and Crafts
   Animals
   Arts and
   Crafts
Electronics
   Ranch
   Central Campus
Animals
   Ranch
   Central Campus
Activities/ Appointments
   Ranch (assume also Central Campus)
Shopping
   Ranch
Central Campus
Transportation
Ranch (assume also Central Campus)
Go Out
Varies

School
Options: Public, Private, Homeschooled
Perceptions
People: Friends and Adversaries
Outside the House
Education
Teaching Methods
Teacher Effort
Achievement
Subjects
Like
Dislike
College
Volunteer
Formal Organization
Opportunity Arises
Lesson's Learned
Frequency
CH Events
Camps
Donated Events

RQ 2 - HOW IS SAFETY ADDRESSED?

Children's Perception of Safety

Ranch
Geographic location
Security
Dogs
Looked After/CH Family
Age
Other
Campus
Perception
Safe because of:
- Familiarity
- CH Family
- Security
Unsafe because of:
- Strangers
- Gangs
- Petty Theft
- Trespassing
- Unsafe location/neighborhood/environment
- Destruction of Property

Feel Safest
Geographic
Here

Ensuring Safety

Preventative Measures:
- Security Measures
- Health/Medical
Regulations:
- Cottage
- Animals
- Transportation
Cottage Composition: Gender Segregation

Responsive Measures
Aware -> Respond
Supervision
- Count
- Safety for themselves
- Safety from others
Accountability (-> = held accountable to)
- Organization -> Government Departments, External Organizations, and Community
- Staff -> Staff Hierarchy
- Children -> Staff
- Visitors -> Organization
RQ 3 - HOW IS PERMANENCY ADDRESSED?

Am I Gonna Stay Here?

Children's Perspectives/Wishes:
   Live Anywhere
      Geographic locale
      Here
   Live Anyone
      Biological/Reunification
      CH Family
      Don't Know
Reasons for Stability
   Long-term care
      Length of Stay
   Consistent Physical Location
Reasons for Instability:
   Moving from CH:
      Temporary Care
      Voluntary Placement: Family Reunification
      Sponsors
   Moving within CH:
      Safety
      Well-being
      Logistical

Unique Forms of Stability and Instability

Houseparents
   Stability and Turnover
CH Family
   Alumni Association
   CH Changes

RQ 4 - HOW IS WELL-BEING ADDRESSED?

Transformation: A Slow Evolution
Where they come from…

Previous living environments
- Broken Homes
  - Neglect and Abuse
  - Drugs, Alcohol, and Jail
  - Kinship Care
  - Low Expectations
  - Food Insecure

Well-being Upon Arrival
- Developmental Delays
- Socially/Emotionally Malnourished

Arrival (from the perspective of children)

Where they are now…

Current Residents:
- Psychological Well-being
  - Psychological Diagnosis
- Physical Well-being
- Social Well-being
  - Friends
  - CH Family Identity
  - CH Organization Identity
- Emotional Well-being
  - Access to CH Social Workers and other counselors
- Handling Experiences
  - Positive
    - Share or Internalize
  - Disagreements
    - Fight Back
    - Walk Away
    - Involve Parents: Mediators
    - Keep it to myself
    - Work it out yourself
    - Compromise
    - Stay Angry/Ignore
  - Worrying
    - Share or Internalize
- Academic Well-being
- Future Career
- Personal Attributes/Passion
Following Footsteps
Success or Failure
Work Ethic
Financial Concerns
Available Opportunities

Assessment of Well-being: Care Plans

Alumni:
Career
Family Life
Material Success
Cycles Broken

Depends

Reasons for Change:
Provided for (basic necessities met)
Relationships
Caregivers

Parenting Style and Personality
Embodiment of Care
Family
Pride in Accomplishments
Spending Time/Interacting
Reaching Out and Helping
Listening and Communicating
Physical Affection
Spend Personal Money
Stability
Feel Special
Another Chance
Maintaining Connections
Sacrificing
Trust
Supportive/Here for us
Love and Care

