

Participants' Perceptions of an Urban After-school
Employment Program: A Phenomenological Qualitative Study

Presented to
the Faculty of the Graduate School
of Millersville University of Pennsylvania

In partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Social Work

By Alexandria L. Patrick

March 2019

This Dissertation for the Doctoral (Program) Degree by
Alexandria L. Patrick
has been approved on behalf of the
Graduate School by

Dissertation Committee:
signatures are on file

Marc V. Felizzi, Ph.D., Chair

Juliana Svistova, Ph.D.

Heather Girvin, Ph. D.

Dedication



This dissertation is dedicated to Carl: the man, the myth, the legend. Carl passed away unexpectedly on June 1, 2018. I first met Carl about a decade ago when we crossed paths at an urban after-school program where Carl served many years of his life dedicated to empowering the lives of urban youth. I worked with Carl for three years and continued to volunteer at the program on a regular basis for the past seven years after moving on to other job opportunities.

Words cannot describe the larger-than-life fire-cracker of a guy that was Carl. It didn't matter who you were, if you met him once, you were certain to have a lasting image in your head. Carl made me laugh every time that I saw him and the contagious charisma of his smile never went unnoticed. His presence alone could turn a bad mood into full-bellied laughter. But even more than that, Carl was an amazing man who dedicated a great part of his life to his "second home." It would be impossible to count the number of lives he has changed and impacted throughout the years—youth, adolescents, staff members, volunteers, and parents alike. He will be so deeply missed by the program that he served, but I am certain that his unforgettable, kid-at-heart, crazy, wonderful memory will live on for generations to come.

An anonymous friend of Carl's wrote on his public obituary guest book "What a great man! More of our black children need a great leader like him in their lives if not in the home. Very special to see such a great person at work in the lives of impressionable children. Rest easy and watch over all those kids."

All of the youth who were interviewed for this dissertation knew Carl, and many referenced him as a positive source or role model in their lives. Carl joked about one day calling me “Doctor Lex” when I finally finished this three-year pursuit. Although I won’t get to hear those words come from his mouth, it gives me peace to dedicate my work to Carl and to acknowledge that many of the positive results of the program’s efforts are directly attributed to this man.

Acknowledgements

I would like to, first and foremost, thank the Millersville and Kutztown academia communities for the education and support provided in the Doctor of Social Work joint program. This was my first experience in a cohort-style of learning and also in a partially-online program. I was blown away by the connections and bonds made with professors and cohort members alike. This program exceeded my expectations and never left me feeling alone. I can honestly say that I have formed lifelong relationships in this program and a network system with some of the most intelligent people that I have the honor to know.

I extend my deepest gratitude to the chair of my dissertation committee, Dr. Marc V. Felizzi. Dr. Felizzi's brilliant yet down-to-earth approach kept me motivated, made me feel a connection to my goal, and inspired me to accomplish one task after the next, or as he would say "hurdle by hurdle." Dr. Felizzi was always quick to respond to my incessant questions and powered through pages and pages of my word vomit with lightning speed! I am so appreciative of his editing skills and the time that he dedicated to capture every error. Dr. Felizzi provided me with a sense of direction when I was lost and helped me to restructure and focus my ideas when they were scattered. I cannot thank you enough for your time, energy, and laid-back spirit.

I want to sincerely thank the remaining members of my committee, Drs. Juliana Svistova and Heather Girvin. Dr. Svistova is a true mastermind of qualitative research and provided me with the education and experience that I have with this type of work through her Qualitative Analysis course and the two Independent Studies that I was able to complete under her watch. Dr. Svistova fielded hundreds of my questions and helped me to make sense of a vast quantity of data to move forward with generalized themes.

Dr. Girvin's attitude towards life made a huge impact on me and an extremely positive first impression of the DSW program when I met her through my first Leadership course in the program. Dr. Girvin's advice to always face life with "compassion and grace" stuck with me throughout the past three years and has made an impact on not only the person that I am, but the person that I continue to strive to be. Dr. Girvin is also a stellar editor. Although it may have taken her a bit longer to return my work submissions, the pages came back more alive than ever, and I learned so much about APA and writing, including the elimination of anthropomorphism in my writing and also eliminating the "fluff."

Although not an official member of my committee, I would like to extend thanks to Aunt Marsha, my outside "reader" and "coach." I say coach rather than cheerleader because I think that Aunt Marsha would prefer this! A member of the PhD club herself, Aunt Marsh was invested in my work from the start and supported me every step of the way, often providing me with nuggets of her ineffable wisdom. Aunt Marsh spent time reading and providing feedback on my work that included a unique perspective or angle that my committee did not offer. I am forever appreciative of this time and wisdom. I am so honored to have received the passed down graduation cap and tassel and will wear this with pride on graduation day.

Next, my cohort. Where to even begin with this crew?! From our very first messages on GroupMe where we were feeling each other out, to group projects in Dr. Yeboah's class, to our SPSS memes, to Marla's barn party, to supporting each other through life's ups and downs over the past three years... I can't possibly put everything into words here. I always felt supported by this group, and it was reassuring to know that there were others out there who "got it" during the times of struggle. To two cohort members that I formed very close relationships with, Ally and Micah, or as we call ourselves, "MAL" practice: we shared some great times, from spending the

night in “Minnie,” to the music festival, to our never-ending group chats, to their attendance at my wedding in 2017. I continue to cherish not only their ongoing support, but their friendship. Our whole cohort was certainly unique, to say the least, but I believe that our eclectic variety of personalities blended magnificently, and I wouldn’t trade a single one of you throughout this experience. I have grown as a person because of your impact.

A huge thanks to Dave for being the gatekeeper to my study with the after-school program. Along with Roseann and Chance, Dave spent much of his own time helping me to recruit willing participants for my study. I am forever grateful for this assistance and would not have accomplished this study without his support.

To my family and friends: thank you for your continued love despite my distance over the past three years! I missed so many nights hanging with friends, going on family weekend trips, spending time with my mother-in-law, travelling, or catching up due to what felt like writing, writing, and more writing. 2019 and beyond will bring plenty of cookouts, gatherings, and time spent together!

To my mom - thank you for listening to my incessant ramblings about school and for taking the time to read various paper submissions and provide your input! You sparked so many ideas without even trying to, and you always invest your time, attention, and concern into everything I do. Mom and Dad - thanks for your unwavering support. I mean it when I say that I couldn’t have done it without you! It feels so good to make both of you proud and I love you so much.

And last, but certainly not least - thanks to my husband, Brody. You have truly been my rock throughout this process and supported me every step of the way. Together, we have accomplished so much in the past three years: the completion of your Master’s degree, our

engagement, buying a new home, getting married, adding a second fur-baby to the family, and dealing with life as it has come our way—the ups, the downs, and everything in between. You have held our household together and picked up in all places where I was slacking. I cannot thank you enough for your love and support and look forward to what the future holds for us as a family.

Abstract

Aftercare programs are deemed to be a critical prevention tool and integral component on the spectrum of juvenile justice interventions (Abrams, Mizel, Nguyen, & Shlonsky, 2014). The purpose of this phenomenological study was to identify how youth enrolled in a western Pennsylvania urban after-school employment program perceive the program to affect them and to determine whether the program's intended goals and competencies align with youth perceptions of goals and competencies gained from the program. The participants included nine youth who were members of an urban after-school employment program. The four themes that emerged as findings through the coding and analysis process include interpersonal skills, self-efficacy, decreased maladaptive activity, and professional competencies. The findings of this study provide insight for after-school employment programming and shed light on the goals and competencies that youth perceive to be most beneficial.

Table of Contents

| | |
|--|-------------|
| LIST OF TABLES..... | XII |
| LIST OF FIGURES..... | XIII |
| CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION | 1 |
| STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM | 1 |
| DESCRIPTION OF THE PROBLEM | 2 |
| PURPOSE OF THE STUDY..... | 3 |
| RELEVANCE TO SOCIAL WORK | 5 |
| RESEARCH QUESTIONS | 6 |
| CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW | 7 |
| THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK | 7 |
| <i>Social learning theory.</i> | 8 |
| <i>Social learning theory and juvenile crime.</i> | 10 |
| <i>Application of social learning theory to the current study.</i> | 10 |
| JUVENILE OFFENDERS IN THE UNITED STATES..... | 12 |
| AFTERCARE SERVICES | 13 |
| HISTORY OF THE JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM IN THE UNITED STATES | 14 |
| AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS | 16 |
| GAPS IN THE RESEARCH..... | 20 |
| CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODS | 22 |
| QUALITATIVE RESEARCH JUSTIFICATION..... | 22 |
| SAMPLING..... | 23 |
| DATA COLLECTION METHODS | 23 |
| DATA ANALYSIS | 24 |
| <i>Transcription.</i> | 24 |
| <i>The codebook.</i> | 25 |
| <i>The coding process.</i> | 25 |
| <i>Analysis.</i> | 27 |
| <i>Validation.</i> | 27 |
| REFLEXIVITY AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS | 28 |
| STATEMENT OF POSITIONALITY | 30 |
| CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS | 34 |
| PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS | 35 |
| THEME 1: INTERPERSONAL SKILLS | 36 |
| <i>Relations with family members.</i> | 36 |
| <i>Professional communication skills.</i> | 37 |
| <i>Relationships with staff.</i> | 39 |
| <i>Interpersonal skills.</i> | 39 |
| THEME 2: SELF-EFFICACY | 40 |
| <i>Maturity and motivation.</i> | 41 |
| <i>Independence and responsibility.</i> | 43 |
| <i>Hopes for a successful future.</i> | 44 |
| THEME 3: DECREASED MALADAPTIVE ACTIVITY | 46 |

| | |
|--|-----------|
| <i>Decreased maladaptive activity, “off the streets”</i> | 47 |
| <i>Payment of court fees, fines, restitution</i> | 48 |
| <i>Change in peer group</i> | 48 |
| THEME 4: PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCIES | 50 |
| <i>Job roles and training</i> | 51 |
| <i>Financial literacy</i> | 52 |
| <i>Time management</i> | 54 |
| <i>Career building</i> | 55 |
| PROGRAM INTENDED VERSUS PERCEIVED GOALS AND COMPETENCIES..... | 56 |
| <i>Program competencies</i> | 56 |
| <i>Program Goals</i> | 58 |
| CHANGES TO THE PROGRAM..... | 60 |
| CONCLUSION..... | 61 |
| CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION | 64 |
| CONNECTION TO LITERATURE..... | 64 |
| CONNECTION TO THEORY | 66 |
| IMPLICATIONS OF THE FINDINGS FOR PRACTICE | 68 |
| RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH | 70 |
| LIMITATIONS..... | 71 |
| CONCLUSION..... | 73 |
| REFERENCES | 75 |
| APPENDIX A | 90 |
| APPENDIX B | 93 |
| APPENDIX C | 96 |

List of Tables

| | | |
|---------|---|----|
| Table 1 | Participant Demographics | 48 |
| Table 2 | Program Competencies and Corresponding Codes | 70 |
| Table 3 | Individual Participant Perceived Increase in Competencies | 70 |
| Table 4 | Program Goals and Corresponding Codes | 71 |
| Table 5 | Individual Participant Perceived Increase in Goals | 71 |

List of Figures

| | | |
|----------|-------------------|----|
| Figure 1 | Summary of themes | 74 |
|----------|-------------------|----|

Chapter 1: Introduction

Statement of the Problem

Juvenile crime is a major social problem in the United States (Barnes, 2008; Flynn, 1983; Hutchins, 2015; Thompson, 2012). The United States Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (2017) reports that there were 856,130 arrests of persons under age 18 in 2016. It is estimated that over 80,000 adjudicated youth in the juvenile justice system return to their communities following a period of custody each year and that over 50% of these youth are rearrested in three years or less (Weaver & Campbell, 2015). Tapia, Alarid, and Enriquez (2013) explain that a variety of factors contribute to youth involvement in the criminal justice system, including “alcohol and drug use, family violence, low parental involvement, poor school performance, and deviant peers” (Tapia et al., 2013, p. 2).

Juvenile crime affects not only the youth involved, but their families, friends, and the community at large. It affects United States citizens at a national level, as taxpayers bear the financial burden for treating and incarcerating juveniles through adulthood (Thompson, 2012). It is for this reason that after-school programs are deemed to be a critical prevention tool and integral component on the spectrum of juvenile justice interventions (Abrams, Mizel, Nguyen, & Shlonsky, 2014).

There is a vast amount of research regarding juvenile justice and the rehabilitation of youth offenders (Barrett & Katsiyannis, 2015; Hirsch, Dierkhising, & Herz, 2018; Mathur & Clark, 2014; Robst, Armstrong, & Dollard, 2017; Spencer & Jones-Walker, 2004; Troutman, 2018; Yampolskaya & Chuang, 2012). Existing research tends to take a narrow view of reentry outcomes and primarily emphasizes recidivism rates, rather than identifying if youth succeed in a number of other critical domains, such as school, finding work, and developing prosocial peer

friendships (Spencer & Jones-Walker, 2004). Further, only a small fraction of this research takes into consideration the perspectives of youth offenders on the effects of intervention programs (Fields & Abrams, 2010).

Description of the Problem

The results of several studies show that the hours immediately following a typical school day pose the opportunity for adolescents to engage in criminal behavior (Ouellette, Hutchinson, & Frant, 2005; Sickmund, Snyder, & Poe-Yamagata, 1997; Snyder & Sickmund, 1999, 2006; Snyder, Sickmund, and Poe-Yamagata, 1996; U.S. Department of Justice, 2000). It is estimated that over 15 million children and youth in the United States lack adult supervision during non-school hours in a typical work week (Ouellette et al., 2005) and that the period of time between 3:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m. are the peak hours for juvenile crime and experimenting with drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, and sex (Afterschool Alliance, 2014; U.S. Department of Justice, 2000). Gottfredson, Gottfredson, and Weisman (2001) state that youth who are unsupervised during after-school hours are found to be more likely to engage in criminal behavior at all times, not only after school.

These trends have considerably increased the attention of policymakers and youth service programs to youth aftercare and employment opportunities (Brown, O'Sullivan, & Maxwell, 2005) and have helped to contribute to the increase in public support for after-school programs as a crime prevention tool (Soule, Gottfredson, & Bauer, 2008). Municipal leaders recognize the link between quality of life, the economic viability of cities, and the availability of high quality after-school programs (Ouellette et al., 2005). Mayors and city council members want to ensure that our youth receive the proper supports so that they can eventually contribute to society, the workforce, and the tax base of their communities (Ouellette et al., 2005). Therefore, after-school

programs have received great attention and support from stakeholders and community members, with extra emphasis on programs that offer employment or competency-based services to adjudicated youth in an effort to reduce crime rates (Ouellette et al., 2005).

The goal to reduce the recidivism rates of juvenile offenders by offering employment and mentor services has seen an increase in both support and recognition for its potential to contribute to the positive development of adjudicated youth (Braithwaite & Mugford, 1994; Carruthers, 2006; Izzo & Ross, 1990; James, Stams, Asscher, De Roo, & van der Laan, 2013; Kauffman, Wyman, Forbes-Jones, & Barry, 2007; Weaver & Campbell, 2015). In the past, programs operated with the intent of “prevention” or “reduction;” however, current program outcomes are more likely to target positive qualities and competencies in youth, with the goal of producing competent and productive adolescents and adults (MacDonald & Valdivieso, 2001).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological, qualitative study is to describe the lived experiences of juvenile offenders enrolled in a western Pennsylvania after-school employment program, located in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The city of Pittsburgh encompasses 17 different zip codes and is the second most populous city in the state of Pennsylvania. In 2016, the city had a population of 303,625 people (United States Census Bureau, 2016). This study aims to capture how the youth perceive the program to affect them and aims to determine whether the program’s intended goals and competencies align with youth perceptions of goals and competencies gained from the program. Although this study will only be generalizable to the sample of youth who are interviewed, the insight pertaining to aftercare programming could serve as a template for the rest of the country.

The program, located in Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, offers court-ordered employment/remediation services as well as competency-based prevention strategies that emphasize the personal qualities of responsibility, self-esteem, sociability, self-management, and integrity (Program Director, Personal Communication, August 28, 2017). Juveniles who are referred by the court to the program are employed at a minimum-wage rate, where half of their paycheck goes towards restitution costs and court fees, and the other half is deposited into their personal bank accounts (Program Director, Personal Communication, August 28, 2017). The program aims to prepare youth for future success in the workforce by providing them with the knowledge and skills to work a full-time job. Training focuses on the goals of exiting the juvenile justice system, the prevention of recidivism, and the provision of job training, career building, and financial literacy skills (Program Director, Personal Communication, August 28, 2017).

Many factors are said to contribute to criminal behavior of juveniles (Barnes, 2008; Chung, Mulvey, & Steinberg, 2011; Flannery, Williams, & Vazsonyi, 1999). Although research has been done on the success rates and effectiveness of after-school employment programs (Abrams et al., 2014; Bullis & Yovanoff, 2002; Caldwell, 2005; Carruthers, 2006; Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Soule, Gottfredson, & Bauer, 2008; Trout et al., 2010; Weaver & Campbell, 2015; Witt & Caldwell, 2005), studies tend to be outcome-focused, based upon recidivism statistics (Harris, Lockwood, Mengers, & Stoodley, 2009; Kadish, Glaser, Calhoun, & Risler, 1999; Spencer & Jones-Walker, 2004), and do not always represent the perceptions that juvenile offenders themselves have for after-school programming (Fields & Abrams, 2010).

