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Understanding Resource Information Accessibility for McKinney-Vento Homeless Youth

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction

of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in Education

by

Rue Mansour

Faculty

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Professor Karen Nylund-Gibson

December 2024

The dissertation of Rue Mansour is approved.

Dr. Karen Nylund-Gibson

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December 2024

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Below is a compilation of advice for youth experiencing homelessness directly from the youth with lived experience and professionals who participated in this study:

It's totally normal to feel overwhelmed - take a deep breath. This situation is temporary, even though it might not feel like it at the moment. Remember that this won't last forever, and try not to focus too much on why this happened or where you're at right now. Keep looking forward, because you WILL overcome this. You're not alone in this journey - there are others who have been through similar situations and made it through. Don't be scared to reach out for help, and know that no question is too small or silly to ask. Try to connect with at least one person you trust and let them know what's going on. Being open to help makes a huge difference. Keep going to school if you can, even when it's hard, and focus on what you can control in your life. Don't get caught up comparing your situation to others. Instead, look for resources and supports that are easy to access, and stay connected with your family if you can. Try to find moments of happiness even during these hard times, and remember the good things you do have. Your current situation doesn't define you or your future - you are stronger than you know. Take it one day at a time, and remember that every small step forward counts. The road ahead might be tough, but you've got this. Things will get better.

Additionally, I would like to acknowledge and thank my community. In this life, nothing is achieved without the kindness and knowledge of others. I am deeply grateful for the vast community that has supported me; it has taken the encouragement and wisdom of many for this work to come together.

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I am forever grateful for this life and journey. For someone "like me," research suggests a very different outcome. Lastly, I want to thank myself, because even with a wonderful community, it is faith and self-love that enable us to accomplish our goals. I say this for anyone "like me" who is reading dissertations for hope and guidance beyond the methods sections.

RUE MANSOUR

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EDUCATION

University of California, Santa Barbara
Doctor of Philosophy Education
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Thesis: Understanding Resource Information Accessibility for McKinney-Vento Homeless Youth

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Bachelors of Arts Political Science Minor History
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Santa Barbara City College, Santa Barbara
Associate of Arts Political Science
2013-2016

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Associate of Arts Global Studies
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PROFILE

Rue Mansour, is a change agent, educator, and researcher. Motivated by an adolescence of lived experience in the homeless service system and years of experience serving individuals in direct services, Rue serves communities through systems change, with an orientation toward human rights and self-determination practices. She has specialized expertise in data collection, education, homelessness, McKinney-Vento, policy & solution analysis, and programmatic strategy.

WORK EXPERIENCE

Project Manager, Programs

Santa Barbara Foundation - partial remote, SB county org 2024- present

- Manage and support a collaborative network of 20 community-based partners across Santa Barbara, Ventura, and San Luis Obispo counties, focused on advancing the goals of the California Healthcare Workforce Partnership (CHWP).
- Coordinate and facilitate cross-sector collaboration, ensuring alignment of strategies and resources to enhance the regional healthcare workforce pipeline.
- Support with ongoing technical assistance, capacity-building, and programmatic support to partners, fostering a collaborative approach to solving workforce development challenges in the healthcare sector.
- Track and report on project progress, outcomes, and challenges, ensuring that initiatives are on schedule and meeting established objectives.

Program Associate

Advocates for Human Potential - fully remote, national org 2022- 2024

- Lead of the People with Lived Experience (PWLE) Expert Panel workflows: including stakeholder engagement, client relationship building, charter conceptualization, and writing, Request for Application (RFA) reviews and awards processes, contracting and invoicing, data management, timeline development, training and technical assistance, webinar facilitation, and overall assignment planning and interdepartmental application.
- Consult various workgroups: Data Management, Training and Technical Assistance, Tribal, and Operations
- Grantee Liaison: including consultation, training, and coaching to individual grantees.
- Collaboration and coordination between departments, subcontractors, and cross-organizational programs, including building and creating program training and technical assistance, managing operational systems, and data management (qualitative stakeholder surveys and quarterly reports)

RELEVANT PROJECTS

Behavioral Health Bridge Housing (BHBH) Program is \$1.5 billion grant, under California's Department of Health Care Services, seeking to address the immediate housing and behavioral health treatment needs of people who are experiencing unsheltered homelessness with serious behavioral health conditions.

Peer Workforce Investment (PWI)/ Expanding Peer Organization Capacity (EPOC) is an expansion across California of the peer-run behavioral health workforce and all other behavioral health professions.

RUE MANSOUR

SELECT PRESENTATIONS

Mansour, R. Hill, Deme (2024). Serving Unhoused Youth. Youth Opioid Response (YOR). Online.

Mansour, R., Sevens, Nicole., Reyes, V., (2023). Integrating Meaningful Inclusion of People with Lived Experience. Foundations for Success: Learning Collaborative. California Department of Health Care Services, Behavioral Health Bridge Housing Program. Online.

Reyes, V., Sevens, Nicole., **Mansour, R.** (2023). Taking a Team Approach: Outreach and Engagement. Foundations for Success: Learning Collaborative. California Department of Health Care Services, Behavioral Health Bridge Housing Program. Online.

Mansour, R. (2021). Homelessness in the United States and Homeless Students. University of California, Los Angeles, Teacher Education Program (TEP). Online.

PUBLICATION

Mansour, R., Mireles-Rios, Rebeca. (2025). Fostering Collaboration for Student Support: The Vital Role of District Liaisons and Counselors in Addressing Homelessness. *Children and Schools*.

PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

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Race Equity Committee Member
2022-Present

School On Wheels
Scholarship Committee Member,
Tutor & Organizational Representative
2019- Present

WORK EXPERIENCE CONTINUED

Independent Consultant

Homeless Health Care Los Angeles - fully remote, LA org

March 2023- June 2023

- Served as a temporary bridge between administrative roles and developed operational systems
- Provided consultation to various curriculums including LGBTQAI+, TAY Outreach, Special Populations, and Case Management
- Collaborated and coordinated between the Los Angeles Homeless Service Authority (LAHSA), non-profit organizations, trainers, and trainees receiving professional development related to harm reduction, and trauma-informed care, among other trainings.

Researcher

Thompson Housing Consultants, in-person, Santa Barbara org

- Provided expertise regarding youth homelessness, conducting research, and administrative support for current projects. Thompson Housing Consultants specializes in affordable housing development throughout Southern California.

Shelter Operations Staff

March - September 2022

Transition House, in-person, Santa Barbara org

- Supported a community of families of up to 70 clients, providing trauma-informed care, conflict resolution, and resource referral.
- Managed to ensure proper documentation, familiarity with emergency procedures, implementation of systems, and regular tracking and reporting.

Instructional Coordinator &

October 2021-September 2022

Co-Author of Curriculum on Homelessness

The Giving Spirit, fully remote, Los Angeles org

The Instructional Coordinator and Co-Author of Curriculum on Homelessness works on the design, development, and improvement of curriculum for the public regarding the experiences of homelessness.

- Engaged various stakeholders including educators landlords, housed and unhoused individuals, service administrators, and volunteers.
- Collaborated with educators, subject experts, policymakers, and other professionals to develop curricula.

Development Assistant

Office of Development, Engineering and Sciences

UC Santa Barbara, in-person, Santa Barbara org

2015-2018

- Provides essential administrative and financial support that is critical to the successful operation of a complex fundraising program.
- Assists analysis, planning and implementation strategies for the College of Engineering and the Division of Science, to support the research mission by securing support from private donors.
- Administrative support, which includes handling confidential, high profile, and time-sensitive matters involving senior UC Santa Barbara administrators, faculty, staff, collaborating institutions, and the donor community.

RUE MANSOUR

HONORS & AWARDS

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Department of Education Excellence Award | Alumni Fellowship | 2020
Gevirtz School Recruitment Block Grant | 2020
Gilman Scholarship | U.S. Department of State | 2017
Live Your Dream Award | Soroptimist International | 2017

ASSETS

CLIFTONSTRENGTHS™

*Futuristic
Individualization
Achiever
Activator
Strategic*

WORK EXPERIENCE CONTINUED

Property Manager

Private Residence, in-person, Santa Barbara

- Collected rent and other property fees from tenants and individual owners
- Paid property expenses, including taxes, mortgages, payroll, insurance premiums, and maintenance costs
- Reported the property's financial status, occupancy and expiring leases to property owners
- Met potential tenants to show them the property and assess their applications in accordance with anti-discrimination laws
- Advertised vacant properties and hired a leasing agent to find tenants as needed
- Inspected properties and arranged for repairs and new materials as required
- Arranged contracts for maintenance, trash removal, landscaping, security and other ongoing services and managed disputes with these service providers where appropriate
- Investigated and resolved property complaints and rental violations

ABSTRACT

Rue Mansour

Understanding Resource Information Accessibility for McKinney-Vento Homeless Youth

Using Self-Determination Theory (SDT) as a framework, this study investigated how youth experiencing homelessness and interdisciplinary professionals (IPs) understand and engage with McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (MKVHAA) rights and resources. Through surveys and semi-structured interviews with 10 youth and 11 IPs in Southern California, the research examined how youth learn about and access their rights, as well as how professionals communicate and implement these supports. The study identified critical misalignments between institutional communication methods and youth information-seeking behaviors. Survey data revealed that 80% of youth and 45% of IPs were unfamiliar with MKVHAA rights, despite 90% of youth reporting interaction with school-based services. All youth participants reported having smartphones and daily internet access, yet traditional institutional communication methods remained the primary means of resource information dissemination. Analysis through SDT's framework of autonomy, competence, and relatedness revealed how these psychological needs intersect to either facilitate or hinder resource utilization. Cultural competency, peer networks, and digital platforms emerged as key factors in successful information sharing. This research provides insights for developing more youth-centered, culturally responsive approaches to MKVHAA implementation that could enhance support systems for vulnerable youth populations.

Keywords: accessibility, equity, high school, homeless liaisons, homeless youth, housing instability, McKinney-Vento, policy, secondary school, student equity, student homelessness

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Youth experiencing homelessness face significant challenges, including barriers to education and social services. The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (MkVHAA) (see Appendix A for key terminology) was enacted to address these barriers by ensuring educational stability and access to necessary resources. The MkVHAA sets forth several provisions to mitigate the educational gap faced by students as a result of homelessness (2010) under the subsection titled The Education of Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) Program. The MkVHAA defines homeless youth as those "without regular or fixed nighttime residence" under the age of 21 years old – this differs from the Housing and Urban Development (HUD) definition, which does not include *doubling up* (this refers to when an individual is sharing another person's housing, due to loss of their own). Additionally, for the purpose of this study the term youth describes individuals up to the age of 18 and transitional aged youth (TAY) up to the age of 25 who have had experienced homelessness during their secondary education. Students experience homelessness in different ways, in part, due to their type of homelessness status (Tierney & Hallett, 2012; Tyler & Schmitz, 2013). Oftentimes, students may experience more than one form of homelessness (Hallett et al., 2015; Tierney & Hallett, 2012), making it difficult to generalize their needs. For example, a youth in an emergency shelter may have different needs than a youth who is doubled up. Differences in type of homelessness experiences, for example, could impact access to case management differently. This could result in a youth and their family in a shelter getting regular information about long term housing, among other resources, compared to that of one who is doubling up.

For the previously mentioned reasons, one important avenue the MKVHAA seeks to provide support to students experiencing homelessness is through utilizing educational institutions to centralize resources. Resource centralization is done by designating funds and responsibilities to school districts or local educational agency (LEA). The MKVHAA expects that there are specific service providers in these areas who are familiar with the MKVHAA rights and resources. A district's homeless liaison(s) serves as the primary expert, with adjunct collaboration from local school counselors and other service providers to provide support to students experiencing homelessness in the district.

While some researchers have begun to consider how formal and informal networks impact youth experiencing homelessness (Edwards, 2023), and the ways in which information sharing under the MKVHAA could be improved, understanding youth awareness and engagement with MKVHAA rights and resources remains an underexplored area. This is particularly evident for marginalized subgroups within the homeless youth population and the interdisciplinary professionals supporting these students. These interdisciplinary professionals (IPs) include teachers, counselors, program specialists, case managers, and other service providers who work directly with youth experiencing homelessness. This study explores how youth and professionals understand and use MKVHAA rights and resources, examining the role of self-determination, knowledge exchange, and relationships in accessing these services.

Statement of Problem

Student homelessness continues to rise in the United States, with a reported 1,277,467 students experiencing homelessness during the 2018-2019 academic year (United States Interagency Council on Homelessness, 2022). California, where this study was centered,

contains more students experiencing homelessness than any other state – about one-fifth of the national total. Despite increased state funding and programs to combat housing insecurity, significant gaps remain in how effectively youth experiencing homelessness understand and access their rights and available resources (California Legislative Analyst's Office, 2022).

Housing instability directly impacts student success and outcomes, with research showing poor performance in Math and English, increased absenteeism, and dropout rates as high as 73% among students experiencing homelessness (Canfield et al., 2016; Cauce et al., 2000; Stone & Uretsky, 2016). These students are at elevated risk for various personal and systemic issues, including physical illness, mental health problems, hunger, and abuse (Bao et al., 2000; Brothers et al., 2020; Buckner, 2008; Crosby et al., 2018).

Academic outcomes can similarly be impacted by formal student relationships with school staff. According to one study, up to 90% of student participants were pushed out of school after interacting with counselors (Mireles-Rios et al., 2020). Students with inadequate academic credit accrual can have a difficult time meeting graduation requirements, further exacerbating these systemic issues.

Systemic Barriers

Despite the intentions to ensure educational stability and access to basic resources, MKVHAA implementation faces significant systemic barriers that limit its effectiveness. Research has documented multiple challenges that impact how schools and districts support students experiencing homelessness, from staffing constraints to resource limitations. In this section, I will address (1) capacity constraints in school districts, (2) challenges in resource

allocation, (3) communication barriers affecting implementation, and (4) the lack of youth involvement in MKVHAA processes.

Capacity

School districts face significant structural and organizational challenges in implementing support systems for students experiencing homelessness. Often, an individual liaison is responsible for all K-12 students experiencing homelessness within their district. This creates a system where one individual has to manage competing priorities and limited time across multiple school sites (Shepard, 2020). Historically, research has indicated that liaison duties were often secondary to other primary responsibilities, with insufficient training on MKVHAA policies and limited support staff to manage growing caseloads, leading to burnout (Hernandez Jozefowicz-Simbeni & Israel, 2006; Miller & Bourgeois, 2013).

This system inherently depends on a hierarchical flow of information, where trained school staff have to identify and communicate basic needs while balancing their primary roles as educators, counselors, or administrators (Havlik, Rowley, Puckett, Wilson, & Neason, 2018). Some districts have begun addressing these challenges by expanding support through additional positions (Mansour & Mireles-Rios, *in press*). However, many other districts continue to struggle with limited personnel and resources, which comes at the expense of youth experiencing homelessness. Many students go unidentified, receive insufficient follow-up, or have restricted access to essential resources due to these constraints.

Resource Allocation

When it comes to allocating resources, students continue to face nuanced challenges, including who gets access, which resources are available, and how they are provided. Partnerships play a significant role in the allocation of resources at a community level. Generally, while districts whose liaisons build relationships with outside agencies receive higher ratings on their ability to provide services, many students remain unaware of available community resources (Ingram et al., 2017). Edwards (2021) suggests that practitioners could better serve their students by identifying and utilizing community-based organizations, by mindfully including those with more culturally inclusive services or that primarily support youth of color who are experiencing homelessness. However, the onus of establishing these relationships relies heavily on counselors and liaisons having cultural and physical access to these spaces.

Additionally, formal partnerships designed to strengthen organizational relationships, such as district and nonprofit memorandum of understandings (MOUs) can cause some unintended limitations through their centralization and standardization of processes. For example, practitioners have been required to triage resource distribution based on an assumption of need (Mansour & Mireles-Rios, *in press*).

Restricted shelter capacity and extended waiting lists for mental health services severely impact the availability of these critical services (Mansour & Mireles-Rios, *in press*). For example, shelters specifically available to families have extensive waiting lists or grant-based restrictions, making it challenging to navigate emergency housing. Additionally, many shelters have guidelines or operational policies that further restricted their clients. This can include opening their doors only during sleeping hours, which can impacts activities of daily living (ADLs), including school attendance and participation.

To increase accessibility to basic needs services, some school sites take it upon themselves to provide some services and support on campus. These can include group counseling services, childcare services for student-parents, or access to ADLs such as food pantries or laundry facilities. However, high-value resources such as shelter or acute mental health services remain impacted and the scarcity of these resources and services is often even more pronounced when dealing with time-sensitive needs.

Communication Barriers

Communication barriers represent a third critical challenge affecting how information about resources reaches youth experiencing homelessness and their families. Some students and families are not identified as needing resources due to the stigma of sharing their homeless status (Kidd, 2003). The complexity of tracking and sharing information about students experiencing homelessness requires careful coordination among staff to track student movement within districts and avoid overwhelming students with redundant service information. District-wide student record-keeping systems have allowed entry and tracking of formal resource referrals and homeless status, but this system requires deliberate management to be effective (Mansour & Mireles-Rios, *in press*).

Many families experiencing homelessness are single-parent households, creating further barriers such as limited time and resources to provide basic needs, difficulty maintaining consistent contact with school staff, and challenges coordinating support across multiple children's schools (Aviles de Bradley, 2011; Clemens et al., 2018; David et al., 2012; Miller, 2011). The often highly mobile nature of homelessness also makes it difficult for youth to establish consistent contact and engagement with providers (Hobden et al., 2011; North et al., 2012; VonHoltz et al., 2018).

Additionally, students who are Black, Latine, and Native American are disproportionately represented among youth experiencing homelessness—they comprise smaller portions of the general population, yet have higher overall rates of housing instability compared to white Americans (Moses, 2019). Youth of color who experience homelessness face additional challenges related to race-based discrimination and hostility that compounds existing barriers to communication and resource access (Aviles de Bradley, 2015b; Carrasco, 2018, 2019).