Siblings: CH Family
Administrative Staff
Biological Families
Siblings/Cousins
Parents

Friends
Christianity: true hope

Love of God -> His Children
  Spirituality for Strength
  Serving Christ
    Employment as Vocation
His Children -> His Children
  Administrative Support to Staff and Children
  Houseparent Staff to Children
  Giving Back
His Children -> God
  Teaching God's love
    Encourage spirituality
    Formal/Informal
    Group/Private
Church
  attendance/involvement
  perception
  youth group
  message received
  dislikes
Email sent on 12/06/2011

Dear Mr. ____,

I hope all is going well with you and your family since I’ve seen you last! I heard you now work at ___, and I hope that’s all going well too!

After leaving ___ at the end of July, I am continuing to work on my thesis. After coming back to Iowa, I transcribed and coded all my interviews and observation notes. Coding is essentially reading through all my material and assigning ‘codes’ or key words to sentences/paragraphs which describe what a participant was saying or sum up what I was observing. Organizing my codes allowed me to find categories and overarching themes.

Before we left, you expressed interest in reading my final manuscripts. I wanted to know if you would also like the opportunity to review my findings before I fully finish writing my manuscripts. This would essentially include looking through the document attached (a brief summary of my main points/key findings) to see if I’m on the right track. Essentially, I’m interested in hearing if you feel my themes and categories accurately represent life at ___.

If you are interested, the document is broken into four different sections to represent the four different research questions, with themes bolded and italicized. Everything written was derived from my interviews and the notes I took at ___. In addition, you will see that everything in the document has a fictitious name. If it’s alright with you, I have been referring to ___ as ‘Children’s Hope’.

In addition, if you are interested, I would be happy to send an electronic copy of your transcribed interview with me. It’s really up to you.

If you have the time and are interested, I’d love to hear your initial feedback, comments, or questions.

My thanks for all your continued help,

Elizabeth Zimmermann

Member Check Document

What's it Like to Grow Up and Live at Children's Hope?

*Children's Hope*

- Children’s Hope is a privately funded, alternative care format that focuses on the best interests of the children they serve
• Children’s Hope serves children of all ages (particularly sibling groups) who come from broken environments and are in need of short or long-term placement (and can function in a family environment).
• Children’s Hope has a central campus with varying facilities and outdoor play equipment/space; Children’s Hope also has a ranch location. In both situations, cottages are designed to feel like a home (not an institution). (For the sake of protecting identity, I will not be discussing the other campus)
• Children’s Hope has several staff (board, executive director, social workers, etc.)

A Community and Family: cottages and campus

• Every cottage is designed to mimic a family (to the best of their ability): children have ‘parents’ and ‘siblings’.
• A houseparent’s main purpose is to function like a normal parent (i.e., providing unconditional love and support). Houseparenting is a 24/7 job, which is very challenging, but can also be very rewarding
• Like their children, houseparents have a variety of personalities.
• Children very positively describe their current living situation and family, and have limited negatives
• The campus is a warm and welcoming community which offers many advantages to children in need of care, love, and support.

A Day in the Life

• A typical day includes meals, work/jobs, chores, playing, hobbies, animals, shopping, transportation, volunteering, etc – essentially, Children’s Hope families function like most normal families
• Children have several options for schools, and several are in (or soon starting) college. Children have varying perspectives regarding their school and also have varying academic achievement.

How does Children's Hope Address the First Child Welfare Goal of Safety?

Children's Perception of Safety

• All children interviewed felt safe on the ranch for varying reasons (primarily because they felt looked after by their family). Most children said the safest place they felt (ever) was at the ranch.
• Children had mixed feelings about safety on campus, primarily feeling safe because of Children’s Hope staff and family, and primarily unsafe because of the surrounding neighborhood
Ensuring Safety

- When possible, Children’s Hope takes precautionary measures to keep children safe (e.g., regular medical visits, cottage composition, etc.).
- Unable to prevent all unsafe situations, Children’s Hope works to stay aware of potential safety issues (most importantly by supervising children), and respond appropriately when an issue does arise.