Relevance to Social Work

According to Anthony et al. (2010), “one of the major limitations of the research on the community re-entry of juvenile offenders is the overall lack of recent studies in the last 20 years” (p. 1272). Relatively little research has been conducted on the effectiveness of innovative aftercare approaches, and findings have not provided clear-cut guidance for future policy or programmatic directions (Weibush, Wagner, McNulty, Wang, & Le, 2005). Existing research utilizes the etic perspective as it is relayed through the lens of justice system personnel, lawmakers, families, and practitioners, rather than the youth who live the experience (Fields & Abrams, 2010; Hennegler et al., 2009; Piquero, Cullen, Unnever, Piquero, & Gordon, 2010; Rooney, 2010; Tuell, 2003; Wu, 2004). While one may argue a value for both perspectives, the emic perspective aligns with the social work values on human rights, particularly embracing the core values of dignity and worth of a person, importance of human relationships, and competence (National Association of Social Workers, 2017). The emic perspective is more relevant in accomplishing the identified research questions and embraces the concept that it is impossible to truly comprehend and appreciate the nuances of the specific population of youth from an outside lens (Garcia, 1992; Godina & McCoy, 2000; Saville-Troike, 1989).

The proposed research question - “How do youth enrolled in an urban after-school employment program perceive the program to affect them?” - is important to social work practice, policy, and theory. Fields and Abrams (2010) state that “understanding youth perception is important, as research has shown that offenders’ perceptions and expectations about returning home often correlate with actual reentry experiences” (p. 255). This study aims to fill the gap in research by specifically discussing the effects that an after-school program has on youth who have participated in the program. If social work practitioners can identify the

critical components to successful after-school employment programs, as identified by the youth who participate in the programs, a direct positive influence can be made on the development of youth and their contributions to society. Through understanding the factors that the youth deem to be most important to programming and embracing a strengths-based approach, we can directly contribute to their personal success, as gaining knowledge from the youth may give insight into specific events and components that lead to paths of achievement (Hutchins, 2015). In addition, lawmakers, juvenile justice system personnel, mental health professionals, social workers, and programming agencies may gain awareness into areas where treatment and program models can be improved to build upon current community-based aftercare programming so that our society may become more adept in serving juvenile offenders (Hutchins, 2015).

Research Questions

Using the phenomenological qualitative research approach, this study addresses the following research questions:

1. How do adjudicated youth enrolled in an urban after-school employment program perceive the program to affect them?
2. Do the program's intended goals and competencies align with youth perceived goals and competencies?

Chapter 2: Literature Review

A literature search was conducted to capture the definitions of the study variables, gain insight on the history and transformation of the juvenile justice system in the United States, outline the theory that underpins the nature of this study, and review literature that addresses the effectiveness of after-school programs for juvenile offenders. Due to the dearth in literature over the past 20 years that focuses on community re-entry of juvenile offenders (Anthony et al., 2010), the researcher has incorporated studies that span beyond the past decade in order to provide a greater variety of research conducted on this topic.

Several resources were utilized to obtain information for the literature review. The Francine G. McNairy Library and Learning Forum at Millersville Library was utilized to search for related research articles, books, dissertations, and academic journals. Some of the databases that were used include: PsycINFO, ProQuest, PsycArticles, EBSCOhost, Educational Resources Information Centre (ERIC), Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention publications (OJJDP), SAGE Journals online, Criminal Justice Abstracts, and Google Scholar. Some of the journals that were used include: Justice Quarterly, Clinical Psychology Review, Journal of Juvenile Justice, Criminology and Public Policy, Pace Law Review, and Journal of Evidence-Based Social Work. Some of the search terms that were used to search for relevant literature include: juvenile, delinquency, youth, aftercare, after-school, employment program, effectiveness, outcomes, juvenile delinquency, juvenile offenders, juvenile recidivism, and juvenile aftercare programs.

Theoretical Framework

An abundance of theories have been used to explain the complexity of juvenile delinquency: psychoanalytic theory, cognitive development theory, learning theory,

constitutional learning theory, deterrence theory, differential association, labeling theory, strain theory, and social learning theory (Rogers, 2013). This study will embrace social learning theory as its theoretical underpinnings, as this theory has provided a number of areas for consideration of prevention and treatment of juvenile offenders (Felizzi, 2011).

The social learning model is social-psychological in nature and deals with the association between social variables and individual activities (Conger, 1976). The theory suggests that behavior is learned and that if an individual has the ability to learn maladaptive behaviors, he or she can learn to replace the maladaptive behaviors with more positive behaviors (Bartol & Bartol, 2005). Akers (1973) refers to social learning theory as the combined body of information that is derived from studies in classical and operant conditioning and modeling and posits that as situations change, behavior will change to fit new circumstances. Social learning theory will be explicated in this section to include the origin of the theory, information pertaining to this theory, and the application of the theory to the current study with juvenile offenders and after-school programming.

Social learning theory. Concepts of social learning theory can be traced back to the 1940s with B.F. Skinner and his lectures in Sunyani Fiapre, Ghana, on verbal behavior, stimulus-response, and operant conditioning (Skinner, 1947). Skinner (1938) posited that the behavior of an individual will remain stable if the variations that lead to reinforcements are stable and consistent, but that behavior can be altered through the manipulation of certain variables. He deemed that reinforcement and punishment are ultimately the core determinants of positive or negative behavioral outcomes (Skinner, 1938).

Around the same time period, Clark Lewis Hull headed a group at Yale University to advocate on behalf of stimulus-response theories (Hull, 1930). It was under Hull's directive that

John Dollard and Neil Miller aimed to reinterpret the psychoanalytic theory and published the book, *Social Learning Theory*, in 1941 (Hull, 1930).

During the 1960s and 1970s, the work of Robert Sears and Albert Bandura is said to have directly contributed to social learning theory (Grusec, 1992). Bandura expanded upon Skinner's radical behaviorism work and added the concept of modeling behaviors (Grusec, 1992). Their work quickly evolved into forms of learning theories that were informed by concepts from information-processing theory (Grusec, 1992).

Although a number of theorists contributed to the ultimate creation of social learning theory, Robert Burgess and Ronald Akers are considered to be the pioneers of the theory (Burgess & Akers, 1966). Burgess and Akers set out to develop a more precise explanation of Edwin Sutherland's differential association theory and built upon the behavior theories set forth by Albert Bandura (Simons, Simons, & Wallace, 2004).

Social learning theory is built on the concepts of learning and social behavior and proposes that new behaviors can be acquired by observing and imitating others (Bandura, 1971). Akers (1977) indicates that the primary learning mechanism in social behavior is operant conditioning in which behavior is shaped by the resulting consequences of the behavior. Further, social behavior is learned through both direct conditioning and imitation (modeling) and is strengthened through reward and avoidance of punishment (Akers, 1977). Aligning with the proposition set forth by Akers, Bandura (1977) states that most human behavior is learned by observing others (modeling). Through the observation process, one forms an idea as a reference or guide for action and interprets experiences by integrating them with existing understandings of the world (Bandura, 1977).

Social learning theory and juvenile crime. Pratt et al. (2010) applied the concept of social learning theory to juvenile crime in that we can expect criminal behavior to be perpetuated in social environments where it is already reinforced and where differential association with pro-criminal definitions and behavioral patterns currently exist. Burgess and Akers (1966) proposed that association with criminals is not enough to explain one's engagement in crime, but that crime itself also provides reinforcing rewards in the absence of punishment. Although a form of social learning theory, this concept was labeled "differential association-reinforcement theory" in 1966 (Tasgin, 2012). Akers (1985) stated that more time spent or involvement with deviant peers will expose an individual to deviant definitions, models of behavior, and reinforcement (Tasgin, 2012). Akers (1998) summarized social learning theory and crime in one proposition:

The probability that persons will engage in criminal and deviant behavior is increased and the probability of their conforming to the norm is decreased when they differentially associate with others who commit criminal behavior and espouse definitions favorable to it, are relatively more exposed in person or symbolically to salient criminal/deviant models, define it as desirable or justified in a situation discriminative for the behavior, and have received in the past and anticipate in the current or future situation relatively greater than punishment for the behavior. (p. 50)

Application of social learning theory to the current study. When analyzing the propositions set forth by Burgess and Akers (1966) and Pratt et al. (2010), the concept of the social learning theory and juvenile crime can be applied to the parameters of the present qualitative study that seeks to elicit youth perspectives of an urban after-school employment program in western Pennsylvania. Youth who spend after-school hours in an unmonitored or unsupervised setting are at the greatest risk for experimenting with drugs, alcohol, cigarettes,

sex, or engaging in juvenile crime (Afterschool Alliance, 2014; U.S. Department of Justice, 2000). A survey conducted in California in 2006 sampled over 600 youth between the ages of 12 and 17. The study found that youth who were left unsupervised for three or more days per week were twice as likely as other youth to hang out with gang members, three times as likely to engage in criminal behavior, and three times as likely to smoke marijuana (Opinion Research Corporation, 2006).

After-school programs, however, can help to shut down the prime time for juvenile crime. In a study conducted by Schinke, Orlandi, and Cole (1992), five housing projects without Boys & Girls Clubs were compared to five housing projects where new clubs were established. Findings highlighted that at the beginning of the study, drug activity and vandalism were the same; however, by the time the study concluded, the housing projects without the Clubs had 50% more vandalism and scored 37% worse on drug activity than the projects with the Clubs (Schinke et al., 1992).

Another study was conducted on after-school programs in 12 high-risk California communities. Compared to youth not participating in the programs, youth participants in the programs showed that rates of vandalism and stealing dropped by two-thirds, violent acts and carrying a concealed weapon decreased by more than half, and arrests decreased by half. In addition, school discipline, detention, suspensions, and expulsions dropped by one-third (Philliber Research Associates, 2000).

The application of social learning theory to the above findings highlights that youth who are surrounded by deviant peers are more likely to engage in crime, whereas youth who attend a positive, supervised after-school environment are less likely to be involved in delinquent acts. This reduction may stem from the underpinnings of social learning theory and that the

environment and mentors that surround a youth are what drive his or her participation in either maladaptive or positive acts.

This study hypothesizes that adjudicated youth who are involved in a specific after-school employment program in western Pennsylvania will perceive the program to be beneficial to them in a multitude of ways. Social learning theory directly applies to the study variables in that the youth who were previously surrounded by a delinquent environment, spent after-school hours on the streets, or lived with negative role models were more likely to engage in maladaptive or criminal behavior. The same youth who are now surrounded by a positive environment with law-abiding mentors perceive that their criminal engagement has decreased due to the support of the rehabilitative employment program.

Juvenile Offenders in the United States

Juvenile delinquency is a legal term used to describe violent and non-violent criminal behavior committed by minors, typically between the ages of six and 18 years of age, depending on the state (Perkins-Dock, 2001; Young, Greer, & Church, 2017). In the United States, definitions and age limits of juveniles vary, with the maximum age being set at 14 years in some states and as high as 21 years in others (Cromwell, 1978). A juvenile, in this context, refers to an individual who is “legally able to commit a criminal offense owing to being over the minimum age of criminal responsibility, but who is under the age of criminal majority, when a person is legally considered an adult” (Young et al., 2017, p. 21).

It is important to note that not all juveniles that are arrested, detained, or otherwise supervised by a probation officer are delinquent. Juveniles may be detained or placed on supervision restrictions pre-trial and may not end up being convicted of an offense (Pennsylvania Council of Chief Juvenile Probation Officers Juvenile Court Judges’ Commission, 2016).

A press release from the Department of Justice in 2015 mandated that the term “juvenile delinquent” is a label that is offensive and unfair. Former United States’ Attorney General Loretta Lynch stated that “those in the minor-age category who commit crimes” should be referred to as “justice-involved youth” (Chumley, 2015). Therefore, rather than using the term “delinquent,” the following terms will be used in this dissertation and can be interchangeably related to the definition of “juvenile delinquent:” youth, juvenile, offender, justice-involved youth, criminally-involved youth, adjudicated youth.

Aftercare Services

Aftercare can be defined as “a re-integrative service that prepares out-of-home placed juveniles for reentry into the community by establishing the necessary collaborative arrangements with the community to ensure the delivery of prescribed services and supervision” (Altschuler & Armstrong, 2001). Aftercare is reported to be a promising concept that is designed to minimize recidivism among youth released from out-of-home placement (Gies, 2018). It can be distinguished from the typical punitive juvenile justice model in that aftercare provides supervision and services and is implemented on a continuum from disposition to release (Gies, 2008; U.S. Department of Justice, 2003).

The majority of studies that pertain to transitional aftercare, or employment programs for youth offenders and recidivism reduction, have been conducted from a third-party point of view (James et al., 2013; Weaver & Campbell, 2015). Although literature attempts to describe ways to reduce recidivism among juvenile offenders, these ideas are limited and neglect to correspond with what juvenile offenders believe they need to overcome and challenges that they face when they return to their communities. The focus on recidivism does not account for how the lived experiences of juveniles shape successful outcomes in their lives (Ochoa & Rome, 2009).

History of the Juvenile Justice System in the United States

The early criminal justice system in America did not have a classification for juvenile offenders. Juveniles who committed a crime were warned, shamed, or given corporal punishment before returning to their respective communities (Finklea, 2010). Zimring (2004) indicates that treatment was limited to the family and community level. Juvenile justice in the United States had predominantly been within the power of the states and their localities until the first juvenile court was founded in 1899 in Chicago, Illinois. By 1925, all but two states had established juvenile court systems (Finklea, 2010). Finklea (2010) explained that the mission of these early juvenile courts was to rehabilitate criminally-involved youth instead of merely punishing them for their crimes, with the goal of transforming these youth into productive adult members of society (Finklea, 2010). The court acted under the doctrine of “*parens patriae*,” with the notion that the state would act in “the nature of a parent” in order to provide protection and treatment for children whose parents did not provide adequate supervision or care. This led to a change in the mind-set of Americans and the view towards juvenile offenders; it placed a focus on the offenders, not the offenses, and rehabilitation, rather than punishment (Cromwell, 1978; Eastman, 2005; Finklea, 2010; Zimring, 2004). At this point in time, juvenile wrong-doers became less culpable for their criminal acts than their adult counterparts (Menihan, 2015); however, little research (quantitative or qualitative) was conducted on causal factors or theories of offending (Felizzi, 2011).

In the 1960s, the federal government established federal juvenile justice agencies and grant programs to influence the states’ juvenile justice systems. It was also in the 1970s that juvenile residential placements and specialized facilities began to emerge for the treatment and rehabilitation of offenders (Felizzi, 2011). The Juvenile Delinquency and Youth Offenses

Control Act of 1961 authorized the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) to provide annual grants to states, local government entities, and private nonprofit agencies to improve methods used to prevent and control juvenile crime. In addition, the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDP) of 1974 was enacted (Finklea, 2010). This act created many of the federal entities and grant programs that continue to operate today, including the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) and the state formula grants (Finklea, 2010). The JJDP was most recently authorized in 2002 (Kelly, 2014) and continues to align with emerging practices that reduce delinquency, protect youth, and improve public safety (Andrews, 2011). The movement towards “rehabilitation, not retribution” spurred the *In re Gault* Supreme Court decision, which gave juveniles the right to due process in a court of law (Eastman, 2005; Felizzi, 2011; Zimring, 2004).

The results of studies that emerged over the past two decades indicate that the hours immediately following school hours are the peak times for juvenile crime to occur (Afterschool Alliance, 2014; Ouellette et al., 2005; Snyder & Sickmund, 1999, 2006; Snyder et al., 1996; Sickmund et al., 1997; U.S. Department of Justice, 2000). Gottfredson et al. (2001) suggest that youth who are unsupervised during after-school hours are found to engage in criminal activities at all times, not only after school. These trends have increased the attention and focus placed on preventative measures for juvenile crime and have increased public support for after-school programs to serve as a crime prevention tool (Abrams, Shannon, & Sangalang, 2007; Soule et al., 2008). In the 1980s-1990s, programs that previously operated with the intent of “prevention” or “reduction” underwent a shift to enhance outcomes that targeted positive qualities and competencies in youth, with the goal of producing competent and productive adolescents and adults (Benson, 1997; Benson, Mannes, Pittman, & Ferber, 2004; Caldwell, 2005; Eccles &

Gootman, 2002, Lerner, Theokas, & Jelcic, 2005; MacDonald & Valdivieso, 2001; Theokas, Danish, Hodge, Heke, & Forneris, 2015; Witt & Caldwell, 2005).

Today's juvenile justice system continues to operate under a rehabilitative, rather than punitive, approach and maintains the belief that juvenile offenders are different than adult offenders; they are less blameworthy and have a greater capacity to change (Juvenile Law Center, n.d.). James et al. (2013) explain that aftercare programs have shown a drastic increase in the past two decades. In lieu of prison, juvenile court judges have a variety of legal options for the disposition of youth offenders, including after-school programs, employment programs, and a range of other court-mandated programs or obligations that meet the safety needs of the public as well as treatment needs of the youth (Juvenile Law Center, n.d.).

After-school Program Effectiveness

Despite the growth in the amount of studies pertaining to after-school programming, a dearth in literature still exists (Anthony et al., 2010; Carruthers, 2006). The literature reveals that some authors focus solely on recidivism rates as an outcome variable for the success of an after-school or employment program (James et al., 2013; Weaver & Campbell, 2015), while others take into account the perspectives of the youth who are participants of these programs (Abrams, Mizel, & Nguyen, 2014; Bullis & Yovanoff, 2002; Carruthers, 2006; Soule et al., 2008; Trout et al., 2010). Many researchers have come to an agreement in identifying positive youth development attributes to include one's physical, intellectual, psychological, and social assets (Benson, 1997; Benson et al, 2004; Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Lerner et al., 2005; Theokas Danish, Hodge, Heke, & Forneris, 2015). There is some evidence that after-school programs can provide an outlet for cultivating these assets and increasing positive behavior among youth. An after-school program must reflect the essential characteristics of effective development in order

to successfully contribute to positive youth growth and an increase in protective factors (Caldwell, 2005; Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Witt & Caldwell, 2005).