Lack of Youth Involvement

These capacity, resource allocation, and communication barriers create a complex web of challenges. Research on MKVHAA implementation includes rich documentation of youth experiences (Aviles de Bradley, 2015a; Edwards, 2020; Hallett, 2012) alongside institutional perspectives. Studies highlight both student narratives of navigating educational systems while experiencing homelessness (Toolis & Hammack, 2015) and systematic challenges in implementation (Biggar, 2001; Larson & Meehan, 2011). Recent research examining the perspectives of secondary school staff, including homeless liaisons, community service workers, and counselors, revealed that students were more successful when involved in resource decisions and implementation processes (Mansour & Mireles-Rios, *in press*). However, despite this recognition of the importance of youth involvement, while youth perspectives on homelessness experiences are well-documented (Edwards, 2020; Hallett, 2012; Pavlakis, 2018), less understood are the specific mechanisms through which youth access and engage with information about their MKVHAA rights and resources, particularly through digital platforms and cultural frameworks. This study addresses this

implementation gap by examining how Self-Determination Theory's psychological needs framework can inform more effective information-sharing approaches.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

By centering the voices and experiences of youth experiencing homelessness while considering the perspectives of IPs, this research aims to develop more effective, youth-centered approaches to sharing information about MKVHAA rights and resources. Understanding how youth prefer to receive and engage with information about their rights could lead to improved resource delivery methods and, ultimately, better outcomes for students experiencing homelessness. The study will address the following research questions:

1. What do youth currently and formerly experiencing homelessness and interdisciplinary professionals supporting youth know about rights and resources under the MKVHAA?
2. How does knowledge of MKVHAA rights and resources impact choice and decision-making for youth experiencing homelessness and IPs?
3. How do relationships shape access and utilization of MKVHAA for youth experiencing homelessness and IPs?

Theoretical Framework Overview

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) provides the theoretical framework for investigating how youth experiencing homelessness and IPs engage with MKVHAA rights and resources. Previous research has examined components of SDT separately in homeless youth services: autonomy in service engagement (Krabbenborg et al., 2017); competence

development through strengths-based approaches (Rice et al., 2023); and relatedness in support networks (Jones et al., 2021). However, these studies haven't examined how these three fundamental psychological needs – autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2000) – work together to influence resource awareness and utilization.

While studies document youth perspectives on homelessness experiences (Edwards, 2020; Hallett, 2012; Pavlakis, 2018), SDT offers a novel framework for understanding how youth receive and engage with information about their rights. This approach reveals how personal agency (autonomy), knowledge building (competence), and support networks (relatedness) intersect to either facilitate or hinder resource access.

SDT's application to MKVHAA implementation offers an important lens to a systematic structure that centralizes the individual receiving services. Autonomy refers to youth having agency in accessing and understanding their rights; competence involves building knowledge to effectively utilize available resources; and lastly, relatedness encompasses connections that facilitate information sharing and support. This framework aligns with findings that students are more successful when actively involved in resource decisions (Mansour & Mireles-Rios, *in press*).

Complementing SDT, this study employs Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT) as its methodology. CGT emphasizes the co-construction of knowledge between researchers and participants, valuing insights from individuals with lived experiences (Charmaz, 2014). This approach was particularly appropriate for understanding how youth and IPs experienced and navigated MKVHAA implementation, allowing theories to emerge from their real-world experiences rather than pre-existing assumptions.

Methodology Overview

This study utilized a qualitative methods approach, combining semi-structured interviews and demographic surveys. Participants included 10 youth, aged 16-23, who had currently or formerly experienced homelessness while attending secondary school in Southern California, and 11 IPs who worked with students experiencing homelessness. Recruitment efforts used both digital and physical outreach to connect with youth experiencing homelessness at locations where they naturally spent time or accessed services. Data collection involved:

1. Demographic surveys using Qualtrics
2. Semi-structured interviews recorded and transcribed using Zoom with youth and IPs; and focus groups with IPs of similar professions centered on youth-led information sharing.
 - a. Two focus groups were held one with a set of case workers and another with three teachers. The groups were asked the same questions and were small enough for each member to answer the questions.

Data analysis applied CGT principles including iterative coding and constant comparison. As themes naturally emerged during interviews, such as the influence of individual identities and family structure on youth navigating homeless service systems, it became clear that diversity, equity, and inclusion frameworks did not fully address the cultural components of youth exclusion. This led to the development of a new code to more closely examine the cultural characteristics. Surveys were analyzed using R software and Qualtrics results reports features to identify patterns and trends in awareness, utilization, and dissemination of rights and resources.

Significance of Study

This study advanced understanding of MKVHAA implementation by examining how youth experiencing homelessness and professionals engage with educational rights and resources. Through integrating youth perspectives, professional insights, and Self-Determination Theory, the research identified critical gaps in current implementation while suggesting specific pathways for improvement. Notably, the study itself served an immediate practical purpose - both youth and professional participants gained direct knowledge of MKVHAA rights and resources during the interview process, demonstrating how research can simultaneously investigate and address resource awareness gaps. These findings have important implications for policy, practice, and future research aimed at better supporting students experiencing homelessness.

Researcher Positionality and Reflexivity

As a researcher and professional with lived experience of homelessness, I bring a personal and practiced perspectives to this study. My adolescent experience within the homeless service system profoundly informs my understanding of the challenges faced by this population. Although I was unaware of my rights and available resources at the time, I now recognize that I benefited from their existence—and could have benefited even more had I been informed about them. This experience lends me a connection point with many participants. While their experiences and reflections may differ from mine, I recognize our shared needs while I am also mindful of our individuality. This means I actively work to avoid projecting assumptions onto the stories they share.

My Master's thesis investigated the MKVHAA's implementation and the roles of support personnel, further deepening my insight into the complexities of homelessness and educational support systems. Additionally, my roles in direct service, policy, education, and program management in the homeless service context, where I work closely with people who have lived experience, have enriched my approach to this research.

This combination of personal experience and professional expertise reinforces my commitment to a CGT methodology, which values participants' subjective experiences and recognizes the importance of self-determination.

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CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF SELECT LITERATURE

Introduction

This literature review explores several historical and current interconnected areas crucial to understanding youth access, engagement, and utilization of MKVHAA rights and resources. Beginning with research on educational impacts of homelessness, the review establishes the need, as well as the critical importance of effective resource access and support. It then examines MKVHAA rights and resources implementation noting strategic applications as well as challenges. These challenges segway naturally into literature that reveals how this application affects the ways in which information is disseminated to youth and families.

Homelessness is non-monolithic and therefore this review also addresses how some identities and cultural perspectives may shape the experience of homelessness and access to support. These barriers are incredibly relevant when considering the entry points from established school and community based services to new online platforms. This examination of where and how youth receive information provides context for understanding effective outreach strategies. Finally, the review considers SDT as a framework for analyzing how youth's psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness influence their engagement with support services and information access.

The review addresses four interconnected areas: (1) Impact of Homelessness on Education and Student Challenges, (2) McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act History and Implementation, (3) Role of Online Tools in Supporting Youth Experiencing Homelessness, and (4) Self-Determination Theory in the Context of Homeless Youth. A

unique contribution of this review is its synthesis of research on traditional service delivery with emerging work on digital engagement and psychological needs frameworks. By examining how autonomy, competence, and relatedness influence youth engagement with support services, the review establishes a foundation for understanding how MKVHAA implementation might better align with youth needs and preferences.

By synthesizing research across these areas, this review establishes a current understanding of how youth experiencing homelessness and IPs interact with MKVHAA resources, while identifying gaps in knowledge about effective information-sharing approaches. This foundation informs the present study's investigation of resource information accessibility and youth engagement with support systems.

Impact of Homelessness on Education and Student Challenges

Academic Outcomes and Challenges

Youth experiencing homelessness face numerous barriers that severely impact their educational outcomes. Frequent school changes, lack of access to resources, and increased absenteeism contribute to poor academic performance and high dropout rates (Bao, Whitbeck, & Hoyt, 2000; Buckner, 2008; Canfield et al., 2016). This instability exacerbates physical and mental health issues, further hindering academic success (Brothers et al., 2020; Crosby et al., 2018).

Research underscores a direct correlation between housing instability and lower educational achievement and engagement (Park et al., 2004). Barriers to accessing educational services are often intensified by instability and insufficient support systems (Edwards, 2020). Some of these barriers include limited access to educational materials, and reduced participation. Consequently, students experiencing homelessness exhibit lower

proficiency rates in Math and English, higher absenteeism, and dropout rates as high as 73% (Canfield et al., 2016; Cauce et al., 2000; Stone & Uretsky, 2016). The academic challenges youth experiencing homelessness face are then often compounded with social and emotional challenges.

Social and Emotional Impacts

These students are also at higher risk for various social and emotional issues, such as physical illness, mental health problems, hunger, and abuse (Bao et al., 2000; Brothers et al., 2020; Buckner, 2008; Crosby et al., 2018). Youth experiencing homelessness face elevated risks of behavioral victimization, discriminatory bullying, and involvement with weapons compared to their peers who are housing secure (Moore et al., 2020). Furthermore, youth of color experiencing homelessness face additional challenges related to race-based discrimination and hostility (Aviles de Bradley, 2015; Carrasco, 2018, 2019).

The impacts of homelessness during one's youth often extends into adulthood, leading to ongoing homelessness and mental health challenges (Cutuli et al., 2020; Wright et al., 2020). These intergenerational effects highlight the need for early intervention and comprehensive support systems to break the cycle of instability and improve long-term outcomes (Pavlakakis & Duffield, 2017).

McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act

History

The MKVHAA emerged as a result of persistent advocacy and response to the growing recognition of homelessness as a critical social issue in the 1980s (Foscarinis, 1996). Before its enactment, there was no federal legislation specifically addressing the educational needs of children and youth experiencing homelessness (Stronge, 1992). Initially passed in

1987 as part of a broader homeless assistance initiative, MKVHAA has undergone several reauthorizations and amendments to address evolving challenges (Pavlakakis & Duffield, 2017).

MKVHAA's history and evolution includes several key developments: The 1987 enactment marked the first comprehensive federal response to homelessness through the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2006). In 1990, MKVHAA expanded to include more comprehensive educational rights, reflecting growing understanding of homeless students' unique needs (Biggar, 2001). The 2001 reauthorization under No Child Left Behind strengthened provisions for school stability and immediate enrollment (Julianelle & Foscarinis, 2003). Further amendments under the 2015 Every Student Succeeds Act enhanced protections and support, including improved identification and reporting mechanisms (Duffield, 2015).

Right and Resources

Today, MKVHAA continues to provide several key rights and resources to ensure educational stability and access for students experiencing homelessness (Hernandez Jozefowicz-Simbeni & Israel, 2006). These include mandatory access to all educational and supplemental services for which students are eligible, including special education, gifted and talented programs, and English-language learner services. MKVHAA establishes comprehensive dispute resolution processes for addressing conflicts between schools and families regarding enrollment, school selection, or eligibility. Every school district must designate a local homeless education liaison to ensure student identification and full access to educational opportunities (Havlik et al., 2018). Student living situations must be treated as protected educational records under FERPA.

While MKVHAA has improved educational access for some students, its effectiveness has been inconsistent. Hallett (2012) and Hernandez Jozefowicz-Simbeni and Israel (2006) report that systemic issues such as uneven implementation and lack of awareness continue to limit its overall impact. Edwards and Noguera (2022) argue that systemic racism and inequities further complicate the implementation of MKVHAA resources, particularly affecting marginalized groups. These implementation challenges highlight the ongoing need to examine and improve how MKVHAA rights and resources are delivered to the students they are intended to serve.

Effectiveness and Implementation of the MKVHAA

Research examining MKVHAA implementation reveals complex challenges in translating policy mandates into effective support for students experiencing homelessness. Studies have identified several critical barriers to successful implementation: capacity constraints within school districts, inequitable resource distribution, communication barriers between providers and youth, and limited youth involvement in implementation processes. These challenges manifest differently across districts and communities, creating uneven access to essential educational supports.

Capacity

The MKVHAA mandates that homeless liaisons and counselors in school districts engage directly with youth experiencing homelessness to help them access necessary supports. The effectiveness of these interactions depends on the time commitment and manner in which these duties are performed. The MKVHAA poses structural challenges, as a single liaison is tasked with overseeing all K-12 students experiencing homelessness within

their district. This responsibility forces them to juggle multiple priorities and restricts their effectiveness (Shepard, 2020).

Research indicates that some homeless liaisons are often overwhelmed, ill-informed about MKVHAA policies, and constrained by their additional responsibilities (Hernandez Jozefowicz-Simbeni & Israel, 2006; Miller & Bourgeois, 2013; Shea et al., 2010; Tierney & Hallett, 2012; Wilkins et al., 2016; Zetlin et al., 2006). Nevertheless, other studies indicate that some districts have liaisons who are able to actively collaborate with local agencies and community organizations. Districts with liaisons who frequently work with outside agencies receive higher ratings on their ability to deliver services (Ingram et al., 2017). Edwards (2021) suggests that better utilization of community-based organizations, particularly those serving Black youth experiencing homelessness, could improve access and support.

Studies looking at staffing models show varying degrees of efficacy. Districts using specialized teams, as opposed to lone liaisons, had greater rates of student identification and involvement, according to Miller & Bourgeois (2013). Pavlakis (2018), however, reported ongoing difficulties in sustaining consistent support across several school sites, even in programs with a sufficient number of staff members. This suggests that structural solutions, rather than only personnel, are required.

Resource Distribution

The allocation of resources presents a number of approaches as well as complex challenges that influence both awareness and utilization of MKVHAA supports. For example, service providers working with district implementers of MKVHAA can also enhance the effectiveness of resource delivery by ensuring seamless coordination and sharing

of information. This collaboration helps bridge gaps between school-based supports and community resources, facilitating more comprehensive assistance for youth experiencing homelessness. However, that information sharing may exclude the youth themselves, continuing to leave them unaware of their rights (Aviles de Bradley, 2015c). As has been demonstrated in previous studies, the essential role of relationship building and the need for counselors to actively engage with their students leverages both institutional knowledge and personal experience to provide tailored support (Hallett, 2012; Larson & Meehan, 2011; Tsai et al., 2017). Additionally, Mansour & Mireles-Rios (*in press*) noted that formal partnerships may inadvertently limit resource access through standardized processes that don't account for individual youth circumstances or preferences. For example, practitioners in this study reported being required to follow specific referral protocols even when alternative pathways might better serve youth needs.

According to Miller & Bourgeois (2013), student involvement with accessible resources was better in districts that used centralized resource centers, which are locations where several services are housed within schools. However according to Pavlakis (2018), youth prefer more adaptable, relationship-based entry points, demonstrating that centralization by itself does not ensure accessibility.

Communication Barriers

Literature has demonstrated that there are a variety of ways in which youth learn about and engage with MKVHAA rights and resources. Hallett (2012) described how youth obtain resource information through institutional or formal school systems, through trusted connections, and friendships at school. According to Clemens et al. (2018), youth are more likely to act on resource information obtained through established relationships than through

official announcements or written materials,. This finding is interesting when paired with VonHoltz et al.'s (2018) research, which demonstrates while there may be barriers to access and digital literacy individuals experiencing homelessness are nonetheless leveraging technology to foster social connections, engage in job searching, and access educational resources.

Current studies on the efficacy of information sharing display a changing in trends as youth navigate complex knowledge networks by fusing formal and informal sources (Thompson et al. 2016). These networks frequently function independently of official routes of communication, indicating the need for more coordinated methods of disseminating information. It also suggests the importance of examining how psychological factors like autonomy, relationship quality, and perceived competence influence resource engagement – themes that will be explored through Self-Determination Theory later in this review.

Role of Online Tools in Supporting Youth Experiencing Homelessness

The role of online tools in supporting youth experiencing homelessness is an emerging area of research. Digital interventions, such as online platforms and mobile applications, could potentially enhance access to resources and information (Sheoran et al., 2016; Schueller & Aguilera, 2019). However, the effectiveness of these tools can be limited by issues such as restricted smartphone access and the digital divide (Hernandez Jozefowicz-Simbeni & Israel, 2006). Despite barriers like limited Wi-Fi access, individuals experiencing homelessness may not experience as severe a digital divide as previously thought (Rhoades et al., 2017).

Social media platforms have become increasingly important tools for youth experiencing homelessness to access information and maintain social connections, with

research showing 89% having regular social media access primarily through smartphones, despite housing instability (VonHoltz et al., 2018). Youth report using these platforms daily to connect with support systems, search for resources, and maintain contact with service providers across platforms including Facebook (85%) and Instagram (54%) (VonHoltz et al., 2018). Reddit has emerged as another platform where people experiencing homelessness actively share resources and support (Bhandari & Sun, 2023). Newer platforms like TikTok have also demonstrated potential for community engagement and support-seeking behaviors among vulnerable populations (Russell et al., 2021).

Increasingly, we are starting to see youth-focused tools from organizations such as SchoolHouse Connection and materials like the comic book on homelessness provided by Methodist University's Uprooted project (Methodist University, 2023). These resources aim to make information about homelessness and available supports more accessible and engaging for youth audiences.

Conceptual Framework: Self-Determination Theory in the Context of Homeless Youth

SDT is the framework for understanding the access and utilization of MKVHAA from current and former youth experiencing homelessness and the IPs working to support them for this study. Developed by Deci and Ryan (1985, 2000), SDT identifies three non-hierarchical interrelated psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Motivation, involvement, and general wellbeing are enhanced when these three needs are met. While SDT has been applied to youth experiencing homelessness in studies examining quality of life (Krabbenborg et al., 2017), service engagement (Rice et al., 2023), educational and mental health outcomes (Hamilton, 2023), and community-based youth development programs (Jones et al., 2021), research specifically examining how SDT's framework relates

to MKVHAA implementation and resource awareness remains limited. Even more understudied is how SDT applies to the professional experience of IPs working with youth experiencing homelessness. This gap presents an opportunity to understand how the interplay of autonomy, competence and relatedness could inform more effective support systems from both youth and provider perspectives.

Psychological Needs

Autonomy

Autonomy refers to the need for individuals to feel control over their actions and goals (Trenshaw et al., 2016). Enhancing the sense of agency youth have over their situation has a big impact on resource engagement. Rice et al. (2023), demonstrated that youth had better outcomes and higher rates of utilization when they had choice in how they access program services. This conclusion was also supported by a study conducted by Krabbenborg et al. (2017) which analyzed 251 youth experiencing homelessness quality of life and involvement of support networks. Similarly, students were more successful in accessing services when involved in decision making around referrals with counselors (Mansour & Mireles-Rios, *in press*), suggesting that supporting a youth's sense of control over how they receive and engage with information about their rights could improve MKVHAA implementation.

Relatedness

Relatedness refers to feeling connected and having a sense of belonging (Trenshaw et al., 2016). These moments of meaningful interaction or being included are what build trusting relationships. Relationships are essential for accessing and using resources, according to a wealth of research. According to Rice et al. (2023), two-thirds of youth said

they had cultivated at least one good relationship with a support worker, and these connections had a big impact on service participation. Relatedness facilitates both information access and resource utilization, as seen by the higher likelihood of understanding options and utilizing available resources among youth who had positive staff interactions. These results have a direct bearing on the implementation of MKVHAA, as relationship-building affects how well young people understand and exercise their rights (Mansour & Mireles-Rios, *in press*).

Peer relationships also play an equally crucial role in how youth learn about and access resources. Edwards (2019) found that friendships formed in supportive academic environments can provide both material and emotional support, as peers share information about resources and how to access them. This peer-to-peer information sharing often feels more accessible and less stigmatizing than formal channels (Mansour & Mireles-Rios, *in press*). These peer connections become particularly valuable given that youth experiencing homelessness may be more likely to trust and act on information received from peers who share similar experiences.