How Does Children's Hope Address the Second Child Welfare Goal of Permanency?

Am I Gonna Stay Here?

- When asked if they could live anywhere, most responded that they would live on the ranch.
- When asked if they could live with anyone, most responded with their current houseparents.
- Children experience stability because Children’s Hope is designed to be long-term care for those who need it – children are allowed to stay through college and receive support (and come back home when need be).
- Children experience instability when they move from Children’s Hope. Children may originally only have needed a temporary placement, or children may be reunited with their biological family because parents may want their children back and are able to do so because of voluntary placement.

Unique Forms of Stability and Instability

- Children experience stability or instability in houseparent stability or houseparent turnover.
- Children experience stability in a consistent physical entity, but instability in changes of administration and other persons.

How Does Children's Hope Satisfy the Third Child Welfare Goal of Well-being?

A Butterfly Transformation: A Slow Evolution

- Although children come from varying backgrounds, all of them are broken homes, and their well-being upon arrival varies. Children themselves have mixed memories of what it was like when they first came to Children’s Hope.
- Children see significant improvements in well-being after living at Children’s Hope. Psychologically children receive the diagnosis and care they need. Physically children are provided for. Socially children find family identity. Emotionally
children receive love and care, and handle varying experiences differently. Future oriented, children have career dreams.

- Along the way, Children’s Hope assess well-being through care plans
- Although some alumni do not have high well-being, most have met career and family success (breaking the cycle).
- Primarily, children undergo positive changes in well-being because of the relationships they form. Relationships with caregivers play a major role, and children describe many ways in which their caregivers embody care. Children also develop relationships with their Children’s Hope siblings, Children’s Hope administration, and biological families.

**Christianity: true hope**

- Children’s Hope is a Christian organization that points children to “true hope”
- Staff see employment as vocation, and see themselves loving and serving others (particularly the children) because of the sacrifice Christ has made for His children (themselves).
- Support and love is circular: administration cares for houseparents, houseparents care for children, children serve others (e.g., volunteering) and are then taught about God
- Christian teachings are encouraged but never forced, either through formal/informal teachings and group/private activities.
- Church is mandatory, and children have very positive perceptions and have learned important lessons

Email received on 12/06/11

Elizabeth,

Thank you for the opportunity to look at your findings.

We are doing well, although we miss the staff and children in ___, my family is enjoying getting to know ...

I think that your observations are a good summary of life at ___ and it was helpful for me to see what you learned through talking with our children.

I would like to see more as you complete it and yes, I would like the copy of our interview…

Thank you for your work on this and if you need anything else, let me know.

___
Email sent on February 13, 2012

Dear Mr. ___,

I hope all is going well for you and your family at the ___ campus! Life has been busy here, but what else can be expected from graduate school😊

The good news is that I’ll be graduating in May, and the even better news is that my thesis work is nearly complete! As you previously requested, I am sending electronic copies of my two manuscripts. These manuscripts represent the bulk of my thesis and are in their near final form (they will still undergo some edits from my professors and slight changes to fit with journal requirements).

If you are still willing, I am sending them to you in order to verify their accuracy. Everything I have written has been analyzed and pulled from my observational notes and interviews. It would be incredibly helpful to me if you would be willing to read through them and let me know if:

- Any information is inaccurate or you feel misrepresentative
- If I have accurately captured life at Children’s Hope
- Any overall or specific comments or suggestions you wish to offer

For the sake of confidentiality (because you know who I spent time with), I am not identifying any quotes in this version of the manuscripts I am sending you (I did, however, leave your quotes identified with your fictional name). When I submit these articles for publication, they will all be labeled with fictional names.

If you could please use track changes when making edits that will be easiest for me. If you would like to email these manuscripts back to me that would be fine, otherwise we can discuss over the phone if you would prefer at a time convenient for you.

I know you have a lot to do on a daily basis, but I was wondering if it would be possible to get any feedback returned to me by March 5th (that’s three weeks from today)?

Please let me know if you are still interested in reviewing these documents or if you would like any additional information.