Weaver and Campbell (2015) conducted a meta-analysis in order to generate an understanding of the effectiveness of aftercare programs and their ability to reduce recidivism rates of juvenile offenders. The authors obtained 30 studies through a systematic literature review that utilized a wide range of electronic databases and Internet sources that met the eligibility criteria outlined within the study. These studies culminated a total of 6,620 participants (with 3,114 being in treatment groups and 3,506 in control groups). The findings indicate that under specific conditions, aftercare programs can reduce recidivism rates for youth involved in the juvenile justice system. Although the summary effect size of aftercare programs was not significant, subgroup univariate and multivariate analyses produced significant treatment effects for youth samples who averaged over 16.5 years of age and whose predominant index offense was violent. Well-implemented aftercare programs also yielded substantial treatment effects (Weaver & Campbell, 2015).

James et al. (2013) conducted a meta-analysis to examine the effectiveness of aftercare programs on recidivism in juvenile and young adult offenders released from correctional institutions. This meta-analysis “aimed to determine which components of the aftercare programs and client characteristics are related to a positive program outcome” (p. 264). Recidivism was measured by means of youth who were re-arrested or reconvicted. Approximately 19 electronic databases were utilized to identify relevant studies, but only studies that used an experimental or quasi-experimental research design were included. Participants included both male and female juveniles and young adult offenders with an age range of 10 to 25 years. The meta-analysis consisted of 22 independent studies (N = 5,764). Based upon the findings, the authors indicate

that “aftercare has a small and positive effect on recidivism, compared to juveniles and young adults receiving no treatment or care as usual after incarceration” (p. 266). Moderator analyses of sample, treatment, and study characteristics revealed that “aftercare is most effective when it is well-implemented and consists of intensive individual treatment aimed at older youth, at high risk of recidivism” (p. 268). The authors determined that the age of the individual’s first arrest and number of prior arrests are not related to program effectiveness. Further, they determined that commencing aftercare before the youth re-enters society does not increase the effectiveness of the program (James et al., 2013).

Carruthers (2006) conducted a qualitative study that evaluated the impact of the after-school program “Skills and Knowledge Applied toward Enhancing Success” (SKATES) for 25 adolescent girls, ages 14 to 18, who resided in a residential facility designed to foster behavioral change. The girls were referred to this program through the juvenile justice system for status and misdemeanor offenses. The SKATES program is described as a “comprehensive asset-building program” that was designed to “help the girls to build self-esteem, improve skill levels, establish positive caring adult relationships, increase commitment to learning, and have a positive view of the future” (Carruthers, 2006, p. 134). Data were collected via computer questionnaires and interviews with the girls, in which they were asked about the SKATES program and aspects that they found to be most salient to them over a six-month period of time. After five common themes emerged from the data (exploration and goal setting, developing competence/past performance, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and self-efficacy for the future), findings indicate that the girls had “acquired the self-efficacy belief that they could create a positive future for themselves” (Carruthers, 2006, p. 138).

Bullis and Yovanoff (2002) interviewed youth in a five-year longitudinal study. Their study examined “facility-to-community transition experiences of formerly incarcerated youth in the sample who remained in the community for one year following release from a juvenile correctional system” (Bullis & Yovanoff, 2002, p. 66). The project used a follow-along (Halpern, 1990) or prospective (Menhard, 1990) survey approach. Two large juvenile correction programs and three correctional camps were used for the facilitation of this study. Participants were identified and recruited prior to their discharge from the facilities. Data was collected via structured interviews with 531 youth in person and by phone prior to their discharge and then at six-month intervals upon their return to the community for one to four years. The interviews allowed the youth to describe their work, educational, living, and social experiences in the community. Data on whether the youth returned to a juvenile correctional system were gathered from a database maintained by the state agency. Based upon the findings, the researchers suggest that transition and post-exit services could be tailored to specific subgroups of youth and that career/vocational instruction coupled with services offered upon community return, “could have a positive impact on the adjustment of incarcerated youth” (Bullis & Yovanoff, 2002, p. 66).

Trout et al. (2010) conducted a study from 2003 to 2005 to identify needs and risks of youth departing from out-of-home care settings and into placements that have been unsuccessful in the past. The authors evaluated the discharge data of 640 youth who departed from the Girls and Boys Town Home Campus residential group care program in Omaha, Nebraska. Through their archival research, they addressed the following questions:

- (a) To what settings do youth depart following a stay in residential group care?
- (b) What are the demographic, family, educational, behavioral, and departure characteristics of youth at departure?

(c) Do these characteristics differ for youth departing to different levels of restrictiveness?

Results indicate significant differences on youth characteristics based upon levels of restrictiveness at departure placement. “Youth departing to more restrictive placements presented a broad host of challenges across domains, while those departing to less restrictive settings demonstrated fewer needs and departed with greater educational and behavioral gains” (Trout et al., p. 67). Results from this study highlight the need for the development and planning of targeted aftercare programs designed to “promote the short- and long-term functioning of youth served in out-of-home care” (Trout et al., 2010, p. 67).

Abrams et al. (2014) utilized a systematic review method to investigate the use of mentoring programs to assist youth in transitioning back to their communities following juvenile placement. The authors used search, screening, and data extraction methods to access published and non-published literature on mentoring re-entry programs involving detained or incarcerated youth and attempted to answer the question “what is known about the efficacy of mentoring as a reentry intervention for incarcerated youth?” (Abrams et al., 2014, p. 408). Results were mixed, as one study found no difference between groups, and other studies found recidivism reductions among youth who received the mentoring intervention. The authors indicate that future research is needed to better understand the effectiveness of mentorship as a juvenile reentry intervention (Abrams et al., 2014)

Gaps in the Research

According to Anthony et al. (2010), “One of the major limitations of the research on the community re-entry of juvenile offenders is the overall lack of recent studies in the last 20 years” (p. 1272). Although researchers have produced a limited mix of quantitative and qualitative

studies that look at recidivism rates as well as youth perspectives (Abrams et al., 2014; Bullis & Yovanoff, 2002; Caldwell, 2005; Carruthers, 2006; Eccles & Gootman, 2002; James et al., 2013; Trout et al., 2010; Weaver & Campbell, 2015; Witt & Caldwell, 2005), literature would benefit from studies that shed light on youth participant perspectives in order to provide clear-cut guidance for future policy or programmatic directions (Weibush et al., 2005).

Chapter 3: Research Methods

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore how youth in an urban after-school employment program perceived the program to affect them and to determine whether the program's intended goals and competencies aligned with youth perceived goals and competencies of the program. Existing literature tends to focus on outcome variables as determiners of success rather than examining participant perspectives. The involved participants' voices were at the core of this investigation, as their lived experiences shed valuable light on this phenomenon. A qualitative strategy was chosen to help navigate the investigatory effort. This chapter outlines the study's design, sampling measures, data collection methods, and analysis process. Reflexivity and ethical considerations are also discussed.

Qualitative Research Justification

Padgett (2017) indicates that one of the several distinctions of qualitative research includes looking from the "insider" rather than "outsider" perspective. In addition, Padgett (2017) outlines reasons for which qualitative methods are appropriate, including the exploration of a topic of which little is known (especially from the inside perspective), pursuing a topic of sensitivity and emotional depth (interviewing adjudicated youth, what may be a "taboo" population), and wishing to capture the "lived experience" from the perspective of those who live it (p. 16). Because there is little research published that reflects youth perspectives of after-school employment programs, it appears that this type of research would appropriately align with the objectives of a phenomenological qualitative study. Creswell and Poth (2018) explain that phenomenological studies strive to understand the essence of the experience and aim to describe the essence of a *lived* phenomenon, specifically the experience or perceptions of adjudicated youth employed in a western Pennsylvania urban after-school employment

program. In this instance, qualitative research and the phenomenological framework will allow the researcher to move beyond general satisfaction levels within quantitative measures in order to capture the perspectives of youth who are enrolled in the program and obtain first-hand knowledge of how they perceive the program to affect them.

Sampling

The sample population consists of nine adjudicated youth participants who are members of an urban after-school employment program in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and are between the ages of 14 and 19 (the potential age range for participants of the program). The sample of nine youth reflects approximately 75-80% of the total youth enrolled in the program from August 2017 through December 2018. Therefore, inclusion criteria for the proposed research study consists of youth who are members of the after-school employment program who are willing to participate, and exclusion criteria consists of youth who are members of the after-school program but are not enrolled in the employment program. The study participants were derived from a purposive and convenience sample of youth, as all participants were members of the program from one specific branch location. The sample size of nine youth aligns with the recommendations set forth by Padgett (2017) with regards to a phenomenological study, in which he states that sample sizes of six to 10 participants are common and acceptable.

Data Collection Methods

After gaining approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB), the researcher spent time at the after-school program during the timeframe of 4:00 pm to 8:00 pm to engage in purposive and convenience sampling and recruit willing participants. The researcher attended the program two to three days per week from November 13, 2017 through December 6, 2017 and September 1, 2018, through December 1, 2018, to attempt to interview participants.

Permission slips were distributed to youth who expressed an interest and willingness to participate in order to obtain parent or guardian consent. The youth were informed that interviews would be held as soon as permission was obtained from parents or guardians and slips were returned to the researcher.

After obtaining the parental informed consent form, the researcher reviewed the youth assent form with participants before beginning the interview with youth who were under 18 and ensured an understanding prior to obtaining a signature. Permission to use a voice recorder was also obtained with the understanding that youth would be referred to as “Participant A, B, C, etc.,” rather than by name in order to uphold confidentiality.

An interview guide was utilized for the interview (Appendix C) that outlined a protocol with 25 guiding questions for the interview process. The interviews ranged from approximately 20 to 45 minutes per participant depending on the extent to which each youth elaborated on any given question. Padgett (2017) explains that “high-quality interviews are the linchpin of success for qualitative studies” (p. 108). “The goal is to be attuned yet unbiased, empathetic but not overly solicitous, judicious but also vigilant in the use of probes” (Padgett, 2017, p. 108). To increase interaction and engagement with participants, the researcher did not take field notes during the interview process; however, the entire interview was recorded and transcribed at a later time to prepare for coding. Post-study debriefing was conducted with all participants, and the researcher wrote relevant memos to reflect upon during the coding process.

Data Analysis

Transcription. The researcher transcribed all interviews through utilizing the VLC Media Player to playback the interview recordings in a slower version and Microsoft Word to

transcribe the interviews. Transcriptions were iterated in a clean, verbatim manner, where false starts and filler words were not removed. Slang terms, expressions, and contractions were written verbatim and were not changed to formal writing. Transcribed data was then uploaded into the NVivo 12 Plus qualitative data analysis software program as a file for coding and analysis purposes.

The codebook. A codebook framework was created that initially utilized a strictly open, iterative coding approach, but later combined the theory-driven, data-driven, and structural inductive approach methods as existing theories, concepts, raw data, research goals, and questions were incorporated into codebook creation (DeCuir-Gunby, Marshall, & McCulloch, 2011; Padgett, 2017). An initial codebook was created after analyzing the first three participants' transcripts and was based upon the guidelines of Creswell and Poth (2018) to include a six-column outline that identified the overarching theme (or parent node), code name, definition, when to use, when not to use, and examples of phrases that apply. Padgett (2017) suggests a more condensed setup but still includes the same criteria, referring to "when to use" and "when not to use" as "inclusion" and "exclusion" criteria. This codebook was then transferred to NVivo 12 Plus where the format was adapted within the program. The researcher no longer utilized the initial version but continued to modify and expand upon the nodes within NVivo, adding definitions and combining like-codes when applicable. Codebook creation was an iterative process that involved many rounds of combining, collapsing, and adding codes, as applicable.

The coding process. Coding not only sets the stage for interpretation of the interview, it *is* interpretation (Padgett, 2017). The stages of the coding and analysis process began with initial coding of the paragraph or "question and answer chunk" unit of analysis. Tesch (1990)

notes that each chunk or quotation has two contexts: the origin in the narrative and a pool of meaning located in higher levels of abstraction. This transformed into codifying or arranging things in a systematic order to integrate the identified codes into part of a greater system. The codifying process ultimately lead to the categorization of identified codes, all while recoding and re-categorizing in order to ensure that the codes and categories were all-encompassing and mutually exclusive (Saldana, 2009). Through this open coding iterative process, codes became redefined for several reasons: their content was too thin or they may have merged with or became absorbed by another code (Padgett, 2017). Through further analysis, the researcher transformed the codes into categories and the categories into overarching themes. “When major categories are compared with each other and consolidated in various ways, you begin to transcend the “reality” of your data and progress toward the thematic, conceptual, and theoretical” (Saldana, 2009, p. 12).

The researcher utilized the NVivo 12 Plus software program for coding of the transcriptions but did not rely on auto-coding technology. Marshall and Rossman (2015) cautioned that the auto-coding software be used “merely as a tool to aid in the management aspects of analysis and that the researcher’s analytical skills are embraced” (p. 228). As stated, the coding process was done with “paragraph” unit of meaning in which all applicable codes were applied to one “question and answer chunk” of the transcription. It was not uncommon for one chunk to contain anywhere from one to six relevant codes. After coding all nine interviews, the researcher re-coded two additional times, with the second time serving as the final overview to assure that all codes were done consistently and accurately.

Saldana (2015) states that memo-writing is key to the process in which the researcher documents his or her thoughts and ideas that emerge through interacting with the data. Memos

evolve and become more focused as patterns are recognized and interpretations from the researcher come into play (Padgett, 2017). Memoing was utilized throughout the coding process and was done within the NVivo program. This allowed the researcher to have an organized, detailed outline of thoughts, feelings, and reflections that emerged throughout the process for further reflection following analysis (Padgett, 2017; Saldana, 2015).

Analysis. Although phenomenological analyses can take on different forms, they share certain features, including synopses of each participant's experience, a summary of major themes identified, and associated excerpts from the interviews (Giorgi, 1985; Moustakas, 1994; Padgett, 2017). The concept of horizontalization was used, where the researcher "read across the interviews" repeatedly to identify significant statements in the data and group these into themes (Padgett, 2017, p. 159). Padgett (2017) suggests following the horizontalization process with the next stage of analysis, structural description. This included moving from analyzing the *what* to the *how* and aimed to capture a broader examination of the context of the lived experience (Padgett, 2017). Lastly, the researcher aimed to synthesize meanings into *essences* or "the condition or quality without which a thing would not be what it is" (Padgett, 2017, p. 159). This stage captured the overarching themes and attached excerpts from the participants' interviews in order to enhance the reader's understanding of the essences captured.

Validation. Creswell and Poth (2018) recommend that the qualitative researcher engage in at least two validation strategies when conducting a study. The researcher utilized both the "researcher's lens" and "reader's lens" as forms of validation strategies. Through the researcher's lens, the researcher corroborated evidence through the triangulation of multiple data sources. The dissertation process requires an extensive literature review that allowed the

researcher to corroborate evidence from various sources to shed light on identified themes or perspectives. The researcher also engaged in reflexivity to disclose understandings about biases, values, and experiences that are brought into the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The reader or reviewer's lens was embraced through utilization of the researcher's dissertation committee and chair as well as peer consultation with two doctoral cohort members. External parties had ongoing review of the study and analysis and were able to examine the process and product to assess accuracy. The committee has no connection to the study or its outcome and maintained an objective standpoint when reviewing. Peer consultation with two cohort members was utilized through participation in an Independent Study course. The researcher and two cohort members met on five occasions throughout the interviewing, coding, and analysis process to cross-check the accuracy of the work and engage in open, reflective discussion pertaining to the findings. Recommendations were applied to this study and included rewording of interview questions, coding definitions, and categorization of codes to form clusters or themes.

Reflexivity and Ethical Considerations

Dunn, Saville, Baker, and Marek (2013) explain that "educational sciences have shown the importance of metacognitive competencies in learning processes and more recently defined them as a promising field for evidence-based learning" (p. 248). Reflective practice is a form of metacognitive competence that involves the questioning of our own ways of being, relating, and acting (Bruno & Dell'Aversana, 2017; Hibbert & Cunliffe, 2015). Reflexivity can be defined as an attitude of attending systematically to the context of knowledge construction, especially to the effect of the researcher, at every step of the research process (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). Reflexivity and qualitative research go hand and hand, as ethical

dilemmas and research biases are an inevitable aspect of this type of research process. One ethical consideration that the researcher was aware of prior to initiating this project is the fact that this research consists of a vulnerable population in two regards: working with children and working with adjudicated youth. Although the aspect of “power” is inevitable when an adult is working with a child, the researcher attempted to minimize the effects of power through building a rapport with the youth, talking to them about the project (in a group or individual setting), maintaining eye contact, being open and transparent about the research, and asking for questions. If a youth member of the program indicated that he or she was not interested in participating, the researcher aimed to maintain the same positive tone and assure the youth that this is completely understood and that no further explanation would be needed. Youth who expressed an interest in participating were encouraged to think about this decision and discuss with a parent or guardian prior to making the final decision to participate.

The concept of trustworthiness is an aspect that must be considered within this research project (Padgett, 2017). Pertaining to the credibility of the research, this study holds low credibility due to brief engagement and zero formal observations. Peer debriefing with cohort members was conducted to increase the trustworthiness of the study; however, measures were not taken to include an official inter-rater reliability check. With regards to transferability, the findings from this study are not generalizable to other after-school programs but aim to shed light on aspects that other (similar) programs can consider or inquire about.

The goal of this phenomenological study was not to generalize beyond the sample. Therefore, the researcher strived to take youth responses at face value, which added to the study’s dependability. The researcher does not have a current investment in the after-school

program studied, but chose this program due to past involvement. The researcher was not affected by either positive or negative perceptions of the program. The researcher strived to maintain a flat affect throughout the interviews and focused on trying to understand the program through the eyes of the participants.