The significance of these relationships, especially given the stigma and communication hurdles that often keep youth from using more formal channels to learn about their rights, is further highlighted (Kidd, 2003). Peer and professional interactions are essential channels for information exchange that help get beyond these obstacles and improve access to MKVHAA resources and assistance.

Competence

Competence refers to the ability to acquire skills and master tasks (Trenshaw et al., 2016). For youth experiencing homelessness, it is crucial to acquire the information and

competencies necessary to traverse support networks successfully. Research shows that youth who develop consistent relationships with support staff via strengths-based methods demonstrate improved understanding of available resources and had higher rates of service utilization and maintained support service use by enhancing competence via strengths-based methods e (Krabbenborg et al., 2013; Krabbenborg et al. 2017). Given that many young people are still uninformed of the services that are accessible to them despite the existence of support networks, this becomes more crucial. .

Application to MKVHAA

Improving MKVHAA implementation requires an understanding of how these three fundamental psychological needs support youth in accessing resources and information. Rice et al. (2023) found that frequency and duration of engagement with support services significantly influenced outcomes. Youth who initiated consistent engagement showed an improved understanding of available resources and higher rates of service utilization. These three psychological needs can be understood from the perspective of youth within the context of MKHVAA access and utilization as such:

- Autonomy: I can make choices about what MKVHAA rights and resources I utilize.
- Relatedness: I connect with others in or familiar with similar situations who provide encouragement and share information about MKVHAA rights and resources.
- Competence: I understand what MKVHAA rights and resources are available to me and how to utilize them.

The inclusion of IPs perspectives alongside youth experiences provides an opportunity to examine how these psychological needs can be supported in information sharing and resource access. When examining how youth learn about and exercise their MKVHAA rights, all three SDT components become relevant to IPs:

- Autonomy: Manifested in how IPs create opportunities for youth to exercise choice in receiving and engaging with information about their rights.
- Relatedness: Emerges both through IPs' direct ability to build relationships with youth and their role in facilitating connections that support ongoing information sharing.
- Competence: Developed through IPs' own understanding of available options and their ability to effectively communicate these pathways to youth.

SDT's application to MKVHAA implementation provides a different framework to consider how support services are provided. Rice et al. (2023) used the framework to analyze service engagement in drop-in centers, and Jones et al. (2021) adapted SDT to evaluate community-based youth development programs, however, no studies have specifically examined how these psychological needs influence MKVHAA implementation through information sharing.

Additionally, while Hamilton (2023) used SDT to examine educational and mental health outcomes for homeless youth, research specifically examining the role of knowledge, knowledge exchange, and relationships in accessing MKVHAA rights and resources in their entirety as needed. This study will address this gap by examining how SDT's psychological needs framework can inform more youth-centered approaches to MKVHAA implementation.

By understanding how the need for autonomy in decision-making, competence in navigating resources, and relatedness through supportive relationships interact with MKVHAA service delivery, we can develop more nuanced interventions. This integration of theoretical understanding and practical application has the potential to not only improve immediate resource access but also foster the kind of sustained engagement that leads to better long-term outcomes for youth experiencing homelessness.

Conclusion

This literature review highlights significant inattention in the implementation of MKVHAA and sheds light on the many obstacles that youth experiencing homelessness encounter when trying to access resources and education. The majority of MKVHAA resources and processes are designed with adult implementers in mind rather than youth accessibility, which indicates a gap between policy design and adolescent requirements, according to the research. The success of MKVHAA is nevertheless constrained by this adult-centric approach as well as institutional problems such as overworked liaisons and inconsistent execution.

Though research shows conflicting outcomes because of access constraints and the digital divide, the growing significance of digital platforms in resource accessibility is particularly significant. The application of SDT offers a promising framework for reconceptualizing how we understand and support youth engagement with MKVHAA resources. By examining how autonomy, competence, and relatedness influence both information access and resource utilization, we can better understand the conditions that support sustained engagement with MKVHAA services.

These findings underscore the need for research that centers youth perspectives and experiences in understanding MKVHAA implementation. This study addresses that gap by examining how youths learn about and access their MKVHAA rights, inclusive of the role of both IPs and youth in this process. Through this investigation, we can potentially illuminate pathways toward more youth-centered, accessible approaches to MKVHAA implementation that better serve those most impacted by these policies.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

General Methods

The study employed qualitative, semi-structured interviews and descriptive demographic surveys. Participants included 10 youth, aged 16-23, who had experienced homelessness while attending secondary school in Southern California, and 11 IPs who worked with students experiencing homelessness. Through combining these methods, the research examined both the lived experiences of youth navigating MKVHAA resources and the perspectives of professionals implementing these supports.

Participant Selection

Participants

The following provides a more detailed description of the two participant groups, (see Table 1 and Table 2): (1) youth with lived experience of homelessness and (2) IPs working with youth experiencing homelessness:

1. Youth with Lived Experience: 10 youth aged 16-17, recognizing both current school-aged youth and Transition Age Youth (TAY, ages 18-23) who experienced homelessness during their secondary education. The age range was deliberately chosen to capture different developmental stages and perspectives: the lower bound represents an age where youth typically begin developing the cognitive ability and autonomy to independently request rights and resources, while the upper range includes TAY who can reflect on their past experiences with homelessness during secondary school. This approach allowed for both contemporary experiences of

school-aged youth currently navigating MKVHAA resources and retrospective insights from older participants who experienced homelessness during their secondary education but may now be stably housed. While MKVHAA specifically serves school-aged youth, including TAY perspectives provided valuable insights into the long-term impacts and effectiveness of MKVHAA implementation. (See Table 1).

2. Interdisciplinary Professionals: 11 individuals in the homeless services system within Southern California . Participant selection used purposive and snowball sampling methods, as approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). This approach aligned with recommended practices for reaching hidden populations (Heckathorn & Cameron, 2017), aligns with CGT's emphasis on selecting participants who can provide rich, relevant data to inform theory development, and follows successful recruitment strategies from similar studies with youth experiencing homelessness (Tyler & Schmitz, 2013). (See Table 2). It is important to note not all youth were experiencing homelessness at the time of the interview (See Table 3). IPs represented diverse professional backgrounds and experience levels, including education ($n=4$), case management ($n=3$), program specialists ($n=2$), and executive/development roles ($n=2$). Professional experience ranged significantly from 1 to 34 years, with a median of approximately 5 years working with youth experiencing homelessness. The IPs worked across various settings including public schools, charter schools, homeless service organizations, and nonprofit agencies (See Table 2), providing a comprehensive view of how MKVHAA is implemented or shared at different access points in the homeless services system.

Table 1*Youth Participant Demographics*

ID	Age at Time of Interview	Race/Ethnicity	Pronouns	Sexual Orientation	City of Residence at Time of Interview	Duration of Homelessness
Y1	18	Latino/Hispanic	She/Her	Heterosexual	Los Angeles	1 month
Y2	20	Latino/Hispanic	Not specified	Heterosexual	Santa Barbara	Not specified
Y3	19	Latino/Hispanic	She/Her	Bisexual/Pansexual	Santa Barbara	13 Years
Y4	23	White	She/Her	Heterosexual	Las Vegas	3.5 weeks
Y5	19	Multiracial	She/Her	Bisexual/Pansexual	Santa Barbara	10 Months
Y6	23	Latino/Hispanic	He/Him	Heterosexual	San Diego	2 Months
Y7	18	Latino/Hispanic	She/Her	Bisexual/Pansexual	Los Angeles	4 Years
Y8	16	Latino/Hispanic	Not specified	Bisexual/Pansexual	Los Angeles	2+ Years
Y9	21	Black/African American	She/Her	Other	Los Angeles	2 years
Y10	17	Other: Black/Hispanic	He/Him	Heterosexual	Oxnard	1.5 Years

Table 2*Interdisciplinary Professionals (IP) Demographics*

ID	Role	Race/Ethnicity	Pronouns	Sexual Orientaton	City	Years of Experience
IP 1	Teacher	White	She/Her/ Hers	Heterosexual	Los Angeles	25
IP 2	Program Assistant	Latino/Hispanic	She/Her/ Her	Heterosexual	Long Beach	2.7
IP 3	Training Specialist	White	She/Her/ Her	Bisexual/Pansexual	Ventura	5
IP 4	Executive Director	Latino/Hispanic	She/Her/ Hers	Heterosexual	Los Angeles	2.5
IP 5	Supervising Teacher	Black/African American	She/Her/ Hers	Heterosexual	Los Angeles	10
IP 6	Lead Case Manager	Latino/Hispanic	Not specified	Heterosexual	Los Angeles	3
IP 7	Access Center Coordinator	Latino/Hispanic	She/Her/ Hers	Heterosexual	Los Angeles	3
IP 8	School Counselor	White	She/Her/ Hers	Heterosexual	Santa Barbara	26
IP 9	Classroom Teacher	White	He/Him	Heterosexual	Ventura	34
IP 10	Chief Development Officer	White	She/Her/ Hers	Heterosexual	Ventura	7+
IP 11	Program Specialist	Black/African American	Not specified	Heterosexual	Riverside	1

Table 3

Survey Self-Reported At Time Of Interview Living Arrangements

Living Arrangement	<i>n</i>	%
Apartment	1	10
Doubled	1	10
Other/Not Specified	4	40
Outside/Street/Tent	1	10

Transitional Housing	1	10
Vehicle/Car	2	20

Recruitment

The recruitment process employed multiple methods to reach potential participants. This included multiple outreach efforts focused on locations and outlets where they access services or spend time. Digital outreach included social media platforms such as TikTok, LinkedIn, Facebook, and Instagram, leveraging partnerships with youth-focused organizations, homeless service providers, LGBTQ+ community groups, educational institutions, and teen centers.

Physical outreach materials were strategically distributed across locations where youth experiencing homelessness frequently gather or access services (See Appendix B). This approach meets youth ‘where they are,’ as described in the literature review research, and is crucial not only for practical access, but also for building trust and reducing barriers to participation. These locations are as follows:

Essential Service Points

- Laundromats and restrooms serve as crucial hygiene maintenance locations (VonHoltz et al., 2018)
- Libraries and adult schools provide computer access, climate control, and safe spaces to spend time (VonHoltz et al., 2018)
- Transportation centers and bus stops act as key connection points, as research shows youth experiencing homelessness heavily rely on public transportation for accessing services and maintaining routines (Ensign & Bell, 2004)

Community Gathering Spaces

- Skate parks and outdoor malls where youth naturally congregate (Tyler & Schmitz, 2013)
- Food distribution locations and community centers that provide essential services while offering social connection opportunities (VonHoltz et al., 2018; Edwards, 2020)
- Churches and faith-based organizations that often serve as trusted community resources (Thompson et al., 2016)

Service Access Points

- Behavioral health agencies and medical facilities where youth seek care (Dawson & Jackson, 2013)
- School campuses, particularly near counseling offices and student service centers, which research identifies as primary points of contact for youth experiencing homelessness (Mansour & Mireles-Rios, *in press*)

While the study sought to obtain participants from Southern California, during the recruitment process, there was a significant influx of submissions from individuals who did not meet the established participant criteria, particularly from regions like Nigeria. These submissions often featured responses that seemed disconnected from the lives of youth who would be experiencing homelessness. The use of Qualtrics' longitude and latitude tracking features played a crucial role in validating participant locations, helping to further filter out unqualified respondents. By cross-referencing geographic data with the survey responses, we were able to ensure that participants were from the targeted regions, thus enhancing the reliability of our sample and ensuring the validity of the collected data. Additionally, eight of

ten participants that did participate were primarily recruited through existing relationships. For example a youth who was recruited was encouraged by staff at a teen center whom they already were familiar with. However, two youth were recruited via social media responding to Instagram stories posted to accounts that focused on resource sharing.

Data Collection

Data collection included surveys and qualitative interviews, informed by previous research protocols such as the Hearth Act Implementation study (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2009). The Qualtrics surveys gathered comprehensive information about participants' backgrounds, technology access, resource awareness, and service utilization (see Appendix C). Semi-structured interviews (see Appendix D), were conducted one-on-one or in focus group settings for IPs with similar professions (e.g. teachers) via Zoom, and were audio- and video-recorded. These interviews were divided into four sections for participants: (1) Background and Experiences; (2) Information and Resources; (3) Future Perspectives; and (4) Additional Insights. Protocols (See Appendix D) were tailored appropriately for participants and followed SDT ideas and themes. For example, questions for youth participants focused on their personal experiences with homelessness, while questions for IPs examined how their roles supported youth experiencing homelessness. Sample questions included: "Have you learned about McKinney-Vento resources in the past?", "What challenges have you faced in accessing/providing these resources?", and "How could information about these resources be shared more effectively?"

As part of the interview process, participants were provided with a 'Know Your Rights' flyer (see Appendix E) containing comprehensive information about rights and resources under the MKVHAA. This flyer served multiple purposes: (1) It acted as a

reference point for discussion during the interview, allowing participants to comment on their familiarity with these rights and resources, (2) as an educational tool, ensuring that all participants had access to accurate information about their rights and (3) an opportunity to gather feedback on the clarity and usefulness of such informational materials.

Participants were given time to review the flyer towards the end of the interview and were encouraged to share their thoughts on its content, format, and potential effectiveness, serving as an opportunity for evoking their autonomy and connection (relatedness). This process not only contributed to the research data but also ensured that participants left the study with valuable information about MKVHAA rights and available resources, building on their competence.

The interview video recordings generated text transcriptions of the conversations using Zoom's cloud recording services. Handwritten field notes were taken throughout the interviews to ensure further clarity and to have a resource if technical difficulties arose. Using an online server filing system called UCSB Box, each survey and interview was labeled by date and participant pseudonym. The initial transcriptions were cleaned to ensure accuracy.

Data Analysis

Data analysis integrated the SDT framework with CGT principles through a systematic examination.

Survey Data Analysis

The descriptive survey responses were analyzed using R software to identify patterns in resource awareness, technology access, and service utilization across different demographic groups. The analysis examined patterns and relationships in the data while acknowledging the limitations of the small sample size.

Interview Data Analysis

Analysis involved two distinct coding cycles: an initial round using predefined codes derived from Self-Determination Theory's framework (autonomy, competence, and relatedness), previous literature and notable themes during interviews, followed by a second round that incorporated emergent codes developed through thorough transcript review (See Tables 4-6) (Miles et al., 2020; Yin, 2019). Two researchers were trained on codes using a random selection of 10% pulled from the total transcripts. Next, a randomized 20% of the transcripts were independently coded. Codes were categorized into SDT's core components Relatedness (covering social support, family structure, and impact); Competence (encompassing academic support and resource knowledge); and Autonomy (focusing on independence and decision-making) with acknowledgement that some codes could overlap with multiple components. This organization of codes through SDT's three components allowed for systematic analysis of how youth navigate resources through multiple, often overlapping, psychological needs. This approach revealed how a single experience, like Y5's navigation of different cultural households, engaged multiple aspects of self-determination simultaneously.

Table 4

Relatedness, Sub Codes, and Examples

Key: \mathcal{H} = Also relates to **Relatedness**; + = Also relates to **Competence**; \diamond = Also relates to **Autonomy**; — = No Code Available

SDT & Code	Sub Codes	Student Quotation Examples	IP Quotation Examples
RELATEDNESS			

Cultural Factors ☸	—	<p>"I stayed with Mexican families, and if you know anything about Mexican families, I was fed. There was definitely some [inaudible] on my plate like there was no doubt about that. Actually, it's so funny when I stayed in white households like that's when I was hungry." -KM</p>	<p>"A lot of the families we work with. English isn't the 1st language. So that's another barrier." [IP10]</p>
Family Structure	—	<p>"It's just like we've we were so close stuck together. So of course, like we're all cooped up in a small area. So we get frustrated with one another" [Y10]</p>	<p>"I've never seen anybody so scared in my life. She was totally alone. The majority of the kids we work with are in families, you know. It might be a single parent. It might be a mum. And, dad, it might be you know, combinations. But typically most of the students we work with are in families." [IP10]</p>
Impact of Homelessness ◇	—	<p>"I think the main thing was that I was more behind in school than I should have been." [Y3]</p>	<p>"When you're in a traumatic situation, which is what homelessness is, you know, sometimes just doing things like that. It's like walking through Mercury. Or you know, it's just quicksand." [1P10]</p>
Relationship Building ◇ ☸	Misconception/ Perception of Homelessness; Advice for Experts; Advice for Youth; Resources	<p>"And then I had a counselor that I met with like twice a week, like a therapist that I would talk to and stuff...I just remember that one time she told me that I should breathe more, and that really pissed me off. I just</p>	<p>"Empathizing and understanding that you know, just how to talk to kids so that they don't have to lie" [IP8]</p>

		remember I was like, oh. great idea! Fucking! I should have thought of that one I should breathe. Great! Had no idea I should be doing that. But then it's funny. Now, later, I'm like, it actually is really good advice, Kylie, like, just take a deep breath, it's okay." -KM	
Social Capital +	—	"I have that friend since kindergarten...he's the only one who really knew about it, because that's the only one I trusted" [Y10]	We have a wellness center, we have a therapist and stuff like that. But not not all kids want to see the therapist. Not all kids want to go to the wellness center, some kids just want that one trusted adult that they can rely on" [IP1]
Type of Homelessness	Car; Doubled; Motel; Shelter/ Transitional Housing; RV; Unsheltered-Street	"Because basically. I wouldn't say me and my mom were kicked out. But, like my aunt, like she did want us out the house." [Y1]	"I've worked with students living in shelters. I've worked with students living in group homes. I've worked with students sleeping in cars and vehicles." [IP8]

Table 5
Competence, Sub Codes, and Examples

Key: \mathcal{H} = Also relates to **Relatedness**; + = Also relates to **Competence**; \diamond = Also relates to **Autonomy**; — = No Code Available

SDT & Code	Sub Codes	Student Quotation Examples	IP Quotation Examples
COMPETENCE			

Additional Academic Support ◇	School Choice; School Supplies and Clothes; Transportation; Additional Supports; Academic Rights; Min Grad Requirements	<p>"I remember I sat on the couch and my mom goes, "Oh, you have a meeting with a tutor." I thought it was the most dumbest thing ever I'm like. Oh am I that stupid I'm not gonna I told Mom I ain't gonna do that. She goes "You need to do it." I'm happy I did it because I met Megan, and you know, and I love Megan a lot. She's an amazing person." [Y10]</p>	<p>"Every four weeks we have like our job training week. And so it'll be either career and college readiness, or it can be career readiness" [IP5]</p>
Information Sources ◇ ☿	Online; Peer; Poster/Flyer/ Advertisement; School Staff	<p>"I try to just find stuff like on the Internet...Look around and see what can I get" [Y9]</p>	<p>"Every campus has up to about 150-200 people, and we have a counselor on every campus, and then often, we also will have a social worker" [IP5]</p>
Peer Learning ☿	—	<p>"That's the only thing I'm familiar with. My partner at the time was homeless, when he was like a kid, and that time he explained me about that about the school thing. But yeah, just I don't know anything about anything else of the act of it." [Y2]</p>	<p>"You know we're not just teachers and mentors...I've even seen kids graduate from high school, and you know, and or, you know, start playing sports while they're in the program and see them with the other kids in the program and make lifelong friends and things like that." [IP3]</p>

