"Kurn Hattin was like home" : exploring the experiences of former resident students of a private, charitable, therapeutic children's home and junior boarding school

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ABSTRACT

This study was undertaken to determine how attending a private, therapeutic children’s home/junior boarding school impacted the lives of former resident students, emotionally, socially, and educationally, and to compare those experiences to those of children who have lived in foster care.

A recruitment flyer was posted on the Alumni of Kurn Hattin Homes Facebook page, and ultimately, six subjects who had lived at the homes and school for at least two years were interviewed about their experiences. Subjects were asked to describe the reason for attending, their experiences of separation from their families, the ways they coped with their feelings, what factors or interventions were most helpful or unhelpful to them while at the homes and school, and whether they were still in contact with anyone from the school today. Finally, they were asked if they had ever lived in foster care and if so, what their experiences had been.

The findings of this study suggested that former resident students lives were impacted both positively and negatively by their attendance at the school. Though separation from family was traumatic for most subjects, after adjusting to the new environment they described positive experiences: close relationships with staff and peers that created a feeling of family, increased feelings of confidence and self-esteem, and a positive academic experience.
“KURN HATTIN WAS LIKE HOME”: EXPLORING THE EXPERIENCES OF FORMER RESIDENT STUDENTS OF A PRIVATE, CHARITABLE, THERAPEUTIC CHILDREN’S HOME AND JUNIOR BOARDING SCHOOL

A project based upon an independent investigation, submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Social Work.

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2015
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The creation of this thesis began over forty years ago when, as a child, I was sent away to live at New England Kurn Hattin Homes, a children’s home/junior boarding school located in southern Vermont. The experience of being sent away to live among strangers shaped my life and worldview in a way that I would not fully understand until I became a parent myself and began to reflect on the meaning of family. It was my great grandmother Jean Eliza Burke who first heard about Kurn Hattin from a friend and persuaded my mother and others that it might be the best solution for our family at that time. Without her wisdom, her foresight, and her dedication to family, this thesis would not have been possible.

This thesis also would not have been possible were it not for the existence of Kurn Hattin Homes, so I also thank Kurn Hattin and all of the houseparents, teachers, coaches, other staff, and administrators for their mission of helping families like mine that are in need of support, for investing so heavily in my family and in me, as well as in all the other families that have benefitted from being placed in your care. The work you do is invaluable!

The participants’ voices heard in this study are what brings the study to life. I thank them for their honesty, their courage, and their willingness to share their experiences, both positive and negative. Without their generous participation, this study would not have been possible.

Many people assisted me along the way in the creation of this paper, whose help was invaluable to me at various stages of the process. These include Kathy Layer and Margaret Meiman, Laurie Wyman, Elaine Kersten, Seth Dunn, Yoosun Park, Maurianne Adams, Jehann El Bisi, and finally, my thesis advisor, Robert Eschmann.

None of us gets to where we are without the help of others along the way, especially those of us whose lives start off so precariously. Many people came into my life along the way providing much needed guidance and support, making it possible to traverse the rocky path that has been my life. They include: Carol Ann Wheeler, Vivienne Kelley, Gina Simm, Lisa Berkson, and Ingrid Bracey.

I also want to note the supportive role that my stepmother, Louella Barnes, played in our lives, growing up. Although my siblings and I dreaded summertimes spent with dad and Lou due to frequently being made to weed the garden, looking back, I see the experience with fresh eyes. Thank you, Louella, for growing us healthy food, for insisting that we participate in the process of gardening, and for preparing all those nutritious meals for four unruly and ungrateful children. You were ahead of your time, and very much underappreciated!!

I thank my mother, Ocean Calypso Maverick, for always offering me a shoulder to cry on when demands began to feel overwhelming and self-doubt began to creep in. Your unflinching love and your belief in me has been a great comfort. I also thank my lovely daughter Emma, for all the amazing back and shoulder rubs over the past two years. You’ve kept me going and able to carry on when it felt as though I couldn’t read or write another word. ~ Deepest gratitude ~
Finally, I would not be where I am today without the tireless love and support of my best friend and fiancé, Alex Kent. Thank you for everything you do every day to make me feel loved and for always encouraging me to take on new challenges and to claim what is rightfully mine.

This thesis is dedicated to my great grandmother, Jean Eliza Burke and to my sister, Cam Millett.

~I hold the memory of both of you close to my heart~
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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Research suggests that there is an association between early traumatic experiences or adverse life experiences in childhood and later negative emotional, behavioral, and physical outcomes (Anda et al., 2005; D’Andrea, Ford, Stolbach, Spinazzola, & van der Kolk, 2012; Cicchetti, Rogosh, & Toth, 2006; Grasso, Ford, & Briggs-Gowan, 2013; Perry & Szalavitz, 2006), and that young children are particularly vulnerable to the effects of early adversity and trauma due to their limited coping skills and dependence on their primary caretakers (De Young, Kenardy, & Cobham, 2011). Children whose lives have been affected by adverse life experiences require special attention and care due to their particular needs, which, if not addressed in a sensitive and timely fashion, may put them at risk for a host of later negative outcomes (Children’s Defense Fund, 2014; Davies, 2011). Research also points to the positive impact that healthy adults outside the family, in combination with a child’s good intellectual functioning, can have on building protective factors capable of buffering the negative impact of trauma and adverse experiences on children’s development (Appleyard, Egeland & Sroufe, 2007; Ladd, 2012; Lieberman, Padron, Van Horn & Harris, 2005; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998; Winnicott; 1992; Winnicott, 2002).

When conditions in families or in communities threaten children’s safety or healthy development, steps must be taken to protect children from further adversity. In some cases this means placing children outside of the home either temporarily or longer term while offering treatment to the family or addressing the issues in the community. If the option of living with
other family members does not exist, alternative arrangements may need to be made. For children requiring alternative or “out-of-home” placements, some possible options include foster care, group homes, or other residential settings (United States Department of Health and Human Services, 2014).

This study explores the impact of attending a residential education program for children whose lives had been affected by adverse or traumatic events. The subjects of this study are former resident students of Kurn Hattin Homes for Children, a private, therapeutic, children’s home/junior boarding school located on a 280-acre campus in southern Vermont. The study is retrospective in nature, and asks subjects to reflect on their time at Kurn Hattin and to describe which factors or interventions they found to be most useful or helpful in meeting their particular needs. Among other things, children who have been exposed to early trauma and adversity require safety and stability, as well as caring, consistent, and supportive caregivers (Children’s Defense Fund, 2014; Davies, 2011; Herman, 1997).

Kurn Hattin Homes for Children (Kurn Hattin) was originally founded in the late 1890’s to provide orphaned boys with a home, an education, and a life of purpose and meaning (Kurn Hattin Homes for Children, 2014). Since its founding, Kurn Hattin has expanded its mission, and now serves both boys and girls whose lives have been affected by adversity. Adversity can take many forms in a child’s life, including: poverty, homelessness, parental neglect, abuse, incarceration, or death, parental mental illness, drug and alcohol abuse, racism or other forms of oppression, unsafe neighborhoods, or low-quality schools that do not adequately meet the child’s needs. The subjects of this study described many of these experiences of life before Kurn Hattin.

The research question guiding this study is: How did the experience of attending a therapeutic children’s home/junior boarding school impact student’s lives emotionally, socially,
and educationally? The study addresses three main areas of interest: How were the students’ lives impacted by attending Kurn Hattin? Which factors or interventions did the students find to be most effective in meeting their particular needs? And if the students have ever lived in foster care, how did that experience differ from their experience of attending Kurn Hattin?

For the purpose of this study, and as defined in the Kurn Hattin fact sheet taken from their website, at-risk children are those “who have been affected by family tragedy, poverty, homelessness, abuse, or other hardship” (Kurn Hattin Homes for Children, 2014). Resident students are defined as any person between the ages of 6 and 15 who lived on the campus and attended the school for a minimum of two years at any time between 1980 and 2010. Impacted refers to any change, either positive or negative, in the student’s emotional, social, or educational experience as a result of attending the school.

Factors or interventions refers to any of the programs, activities, physical, relational, or curricular aspects of the school or classroom environment, boarding school structure, or relationships with houseparents, teachers, or peers. For the purpose of this study, the definition of a therapeutic children’s home and junior boarding school is a K-8 residential education program designed to meet the emotional, social, and educational development needs of at-risk children in a structured, campus setting using programming that incorporates some type of therapeutic model. This study is exploratory in nature, and utilizes a qualitative, inductive method, the purpose of which is to gather personal, rich, descriptive data and information about students’ experiences from the perspectives of the subjects themselves.

Why Kurn Hattin?

This study has deep personal significance for me. Having myself been a child whose life was profoundly affected by adversity, and having lived at Kurn Hattin from the age of four and
one-half to age thirteen, along with my three other siblings, I often wondered what had brought others to be at Kurn Hattin and how their lives had been affected by that experience. Through the requirement of a thesis, Smith College has given me the opportunity to explore these questions and to try and make meaning from my own experience, as well as the experience of others. The journey I’ve taken over the past nine months of this study has reconnected me to long-forgotten memories and emotions, returning me in my mind to a place I once called home, as well as connecting me to others who share my unique experience of having grown up away from my family and community.

Not unlike some of the subjects of my study, I found growing up at Kurn Hattin to be a mix of both positive and negative experiences. Although I initially wanted to live at the school where my older sister and brothers already had been placed, after joining them, I quickly experienced feelings of sadness, loneliness, fear, anger and confusion. The girl’s campus in the 1970s, with its brick buildings and 19th Century feel appeared large, hostile, and intimidating to my four-year-old sensibilities, but over time it became familiar, and with the kindness and support of house parents and others, Kurn Hattin came to represent stability, safety, and family, a luxury I did not enjoy back at home.

Living in “cottages” with house parents and the other children created some semblance of the family I once had, and although not all the house parents were warm and loving, those who were helped soothe some of the sadness and loneliness I felt about being separated from my family. The friendships I formed with other students were invaluable to me. As with any family, life at Kurn Hattin was not always harmonious, but it was certainly always alive with activity and new opportunities. The daily schedules and routines at Kurn Hattin added much needed consistency, predictability and structure to my life. Classes were small, allowing for extra
attention from teachers if needed, and many teachers showed genuine concern and care for my well-being and for that of my fellow classmates. Participating in extracurricular activities, such as music, arts, and sports, was a highlight of my experience at Kurn Hattin, and allowed me to be challenged regularly, while providing me with the opportunity to be part of a team all working together toward a common goal. I excelled in music, which gave me a great feeling of accomplishment, and even became an adequate second-base player - a great surprise to me. Finally, learning the skills of cooking, cleaning, sewing, and typing provided me with valuable assets that I’ve been able to utilize throughout my life since leaving Kurn Hattin.

Growing up at Kurn Hattin allowed me opportunities I would likely not have received at home due to the many problems occurring in my family. Unlike at home, where schedules were erratic, rules were few, and regular meals, bedtimes, and personal safety could not be guaranteed, being at Kurn Hattin allowed for predictability, consistency, and ease of mind. Although I didn’t always appreciate the rules, Kurn Hattin allowed me the freedom to just be a kid, because I could see that there were kind and competent adults in charge whose job it was to look after me and keep me safe. And although I often wished to return home and to live like a “normal” family, I now consider myself lucky to have attended Kurn Hattin, for all of the reasons mentioned above and many more I could add to that list.

In the end, the experience of growing up at Kurn Hattin helped me to learn the important values of honesty, kindness, sharing, cooperating with and respecting others, accepting personal responsibility, and believing in myself. And although the houseparents weren’t my actual parents, and most of the children weren’t my actual brothers and sisters, through our shared experiences, I learned what it means to be part of a family. At Kurn Hattin I felt safe, supported,
encouraged, and cared for, I felt challenged physically and artistically, and I developed lasting and meaningful relationships that continue to this day.

An important goal of this study is to add to the literature on the impact of a particular type of out-of-home placement: “residential education programs,” (Lee & Barth, 2009; McKenzie, 1999), especially as they compare to the experience of placement in foster care. As of today, there is mixed evidence on the impact of out-of-home placements on children and families (Davidson-Arad, 2005). While some children and families have benefitted from out-of-home placements, others have experienced further difficulties (Davidson-Arad, 2005). Studies suggest that removal from the home and placement into out-of-home care has the potential to lead to both benefits and risks to the child (Rutter, 2000). Clearly, an important goal of out-of-home placement must be to seek placements that increase the benefits to children and their families while simultaneously reducing the risks.

With respect to the impact of foster care placements on children, many studies suggest mixed outcomes (Lawrence, Carlson, & Egeland, 2006; Tarnai & Krebill-Prather, 2008; USDHHS Report to Congress, 2014). Although foster care is intended to provide at-risk children with a safe and temporary living arrangement in the least restrictive setting possible until the family can be reunified, the reality of children’s lived experiences in foster care does not necessarily align with that goal. Not all foster care placements are safe, and the goals of both temporary placement as well as reunification are not always the most beneficial for at-risk children, as was the case for my siblings and me. Additionally, studies suggest that many children in foster care experience additional negative outcomes while in care (Allen & Vacca, 2010; Davidson-Arad, 2005; Lawrence, Carlson, & Egeland, 2006; Leslie et al., 2000; Rubin,
Many children living in foster care experience multiple placements, leading to multiple disruptions in relationships with caregivers, community and friends, as well as in the child’s educational experience (Allen & Vacca, 2010; Leslie et al., 2000; Rubin, O’Reilly, Luan, & Localio, 2007; Stott & Gustavsson, 2010; Unrau, Seita & Putney, 2008; Zetlin & Weinberg, 2004). With this in mind, it seems incumbent upon those who work with at-risk children to investigate viable alternatives to foster care which emphasize stability of home and community, and consistency of caregivers, social peers, and schools in a safe, structured, supportive, and academically challenging environment.

In situations where it is not in the best interest of the children to return to their homes, where there are no available family members with whom the child can reside, and when a longer-term, more consistent placement for the child is indicated, residential educational programs may be viable options for some children (Jones, 2009; Jones & Lansdverk, 2006; Lee & Barth, 2009; McKenzie, 1999; McKenzie, 2009; Thompson et al., 1996). Few qualitative studies have addressed the impact of attending residential education programs for at-risk youth. This study attempts to add to the existing literature on this topic.

In the United States, many programs for at-risk children began as orphanages in the early 19th century and were funded and directed by religious organizations and other aid groups. Today’s residential care settings and programs for at-risk youth are far more varied, with funding coming from either public or private sources, and sometimes a combination of the two (McKenzie, 1999; McKenzie, 2009). Whether they are referred to as therapeutic boarding schools, residential schools, residential education settings, residential treatment centers, group
homes, children’s homes, or something else, the goal of these alternative programs is to provide high-quality care and education to children with specific social, emotional, or behavioral needs and for whom it has been determined are better off living outside of the home in a more long-term, structured setting (Lee & Barth, 2009; McKenzie, 1999).