Statement of Positionality

“A researcher’s background and position will affect what they choose to investigate, the angle of investigation, the methods judged most adequate for this purpose, the findings considered most appropriate, and the framing and communication of conclusions” (Malterud, 2001, p. 483). Further, Holmes (2014) explains the following regarding positionality:

It is important to note here that a researcher’s positionality not only shapes their own research, but influences their interpretation, understanding and ultimately their belief in the ‘truthfulness’ of other’s research that they read or are exposed to. Open and honest disclosure and exposition of positionality should show where and how the researcher believes that they have influenced their research, the reader should then be able to make an informed judgement as to the researcher’s influence on the research process and how ‘truthful’ they feel the research is. (p. 5)

I am currently employed as a social worker for a non-profit agency that serves individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities, behavioral needs, and autism in residential and vocational settings. I engage in both direct practice and corporate management roles. The passion for my current research topic stems from my past employment at this after-school employment program, where I was the director of the after-school employment program, as well as my work as a juvenile probation officer for Allegheny County. I mentored and referred many youth to this program and sustain a passion for the field of juvenile crime

and rehabilitation. I continue to maintain a close connection with the director and staff at the after-school program and routinely volunteer for activities, fundraisers, and events when my schedule permits. During this study, I ran a 10-week group for females ages eight to 11 for one of my doctoral course requirements and attended the program on a weekly basis during this time. I recruited female adjudicated youth who were members of the employment program to assist with mentoring the girls group every week. It is important that various dimensions that reflect my position in this study are explored and the impact that my position may have on the research be examined and made explicit.

First and foremost, I have disclosed my history with the program and continued involvement therein. Although I have a love and passion for the program, I assure readers that I strove to take a step back and conducted the coding and analysis stages of research through an objective lens. My goal was to capture the perspectives of the youth in the program. I have no political investment in the program and, therefore, was not affected by the analysis outcome and whether it was a positive or negative one.

Next, I acknowledge a power differential that exists in my work with youth in this study. Although all attempts to remove any power struggles were made (as acknowledged in ethical considerations), this dynamic is unavoidable. I, therefore, paid close attention when analyzing the interviews in an attempt to identify “leading questions” on my behalf or social desirability on behalf of the youth. This was done through continuous review of the audio recorded data as well as transcribed data, memoing when leading questions or acquiescence appeared to be present, and attempting to view the responses from all angles. Padgett (2017) describes the concept of coercion and “deformed” consent and explains that “the potential for coercion becomes problematic when the study involves clients, students, or coworkers who

are familiar to them” (p. 82). I can assure readers that although I am involved with the program on a volunteer basis, I am not familiar with any current members of the employment program and do not hold a relationship with any of the members. It is my hope that this relieved any potential pressure of the members to want to “please” me by participating in the study.

My race, gender, age, culture, and environment play a significant role in this study. I am a white female in my 30s who grew up in the suburbs of central Pennsylvania in a predominantly conservative town. The socioeconomic status of my two-parent household was upper-middle class. These dynamics are very different than the population in this study and thus pose as a barrier to my understanding and relatability to the youth. The demographics of youth in this program include predominantly black males. The program director reports that 60% of youth who attend the after-school program stem from single-parent households, and 62% of the youth live in low-income households (Program Director, Personal Communication, August 28, 2017). Although I have experience in working with diverse populations, these differences cannot be ignored. Interpretations that I made through the interview process and analysis inevitably contain biases because I have no way of fully relating to the youth. I aimed to eliminate these biases to the greatest extent possible through continuous reflection, re-reading the interviews, striving to consider responses from all angles, and maintaining an objective lens.

I recognize that I am working with a vulnerable population: youth who are adjudicated and serving a term of probation. Although I took ample time to explain to the participants that their involvement in this study will not affect their terms of probation or participation in the employment program, the youth may have been skeptical of this or felt some level of pressure

to cooperate. I was sure to direct interested participants to review the study proposition and informed consent and assent documents with their parents or legal guardians prior to engaging in the study. I also maintained a neutral demeanor to both interested and uninterested participants to demonstrate that they have the freedom to choose whether they would like to participate and that their choice will not elicit any extreme response on my behalf, whether positive or negative.

After conducting three interviews in the Fall of 2017 as part of a doctoral course, I found that my past involvement as a juvenile probation officer (PO) seemed to connect me with several of my youth participants. After disclosing this to some youth participants, I found that several youth appeared to be eager to tell me who their current probation officer was and to find out whether I knew their PO or not. Many youth said that they were “cool” with their PO, and I found that the youth who had a positive relationship with their probation officers were able to easily connect with me. After reflecting upon this and discussing with my committee, it was decided that I will not disclose this connection to youth interviewed for the dissertation process moving forward, as I did not want to bias their opinion of me in any way, and the information was not deemed to be relevant to the study.

My hopes for this study included the ability to step outside of myself and my own biases to really capture and relay the perspectives of the youth who are currently enrolled in the after-school employment program. As stated, I have no current investment in the program, and my intentions are only to inform stakeholders as to what youth perceive to be the most beneficial aspects of the program as well as to identify whether intended program goals and competencies align with youth perceptions.

Chapter 4: Findings

This study explored youth perceptions of an urban after-school program. A void in previous research and literature that looks at programs for adjudicated youth through youth lens compelled the researcher's interest in investigating youth perspectives rather than third-party perspectives. A qualitative framework was used to design this study, and methods common to phenomenological research guided the data collection process as well as coding and analysis procedures. The findings contain a culmination of youth perspectives and aim to shed light on their lived experiences. This research framework was based on the following two research questions:

1. How do adjudicated youth enrolled in an urban after-school employment program perceive the program to affect them?
2. Do the program's intended goals and competencies align with youth perceived goals and competencies?

This chapter presents findings that emerged from the data. A sample of nine adjudicated youth was selected through purposive and convenience sampling methods from one after-school program in western Pennsylvania. An iterative analysis of the interview transcriptions allowed the researcher to identify codes that set the stage for clustering like-codes and analyzing themes that emerged from the data. Ultimately, a total of 43 codes were delineated into four overarching themes that emerged from the clusters. The four themes include Interpersonal Skills, Self-Efficacy, Decreased Maladaptive Activity, and Professional Competencies.

Chapter four will cover participant demographics, the four identified themes and subthemes, program intended versus perceived goals and competencies, and changes that participants would like to see with regards to the after-school program.

Participant Demographics

A sample of nine adjudicated youth participants of an urban after-school program in western Pennsylvania were interviewed. The sample included six male participants and three female participants, ranging from ages 14 to 19. Eight out of nine youth were referred to the program by a juvenile probation officer (JPO), and one youth was referred by a job readiness coach (JRC). Enrollment time for the youth ranged from two months to two years, with the average enrollment time being approximately nine and a half months. The adjudicated charges that were self-reported by participants varied, with simple assault or aggravated assault being the most prevalent. Other adjudicated charges included reckless driving, fleeing and eluding, endangering children, driving under the influence, robbery, criminal conspiracy, home invasion, property destruction, and receiving stolen property. Youth were assigned participant labels to maintain confidentiality. Table one provides a snapshot of the participants' demographics.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

| Participant Label | Sex | Age | Referral Source | Enrollment Time (in months) | Adjudicated Charge(s) (self-reported) |
|--------------------------|------------|------------|------------------------|------------------------------------|---|
| A | M | 17 | JPO | 7 | Aggravated Assault |
| B | M | 18 | JPO | 2 | Danger in the City, Reckless Driving, Fleeing and Eluding, Receiving Stolen Property, Endangering Children, Driving Under the Influence |
| C | F | 15 | JPO | 10 | Simple Assault |
| D | M | 19 | JRC | 12 | Robbery, Criminal Conspiracy |
| E | M | 15 | JPO | 12 | Home Invasion |
| F | M | 14 | JPO | 3 | Simple Assault |
| G | M | 16 | JPO | 4 | Property Destruction |
| H | F | 16 | JPO | 24 | Simple Assault |
| I | F | 18 | JPO | 12 | Receiving Stolen Property, Simple Assault |

Theme 1: Interpersonal Skills

The first theme identified is Interpersonal Skills. This theme encompasses both communication skills and connection with others. The communication code refers to any evidence that shows an increase in communication or socialization skills, an increase in the understanding of “professional” communication, or a general increase in one’s ability to communicate with others. The connection code refers to any evidence that shows one’s interaction or relationship with others, engagement with others, or a bi-directional bonding with family, school, community, and peers. These codes are mutually exclusive in that communication is separated by its focus on communication skills and connection focuses on the bond between two individuals.

All nine youth discussed interpersonal skills, with five youth indicating that they believed their participation in the after-school employment directly increased their interpersonal skills and four youth described how these skills have remained the same. Youth responses that fell under this theme included increased interpersonal communication, communication with staff or coworkers, working with the kids, increased relationships with others, helping others, and others looking up to the youth.

Relations with family members. In describing his work at the program and interactions with children who attend the program, Participant A, a 17 year old male who has been enrolled in the program for seven months, indicated that, “I have a younger sibling, so this is helpin’ me with that too back home.” This statement signified an increase in Participant A’s engagement with his family due to the perceived increased skills in working with the children at the program. Participant E, a 15 year old male who has been enrolled in the program for one year, also

described his perception of how he believes that his involvement with this program directly contributed to his relationship with his siblings at home:

Like helping my siblings out ... it got even better. It's easier to talk to 'em and know what they have to do. 'Cuz here, you can't really like yell at kids or be bad, so it makes you a little bit better, happier ... I don't know how to explain it! I got a one and three year old [at home] ... and with them, it's like, you gotta be real cautious with them. When I'm babysitting now, it's like I can't just keep my eyes off of them and do what I wanna do. It's more of listenin' to them and seein' what they're doin' ... I learned that too!

Both participants highlight the transferrable interpersonal skills that they perceive to have gained through their participation in the urban after-school program.

Professional communication skills. Youth discussed how their experience with the program has helped to increase professional communication skills, with Participant G's sentiment reflecting this area:

I talk to people better, like, we talk to people different [here] ... from on the streets, its different from there ... 'Cuz I can't talk to little kids however you wanna talk to 'em ... like if they were my friends or somethin', I gotta talk to them wit polite-ness ... more professional ... than street talk.

When Participant A was asked if he thinks his social skills or talking with other people has changed from being in the program, he commented that "communication ... like professionally ... like how to talk better and stuff" has shown an increase. Youth also expressed that program participation has led to an increase in positive relationships with others and has encouraged them to communicate more than they had in the past. Participant F, the youngest

participant in the sample (age 14), offered “sometimes I don’t like talking to other people.” When asked if the program has changed his communication skills in any way, he indicated “yeah, because I have to [talk to other people here] ... I just be like, I’ll just do it!” Participant B, an 18 year old male who has only been enrolled in the program for two months, believes that his social skills have changed a lot from this program, including the way he presents himself in interpersonal connections. He described that:

I be talkin’ to people. I be talkin’ to maybe some of these kid’s mom and I can’t always just come to ‘em wit’ my pants saggin’ and just be like ‘yo, boom boom, like yeah, such and such, he was bein’ bad, eh ...’ like naw! Sometimes you just gotta’ talk to ‘em different ways and you just gotta learn how to hold a convo with somebody. Even if it’s just about a shoe, you feel me, even if it’s about some pants, you better have the best conversation, know how to start the conversation and all that ... you gotta present yourself a different way. I’m from a whole different type of wave of people, so I just gotta bring myself away ... gotta make myself look different in front of other people ... it’s just the way you gotta carry yourself.

This powerful depiction highlights this participant’s acknowledgement that different cultures of people have different means of communication. He has learned through participation in the program how to present himself to engage with others in a professional manner. He also appears to acknowledge a stereotype that others may have with regards to his hometown. Participant B continued to explain in the interview that he presents himself differently so that others won’t know he is from a specific neighborhood and believes that this mindset changes the way others view or respect him.

Relationships with staff. Youth responses also indicated an increase in relationships with other staff members. Participant B indicated coworkers as “great” aspects about the program. He expressed:

Like my colleagues, my staff, like I gained relationships, talk to them about personal things, stuff like that. I just gained personal relationships wit’ everybody ... like my staff, some of my coworkers, my boss, things like that ... I don’t really think of them as my boss, I think of them as both ... because we have our talks, so it’s just like ...

Several youth discussed their relations with staff and the importance in having a positive role model to relate to. Many youth discussed particular staff members by name and stated that these particular staff members made a direct positive contribution to their lives.

Interpersonal skills. Of the four youth who did not express a perceived increase in interpersonal skills, they did indicate that they have always been known to be “talkative,” so that piece has not changed from the program. These four youth each acknowledged an increase in interpersonal skills through working with kids, monitoring kids, and engaging in a variety of after-school activities. Participant D, the oldest participant in the sample (age 19) who has been enrolled in the program for one year, believes that his interpersonal skills have remained the same; however, he acknowledged a change in the people he surrounds himself with and a positive view on his work with youth:

It [the program] keep me outta trouble. I don’t be wit’ the same people that I used to be wit’ ever since I got off of probation. I monitor the kids, I feed them, I help out wit’ their homework and after-school program stuff ... like they got a batting cage ... I help them with they pitches or swingin’ or anything they need me to do, I do.

The first theme, interpersonal skills, established that five youth in the program believe that the program has helped to increase their interpersonal skills pertaining to connection and communication with others. The remaining four youth did not acknowledge an increase in these skills but indicated that they believe they are already skilled in this area. Despite the fact that these four youth did not acknowledge an increase in skills, they did not note a decrease in this skill area through being a part of the program, and their commentary suggests that their connections with others are evident through their work at the program.

Theme 2: Self-Efficacy

The second theme identified is Self-Efficacy. This overarching theme is defined by Albert Bandura's definition to encompass people's beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives (Bandura, 1994). Self-efficacy beliefs determine how people feel, think, motivate themselves, and behave. This theme captures seven codes that were distinguished in the transcriptions: drive, independence, maturity level, responsibility, character, contribution, goal-setting, and confidence/self-esteem. The "drive" code refers to any evidence that shows an increase in the drive or motivation level of the participant, goals he or she is achieving, or an increase in self-management. Independence is distinguished by evidence that indicates an increase in the level of independence felt by the participant and a decreased need to be dependent on another human being. Maturity level is indicated in any statement by youth that discusses growth, change in maturity, or perceived steps towards adulthood. Responsibility refers to any youth discussion on responsibility directly or evidence that alludes to the state or fact of having a duty to deal with something or having control over someone. Character is defined by evidence that reflects an increased perspective of the participant pertaining to his or her values, morals, social conscience,

respect for diversity, honesty, honorable, truthfulness, trustworthiness, or integrity. The contribution code shows evidence of the youths' commitment to making the world a better place or giving back in some way. Goal-setting includes evidence that shows the participant's engagement in establishing a goal or task to be completed by a certain time or in the future (i.e. someday). Lastly, confidence/self-esteem involves any evidence that shows an increase in the way a participant feels about his or her self or evidence of feeling positive self-identity, self-worth, or self-efficacy.

All nine youth discussed the concept of self-efficacy and reported that their participation in the after-school program has increased this competency in at least one regard, with several citing a variety of areas in which their self-efficacy has increased. Youth responses in this theme included youth perceiving the program to help them with increased levels of motivation, increased responsibility, the ability to be more independent, showing a greater level of commitment, an increase in trustworthiness, increased maturity, and confidence, especially pertaining to one's future.

Maturity and motivation. Participant B, who revealed that he is the father to an infant child, captured his belief that the program has increased his maturity and responsibility and speculated upon his possible whereabouts if he was not enrolled in the program:

I matured a lot ... cuz, like I said, if I wasn't in this program, I'd prolly be hangin' out wit' my friends right now, as in me bein' 19, I'd be hangin' out wit' my friends not doin' nothin' in life and then goin' back home at the end of the day, just to play the game ... but now that I'm working, lookin for another job, Im'a have to start payin' bills and my mom's ... that's gonna take some stress of her back that I'm helpin' out. So I can say that

matured me a lot ... this building matured me a lot, for real for real ... responsibility for getting up on my own, going to work, doin' the things that I have to do.

Participant B further reflected on his increased maturity and motivation. He acknowledged a difference in himself "getting up and doing it," whereas others he knows or may be surrounded by don't have this level of motivation. He attributed his motivation to his participation in the after-school program:

I would say it motivate me, for real. I get up and I go to school every day and then I go straight to work here ... It's just the motivation that I'm getting up and doin' it. Cuz some people around my way don't really get up and do it. Some people just say they got it and just leave it how it is and don't really follow through with it ... I'm getting up and doin' it ... you just gotta get your effort up and do it. It might not be a lot, but it's a lot to somebody, some people ..."

Participant B explained that he used to have trouble "waking up and doing it" and how the old him may have quit. He disclosed his adjudicated charges to be Danger in the City, Reckless Driving, Fleeing and Eluding, Receiving Stolen Property, Endangering Children, and Driving Under the Influence.

Sometimes I do things, I have fun wit it, then I just quit. Now it's just like, I'm just getting back on myself ... I'm goin' to school, I'm goin to work, I'm goin' to, you feel me, I'm doin' things every weekend, I get my daughter now ... so it's just likethis job, you feel me, this job helped me keep me motivated, to keep goin' ... you just gotta start from the ground up, you just gotta keep goin'. That just how it always been and what I always knew, but I never actually fell through with it...

Participant D, who disclosed that his adjudicated charges included robbery and criminal conspiracy, expressed his perspective that, although he believes his independence has not changed much from his participation in the program, the program has helped his motivation in some ways:

Like, I didn't have no dad growin up ... my whole life, my mom, she was there, but she wasn't, for real for real ... so I was the dad of my lil sister, doin' things for my lil sister, like my mom wasn't home, I was the one doin' things for her. So I was always independent myself ... always having to get up. So it [the program] helped [my independence], but it's also the same, for real for real. Because some days I don't be wantin' to come to work, but at the end of the day, I still gotta go, ya know.

Participant H, a 16 year old female who has been enrolled in the program for two years, summarized the qualities of motivation and commitment under her classification of these things being "older responsibilities" and elaborated by describing these traits as "being more independent, working on my own, coming everyday ... and staying late." Participant H has completed her terms of probation and disclosed that she chose to remain employed at the program for income, structure, and a positive environment.