Finally, at this point in time I would appreciate if you kept this information confidential.

Thank again for all your support in this research.

Elizabeth
Email received on 03/05/12

Thanks, Elizabeth.

I read chapter 3 and glanced over chapter 4. I will attempt to look closer at chapter 4 later this afternoon. Thank you for the opportunity to read it. You have done a good job.

Everywhere you ask for an accuracy check, the answer is yes. What you have written is accurate.

CH. 3

Not sure about your requirements but if it is allowed, feel free to edit “um” and anything else out of my quotes that causes it to read rough.

Under work routine – the age is ten instead of nine

Thanks, Elizabeth!!
APPENDIX D: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY
OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Institutional Review Board
Office for Responsible Research
Vice President for Research
1138 Pearson Hall
Ames, Iowa 50011-2207
515-294-4566
FAX 515-294-4567

Date: 6/30/2011
To: Elizabeth Zimmermann
2931 West Street Unit 1
Ames, IA 50014

CC: Dr. Janet Nieuwsma Melby
2625 N Loop Dr
Dr. Brenda Lohman
2330 Palmer, Suite 6230

From: Office for Responsible Research

Title: Modern Day Orphanages: Exploring What it is Like to Grow Up in a Stable, Long-Term Residential Children’s Home

IRB Num: 11-198

Approval Date: 6/29/2011
Continuing Review Date: 5/15/2012
Submission Type: New
Review Type: Full Committee

The project referenced above has received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Iowa State University. Please refer to the IRB ID number shown above in all correspondence regarding this study.

Your study has been approved according to the dates shown above. To ensure compliance with federal regulations (45 CFR 46 & 21 CFR 56), please be sure to:

- Use only the approved study materials in your research, including the recruitment materials and informed consent documents that have the IRB approval stamp.
- Obtain IRB approval prior to implementing any changes to the study by submitting the “Continuing Review and/or Modification” form.
- Immediately inform the IRB of (1) all serious and/or unexpected adverse experiences involving risks to subjects or others; and (2) any other unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others.
- Stop all research activity if IRB approval lapses, unless continuation is necessary to prevent harm to research participants. Research activity can resume once IRB approval is reestablished.
- Complete a new continuing review form at least three to four weeks prior to the date for continuing review as noted above to provide sufficient time for the IRB to review and approve continuation of the study. We will send a courtesy reminder as this date approaches.

Research investigators are expected to comply with the principles of the Belmont Report, and state and federal regulations regarding the involvement of humans in research. These documents are located on the Office for Responsible Research website http://www.compliance.iastate.edu/irb/forms/ or available by calling (515) 294-4566.

Upon completion of the project, please submit a Project Closure Form to the Office for Responsible Research, 1138 Pearson Hall, to officially close the project.
Date: 7/27/2011
To: Elizabeth Zimmermann
    2931 West Street Unit 1
    Ames, IA 50014

CC: Dr. Janet Nieuwsma Melby
    2625 N Loop Dr
    Dr. Brenda Lohman
    2330 Palmer, Suite 6230

From: Office for Responsible Research

Title: Modern Day Orphanages: Exploring What it is Like to Grow Up in a Stable, Long-Term Residential Children’s Home

IRB Num: 11-198

Approval Date: 7/27/2011  Continuing Review Date: 5/16/2012
Submission Type: Modification  Review Type: Expedited

The project referenced above has received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Iowa State University. Please refer to the IRB ID number shown above in all correspondence regarding this study.

Your study has been approved according to the dates shown above. To ensure compliance with federal regulations (45 CFR 46 & 21 CFR 56), please be sure to:

- Use only the approved study materials in your research, including the recruitment materials and informed consent documents that have the IRB approval stamp.
- Obtain IRB approval prior to implementing any changes to the study by submitting the “Continuing Review and/or Modification” form.
- Immediately inform the IRB of (1) all serious and/or unexpected adverse experiences involving risks to subjects or others; and (2) any other unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others.
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Research investigators are expected to comply with the principles of the Belmont Report, and state and federal regulations regarding the involvement of humans in research. These documents are located on the Office for Responsible Research website http://www.compliance.iastate.edu/irb/forms/ or available by calling (515) 294-4586.