It is important to understand what the benefits and limitations of these alternative settings may be by asking whether they are effectively meeting the emotional, social, educational, and other developmental needs of the children in their care. Some studies have suggested positive outcomes for at-risk children who have been placed in settings such as group homes, orphanages, boarding schools, or residential education programs (Jones, 2009; Lee & Barth, 2009; Lee & Thompson, 2008; Maxwell, Chase, Statham & Jackson, 2009; McKenzie, 2003; McLoughlin & Gonzalez, 2014; Thompson et al., 1996). Positive outcomes have included feelings of safety and support, access to opportunities that might not otherwise have been available to the children, increased confidence, self-esteem, a sense of belonging and identity, increased academic achievement.

Some studies have also suggested negative or mixed outcomes (Bass, 2014; Maxwell, Chase, Statham, & Jackson, 2009; Schaverien, 2004; Schaverien, 2011), which have included difficulty adjusting to the new environment, difficulty fitting in when returning home, a loss of connection to family and community, stigmas attached to attending a residential school, and for small children in particular, strong emotional distress resulting from the separation from primary caregivers.

Positive outcomes have also been suggested in studies of disadvantaged or at-risk youth who have voluntarily chosen to attend boarding school or residential education programs as a way of improving their access to a better education and other resources (Alexander-Snow, 2010;
Bass, 2014; Fryer Jr. & Curto, 2014; Jones & Lansdverk, 2006). Positive outcomes noted in these studies include increased cultural awareness and pride, feelings of inclusion and belonging, increased self-esteem, and access to positive role models and peers, compared to later experiences at more traditional colleges and universities (Alexander-Snow, 2010), improved academic outcomes in both reading and math scores, compared to those who attended the District of Columbia Public Schools (Fryer Jr. & Curto, 2014), access to social, cultural, and educational capital (Bass, 2014), and increased placement stability upon enrollment, higher rates of graduation, high levels of engagement with their families, staff and peers after leaving school, and good social supports upon completion of the program (Jones & Lansdverk, 2006).

These few studies suggest that there are both potential benefits and disadvantages for at-risk students who attend residential educational programs, either voluntarily or involuntarily. My study is needed to add to the qualitative literature on the impact of out-of-home placements for at-risk children, and in particular, for children who attended a private, therapeutic children’s home/junior boarding school. This residential education program differs from those I found in my literature review in that its programming ends at the eighth grade, rather than continuing through the twelfth grade. This study is also important for its examination of factors or interventions that the students felt were most helpful in meeting their particular needs.

As of today, very little qualitative research exists that examines the experiences of this particular population, from the perspective of the participants themselves. The findings of this study have the potential to inform policy on child placement options and on educational funding, as well as inform practice for social workers, school administrators, and the staff and teachers who work at residential educational programs.
Researcher’s hypothesis

Before conducting my study, I hypothesized that students would have had both positive and negative experiences of attending the school, and that residential education programs could benefit some at-risk students. I hypothesized that the beneficial experiences of attending the program might be that students felt safe and supported, made positive connections to teachers, houseparents and peers, and experienced an increase in self-esteem and confidence. Factors or interventions hypothesized to be important were relationships with teachers, houseparents, peers, and other staff members, a feeling of safety and containment on the campus, family involvement in the child’s experiences at school, opportunities for mastery in music, sports, and other programs, and small class sizes.

Some possible negative experiences might have been separation from families, adjusting to an unfamiliar setting with unfamiliar rules and people, and experiencing strong feelings of sadness, grief, fear, confusion, or loneliness. My hypothesis held up in the analysis of the data. I did not anticipate the degree to which subjects would experience difficulty with transitioning from Kurn Hattin, despite my own experience of it, and yet, it emerged as a key finding of this study.
CHAPTER II

Literature Review

Introduction

The empirical literature reviewed here is separated into three sections: Child Development, Out-of-Home Placements, and Residential Education Programs as an Alternative to Foster Care. The first section reviews the literature related to child development, with an emphasis on early traumatic experiences in childhood and the implications for later negative behavioral, mental, and physical and educational outcomes. Research is also provided on resilience and competence in children and its relationship to positive outcomes. In the second section of the review, out-of-home placements are described, and issues emerging from the foster care system are explored, with an emphasis on the negative outcomes related to multiple foster care placements.

Finally, residential education programs are further described and considered as an alternative to foster care placements. Literature is explored related to outcomes for at-risk children who attend these programs. Included are residential education programs specifically designed for at-risk youth, as well as residential education programs not specifically designed for at-risk youth, but where positive or mixed outcomes have been shown. Models of care that have shown positive outcomes for children in out-of-home placements, as well as specific factors that have been associated with positive outcomes are also explored. Indian boarding schools, both past and current are also given brief mention.
Themes emerging from the literature covered in the first section include: long-term sequelae of early traumatic experiences for children, and competence, resilience, and the importance of safe, supportive, and consistent relationships as protective factors for children at-risk. Themes that emerged from the second section were: negative emotional, behavioral, and academic outcomes associated with multiple placements for children in foster care. In the third section, themes that emerged included: residential education programs as alternatives to foster care; positive outcomes of family-style models of care for at-risk youth; consistent, supportive, caregiver relationships and highly-trained teachers as important factors for social, emotional, and academic development; benefit of extracurricular activities in fostering social, emotional, and identity development, and the exclusion of the most at-risk students from many programs.

This review also includes theoretical literature that is used to frame and to understand the specific experiences and needs of at-risk children. Theories included in this section will include: Herman’s Trauma Theory, Erikson’s Stages of Development Theory, and psychodynamic theories including Attachment Theory and Winnicott’s concept of “The Holding Environment,” both of which fall under the umbrella of Objects Relations Theory (Berzoff & Flanagan, 2011; Bowlby, 1969; Bowlby, 1973; Bowlby, 1988; Erikson, 1950; Herman, 1997; Winnicott, 1989; Winnicott, 1992; Winnicot, 2002).

Herman’s (1997) Trauma Theory explores the impact of trauma on children and helps inform an understanding of the stages of recovery from traumatic events. It emphasizes the importance of safety, consistency, and structure in the context of relationships as part of the recovery process toward emotional health and reconnection to the larger community. Those charged with making decisions about child placements must prioritize placements that foster a feeling of safety, consistency, and trust through the context of healthy relationship-building.
Erikson’s (1950) theory of psychosocial development is used to understand the importance of mastering psychosocial tasks as a way of building a positive sense of self in a child’s progression to adulthood. When considering out-of-home placements for at-risk children, it is important to consider whether the setting offers adequate opportunities for building healthy self-esteem and identity development.

Attachment Theory stresses the importance of safe and consistent physical and emotional attachments with caring and attuned caregivers and the traumatic effects of separation from the primary caregiver(s) for young children (Bowlby, 1969; Bowlby, 1973; Bowlby, 1988). Attachment relationships in humans are crucial for building feelings of trust in other people and belief that the world is a safe place for exploration and growth. Secure attachment relationships foster healthy emotional and social growth in children and are predictors of positive future development. Ensuring consistent attachment relationships is crucial for those who work with families who are experiencing adversity and for those making decisions about out-of-home placements for at-risk children.

Winnicott (1989; 1992; 2002) theorized that even if secure and consistent attachment relationships had not been adequately provided in the early years by primary caregivers, healthy development could still occur through “surrogate” means later on. He posited that an individual could benefit from the provision of care in a safe, supportive, and adaptive environment, in the context of consistent and caring relationships with teachers, house parents or friends; a concept he referred to as a “facilitating” or “holding environment”. Out-of-home placements that create safe, consistent, and adaptive physical and psychological spaces for at-risk children may help mitigate the harmful effects of early trauma and adversity while strengthening the capacity for healthy relationship-building, which is associated with positive outcomes.
Empirical Literature

**Long-term sequelae of early traumatic experiences for children.** The empirical literature describes a variety of negative long-term consequences to children’s emotional, social, behavioral, and physical health that are associated with the child having experienced traumatic or adverse life events (Anda et al., 2005; Cicchetti, Rogosh, & Toth, 2006; D’Andrea, Ford, Stolbach, Spinazzola, & van der Kolk, 2012; Davies, 2011; De Young, Kenardy, & Cobham, 2011; Grasso, Ford, & Briggs-Gowan, 2013; Herman, 1997; Ladd, 2012; Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000; Stone, 2007.) These consequences may include later mental health issues, somatic issues, substance abuse, impaired memory of childhood, issues related to sexuality, perceived stress, affect regulation, anger control, risk of intimate partner violence, and poor academic achievement.

All families, regardless of socioeconomic class, experience life stressors, but low-income families, and children in particular, are at increased risk, due in large part to their lack of access to external resources that could act as protective factors to stressful life events (Davies, 2011; Ladd, 2012). Most parents want to provide for their children, but many parents who experience these types of life stressors find themselves struggling to provide their children with the kind of structure, stability, safety, and support needed for children’s healthy growth and development. And in some situations, such as parental incarceration or death, there are no parents available to care for the children.

Of the many types of trauma that a child might be exposed to, interpersonal trauma has been shown to have a particularly damaging effect on children, due to the personal and relational nature of the experience. As stated in D’Andrea, Ford, Stolbach, Spinazzola, & van der Kolk’s (2012) article, “numerous studies have shown that exposure to interpersonal trauma can
chronically and pervasively alter social, psychological, cognitive, and biological development” (p. 187). Herman (1997) concludes the same when she states that, “...repeated trauma in childhood forms and deforms the personality” (p. 96).

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services website, there were approximately 742,000 reported instances of child maltreatment in 2011 (USDHHS, 2014). Children who are exposed to poverty, neglect, homelessness, dangerous neighborhoods, domestic violence, divorce, physical, sexual, or emotional abuse, or the loss of a parent are at risk of developing both short and long-term mental health and behavior problems, which can lead to negative effects in many other areas of their lives (Anda et al., 2005; Cicchetti, Rogosh & Toth, 2006; D’Andrea, Ford, Stolbach, Spinazzola, & van der Kolk, 2012; De Young, Kenardy, & Cobham, 2011; Grasso, Ford, & Briggs-Gowan, 2013; Herman, 1997; Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000; Stone, 2007).

In a review of the literature on trauma and its effects in early childhood, De Young, Kenardy, and Cobham (2011) found a number of studies suggesting a link between early traumatic experiences in children and the development of issues such as anxiety and depression, to the onset of more severe psychological disorders. Young children are particularly vulnerable to early trauma and developing mental health and behavior problems due to factors such as their rapid development, limited coping skills, and dependence on primary caregivers (p. 232).

Repeated trauma in early childhood can influence and alter children’s stress response systems, their immune and hormonal systems, resulting in later difficulties in accurately assessing traumatic events. What starts out as a healthy and adaptive response to stressful situations, over extended periods, becomes unhealthy and maladaptive to the developing brain and body of young children. In a study conducted in 2013 of 214 two to four-year-olds, 64.3% of
whom had some potential exposure to trauma, Grasso, Ford, and Briggs-Gowan, found that children who have been exposed to previous traumatic events and who are experiencing “current life stressors” are at increased risk for internalizing and externalizing behaviors. The study suggests that early exposure to trauma may “sensitize” (p. 94) young children, making them more vulnerable to future “non-traumatic life stressors” (p. 98), which could have a lasting effect on their healthy development.

Data for this study was collected from parents who completed a questionnaire and participated in semi-structured child psychiatric interviews. Limitations of the study were that parents self reported, and may have been inclined to list more internalizing or externalizing problems if they themselves were experiencing life stressors. Researchers also assessed for trauma exposure retrospectively, which may have affected reliability. A large number of the study subjects were male (71.4%) and White (46%). About 45% of respondents were living in poverty, and nearly half had above an associate degree. Further studies need to be conducted assessing outcomes for other populations.

Using a combination of both epidemiological and neurological evidence of the effects of childhood trauma, Anda et al. (2005) used the results of the ACE (Adverse Childhood Experiences) report to carry out a case study. 9367 women and 7970 men were asked about their exposure to traumatic experiences up to age 18. Traumatic experience exposure included physical, emotional or sexual abuse, physical or emotional neglect, parental mental illness, substance dependence, incarceration, parental separation or divorce, or domestic violence. The researchers took the ACE scores and hypothesized a “dose response relationship” (p. 174) to 18 selected outcomes. Outcome categories included mental health disturbances, somatic
disturbances, substance abuse, impaired memory of childhood, sexuality, perceived stress, anger control, and risk of intimate partner violence.

The researchers discovered that as the scores of the ACE increased, the rate of every risk increased in relation, as well as the mean number of co-morbid outcomes. The more adverse experiences the child had undergone, the higher the number of negative outcomes. These findings demonstrate a strong correlation between early traumatic events and later negative mental, behavioral, physical and social health outcomes and suggest that the effects of trauma and adverse experiences are cumulative. This study strongly suggests that one way to help mitigate the harmful effects of trauma over the lifespan is through the implementation of positive interventions early on in a child’s life.

Although the large sample number used for this study and the convergence of both epidemiological and neurological evidence gives the study significant credibility, the study participants were predominantly White, middle-aged, and upper-middle class and from the same geographical area. Further studies must be conducted to assess for differences in outcomes with different populations. The above studies point to the strong association between early traumatic experiences in children and the potential for long-term negative outcomes, and clearly show the importance of early intervention for at-risk children. They also show the need for further studies with different populations.

**Resilience, competence, and protective factors.** In addition to the strong correlation that researchers have found between early trauma and later negative mental and physical health outcomes, studies on resilience, competence, and protective factors in children suggest a more complex picture of child development. Human beings are constantly interacting with and being shaped by their environment. The experience of a healthy, nurturing, and supportive relationship
or environment at any time in a person’s life can positively alter and affect development, although changes become more difficult as children age (Bowlby, 1988). Research shows that some children have a greater capacity than others to weather difficulties and are better able to progress toward healthy development, a trait that some researchers refer to as “resiliency” or “competence” (Egeland, Carlson, & Sroufe, 1993; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998.)

Both resilience and competence are built over time through effective adaptations to the child’s environment and are influenced by the child’s capabilities and the context in which the child lives (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998). These capabilities have been strongly linked to secure attachments with early caregivers. Secure attachments beginning in childhood have been shown to be predictors of later problem-solving abilities and qualities that lead to better adaptability later in life, such as social competence (Sroufe, Egeland, Carlson, & Collins, 2005).

As stated earlier, research also points to the positive impact that healthy adults outside the family, in combination with a child’s good intellectual functioning, can have on building protective factors capable of buffering the negative impact of trauma on children (Appleyard, Egeland & Sroufe, 2007; Ladd, 2012; Lieberman, Padron, Van Horn, & Harris, 2005; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998; Winnicott, 1992; Winnicot, 2002). In summary, resiliency and competence in children appear to accrue over time, building upon previous interactions in the context of positive environmental support (Egeland, Carlson, & Sroufe, 1993).