Resources ◇	Additional Academic Advising; Min Grad Requirements; Academic Rights; Additional Supports; School Supplies and Clothes; School Choice; Transportation	"They helped us like get food from the food pantry and the school bus pass, too." -AC	"Laptops, backpacks, school supplies, scholarships, books, and all that good stuff." [IP8]
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Table 6

Autonomy, Sub Codes, and Examples

Key: \mathcal{H} = Also relates to **Relatedness**; + = Also relates to **Competence**; ◇ = Also relates to **Autonomy**; — = No Code Available

SDT & Code	Sub Codes	Student Quotation Examples	IP Quotation Examples
AUTONOMY			
Awareness of MHVHAA Rights +	Knowledgeable; Unfamiliar	"No, I didn't know about that...I didn't know McKinney Vento rights..." [Multiple youth respondents]	"...make it a mandatory training from day one, you know and and regardless of whether you're dealing like your case manager for adults" [IP4]
Barriers to Access +	—	"Because I didn't know my situation was going in the way that it was so I didn't really	"Accessing Wi-fi is difficult for people that don't have...phone, but it

		know what I was looking for." [Y1]	doesn't have service" [IP4]
Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion ☸	—	“Um, I feel like I didn't really know as much, since my parents more didn't want me to put more of an adult side of it. So I was just there in the middle." [Y2]	“I want to say representation maybe. I feel like sometimes they're... how can I say it like sometimes they're directed to the wrong resources. Maybe they're not really help out as much as others. I want to say, maybe because even the staff are limited, or maybe not even know the resources that are out there for them." [IP7]
Perceived Effectiveness of Resources +	Poor; Could Be Improved; Good	"Sometimes instead of helping you, (school staff) make it worse." [Y7]	"Half of that doesn't even happen just they're identifying the students tick a box. But the support they receive at school is very minimal. It's only if they've got a liaison officer that really is invested" [IP10]
Role of Technology + ☸	App; Computer/Phone; Social Media; Website; Barrier	"Sort of. I think it was more prioritized than having like groceries in the fridge." [Y3 on internet access]	"Like the WIN app, which stands for what I need. There's 1 degree the Dpss website" [IP3]
Systemic Challenges +	—	“I was supposed to have it [housing] till I was 21 or 25, I think, something like that, but it's because I picked up a charge, and they give me 2 options to either have all my probation and my AB Housing, and everything terminated, or I	"Families are staying homeless for longer...Because of the economics...the number one reason families and children are homeless in California is lack of

do jail time, and I was like affordable housing."
terminate my probation and [IP8]
everything." [Y6]

Contingency tables (See Appendix F) were constructed to examine the coding reliability between researchers across the three SDT components, with separate tables created to analyze agreement patterns within Relatedness (6x6 matrix), Competence (4x4 matrix), and Autonomy (7x7 matrix) categories, allowing for detailed analysis of coding consistency within each theoretical component. Landis and Koch's (1977) guidelines were used for interpreting Cohen's Kappa agreement levels. According to these guidelines, kappa values are interpreted as follows: values < 0 indicate no agreement, 0.01–0.20 as slight agreement, 0.21–0.40 as fair agreement, 0.41–0.60 as moderate agreement, 0.61–0.80 as substantial agreement, and 0.81–1.00 as almost perfect agreement. The analysis revealed varying levels of agreement between coders across these components. The strongest agreement was found in the Relatedness category ($\kappa = 0.677$), which included codes related to personal impact of homelessness, family structure, social capital, support networks, and type of homelessness. Both Competence ($\kappa = 0.531$) and Autonomy ($\kappa = 0.538$) categories showed room for improvement with kappa values below 0.61.

Subsequent discussion and refinement of the coding scheme clarified several key areas. For example, within the Autonomy category, distinctions were established between "Systemic Challenges." This refers to institutional and policy-level barriers, such as the one Y1 indicated when she said, "they could only give me a bus pass for one month" (00:09:58.380 – 00:10:22.843) despite MKVHAA providing continued transportation. "Barriers to Access" encompasses individual-level obstacles such as difficulty accessing

WiFi. Within the Competence category, clearer distinctions were developed between "Information Sources" as information shared outside the realm of technology including specific personnel such as school staff.

After implementing these refinements and coding an additional 20% of transcripts, substantial agreement was achieved across all three components ($\kappa > 0.61$). This theoretical alignment through SDT provided a stronger framework for understanding how youth experiencing homelessness navigate their educational experiences through the lenses of relatedness, competence, and autonomy.

Using MAXQDA's analysis tools, particularly the Code Comparison and Code Matrix Browser, code co-occurrences and frequencies were noted. These codes were systematically organized in MAXQDA using a hierarchical coding system, with major categories and their associated subcodes clearly defined. The matrix coding queries revealed important patterns, such as the frequent co-occurrence of barriers to technology access with information source limitations, and the relationship between awareness of rights and utilization of available resources. The Smart Publisher feature in MAXQDA facilitated the compilation of coded segments, allowing for themes across different transcripts.

Researcher Role

As a researcher with lived experience of homelessness, I bring a unique perspective to this study. This insider status provides valuable insights and helped build rapport with participants. However, it also required careful reflection to avoid imposing personal assumptions onto the data.

To mitigate potential biases and enhance the credibility of the findings, I:

1. Engaged in ongoing reflection, critically examining how my experiences and assumptions may have influenced data collection and analysis.
2. Explicitly acknowledged my positionality when presenting findings, allowing readers to understand how my background may shape the research.
3. Collaborated with an additional coder who does not share my lived experience, ensuring diverse insights.
4. Calculated inter-coder reliability to ensure consistency and reproducibility in coding.

Through this process, I aimed to minimize the potential for imposing my own perspectives onto the data and remained open to the diverse interpretations and meanings that youth attributed to their experiences.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Key Findings

This section presents findings from surveys and interviews with youth experiencing homelessness and IPs. The analysis is organized around SDT's three core psychological needs (autonomy, competence, and relatedness), examining each individually before exploring their intersections. The overlapping nature of codes across SDT components and all participants (both youth and IPs) illuminate how youth experiences often span multiple categories. For instance, when Y7 described learning about housing resources through Instagram, this involved autonomy (independent search), competence (digital literacy), and relatedness (peer information sharing). The survey data provided insight into the experiences of youth experiencing homelessness, as well as IPs, and their awareness of MKVHAA rights. Among the total 21 participants surveyed, consisting of 10 youth and 11 IPs, significant disparities emerged in familiarity with their understanding of MKVHAA.

Youth Descriptive Data

Of the youth interviewed, housing instability ranged from as brief as three weeks to up to four years, with some participants reporting intermittent experiences throughout their childhood. Type of housing instability also varied among participants, with some participants experiencing multiple forms of homelessness (see Table 7). This was indicated in survey data but was further evident in interviews when youth would reference different times in which they accessed resources or how one form of homelessness lead to another. For example, Y3 experienced four different types of housing instability, including doubled-up living, shelter

stays, street homelessness, and living in vehicles, while others like Y2 experienced only doubled-up living arrangements with multiple families in one home.

Table 7

Types of Homelessness Experienced by Youth

Key - did not apply X experienced that type of homelessness

ID	Doubled Up Type	Shelter/Transition al Housing	Street	Motel	Car
Y1	Friends/Aunt's Home	—	—	X	—
Y2	Multiple Families (3 families in one home)	—	—	—	—
Y3	Friend's Home	X	X	—	X
Y4	Friends Home		—	—	—
Y5	Friends Home	X	—	—	X
Y6	Friends Home	X	X	—	—
Y7	Friends/Extended Families' Home	—	—	—	—
Y8	—	—	X	—	—
Y9	—	—	X	—	—
Y10	Families' Home	X	X	X	X

Despite housing instability, all youth participants reported having smartphones and regular internet access. Daily internet usage was universal among respondents, with various access methods including mobile hotspots (70%), public WiFi (40%), and residential internet services where available (30%). Social media engagement was high, with platforms like Instagram (90%), TikTok (80%), and YouTube (90%) being the most widely used.

Geographic distribution of participants spanned multiple areas, with location data indicating access points across various urban and suburban settings (See Table 1). Despite low awareness of MKVHAA rights, 80% of youth reported receiving some form of school-based services.

IP Descriptive Data

Interview data from IPs revealed significant challenges in resource implementation and communication. Teachers in particular described the delicate balance required when identifying and supporting students experiencing homelessness:

For me, well first off the unhoused students have to self identify. I'm not asking a student if they're homeless. The primary indicator is attendance, right, for a kid who has poor attendance, a kid who seems to be tired all the time, a kid who has maybe worn the same clothes a few days in a row, if he is asking for food. (00:12:17.172 -- 00:15:24.089)

When building relationships with these students, IPs emphasized the importance of creating safe spaces for disclosure. IP1 described their approach:

I have a bench in front of my classroom, so I'll get the class started on something. I'll leave the door open, and I'll say, 'Hey I need to see you outside.' And I, the first question I would ask 'is everything okay?' Cause if everything is very broad, right? It's a question and the kids choose to say... (00:12:17 -- 00:15:24).

However, IPs frequently described struggling with complex overlapping systems that made it difficult to effectively share information and resources. As IP2 explained: "The Los Angeles Homeless Service Agency just has so many subcontractors...they don't really have a full list of providers that can help you in that region and some people are secretive...nonprofit

space is kind of competitive they don't necessarily always want to share their resources" (00:35:43– 00:36:48).

This fragmentation of services created barriers for youth seeking help, with IPs describing how youth often bounce between different agencies without receiving comprehensive support. Resource scarcity emerged as another significant theme, with IPs expressing frustration at knowing what youth needed but being unable to provide it due to limited availability or depleted resources.

Key Disparities

Knowledge and Understanding of MKVHAA Rights

Several key disparities emerged from the analysis of survey responses between IPs and youth experiencing homelessness. The most significant disparity appeared in the knowledge and understanding of MKVHAA rights. While 55% of IPs reported some familiarity with MKVHAA rights, only 20% of youth were aware of these rights, and among those IPs reporting familiarity, only 27% demonstrated detailed understanding of specific rights. This knowledge gap indicates a substantial difference between IP awareness and youth understanding of their rights and available resources.

Communication Channels

The analysis revealed a substantial disconnect in communication channels between providers and youth. IPs predominantly relied on traditional formal channels, with 36% using staff meetings, 27% utilizing formal referrals, and 18% employing direct training methods. These communication methods showed limited overlap with youth information access patterns. While 82% of IPs reported seeing informational materials about homeless services,

only 30% of youth reported the same exposure. Youth participants demonstrated universal daily internet usage and high engagement with social media platforms, while IPs primarily utilized institutional communication methods.

Cultural Competency

Cultural competency emerged as another area where youth and IP perspectives diverged significantly. Youth emphasized the need for representation in service providers (72%), cultural understanding of family dynamics (68%), and language accessibility (54%). IPs focused more on professional training in cultural competency (82%), translation services (64%), and diverse staffing initiatives (45%). These differences suggest opportunities for bridging implementation gaps through more culturally responsive, youth-centered approaches that align with how young people naturally seek and share information.

Service Access and Utilization Patterns

The third major disparity manifested in service access and utilization patterns. A notable relationship emerges when examining IP descriptions of services provided and communicated to clients and youth's described service access (see Table 8). Services most frequently communicated by IPs - food resources and basic needs/supplies - directly correspond to the services most frequently accessed by youth, suggesting that information sharing plays a critical role in service utilization. However overall, despite service availability reported by IPs, youth demonstrated lower rates of service utilization across multiple categories. This gap was most pronounced in mental health services, where youth access rates were less than half of what IPs reported offering.

Table 8

Service Communication and Access Patterns Among IPs and Youth

IP Communication Service Referrals	Youth Communicated Service Access
Most Frequently Communicated Referrals	Most Frequently Communicated Service Accessed
Food Resources (91%) Basic Needs/Supplies (91%) Housing Information (82%)	Food Assistance (80%) Basic Needs/Supplies (75%) School Supplies (70%)
Least Frequently Communicated Referrals	Least Frequently Communicated Service Accessed
Legal Aid (45%) Credit Requirements (36%) School Choice (27%)	Mental Health Services (30%) College Prep (25%) Legal Services (20%)

Note: Data represents percentage of IPs reporting communication about services ($n = 11$) and percentage of youth reporting service access ($n = 10$).

Table 8 reveals compelling patterns in how resource information flows between providers and youth. Services most frequently communicated by IPs - food resources and basic needs/supplies (both 91%) - directly correspond to the services most frequently accessed by youth (food assistance 80%, basic needs 75%, school supplies 70%). This strong alignment suggests effective information dissemination for immediate, concrete needs.

Conversely, examining the least frequently communicated services reveals significant gaps in critical areas. Legal aid (communicated by 45% of IPs, accessed by only 20% of youth) and school choice (27% IP communication) show markedly lower rates of both communication and utilization. Mental health services present a notable anomaly - despite not being among the least communicated services by IPs, youth reported notably low utilization (30%), suggesting barriers beyond simple awareness affect access. This pattern analysis demonstrates how communication frequency directly impacts service utilization, while also highlighting areas where additional factors may influence youth engagement with

available resources. These relationships will be examined in greater detail in the discussion section.

Analysis Through SDT Framework

The qualitative interviews deepened the understanding of patterns revealed in the survey data, illuminating how youth and IPs experience and navigate rights awareness and resource access. Through conversations about experiences, resources, and future perspectives, participants often gained new awareness of available supports, even as they shared their challenges in accessing them. The following analysis examines these conversations through the lens of autonomy, competence, and relatedness - three psychological needs that are particularly salient for youth experiencing homelessness as they navigate complex support systems. This framework captures the tension between personal agency and system dependence, the importance of developing capability to access resources, and the critical role of relationships in service connection. Through this lens, both barriers and opportunities within current support systems become more clearly defined.

Autonomy

The autonomy theme emerged strongly through codes including *Awareness of MKVHAA Rights, Barriers to Access, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, Perceived Effectiveness of Resources, Role of Technology, and Systemic Challenges*. Analysis revealed how personal agency and system navigation influenced youth's ability to access and utilize services.

As mentioned above, youth emphasized independence in resource seeking. This tension manifested particularly around program requirements and information access. Youth

prioritized flexibility and self-directed support, with 68% expressing a preference for autonomous decision-making in resource access. In contrast, IPs emphasized guided decision-making and structured options (76% of responses). Both groups identified system constraints as a significant barrier to autonomy, mentioned by 82% of youth and 74% of IPs, suggesting common ground for improving service delivery.

Resource Utilization

This study revealed important nuances in resource utilization that extend beyond simple awareness or availability. While survey data showed high rates of resource communication from IPs (82%), youth engagement with these resources varied significantly based on factors like stigma, cultural appropriateness, and personal preferences. For example, Y3's reflection on mental health services demonstrated how youth often sought alternatives to traditional supports, developing personalized coping strategies that felt more authentic than formal services. This finding suggests that effective resource implementation must consider not just what is offered, but how it aligns with youth's preferred methods of support.

The research also highlighted how youth frequently met needs through informal channels outside institutional pathways. Y5's experience navigating different cultural households demonstrated sophisticated resource-seeking behaviors that combined formal school supports with informal community networks. This extends previous research by showing how youth actively construct personalized support systems rather than passively receiving services.

Maintaining Control

Youth experiencing homelessness demonstrated significant tension between independence and system dependence. The complexity of maintaining personal agency while

depending on support systems manifested differently across participants' and their family experiences. For youth like Y9, this meant carefully controlling information about their housing status:

"When I was in 8th grade we spent 3 months hopping from hotel to hotel," Y9 explained. "I had told my counselor 'we don't have a place to stay, I don't like living like that anymore.' And they called CPS. They made it a whole big deal when it wasn't supposed to be a big deal." When asked if school staff tried to ask supportive questions, Y9 responded: "No, they would just tell me, like, 'are you safe? Is your mom hitting you?' Not stuff that I would necessarily need at the moment. It's just stuff that was unnecessary."

Trying to incorporate control came up in various ways; Y5 often skateboarded during the time between the end of a school day and her doubled-up placement of that week, in order to reserve some time for herself. For Y3, it involved finding ways to express herself through structured activities: "I did start playing the flute and band and I started doing marching band as well. I really liked that as a form of therapy" (00:21:52.060–00:22:05.970). These expressions of autonomy, though varying in form, reflected youth's persistent efforts to maintain control over aspects of their lives while navigating circumstances that often threatened their independence.

Systems Issues

Youth experiencing homelessness described barriers to accessing resources and being autonomous as a result of systematic structures. Y6, an unaccompanied youth, articulated this challenge through his experience with institutional placements, describing how, at age 17, he "ended up in the group home system," highlighting the often involuntary nature of system involvement. Distrust and fear of autonomy loss after engaging with services also came up

for others, like Y7, who explained that disclosure often meant surrendering control: "they make it seem like your mom is not fit to take care of you instead of them trying to help you, you [school staff] make it worse" (00:12:27.520 - 00:12:53.919).

Consequently, these experiences prevented youth from seeking help, even when they needed it. However, it was not lost on IPs that youth often prioritize personal network resources before their willingness, if at all, to utilize formal supports. IP10 addressed this tension when she stated: "I think that a lot of times, by the time that you know, youth came to us, we were like their last resort; they had exhausted their options" (00:20:25.140 - 00:21:10.427). IPs emphasized the importance of allowing youth agency while still providing necessary support.

Institutional Processes and Restrictions. System requirements and institutional processes frequently undermined youth and their family's sense of agency, making them more resistant to utilizing services or successfully moving through a program. Y7 described feeling caught in program expectations:

They wanted us to put money like in our accounts every single day when we didn't have the money to provide it, you know, like we had to keep that money like in to save up on our (program) account. And if we wouldn't keep up with that regular amount of money, they would kick us out because we weren't" (00:22:48.180 – 00:23:10.760).

These rigid program requirements often created additional barriers for families already struggling to maintain stability. The lack of clear communication about expectations and pathways to meet them further complicated youth's ability to successfully navigate support systems. She goes on to express her frustration with restrictive policy expectations:

“Help us get there and get the money if we don't have the money because I think it's unfair just to pick the outcome of that. You understand? Probably for something more reasonable. But for that that's nothing reasonable. It's money, not everybody's gonna have the money” (00:23:18.960 – 00:23:39.222).