Upon completion of the project, please submit a Project Closure Form to the Office for Responsible Research, 1138 Pearson Hall, to officially close the project.
Iowa State University
Of Science and Technology

Date: 10/20/2011
To: Elizabeth Zimmermann
2931 West Street Unit 1
Ames, IA 50014

CC: Dr. Janet Nieuwsma Melby
2625 N Loop Dr
Dr. Brenda Lohman
2330 Palmer, Suite 6230

From: Office for Responsible Research

Title: Modern Day Orphanages: Exploring What it is Like to Grow Up in a Stable, Long-Term Residential Children's Home

IRB ID: 11-196

Approval Date: 10/18/2011 Date for Continuing Review: 5/16/2012

Submission Type: Modification Review Type: Full Committee

The project referenced above has received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Iowa State University according to the dates shown above. Please refer to the IRB ID number shown above in all correspondence regarding this study.

To ensure compliance with federal regulations (45 CFR 46 & 21 CFR 56), please be sure to:

- Use only the approved study materials in your research, including the recruitment materials and informed consent documents that have the IRB approval stamp.
- Retain signed informed consent documents for 3 years after the close of the study, when documented consent is required.
- Obtain IRB approval prior to implementing any changes to the study by submitting a Modification Form for Non-Exempt Research or Amendment for Personnel Changes form, as necessary.
- Immediately inform the IRB of (1) any serious and/or unexpected adverse experiences involving risks to subjects or others; and (2) any other unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others.
- Stop all research activity if IRB approval lapses, unless continuation is necessary to prevent harm to research participants. Research activity can resume once IRB approval is reestablished.
- Complete a new continuing review form at least three to four weeks prior to the date for continuing review as noted above to provide sufficient time for the IRB to review and approve continuation of the study. We will send a courtesy reminder as this date approaches.
- Upon completion of the project, please submit a Project Closure Form to the Office for Responsible Research, 1138 Pearson Hall, to officially close the project.

Please don't hesitate to contact us if you have questions or concerns at 515-294-4566 or IRB@iastate.edu.
Date: 11/4/2011
To: Elizabeth Zimmermann
2931 West Street Unit 1
Ames, IA 50014

CC: Dr. Janet Nieuwsma Melby
2625 N Loop Dr
Dr. Brenda Lohman
2330 Palmer, Suite 6230

From: Office for Responsible Research

Title: Modern-Day Orphanages: Exploring What it is Like to Grow Up in a Stable, Long-Term Residential Children's Home

IRB ID: 11-198

Approval Date: 11/4/2011 Date for Continuing Review: 5/16/2012
Submission Type: Modification Review Type: Expedited

The project referenced above has received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Iowa State University according to the dates shown above. Please refer to the IRB ID number shown above in all correspondence regarding this study.

To ensure compliance with federal regulations (46 CFR 46 & 21 CFR 56), please be sure to:

- Use only the approved study materials in your research, including the recruitment materials and informed consent documents that have the IRB approval stamp.
- Retain signed informed consent documents for 3 years after the close of the study, when documented consent is required.
- Obtain IRB approval prior to implementing any changes to the study by submitting a Modification Form for Non-Exempt Research or Amendment for Personnel Changes form, as necessary.
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Please don't hesitate to contact us if you have questions or concerns at 515-294-4566 or IRB@iastate.edu.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


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http://www.houseparent.net/newdirectory.shtml


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I would also like to acknowledge and thank my family and friends who have supported me throughout my experience. My loving husband, who has spent countless hours encouraging and listening, helping brainstorm and problem solve, daily throughout my time here at ISU. My friends, who through informal conversations have helped guide and direct my research, in addition to providing much needed emotional and social support. And finally my family, who encouraged me throughout my undergraduate degree to pursue my Master of Science degree, bolstered me along the way, and who continue to support me in all my endeavors.