Independence and responsibility. Some youth relayed a sense of increased independence due to the financial aspects of the job. Many expressed the ability to purchase things on their own that they relied on others to buy in the past. Participant C, a 15 year old female who has been enrolled in the program for ten months, explained how the program has increased her independence, in her perspective, through increasing her financial capabilities:

When I started here, I didn't really have it [money]. So when I did my community service, they told me that I could still work here and get paid and everything. Before, I

didn't really get to do anything, like I didn't really have money. I mean, I always had to ask my mom for something but she didn't always have it [money], so yeah, that kind of helped. It helped me to get out more and then start tryin' to learn how to depend on myself and not always depend on others.

Participant F echoed a similar experience in which he is now responsible for purchasing necessities for himself, whereas his brother and mom used to buy these items prior to his earning a paycheck. He quoted "my brother and my mom, they used to buy my clothes and shoes ... but now they're like 'you got a job now, so you can buy your own clothes and I'll buy your shoes.'" He believed that this aspect has made him more responsible and independent. Participant H also stated that the program has changed her independence and stated that one example of this includes "not always depending on my mom ... like to buy stuff for me and get stuff for me ... since I make my own money, I can get it by myself."

Participant E, who revealed that he was charged with home invasion, believes he has learned to be more responsible with how he spends his paycheck and attributes this to his talks with the program director. He explained that "when I first got my check, I spent it on little crazy things. It teaches you how to spend it on more important things, like clothes and stuff."

Participant E further explained that his independence has increased through his participation in his program, citing that he now has a bus pass and is able to transport himself to and from work independently. He acknowledged an increase in his maturity where he now understands that he has to save a little extra money for his bus pass and put enough aside so that he can still buy clothes.

Hopes for a successful future. Discussion with youth also led to the finding that through the process of goal-setting, competence-building, working with role models, and increasing

confidence, youth believe they have the ability to be successful in the future. The after-school programming led Participant A to believe that he can potentially run a similar program to this one in his future:

It makes me think maybe someday I'll run my own company like this ... I like basketball and football so I could prolly run a, um, after-school program with kids that play sports or something like that ... Sports camp ... I could bring 2 into 1, work with sports and kids.”

Participant D also appeared to demonstrate a higher level of confidence for his future career and explained that he asked the program director if he can make this a career for himself. His reflection highlighted his belief that he can do better and that he can make a difference in the lives of the kids who attend the program.

This is my first time actually workin' wit' kids and I actually like it, for real for real. My last job that I worked at was Macy's and I got fired from Macy's 'cuz I was doin' the wrong thing ... like givin' people discounts when I wasn't supposed to. But I can say this job here, I actually like workin' wit' kids ... I know there's kids in here that could be taught the right way ... that I don't want them to grow up and do what I did. I asked Mr. D if I can stay, like if I can make this a career workin' wit' kids.

The self-efficacy findings capture a variety of perspectives from youth, including an increase in independence, maturity, and responsibility, as well as the belief that they can succeed in the future. All nine youth have attributed at least one way in which they perceive their self-efficacy to have been directly impacted through their experienced in this program, with several youth citing a number of avenues that have improved.

Theme 3: Decreased Maladaptive Activity

The third theme identified includes ways in which youth perceive the program helped them to fulfill their probationary terms. It encompasses the codes “decreased maladaptive activity,” “helped to get off of probation,” and “change in friends.” Terminology or phrases used by youth in the interviews that were coded under this theme included them reporting a decrease in time spent “on the streets,” “doin’ dumb stuff,” “getting into trouble,” and “roaming outside.” They also referenced “not going outside” to justify a decrease in maladaptive behavior and the program’s assistance with paying court fines and restitution costs as a way in which the program helped them to get off of probation and/or exit the juvenile justice system.

“Decreased maladaptive activity” is defined by any evidence that shows a decrease in maladaptive behavior, activities, and time spent after school. “Helped to get off of probation” was coded anytime there was evidence that the youth believed that the program has helped or is actively helping him or her to “get off of probation” or exit the juvenile justice system through his or her perspective. Some youth cited this explicitly and others alluded to ways in which the program helped or is helping them to fulfill terms of probation, including restitution payments and completing obligatory community service hours. “Change of friends” was coded any time there was evidence that the youth has different friends after being in the program than from prior to his or her experience with the program. In all nine interviews, youth change in friends always referred to the youth’s perceived “positive” change in his or her friends, where “old friends” were consistently described to be troublemakers or to bring the youth down.

All nine youth who were interviewed referenced a decrease in maladaptive activity. Of the nine youth interviewed, seven are no longer on probation but have continued to work at the program for a job, with six of these seven youth directly stating that the program has helped them

to get off of probation. Two of the nine youth are still actively completing their terms of probation, with Participant F stating that he has one more restitution payment to make and Participant G stating that he believes he has two more restitution payments to make. Both of these participants cited the program as helping them to get off of probation.

Decreased maladaptive activity, “off the streets”. Youth discussed many ways in which they perceive that the after-school employment program has helped to keep them “out of trouble” or “off the streets” and has given them a more positive focus during after-school hours. Participant B explained the difference between the “old” him and where he is today.

I see a big change, for real for real. Like the old me ... I woulda been quit this like, I woulda stopped goin ... but I just think it’s better, me comin here one day, besides goin’ outside and walkin’ down the street to a store, go stand on a corner or somethin’, I might get killed by somebody ... I just come here to clean up, just lay low for real, that’s how I see it ... it keep me off the streets, all day, every day.

Participant F echoed a similar past-life where he used to spend more time on the streets. In his interview, he referred to his history of spending time on the streets as “doin’ dumb stuff,” and he reported that he believes that the program has helped to decrease his time spent doing “dumb stuff,” coded as a decrease in maladaptive activity.

I see a lot of changes because, like, before I had this job, I’d just be outside, just roamin’, but now I’ll just go to my job, like when it’s summer-out time, I’ll just go to my job, go home, eat somethin’, go to football practice, go home, go to sleep, get ready for the next day, and do the same thing.

Like Participants B and F, Participant C sees a change in her life because of her work at the program, as she stated “I do more for myself and it [the program] keeps me out of trouble ...

Me being here helped me get off probation and all that.” Participant D strongly attributed his employment through the program and his work with the program director to have affected him: “this program ... if it wasn’t ‘cuz of this program, I think I’d still be on probation right now.” Participant E noted that his time at the program kept him from “goin’ outside,” which he equivocated with “getting into trouble,” or as Participant F described it, if he wasn’t enrolled in this program, he “woulda’ probably been doin’ dumb stuff” instead.

Payment of court fees, fines, restitution. Several youth discussed the financial aspects of the after-school employment program to be highly beneficial to them, not only in terms of providing them with an income (and ultimately increasing their independence), but in helping them to get off of probation. The after-school program has a unique payment system in which half of the youth’s paycheck goes directly towards court fees, fines, and restitution payments, and the other half goes to their own bank account (Program Director, Personal Communication, August 28, 2017). Many youth referenced these payments as one of the major factors that helped them to get off of probation. Participant I, an 18 year old female who has been enrolled in the program for one year, stated, “it [the program] helped pay the fees and stuff that I needed and after that, I was just off probation!” Participant A explained that “the money I raised here paid everything off and after I got done with everything [terms of probation], I still just kept the job!” Participant H believes that if it weren’t for the program, she may not have had another source of income to pay off her court-ordered fees, stating “without me workin’ here, my restitution probably woulda never got paid!”

Change in peer group. The code “change of friends” was clustered under this theme due to youth perceptions that changing his or her peer group after enrolling in the program has lead to a decrease in maladaptive activities which assisted with him or her fulfilling probationary

terms. Participant D states that the program has helped him “cuz it keep me outta trouble and I don’t be wit’ the same people that I used to be wit’ ever since I got off probation.” He further explained how he believes that his peer group was what led him to be on probation and that he is a more trustworthy person now due to his change in friends. He explained:

The reason I was on probation was ‘cuz of something they [my old friends] did, but I was just *there* ... I can say [I’m more] trustworthy ‘cuz I don’t talk to them guys. They still try to get me to do certain things, but I can say by me comin’ to this job, I can say I really don’t leave this ... it’s cuz of this building. I don’t leave this building ... because of the things I get into. I can say if I was home or something, I believe I woulda’ went outside and did it. But since I’m in here and I know I got work to do and wanna be wit’ the kids, I don’t do it.

Participant E also alluded to changes in his peer group by explaining how he believes that his participation in the program helps to keep him “off the streets.” He described “I mean like, sometimes, I still might run into people from the same or they’ll say what’s up, but mostly, I’ll come here every time and then I’ll go right back home and go to sleep or stay in the house ... so it has been helpin’ me more.” Through this commentary, one may observe a continued pattern of discussing change in peer group as well as indication that program participation replaces time that was previously spent “outside,” as the youth consistently correlated being out “in the streets” with engaging in maladaptive activities. Participant E further explained that he used to hang around the “older kids.” He said when the older kids got off from school, he was already off and would meet up with these kids. He disclosed that “it was bad, I’ll say, and that’s how I got in trouble in the first place.” After his enrollment in the program, he reported that he now has a responsibility to take up his time during after-school hours until bed time:

The older kids used to get off [from school] before us, but I used to already be home, so I would be outside and they would come and then ask me ‘do I wanna play wit’ them or ‘chill wit’ them.’ But now, since I get here until 7, they’re already doin’ something or already up to something ... where I’m comin’ right back home tired, ready to go to sleep.

When asked if Participant E believes he has separated himself from his old friends after his enrollment in the program, he explained “not all the way ... but they have been layin’ off me a little bit ... my life changed from that I think ... this program did better my life.”

The theme “helped get off probation” captures a variety of aspects that the youth directly believe helped them to satisfy their terms of probation and exit the juvenile justice system. Decreased maladaptive activity, a positive after-school environment, change in peer group, and the program’s assistance with paying off court fees, fines, and restitution are captured in this theme.

Theme 4: Professional Competencies

The fourth theme identified is Professional Competencies. This theme focuses on competencies that the youth perceive to have gained through participation in the program and encompasses the following codes that were reported at high frequencies: Job Roles/Skills/Training, Financial Literacy, Time Management, and Career Building. Job roles was coded any time youth outlined job duties or roles he or she performed while at work. The job skills/training code was coded anytime youth relayed evidence that reflected “hard skills” or specific talents and/or expertise that a participant believes he or she has gained through the program. It also refers to any training they may have gained. Financial literacy encompasses evidence that the youth has increased in his or her finance management, created a bank account, gained a deeper understanding of money, or anything else related to finances. The time management code reflects

evidence that the youth has increased his or her skills pertaining to managing his or her time. Lastly, the career building code included evidence that the youth is planning for a future career or that the youth perceives that the program has helped with future job opportunities in any way.

All nine youth reported at least one form of competency that he or she perceived to have gained through participation in this program, with eight out of nine youth discussing benefits with regards to job training, perceiving the program to have helped them with career building, and discussing an increase in their time management skills. Seven out of nine youth discussed a perceived increase in financial literacy skills.

Job roles and training. All youth were asked to describe what they do at the program and to talk about their job roles and responsibilities. Youth responses were very similar, with youth describing common tasks to include interacting with the younger kids, distributing snacks, cleaning duties, tutoring with homework, monitoring interactions, engaging in athletic activities, and helping out with other duties as assigned by the program director. Participant B summarized his job duties to include:

Well, when I first come, I get the snack room ready like for the kids, get the huggies and the chips out and I get the tables ready and all that for the kids when I first come and then ... like when they done ... I clean the snack room up then sweep, mop the snack room, and then clean up the bathroom before I leave every day. Just monitor the place, walk around, make sure everything's right, nobody messin' wit' no kids, nobody doin' nothin.

Participant B's description was very similar to the sentiment echoed by other participants, with Participant C adding that there is also a class requirement to their participation in the after-school employment program. She explained that the youth are required to participate in a life skills class every Wednesday where they learn about "goals, banking accounts, and all of that."

Participant B expressed his willingness to do anything asked of him and how he feels a level of contribution or giving back. He exclaimed “what I like about my work is for real for real. I do a lot ... if somebody asked me to do something, it don’t matter what it is or how it go, if somebody asked me to help you pick up that penny, im’a help you pick up that penny. It’s gonna make me feel like I helped you.”

Youth expressed a variety of areas in which they believe they have improved through training on the job. Many of these areas have been captured under other theme areas, but I thought that it was important to also compile a list of areas in which the youth believed their enrollment in the program provided training and growth. Youth responses included training in communication skills and learning the difference between “professional communication” in the work place and “street talk,” experience in working with the youth population, general job responsibilities and duties, time and dedication duties, and following rules.

Financial literacy. The youth talked about a Life Skills class that the program offers on an annual basis. Participant I described how “a guy came in every Wednesday for six or seven weeks” and “provided education on job skills, financing money, and resume-building.” She explained that if a participant was present for four of the weeks, he or she gained an extra \$100 bonus on their paychecks. In describing some of the things she learned, she explained:

We learned what the, I think it was the annual rate ... we learned how to read our checks right, make sure that none of the money was getting stolen ... always to save like ones and fives, we should just put those aside cuz they soon add up ... and put at least 10% of your check aside ... yeah we just learned stuff like that!

Participant D stated that he never had a savings account until taking the financial class offered by the program. He explained that if it weren't for this program, he wouldn't have one right now.

They helped us. They told us what a bank account was, the growth account, all of that. And I didn't know about ... I knew about a savings account, but like, I wasn't really up on that to really set one up ... like my mom never told me about a savings account ... but then when I learned about a savings account, I had went home and told her like, yeah, I wanna set up a savings account, and she was surprised because, like, she was just thinkin' that I only had a bank account, but when I told her that I actually wanted to save money, that had put a smile on her face...

In addition, Participant H learned about "banking and credit cards and debit cards and how to save and like, what percentage to save and what like not to just spend on, and stuff like that."

In addition to the Life Skills/Financial Literacy course offered by the program, a stipulation of the program is that the youth must open a bank account in order to get enrolled and to receive direct deposit (Program Director, Personal Communication, August 28, 2017). Many of the youth explained that they did not have their own bank account prior to being enrolled in the program and that this was a new competency development for them. Participant E explained that having a bank account and managing his money was a new experience for him. He attributed his knowledge of finances to the after-school employment program and discussed how he has learned to "save a little and spend a little," rather than spend his money on "crazy things." Participant H also reported that she did not have her own bank account prior to enrollment in the program. She thinks that the program helped her to save money and states that upon enrollment,

she got a bank account “for like direct deposit and stuff.” She concluded that it “helped me save money better.” Similarly, through her job experience in the program, Participant G stated that she has learned about “payroll and stuff,” which was a new concept to her.

Time management. Discussion with youth highlighted a theme for an increase in time management skills. Youth responses ranged from indicating the ability to now juggle more responsibilities and manage the time spent among these responsibilities to being punctual and understanding the value of time. Participant A described the following as a change that he has seen in his life due to involvement in the program:

I’m on the basketball team now. I haven’t played sports since like middle school, 7th grade. I started getting back into that and, um, yeah I just, usually it’s work, home, school, or practice every day. There’s no way I can get in trouble.

This statement not only shows that Participant A is now able to juggle more activities, something he hasn’t done since the 7th grade, but he also manages his time well and does not leave time for maladaptive engagements as he may have in the past. Participant B reflected a similar sentiment in his explanation that he now juggles school and his job. He stated that he has learned to manage his time better where he just “knocks it out” and gets his day over with. “I go to sleep, wake up the next day, and do it over again like it ain’t nothing.” He believes that his participation in this program has helped him to increase this time management piece. Participant G, a 16 year old male who has been enrolled in the program for 4 months, agreed that the program has instilled changes in his schedule and waking up on time, and Participant H reported that “having to come every day” and “stay late” equates in her mind to “older responsibilities” and helps her to balance out her time better. Participant I sees a difference in how her time is spent now versus in the past, and she believes that she uses her time wisely now: “Cuz when I’m

here, I do my homework and stuff now, cuz usually I would just put it off ‘til the last minute when it’s late at night, but now, I do it when I come here [to the after-school employment program].”

Lastly, Participant D described how this program has increased his responsibility directly pertaining to time management. He talked about how he got fired from his previous job for not arriving by his “start time” but has learned through his terms of probation and involvement with the after-school employment program that he has to be on time and clock in.

Uh, like, my other job, like I usually wasn’t goin’ to work on time, that’s why I got fired. But since I been on probation and worked here, then I *had* to come here on time, clock in on time. Ever since I had got off probation, I just been comin’ here on time.

As is evident in the excerpts above, many of the youth’s statements echo each other with regards to the time management and structure that the after-school program instills.

Career building. The career building code encompasses youth plans for future careers or evidence that the after-school employment program has helped with future job opportunities (building or planning). Eight out of nine participants discussed ways in which he or she believed that the after-school employment program has helped with career building. Participant A aspires to run his own company like this in the future. Participants C, D, E, G, H, and I discussed the experience aspect of the job, with Participant E talking about how this is a good “starter job” and Participant G disclosing that this is the first job he has ever worked. Several participants cited how this job provides them with experience to include on a resume, with Participant H indicating that she always includes this job experience on her resume and job applications. Participant F had a unique perspective on how he believes that the after-school employment program will affect him with future job opportunities. He discussed a hierarchy perspective of working a job

and stated “because the jobs let you know that you’re just not gonna get your way ... you work for *them* and they don’t work for *you*.” Participant F said he believes he has learned more respect through his work and understands that he needs to abide by his workplace rules rather than “making the rules.”

The professional competencies theme captured the areas in which the youth believe they have an increased understanding in the areas of job roles/skills/training, financial literacy, time management, and career building. All nine of the youth had something to contribute to the conversation with regards to one of the highlighted areas, with a solid theme emerging in this regard.

Program Intended versus Perceived Goals and Competencies

The second research question asks whether the program’s intended goals and competencies align with youth perceived goals and competencies. The findings for this research question were assessed through an iterative coding process that allowed the researcher to code youth discussion in the areas of both program competencies and program goals. Youth transcriptions pertaining to these codes were then analyzed to determine whether the youth perceived the program to have increased his or her competency in a specific regard or whether the youth believed that the program’s intended goal was achieved, through his or her perspective, due to involvement in the program. Table two was created for a visual snapshot of the findings.