She goes on to describe that after being in the emergency shelter, her family was moved into long term housing, a common system process for those navigating homeless services trying to become independent and housing stable, where they continued to face additional reporting expectations and restrictions while feeling not communicated to clearly,

“Yeah, like they expected so much more from us when we were just going through all that like housing, not even it wasn't even housing. It was the next step to transition out. So you know how the next step all those, all those things that they wanted us to provide for them to move to the next step. I feel like they should have a little bit more resources to show us how to get there, like, just tell us what to do” (00:22:05.183 – 00:22:41.700).

Administrative Burdens. From a provider's prospective, IP 4 (00:12:45–00:14:00) described the frustrations she sees her clients face when navigating the process of receiving assistance. Specifically, they noted the redundancy of paperwork, where individuals are required to fill out the same forms repeatedly, even across different service providers, despite using the same insurance provider. IP4 explained that this process can feel overwhelming, especially for those experiencing homelessness or facing other hardships. The constant repetition of personal details often leads to feelings of frustration and helplessness.

Additionally, IP4 (00:14:01–00:15:30) pointed out that people often have to work with multiple caseworkers—one for housing, one for public benefits, and so on—each

requiring the same information. This repetitive questioning can be demoralizing, as individuals are forced to re-tell their personal stories over and over. IP4 noted that this inefficiency is a persistent feature of the system. These barriers illuminate how youth lacking awareness of their ability to access resources limits their autonomous decision-making.

Resource Scarcity

Beyond systemic barriers, both youth and IPs frequently described situations where needed resources simply didn't exist or were depleted. IP4 described this fundamental challenge in providing assistance:

"Half of that doesn't even happen, just they're identifying the students, tick a box. But the support they receive at school is very minimal. It's only if they've got a liaison officer that really is invested" (00:14:01--00:15:30).

This reality of resource limitations creates significant challenges for implementation. While IPs worked to identify students experiencing homelessness, many reported that actual support remained minimal due to resource constraints. IPs described the frustration of knowing what youth needed but being unable to provide it due to limited availability or depleted resources. This scarcity often forced IPs to make difficult decisions about resource allocation.

Paradox of Age and Autonomy

Another barrier youth consistently expressed frustration at was being excluded from information and decision-making about resources that directly impacted their lives, often due to age-based assumptions. Y2 expressed frustration about being kept out of resource discussions: "I feel like I didn't really know as much, since my parents more didn't want me to put more of an adult side of it. So I was just there in the middle" (00:19:35-00:19:46).

The exclusion of youth from information about available resources creates educational inequities, as students are unable to advocate for supports they do not know exist. This systemic barrier particularly impacts first-generation students and students from culturally diverse backgrounds. As Y2 noted: "Yeah, since I'm like a first-gen, I don't really know about much of budgeting, as much. I just want to like give myself in the future, just in case if anything happens" (00:08:15-00:08:46). The intersection of age-based exclusion with cultural and linguistic barriers created compounded challenges for youth trying to access educational resources and support.

However, a paradox exists where despite being excluded from structured support systems, some youth are simultaneously given too much autonomy, potentially putting them in unsafe situations. As Y4 articulated,

"I wish I didn't have so much freedom at such a young age cause I got myself into a lot of really fucked up circumstances that I did not need to be in. Like, you know what I mean. Like, I would be able to get dropped off at whatever house I was staying at, and then be picked up within 30 min at any given weeknight" (00:41:21-00:42:20).

Perceived Lack of Autonomy

In addition to the systemic barriers faced by youth, a perceived lack of autonomy also played a role in participants' challenges. Y5 described how when she would share resources that she learned about at school with her father, his pride and the stigma around homelessness kept them from accessing those resources. She reflected on the impact that these resources could have had, stating that had she been aware she could have accessed them by herself, things might have been easier: "Yeah if I knew, I would have gotten clothes and hygiene products. And all that stuff" (00:59:59–01:00:31).

Y5 also described how dire her situation felt, explaining how she struggled with basic necessities, such as clothing and hygiene products:

“Oh my god! I was wearing Converse, and the soles were just completely gone. Like they were gone, like I’d lift up my shoes, and at the bottom of the shoe, there was no rubber. And I was like, I don’t know what to do. Like, this is just what I have. And I was like, I also know I’ve ran out of shampoo, conditioner, body wash, deodorant, socks, and toothpaste, and I was like, I’m literally on fumes here. Like, I smell like shit” (00:13:14 - 00:14:25).

Successful Experiences of Autonomy

Successful experiences of autonomy often emerged when youth felt they had choice in how and when to engage with service utilization. These successes were particularly pronounced around themes of technology, needs, and institutional support.

Technology. The interaction between autonomy and technology access emerged as a significant factor in youth's ability to navigate support systems independently. As mentioned, all youth participants reported having smartphones in their surveys. This universal digital access serves as a pathway for independent resource seeking and rights awareness. Y2 shared these reflections about how her experiences shifted from high school to college: during highschool, she “only just relied on [her] parents” for accessing homeless services (00:21:26.950 - 00:21:51.701), however, when she moved to college, and had consistent internet service, she began to independently research financial literacy and local services including following a local foodbank on Instagram.

Y7 similarly noted technology's role in helping her family find housing through using key search terms such as "cheap apartment" or "no down payment," demonstrating how digital tools can enhance autonomous decision-making.

Coping Strategies. Youth displayed independent problem solving and resourcefulness around meeting their own self-care needs, despite low utilization of traditional mental health services (30%). Interviews revealed nuanced attitudes toward emotional support, such as Y3's reflection: "I didn't feel like I could truly express my feelings" (00:19:59.590 - 00:20:48.130). When asked about preferred support methods, she continued: "therapy like isn't my thing, and like really talking through it, but I think there's like something to look forward to like an activity that that could help in a way mentally" (00:20:58.670 - 00:21:44.340).

Youth frequently described developing personal coping strategies that differed from traditional mental health services. Y10 described, "I have a cat, and what I do is I, I may sound weird, but I talk to my cat... she meows back at me, and it feels like she's talking back like she gets me" (00:08:45.900 --> 00:09:30.320). These individualized coping mechanisms often existed alongside, or in place of, formal support services. This illustrates how youth autonomously meet their own needs for support.

Institutional Support. Youth experiences with institutional support revealed how autonomy could be enhanced, rather than restricted, within structured environments as well. Y8's journey through different educational settings highlighted this possibility:

"It wasn't like a regular school at all. In Jewel City, they really sat down with you, and if you were feeling a certain way, you were almost like, not forced, but you were

encouraged to talk about it. And schoolwork wasn't the most important thing there. It was mostly about the kids" (00:08:39 - 00:09:22).

This experience demonstrates how institutional support, when focused on youth agency and choice, can facilitate rather than restrict autonomy.

IPs also discussed supporting youth autonomy and emphasized creating opportunities for agency within necessary structures. IP8 described their approach: "I always ask parents and kids any type of hardship they're going through, but especially the homelessness, what details do you want me not to include?" (00:36:45 - 00:37:32). This collaborative approach to information sharing exemplified how professionals can support autonomy while maintaining necessary oversight.

Relatedness

The relatedness theme was particularly evident through codes including *Cultural Factors*, *Family Structure*, and *Relatedness/Relationship Building*. Analysis revealed how social connections influenced both access to and utilization of resources. A significant subtheme emerged around sibling relationships and family role adaptations during housing instability. The impact of relationships on resource access and utilization emerged as a crucial theme. Youth often described complex family dynamics that both contributed to and complicated their housing instability.

Provider Relationships

Survey data indicated that 90% of youth reported interaction with school-based services, suggesting schools represent a critical point of potential connection. However, youth described varying experiences with these relationships. As Y7 shared about her distrust

and belief that “they make it worse (13:53.360 – 00:13:58.) ” while IP1 observed, "We have a wellness center, we have a therapist and stuff like that. But not all kids want to see the therapist. Not all kids want to go to the wellness center, some kids just want that one trusted adult that they can rely on" (00:03:09 – 00:04:26). This contrast between formal services and youth preferences, again, illustrates how institutional support structures may not align with how youth prefer to build relationships and access help.

Family Relationships

Youth often described complex family dynamics that both contributed to and complicated their housing instability. Y7 explained: "my mom doesn't work, but my dad has less work, shift hours. I remember my parents stressing about money especially, and also, since I live in a family of 12 people with 3 individual families" (00:02:30 - 00:03:33).

This complexity was further illustrated by Y4's experience navigating the transition from independent living to staying with family, stating they were "with my grandparents and then their health has declined over the years, they recently sold their home to afford assisted living. And so that brought me to homelessness" (00:08:55.050 - 00:09:50.870). This experience highlights how family connections can both support and complicate housing stability, creating complex webs of interdependence and responsibility that directly impact youth's ability to access and maintain stable housing.

Peer Relationships

The challenge of maintaining peer relationships while experiencing housing instability emerged as another significant barrier. Youth frequently described feeling disconnected from peers who hadn't shared similar experiences. Y8 articulated this disconnect: "I feel like me and my friends that have lived in Glendale their whole lives. We

are very different, completely different" (00:06:09 - 00:06:20). This social distance often impacted youth's willingness to seek help or share their circumstances with potential support networks.

Conversely, peer networks, when successfully established, play a crucial role in resource awareness and access. Youth described learning about resources through informal networks and sharing information with others in similar situations. As Y2 described, "I remember during my school time they provided food distribution like once a month, and I remember my mom and my other friends will go too cause that was our school at that time and anyone in the community will be welcome to grab some food also" (00:05:11.098 - 00:05:37). Youth shared that this peer-to-peer information sharing often felt more accessible and less stigmatizing than formal channels.

Differences in Approach

While both groups emphasized relationships, their approaches differed significantly. Youth primarily built connections through peer networks and trusted individuals, with 42% of youth relationship codes focusing on informal support systems. In contrast, IPs emphasized professional relationship building and formal support networks, which comprised 38% of IP relationship codes.

A critical finding emerged in the contrast between information-sharing approaches. Youth predominantly reported learning about resources through peer networks (76%), social media platforms (82%), and informal relationships (68%). IPs, however, primarily relied on formal referral systems (91%), institutional communications (82%), and professional networks (73%) (see Table 5). This misalignment helps explain why, despite IPs reporting high rates of resource communication (82%), youth awareness of available supports

remained low (20%). These differences suggest opportunities for bridging implementation gaps through more culturally responsive, youth-centered approaches that align with how young people naturally seek and share information.

Competence

Codes including *Additional Academic Support*, *Information Sources*, *Peer Learning*, and *Resources* illuminated how knowledge and awareness of MKVHAA rights and other skills significantly impacted youth's ability to advocate for themselves and access resources.

Knowledge Sharing and Learning

The comparative analysis of youth and IP perspectives on competence revealed gaps in how resource knowledge is developed and shared. Youth predominantly built competence through peer knowledge sharing and experiential learning (Rice et al., 2023). As Y9 described: "I try to figure it out by watching what other people do first...then I know what works." This peer-oriented approach to learning contrasted with IPs' more structured methods. IP3 explained their approach: "We have a training protocol - first we establish their baseline knowledge, then build from there with specific modules about their rights and available resources." This difference in learning approaches extended to technology use. While 72% of youth reported using digital platforms to build resource knowledge, only 45% of IPs incorporated digital tools into their regular practice.

When asked about their rights, many youth expressed surprise at learning about available supports. Y3 responded to learning about transportation rights:

Not entirely. I know my high school did give out free bus passes to those who were on the poorer side. That was it. And you had to go to the office and ask about it. They didn't just tell you about it. (00:27:32.410 - 00:27:55.098).

Table 9 illustrates the knowledge distribution of MKVHAA rights among youth participants, showing a clear discrepancy between the knowledge of youth and that of professional participants. Nearly all of the youth that were interviewed were unaware that they could have accessed these rights and resources.

Understanding and Utilization

This study also illuminated nuance between understanding and utilization. For example The notably low utilization of mental health services (30%) among youth participants initially appears concerning. However, interview data revealed more complex attitudes toward emotional support than simple resistance or lack of access. Youth often developed alternative coping mechanisms and support networks that served similar functions while feeling more culturally appropriate or personally comfortable. This finding suggests that traditional metrics of service utilization may not fully capture how youth address their mental health needs, indicating a need for broader conceptualization of emotional support in program evaluation and design.

Systemic Challenges

Barriers to competence often stemmed from distrust and systemic challenges in information dissemination. Y7 described, "I don't think I like saw the need to talk to anyone or like, get my mother in trouble, just cause I feel like she could have if somebody knew about our situation" (00:13:17.390 - 00:13:34.439). This gap between available resources and youth awareness directly addresses the first research question, highlighting a critical disconnect in how MKVHAA rights information reaches youth.

Successful Experiences of Building Competence

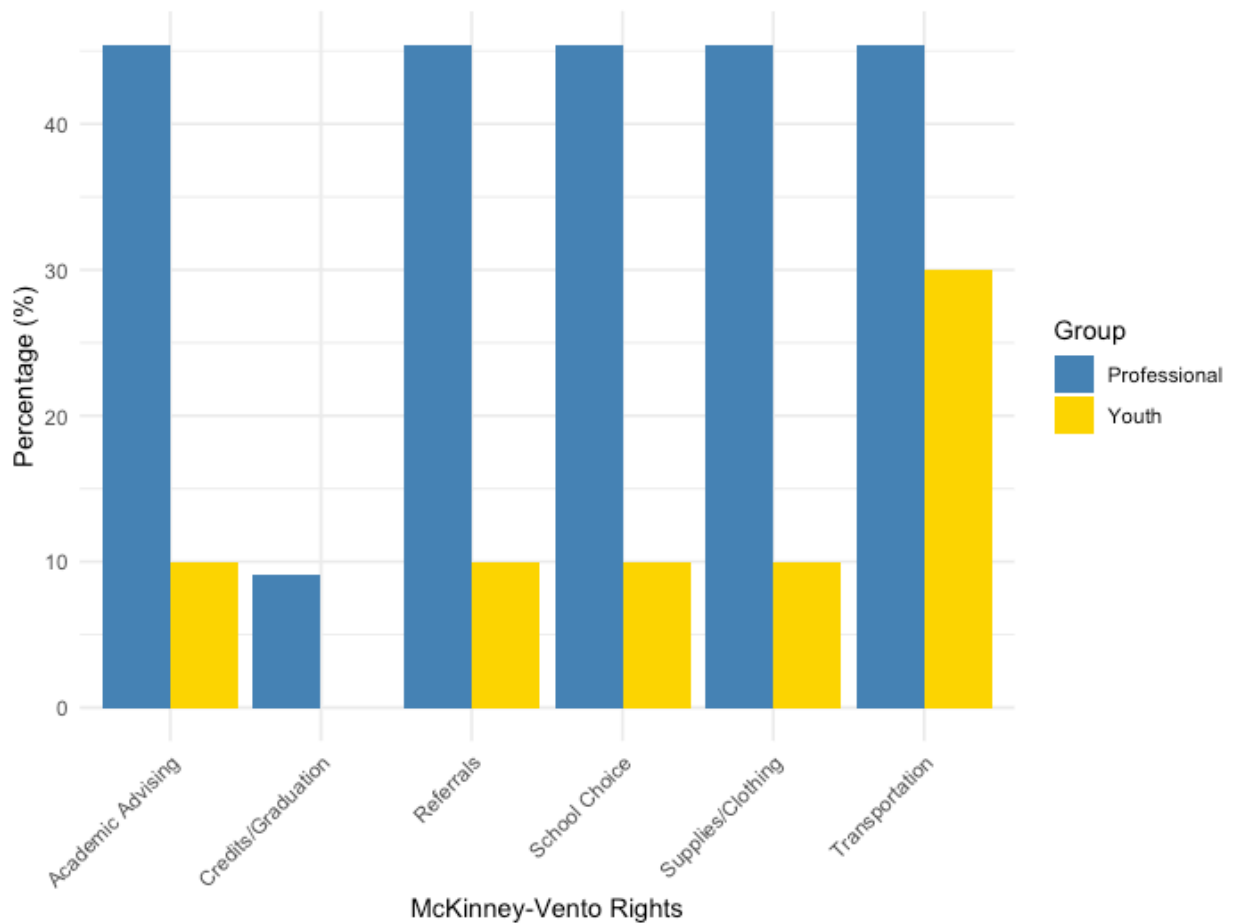
Success in building competence often involved creative approaches to information sharing. IP2 emphasized,

“disseminating information to workers who can then disseminate it to clients is important. Being able to provide these rights in a very digestible manner, you know, whether that be like a short infographic, or you know something along the lines of like a flier or poster would be super helpful” (00:52:41.710 --> 00:53:39.452).

While examining individual SDT components revealed important patterns in how youth access and engage with resources, the most compelling insights emerged at the intersections of these psychological needs, where autonomy, competence, and relatedness worked together to either facilitate or hinder resource utilization.