These studies help point to the interactional nature of relationships between the child, the adults and peers in the child’s life, and the environment (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998). They also help support the argument that children who have experienced traumatic events or adverse life experiences can benefit from safe, stable environments and through relationships with consistent,
supportive caregivers. High quality out-of-home placements such as residential education programs are one example of those types of environments.

**Out-of-home placements**

This section begins with a description of different types of out-of-home placements and includes empirical literature related to the impact of out-of-home placements, with a focus on foster care. Literature is reviewed on both the positive and negative outcomes of foster care, with an emphasis on the many issues associated with multiple placements. Emerging themes from the second section were: *Disproportionate numbers of children of color in the foster care system, children’s exclusion from conversations about their futures at exit from care, negative outcomes associated with multiple placements, older children or children with disabilities less likely to achieve permanency.*

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services website states that:

Out-of-home care encompasses the placements and services provided to children and families when children must be removed from their homes because of child safety concerns, as a result of serious parent-child conflict, or to treat serious physical or behavioral health conditions which cannot be addressed within the family (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2014, Overview section, para. 1)

Out-of-home placements can include “kinship or relative’s homes, family foster homes, treatment foster homes, or group or residential care (USDHHS, 2014, Overview section, para. 3). While “one fourth of the children in out-of-home care are living with relatives,” (USDHHS, 2014, Kinship care section, para. 2) the remainder are scattered throughout other placement settings. Out-of-home placement settings fall upon a continuum from the least restrictive (kinship care, family foster care), to more restrictive (treatment foster homes, residential or group
care treatment centers) (USDHHS, 2014) to the most restrictive (psychiatric hospitals, juvenile detention centers) (McKenzie, 1999). Between those two extremes exist a host of other types of settings, which some researchers and scholars have referred to as residential education settings or programs (Lee & Barth, 2009; McKenzie, 1999).

As I stated earlier, there is mixed evidence on the impact of out-of-home placements on children. Studies have suggested that removal from the home and placement in an out-of-home setting has the potential for both risks and benefits to the child (Rutter, 2009). It seems clear that further studies are needed in this area, but conducting accurate studies has many challenges. One issue that may affect the ability to assess for the impact of out-of-home placements is the vast differences in policies, settings, and treatment models across states and counties. These differences have made it difficult for researchers to come to any one conclusion about the outcomes of various types of out-of-home placements (Courtney, 2000). Creating standardized definitions of settings and utilizing consistent treatment models across placements is one way to move in the direction of better understanding the impact of out-of-home placements on children. It is clear from the varying points of view on out-of-home care that further research into these areas is needed.

**Foster care.** As is written into the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980, the preferred option for children requiring out-of-home placement is kinship care (care with relatives), considered the least restrictive option, or other types of foster care placements within close proximity to the family-of-origin. The Act also states that placements should be short-term and temporary, with reunification of the family as the primary goal (USDHHS, 2014). This mandate seems to emphasize reunification with family over stability of setting, which some see as flawed, and not necessarily in the best interest of the child.
According to the 2013 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services AFCARS report on adoptions and foster care estimates, there were 402,378 children living in foster care in the United States on September 30, 2013 (USDHHS, 2014). According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Child Welfare Outcomes Report to Congress, in 2011, a disproportionate number of children entering care were African American, Native American or Bi-racial. These numbers urge a call to action on behalf of at-risk children across the nation, and of children of color, in particular.

The empirical literature describes a variety of experiences of children who have been placed in the foster care system. Children who have formerly lived in foster care and those who are currently living in foster care report a mix of positive and negative experiences (Allen & Vacca, 2010; Fernandez, 2009; Leslie et al., 2000; Rubin, O’Reilly, Luan, & Localio, 2007; Stott & Gustavsson, 2010; Tarnai & Krebill-Prather, 2008; Unrau, Seita, & Putney 2008; USDHHS, 2011). Positive experiences reported include improvements in behavior and coping skills, that foster parents were positive influences on them, that relationships with foster fathers had an important developmental influence on children, and that placement in foster care led to better relationships with family members and safer and happier lives (Fernandez, 2009; Tarnai & Krebill-Prather, 2008).

One study that found positive experiences of youth in foster care was Tarnai and Krebill-Prather’s 2008 study of Washington youth in the foster care system. This study was the first survey of this population ever conducted for the Children’s Administration, and was requested by the agency as a way of assessing and improving services for youth in care. The purpose of the study was to assess how well the foster care system had prepared youth for living independently. The study population consisted of all youth age 15-18 who had been living in state custody for
60 days or longer during 2007. Of the 1679 youth who fit that description, 698 completed interviews and became part of the study. There was also an attempt to include 3 discussion groups as part of this study, but that attempt did not meet with enough interest to merit large enough numbers to produce good results.

The results of the study showed that 88% of the youth interviewed described positive experiences of being in care, saying that they had been treated very well or somewhat well in 2007. 65% reported positive feelings about their current foster home, and 93% of the youth reported that they knew how to contact their social worker. Additionally, results of the study showed that 26% were dissatisfied with the quality of support their received from their social worker, less than half the youth reported that their social workers had referred them to an Independent Living or Transitional Living program, and close to 60% of the youth age 17.5 and older had never been invited to a shared planning meeting to discuss their transitions out of the foster care system. Some youth also reported feeling unsafe due to other foster youth and foster parents (Tarnai & Krebill-Prather, 2008).

The subjects of this study were identified as 51% male and 49% female, with one person identifying as transgender. 52% identified as White, 12% Black, 7% Native American, 3% identified as Asian, Hawaiian, or Aleut. 8% identified as Hispanic, and 18% as mixed ethnic backgrounds. “Separately, almost 18% of these youth say they are of Hispanic background” (Tarnai & Krebill-Prather, 2008, p. 22). 91% of the youth identified as heterosexual, 2% as homosexual, and 6% identified as bisexual.

Findings of the study suggest that although there can be positive outcomes for youth living in foster care, the experience is not without problems. Important decisions about transitioning out of care are being made by staff, without including youth in the conversations,
showing a lack of respect for the youth’s ability to participate in their own futures, and preventing them from learning the necessary independent living skills they are purporting to be helping teach. One-quarter of the youth did not feel supported by their social workers, and some children report feeling unsafe while living in care, including youth who identify as homosexual, bisexual, or transgender. Efforts need to be made to identify the issues causing youth to feel unsafe, and perhaps more training needs to be made available to staff and other foster children to reduce incidents of children feeling unsafe.

While this study is an important first step in the right direction, further studies are needed which include the experiences of more youth of color and youth with non-conforming gender identities and sexual orientations so as to better understand how to address their particular needs.

**Negative outcomes of children placed in foster care.** Negative experiences that have been reported of children living in foster care include the problem of multiple placements, which leads to social disruption of their families, schools, and communities (Stott & Gustavsson, 2010; Unrau, Seita, & Putney 2008), to poor school performance (Allen & Vacca, 2010), to difficulty finding permanent placements when exiting care, especially for children with a diagnosed disability or those who entered care older than age 12, and also of low rates of adoptions, especially for older children (Leslie et al., 2000; Rubin, O’Reilly, Luan, & Localio, 2007; USDHHS, 2011). Additionally, placement in foster care has been shown to be associated with higher levels of behavior problems, including an increase in internalizing and externalizing behaviors both while in foster care and after exiting care (Lawrence, Carlson, & Egeland, 2006).

Some children living in foster care experience further maltreatment while in care (Davidson-Arad, 2005; USDHHS, 2014) as well as facing barriers to permanency (USDHHS, 2014). The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Child Welfare Outcomes Report to
Congress (2012) provides information on state and national performances on operating child protection and child welfare programs. According to the report, measuring all states that had adequate data available from 2008-2011, the median number of children in foster care who experienced maltreatment by a foster parent or staff person in 2011 was .32%. While the median percentage of children exiting care to a permanent home was 87.3%, for children with a diagnosed disability, the percentage experiencing barriers to permanency was 78.0% and for those who had entered care older than the age of 12, the rate was 66.0% (USDHHS, Children’s Bureau, Report to Congress, Executive Summary, 2012, p. iii).

Older children and those who have been in care longer face additional obstacles to finding permanent homes. The median percentage of children who had been in foster care for 24 months or longer and had found permanent homes by the end of 2011 was just 31.8%, while “43.4 percent or more of the children emancipated from foster care, or who turned age 18 while in care, were in care for three years or longer” (USDHHS, Children’s Bureau, Report to Congress, Executive Summary, 2012, p. iii). The national median for adoptions in less than 12 months from the date of entry into care was just 3.8 percent, and for those in care less than 24 months, the rate was 33.5 percent. (USDHHS, Children’s Bureau, Report to Congress, Executive Summary, 2012, p. iv).

What emerges from these findings is that the longer a child is in care, the lower their likelihood of experiencing permanent stability with consistent, supportive caretakers, a factor which is known to be associated with positive outcomes, especially for at-risk populations (Appleyard, Egeland & Sroufe, 2007; Ladd, 2012; Lieberman, Padron, Van Horn, & Harris, 2005; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998; Winnicott, 1992, 2002).
Multiple placements. The longer a child is in care, the more likely they will experience multiple placements, a factor that is known to be associated with negative outcomes (Allen & Vacca, 2010; Jones, 2009; Leslie et al., 2000; Rubin, O’Reilly, Luan, & Localio, 2007; Stott & Gustavsson, 2010; Unrau, Seita & Putney 2008; USDHHS, 2014). While a median number, 64.3%, of children in care from between 12 and 24 months experienced no more than two placements, for those in care longer than 24 months, only 32.8% experienced no more than two placements, (USDHHS, Children’s Bureau, Report to Congress, Executive Summary, 2012, p. iv), meaning that 67.2% of children in care longer than 24 months experienced more than two placements. It is important to keep in mind that the actual numbers of each of these categories may be higher, as these numbers are only for cases that have been reported.

Several studies have addressed the issue of multiple placements and its implications for negative effects for children in foster care (Allen & Vacca, 2010; Jones, 2009; Leslie et al., 2000; Stott & Gustavsson, 2010; Rubin, O’Reilly, Luan, & Localio, 2007; Unrau, Seita, & Putney 2008; USDHHS, 2011). Multiple placement changes can add to the feelings of loss that children experience as a result of separation from their primary caretakers (Stott & Gustavsson, 2010). Jones (2009) reaffirms this position: “It is important to consider that the trauma of removal from the home by child protective services can be exacerbated by instability in placements and relationships” (p. 321). It has already been established in this literature review that children require healthy and consistent connections with safe and supportive caregivers to promote healthy emotional, social, and academic development. Multiple placement changes for children in care are in direct conflict with achieving healthy and consistent caregiver relationships, which are known to be associated with positive outcomes (Bowlby, 1982; Bowlby, 1988.)
Multiple placement changes have been shown to be associated with academic problems, (Allen & Vacca, 2010; National Working Group on Foster Care and Education, 2013; Zetlin & Weinberg, 2004) and behavioral problems (Rubin, O’Reilly, Luan, & Localio, 2007; Zetlin & Weinberg, 2004) due to dislocation and school changes, disruptions in learning, leading to less time in the classroom, poorer achievement performances, higher enrollments in special education, less access to needed services, higher tardiness, and higher rates of dropout from school. These problems put foster children at greater risk for relying on public assistance and for involvement with the criminal justice systems (Children’s Defense Fund, 2014; Zetlin & Weinberg, 2004). Foster children also have a lower level of financial, emotional, and social support than many other children get from their friends, families, and communities (Allen & Vacca, 2010). These studies all support the argument that there is a need for stability and permanence in relationships, in community, and in education for at-risk children living in out-of-home care to reduce the likelihood of negative outcomes.

**Addressing the effect of multiple placements.** Some recent actions have been taken to address the unique issues that arise for children living in foster care, suggesting that the negative effects of multiple placements are well known. On January 14, 2013, President Barack Obama signed into law The Uninterrupted Scholar’s Act, an amendment to The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA). The newly amended act specifically addresses the needs of children in foster care by providing child welfare agencies with expedited access to foster children’s school records after a change in placement. This change helps expedite foster children’s enrollment into new schools as well as access to the interventions and supports they will need to work toward academic success (Children’s Defense Fund, 2014). Although it is a
step in the right direction, and may lead to improvements for foster children who experience multiple placements, the Act does not confront or limit the problem of multiple placements.

In summary, the data suggests that for children in need of out-of-home placement, foster care can be beneficial, but it also has many disadvantages. Many children in foster care experience dislocation and disruption of their families, schools, and peers due to multiple placements while in care, difficulty accessing the services they need, an increase in behavior and academic problems, difficulty finding permanent placements when exiting care, especially for children with a diagnosed disability or those who entered care older than age 12, and low rates of adoptions, especially for older children. Some children have reported feeling unsafe while in care, as well as being excluded from important decisions made about their care. Out-of-home placements which emphasize safety, consistency, containment, and building healthy and trusting long-term relationships may lead to better outcomes by helping at-risk children recover from traumatic events and other types of adversity, as well as helping foster healthier emotional, social, and educational development (Daly & Dowd, 1992).

**Residential Care as an Alternative to Foster Care**

This section begins with a brief description of the history of residential programs and notes the difference between residential treatment centers and residential education programs, followed by a description of several types of current residential programs. Literature is reviewed on the outcomes, both positive and negative, of at-risk children who have attended various types of residential education programs in the U.S., Britain, and Australia, and the factors associated with those outcomes. Included are residential education programs designed specifically for at-risk youth, as well as programs not specifically designed for at-risk youth. Both voluntary and involuntary placements are reviewed. The section ends with a description of the site of this
study, Kurn Hattin Homes for Children, including a description of its programming and mission for at-risk youth.

Themes emerging from this section include: positive outcomes of family-style models of care for at-risk youth; the importance of consistent, caring, supportive relationships for children in out-of-home care; highly trained caregivers and teachers as important factors in social, emotional, and academic development for children; engagement in extracurricular activities for fostering connection and positive social and emotional development, and the exclusion of the most at-risk children from many programs.

**Residential education programs.** One potential alternative to foster care could be “residential education programs” (Lee & Barth, 2009; McKenzie, 1999, p. xi) for at-risk youth. In the United States, many residential programs for at-risk children began as orphanages in the early 19th century, and were often funded and directed by religious organizations and other aid groups (McKenzie, 1999). While interest in the use of orphanages for housing and educating disadvantaged children has waned over the past 60 years, residential education programs have begun regaining popularity among certain groups who are able to recognize the potential beneficial aspects of high-quality, long term, stable care for some children.