Program competencies. According to the program, the intended competencies include Responsibility, Self-Esteem, Sociability, Self-Management, and Integrity (Program Director, Personal Communication, August 28, 2017). Many of these competencies have already been discussed in the general finding of themes sections above, alluding to a positive indicator that the program’s intentions are resonating with the youth. Because the youth did not always use the

exact vocabulary of the intended competencies, coding varied in some regards to capture youth terminology that was coded that the researcher believed fell under the same umbrella. Table two outlines the program’s intended competencies in the first column and the coding used from the youth transcriptions that counted towards a positive indicator in that regard.

Table 2

Program Competencies and Corresponding Codes

| Program Intended Competency | Codes that Capture the Competency |
|------------------------------------|--|
| Responsibility | Responsibility |
| Self-Esteem | Confidence |
| Sociability | Communication Skills Connection |
| Self-Management | Drive Goal Setting Independence Time Management Anger Management |
| Integrity | Character |

Table three provides a snapshot of the overall findings pertaining to competencies instilled by the program and allows the reader to break down the total findings by competency and also by participant perception. The youth perceived that the intended competencies of responsibility and self-management were increased through their participation in this program, with all nine youth (100%) reporting that the program has helped them in these regards. Five out of nine youth (55%) believe that their sociability and integrity has shown an increase through participation in the program. Finally, four out of nine youth (44%) believe that his or her self-esteem has shown an increase through participation in the program.

Table 3

Individual Participant Perceived Increase in Competencies

| Program Intended Competency | Participant Labels | | | | | | | | | Total | % |
|-----------------------------|--------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|--------|-----|-----|-------|-----|
| | A | B | C | D | E | F | G | H | I | | |
| Responsibility | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | 9/9 | 100 |
| Self-Esteem | X | X | X | | | X | unsure | | | 4/9 | 44 |
| Sociability | X | X | | | X | X | X | | | 5/9 | 55 |
| Self-Management | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | 9/9 | 100 |
| Integrity | X | X | | X | | | X | X | | 5/9 | 55 |
| Total | 5/5 | 5/5 | 3/5 | 3/5 | 3/5 | 4/5 | 4/5 | 3/5 | 2/5 | | |
| % | 100 | 100 | 60 | 60 | 60 | 80 | 80 | 60 | 40 | | |

Table three captures the aspect that all youth believe to have benefitted at a minimum from two different competency areas, with some youth finding an increase in competency in all five areas. The average for all nine youth shows an increase in approximately three and a half of the competencies.

Program Goals. The intended goals of the program include exiting the juvenile justice system, prevention of recidivism, job training, career building, and financial literacy skills (Program Director, Personal Communication, August 28, 2017). As with the competencies, many of the goal areas have been addressed in the general findings of themes. Because the youth did not always use the exact vocabulary of the intended goals, code words varied in some regards to capture youth terminology that was coded that the researcher believes falls under the same umbrella as the aforementioned goals. Table four outlines the program’s intended goals in the first column and the coding used from the youth transcriptions that counted towards a positive indicator in that regard.

Table 4

Program Goals and Corresponding Codes

| Program Intended Goal | Codes that Capture the Goal |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| Exiting the Juvenile Justice System | Helped get off probation |
| Prevention of Recidivism | Decreased Maladaptive Activity Recidivism |
| Job Training | Job Skills or Training Job Roles |
| Career Building | Career Building |
| Financial Literacy Skills | Financial Literacy |

Table five provides a snapshot of the overall findings pertaining to goals of the program and allows the reader to break down the findings by goal and by participant perception in the target goal areas. Eight out of nine youth (89%) perceived that the goal areas of exiting the juvenile justice system, job training, and career building have been addressed through participation in the after-school employment program. Six out of nine youth (67%) indicated an increase in financial literacy skills through participation in the program. The goal of prevention of recidivism was not addressed in this study due to the time restraints and purpose of the study. The researcher was not able to observe youth over a period of many years to determine whether the youth recidivate following program participation. In addition, the nature of the study was self-reporting through one interview process, which does not include the longitudinal aspect of observation and data collection over a period of time. Therefore, this goal area will not be addressed in the findings.

Table 5

Individual Participant Perceived Increase in Goals

| Program Goal | Participants | | | | | | | | | Total | % |
|--|---------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|--------------|----------|
| | A | B | C | D | E | F | G | H | I | | |
| Exiting the Juvenile Justice System | X | | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | 8/9 | 89 |
| Prevention of Recidivism | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a |
| Job Training | X | X | X | | X | X | X | X | X | 8/9 | 89 |
| Career Building | X | | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | 8/9 | 89 |
| Financial Literacy Skills | | | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | 6/6 | 100 |

| | | | | | | | | | |
|--------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Total | 3/5 | 1/5 | 4/5 | 3/5 | 4/5 | 4/5 | 4/5 | 4/5 | 4/5 |
| % | 60 | 20 | 80 | 60 | 80 | 80 | 80 | 80 | 80 |

Table five captures the aspect that all youth believe to have benefitted at a minimum from one goal area, with some youth finding an increase in four out of five goal areas. The average for all nine youth shows an increase in approximately three and a half goal areas. Note that the goal area of recidivism skews the results, as this goal area was not studied.

Changes to the Program

All participants were asked questions that allowed them the opportunity to discuss any changes they would like to see in the program, ways they would improve the program, or anything that they dislike about the program. An overwhelming seven out of nine youth could not come up with one programmatic change or improvement, with the exception of Participant G, who jokingly stated that he wishes the program had accessible wireless internet (“wifi”). Participant B’s only wish of the program was to increase the number of work days. He stated that he would like to work weekends and have more available work hours to dedicate to the job. Participant B also talked about how he believes that the program could benefit from additional events or outing activities for the kid participants. He reflected on what he believes it is like to experience different events or outings and to be exposed to various cultures of people.

More hours and just more events for us to have wit the kids, like take them to the Pirate’s game or the Steelers. ‘Cuz when I was a kid, for real for real, it feel like ... when people used to take me on lil events that I used to have like a lot of fun ‘cuz I ain’t ever go to one before ... you know, some of these kids never been to a football game or a hockey game or anything ... I just like to see kids smile and have a good [time], instead of always growin’ up around people wit they pants sagging and chains around they necks and just

have a little fun, go out, meet new people, see new people, see how they live. I used to have that smile on my face too to see other people.

Participants C and E discussed similar improvement factors pertaining to boredom or idle time when at work. Participant C said that she will sometimes just sit in the back room, which gets boring. She indicated that “it would be better if I actually did something while I was here.” However, when asked if she believes there is an opportunity for her to do more, she responded that she was unsure. Participant E stated that although he hasn’t had any bad experiences during his time enrolled with the program thus far, the back room can get “a little boring.” He discussed ways in which the program has improved over the past several months and ended his discussion by saying that there is not much that he does not like about the program.

Conclusion

This chapter presented findings that describe how youth perceive their after-school employment program to affect them. It also examined the program’s intended goals and competencies and whether they aligned with youth perceived goals and competencies. The research design purposefully aligned with strategies designed to investigate the lived experiences of the youth sample. This chapter provided demographics of the sample, discussed the iterative coding and analysis process, and identified the emerging themes. The four themes that evolved include interpersonal skills, self-efficacy, decreased maladaptive activity, and professional competencies. These themes and their supporting foundations are displayed in *Figure 1*.

Figure 1

Summary of Themes

| | |
|--|--|
| Theme 1: Interpersonal Skills | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relations with family members • Professional communication skills • Relationships with staff • Interpersonal skills |
| Theme 2: Self-Efficacy | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maturity and motivation • Independence and responsibility • Hopes for a successful future |
| Theme 3: Decreased Maladaptive Activity | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decreased maladaptive activity, "off the streets" • Payment of court fees, fines, restitution • Change in peer group |
| Theme 4: Professional Competencies | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Job roles and training • Financial literacy • Time management • Career building |

The after-school employment program’s intended goals include youth exiting the juvenile justice system, prevention of recidivism, job training, career building, and financial literacy skills. Through youth interviews, it was determined that 100% of youth believe that the program has helped to improve financial literacy skills and 89% of youth believe that the program is helping them to exit the juvenile justice system, enhance their job training, and assist with career building. Recidivism rates were not analyzed in this study and findings were not identified for this goal area. Based upon these findings, it appears that the program is implementing the goals that it intends to implement.

The program’s intended competencies include increasing youth responsibility, self-esteem, sociability, self-management, and integrity. Youth findings indicate that 100% of youth believe the program has helped to increase responsibility and self-management, 55% of youth believe that the program has increased sociability and integrity, and 44% of youth indicate that the program has helped to increase self-esteem. It should be noted that although youth may not have identified growth in certain areas, they did not indicate a decrease in any of the identified

competencies as a result of being in this program. Based upon these findings, it appears that the program is implementing the competencies that it intends to implement and youth perceive that they have either remained the same in certain competency areas or have improved as a result of their participation in the program.

Chapter 5: Discussion

This phenomenological study explored how adjudicated youth perceive an urban after-school employment program to affect them. The researcher was interested in gaining insight from youth perspectives (those who live and breathe the program) and learning whether the program's intended goals and competencies align with the goals and competencies perceived by participants. The intent of this research aimed to explore what youth deem to be critical components of an aftercare or after-school program in order to increase the body of knowledge pertaining to adjudicated youth treatment measures. This study adds to the body of existing literature and takes a unique angle from an emic (inside the social group) rather than etic (third-party lens) perspective. The lived experiences of nine youth who are members of a specific urban after-school program in western Pennsylvania were captured through face-to-face interviews. The transcriptions were coded and analyzed through an iterative process until four emerging themes presented themselves. This chapter weaves together the literature, theoretical framework, and findings. It also discusses implications and makes a recommendation for future research.

Connection to Literature

Chapter two presented a foundation of literature for positioning this study within a framework of existing publications that involve definitions for key terms such as juvenile offender and aftercare, a historical outline and transformation of the juvenile justice system in the United States, the theoretical framework that underpins the nature of the study, and literature that addresses the effectiveness of after-school programs for juvenile offenders. Empirical studies that capture both third-party and first-person perspectives of after-school programming for adjudicated youth now serve as the collective lens for examining the findings. It is noted that an abundance of existing literature does not directly explore how youth perceive their treatment

programming to affect them. Current literature inspects this issue through outcome variables, such as recidivism, or through the perspectives of those who encounter youth in the juvenile justice system (probation officers, social workers, psychologists, judges, attorneys, etc.). While this study fills a gap in existing literature, the dearth in relevant studies makes it difficult to compare literature findings.

A qualitative study conducted by Carruthers (2006) embraced a similar approach to this study and also utilized the phenomenological framework. Carruthers (2006) discussed the need to contribute to the positive development of youth and focused her research on after-school programs to understand the impact of an after-school program (SKATES) for adolescent girls, as well as understand the mechanisms of change that were related to the outcomes. The five themes that emerged from Carruthers' (2006) study include exploration and goal setting, developing competence/past performance, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and self-efficacy for the future. These themes align closely with the themes that emerged from this study, including interpersonal skills, self-efficacy, decreased maladaptive activity, and professional competencies. Although the umbrella themes may differ in terminology, many of the core competencies reported in Carruthers' (2006) study align with those in this study, with the increase in professional competencies, communication skills, and self-efficacy correlating directly.

An abundance of studies indicate that the hours between 3:00 pm and 6:00 pm pose a high risk for maladaptive activity among youth and present the opportunity for youth to engage in criminal behavior due to the lack of structured supervision (Ouellette et al., 2005; Sickmund et al., 1997; Snyder & Sickmund, 1999, 2006; Snyder et al., 1996; U.S. Department of Justice, 2000). In addition, Gottfredson et al. (2001) state that youth who are unsupervised during after-school hours are found to be more likely to engage in criminal behavior at all times, not only

after school. These findings align with the findings accumulated from youth perspectives in this study. Youth explained that the after-school employment program provided them with a positive environment that also kept them “off the streets” and away from negative influences during after-school hours. Rather than engaging in maladaptive activities (as many reported that they had done in the past), they believe that they now have a purpose through their employment program and find it motivating to have meaningful, structured time to fill the hours after school until bed time.

The study conducted by Schinke et al. (1992), discussed in chapter two, concurs with the findings of this qualitative study. The study compared housing projects without a Boys & Girls Club program to housing projects where new clubs were established and found by the conclusion of the study that the housing projects without the Clubs had 50% more vandalism and scored 37% worse on drug activity than the projects with the Clubs (Schinke et al., 1992). Although the studies varied in composition and purpose, both highlight the common theme that after-school programs can help to shut down the “prime time for juvenile crime.” Several youth in this qualitative study attested that their involvement in the after-school employment program helps to keep them “off the streets,” from engaging in maladaptive acts, and from doing “dumb stuff,” things that they reported to do prior to their engagement in the after-school program.

Connection to Theory

Creswell (1998) explains that one of the most valuable aspects of a qualitative research design is the development or validation of theory. The findings of this study acquired a rich understanding of how youth involved in an after-school program in western Pennsylvania perceive the program to affect them; however, it is important to also consider these findings from a theoretical perspective (Baldwin et al., 2005). Through analyzing the data, themes, and

findings, it becomes clear that the social learning theory, as set forth by Burgess and Akers (1966) and Prat et al. (2010), can be used to explain the data.

This study's findings capture the essence that youth involved in the after-school employment program identified positive ways in which the program affects them, including increased interpersonal skills, increased self-efficacy, decreased maladaptive activity, and increased professional competencies. The findings also highlight that the intended competencies (responsibility, self-esteem, sociability, self-management, integrity) and goals (exiting the juvenile justice system, prevention of recidivism, job training, career building, and financial literacy skills) of the program are being instilled in youth, according to their perception.

The findings and application of theory of this study aligns very closely with Carruthers (2006), who applied the research of Bandura (1997) to the evaluation of youth in the after-school program, SKATES. Specifically, the study suggested that the girls experienced what Bandura (1997) referred to as a "transformational restructuring of efficacy beliefs" (p. 53) that resulted in a "greater sense of self-efficacy about the future" (Carruthers, 2006, p. 144). Bandura (1997) explains that "self-efficacy is an individual's belief that he or she has the capabilities to be successful in a certain situation" (Carruthers, 2006, p. 144). Carruthers' (2006) study indicated that the SKATES program participants acquired the belief that they could create a more enjoyable future for themselves as a result of participation in the program. In this study, the concept of self-efficacy also emerged as an umbrella theme and was identified by 100% of participants. This theme encompassed youth beliefs that their drive, independence, maturity level, and confidence has increased due to participation in the after-school employment program.

Social learning theory also drives the positive mentor aspect of the findings, whereas youth described the staff members at the employment program to be positive role models, with

several youth members stating that they were able to form positive connections with the staff members, other kids, and parents at the program. Carruthers (2006) supports this finding in her research and discusses the central role of relationships in positive youth development.

As hypothesized, social learning theory can be applied to the above findings with the assumption that youth who are surrounded by deviant peers are more likely to engage in crime, whereas youth who attend a positive supervised after-school environment are less likely to be involved in delinquent acts. It can be argued that this reduction stems from the underpinnings of social learning theory and that the environment and mentors that surround a youth are what drive his or her participation in either maladaptive or positive acts.

Implications of the Findings for Practice

Although adjudicated youth and treatment programs have been heavily researched, most studies neglect to consider youth perspectives. The National Association of Social Workers (2017) *Code of Ethics* lists the ethical principle that social workers respect the inherent dignity and worth of the person. Under this principle, it is stated that social workers seek “to enhance clients’ capacity and opportunity to change and to address their own needs” and “resolve conflicts between clients’ interests and the broader society’s interests in a socially responsible manner” (NASW, 2017, p. 6). By identifying the components that youth themselves deem to be critical components to successful after-school programs, as well as referencing the youth as to whether a program’s intended goals and competencies are being instilled, social workers can make a direct positive influence on the development of youth and their contributions to society.

The findings of this study provide direction for program directors of similar after-school programming. The study affirms the key role that interpersonal connections and relationships serve in perceived youth success. Staff and social workers who are employed in after-school

programming, especially with at-risk youth, should receive ongoing support and training in order to more adequately understand this population and be equipped with the skills needed to work effectively with the youth and serve as mentors and role models (Ellis & Caldwell, 2005; Hirsch, 2005; Larson et al., 2004). Carruthers and Busser (2000) and Eccles and Gootman (2002) highlight the importance of staff burnout and turnover being kept to a minimum. Hirsch (2005) provides a more detailed explanation for the reason behind this, being that staff who are burned out are less likely to provide the youth with the appropriate level of support necessary for their growth and development.

The findings highlight that after-school programs can better serve youth participants through competency-based programs and education on skills. Findings highlighted that 100% of youth perceived their competencies to improve through participation in the program, especially with regards to career building, time management, job skills and training, and financial literacy. Therefore, these opportunities should be integrated into similar after-school programs to enhance the education and competency-based skills of youth participants.

This emic approach is strength-based, gives a voice to the participants, and balances the ethical principle of the dignity and worth of the person, while balancing society's interest in a decrease in juvenile crime. Lawmakers, juvenile justice system personnel, mental health professionals, social workers, and programming agencies may gain awareness into areas where treatment and program models can be improved to build upon current community-based aftercare programming so that our society may better serve juvenile offenders (Hutchins, 2015). Although this phenomenological study is only generalizable to the youth interviewed, it serves as a segue for future research and for ways in which current after-school programs can incorporate the findings in order to better serve the youth population. A larger sample size across a greater

number of states and after-school programs will help to make the study's findings more transferable. In addition, themes that emerge can be compared across a greater spectrum to really capture the qualities that the youth embrace as well as the factors that contribute to making an after-school program successful. Social workers can use these measures to enhance efforts of integrating critical components into future programming.