Table 9

Knowledge Distribution of McKinney-Vento Rights

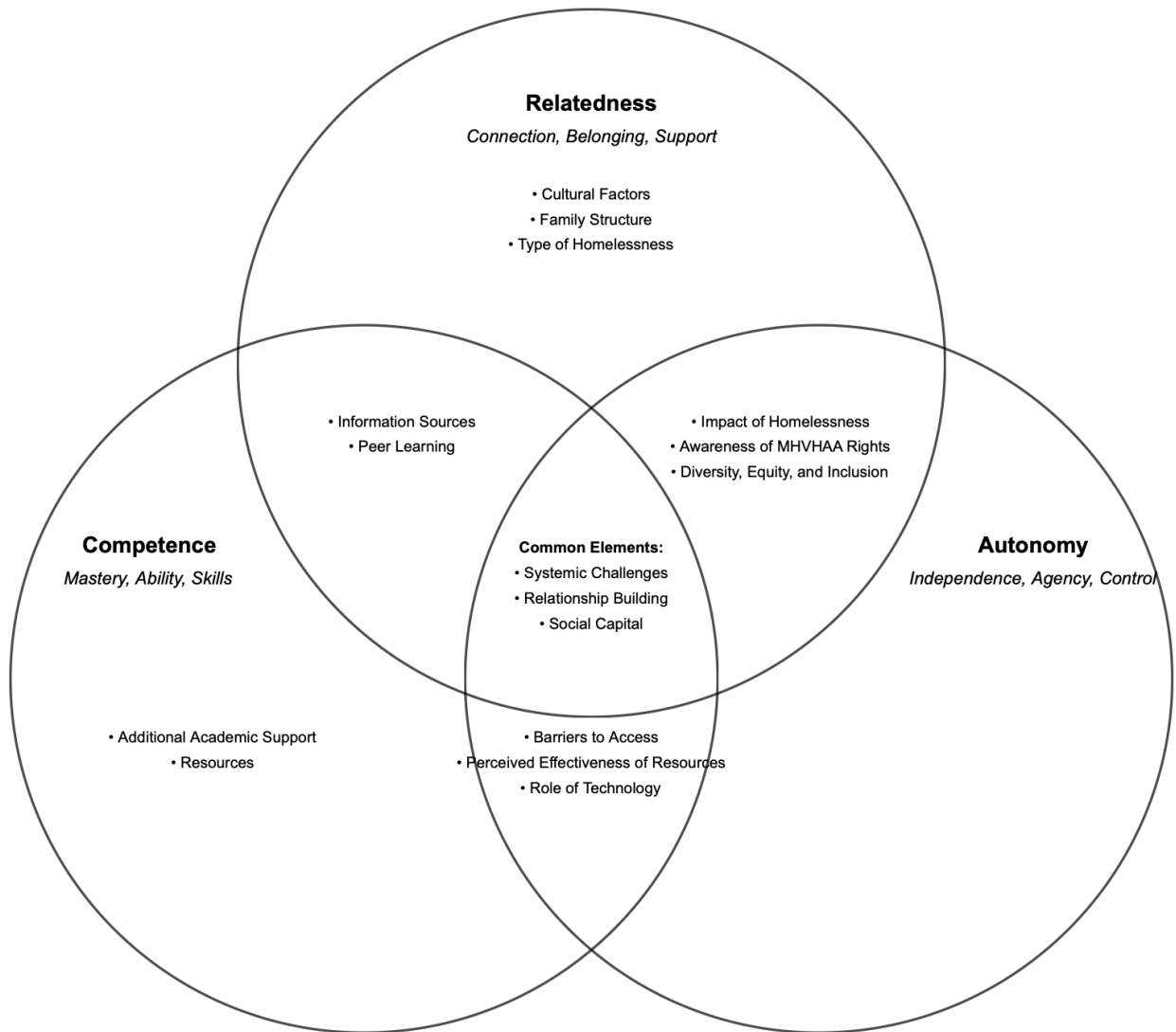


Intersection of Autonomy, Relatedness, and Competence

Using R software's Relationship Models feature to help visualize the relationships between different code categories revealed clusters of related experiences and challenges faced by youth experiencing homelessness (see Figure 1). This systematic approach to analysis helped identify both explicit and implicit patterns in the data, providing insights into how youth navigate educational systems while experiencing homelessness. While youth participants provided insight into their experiences with homelessness, perspectives from IPs helped illuminate how MKVHAA rights and resources are implemented in practice.

Figure 1

Self Determination Theory Themes and Codes



The analysis revealed distinct patterns in how youth and IPs experience and understand MKVHAA implementation. By reviewing the frequency and cross occurrence of SDT needs (see Table 10) themes and codes appeared differently for IPs and youth.

Table 10

Occurance of SDT Needs

SDT Component	Youth %	IP %	Combined %	Key Insight
Relatedness	37%	42%	39.50%	IPs emphasized relationship building slightly more than youth.
Competence	35%	32%	33.50%	Youth focused more on skill/knowledge development.
Autonomy	28%	26%	27%	Both groups reported autonomy as least prominent.

The data revealed how autonomy, competence, and relatedness work in concert to facilitate or hinder youth access to MKVHAA rights and resources. Survey data showed that services most frequently accessed by youth (food assistance 80%, basic needs 75%, school supplies 70%) corresponded directly with services most frequently communicated by IPs, suggesting that competence (knowledge) combined with relatedness (trusted information sources) enables autonomous action. While examining each SDT component individually provided valuable insights, the most compelling patterns emerged at the intersections of these needs. For example, cultural factors shaped not only relationships (relatedness) but also how youth exercised choice (autonomy) and developed strategies for navigating support systems (competence).

Autonomy and Relatedness

Autonomy and relatedness emerged particularly strongly in youth narratives about disclosure. Y2 explained: "I'll go to friends or like certain family members and I've got mentors" (00:07:02.550 - 00:07:11.670). This highlights how strong relationships created space for autonomous decision-making about resource seeking.

Family Dynamics and Sibling Relationships

The experience of housing instability significantly impacted how youth viewed themselves and their place within family systems. A recurring pattern emerged of older siblings assuming quasi-parental roles, adding complexity to their experience of homelessness. As Y10 described: "I'm the oldest out of every single one... the parents expect more out of me because I am the oldest. I'm supposed to be the role model of all the children" (00:05:23.710 – 00:05:37.279). This role often provided purpose but also added pressure during already challenging circumstances. Beyond general family relationships, specific patterns emerged regarding sibling dynamics and role adaptations during periods of housing instability.

This sibling caretaking dynamic created a unique intersection between relatedness and autonomy, as youth simultaneously maintained family bonds while being forced into premature independence. The Family Structure code frequently overlapped with Impact of Homelessness, particularly when examining how family roles adapted to housing instability. Often this code illustrated the dual role of family serving as support and a barrier.

Competence and Relatedness

The relationship between competence and relatedness emerged particularly strongly in areas of cultural competency, academic support, and information sharing networks. These interactions demonstrated how building knowledge and relationships mutually reinforced each other in supporting youth experiencing homelessness.

Cultural competence emerged as inseparable from relationship building in effective service delivery. IP5 articulated this connection:

“having things available...I mean, I'm just gonna say Spanish, because I'm Hispanic. So things in different languages. People that look like me. Not just a bunch of words

like, you know 'you're welcome here,' but like what? Who is welcome here? What does that look like in color, in real people's faces" (00:38:07.420 - 00:39:46.280).

This perspective highlighted how cultural representation enhanced both service competence and relational trust. IP Y5 stated,

"School staff served as both academic support and resource connectors." Y5 explained

"My teachers were supportive and understanding, and wanted to offer resources. Like I had one teacher offered to do my laundry like very sweet, but I didn't need him to, but he after class he privately, was like, 'if you want to, bring a bag of clothes I'll wash them for you and bring them back'. And I was like, Oh, thank you so much for that offer, but the house I'm staying at has a washer dryer. So I'm okay" (00:12:34-00:13:14).

Technology and Information Access

The intersection of technology access and relationship-based information sharing emerged as a crucial mechanism for building competence. Youth leveraged online platforms to search for resources before having to ask others for help, as exemplified by Y9's experience: "I try to just find stuff like on the Internet, on the just like, look for stuff. Look around and see what can I get? Well, what can I get like before, like asking strangers out on the street. I just like try to research stuff" (00:06:16.240 --> 00:06:26.039). This independent searching was complemented by peer-to-peer digital resource sharing, as MD describes how friends would "Give us some links... during my school time they provided food distribution like once a month, and I remember my mom and my other friends will go too cause that was our school at that time and anyone in the community will be welcome to grab some food"

(00:04:48 --> 00:05:01). This pattern of using online resources to find information independently while also sharing opportunities through text messages demonstrated how youth combined technology and peer networks to enhance their ability to navigate and access resources as a community.

Autonomy and Competence

The intersection of autonomy and competence appeared frequently in youth's ability to navigate systems independently once they understood the resources available to them. All the youth that were interviewed felt strongly that all youth should be clearly informed of their rights and resources. Y3 reflected on learning about MKVHAA rights: "I think that like if those who are experiencing homelessness knew about all these resources, that it could help them get on their feet more faster" (00:30:11.300 - 00:30:42.550). This highlights the importance of finding ways to communicate knowledge effectively.

Competence and Relatedness

The interviews revealed how peer knowledge-sharing networks were crucial for building both competence and relationships. IP2 emphasized,

“you need to build a community between your clients...if you are able to provide them events to be able to connect with others who are going on a similar journey, that can help them not feel as alone” (00:16:57.360 – 00:18:48.109).

Service providers noted that youth often learned about resources through peer networks rather than formal channels. Interviews also highlighted how resource and knowledge barriers could hinder relationships particularly in institutional settings. IPs, particularly those providing a direct service, struggled with complex overlapping systems that made it difficult to effectively share information. As IP2 described,

“The Los Angeles Homeless Service Agency just has so many subcontractors. They don't really have a full list of providers that can help you in that region and some people are secretive... nonprofit space is kind of competitive... they don't necessarily always want to share their resources.”

IP7 further illustrates this challenge in the following statement,

“They wanted us to provide them with the right resources that we think it's right and then it's a completely different thing when they show up to the other agency. So that youth is just going bouncing from one location to another to another, to another, and then it's just expanding their homelessness” (00:09:12.040 –00:10:08.680).

The analysis revealed multiple instances where all three SDT components - autonomy, competence, and relatedness - converged to influence how youth accessed and utilized MKVHAA rights and resources. These intersections were particularly evident in youth narratives about navigating both formal and informal support systems.

Autonomy, Competence, and Relatedness

Analysis revealed how the three psychological needs of SDT intersect in complex and meaningful ways to shape youth experiences with MKVHAA resources. These intersections manifested across multiple contexts; from individual youth navigating family caregiving responsibilities, to cultural dynamics in different housing situations, to interactions with formal support systems. The data demonstrated how supporting or hindering any single component created ripple effects across all three needs. This was particularly evident in three key areas: youth managing multiple roles (as seen in Y6's experience as both a homeless youth and caregiver), cultural navigation (exemplified by Y5's experiences across different

household cultures), and institutional interactions (illustrated through various youth-provider relationships).

While examining individual SDT components revealed important patterns, the most compelling insights emerged at the intersections where autonomy, competence, and relatedness worked together to either facilitate or hinder resource utilization. Survey data showed that services most frequently accessed by youth (food assistance 80%, basic needs 75%, school supplies 70%) corresponded directly with services most frequently communicated by IPs, suggesting that competence (knowledge) combined with relatedness (trusted information sources) enables autonomous action.

Anecdote from Participant Y6

The complex interplay of these three needs is further illustrated through Y6's experience as both a youth experiencing homelessness and a caregiver to his younger brother. His narrative demonstrates how gaps in resource awareness can impact multiple generations within a family. As an older sibling, Y6 took on significant responsibilities for his brother who struggled with mental health challenges: "I took him under my wing like. I took him in as if he were like own son" (00:16:18.970 - 00:16:24.550). This caregiving role emerged within a context of housing instability, as Y6 described being regularly kicked out as punishment:

"over petty stuff... like we were playing tag or something." When trying to protect his brother from their grandfather's intervention, conflicts escalated: "I stood up for my little brother... like my grandpa like start wanting to act out with me" (00:03:09.480 - 00:03:36.359).

The emotional toll of watching his brother struggle while trying to maintain stability was evident: "Yeah, he's my little brother, so I'm tired of him getting hurt... Oh, yeah, it does affect me. And it makes me like upset, you know?" (00:18:14.110 - 00:18:40.362).

Y6's attempts to exercise autonomy in protecting his brother, while navigating unstable housing, ultimately intersected with system involvement. At age 17, he "ended up in the group home system" and later faced a choice that exemplifies how lack of knowledge about rights and resources can have cascading effects: "I was supposed to have [housing] till I was 21 or 25... but because I picked up a charge, they give me 2 options, to either have all my probation and my AB Housing and everything terminated, or I do jail time" (00:20:09.560 - 00:20:25.929). When presented with information about MKVHAA rights during the interview, OR's response highlighted the critical gap between available resources and youth awareness:

Well, yeah, cause like, if I'd known about all that, like, everything would have been easier to get to school, I mean, like choices I could have made back then would have been better like maybe the outcome of my life would be different right now, like now that I put that into all that. Yeah (00:14:05.960 –00:14:20.169).

His story illustrates how the intersection of autonomy (making choices about protection and substance use), competence (understanding available resources), and relatedness (family relationships and system involvement) shapes youth trajectories through homelessness.

Anecdote from Participant Y5

Y5, who identified as Cuban and experienced living doubled-up with over 20 different households of varying backgrounds over the span of one year describes themes she

noticed about her own autonomy, access to resources and ability to share or learn information, and where she felt or didn't feel belong among families. She took away broad life lessons stating: "Everyone's household... the one thing I really realized, you never know what's going on in somebody's house. Like a house could look completely normal from the outside. You never fucking know how they're talking to each other, how they're living" (00:36:51—00:37:24). She ultimately describes how needs manifested differently across cultural contexts. In Mexican households, Y5 experienced greater autonomy in personal space ("very unbothered, very much not involved at all"), while still receiving structured support around basic needs like meals. This contrasted with some white households where she described more interpersonal monitoring, but less consistent material support. Her competence in navigating these different cultural spaces was crucial, as she learned to adapt her behavior and expectations: "I would just get ready and go to bed and leave in the morning. I just didn't like that I was already intruding on their space, so I didn't wanna push it" (00:06:59—00:08:05). These experiences demonstrate how cultural dynamics influenced not only relationships and support access, but also youth's ability to exercise autonomy and develop competence in navigating different household norms.

This analysis shows how cultural contexts create unique configurations of autonomy (in how youth can occupy space), competence (in navigating cultural norms), and relatedness (in forming connections across cultural differences highlighting the deeply interconnected nature of these psychological needs in youth's lived experiences. This experience, in contrast to Y7's shelter to transitional housing experience, also illustrates how the varying living conditions or type of homelessness shapes the kinds of autonomy, relatedness, and competencies a youth may have or require to access rights and resources.

Integration of Autonomy, Relatedness, and Competence

In formal settings all three SDT components revealed how institutional barriers often simultaneously affect youth's sense of control, ability to effectively use resources, and relationships with support systems. This was particularly evident in descriptions of program requirements, where youth like Y7 faced challenges that impacted their autonomy ('they would kick us out'), competence ('they should have a little bit more resources to show us'), and relatedness ('they expected so much more from us'). IP4 described an integrated approach in her work,

creating that relationship with the kids...and really learning who they are, and having this open dialogue and allowing them to trust you and know that you're a safe place...and then from there we go from there to see what advice I can give them.

However, the absence of any component could disrupt the entire support cycle. Multiple youth reported not knowing doubled-up housing qualified as homeless or being unaware of their McKinney-Vento rights, which limited both their relationships with school staff and their ability to autonomously access resources. As Y1 reflected: "No, I didn't know about that...I wouldn't have thought that they could help me with anything." These findings highlight the significant gap between available resources and youth awareness, suggesting a need for more effective information dissemination strategies that align with how youth prefer to receive and engage with information.

CHAPTER V

Discussion and Conclusion

This study examined awareness and accessibility of MKVHAA rights and resources from youth experiencing homelessness and IPs' perspectives. Through the lens of SDT, findings revealed how autonomy, competence, and relatedness shape engagement with educational supports. Little to no research exists on understanding how SDT applies to information sharing of MKVHAA. This study applies a holistic approach to youth needs by utilizing a framework that allows us to address each whilst also considering how they inform one another. The integration of survey and interview data illuminated critical gaps between policy intent and implementation while suggesting pathways for improvement.

Autonomy

This study's findings significantly extend our understanding of autonomy in MKVHAA implementation. While Halltt (2012) documented implementation challenges from institutional perspectives, this study addresses how youth themselves construct support systems often piecing together formal and informal resources in ways not often described systematically or addressed by service providers. Analysis of service communication patterns provides further insight into this institutional misalignment.

Communication of Rights and Resources

The notable alignment between services most frequently communicated by IPs and those most frequently accessed by youth reveals both successes and limitations in current MKVHAA implementation. Food resources and basic needs/supplies, both communicated by 91% of IPs, corresponded directly with the highest youth access rates (food assistance 80%,

basic needs 75%). This strong correlation suggests that when information about resources is consistently and widely shared, youth are more likely to utilize these services.

However, examining the least frequently communicated and accessed services reveals concerning gaps. Legal aid (45% IP communication, 20% youth access) and school choice (27% IP communication) showed significantly lower rates of both communication and utilization. This pattern suggests that when providers communicate about services less frequently, youth access drops correspondingly. The relationship is particularly troubling for critical educational rights like school choice – a core MKVHAA provision that appears to be systematically under-communicated and under-utilized.

Mental health services present an interesting anomaly in this pattern. Despite not appearing among IPs' least communicated services, youth reported notably low utilization (30%). This discrepancy suggests that barriers beyond simple awareness affect mental health service access – potentially including stigma, cultural factors, or preference for alternative support systems as revealed in the interview data.

It is likely that this pattern of services utilization extends not just to youth experiencing homelessness, but adults as well. Culturally speaking, accepting tangible assistance, such as food and clothing, may still remain less stigmatized than receiving mental health services. Youth who receive this messaging from their parents are likely to grow into adults that carry these same perspectives, possibly maintaining generational patterns.

These findings indicate that while current communication strategies work effectively for concrete, immediate needs like food and supplies, they may be less successful in conveying information about more complex rights and services. Future work could examine perspectives of youth and their parents about the utilization of specific resources, such as

food versus therapy, to understand more about why these discrepancies exist. Additionally, another focus could include improving communication and access around these under-utilized resources, particularly those fundamental to MKVHAA's educational aims like school choice options.

Navigating Systems and Relationships

This study's findings build on Krabbenborg et al.'s work by demonstrating how youth exercise agency in resource seeking, even within constrained or diverse circumstances. Previous research often focused primarily on formal service engagement; this study addresses how youth are navigating multiple systems and relationships, making strategic decisions about disclosure and resource utilization. The gap between available resources and actual needs emerged as a fundamental barrier to effective MKVHAA implementation, one that could not be solved through better communication or coordination alone.

This finding extends Miller & Bourgeois's (2013) work on implementation challenges by revealing how resource scarcity creates an unspoken expectation for youth to demonstrate persistence and self-advocacy, while simultaneously confirming Pavlakis's (2018) observation that even well-staffed programs struggle to maintain consistent support across service sites.

While previous research has documented implementation barriers from organizational perspectives (Hernandez Jozefowicz-Simbeni & Israel, 2006), this study illuminates how resource limitations create a paradoxical system where youth must build and maintain relationships with providers who often cannot meet their basic needs, fundamentally undermining the relationship-based support that Edwards (2020) identified as crucial for successful engagement.

Digital Engagement

Digital engagement emerged as a key autonomy factor. Universal smartphone access among youth allowed opportunities for enhancing independent resource navigation utilizing social media to connect with friends and family. Through technology, they were able to share resources, as well as utilize general online searches, such as those noted by Y7 in the section addressing technology. This is data not previously documented and extends Sheoran et al.'s (2016) work around youth utilizing a homeless service app.

This study highlights the need to examine the effectiveness of youth-designed programs versus traditional models, particularly investigating how different levels of structure impact sustained engagement. Studies exploring how digital platforms support youth agency and accessibility, while maintaining necessary safeguards, could inform implementation strategies. Data from both surveys and interviews reveals how evaluation frameworks often fail to capture youth perspectives on resource accessibility. There is a need for youth-centered evaluation approaches that respect autonomy in information sharing while gathering meaningful feedback (Gregorio et al.'s, 2022).