Unlike the orphanages and children’s homes of the early 19th century, today’s residential care settings and programs for at-risk youth are far more varied, with funding coming from either public or private sources, and sometimes a combination of the two (McKenzie, 1999; McKenzie, 2009). The programs all operate with their own philosophies and treatment modalities and serve children with a range of behavioral, emotional, social, and academic needs. In this way, residential programs strive to meet the diverse needs of the populations they serve while also reflecting the surrounding community’s values (Lee & Barth, 2009).
The National Association of Therapeutic Schools and Program’s website (NATSAP) (2014), states that it “represents a variety of programs and schools providing treatment to over 4,600 clients across North America” (National Association of Therapeutic Schools and Programs section, para. 1.) The Association lists a vast array of settings, including “therapeutic schools, residential treatment schools, wilderness programs, outdoor therapeutic programs, young adult programs, and home-based residential programs” (NATSAP section, para. 1.).

The Coalition for Residential Education Programs (CORE) is a “national professional membership organization focused on advancing and strengthening residential education programs” (CORE membership brochure, 2014, About CORE section, para. 1.). CORE’s website states that its mission is, “to support, promote, and advocate for residential education programs and schools that serve at-risk children and youth” (CORE, 2014, main page). Residential education programs “differ from residential treatment,” with residential education programs being longer term and focused on education, rather than short-term and focused on treatment (Lee & Barth, 2009).

Whether they are referred to as therapeutic boarding schools, residential schools, residential education settings, residential treatment centers, group homes, children’s homes, or something else, the goal of these alternative programs is to provide high-quality care and education to children with specific social, emotional, or behavioral needs; children who for whom it has been determined would be better off living outside of their homes in a more structured setting (Lee & Barth, 2009; McKenzie, 1999). Lee & Barth (2009) make the distinction between residential treatment centers, which are usually organized around a medical model and are focused on short-term mental health treatment, and residential education
programs, which often provide low-levels of mental health care, and where the larger goal is “to boost youth development rather than provide treatment” (p. 156).

According to Lee & Barth (2009):

Residential education programs serve youth whose homes or communities cannot meet their educational or socio-behavioral needs and who, therefore, risk out-of-home placement, as well as youth attending underperforming schools, or youth already involved with child welfare services. (p. 156)

Most residential education programs encourage children to become engaged in their environment by participating in school-based activities, such as sports and the arts, which promote “pro-social values,” and encourage a sense of belonging (Lee & Barth, 2009). These goals align with Erikson’s (1950) teachings on psychosocial stages of development, which state that children need the opportunity to master various stages of development, such as trust, autonomy, purpose and initiative, competence, industry, and identity in order to build healthy self esteem and to progress from childhood to adulthood. They also support Herman’s (1997) teachings, which state that recovery from traumatic events can only happen in the context of healthy social relationships and connection to community.

In many residential education settings for at-risk youth, children are housed and schooled on the same campus, maintain a close connection between the home and school environment and creating a sense of both physical and psychological containment. In many of these settings, four to twelve children, many of whom have experienced similar life circumstances, live together in small cottages, houses, or dormitories that are commonly overseen by house parents. This model of care, referred to as a “Teaching Family Model” or a “therapeutic family model” (Boy’s Town, 2014; McLoughlin & Gonzalez, 2014; Thompson et al., 1996; Thompson & Lee, 2009) recreates
an important sense of family for the children. Research suggests that some residential settings utilizing this “family-style” model of treatment and care have shown promising outcomes for at-risk youth (Jones, 2009; Lee & Barth, 2009; Lee & Thompson, 2008; McLoughlin & Gonzalez, 2014; Thompson et al., 1996).

Studies have shown that children coming from disadvantaged households perform less well in school on average than their more advantaged peers, and that, “children’s learning can be impeded…by poor physical health…and also…by poor mental health and depression caused by problems at home” (Ladd, 2012, p. 221). Many disadvantaged children, the majority of whom are children of color, are “less likely to obtain a well-paying job and more likely to suffer ill health and to be incarcerated as adults” (Children’s Defense Fund, 2014, p. 34). In addition to increased funding for public education, one way to help mitigate the discrepancies between children coming from advantaged and disadvantaged households is to assess the value and impact of high-quality residential educational programs or boarding schools for at-risk youth (Lee & Barth, 2009).

The long-term nature of boarding schools and other residential education programs, which lead to consistency of place and of relationships, may be a solution to the problem of multiple placements that many children in foster care experience (Lee & Barth, 2009). Although not the answer for all children, for children coming from unstable homes or dangerous communities, the containment, consistency, and structure inherent in the boarding school or residential educational environment may make a difference in their ability to learn and reach their full potential (Lee & Barth, 2009; Lee & Thompson, 2008).

**Positive impact of residential educational programs.** The first national survey of residential education programs, (the National Residential Education Survey), was conducted in
2009 by a group called CORE, the Coalition for Residential Education. Of the original 3000 programs originally considered, 119 of the programs qualified for inclusion in the study and were sent surveys to complete. 67 programs across the U.S. returned the completed 52-item survey, which gathered information about program’s organizational history and profile, goals and objectives, funding and services, as well as a brief section on outcomes (Lee & Barth, 2009). The survey assessed program populations of youth served and services offered to program youth. They also compared programs that included foster youth (N=41) against programs that did not include foster youth (N=26).

The majority of the programs were co-educational, approximately 50% of the students were White, 30% African American, 13% Hispanic, and 7% listed as “other.” Most of the youth in all the programs were referred either by parents and family or by social services. 60% of the programs served youth in the foster care system, and of those programs, the majority of students were referred by social services rather than by family members. The majority of the programs reported utilizing a family-style model with live-in house parents. Over three quarters of the programs reported an average length of stay of at least one year, with 43% reporting 13-24 months and nearly 20% reporting a 3-4 year stay (Lee & Barth, 2009), reflecting a stability and consistency of setting which has been shown to be important for social, emotional, and educational development.

The programs also reported an array of services to youth and their families, including counseling, spiritual development, independent living services, technology, sports, arts, leadership, tutoring, and additional services such as equine therapy, scouting, 4-H, community service and travel. Family-specific services such as parenting classes and family counseling were also provided. Additionally, some of the programs provided extended aftercare services such as
transitional housing and supervised apartments (Lee & Barth, 2009). Researchers found that applications to the programs were more than double the number of youth enrolled in the programs, suggesting that the strong interest in residential education programs outweighs the current provision of residential education to interested students. Their study also found that of the 60% of programs that looked at outcomes, a sizeable number, nearly half of the members of the most recent graduating class, were enrolled in either 2 or 4-year colleges.

The findings of Lee & Barth’s (2009) study suggest that there is a strong interest in residential education programs, although we do not know the full demographics of the people expressing interest. Findings also suggest that some at-risk children have experienced academic benefits to attending these programs, but we also do not know the demographics of which youth experienced benefits. Comparing programs that both did and did not include foster youth was helpful in gathering information about the specific impact of these programs on foster youth. Stability of place and length of stay, both concerns in foster youth, may have been associated with the higher level of educational attainment for those who attended the programs.

A limitation of this study is that survey respondents were either Executive Directors of the programs or their designees, so no actual program participants were asked about their experiences, which might have led to a richer study and would possibly have provided more accurate and descriptive data. Also, the majority of the students in these studies were white, and it would be interesting to research the reasons for that finding, which might reveal something about how resources are allocated in this country.

The Boarding Provision for Vulnerable Children Pathfinder (The Boarding Pathfinder), a program that was designed to explore whether a boarding school experience could be used by more local authorities to provide support and stability and improve the life chances of
“vulnerable” English children, was formally launched in November 2006. An evaluation of the program, commissioned by England’s Department of Children and Families, was conducted between December 2006 and October 2008, and was limited to the first 10 local authorities that had originally signed on to participate. At the end of the evaluation period, The Boarding Pathfinder included 80 boarding schools and 18 local authorities.

Following the evaluation, Maxwell, Chase, Statham & Jackson (2009) conducted a mixed-methods study of 17 children who were originally followed after boarding school placement. Out of the original 17, seven were chosen as case studies and were interviewed twice. Parents or caregivers, school staff, and local authorities were also interviewed when possible. The results of this study suggested positive gains for many of the students who remained at the school throughout the entire evaluation period. Gains reported included increased confidence, improved educational attainment, opportunities to engage in extracurricular activities, which helped develop confidence and leadership, increased ability to socialize and build friendships, and improved family relationships. The boarding school structure eliminated the problem of truancy for some children, leading to more time in the classroom.

In addition to the positive gains reported, a few of the older students also reported some difficulty adjusting to the structure of the school setting. Some children had difficulties with going back and forth from the school to home, due to differences in structure and expectations, as well as strained relationships with family members. This was particularly true for children who returned home during extended holidays and vacations. Some children found the schools to be too culturally homogeneous. Additionally, some of the lower income kids reported that socioeconomic differences made fitting in to private boarding school difficult. While some had an easier time adjusting, others struggled with trying to fit in. The child’s resilience and adaptive
ability was one important factor for success, as was the percentage of higher vs. lower income students (Maxwell, Chase, Statham & Jackson, 2009).

The findings of this study suggest that for some disadvantaged children, attending either private or state run residential education programs has the potential to lead to positive outcomes in academic achievement, higher academic aspirations, self confidence, leadership opportunities, improved family and social relationships, and stable living conditions. Important factors that may have contributed to a successful experience were that the child and parent have a choice in attending the school, that the child has good promise of doing well in a structured setting, that the child has no intractable behavior problems, such as a history of sexual or physical assault on others, and that they child does not have severe special needs. Children also need to have at least one close family member that they can return to for vacations and holidays. These factors would, in effect, lead to the exclusion of some children, who may be better served in a program or facility equipped to deal with a higher level of behavioral or emotionally troubled youth.

Of the 17 students followed, two children were identified as Black African-Carribean, while two others were identified as having mixed parentage. The remainder of the students in the study identified as White British. Both the Black African-Carribean students were no longer enrolled at their schools by the end of the 2-year evaluation period, yet the study does not explain the reason for their departure. It is possible that the racial, socioeconomic, cultural, or some other differences between these two students and the majority of the other students at the schools were too vast, but we are unable to know the reasons without actual data. This may suggest that more efforts need to be made to ensure that the boarding school experience is made more accessible to a diverse population of students. Additionally, this program was intended to act as an early intervention program, preventing children from reaching the point where they were at risk of
foster care, not as an after-the-fact alternative to foster care (Maxwell, Chase, Statham & Jackson, 2009).

In 1997, the SEED (School for Educational Evolution and Development) foundation was created as a response to attempt to address the racial achievement gap, the fact that in the United States, children of color consistently score lower in reading and math on achievement tests and also have much lower graduation rates from high school and college than their White counterparts (Children’s Defense Fund, 2014). These issues are seen by many to be at least partly a result of dangerous neighborhoods and failing inner-city schools, although the problem runs much deeper and is far more complex than these two issues alone, and are therefore, far beyond the scope of this paper. Operating as a charter school, the first SEED school opened in 1998 in Washington D.C., and the second in Baltimore, MD in 2008. The SEED schools are unique in that they are the only urban public boarding schools for disadvantaged students in the country (Fryer Jr. & Curto, 2014).

SEED schools serve students in grade 6-12, and students come from all areas of the city. If more students apply than there are spaces available in the school, students are chosen by lottery. Students attending SEED schools live on campus from Sunday evening through Friday afternoon and return home on weekends. Groupings of approximately 12-14 students live together in larger dormitories and attend classes together during the week, returning to their families on the weekends. SEED schools maintain “a paternalistic culture and high expectations” (Fryer Jr. & Curto, 2014, p. 4), which they use to impart mainstream and middle-class values to their students, elements that many believe are associated with boarding school success. Part of their curriculum includes the teaching of “non-cognitive skills,” (p. 9) through their Habits for
Achieving Lifelong Success (HALLS) curriculum, which includes lessons on nutrition, etiquette, and social skills.

Fryer Jr. & Curto (2014) conducted a study assessing the effectiveness of the SEED schools on disadvantaged students by matching data from admission lotteries for students who applied but did not win the lotteries against data on student demographics and outcomes for the District of Columbia Public Schools. The study used causal estimates of the effect of attending a SEED school. All students in the SEED lottery sample were Black and a higher number were males than females. Lottery winners were more likely to have higher test scores than lottery losers at baseline, and lottery winners were significantly more likely to be eligible for free lunch and less likely to be special education students.

The result of their study suggests that “poor minority students” (p. 82) who attended the Washington D.C. SEED charter boarding school showed improved academic outcomes in both reading and math scores, compared to those who attended the District of Columbia Public Schools. The findings suggested that attending a SEED school increases achievement by 0.211 standard deviations in reading and 0.229 standard deviations in math, per year of attendance (p. 65). The study also suggests that smaller class sizes and higher quality teachers may be contributing factors to students’ increased scores. The boarding school structure provided students with longer school hours, a safe, highly structured setting in which they could focus on schoolwork, highly-trained tutors to assist with their studies, and an environment of like-minded peers with whom they could socialize. Any or all of these factors may have contributed to the students’ academic achievements (Fryer Jr. & Curto, 2014).

The fact that lottery winners in this study were more likely to have higher test scores at baseline and less likely to be special education students raises the question of how winners are
selected, who wins and who loses in the selection process, and how those decisions are made. The findings seem to suggest that the most disadvantaged students are less likely to win the lottery and to be admitted to the schools, thereby reinforcing their experiences of being disadvantaged. Further investigation into these issues would be needed to determine how the process of enrollment is conducted to rule out any bias on the part of the admissions committee.

Comparing successful Israeli residential school models such as Hadassim and Yemin Orde (which admit students whose lives are affected by poverty, personal or family conflicts, or issues of immigration), to the historically Black colleges and universities in America, English (as quoted in Schuh & Caneda, 1997), finds a similarity between the Israeli experience and “the experiences of more economically disadvantaged youths…in America” (Schuh & Caneda, 1997, p. 6). English finds that the residential settings are similar both in their concern toward academic achievement “through the development of self-confidence and competence in the context of the realistic understanding of the societal context in which they are to live their lives” (Schuh & Caneda, 1997, p. 6) and in their design, which focuses on development, with an emphasis on the student’s “cultural heritage, rather than the treatment of deviance or deficits” (Schuh & Caneda, 1997, p. 6).

The environment at Yemin Orde is both structured and flexible, allowing for a degree of autonomy, and “supports and incorporates students’ cultural traditions and a variety of artistic pursuits” (Schuh & Caneda, 1997, p. 4). Hadassim’s model, rather than focusing on the treatment of behaviors, focuses on relationship-building as a way of promoting identity development and change (Schuh & Caneda, 1997). The success of both these programs supports the argument in favor of residential education programs for at-risk youth. Their focus on development rather than
on treatment aligns with Erikson’s (1950) psychosocial stage model, as their focus on relationship-building does with Herman’s (1997) trauma recovery model.

Alexander-Snow (2011) conducted a qualitative study of four Black graduates of a traditional, private, Black boarding school in Mississippi, The Piney Woods School, exploring the cultural impact of the school on social and academic experiences of graduates. Comparisons were then made to their experiences in traditional “White, Euro-American cultural system of state universities” (Alexander-Snow, 2011, p. 332). In keeping with the private, independent, Black boarding school tradition, the school focuses on offering what Foster & Foster (as cited in Alexander-Snow, 2011) refer to as “educational options that cater to the intellectual, social, cultural, and spiritual needs of [African-American] students” (p. 324).