Recommendations for Further Research

This phenomenological study offered a preliminary essence of how youth perceive and experience an urban after-school employment program to affect them. Previous research was limited in examining this topic through the lens of those who live and breathe the program. The findings of this study offer a foundation from which to build on as future research continues to explore this evolving dynamic pertaining to adjudicated youth and treatment programs. The researcher suggests that continuing research considerations include expanding the target population to include a larger number of participants from a diverse number of after-school employment programs, exploring common themes across programming to determine consistencies in youth perspectives, engaging in observation of youth in the research to examine whether youth commentary aligns with objective observation, and examining recidivism rates through a longitudinal study for youth who participate in after-school employment programming to compare their relayed perspectives with outcome variables.

The researcher recommends increasing the number of participants in future studies to increase the transferability across the spectrum of after-school programming. As discussed in the limitations section, this study is only generalizable to the participants who were interviewed. As the research into this topic expands, larger sample sizes should be considered so that common themes across participants in a variety of after-school employment or aftercare programs can be

compared. It should become clear over time whether there are consistencies amongst the youth participants in order to further guide after-school program structure to more adequately meet youth needs.

Researcher observation would be a beneficial component to add to youth interviews in order to strengthen the findings and gain insight into youth perceptions of after-school programs. The researcher could observe through an objective lens to determine whether youth responses align with observed outcomes. For example, when youth describe their duties on a given day when at “work,” the researcher would then be able to observe for accuracy.

Although it is the researcher’s opinion that it is extremely critical to learn about youth treatment programs through the perspective of youth participants, expanding upon this phenomenological framework with raw data pertaining to recidivism rates would help to strengthen the validity in youth responses.

Limitations

Limitations involved within this study encompass factors that are specific to phenomenological research. First, the study’s participants were limited to nine youth who are enrolled in a specific urban after-school employment program. The study contributes to learning how youth perceive a specific after-school employment program to affect them and the findings are best understood through the context of the nine youth who were interviewed. Therefore, generalizability and transferability are weak factors in this study. Although the findings can provide valuable information into the perspectives of the sample of youth in this after-school program, additional research would need to be completed to increase the validity and transferability of the findings.

Second, power should be considered as a potential limitation in this study. Although the researcher aimed to limit the effects of the power differential that inherently comes with youth being interviewed by an adult researcher, the factor of social desirability bias should be considered. Youth may have been more likely to provide positive responses in order to “please” the researcher.

Third, the language gap should be noted. Although the researcher went to great lengths to attempt to speak with youth in very basic, understandable terms, the potential for misunderstanding due to a language barrier exists. For example, through the transcription process, the researcher noted that one youth appeared to have a misunderstanding of what “self-esteem” meant. Although the researcher attempted to redefine this in a way that made sense to the youth, the true essence behind the meaning of the word could have been lost, thus creating a skewed response on behalf of the participant.

A fourth limitation involves youth cognitive capacity to discuss ways in which they wish to change or improve the program. As discussed in Chapter four, all participants were asked what they dislike about the program or wish to change; however, only seven youth could formulate any type of response. It is suspected that the maturity and experience of the youth may not allow them to clearly formulate or articulate areas of improvement, especially considering that several youth mentioned that this is their first experience in a job setting. It can be speculated that youth may feel uncomfortable talking about negative aspects of the program. Although the researcher attempted to reduce power biases, trust may be a factor here. The youth participants are fulfilling probationary terms and may not want to say anything that they believe could jeopardize their status within the juvenile justice system or their place of employment, despite the researcher explaining the terms of confidentiality.

Although the researcher aimed to use youth transcriptions, an iterative coding process, and peer review to structure themes, no member checks were conducted to establish the credibility of the findings. In addition, longitudinal data has not been collected to determine whether perspectives or beliefs were sustained over time or whether the program's effect was positive over time or following termination from the program. Tracking recidivism data of youth is discussed as a recommendation for future research, in addition to the qualitative framework.

Conclusion

This qualitative, phenomenological study aimed to identify how youth enrolled in a western Pennsylvania urban after-school employment program perceived the program to affect them and to determine whether the program's intended goals and competencies align with youth perceptions of goals and competencies gained from the program. A sample of nine youth were interviewed, and the transcripts underwent an iterative coding and analysis process to determine an emergence of themes from the data. Findings pertaining to youth perspectives outlined four umbrella themes: interpersonal skills, self-efficacy, decreased maladaptive activity, and professional competencies. These findings reflected the overwhelming positive experiences that youth participants perceived to gain through their participation in the program. In addition, these themes aligned closely with the program's intended goals and competencies, shedding light on the fact that the program appears to be instilling the goals and competencies in the youth that it intends to.

The social learning theory was embraced and served as the framework and lens through which the study's findings could be understood. The findings aligned with the social learning theory in that youth surrounded by deviant peers are more likely to engage in crime; whereas youth who attend a positive supervised after-school environment are less likely to be involved in

delinquent acts. It can be argued that this reduction stems from the underpinnings of social learning theory and that the environment and mentors that surround a youth are what drive his or her participation in either maladaptive or positive acts.

Research implications highlight the importance of embracing the social work ethical principle of the inherent dignity and worth of a person. This approach should be embraced in all facets of research so that youth have a voice in the treatment programs they are attending. In addition, the importance of interpersonal relations is highlighted, indicating a need for continuing staff training in order to increase their education and ability to serve youth within this population. It is recommended that future research expands upon the sample size to make the findings more transferable. Data pertaining to recidivism rates can be beneficial, but only in combination with a qualitative approach that incorporates the voices of the youth.

References

- Abrams, L. S., Mizel, M. L., Nguyen, V., & Shlonsky, A. (2014). Juvenile reentry and aftercare interventions: Is mentoring a promising direction? *Journal of Evidence-Based Social Work, 11*, 404-422.
- Abrams, L., Shannon, S., & Sangalang, C. (2008). Transition services for incarcerated youth: A mixed methods evaluation study. *Children and Youth Services Review, 30*, 522-535.
- Afterschool Alliance. (2014). *Keeping kids safe and supported in the hours after school*. (Issue Brief No. 65). Retrieved from http://afterschoolalliance.org/documents/issue_briefs/issue_KeepingKidsSafe_65.pdf
- Akers, R. (1985). *Deviant behavior: A social learning approach*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- Akers, R. (1998). *Social learning and social structure: A general theory of crime and deviance*. Boston, MA: Northeastern University Press.
- Akers, R. L. (1973). *Deviant behavior: A social learning approach*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- Akers, R. L. (1977). *Deviant behavior: A social learning approach* (2nd ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- Akers, R. L. (2001). Social learning theory. In R. Paternoster & R. Bachman (Eds.), *Explaining criminals and crime: Essays in contemporary criminological theory* (pp. 192-210). Los Angeles, CA: Roxbury.
- Altschuler, D. M., & Armstrong, T. L. (2001). Reintegrating high-risk juvenile offenders into communities: Experiences and prospects. *Corrections Management Quarterly, 5*, 72-88.
- Andrews, T. (2011). JJDPA. *Poverty & Race, 20*(2), 6.

- Anthony, E., Samples, M., de Kervor, D., Ituarte, S., Lee, C., & Austin, M. (2010). Coming back home: The reintegration of formerly incarcerated youth with service implications. *Children and Youth Services Review, 32*, 1271-1277.
- Baldwin, C., Caldwell, L., & Witt, P. (2005). Deliberate programming with logic models: From theory to outcomes. In P. Witt, & L. Caldwell (Eds.), *Recreation and youth development* (pp. 219-239). State College, PA: Venture Publishing.
- Bandura, A. (1971). *Social learning theory*. New York City, NY: General Learning Press.
- Bandura, A. (1977). Self-efficacy: Toward a unifying theory of behavioral change. *Psychological Review, 84*(2), 191-215.
- Bandura, A. (1986). *Social foundations of thought and action: A social cognitive theory*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Bandura, A. (1994). Self-efficacy. In V. S. Ramachaudran (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of human behavior* (Vol. 4, pp. 71-81). New York, NY: Academic Press. (Reprinted in H. Friedman [Ed.], *Encyclopedia of mental health*. San Diego, CA: Academic Press, 1998.)
- Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*. New York, NY: W.H. Freeman.
- Bandura, A. (2002). *Social cognitive theory of mass communication*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Barnes, C. L. (2008). Outreach intervention reduces recidivism in juvenile delinquents. In G. R. Walz, J. C. Bleuer, & R. K. Yep (Eds.), *Compelling counseling interventions: Celebrating VISTAS' fifth anniversary* (pp. 39-45). Ann Arbor, MI: Counseling Outfitters.
- Barrett, D. E., & Katsiyannis, A. (2015). Juvenile delinquency recidivism: Are black and white youth vulnerable to the same risk factors? *Behavioral Disorders, 40*(3), 184-195.

- Bartol, C., & Bartol, A. (2005). *Criminal behavior: A psychosocial approach* (7th ed). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, Inc.
- Benson, P. (1997). *All kids are our kids*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Benson, P. M., Mannes, K., Pittman, & Ferber, T. (2004) Youth development, developmental assets, and public policy. In R. Lerner, & L. Steinback (eds.), *Handbook of adolescent psychology*. New York, NY: John Wiley.
- Braithwaite, J., & Mugford, S. (1994). Conditions of successful reintegration ceremonies: Dealing with juvenile offenders. *British Journal of Criminology*, 34(2), 139-171.
- Brown, D., O'Sullivan, K., & Maxwell, S. (2005). Overcoming barriers to employment for youth in the juvenile justice system: A practical guide. *National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges Training and Technical Assistance Program Bulletin*, 2(5), 1-5.
- Bruno, A., & Dell'Aversana, G. (2017). Reflective practice for psychology students: The use of reflective journal feedback in higher education. *Psychology Learning & Teaching*, 16(2), 248-260.
- Bullis, M., & Yovanoff, P. (2002). Those who do not return: Correlates of the work and school engagement of formerly incarcerated youth who remain in the community. *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders*, 10(2), 66-78.
- Burgess, R., & Akers, R. (1966). A differential association-reinforcement theory of criminal behavior. *Social Problems*, 14(2), 128-147.
- Carruthers, C. (2006). Processes and outcomes of an after-school program for adolescent girls. *Journal of Park and Recreation Administration*, 24(4), 127-152.

- Carruthers, C., & Busser, J. (2000). A qualitative outcome study of Boys and Girls Club program leaders, club members, and parents. *Journal of Park and Recreation Administration, 18*, 50-67.
- Chumley, C. (2015). *White House: Don't use term 'juvenile delinquent'*. Retrieved from <http://www.wnd.com/2015/11/white-house-suggests-dont-use-term-juvenile-delinquent/>
- Chung, H. L., Mulvey, E. P., & Steinberg, L. (2011). Understanding the school outcomes of juvenile offenders: An exploration of neighborhood influences and motivational resources. *Journal of Youth & Adolescence, 40*, 1025-1038.
- Cohen, A. K. (1955). *Delinquent boys: The culture of the gang*. Glencoe, IL: Free Press.
- Cohen, D., & Crabtree, B. (2006). *Qualitative research guidelines project: Evaluative criteria*. Retrieved from <http://www.qualres.org/HomeEval-3664.html>
- Conger, R. D. (1976). Social control and social learning models of delinquent behavior. *Criminology, 14*(1), 17-40.
- Creswell, J. W. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among the five traditions*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Cromwell, P.F. (1978). *Introduction to juvenile delinquency: Text and readings*. St. Paul, MN: West Publishing Company.
- DeCuir-Gunby, J. T., Marshall, P. L., & McCulloch, A. W. (2011). Developing and using a codebook for the analysis of interview data: An example from a professional development research project. *Field Methods, 23*(2), 136-155.

- Dunn, D. S., Saville, B. K., Baker, S. C., & Marek, P. (2013). Evidence-based teaching: Tools and techniques that promote learning in the psychology classroom. *Australian Journal of Psychology, 65*, 5-13.
- Eastman, B. (2005). Variables associated with treatment failure among adolescent sex offenders. *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation, 42*(3), 23-40.
- Eccles, J., & Gootman, J. (2002). *Community programs to promote youth development*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.
- Ellis, J., & Caldwell, L. (2005). Increasing youth voice. In P. Witt, & L. Caldwell (Eds.), *Recreation and youth development* (pp. 281-300). State College, PA: Venture.
- Encyclopedia.com. (2001). *Theories of juvenile delinquency*. Retrieved from <http://www.encyclopedia.com/social-sciences/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/juvenile-delinquency-theories>
- Felizzi, M. V. (2011). *A study of the relationships among emotional abuse, parent and caregiver instability, and disrupted attachment on juvenile sex offending status*. (2011, doctoral dissertation). Widener University, Chester, PA.
- Fields, D., & Abrams, L. S. (2010). Gender differences in the perceived need and barriers of youth offenders preparing for community reentry. *Child Youth Care Forum, 39*, 253-269.
- Finklea, K. M. (2010). Juvenile justice: Legislative history and current legislative issues. In O. B. Hahn (Ed.), *Perspectives on juvenile offenders*. Hauppauge, NY: Nova Science Publishers, Inc.
- Fitzgerald, C. S. (2011). Historical theories of crime and delinquency. *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment, 21*, 297-311.

- Flannery, D. J., Williams, L. L., & Vazsonyi, A. T. (1999). Who are they with and what are they doing? Delinquent behavior, substance abuse, and early adolescents' after-school time. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 69(2), 247-253.
- Flynn, E. E. (1983). Crime as a major social issue. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 27(1), 7-42.
- Garcia, G. E. (1992). Ethnography and classroom communication: Taking an "emic" perspective. *Topics in Language Disorders*, 12(3), 54-66.
- Geis, S. V. (2003). Aftercare services. *Juvenile Justice Bulletin*. U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.
- Gendreau, P. (1996). Offender rehabilitation: What we know and what needs to be done. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 23(1), 144-161.
- Giorgi, A. (Ed.). (1985). *Phenomenology and psychological research*. Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press.
- Godina, H., & McCoy, R. (2000). Emic and etic perspectives on Chicana and Chicano multicultural literature. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 44(2), 172-179.
- Gottfredson, D. C., Gottfredson, G. D., & Weisman, S. A. (2001). The timing of delinquent behavior and its implications for afterschool programs. *Criminology & Public Policy*, 1(1), 61-86.
- Grusec, J. (1992). Social learning theory and developmental psychology: The legacies of Robert Sears and Albert Bandura. *Developmental Psychology*, 28(5), 776-786.
- Hagan, J. (1991). Destiny and drift: Subcultural preferences, status attainments, and the risks and rewards of youth. *American Sociological Review*, 56, 567-582.

- Halpern, A. (1990). A methodological review of follow-up and follow-along studies tracking school from special education. *Career Development for Exceptional Individuals, 13*, 13-27.
- Harris, P., Lockwood, B., Mengers, L., & Stoodley, B. (2009). Measuring recidivism in juvenile corrections. *Journal of Juvenile Justice, 1*, 1-16.
- Hennegler, S., Letourneau, E., Chapman, J., Bourdin, C., Schewe, P., & McCart, M. (2009). Mediators of change for multisystemic therapy with juvenile sexual offenders. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 77*(3), 451-462.
- Hibbert, P., & Cunliffe, A. (2015). Responsible management: Engaging moral reflexive practice through threshold concepts. *Journal of Business Ethics, 127*, 177-188.
- Hirsch, B. (2005). *A place to call home: After-school programs for urban youth*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Hirsch, R. A., Dierkhising, C. B., & Herz, D. C. (2018). Educational risk, recidivism, and service among youth involved in both the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. *Children and Youth Services Review, 85*, 72-80.
- Holmes, A. G. D. (2014). *Research positionality: A consideration of its influence and place in research*. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/260421552_Research_positionality_-_a_consideration_of_its
- Hull, C. L. (1930). Simple trial and error learning: A study in psychological theory. *Psychological Review, 37*(3), 241-256.

- Hutchins, T. L. (2015). *The perceptions of former female juvenile offenders on the effects of community-based aftercare services on their personal success: A qualitative study* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from Proquest. (No. 3745419.)
- Izzo, R. L., & Ross, R. (1990). Meta-analysis of rehabilitation programs for juvenile delinquents: A brief report. *Criminal Justice and Behavior, 17*(1), 134-142.
- James, C., Stams, G. J. J., Asscher, J. J., De Roo, A. K., & van der Laan, P. H. (2013). Aftercare programs for reducing recidivism among juvenile and young adult offenders: A meta-analytic review. *Clinical Psychology Review, 33*, 263-274.
- Jayes, S. (2014). Using social disorganization theory to guide substance abuse prevention among adolescents: Implications for educators. *Journal of At-Risk Issues, 18*(1), 35-40.
- Juvenile Law Center. (n.d.). *Youth in the justice system: An overview*. Retrieved from <https://jlc.org/youth-justice-system-overview>
- Kadish, T. E., Glaser, B. A., Calhoun, G. B., & Risler, E. A. (1999). Counseling juvenile offenders: A program evaluation. *Journal of Addictions and Offender Counseling, 19*(2), 88-94.
- Kaufmann, D. R., Wyman, P. A., Forbes-Jones, E. L., & Barry, J. (2007). Prosocial involvement and antisocial peer affiliations as predictors of behavior problems in urban adolescents: Main effects and moderating effects. *Journal of Community Psychology, 35*(4), 417-434.
- Larson, R., Jarrett, R., Hansen, D., Pearce, N., Sullivan, P., Walker, K., . . . Wood, D. (2004). Organized youth activities as contexts for positive development. In P. Linley, & S. Joseph (Eds.), *Positive psychology in practice* (pp. 540-560). Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.