Relatedness

Family Dynamics

The relatedness findings significantly expand Aviles de Bradley's (2015b) work on cultural frameworks in homeless services by demonstrating how cultural factors shape both information access and resource utilization. This study reveals previously undocumented complexities in how family dynamics, particularly sibling relationships, influence resource engagement. The findings illuminate how older siblings often assume caretaking

responsibilities while navigating their own housing instability, adding new dimensions to our understanding of family relationships during homelessness.

Provider Dynamics

The study also reinforces and extends previous findings about the critical role of school staff relationships in resource access. While Aviles de Bradley (2015c), Biggar (2001), and Larson & Meehan (2011) documented how uninformed staff created barriers through misconceptions about homelessness and limited resource dissemination, this study reveals additional complexities in these relationships. The findings demonstrate how staff perceptions of family dynamics and assumptions about parental fitness can discourage youth from seeking help, expanding our understanding beyond simple knowledge gaps to deeper relational barriers.

Prioritization of Relationships

Importantly, this study revealed a significant disconnect between how IPs and youth conceptualize and value relationships in resource access. While IPs emphasized professional relationship building and formal support networks (38% of IP relationship codes), youth primarily built connections through peer networks and trusted individuals (42% of youth relationship codes focusing on informal support systems). This misalignment in how relationships are understood and utilized represents a previously undocumented barrier to effective MKVHAA implementation, suggesting why traditional relationship-based interventions might fall short of their intended impact. Future research could expand on the effectiveness of peer learning with regard to MKVHAA rights and resources. Additionally, continued investigation into the characteristics and qualities of “trusted individuals” may produce insights on better ways to build with youth.

Competence

Digital Literacy

The study revealed a significant institutional lag in adopting digital engagement strategies. Despite universal smartphone access among youth participants, many IPs continued relying primarily on traditional communication methods, with less than half incorporating digital tools into their practice. This gap extends beyond simple technology access issues previously documented by Sheoran et al. (2016), suggesting a deeper institutional resistance to adopting youth-preferred communication channels. This misalignment between youth information-seeking behaviors and institutional practices indicates a need for systemic reform in how organizations approach digital engagement.

Of note, today's technology and information accessibility demonstrates a significant shift from previous generations. In the past, gatekeeping of information was not merely due to institutional resistance, but was a overarching product of a society that did not experience today's level of connection. Researching the experiences of previously homeless youth from even a decade prior would probably garner significant differences in access and utilization of technology. As mentioned, service outreach and engagement has not necessarily kept up with these dynamic changes in social norms, however, innovation in approach much be considered as technology continues to become a universal feature in the lives of youth.

The competence findings also advance Edwards' (2021) research by illuminating specific mechanisms, such as online communication tools, through which youth build and share knowledge about resources. While previous studies emphasized institutional knowledge transfer this research speaks to youth's sophisticated peer-based learning networks (Miller & Bourgeois, 2013). The stark contrast between IP communication methods

(formal referrals 91%, institutional communications 82%) provides insight into why traditional systematic implementation approaches are not appealing or as accessible to youth.

Additionally, this builds on Krabbenborg et al.'s (2017) work by demonstrating how competence development occurs through informal channels often overlooked by service providers. For example, youth like Y2 learned about resources through social media platforms. This peer-to-peer information sharing represents a previously undocumented form of competence building in MKVHAA implementation.

The findings particularly advance our understanding of digital competency in resource access. While previous research by VonHoltz et al. (2018) documented technology access, this study reveals how youth leverage digital platforms to build both knowledge and support networks. This extends Thompson et al.'s (2016) work on information networks by demonstrating specific ways digital literacy supports resource navigation.

Finally, the findings of this study build on previous research showing that competence in MKVHAA implementation entails both learning *how* to obtain resources and *comprehending* one's rights. Given that many young people remain uninformed of accessible services, despite existing support networks, understanding how youth prefer to receive information about their rights, becomes crucial for improving resource utilization.

Integration of SDT Components

This study's examination of the intersection of autonomy, relatedness, and competence shapes the implementation of youth access to MKVHAA resources. While previous researchers have examined partial combinations of these needs – Krabbenborg et al. (2017) focused on autonomy and relatedness support through informal channels, and

Edwards (2020) explored competence and relatedness through academic support systems with educators and peers – this study provides the first empirical evidence of how all three components function interdependently in MKVHAA resource access.

This study significantly extends previous work by demonstrating that success in accessing MKVHAA resources depends on the alignment of all three psychological needs simultaneously. While prior research documented individual barriers, such as Aviles de Bradley's (2015a) examination of cultural frameworks in institutional relationships, Biggar's (2001) analysis of how staff misconceptions limit youth autonomy and competence development, and Larson and Meehan's (2011) work on how implementation gaps affect youth's ability to navigate support systems, this study reveals how these barriers compound across psychological needs. For instance, the findings show that cultural competency is not just a matter of relationships as previously conceptualized, but fundamentally shapes how youth exercise autonomy in help-seeking and developing system navigation skills through peer networks.

This research particularly advances understanding of service delivery by revealing previously undocumented tensions between institutional approaches and youth needs across all SDT components. Survey data demonstrated a striking misalignment between IP communication methods and youth information-seeking behaviors. This extends Hernandez Jozefowicz-Simbeni and Israel's (2006) work on how limited staff training and overwhelming caseloads impact service delivery by demonstrating how institutional structures simultaneously impede youth autonomy in resource choice, limit competence development through inaccessible information channels, and strain supportive relationships. These findings align with and build upon Miller and Bourgeois's (2013) identification of how

district-level capacity constraints affect service coordination while providing new insight into their psychological impact on youth engagement.

This integrated understanding provides new theoretical insight into why some youth successfully navigate support systems while others struggle, moving beyond previous single-factor explanations. The findings suggest that effective MKVHAA implementation requires a fundamental reconceptualization of how services are designed and delivered, considering all three psychological needs as an interconnected framework rather than separate domains for intervention (Aviles de Bradley, 2015c; Edwards, 2020; Hallett, 2012).

Policy Recommendations

This study suggests three critical policy reforms needed to enhance MKVHAA implementation and youth outcomes: (1) restructuring funding streams to enable flexible, youth-centered resource allocation; (2) strengthening legal protections and enforcement mechanisms for MKVHAA rights; and (3) establishing specialized support systems for youth caregivers. These recommendations emerge from analysis of how current policies impact youth autonomy, relatedness, and competency in accessing educational support and stability.

Restructuring Funding Streams

Current funding structures create specific barriers across all SDT components. For autonomy, youth described how program requirements tied to funding sources restricted their choices – exemplified by Y7's experience with shelter rules requiring specific savings amounts that failed to account for family circumstances. Regarding competence, IPs reported how funding limitations affected their ability to provide comprehensive training and resources, with IP4 describing how fragmented funding led to redundant paperwork across services, overwhelming youth and deterring engagement. For relatedness, funding

restrictions impacted relationship building, as demonstrated by IP2's observation that competitive nonprofit funding models discouraged resource sharing between organizations. These findings extend Sullivan and Hodge's (2021) work by showing how funding structures specifically impact youth engagement with support systems.

Legal Protections and Enforcement of MKVHAA

The study documented systemic failures in MKVHAA rights enforcement that require stronger legal protections. Youth frequently received partial or time-limited services despite qualifying for continuous support – exemplified when Y1 received only one month of transportation assistance despite ongoing eligibility. IP10 noted that "half of that doesn't even happen" when discussing MKVHAA implementation, indicating widespread non-compliance. These implementation gaps build on Hernandez Jozefowicz-Simbeni and Israel's (2006) findings about inconsistent MKVHAA enforcement. Policy reforms should establish clear accountability frameworks, including mandated implementation audits and dedicated oversight bodies with enforcement authority.

Youth Caregivers

The research revealed critical gaps in policy support for youth managing family caregiving responsibilities. Y6's experience of simultaneously navigating his own homelessness while caring for his younger brother with mental health challenges demonstrates how current policies fail to recognize youth in caretaking roles. Similarly, Y10 described expectations of being "the role model" while the family experienced housing instability, highlighting how older siblings often assume quasi-parental responsibilities. These previously undocumented dynamics suggest need for specialized case management

programs supporting youth caregivers. Such programs should provide targeted mentorship while acknowledging cultural differences in family structures and responsibilities.

Practical Recommendations

The study identifies five key areas for improving MKVHAA implementation practice: (1) establishing meaningful youth leadership roles in program design and delivery; (2) developing integrated service coordination systems that leverage technology; (3) implementing culturally responsive prevention strategies; and (4) creating comprehensive youth-centered evaluation frameworks. These recommendations focus on practical steps organizations can take to better support youth experiencing homelessness.

Youth Leadership

Implementation strategies must fundamentally shift toward youth leadership in program design and delivery. The study found youth developed sophisticated resource navigation strategies – 76% learned about resources through peer networks rather than formal channels, while 82% utilized social media platforms for information sharing. Organizations should establish youth councils and advisory boards within both homeless service organizations and school systems, with genuine decision-making authority over program design and implementation.

Incentivization should reflect diverse youth experiences, needs, and preferences through multiple pathways: financial support like stipends and employment opportunities; educational benefits including program credits and civic engagement recognition; health and wellness resources such as childcare, fitness programs, and nutrition support; housing assistance; and social-emotional recognition through leadership awards and community events. This multi-faceted approach acknowledges how Y7 described needing both material

support and social connection, while Y5's experience demonstrated the importance of culturally responsive incentives.

Integrated Service Coordination

Cross-system coordination requires significant restructuring based on how youth actually access information and support. The research suggests implementing integrated service hubs where youth can access multiple resources through a single point of contact, reflecting how Y2 successfully utilized combined food bank and educational support services. Digital platforms should mirror youth communication preferences, for example, developing mobile-friendly resource databases, secure messaging systems for provider communication, and social media integration for peer support networks. These platforms must maintain privacy while facilitating information sharing between providers to prevent youth from repeatedly sharing traumatic experiences, as multiple participants described.

Culturally-Responsive Prevention

Prevention strategies should be embedded within existing youth spaces. Schools can implement early warning systems through counseling offices, as IP8 described successfully identifying youth through routine check-ins. Community organizations can offer preventive supports like emergency rental assistance or utility payments before housing loss occurs. Cultural humility training for staff should incorporate lessons from experiences like Y5's navigation of different cultural households, ensuring screening tools and intervention approaches respect diverse family structures and help-seeking behaviors.

Youth-Centered Evaluation Frameworks

Evaluation frameworks require complete redesign to capture youth experiences effectively. Organizations should implement youth-led assessment committees, compensated

through the previously described incentive structures, to develop culturally relevant success metrics. Regular feedback mechanisms could include youth-designed surveys, peer-led focus groups, and digital feedback platforms matching youth communication preferences. These evaluation tools should examine how well services support autonomy (choice in resource access), competence (knowledge building and skill development), and relatedness (relationship quality with providers and peers) across different cultural contexts.

These recommendations emerge from synthesizing multiple data sources while addressing identified gaps between policy intent and implementation reality. The study's unique contribution lies in demonstrating how autonomy, competence, and relatedness interconnect in youth experiences of homelessness and resource access. Successful implementation requires sustained commitment to youth leadership, appropriate compensation for youth involvement, and accountability structures that center youth perspectives while maintaining necessary oversight.

Limitations and Future Directions

For this study, there are two primary limitations: (1) the small sample size and (2) the potential limitations in comprehensively capturing youth perspectives and experiences.

Generalizability

The sample included 10 youth, aged 13-23, and 11 IPs. While this study intentionally centered on youth experiencing homelessness and IPs, the relatively small sample size limits the representativeness of the findings. Although efforts were made to give priority to youth voices—a departure from previous research that primarily examined institutional perspectives—this sample size restricts the ability to generalize the findings to the broader population of youth experiencing homelessness.

The research methodology leveraged purposive and snowball sampling, which is appropriate for reaching hidden populations, but does not guarantee comprehensive representation of the diverse experiences within this group. The study's geographic focus on Southern California further constrains its generalizability. Despite California containing approximately one-fifth of the national total of students experiencing homelessness, the findings may not fully translate to other regional contexts. The unique characteristics of California's educational and homeless support systems could differ significantly from those in other areas, affecting the applicability of the findings to other parts of the country.

Bias

Data collection methods introduced additional constraints. Self-reported data from youth and IPs may reflect social desirability bias, with youth potentially hesitating to disclose certain details due to stigma and IPs possibly emphasizing positive service aspects. The evaluation framework revealed varying initial inter-rater reliability ($\kappa = 0.531-0.677$), though subsequent coding achieved substantial agreement.

Data Reliability

Initial attempts at establishing inter-rater reliability revealed varying levels of agreement among researchers, with kappa values ranging from 0.531 to 0.677. While researchers actively worked to interpret and categorize participant experiences within the SDT framework, distinctions between categories like systemic challenges and individual barriers needed additional clarity. Through collaborative discussion and refinement of the coding scheme, the team achieved substantial agreement ($\kappa > 0.61$) in subsequent coding rounds, though this initial variability speaks to the complex nature of analyzing lived experiences through theoretical components.

Future Investigation

This research opens several promising avenues for future investigation:

1. Youth-Designed Digital Platforms

The universal smartphone access among participants suggests opportunities for youth-centered digital solutions. Future research should examine:

- Effectiveness of youth-designed integration into existing apps versus service provider based apps
- Privacy and security considerations in digital resource sharing
- Integration of peer support networks with formal service systems
- Role of social media in resource awareness and access

2. Cultural Frameworks in Prevention

Building on this study's findings about cultural influences on resource utilization, future research should investigate:

- Development of culturally-specific early warning systems
- Impact of cultural matching between youth and service providers
- Integration of cultural practices in support services
- Role of community-based organizations in prevention

3. Longitudinal Impact Studies

Given the limited temporal scope of current research, longitudinal studies should examine:

- Long-term effects of youth leadership in program design
- Impact of early intervention on educational outcomes
- Intergenerational patterns in service utilization
- Evolution of support needs over time

4. Implementation and Policy Analysis

To better understand systemic factors, research should investigate:

- Impact of different funding structures on program sustainability
- Effectiveness of various staffing models
- Integration of youth feedback in policy development
- Barriers to policy implementation at different institutional levels

5. Evaluation Frameworks

Building on this study's methodological insights, future research should develop:

- Youth-centered success metrics
- Integration of qualitative and quantitative measures
- Cultural competency indicators
- Participatory evaluation methods

This research contributes important youth perspectives to MKVHAA implementation understanding while suggesting specific directions for enhancing support systems through youth-centered approaches. While other studies may look at needs described in SDT, there is more research needed to understand how these needs appear holistically and could be integrated in the homeless service system.

Conclusion

This research demonstrates the critical importance of centering youth voices in MKVHAA implementation while revealing significant gaps between intended support and actual accessibility. Through examination of both youth and professional experiences, this study illuminates how self-determination theory's components of autonomy, competence, and

relatedness fundamentally shape resource awareness and utilization. The findings suggest that effective MKVHAA implementation requires a paradigm shift from traditional service delivery models toward more youth-centered, culturally responsive approaches that align with how young people naturally seek and share information.

Key Findings and Theoretical Contributions

The study's unique contribution lies in its integrated examination of how psychological needs interact with institutional structures to either facilitate or hinder resource access. While previous research has documented implementation challenges from organizational perspectives, this work provides critical insight into how youths actively construct support systems, often piecing together formal and informal resources in ways not previously documented or systematically addressed by service providers. The universal digital access among youth participants, coupled with sophisticated peer-based information sharing networks, suggests untapped opportunities for enhancing resource accessibility through youth-centered digital platforms.

Perhaps most significantly, this research reveals how cultural factors fundamentally shape resource engagement across all three psychological needs – influencing not only relationship building but also how youth exercise choice and develop strategies for navigating support systems. The stark contrast between institutional communication methods and youth information-seeking behaviors suggests that current implementation approaches may inadvertently perpetuate access barriers, despite best intentions. This misalignment between service delivery methods and youth preferences represents a critical area for system improvement.

Beyond implementation and communication challenges, this research also addressed how resource scarcity fundamentally undermines MKVHAA effectiveness. While previous studies documented systemic barriers in policy execution, this work demonstrates how the basic unavailability of critical resources like emergency shelter and mental health services creates an impossible situation, where even perfect implementation cannot meet youth needs. This scarcity particularly impacts time-sensitive interventions, creating a system where youth must demonstrate extraordinary persistence to access limited resources, while navigating complex institutional relationships. These findings suggest that improving MKVHAA outcomes requires not just enhanced implementation strategies but also significant expansion of the fundamental resources necessary to support youth experiencing homelessness.

Implications for Practice

For practitioners, these findings indicate several critical areas for improving MKVHAA implementation. First, the research demonstrates the need to reconceptualize how resources are communicated and distributed. Traditional institutional methods of information sharing proved less effective than peer-based networks and digital platforms, suggesting the need for more youth-centered communication strategies. Organizations should consider developing integrated digital platforms that mirror youth communication preferences while maintaining appropriate privacy and security measures.

Second, the findings emphasize the importance of cultural humility beyond surface-level diversity initiatives. Youth experiences navigating different cultural contexts revealed sophisticated adaptation strategies that current service models often fail to recognize or support. Programs should incorporate cultural frameworks that acknowledge and build upon

these existing strengths while addressing systemic barriers that disproportionately affect marginalized communities.

Third, the research highlights the critical role of relationship-building in effective resource utilization. However, these relationships must be conceptualized more broadly than traditional provider-client dynamics. Programs should create opportunities for peer support and mentorship while ensuring staff have the training and capacity to build authentic, culturally responsive relationships with youth.

Policy Implications

At the policy level, this research suggests several necessary reforms to enhance MKVHAA effectiveness. Funding structures need greater flexibility to support youth-centered program design while maintaining accountability. Current funding models often reinforce rigid service delivery approaches that fail to align with how youth actually access and utilize resources. Policy reforms should prioritize programs that demonstrate meaningful youth involvement in design and implementation while ensuring appropriate oversight and evaluation.

Additionally, policies should address the digital dimension of resource access more explicitly. While MKVHAA provides for traditional educational supports, the universal smartphone access among youth participants suggests opportunities for enhancing implementation through digital platforms. Policy frameworks should evolve to support secure, accessible digital resource delivery, while protecting youth privacy and autonomy.

Furthermore, accountability measures need reformation to better capture youth experiences and outcomes. Current evaluation frameworks often fail to account for the complex ways youth piece together support systems or the importance of cultural factors in

resource utilization. Policies should require more nuanced assessment approaches that center youth perspectives while maintaining necessary oversight.

Research Implications and Future Directions

This study opens several important avenues for future research. First, longitudinal studies examining how youth navigate resources over time could provide valuable insight into the long-term effectiveness of different implementation approaches. Such research should particularly examine how digital engagement patterns evolve and impact resource utilization over time.