Subjects of this study all reported a positive experience of the Piney Woods School including an increase in cultural awareness and pride, a feeling of inclusion, belonging, and community, increased self-esteem, and access to positive role models and peers, compared to their later experiences at traditional universities. All four of the students described negative experiences at traditional universities, including feeling isolated, unwelcome, ignored, passed over, not encouraged to participate in class. They all reported that the universities lacked a commitment to cultural differences and perspectives. Limitations of this study were its small sample size – four students – its exclusive focus on cultural orientations, and a lack of variability of institution size and type used for comparison.

A 2014 qualitative study was done of students who attended a private boarding school in upstate New York serving students in grades 9-12 with a variety of abilities and backgrounds. The diversity of the population of the school is approximately 25%-30%. The school sits on the site of an historic Shaker village and as such, incorporates the Shaker values of integrity,
industry, and simplicity into its school traditions. Those values can be seen operating in the “hands-to-work” program, where students work to maintain the upkeep of the school, as well as the school’s “weekly town meetings” which provide a forum for students to address teachers and the larger school community on any issues they feel are important (Bass, 2014, p. 24).

Bass’ study consisted of 19 students, a portion of whom were considered disadvantaged, 5 teachers, 2 counselors, and 5 administrators. The researcher used Bourdieu’s capital theory as a concept for measuring whether the boarding school setting exposed students to social, cultural, and educational capital. According to Bass (2014), “Bourdieu linked financial capital to power and power to exposure to other forms of capital (social and cultural), and influence” (p. 16). According to the Bourdieu’s theory, giving disadvantaged students access to social, cultural, and education capital creates a spiraling effect outward, leading to greater access to economic capital. To even begin the spiraling effect, students first need access to economic capital, which is often the barrier that separates disadvantaged students from their more well-to-do counterparts.

Another aspect of the theory is the recognition that cultural benefits are cumulative: the more access one has, the more one is able to build other capital benefits (Bass, 2014).

The students in Bass’ study revealed both positive and negative outcomes of their experience. Findings suggested that attending the school did benefit disadvantaged students by providing them with access to social, cultural, and educational capital. Social benefits were gained through “close-knit relationships” with peers, cultural benefits were gained through access to cultural activities, clubs, and sports, while educational benefits were gained by having smaller class sizes, high-quality teachers, and a focus on students’ individual needs. The school also helped foster leadership skills in the students (Bass, 2014).
Bass also found that certain students benefitted more than others. In particular, students who come from homes that lack structure and are less able to support the student showed the greatest potential for benefitting from the structured and supportive environment of the boarding school, as well as access to social and cultural activities. Other factors associated with having a greater impact on students’ educational experience were: the quality of the students’ home environments, the quality of the school or boarding program the student is attending, the needs of the student, and the motivation and attitude of the student. Consistent with findings of some other studies on the boarding school experience, some students also reported that a disadvantage of attending the school was a loss of connections to their families and communities back home. Limitations of this study were the small sample size and the fact that Bass did not describe the percentage of students in the study who were disadvantaged (Bass, 2014).

**Attachment-focused models of residential programs.** Keeping in mind what we know about the importance of attachments for children and the tendency for so many children in foster care to experience multiple placements, which often lead to a loss of attachments, residential educational settings utilizing treatment models that take attachment into consideration show great promise. Thompson et al.’s 1996 evaluation of the Boys Town residential school program in Omaha, Nebraska, (also known as Father Flanagan’s Home for Boys) is a case in point. The Boys Town program, which promotes “quality residential care” for at-risk youth focuses on both social and academic skills, and incorporates evidence-based practices (Boys Town, 2014, p. 9). The Boys Town program incorporates an extensive behavior management system and a social skills curriculum, which is woven into all classroom and extracurricular activities. One of the long-standing features of the Boys Town program is their use of a “Teaching Family Model,” which is based on operant and social learning theories and teaches positive behaviors in the
context of a family-type setting. In this model, approximately 6-8 children live with and are cared for by two Teaching Parents in a small, family-style setting (Thompson, Chmelka, & Daly, 2006).

This study was part of a quasi-experimental longitudinal research project, which was designed to evaluate the effectiveness of the Teaching Family Model. The study measured the short and long-term effects on residents of participation in the program (N=503) against a control group of applicants to the program (N=80), who, due to space limitations were unable to be enrolled. Participants were interviewed at entry to the study and interviews were repeated every 3 months and then every 6 months over the course of several years. Participants in the study gave an average of 11.39 interviews.

Results of the study indicated a positive outcome for the treatment group of Boys Town residents in several areas including academic experience and performance. Findings showed that the treatment group had “a significantly higher grade-point average, completed significantly more years of school, had a higher rate of high school graduation…[and] had significantly more positive attitudes toward post secondary education,” (Thompson et al., 1996, p. 236). Findings of this study suggest that children placed in residential educational settings that utilize a family-style treatment model, emphasizing academics and a specialized school program, showed improved academic outcomes over a control group (Thompson et al., 1996, p. 236). The use of a longitudinal study design, the large number of participants, and the use of a control group gives this study extra merit. Participants in the study were approximately 70% White, 90% male, with a mean age of around 14. Further studies need to be conducted to determine whether the findings are consistent across other population groups.
A 2009 mixed methods study of a residential program that utilized the “teaching family model” revealed positive outcomes for. In the study, a comparison was made between two different treatment models of care at a newly created residential educational facility. Although the facility had originally begun using a “family-style” model of treatment, similar to the one used in the Boys Town residential program (in which residents reside in small cottages with live-in house parents), the financial cost of maintaining 24/7, full-time employees ultimately led to the decision to switch over to a less expensive “childcare worker model” (Jones, 2009, p. 316).

While the houseparents lived full-time in the cottages with the children and participated in activities such as shopping with youth, attending school functions, helping with homework, and role-modeling a positive family-like environment, the childcare workers lived out of the cottages, supervised children in rotating shifts, and focused more on behavior management of the children in their care (Jones, 2009, p. 317).

Benefits of the houseparent model were many. First, having 24/7 live-in staff leads to a “continuity of caregiving,” (Jones, 2009, p. 317), which, for children who have suffered the trauma of ruptured attachments, multiple placements, and a multitude of caregivers creates a feeling of consistency, predictability, and safety (Jones, 2009). Healing relationships, safety, and reconnection are but a few of the well-researched, essential needs for recovery for anyone who has experienced a traumatic event (Herman, 1997). Also, the family-like qualities may help reduce the “institutional aspects” of the environment aiding in the adjustment process. Lastly, the houseparent model leads to more opportunities for observation and interaction with children as well as more opportunities for teaching skills (Jones, 2009, p. 317).

For this study, the researchers combined qualitative interviews with two quantitative instruments designed to assess satisfaction and quality of life of the subjects: an Annual Client
Evaluation instrument and a Ansel-Casey Life Skills Assessment-Short Form. 76 former residents of the program agreed to participate in the study. Close to 50% of the respondents identified as African-American, almost one-quarter as Caucasian, while the remaining identified as Hispanic, Native American, and “Other.” Just over 60% of the respondents were female. The respondents had spent approximately two years at the study site, had been in out-of-home care on average a little over seven years, and had experienced an average of six placements prior to arriving at the program.

Findings of the study suggested that about half of the subjects who had both type of caretakers reported a preference for houseparents, while only 8% reported a preference for childcare workers. Respondents reported that the primary advantage to houseparents was the stability and consistency they provided, two important features in facilitating healthy attachments. The majority also listed “family-like atmosphere” and “having parent-like figures” (Jones, 2009, p. 319) as advantages, while four respondents expressed resentment about the houseparents trying to take on that role when they already had parents. Bonding and relationship advantages were also mentioned as positives of the houseparent model. Several of the respondents expressed concern about becoming close to both the childcare workers and the house parents out of a fear of repeating earlier abandonments if the staff were to leave, once again reinforcing the importance of healthy, stable attachments.

While many respondents found the childcare workers to be more “friend-like,” due to their closer proximity in age, some respondents also found that due to their younger age, the childcare workers were less experienced when the respondents needed help. Higher levels of satisfaction with houseparents were associated with higher levels of satisfaction in the respondents’ living arrangements and “in their ability to perform more of the independent living
skills than youth with lower levels of satisfaction” (Jones, 2009, p. 319). Limitations of the study were the small sample size (76), the sample being drawn from a single site, and the fact that the youth were not randomly assigned to caregivers, which may have led to selection bias. Finally, the study was retrospective in nature, which may have led to inaccurate remembering.

Finally, The Academy, a residential program that includes an on-site public high school, was designed to provide a long-term stable home and comprehensive educational program to adolescent foster youth who lack other placement options and who were not likely to return to their families-of-origin. The emphasis of the program is on placement stability for adolescent foster youth, and was designed specifically to meet that need. All students attend the program voluntarily, and can leave the program if they choose. Helping maintain connections and ties to the student’s families is also an important feature of the program; therefore, The Academy also offers the opportunity for keeping sibling subgroups together. Alumni housing is also available for graduates of the program.

The Academy combines a number of programs and works in collaboration with both public and private agencies including the child welfare agency, Health and Human Service Agency, the County Office of Education, and two private not-for-profits which provide the independent living skills program and the residential program. The program includes the school, the residential facility, a work-readiness and self-sufficiency program, and an independent living skills program. Other features of the program are small class sizes, basic and remedial classes as well as advanced placement classes, access to technology, and extracurricular activities such as sports and arts (Jones & Lansdverk, 2006).

Programming at The Academy focuses on education and development rather than on mental or behavioral health treatment. The program utilizes a wrap-around model to provide
individualized guidance and a variety of services to students, including mental health services, employment services, housing services, and one year of follow-up case management services for graduates. The program’s cottage system and hybrid house parent/childcare worker model of care make it possible for house parents to be on duty when the youth are home, and house parents actively participate in activities with youth including homework, shopping, medical appointments, and school functions, a factor which has been shown to be associated with positive outcomes in other studies.

The researchers reported in 2006 on an evaluation of The Academy, which consisted of a 5-year investigation that followed cohorts of adolescent foster youth up until the age of 20 or until three years past the date of their graduation. Both students and their caregivers completed assessments at intake, which were part of a student profile that included the Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL) and a Youth Self Report (YSR) measure. Youth were also measured at 6 months after graduation and 12 months post-Academy residence.

Compared to the average length of stay in previous placements (338 days), youth who entered The Academy stayed for an average of 448 days, experiencing an increase in placement stability. Looking at current students and graduates of the first three classes, the study also found that, compared to other studies of foster youth graduation or GED completion rates, youth at The Academy experienced higher rates of graduation (78.3%, compared to 55% and 77%, respectively). 28% of youth were attending a 2-year college at 6-months follow-up and 14% were matriculating into a 4-year college (Jones & Lansdverk, 2006).

Most youth reported a high level of engagement with their families, Academy staff, and peers, after leaving the school, and many had built good social supports to whom they could turn for help, if needed. Some of the former students also reported multiple changes in living situation
after graduation, but youth who finished The Academy’s educational program all reported having housing. Although 37% of respondents admitted to using an illegal drug within the past 30 days, none of the respondents reported having problems with drugs or alcohol. Almost half the graduates reported remaining in contact with Academy staff after graduation, signaling that the relationships with staff were important to them.

The demographic makeup of this study shows a good mix of gender, race, and ethnicity, which lends to its merit. Almost 60% of the students in this study were between 15 and 16 years old. 56.3% of the students were female (N=116) and 43.7% were male (N=90). Approximately 33% were Caucasian, 31% African American, 23.8% Hispanic, 1% Asian, 3.4% Native American, and 7.8% identified as Bi-Racial. The mean number of placements students had experienced before coming to The Academy was 7.1 and the mean number of schools youth had attended was 7.9 (Jones & Lansdverk, 2006, p. 1159).

The findings of this study suggest that compared to other types of program studies of adolescent foster youth, adolescent youth who attended The Academy experienced better social and educational outcomes. Many factors may have affected these outcomes, including the use of house parents who live with the students in small cottages, the collaboration with education and mental health agencies, the focus on employment and independent living skills, smaller class sizes and a challenging curriculum, a focus on involvement of the family, and the placement stability offered by the program’s design. Students showed a high number of placement changes before attending The Academy. The placement stability provided by The Academy may have been an important factor in positive outcomes compared to youth who remained living in foster care. The fact that all graduates reported having housing after leaving The Academy was significant.
Students accepted to *The Academy* must also meet certain eligibility requirements. They cannot have a history of assault, cannot be a sexual abuse perpetrator, cannot have recent untreated serious mental health problems or have engaged in high-risk behaviors such as starting fires, running away, or abuse of substances, and cannot have an IEP plan with a serious emotional disturbance. These eligibility factors by design lead to the exclusion of the most at-risk students, whose needs could not be met by this program. Further studies would need to be conducted to see if these findings hold steady over time.

These studies consisted of several different residential educational programs, not all of which were designed to specifically serve at-risk youth. Although none of the studies were specifically of children’s homes with attached junior boarding schools, these studies do suggest that disadvantaged students have experienced positive outcomes from attending residential educational programs. It goes without saying that outcomes would vary based on many factors including, but not limited to, the environment of the children’s original home, the ability of the child to adjust to the new setting, the child’s level of resiliency, the child’s attitude toward the program, the conditions under which the child was sent to the program, the quality of care the child received while at the program, the type of housing and living situation the child experienced, and the quality of teachers at the school, to name a few.

The exclusion of many of the most at-risk students from these programs emerged as a theme from these studies. The nature of the individual program (i.e., whether it is publicly or privately funded, issues of safety for all participants, who the intended population is that is being served), dictated which resources were available and who would be admitted.

**Negative impact of residential education programs.** Some authors have discussed the negative aspects of the boarding school or residential educational experience, including the
rupturing of attachments with important caregivers, being sent to live in unfamiliar environments to be raised by strangers, being separated from siblings and other family, feelings of loneliness and homesickness, being separated by gender at the schools, and for some, being subjected to bullying or more severe forms of abuse (Bass, 2014; Maxwell, Chase, Statham & Jackson, 2009; Schaverien, 2004; Schaverien, 2011). In her study of children attending an upper grade level boarding school, Bass reports in her qualitative findings that some students experience a sense of loss of connection to the culture they left behind, especially if the boarding school culture is very different than that of their home culture. This includes a risk of “no longer blending into the families and friends they once held” (p.31).

Schaverien (2004; 2011) writes about her work with English therapy clients who grew up in boarding schools and reports that she has observed a variety of negative boarding school “symptoms” which she believes are specific to having grown up in boarding schools, away from the family of origin. Schaverien (2011) describes “an inflexible system,” to which children sent away to English boarding schools were made to adjust, leading to “psychological splitting in which the child becomes apparently self sufficient” (p. 139). Schaverian (2011) refers to this split as “armouring,” a kind of psychological defense mechanism that emerges as a way to preserve the child from further “insults to its autonomy,” and asserts that “armouring” may lead to enduring negative symptoms and behavioral issues (p. 139).