- Lerner, R. M., Theokas, C., & Jelicic, H. (2005). Youth as active agents in their own positive development: A developmental systems perspective. In W. Greve, K. Rothermund, & D. Wentura (Eds.), *The adaptive self: Personal continuity and intentional self-development* (pp. 31-47). Göttingen, Germany: Hogrefe & Huber Publishers.
- MacDonald, G. B., & Valdivieso, R. (2001). Measuring deficits and assets: How we track youth development now and how we should track it. In P. L. Benson, & K. J. Pittman (Eds.), *Trends in youth development: Visions, realities, and changes* (pp. 155-186). Norwell, MA: Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- Madyun, N. H. (2011). Connecting social disorganization theory to African American outcomes to explain the achievement gap. *Journal of Educational Foundations, 25*, 21-35.
- Malterud, K. (2001). Qualitative research: Standards, challenges, and guidelines. *Lancet, 358*, 483-488.
- Marshall, C., & Rossman, G. B. (2015). *Designing qualitative research* (6th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Mathur, S. R., & Clark, H. G. (2014). Community engagement for reentry success of youth from juvenile justice: Challenges and opportunities. *Education and Treatment of Children, 37*(4), 713-734.
- Matza, D., & Sykes, G. (1961). Juvenile delinquency and subterranean values. *American Sociological Review, 28*, 712-720.
- Mendes, S., & McDonald, M. (2001). Putting severity of punishment back in the deterrence package. *Policy Studies Journal, 29*, 588-610.
- Menhard, S. (1990). *Longitudinal research*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

- Menihan, C. J. (2015). Criminal mind or inculpable adolescence? A glimpse at the history, failures, and required changes of the American juvenile correction system. *Pace Law Review*, 35(2), 761-784.
- Merton, R. K. (1968). *Social theory and social structure*. New York, NY: International Publishers.
- Miller, W. B. (1958). Lower class culture as a generating milieu of gang delinquency. *Journal of Social Issues*, 14, 5-19.
- Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- National Association of Social Workers. (2017). *NASW code of ethics (Guide to the everyday professional conduct of social workers)*. Washington, DC: NASW.
- Ochoa, T. A., & Rome, J. (2009). Considerations for arrests and interrogations of suspects with hearing, cognitive, and behavioral disorders. *Law Enforcement Executive Forum*, 9(5), 125-135.
- Opinion Research Corporation. (2006). *Fight crime: Invest in kids in California, California survey of teens*. Oakland, CA: Fight Crime: Invest in Kids California
- Ouellette, M., Hutchinson, A. M., & Frant, N. (2005). *The afterschool hours: A new focus for America's cities*. Washington, DC: National League of Cities.
- Padgett, D. K. (2017). *Qualitative methods in social work research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Perkins-Dock, R. E. (2001). Family interventions with incarcerated youth: A review of the literature. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, 45(5), 606-625.

- Philliber Research Associates. (2000). *The California juvenile crime prevention demonstration project: Statewide final report, January 1996 through May 2000*.
- Piquero, A., Cullen, F., Unnever, J., Piquero, N., & Gordon, J. (2010). Never too late: Public optimism about juvenile rehabilitation. *Punishment and Society, 12*(2), 187-207.
- Pratt, T. C., Cullen, F. T., Sellers, C. S., Winfree, L. T. Jr., Madensen, T. D., Daigle, L. E., . . . Gau, J. M. (2010). The empirical status of social learning theory: A meta-analysis. *Justice Quarterly, 27*(6), 765-802.
- Ren, L., Zhang, H., Zhao, J. S., & Zhao, R. (2016). Delinquent subculture and juvenile offenders' attitudes toward the police in China. *Police Quarterly, 19*(1), 87-110.
- Robst, J., Armstrong, M., & Dollard, N. (2017). The association between type of out-of-home mental health treatment and juvenile justice recidivism for youth with trauma exposure. *Criminal Behavior and Mental Health, 27*(5), 501-513.
- Rogers, S. C. (2013). *Effectiveness of a correctional treatment program in the prevention of recidivism among adjudicated female juvenile delinquents* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest. (No. 3553929.)
- Rooney, P. (2010). *Judges and attorneys' perceptions of juvenile sex offenders* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from Proquest. (No. 3439703)
- Saldana, J. (2009). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. London, UK: Sage Publications, Ltd.
- Saldana, J. (2015). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Saville-Troike, M. (1989). *The ethnography of communication* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Blackwell.

- Schinke, S. P., Orlandi, M. A., & Cole, K. C. (1992). Boys & girls clubs in public housing developments: Prevention services for youth at risk. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 20, 118-128.
- Shaw, C. R., & McKay, H. D. (1942). *Juvenile delinquency and urban areas*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Sickmund, M., Snyder, H., & Poe-Yamagata, E. (1997). *Juvenile offenders and victims: 1997 update on violence - statistics summary*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention
- Simons, R. L., Simons, L. G., & Wallace, L. E. (2004). *Families, delinquency, and crime: Linking society's most basic institution to antisocial behavior*. Los Angeles, CA: Roxbury Publishing Company
- Skinner, B. F. (1938). *The behavior of organisms: An experimental analysis*. New York, NY: D. Appleton-Century Company, Inc.
- Skinner, B. F. (1947). *Verbal behavior*. Retrieved from <http://www.behavior.org/resources/595.pdf>
- Snyder, H., & Sickmund, M. (1999). *Juvenile offenders and victims: 1999 national report*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.
- Snyder, H., & Sickmund, M. (2006). *Juvenile offenders and victims: 2006 national report*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

- Snyder, H., Sickmund, M., & Poe-Yamagata, E. (1996). *Juvenile offenders and victims: 1996 update on violence*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.
- Soule, D., Gottfredson, D., & Bauer, E. (2008). It's 3 p.m. Do you know where your child is? A study on the timing of juvenile victimization and delinquency. *Justice Quarterly*, 25(4), 623-646.
- Spencer, M. B., & Jones-Walker, C. (2004). Interventions and services offered to former juvenile offenders reentering their communities: An analysis of program effectiveness. *Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice*, 2(1), 88-97.
- Sutherland, E. H., & Cressey, D. R. (1955). *Principles of criminology*. Philadelphia, PA: Lippincott.
- Tapia, M., Alarid, L. F., & Enriquez, A. (2013). Court-ordered mentoring programs for adjudicated juveniles: When should youth be referred? *Justice Policy Journal*, 10(2), 2-18.
- Tasgin, S. (2012). Contemporary developments in social learning theory in criminological research and its possible use in Turkish criminological research. *The Journal of International Social Research*, 7(34), 982-989.
- Tesch, R. (1990). *Qualitative research: Analysis types and software tools*. London, UK: Falmer.
- Theokas, C., Danish, S., Hodge, K., Heke, I., & Forneris, T. (2015). Enhancing life skills through sport for children and youth. *Positive Youth Development through Sport*, 71-81.
- Thompson, M. (2012). *Reducing recidivism risk for juvenile offenders: Contributing risk factors* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from Proquest. (No. 3555202.)

- Trout, A. L., Chmelka, M. B., Thompson, R. W., Epstein, M. H., Tyler, P., & Pick, R. (2010). The departure status of youth from residential group care: Implications for aftercare. *Journal of Children and Family Studies, 19*, 67-78.
- Troutman, B. (2018). A more just system of juvenile justice: Creating a new standard of accountability for juveniles in Illinois. *The Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology, 108*(1), 197-221.
- Tuell, C. (2003). *Treatment providers' perceptions of effective interventions with juvenile sex offenders* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from Proquest. (No. 3092106.)
- United States Census Bureau. (2016). *Quick facts: Pittsburgh city, Pennsylvania*. Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/pittsburghcitypennsylvania/PST045216>
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2001). *Youth violence: A report of the surgeon general*. Rockville, MD: U.S. Office of the Surgeon General.
- U.S. Department of Justice. (2000). *Working for children and families: Safe and smart afterschool programs*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention
- U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs. (2017). *Juvenile arrests*. Retrieved from <https://www.ojjdp.gov/ojstatbb/crime/qa05101.asp?qaDate=2016&text=yes>
- U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs. (2003). *Aftercare services*. Juvenile Justice Bulletin. Retrieved from <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojjdp/201800.pdf>
- Vold, G. B., Bernard, T. J., & Snipes, J. (1998). *Theoretical criminology* (4th ed.). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Weaver, R. D., & Campbell, D. (2015). Fresh start: A meta-analysis of aftercare programs for juvenile offenders. *Research on Social Work Practice, 25*(2), 201-212.

- Weibush, R., Wagner, D., McNulty, B., Wang, Y., & Le, T. (2005). *Implementation and outcome evaluation of the intensive aftercare program*. Washington DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.
- Witt, P., & Caldwell, L. (2005). *Recreation and youth development*. State College, PA: Venture Publishing, Inc.
- Wolfgang, M., & Ferracuti, F. (1967). *The subculture of violence: Towards an integrated theory*. London, England: Tavistock.
- Wu, I. (2004). *An examination of teacher perceptions of educational services in juvenile correctional schools in Taiwan* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from Proquest. (No. 3131411.)
- Yampolskaya, S., & Chuang, E. (2012). Effects of mental health disorders on the risk of juvenile justice system involvement and recidivism among children placed in out-of-home care. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 82(4), 585-593.
- Young, S., Greer, B., & Church, R. (2017). Juvenile delinquency, welfare, justice and therapeutic interventions: A global perspective. *BJPsych Bulletin*, 41, 21-29.
- Zembroski, D. (2011). Sociological theories of crime and delinquency. *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment*, 21, 240-254.
- Zimring, F. (2004). *An American travesty: Legal responses to adolescent sexual offending*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Appendix A

ASSENT FORM

PARTICIPANTS' PERCEPTIONS OF AN URBAN AFTER-SCHOOL EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

Lexi Patrick
Millersville | Kutztown Doctor of Social Work Program

Research Assent Form



What is a Research Study?

Research studies help us learn new things. We can test new ideas. First, we ask a question. Then we try to find the answer.

This paper talks about our research and the choice that you have to take part in it. We want you to ask us any questions that you have. You can ask questions any time.

Important things to know...

- You get to decide if you want to take part.
- You can say 'No' or you can say 'Yes'.
- No one will be upset if you say 'No'.
- If you say 'Yes', you can always say 'No' later.
- You can say 'No' at anytime.
- We would still take good care of you no matter what you decide.



Why are we doing this research?

We are doing this research to find out more about what youth enrolled in an urban after-school program think and feel about the program. This study will be used for the researcher's dissertation requirement for the Millersville | Kutztown Doctorate Program.



What would happen if I join this research?

If you decide to be in the research, we would ask you to do the following:

- Have a parent or guardian sign the informed consent form
- Have you sign this assent form
- Participate in a 20 to 60 minute interview with Lexi Patrick, the researcher, in which you would be asked some questions about the [REDACTED] program



Could bad things happen if I join this research?

This research has very small risks to the participant.

- No one is being pressured to participate.
- The researcher's relationship with you will not change whether you participate or not
- Your relationship with the [REDACTED] program will not change whether or not you choose to participate
- You can say "no" to what we ask in the research at any time and we will stop



Could this research help me?

- There are no monetary benefits for participating in this study.
- A positive thing that could come from this is that you could help other youth programs to be better
- Although this researcher cannot promise that you will personally experience anything good from being in this study, others may benefit from the information that we find.



What else do I need to know about this study?

- If you don't want to be in the study, you don't have to be
- It is also OK to say yes and change your mind later. You can stop being in the research at any time. If you want to stop, please tell the researcher, Lexi Patrick, or the [REDACTED] director, [REDACTED]
- You will not be paid to be in this study
- You can ask questions at any time. You can talk to Lexi Patrick and can contact her in person or by email (albohner@millersville.edu).
- Take the time you need to make your decision on whether you would like to participate.



Is there anything else?

I will not tell anyone what you tell me without your permission unless there is something that could be dangerous to you or someone else. If you tell me that someone is or has been hurting you, we may have to tell that to people who are responsible for protecting children so they can make sure you are safe. In addition, if you provide me with any information regarding incidents of abuse or neglect of a child, dependent adult or elder, or intent, means, and/or a plan to harm yourself or others, I may be required to report this to the proper authorities.

If you want to be in the research after we talk, please write your name below. We will write our name too. This shows we talked about the research and that you want to take part.

You and your parent or guardian will be given a copy of this to keep for your records.

Statement of Assent:

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I choose to participate in the study.

_____ Please initial here if you agree to have your voice audio recorded during the interview.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Printed name of participant: _____

Signature of Researcher: _____ Date: _____

Printed name of Researcher: _____

This project has been approved by the Millersville University of Pennsylvania Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects. If you have any questions regarding this protocol, please contact Rene Munoz (Director, Sponsored Programs and Research Administration) at 717-871-4457.

Appendix B

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

PARTICIPANTS' PERCEPTIONS OF AN URBAN AFTER-SCHOOL EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

Lexi Patrick
Millersville | Kutztown Doctor of Social Work Program

Your son, daughter, or the minor of whom you are legal guardian is invited to be in a research study that will look at how youth enrolled in [REDACTED] perceive the program to impact them.

Your son, daughter, or the minor of whom you are legal guardian was selected as a possible participant because he or she is currently enrolled in the after-school employment program where the study takes place. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study. Please take whatever time you need to discuss the study with your family and friends, or anyone else you wish to. The decision to join, or not to join, is up to you and your son, daughter, or minor of whom you are legal guardian.

This study is being conducted by Lexi Patrick, doctoral student at Millersville | Kutztown Doctor of Social Work Program, as part of her dissertation requirements for the program.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is: to see how youth enrolled in an urban after-school employment program in western Pennsylvania perceive that the program impacts them.

Procedure:

If you and your son, daughter, or minor of whom you are legal guardian agree for him or her to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things: sign a consent form so that he or she may participate in a one-on-one interview that will be audio-recorded with Lexi Patrick during his or her scheduled work hours at the after-school employment program, lasting approximately 20 to 60 minutes.

Risks and Benefits of this Study:

This research has minimal risks. No one is being pressured to be a part of this study. The researcher's relationship with your son, daughter, or minor of whom you are legal guardian will not change whether they are in this study or not.

There are no monetary benefits for being in this study. The benefits are that they

will know that they will be contributing to information regarding youth after-school and/or employment programs. This study will try to find changes that can be made to make other youth programs better. Although we cannot promise that your son, daughter, or minor of whom you are legal guardian will benefit from being in this study. Others may benefit in the future from the information we find in this study.

Compensation:

Participants will not be compensated for their time or participation in this study. This study is completely voluntary.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private. If the final dissertation product that results from this study is published, I will not include any information that would tell who a participant is. Research records will be stored securely, and only this researcher will have access to the records. The records, notes, and data from interviews will be kept locked in a closet, on the researcher's flash drive under password protection, or on the computer under password protection.

This researcher's dissertation chair, Dr. Marc Felizzi, may also have access to the data collected during this study for the purpose of supervision of the dissertation process.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. The decision whether or not to participate will not change the relationship with the after-school employment program. If your son, daughter, or minor of whom you are legal guardian does decide to participate, he or she does not have to answer every interview question and can withdraw at any time without affecting any relationships.

How to Withdraw from the Study:

Your son, daughter, or minor of whom you are legal guardian has the full right to withdraw from this study, and all information will be permanently deleted or erased. If at any time you feel uncomfortable, you may contact me, Lexi Patrick, via email (albohner@millersville.edu) or in person at any time.

Contact and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is Lexi Patrick. You may ask any questions that you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact Lexi in person or by email at albohner@millersville.edu. You may also contact my supervising professor, Dr. Marc Felizzi, Millersville University, marc.felizzi@millersville.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to

someone other than the researcher(s), you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, Rene Munoz (Director, Sponsored Programs and Research Administration) at 717-871-4457.

Mandated Reporter:

Under Pennsylvania law, this researcher will not maintain as confidential, information about known or reasonably suspected incidents of abuse or neglect of a child, dependent adult or elder, including, but not limited to, physical, sexual, emotional, and financial abuse or neglect. In addition, any information regarding plan, intent, and/or means to harm self or others may also be required by law to be reported. If any researcher has or is given such information, she is required to report it to proper authorities.

You will be given a copy of this to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I give consent for my son, daughter, or minor of whom I am legal guardian to participate in the study.

_____ Please initial here if you agree for his/her voice to be audio recorded during the interview.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Investigator: _____ Date: _____

This project has been approved by the Millersville University of Pennsylvania Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects. If you have any questions regarding this protocol, please contact Rene Munoz (Director, Sponsored Programs and Research Administration) at 717-871-4457.

Appendix C

PARTICIPANTS' PERCEPTIONS OF AN URBAN AFTER-SCHOOL EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

Interview Guide:

1. How old are you?
2. How long have you been enrolled in the [REDACTED]?
3. How did you find out about or get referred to the [REDACTED]?
4. How many hours do you work in one week?
5. Tell me about some of the things you do when you are here at the program?
6. Do you think that the program has helped you to focus on more positive after-school activities?
7. Do you believe it has helped you to “keep you off of the streets” or in getting into further trouble with your terms of probation or the court? (*goal of recidivism*)
8. Do you believe that your self-esteem has changed through being a part of this program? (*self-esteem*)
9. Have you seen any changes in your sense of responsibility after being a part of this program? (*responsibility*)
10. Do you think your social skills or talking with other people has changed because of being in this program? (*sociability*)
11. Do you believe that this program has given you job skills or training about working a job? (*goal of job training*)
12. Do you think this program will help you with or has prepared you for future employment opportunities? (*goal of career building*)
13. Do you think this program has helped you with knowing how to manage money? Having your own banking account? Anything else related to finances? (*goal of financial literacy*)
14. Do you believe that this program has increased your independence? (*self-management*)
15. Do you think this program has helped you to build upon your morals or character? Your honesty or trustworthiness as a person? (*integrity*)
16. Do you think this program has helped you to get off of probation? (*goal of exiting the juvenile justice system*)
17. Can you tell me what you would say your “goals” are for the program?
18. When you were referred to the program, what did you expect to get out of it?
19. Do you think that you got what you expected from the program?
20. Can you tell me what you think about the program?
21. Are there any changes that you have seen in your life after your involvement with the program?
22. What are some things that you like about the program?
23. What are some things you wish you could change about the program?

24. Is there anything else you would like to say about the program?
25. Before I ask the last question, please remember that you do not have to answer if you do not feel comfortable. You can tell me that you would like to “pass” if you do not want to answer the question and that is completely ok!
What charges were you adjudicated of?