Second, more detailed investigation of cultural factors in resource access could inform more effective implementation strategies. While this study identified important cultural dynamics, further research could examine how specific cultural frameworks either support or hinder resource utilization across different communities.

Third, research examining youth-designed digital platforms could provide practical insights for improving resource accessibility. Studies comparing youth-designed systems with traditional institutional approaches could inform both policy and practice while ensuring appropriate safeguards for vulnerable populations.

Final Reflections

Ultimately, this study demonstrates that improving MKVHAA implementation requires fundamental reconceptualization of how we understand and support youth experiencing homelessness. The findings reveal both challenges and opportunities in current implementation approaches while suggesting concrete pathways for enhancement. By centering youth voices and experiences while examining implementation through the lens of

psychological needs, we can develop more effective approaches that truly serve those most impacted by these policies.

The work ahead involves not just refining existing systems but reimagining how we can create more accessible, culturally responsive support structures that empower youth while providing essential resources and stability. This requires sustained commitment to youth leadership, appropriate resource allocation, and accountability structures that center youth perspectives while maintaining necessary oversight. Only through such comprehensive reform can we ensure that MKVHAA fulfills its promise of educational stability and support for all youth experiencing homelessness.

As we move forward, it becomes increasingly clear that effective implementation requires balancing institutional requirements with youth needs and preferences. This study provides a framework for understanding these dynamics, while suggesting practical approaches for enhancement. The challenge now lies in translating these insights into concrete changes that can improve outcomes for youth experiencing homelessness while maintaining necessary systemic supports.

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APPENDIX A

Key Terminology

This section will provide a list of key terminology used in the context of this study.

Counselor is a secondary educational staff member who is responsible for advocating for students, identifying homeless youth, familiarizing themselves with policies, establishing educational and preventative programs for homeless parents and children, collaborating with school and community personnel, increasing stakeholder awareness, coordination of programs and referrals

Doubling up is a type of homelessness that refers to living with others due to economic hardship or housing loss.

Harm reduction is a non-judgmental approach that focuses on minimizing the negative consequences of risky behaviors rather than requiring complete cessation.

Homeless liaison is the primary expert, with high school counselors and other service providers adjunctly collaborating with the homeless liaison(s) to provide support to students in the district experiencing homelessness

Homeless youth those “without regular or fixed nighttime residence” under the age of 21 years old enrolled in secondary education

HUD (The United States Department of Housing and Urban Development) administers federal housing and urban development laws

Identification determining if a student qualifies as homeless

Interdisciplinary Professional training others on, or providing homeless service rights and/or resources related to youth in secondary education in Southern California.

LEA public school districts, charter schools, and county offices of education.

MKVHAA (McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act) is a set of federal provisions that sought to mitigate the educational gap of, homeless youth, as defined as those “without regular or fixed nighttime residence” under the age of 21 years old, by mandating resources such as school choice, transportation, and material resources among other supports.

Motivational Interviewing is a client-centered counseling method that helps individuals explore and resolve ambivalence about behavior change to increase motivation for positive action.

SB 918 is a set of state-level provisions that sought to increase youth-specific state funds and resources, such as providing housing, providing employment, providing addiction services, and creating a state youth homelessness office.

Sheltered homelessness is when someone is living in a temporary or transitional housing arrangement, such as a shelter, motel, or transitional housing program.

Transitional Aged Youth (TAY) is a term that refers to a developmental period and eligibility for certain services for young people between the ages of 15–25.

APPENDIX B

McKinney-Vento Rights Flyer

HELP ADVANCE RESEARCH ON STUDENT AND YOUTH
HOUSING INSECURITY



PARTICIPANTS NEEDED FOR HOUSING INSECURITY STUDY



Earn \$20

QUALIFICATIONS:

- Are between 13-25 years old
- Went to secondary school in Southern California
- While attending Jr. High or High School experienced living:
 - On the street
 - In a shelter
 - In a car/RV/camper
 - Doubled-up (Living with friends or extended family because you could not afford your own housing)



PARTICIPATION INCLUDES:

- Providing survey responses
- Participating in a 45–60 minute interview via Zoom/Phone

*Video recordings are optional and will only be used internally to review responses-it will not be posted anywhere.

*Participants may also request alternative forms of participation (ex. phone call or field notes) provided in their consent form.

CONTACT: RUE MANSOUR | EMAIL: RSMANSOUR@UCSB.EDU

APPENDIX C
Survey Instruments

Table B1. Youth Demographic Survey

Show Block: Services (7 Questions) [Toggle Questions](#)

☐
☐
☐

Q26 Has/Had your school staff helped you with getting the following (Check all that apply):

Q27 Who or what organization, if any, has/had primarily helped you get the things you need? (Examples...

☐
☐
☐

Q28 Have you seen any flyers, documents, videos about services for people who may be homeless?

Q29 What services were they about?

☐
☐
☐

Q30 Did you know that youth who are experiencing homelessness have particular rights?

Q31 Please explain what rights you know/are familiar with.

Q32 Where did you hear about this study?

**Show Block: Introduction** (1 Question) [Toggle Questions](#)

A **Q0** Before completing this survey please make sure that you complete the consent form provided to you...

[Add Below](#) [Move](#) [Duplicate](#) [Delete](#)**Show Block: Identity** (11 Questions) [Toggle Questions](#)

A **Q1** Email

A **Q2** Your first name

A **Q3** Your last name

A **Q4** Please name a person (Celebrity, Mentor, Character, etc.) you admire.

Q5 Are you legally independent/emancipated?

A **Q6** How old are you?

Q6 How do you identify?

Q7 What is your race/ethnicity?


Q8 How do you identify?


Q9 Did you complete high school/continuation school/obtain a GED?

A **Q10** Monthly Income (If you are not sure enter your best guess or 'not sure')


[Add Below](#) [Move](#) [Duplicate](#) [Delete](#)


Table B2. IP Demographic Survey


 **Show Block: Introduction** (1 Question) [Toggle Questions](#)


 Before completing this survey please make sure that you complete the consent form provided to you...


[Add Below](#) [Move](#) [Duplicate](#) [Delete](#)


 **Show Block: Identity** (12 Questions) [Toggle Questions](#)




 **Q1** Email

 **Q2** Your first name




 **Q3** Your last name

 **Q4** Please name a person (Celebrity, Mentor, Character, etc.) you admire.




 **Q5** How old are you?




Q6 How do you identify?


Q7 What is your race/ethnicity?







Q8 How do you identify?


Q9 What is the highest level of education you have acquired?

 **Q10** What is the name of the organization or school you currently/have previously work for related to...

 **Q11** What was/is your role?

 **Q12** How long did you/have you served in this role?

[Add Below](#) [Move](#) [Duplicate](#) [Delete](#)


Show Block: Services and Expertise (6 Questions)
 [Toggle Questions](#)

☐
☐
☐

Q13 How familiar are you with federal and state level policies regarding youth experiencing homelesn...

☐
☐
☐

Q14 If you have provided support information for youth or other individuals experiencing homelessness...

☐
☐
☐

Q15 Have you seen any flyers, documents, videos about services for those experiencing homelessness?

☐
☐
☐

☐

Q16 What were the kinds of information/services (most commonly)?

☐
☐
☐

Q17 Did you know that youth who are experiencing homelessness have particular rights?

☐
☐
☐

☐

Q18 Please explain what rights you know/are familiar with.

[Add Below](#)
[Move](#)
[Duplicate](#)
[Delete](#)


Show Block: Technology (2 Questions)
 [Toggle Questions](#)

☐
☐
☐

Q19 Which of the following social media platforms do you use? (Check all that apply.) Please enter in...

☐
☐
☐

Q20 What do you primarily use social media for?

[Add Below](#)
[Move](#)
[Duplicate](#)
[Delete](#)


Show Block: Additional Information (2 Questions)
 [Toggle Questions](#)

☐
☐
☐

☐

Q21 If you know of any other individuals in the field that would be a great fit for this study please...

☐
☐
☐

☐

Q22 Any additional information you would like to share?

[Add Below](#)
[Move](#)
[Duplicate](#)
[Delete](#)

APPENDIX D

Interview Protocols

Figure C1. Youth Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

For IRB These questions are subject to some slight changes. Questions were influenced by the Hearth ACT Implementation 2009 National Coalition for the Homeless protocol.

Interview Focus- Understanding Homeless Youth Rights and Experiences

Interviewee ID number:

Date:

Pronouns:

Introduction:

If applicable: For the purpose of confidentiality we will need to place a virtual background on your display screen. Please let me know if you need help with setting that up.

I have received your consent form(s) in which you marked _____ however as a formality I would like to ask one more time may I record this interview?

If applicable: I would like to clarify once again that parents do not have to present at this interview, however if you would like to have yours present that is also fine. Additionally you are welcome to put on earphones, move locations, or type in the chat in order to feel more comfortable sharing.

I want to thank you for taking part in this interview for my dissertation research project and talking with me about your experiences. I want to assure you that what you say will be held in confidence. Your responses will only be shared with a select few of researchers evaluating my project and I will use pseudonyms rather than real names. Also, if there are any questions that you would prefer not to answer, just let me know and we'll skip them and move on.

If you feel at any time you are overwhelmed or need to take a moment to breathe you are more than welcome to do that. These topics can be difficult for some so we are happy to provide you with links to some meditation/relaxation videos if that is something you would like.

Do you have any questions before we get started?

Section 1. Background and Experiences

I want to start by asking you some questions about you and your experiences in Jr. High and High school.

1. What is success to you?
2. How has experiencing homelessness shaped your experiences inside and outside of school?
Probe:
 - a. Mental health
 - b. Physical health
 - c. Friendships
 - d. Family Relationships
3. Did/Do you have internet access when you were experiencing homelessness?
 - a. How would you get access to the internet? (hotspot, data, school wifi, etc)
 - i. Computer, phone, ipad/tablet(demographic question)
 - b. What obstacles, if any, did you face when trying to get access to the internet?
4. What kind of content shows up on your social media or online feed the most?

- Prob:
- a. content animation or people?
 - b. Who is your favorite tiktok/influencer?
 - c. What is it about them that you like?
5. Who do you go to when you needed something?
 6. When you have an issue (*use an example if provided one from above*) how do you try and resolve it?
 7. Where do you think you learn the most helpful information?

Section 2. Information and Resources

In this section, I'm going to ask you some questions about your school, resources, and service providers.

Experiences with Resources

1. Do you know if your school was aware of your housing situation?
 - a. If no, was there a reason you didn't share your housing status with staff or teachers?
 - b. If yes,
 - i. Who?
 - ii. How did they learn about your residency status?
 - iii. Did you want the school to know about your housing status?
 - iv. Did you ever interact with a/the homeless liaison?
 - c. Did school staff ever ask questions a
 - d. Were you ever called into the office regarding grades, attendance, milestones?
 - i. What was that like?
 - e. What about your personal life? (friends/ family)
2. Did you receive referrals to resources or support from your school?
 - a. If yes:

What are some examples of resources you have received?

Did you also receive referrals, resources, or support from somewhere else?

Have you ever been asked before by school staff to offer feedback on the quality of services you are currently receiving from them?

If so, how were you asked for your opinion?

Do you feel like your opinion mattered?

Did the school staff member you worked with include you in the process of getting assistance?

Did the school staff member follow up with you at a later time to see if you received the resource or needed additional support?
 - b. If no:

Did you receive referrals, resources, or support from somewhere else?

Have you ever been asked before by school staff to offer feedback on the quality of services you are currently receiving from them?

If so, how were you asked for your opinion?

Do you feel like your opinion matters?
3. Have you ever tried looking for things you or your family need; resources and support online?
 - a. If yes, what kind of searches did you use? What websites did you find? Was this helpful?
 - b. If not, why not?
4. Have you ever turned down a referral, resource, or support?
 - a. If yes, why?
 - b. If no, were all resources you received helpful?

Improvement with Resources

5. How could information about referrals, resources, and supports be improved?
 - a. If yes, what would have made your experience better?
 - b. If no, what do you like about the current way of receiving information and aid?
6. How could school staff improve in how they support students that experience homelessness?
 - a. If yes, what would have made your experience better?
 - b. If no, what do you like about how school staff interacted with you?
7. Are there resources you wish there were more of for yourself or others with similar experiences?

Section 3: Information and Resources in the Future

I would like to take a few minutes to talk about how you feel the idea of online resources meant for students.

Review: "Know Your Rights" Document and mark which they are/aren't familiar with through yes/no questioning.

1. Do you think that knowing about your rights is beneficial?
 - a. If yes, why?
 - b. If no, why?
2. If there were videos to learn about your rights and resources available to you as a student experiencing homelessness would you (have) watch(ed) them?
 - a. If yes:
 - i. How long should they be?
 - i. What is most important to you when it come to learning about navigating resources and supports?
 - ii. Would you be interested in learning about other student's experiences as well?
3. Is there anything you wish people knew about what experiencing homelessness is like?
4. What would you share with another student who just started experiencing homelessness? What advice would you give?
5. How could informational spaces be more culturally inclusive?/How could information be more accessible to young adults, youth of color, queer youth, etc.? How would you like to be represented?
6. I know you use (Name a social media they shared) what is it about that platform that you like?

Section 4: Additional Questions and Comments

1. Is there anything else you'd like to share with me?

Debrief

I just want to just check-in and ask how you are feeling? Would you like to request any additional services? I may know of some or I can follow up with an email with information you would like support with.

Figure C2. IP Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

These questions are subject to some slight changes. Questions were influenced by the Hearth ACT Implementation 2009 National Coalition for the Homeless protocol.

Pre-Submitted Demographic Survey

Interview Focus- Understanding Homeless Youth Rights and Experiences

Interviewee ID number:

Date:

Pronouns:

Introduction:

I have received your consent form(s) in which you marked _____ however as a formality I would like to ask one more time may I record this interview?

I want to thank you for taking part in this interview for my dissertation research project and talking with me about your experiences. I want to assure you that what you say will be held in confidence. Your responses will only be shared with a select few of researchers evaluating my project and I will use pseudonyms rather than real names. Also, if there are any questions that you would prefer not to answer, just let me know and we'll skip them and move on.

If there is a word or phrase that I use that you aren't familiar with let me know and I can rephrase the question.

Do you have any questions before we get started?

Section 1. Background and Experiences

I want to start by asking you some questions about your experiences or experiences with clients/students who have experienced homelessness (Jr. High and High school level).

1. What is a successful day for you?
2. What is your role?
3. What brought you into this work?
4. What have your experiences with youth experiencing homelessness (adults/families) looked like?
5. Who or where do you turn to when you are unsure on how to support a student/client?
6. What have your experiences with youth experiencing homelessness (adults/families) looked like?

Section 2. Information and Resources

In this section, I'm going to ask you some questions about information and resources as it pertains to youth experiencing homelessness.

Experiences with Resources

1. Why do you think some youth (individuals/families) experiencing homelessness are not able to get the resources they need? (addressing barriers)
 - a. Prob: What about help they need for mental health or substance use issues specifically? (Barriers)
2. What are some reasons youth may or may not share your housing status with staff or teachers?
3. What kinds of resources do you (discuss/refer)?
4. Where do you think you learn the most helpful information to support your work?

APPENDIX E

Know Your Rights Documentation








KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

Created by Rue Mansour

Does a following living situation describe you or someone you know?

- Sharing housing due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or similar reasons
- Living in a motel, trailer park, campgrounds due to lack of adequate alternatives
- Staying in shelter or transitional housing
- Sleeping in cars, parks, abandoned buildings, or similar settings

If so, you may qualify to receive the rights and resources below:

United States Legislation McKinney-Vento Act	
	School Choice: Youth must be enrolled immediately, even if they lack documentation or are no longer residing within school boundaries.
	Transportation: Youth must be provided transportation to their school of origin until the end of the academic year, or until they secure permanent housing.
	School Supplies and Clothing: Youth are entitled to receive necessary supplies, such as backpacks and clothing, as well as resources needed to access academic and extracurricular activities.
	Additional Academic Advising: Youth have the right to receive support during their transition to post-secondary education, including assistance with college applications and independent status on FAFSA applications.
	Additional Supports: Youth should receive referrals to health, dental, mental health, housing, substance abuse, and other appropriate services.
California Bill SB 1806	
	Academic Rights: schools must acceptance of partial/full credits during school transfers and homeless liaison must be involved when a youth is up for a suspension or expulsion hearing.
	Minimum Graduation Requirements: depending on criteria, youth may be eligible for state minimum graduation requirements rather than being required to meet school graduation requirements.

For more Homelessness or Housing Insecurity Information and Resources go to:
<https://schoolhouseconnection.org/> or <https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/hs/>

APPENDIX F

Contingency Tables

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
1	Round 1:	RELATEDNESS:				Round 2:	RELATEDNESS:			
2		Researcher 1					Researcher 1			
3		Researcher 2					Researcher 2			
		CF	FS	IH	RB	SC	TH	None		
4	CF = Cultural Factors FS = Family Structure IH = Impact of Homelessness RB = Relatedness/Relationship Building SC = Social Capital TH = Type of Homelessness									
5		CF	3	0	0	0	0	0	1	
6		FS	0	5	0	0	0	0	2	
7		IH	0	0	7	0	0	0	2	
8		RB	0	0	0	4	0	0	1	
9		SC	0	0	0	0	4	0	1	
10		TH	0	0	0	0	0	3	1	
11		None	1	2	2	1	1	1	-	
12						$\kappa = 0.677$				$\kappa = 0.677$
13		COMPETENCE:					COMPETENCE:			
14	AAS = Additional Academic Support IS = Information Sources PL = Peer Learning R = Resources									
15		Researcher 1					Researcher 1			
16		Rue	AAS	IS	PL	R	None			
17		AAS	4	0	0	0	1			
18		IS	0	5	0	0	2			
19		PL	0	0	3	0	1			
20		R	0	0	0	4	2			
21		None	1	2	1	2	-			
22	A = Autonomy AR = Awareness of MHVHAA Rights BA = Barriers to Access DEI = Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion PER = Perceived Effectiveness of Resources RT = Role of Technology SC = Systemic Challenges					$\kappa = 0.531$				$\kappa = 0.652$
23		AUTONOMY:					AUTONOMY:			
24		Researcher 1					Researcher 1			
25		Researcher 2					Researcher 2			
26		A	AR	BA	DEI	PER	RT	SC	None	
27		A	3	0	0	0	0	0	1	
28		AR	0	5	0	0	0	0	2	
29		BA	0	0	4	0	0	0	1	
30		DEI	0	0	0	2	0	0	1	
31		PER	0	0	0	0	3	0	1	
32		RT	0	0	0	0	0	6	2	
33		SC	0	0	0	0	0	3	1	
		None	1	2	1	1	1	2	1	-
						$\kappa = 0.538$				$\kappa = 0.634$