Any conversation promoting boarding schools for disadvantaged youth must include Indian boarding schools and comment on the devastating impact they had on Native American people and their cultures across North America.

**Indian boarding schools.** The first federally-funded, off the reservation, Indian boarding school, the Carlisle Indian Industrial School, was founded in Carlisle, Pennsylvania in 1872 by
Captain Richard Henry Pratt. Pratt believed that Native American children could and should be taught to adapt and assimilate to Euro-American culture and society which could best be accomplished by removing Native children from their families and communities and educating them in separate schools run by Euro-Americans. Children at the school were educated in the English language and basic academic skills, as well as Christian principles. Pratt is famous for his quote “…all the Indian there is in the race should be dead. Kill the Indian in him, and save the man” (Graves, Shavings, Rose, & Saylor, 2007, p. 2).

Pratt’s model of forced assimilation of Native peoples gained popular acceptance at the time and became the model for most of the Indian boarding schools in the United States that followed. The prevailing goal of the schools was to change the essential identity of Native people through the dismantling of the Native tradition of extended families and the removal and re-education of Indian children. The outcome of Pratt’s model was that many Native American children who were sent away to be “civilized” at Indian boarding schools were subjected to terrible abuses, resulting in a painful legacy of broken communities, trauma, and shame that continue to resonate to this day. Yet, despite efforts to extinguish Native American traditions, language, identity, and culture through forced assimilation, Native Americans have shown tremendous resiliency and many tribes are thriving today (Graves et al., 2007).

Research on current Indian boarding schools shows a mix of both positive and negative experiences (DeJong & Holder, 2006). According to DeJong and Holder (2006), “The Federal system of Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) schools currently encompasses over 185 day and boarding schools on and off reservations” (p.1). Reflecting an evolution in their understanding of practices, many Indian boarding schools of today are increasingly incorporating Native cultures into their education programs, which encourages individual development and academic success.
(DeJong & Holder, 2006). Children who attend the boarding schools come for a variety of reasons and hail from many different home environments. Many have suffered traumas whose roots can be traced back to the earlier oppressive treatment of Native people, and many are currently experiencing emotional, behavioral, and academic difficulties as a result. Much of the current boarding school programming has been redesigned to address these unique needs of the Native population, incorporating therapeutic models that take attachment and psychosocial stages of development into consideration (DeJong & Holder, 2006).

With the potential for such destructive outcomes, it is crucial that residential education programs have proper oversight, preferably from an outside, neutral party to ensure that children’s needs are being properly addressed and their rights to safety and good care are upheld.

Problems with assessing outcomes in out-of-home care. In a review of the literature on residential treatment centers, Bates, English, and Kouidou-Giles (1997) found that due to factors such as program costs and availability, children are not always matched up with the residential care setting that best meets their needs. And although four dominant treatment models exist: psychoanalytic, behavioral, peer cultural, and psychoeducational, many residential facilities often mix and match different types of treatment models, creating their own unique models of treatment. The lack of consistency in philosophy and treatment approaches across these various programs and settings make experiences and outcomes difficult to assess and compare. And with no standard definition of what a residential treatment setting is, accurate comparisons of the various treatment outcomes may be impossible (Lee & Barth, 2009). Finally, many of the studies that have been done on outcomes of residential treatment have lacked methodological rigor (Bates et al., 1997).
In a more recent study comparing foster care to modern institutional care, Barth (2002) echoes the conclusion of Bates et al. (1997), stating that the varied role and types of group care make it difficult to assess outcomes. Barth further states that group care should only be considered when all other options have failed for the child. He argues that group care is expensive and restrictive and that there is “virtually no evidence that group [or institutional] care enhances the accomplishment of any of the goals of child welfare services” (p. 25). In his criticism of group care in this article, Barth appears to be referring to large-capacity treatment institutions organized around a medical model of care, rather than the more development and educationally focused residential education programs referred to in this study. Barth goes on to state that, “For more than 50 years, a variety of studies have shown that children fare better in family like settings than in institutional care” (Barth, 2002, Executive summary, p. i), which is what this study argues, also.

As of today, there is mixed evidence on the impact of out-of-home placements on children and families. While some children and families have benefitted, others have experienced further difficulties. Removal from the home and placement into out-of-home care has the potential to lead to both benefits and risks to the child (Rutter, 2000). Some researchers have suggested that negative results of out-of-home placements were associated with problems of selection bias – that children with existing behavioral problems were most likely to be chosen for placement (Berger, Bruch, Johnson, James & Rubin, 2009). To correct for this, Berger et al. (2009) conducted a study using data on 2,453 children between the ages of 4 and 17 from the National Survey of Adolescent and Child Well-Being and employing five analytic methods that adjust for selection bias.
Berger et al.’s study looked at the impact of out-of-home placements on children’s behavior problems and cognitive skills and found that overall, “placement has little effect” on these areas (2009, p. 1). Due to the large variation in child welfare policies across states and counties, it has been difficult for researchers to come any one conclusion about the outcomes of various types of out-of-home placements (Lee & Barth, 2009; Courtney, 2000). Creating standardized definitions of settings and utilizing consistent treatment models across placements is one way to move in the direction of better understanding the impact of out-of-home placements on children (Lee & Thompson, 2008). Results from Lee & Barth’s 2009 study, which compares the same treatment model “the Teaching Family Model” across multiple settings (residential and foster care) and provides extensive training in the application of the model to ensure fidelity, is a step in the right direction. It is clear from the varying points of view on out-of-home care that further research into these areas is needed.

**Some Criticisms of Residential Education Programs and Charters**

Criticism surrounding both residential education programs and charter schools often centers around two arguments: First, despite the additional cost of attending a residential education program or a charter school academic outcomes are not necessarily improved (Ladd, 2012). The second is the issue of selective admissions. Both privately funded residential education programs and publicly funded, privately operated charters are not held to the same standards as public schools in terms of admissions, making it possible for them to “cherry-pick” higher performing students or to eliminate students with greater behavioral or learning difficulties as a way to inflate their effectiveness in terms of academic success. Some see this as creating another form of exclusion for the most oppressed children (Ladd, 2012).
Addressing the issue of cost: If, as some of these studies cited in this study suggest, attending residential education programs can lead to feelings of safety, connectedness, and belonging, if they can offer at-risk children a sense of consistency, care, and support within the context of a family environment, if they lead to children’s improved well-being, increased independent living skills, higher GED scores, greater graduation rates, and a more positive attitude toward higher education, as well as a decrease in later rates of juvenile detention or contact with the law, these programs should be seen as cost-saving, rather than cost-incurring.

On the issue of selective admissions: Private institutions should be allowed to recruit and admit whichever students they feel fit best into their communities. As private entities, they have that right. But with evidence suggesting the positive benefits of residential education programs for disadvantaged students, public monies should be used to conduct further outcome studies with an eye toward the creation of publicly funded, high quality, residential programs to be made available to all youth, including the most at-risk.

The information outlined up to this point has attempted to address the important issues relevant to out-of-home placements for at-risk youth beginning with an understanding of how trauma and adversity can harm young children’s development. It has described a range of out-of-home placements, with a focus on foster care and residential education programs, and has addressed the many negative outcomes associated with foster care placements. It has highlighted several studies that show beneficial aspects of residential education programs for at-risk youth.

The following section explores several theoretical perspectives related to child development and trauma and is useful in helping to understand the particular needs of at-risk children who require out-of-home placement and how to best address those needs.
Theoretical Literature

This section reviews theoretical literature related to child development. It includes literature on Attachment Theory, Trauma Theory, Erikson’s stages of development, and Object Relations Theory, with a focus on Winnicott’s “facilitating” or “holding environment.”

Attachment theory. In addition to safe and healthy environments, children also have a primary need for healthy attachments to important caregivers as a way of providing them with a sense of safety and protection from the unfamiliar outside world. A positive relationship with one or more consistent and trusted attachment figures also helps a child learn to regulate her emotions, leading to a positive sense of self. Theorists and researchers, such as Bowlby (1982), Ainsworth and Wittig (1969) and many others have studied attachment in children and their caregivers. Children as early as three months old, who grow up in “the ordinary expectable environment” (Bowlby, 1988, p. 3) have been observed to seek out their primary caregivers, which, in most of the earliest studies were the babies’ mothers (Bowlby, 1982). Young children, especially in the first few years of life, employ a variety of “proximity-maintaining behavior[s],” (Ainsworth & Wittig, 1969; Bowlby, 1982, p. 200) including crying, smiling, lifting up their arms, clinging, and following their [primary caregivers] in an effort to maintain both a physical and emotional connection (Bowlby, 1982).

When an attuned caregiver provides a child with emotional regulation, the child comes to associate the caregiver with comfort and safety. The child develops an “internal working model” that the world is safe and dependable and so begins to explore the world around them by moving away from the immediate proximity of the primary caregiver and, when in need of a renewed feeling of security and safety, returning back to the comfort and familiarity of the primary caregiver. Bowlby (1988) refers to the primary caregiver as “a secure base” (p. 11) for the child.
The consequences to the socio-emotional development of a child who has been denied these necessary safe and healthy attachments, especially during the crucial early years, can be devastating if left untreated (Bowlby, 1969; Bowlby, 1988; Perry & Szalavitz, 2006). Some of the possible negative outcomes of early traumas and a lack of healthy early attachments include a failure to thrive, distrust of others, negative beliefs about the self, enduring problems in relationships, and a lack of empathy for others leading to pathological beliefs and behaviors (Perry & Szalavitz, 2006).

Through her research on parent-child attachments in Uganda in the 1950s, Ainsworth observed various types of attachment patterns and discovered that it was the quality of the attachment that was significant. “Today, attachments are described as either secure or insecure,” (Berzoff, Flanagan & Hertz, 2011, p. 188) with insecure attachments being divided further into subtypes. Studies have shown that attachments can move from secure to insecure if the child has experienced a trauma, separation from, or loss of the primary caregiver, and also from insecure to secure “earned security,” based on childrens’ interactions with healthier, caring, supportive people in their lives, including, “the introduction of a helpful other, such as a family member, teacher, or clergy” (Berzoff et al., 2011, p. 197).

Although Bowlby and other attachment theorists focused heavily on the relationship between the mother and child, privileging a Western perspective of childcare and childrearing, their recognition of the importance of early child/caregiver attachments has made important contributions to our current understanding of the needs of young children, and can be a valuable tool when considering out-of-home placements for at-risk children. “In so far as attachments to love figures are an integral part of our lives, a potential to feel distress on separation from them and anxiety at the prospect of separation is so also” (Bowlby, 1973, p. 56).
**Separation and loss.** Research shows that children who are separated from their primary attachment figure(s) experience a predictable set of emotional responses, usually moving from protest to despair to detachment. Young children who have been separated from their primary caregivers and then returned have been observed to show signs of emotional and physical dependence on the primary caretaker and to express anxiety about further separation. The severity and the duration of a child’s response to the separation can depend on several factors, such as the age of the child when the separation occurs, the relationship between the child and the primary caregiver before the separation, the circumstances under which the separation took place, the length of the separation, and the quality of care the child receives while in the care of strangers (Bowlby, 1973).

According to Bowlby (1973), the intense effects of separation and loss can be mitigated under certain conditions. The two most effective circumstances are (a) if the child has a familiar person with them during the separation, such as a friend or sibling; (b) with the presence of a loving and attuned substitute caregiver. Special objects that are familiar to the child such as clothes or toys have also been shown to provide comfort.

In summary, this theoretical research supports the crucial nature of attachment for children to a primary caregiver or caregivers from the earliest age. It also forms the basis for the argument that children not only need, but actively seek out, a strong connection with important consistent caregiver(s) whom they have come to trust will protect and care for them while they slowly gain both their independence and their growing trust in the world around them. Given the importance of the attachment relationship between child and caregiver, it follows that the loss of that relationship would be traumatic to the developing child, whose organization and understanding of the world around them is so dependent upon the availability and health of one
or more continuous primary attachments. With this in mind, it is crucial that those making
decisions about children living in out-of-home placements consider the issue of attachments very
carefully, as well as the impact on children of separation from the primary caregiver(s).

**Trauma theory.** According to Herman (1997), children living in environments where
abuse or other traumas are occurring around them must learn to adapt to these situations using
the only means they have available to them, “an immature system of psychological defenses” (p. 96). The use of these adaptations can lead children to develop “abnormal states of consciousness
in which the ordinary relations of body and mind, reality and imagination, knowledge and
memory no longer hold” (Herman, 1997, p. 96). These altered states of consciousness can then
lead to an array of physical and psychological symptoms which often persist into adulthood
(Herman, 1997, p.96) including difficulty regulating emotions, emotional numbing, dissociation,
substance abuse, self-harming behavior, addictions, and more.

At the core of all traumatic experiences is the feeling of disempowerment and
disconnection from others. According to Herman (1997), recovery from traumatic events must
occur in the context of safe, healing relationships. It is through these relationships that the trauma
survivor is able to rebuild the capacity for “trust, autonomy, initiative, competence, identity, and
intimacy” (Herman, 1997, p. 133), otherwise known as Erikson’s stages of psychosocial
development. Those considering out-of-home placements for at-risk youth must ensure that the
placement is safe and healthy for the child and can foster the rebuilding of these capacities
through empowering, safe, healing relationships with consistent and caring providers.

**Erikson’s stages of psychosocial development.** According to Erik Erikson (1902-1994),
a 20th Century developmental psychologist, there are eight stages of human psychosocial
development. Each of Erikson’s stages of development roughly corresponds to a numerical age
in the individual, with some deviation, beginning at birth (Erikson, 1985). In order to progress from one stage to the next, humans must master specific tasks at each developmental stage. Erikson believed that children acquired the skills necessary for continued development in the context of social relationships. Interventions designed to support the healthy progression of these stages of development, such as participation in extracurricular activities, may help at-risk children living in out-of-home placements to build the confidence, positive self-esteem, and identity formation needed for continued healthy development.

Table 1

*Erikson’s Stages of Psychosocial Development*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Task</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Birth-1 Year (Infancy)</td>
<td>Trust vs. Mistrust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Year – 3 Years (Early childhood)</td>
<td>Autonomy vs. Shame</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Years – 6 Years (Preschool)</td>
<td>Purpose and Initiative vs. Guilt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Years – 11 Years (School age)</td>
<td>Competence and Industry vs. Inferiority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 Years – 18 Years (Adolescence)</td>
<td>Fidelity and Identity vs. Role confusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 Years – 35 Years (Young adulthood)</td>
<td>Intimacy vs. Isolation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35 Years – 64 Years (Middle adulthood)</td>
<td>Generativity vs. Stagnation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65 Years and above (Older adulthood)</td>
<td>Ego integrity vs. Despair</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Winnicott and the “facilitating environment.”** Donald Woods Winnicott (1896-1971) was an English pediatrician and psychoanalyst and a highly influential Object Relations theorist who wrote about the importance of a mother’s “holding” of her child and the need to create a healthy and loving “facilitating environment” to promote the child’s healthy development (Winnicott, 1989, p. 89). One of the most important features of the facilitating environment is its
ever-changing growth and adaptation to the needs of the child. An effective facilitating environment is one that creates a “safe physical and psychological space” providing both “protection and freedom so that spontaneous interactions, feelings, and experiences can occur,” preferably, without the child being aware of it (Berzoff, Flanagan, & Hertz, 2011, p.128).

A child who has been deprived of this healthy facilitating environment is at a disadvantage. But Winnicott believed that these children, whom we might now refer to as “at-risk,” could still be helped if another kind of facilitating environment, a “suitable home-substitute” (Winnicott, 1992, p. 231) were provided to them in time. For at least some of these children, Winnicott felt that, “a strong stable environment with personal care and love, and gradually increasing doses of freedom” could be one possible answer (Winnicott, 1992, p. 230).

“The child whose home fails to give a feeling of security looks outside his home for the four walls… Often a child gets from relations and school what he missed in his own actual home” (Winnicott, 1992, p. 228).

On the subject of holding and the facilitating environment, Winnicott (2002) wrote:

A child who has not experienced preverbal care in terms of holding and handling – human reliability – is a deprived child. The only thing that can logically be applied to a deprived child is love, love in terms of holding and handling. To do it later in a child’s life is difficult, but at any rate we may try, as in the provision of residential care. (p. 236)

Although Winnicott spoke exclusively of a mother’s responsibility to provide care, today we would understand that to mean the child’s parent(s) or caregiver(s). Winnicott understood that residential settings which provide a healthy and nurturing “facilitating environment” could be utilized, if necessary, as a kind of surrogate home and family for children who have not
received the kind of loving care that children require for healthy development. I will now describe and explore such a setting: Kurn Hattin Homes for Children.

**Kurn Hattin Homes for Children: In the Beginning**

Kurn Hattin’s founder, Charles Albert Dickenson, born in 1849 in Westminster, VT, grew up and lived on the family farm until he was sixteen. Dickenson graduated from Phillips Academy, Andover, Massachusetts in 1872, Harvard College in 1876, and Andover Seminary in 1879 (Hurd, 1989). Ordained in 1879, he served a church in Lowell, Massachusetts throughout the 1880s. It was during this period that he became very active in “organizing the churches and charitable organizations of Boston” (Hurd, 1989, p. 83) in an effort to aid “the destitute and underprivileged of the city” (Hurd, 1989, p. 83). From an early age he had an interest in helping the less fortunate, and his dream of what would ultimately become Kurn Hattin Homes for Children grew from his desire to “create a home where children in need could experience the kind of life that he himself had enjoyed as a child” (Kurn Hattin Homes for Children, 2014).

Dickinson’s mission was to offer a safe and stable home, founded on Christian principles, to “destitute and orphaned children,” at a time when many poor children were being sent West on “orphan trains” to live and work as laborers for Western pioneers (Hurd, 1989, p. 84; McKenzie, 2009). Dickinson’s hope was to provide local accommodations and opportunities for poor children that they might never have known otherwise. The Articles of Association of the Kurn Hattin Home Association are stated as being, “for the purpose of founding and sustaining a home or homes for destitute and indigent children needing home training” (Hurd, 1989, p. 87).

With the help of other Christian philanthropists and believers, Dickinson’s Kurn Hattin Home for Boys, became a reality in 1894. Shortly thereafter, its name was changed to New England Kurn Hattin Homes, and later still, to Kurn Hattin Homes for Children. In 1945, an
additional campus was built to expand the school’s efforts of helping disadvantaged children to include girls. Nearly 50 years later, in 1993, the campuses merged. The rising costs of maintaining two campuses and of busing children between them was one reason for the merger.

In addition, with growing research on child development and attachment theory, school administrators had a better understanding of the benefits of keeping sibling groups together on one campus, eliminating further family disruptions (C. Sanderson, personal communication, October 20, 2014). From its humble beginnings, when the first building was erected in 1894, to the 280 acres that make up the campus today, Kurn Hattin has strived to provide “a safe home and nurturing environment” as well as a challenging education to over 6,000 children (Kurn Hattin Homes for Children, 2014).

Kurn Hattin Home for Children Today

Kurn Hattin Homes for Children is licensed by the Department of Children and Families (DCF) as a Residential Treatment Center, designed to serve up to 102 children (Vermont State Board of Education, 2012). According to the 2014 Kurn Hattin Homes for Children “Fact Sheet”, Kurn Hattin is “a charitable home and school for boys and girls age 6 to 15 who are affected by family tragedy, poverty, homelessness, abuse, or other hardship” (p. 1). Some other issues that Kurn Hattin families might be experiencing include parental substance abuse, domestic violence, parental loss or incarceration, or other parent-child difficulties. Children come to Kurn Hattin in different ways and for different reasons. While some are referred from the Department of Children and Families, others have heard of Kurn Hattin’s reputation and self-enroll (C. Sanderson, personal communication, October 20, 2014).

Due to a sizeable endowment and generous donations, Kurn Hattin serves children in need, “regardless of their ability to pay.” Though historically, most children at Kurn Hattin
hailed from throughout the Northeast, more recently, Kurn Hattin has also begun partnering with programs such as Friends of the Children New York (C. Sanderson, personal communication, October 20, 2014), an early intervention program providing long-term youth advocacy and mentoring to children from Harlem and the South Bronx who are the most at-risk children and possess the least amount of resiliency. Through these partnerships, Kurn Hattin is expanding the racial and cultural diversity of its school, a positive evolution for Kurn Hattin and for all of the children who attend. Increasing the diversity of the population to better reflect the larger society creates more opportunities for children to be exposed to a range of cultures, ideas, and experiences, which can only lead to the enrichment of a child’s life, better preparing them for the diversity of people and cultures they will likely encounter after leaving the school.

According to Executive Director, Connie Sanderson, fifty percent of children at Kurn Hattin show emotional or behavioral difficulties and most have experienced some type of trauma or loss (C. Sanderson, personal communication, October 20, 2014). As a privately funded entity, Kurn Hattin’s programming is “not geared toward serving children with severe behavioral or emotional challenges, nor toward special education or learning disabilities” (Kurn Hattin Fact Sheet, 2014, p.1). Each child considered for admission to the school is assessed in terms of how they will fit in with the other children and the environment, with the safety and needs of all of the children being a major factor in admission decisions. In a safe and nurturing environment, Kurn Hattin provides a place where children coming from disadvantaged and adverse family situations can “live, grow, learn, and thrive” (Kurn Hattin, 2014). While caring for and educating children, Kurn Hattin also helps support family connectedness through encouraging involvement in family days and events, family counseling services, and other outreach efforts.
The programming at Kurn Hattin is designed to address the emotional, educational, and social needs of its resident students. Kurn Hattin provides many opportunities for exercise and outdoor activities, including an outdoor pool, playing fields, a horse arena, hiking trails, a gymnasium, and “expansive lawns for pick up games” (Kurn Hattin website, 2014, Campus tour section, para. 1). Equine and canine pet therapy programs “provide students with the chance to learn about themselves and their interactions with others through caring for and connecting with the animals” (Campus tour section, para. 1), fostering leadership and teamwork skills, self discipline, and a sense of collective responsibility through their participation in these activities.

Kurn Hattin addresses the unique social, behavioral, and mental health needs of the children in their care in a number of ways. The school offers a variety of music and sports programs, therapeutic horse riding with a certified therapeutic instructor, a sustainable gardening program, yoga classes, and also offers both individual and group therapy with licensed counselors. Although children do not get to choose which therapy they receive, they and their families are both participants in therapy plans and 504 educational plans.

Family programs, family counseling, and groups such as ACOA, NA, and AA are also offered at Kurn Hattin, and the school has expanded its outreach work with parents in an effort to maintain relationships. Efforts include transporting families to and from events, offering gas cards to families to assist with transportation costs, and the use of email and facebook. An outreach worker is also employed to help lessen the challenges associated with the transition from the school (C. Sanderson, personal communication, October 20, 2014).

Critique of Kurn Hattin Homes for Children

Unlike public education institutions that must accept all students, even those with the most challenging needs, Kurn Hattin Homes for Children is a private institution relying almost
exclusively on private, charitable donations to fund their program. As such, Kurn Hattin is able to be more selective in its admission process. Kurn Hattin’s programming is not intended for children whose behaviors are considered very high-risk or for those with severe special needs. As a result, some of the most at-risk children do not have access to the opportunities Kurn Hattin offers to those who have been evaluated and assessed to be a better fit for the program. Though it is clear that Kurn Hattin’s mission is to transform the lives of disadvantaged children, and Kurn Hattin has succeeded in this mission for thousands of children over the years, the fact that some of the most at-risk children are found to be ineligible for the program due to their higher level of need is a drawback to the program and strengthens the argument for the exploration of publicly funded residential education programs that serve all children, regardless of their level of need.

**Summary of the Literature**

The literature in this review suggests children who have been exposed to early traumas and adverse experiences are at risk of a range of emotional, behavioral, and educational problems. The literature also suggests that the risks associated with children who have been exposed to traumatic or adverse events can be mitigated through consistent and safe relationships with caring, supportive people in a stable, consistent, supportive, encouraging, and challenging environment. Although foster care can be a positive experience for some children, many children in foster care have negative experiences while in care including being placed in multiple settings, which has been associated with negative outcomes, socially, emotionally, behaviorally, and academically due to inconsistent caregiving and broken social and academic experiences. Children in foster care are also sometimes mistreated while in care and can experience problems with transitioning out of care, including not receiving proper information about their choices and not being included in meetings to determine their futures after leaving care. Further, the
literature suggests that at-risk or disadvantaged children who attend residential education programs have the potential to be both positively and negatively impacted by their attendance at the programs.

The long-term, stable and structured nature of residential education programs leads to stability, consistency, and increased permanency for at-risk children in need of out-of-home placement. The positive experiences of attending residential education programs might be increased feelings of safety, improved relationships with family members, the development of strong emotional connections to providers and peers, increased social opportunities, access to extracurricular activities which may lead to an increase in self-esteem, confidence, mastery and competence, feelings of belonging and positive identity formation, as well as positive academic experiences and increased graduation rates. Negative experiences might be disconnection from families leading to negative emotional experiences, difficulty adjusting to the new environments, and the potential for bullying or other mistreatment while in care.
CHAPTER III

Methodology

Research Purpose and Question

The purpose of this study is to explore and analyze the experiences and perspectives of former resident students of a private, charitable, therapeutic children’s home and junior boarding school -- Kurn Hattin Homes for Children -- focusing on how the student’s lives were impacted by attending the homes and school. The research question guiding this study is: How did the experience of attending a therapeutic children’s home and school impact student’s lives, emotionally, socially, and educationally? The study will address two main areas of interest: How were student’s lives impacted by attending Kurn Hattin? Impacted refers to any change, either positive or negative, in the student’s emotional, social, or educational experience as a result of attending the school. And which factors or interventions at Kurn Hattin did the students find to be most effective in meeting their particular needs? Factors or interventions refers to any programs, activities, physical, relational, or curricular aspects of the school or classroom environment, boarding school structure, or relationships with house parents, teachers, or peers. From this study, I hoped that themes would emerge that described the experiences of at-risk children who attended the homes and school which could then be used in helping to shape decisions around education funding policy, out-of-home placement decisions, and practice.

Research Design and Rationale

Many of the articles I read in the process of completing this study revealed a need for further studies to better understand the experiences of at-risk youth who attend residential education programs, either voluntarily or involuntarily. Several articles stated a need for further
qualitative and quantitative research of former residents. To answer my research question, I conducted a qualitative, exploratory, inductive study, the purpose of which was to gather personal, rich, descriptive data and information about the experiences of former resident students. The goal of this design is to “develop an authentic understanding of a social setting” (Engle & Schutt, 2013, p. 21), which, in this case, was a private, therapeutic children’s home and school.

My study utilized “intensive interviewing” techniques, with the goal of capturing “in-depth information on the interviewee’s feelings, experiences, and perceptions (Lofland & Lofland, 1984, as cited in Engle & Schutt, 2013, p. 271). This technique resulted in richer data than what would have been gathered through the use of a quantitative survey design. Through the use of inductive research methods, I used the data I had gathered to help explain and to create meaning from the participants’ responses (Engle & Schutt, 2013).

My choice of this research design was purposeful, as most of the subjects of the study had experienced traumatic or adverse events at some point in their lives. Herman (1997) describes one of the major effects of trauma as a feeling of powerlessness and being disconnected from others. It was important to me that the subjects of my study be given the opportunity to speak about their experiences with more freedom than would have been possible in a survey design, thereby increasing their experience of empowerment through the telling of their own experience. In choosing to conduct interviews, rather than doing an anonymous survey, I hoped to offer them a feeling of connectedness with the researcher.

For this study, six interviews were conducted by telephone with six study participants. The interviews were semi-structured to allow for flexibility in the interview process, and
consisted of 10 demographic questions and a set of 19 open and closed-ended questions arranged by themes (Appendix D2).

**Sample**

My research was gathered through the use of non-probability, purposive, and convenience sampling techniques. Because my study did not use a random sampling procedure, it was by definition a non-probability sampling method (Engle & Schutt, 2013). My sample subjects were chosen for their unique position as former resident students of the homes and school. Due to the nature of convenience sampling, we cannot be assured that those who choose to participate in the study are a true representative sample of the larger population of former resident students (Engle & Schutt, 2013).

The population for this study consisted of former students of Kurn Hattin Homes for Children, and participants of the study are a sample of the larger population. Included in the study are people who: (a) are age 18 or older; (b) attended the school for at least two years between 1980 and 2010; (c) are able to read and speak English; (d) were willing to participate in the study. All of the sample participants identified as white, and five of the six subjects were women, which created a sample bias. I will discuss the lack of diversity in my sample in the following chapter.

**Recruitment**

Out of the ten original subjects I recruited for this study, only six returned the consent forms (Appendix C3) and followed through with the interviews. My initial recruitment strategy for this study was to draw from both the Alumni of Kurn Hattin Homes facebook page and the Kurn Hattin alumni paper mailing list, as a way of being as inclusive as possible to those who may not have access to computers or to the Internet. Originally, I had planned to include only
former resident students who had attended the school for at least two years between 1998 and 2008. After encountering some initial setbacks, and in the interest of time, I opened up the timeframe to include anyone who had attended the school for at least two years from 1980 to 2010.

I began by requesting and receiving permission from Connie Sanderson, Executive Director of Kurn Hattin Homes for Children to access former Kurn Hattin students through the Alumni of Kurn Hattin Homes facebook page and paper mailing list (Appendix A: Permission Letter). Next, I posted my recruitment flyer (Appendix B1) to the Alumni of Kurn Hattin Homes facebook page on January 29, 2015, after the Smith College School for Social Work Human Subjects Review Board (HSRB) had given its approval for the study. The recruitment flyer contained all of my eligibility criteria, so that participants could self-identify before contacting me. One week later, I had received no responses to my flyer and contacted the Smith’s HSRB to request a change in protocol (Appendix E1). On February 7th, I received the approval for a change to my study (Appendix E2). I then amended my flyer and reposted it to the alumni of Kurn Hattin facebook page, adding an incentive of a $20 gift card for all participants (Appendix B2).

By February 20, 2015, two people had contacted me, both of whom turned out to be ineligible to participate in the study. Once again, I applied to the HSRB for a change of protocol (Appendix E3), this time allowing for a greater range of years from which to draw my sample. On, February 22, after receiving approval for my study change (Appendix E4), I updated and reposted my flyer to the facebook page (Appendix B3). By early March, it occurred to me that including some interview questions about participants’ experiences of foster care might strengthen my study, so I applied to the HSRB for a third change of protocol (Appendix E5). I
then added four additional questions to the original list of questions (D1). On March 10th I received an approval for my additional interview questions (Appendix E6), and began scheduling interviews with subjects.

The second proposed method of recruitment was through the Kurn Hattin Homes for Children alumni paper mailing list. The executive director of the school had generously agreed to assist me in contacting former resident students who met my eligibility requirements. After she and a member of her staff had located potential study subjects, she sent a letter to all of them asking for permission to release their addresses to me. Due to complications that arose around study bias, the Smith College HSRB informed me that I would not be able to use any of the 68 potential subjects in my study.

Once participants learned about my study, they contacted me either by email, by telephone, or through a facebook message. After screening for eligibility, I sent them two copies of the consent form (Appendix C3) plus a self-addressed, stamped envelope, which they signed and sent back to me by U.S. mail. Upon receiving the returned and signed consent forms, I sent participants a minimum of two mental health resources that they could use, in the event that they felt distressed after participating in the interviews. I then contacted participants by telephone or by email and arranged the interviews, which were audio-recorded.

**Ethics and Safeguards**

Ethical concerns that were raised by this study included confidentiality, anonymity, and the potential for emotional distress. This study is confidential, but not anonymous. To maintain confidentiality, all interviews will be kept in a locked box for three years after the completion of the study. When writing up my findings, I created a pseudonym for all participants so that their identities could not be connected to the responses. Anonymity in this study could not be
guaranteed due to the nature of the interviewing process. This study also had the potential to cause the participating subjects psychological distress due to remembering past events that may have been traumatic or painful.

To reduce the likelihood of psychological distress, I informed all potential and confirmed participants about the possible negative effects of participation. I also provided them with web links, telephone numbers, and physical addresses to local counseling or support services they could access if they felt the need to do so. Initially, I did not offer compensation for participation in my study, but upon further reflection, I came to realize that it was important to me that I compensate all subjects fairly for their time and their willingness to share their experiences. For that reason, each participant received a $20 gift card as an appreciation for their time and contributions to my study.

I addressed validity and reliability concerns for this study by conducting a pilot study of the interview questions and by coding all answers by direct transcription.

**Data Collection Methods**

In this study, I used semi-structured, in-depth interviews to collect qualitative data about the experiences of former resident students of a private, therapeutic children’s home/junior boarding school. All of the interviews were conducted by telephone between March and April 2015, and lasted between 25 and 35 minutes in length. Interviews were then audio recorded and later transcribed for analysis.

All interviews began with ten demographic questions, including current age, age of entry and exit from the school, gender, race/ethnicity, relationship status, income level, highest level of educational attainment, and current employment status and occupation. Next, participants were asked 19 qualitative questions arranged by themes (Appendix D2). Themes covered in the
interviews were: separation from primary caregiver – emotional impact, caregiver involvement, emotional needs, relationships, activities/clubs/groups/programs, academics, structure of the school, present day relationships, and foster care. There was one follow-up question, which allowed participants the opportunity to talk about anything else that they hadn’t yet mentioned and that they felt was important for me to know.

Examples of the qualitative questions were: (a) What was the reason you went to Kurn Hattin Homes for Children?; (b) What emotions do you remember experiencing about being separated from your parents, caregivers, or other family members?; (c) Did you feel safe while you were at Kurn Hattin?; (d) Was there anyone you felt you could trust and go to for support to help you deal with strong emotions such as sadness, loneliness, anxiety, frustration, anger, or fear?; (e) Please describe any relationships you had while at Kurn Hattin that were important to you; (f) Was there anything difficult for you about attending Kurn Hattin?; (g) Did you ever live in foster care?

Data Analysis

The data that was analyzed for this study came from the qualitative interviews with six former resident students. The data was coded by word and by phrase by this researcher and connected to the themes of the interview questions. The data was then used in conjunction with the literature to discuss what was learned from the study, adding to the literature already available on the experiences of at-risk children who attend residential education programs.
Chapter IV

Findings

This chapter outlines the findings of this qualitative, exploratory study involving six former resident students of Kurn Hatti Homes for Children, a long-time residential education program located in southern Vermont. The interviews for this study encompassed several areas of inquiry into the participants’ experiences of attending the homes and school, beginning with the circumstances that led to their being at Kurn Hattin. Other areas of inquiry included: subjects’ response to separation from family, adjustment the new environment, their experience of relationships, activities, and academics, impact of the structure of Kurn Hattin on their lives, and enduring relationships after Kurn Hattin. Subjects were also asked if they had ever lived in foster care and if so, what their experiences had been.

Several themes and subthemes emerged from the interviews. This section will describe those themes and subthemes, referencing examples that have come directly from the participants themselves. In this way, I will maintain fidelity to the participants’ voices.

Demographic Data

Five out of the six subjects of the study identified as female and one as male. Participants’ current ages ranged from 20 to 48. Five of the participants were in their 40s, while only one was in their 20s, resulting in an average age of 41.2, with a mode of 43, and a median of 44.5. The range of years that participants attended the school was from 1972 to 2010, with the range of ages at entry spanning from six to twelve. The average age upon entry was 8.5 and at exit, was 14.3. Length of attendance ranged from three years to nine years, with the average
length of attendance at the school being 5.6 years, indicating a strong consistency in participants’ living arrangements, relationships, and academic experience.

The participants reported a range of relationship statuses: three were married, two were in long-term relationships, and one was divorced and single. Four subjects had completed at least one year of college, a rate more than three times that reported for youth in foster care who have graduated high school (National Working Group on Foster Care and Education, 2014). One participant had dropped out of high school after the 11th grade, one had completed high school, one had completed one year of college, one had completed three years of college, one had received an associate degree, and one had received a bachelor’s degree.

Two of the subjects reported full-time employment, two reported working part-time, one was legally disabled and not a member of the workforce, and one reported being unemployed by choice. Subjects also reported a range of occupations: personal care assistant and handyman, accounting department, certified hospice nurse, direct sales, and stay-at-home mother. Subjects were also asked to report their incomes, and were given a range of choices: 0-$25,000, $25,000-$50,000, $50,000-$75,000, and $75,000 and above. One participant reported their combined annual family income as falling between 0 and $25,000, four participants reported income falling between $25,000 and $50,000, and one reported income above $75,000.

Five of the participants in this study were placed at Kurn Hattin, while one had requested to be placed due to her siblings already being at the school. All six respondents had experienced some form of trauma and adversity in their families, which impacted the decision to enroll them at the homes and school. Subjects reported experiences of poverty and homelessness, parental abuse of alcohol, violent neighborhoods, sexual and other non-specific abuse, and neglect.
Subjects also reported a range of referral sources including child services, social workers, church friends, and neighbors.

The following sections outline the themes that emerged through the qualitative data analysis of this study, as well as the related subthemes. The data is organized into sections along a timeline that maps subjects’ experiences before coming to Kurn Hattin, upon entry to Kurn Hattin, after initial adjustment to Kurn Hattin, and at exit from Kurn Hattin, followed by present day reflections. The main themes outlined in this section are: Before Kurn Hattin: adversity and instability at home, At Entry to Kurn Hattin: separation from family and adjustment to the new environment, Life at Kurn Hattin: relationships, extracurricular activities, and academics, Transitioning From Kurn Hattin: uncertainty, loss of community, and the wish for a Kurn Hattin High School, Kurn Hattin Reflections: enduring relationships and gratitude for opportunities received, and finally, Foster Care: loss of stability, safety, and love.

**Before Kurn Hattin: Adversity and Instability at Home**

All six of the participants of this study described traumatic and chaotic experiences of adversity or an otherwise unstable home environment prior to their arriving at Kurn Hattin Homes for Children. The degree of adversity and instability was severe enough for all participants that they were either placed by child protective services or referred by family or friends to Kurn Hattin. These various experiences of adversity that participants reported during the interviewing process included poverty and homelessness, sexual abuse, parental emotional difficulties, parental alcohol abuse, and neglect. Subthemes included here are poverty and home problems.

**Poverty.** Several of the participants described experiences of financial hardship and poverty at home that directly negatively affected their parents’ ability to care for them. Two
participants reported that their parents were divorced or separated and that their mothers experienced financial hardship in trying to care for them. Two participants also experienced some kind of homelessness. Kelly remembered her mother receiving food aid from the government and from the church:

I know she had financial difficulties. My dad was on the road, you know, as a truck driver, so I didn’t have much of a relationship with him. We always had to go to the church and get canned food. We got food stamps, and the like, so I know she was very poor.

Angela also remembered her mother’s financial struggles and an absent father:

My mother was in a bad place, and really not able to take care of me, financially and emotionally. And my dad was away...

Two of the participants experienced some form of homelessness. Tammy commented:

I had an alcoholic parent and I was kind of living on the street. Eventually, DSS got involved and put me at Kurn Hattin.

Jackie also stated:

My brother is special needs, and they just couldn’t take care of me because they had to deal with him. My stepdad was very abusive, and at one point I was actually living in a tent. It was just a really bad family situation.

**Home problems.** Subjects described a variety of problems at home that were precipitating factors in their coming to Kurn Hattin. Richard told a story about his mother’s experience of being divorced and having difficulty raising his brothers and sisters:

My parents were divorced and my mother really needed help taking care of us kids. She wasn’t able to work and had three of us at home to take care of. She was pretty angry and
depressed a lot. Our great-grandmother finally stepped in and got us placed at the school. My brother was already at the school. There were internal problems at home. The family was broken and things were very dysfunctional.

Kathy described being a victim of ongoing sexual abuse:

I was in a dysfunctional family with sexual abuse that had been occurring pretty much for my whole life, and I was a victim of the situation. I was put in Kurn Hattin when it all came out. I didn’t know which way my emotions were going and they didn’t know what to do with me, so they thought that Kurn Hattin was the place for me to go.

Kelly remembered her mom choosing her boyfriend over her and her siblings, and sending them, one by one to the school:

Well, my brother and sister had gone initially. My oldest sister ended up getting shipped out first. And then my mother found this boyfriend and then he took precedence. And then my mom started saying, now you go, and you go [the other siblings]. And then basically, I was the only one left.

All of the participants had experienced some type of adverse or traumatic experiences before arriving at Kurn Hattin that had impacted their lives negatively. In every situation, their parents were either unable or unwilling to provide appropriate care for them. Under these circumstances, the decision to remove the children from the home and place them at Kurn Hattin was beneficial in preventing further exposure to traumatic or adverse experiences, which has been shown to be associated with negative outcomes. Placement at Kurn Hattin offered safety, stability, and consistent care to the children, all factors linked to healthy social, emotional, and educational development.
At Entry to Kurn Hattin: Separation From Family and Adjustment to New Environment

Five of the participants experienced very strong affective reactions around their initial experience of being separated from their families, while one participant described the experience as wholly positive. The subthemes included in this section are strong affective reactions around separation and difficulty in adjusting to a new environment.

Strong affective reactions around separation. Many participants described feelings of sadness, anxiety, anger and fear, as well as confusion about why they were being left at the homes and school. Some participants described feeling as though they had been abandoned and some thought they were being punished. One participant described a near total loss of memory about her first year at the school. The lack of communication about why they were going to the school intensified their feelings. Richard described a very traumatic experience of his separation:

I was pretty devastated at first. I took out my anger on myself by abusing myself: I was hitting myself and scratching my face. It felt scary and uncertain, at least for the first few weeks. It seemed like I just got dropped off on somebody’s steps for no reason and with no explanation. It made me feel like I had done something wrong at home and that this was a punishment.

Angela also described her experience of separation from her family as a traumatic and confusing time, with no communication about why she was at the homes and school.

I felt extreme anxiety and confusion. My mother didn’t tell me where I was going, and she just drove me from my home straight to Kurn Hattin and dropped me off with the clothes on my back. All I grabbed from home was a little statue from my dresser. I did not see my mother again throughout the course of that year, and my father was away, so I did not see him. Through that first year I don’t even remember, holidays: Who came to
get me? Where I was? I don’t remember any of it. I felt like I had done something wrong and had just been abandoned. I kept thinking, “What did I do wrong? Why was I left behind?” I missed my friends and I just wanted to go home.

Tammy remembered a similar traumatic experience of feeling distressed, confused, and scared:

It was awful at first. I remember crying, kicking, and screaming. I was scared and didn’t know what to think. I hated being there… I hated being separated from my mom, my dad, and my family. I felt like I had been just thrown to the wolves. It made me feel abandoned, and like they didn’t care about me.

These three subjects reported strong negative responses to separation from their families. Reactions can vary among people who are separated from their primary attachment figures, based on many factors including age, context of separation, and the presence of a familiar person (Bowlby, 1973). These subjects were all children at the time of the separation, they were not fully informed about the reason for the separation, and they were placed at the school under difficult circumstances, and did not know any of the new adults in their lives, all factors that added to the negative emotional experience of the separation.

Kelly recalled feeling emotionally torn between wanting to remain with her siblings and also wanting to return home with her mother:

At first I had begged my mother to let me go, because my siblings were there and I didn’t want to be away from them. I actually thought of it as going on kind of a vacation or taking a trip. I was eager to go at first, and I was happy to be with my brother. But when I finally got there, I wanted to just go back home and my mother said, “No.” Initially, I was just sad, because I was so homesick. But I didn’t feel abandoned. I knew my mother loved me.
Kelly’s previous awareness of the school and her desire to join her siblings may have blunted the intensity of separation from family and acted as a protective factor for her. Her account suggests that having a sibling at the school and having some sense of choice in her decision to attend Kurn Hattin made her feel more secure.

Jackie described the difficulty of being separated from her brother, but at the same time, felt a sense of relief about being away from a difficult situation at home:

It was really hard for me to be away from my little brother. He and I were really close, and I was used to taking care of him a lot because he had special needs. It was hard to cope with the fact that my family pretty much didn’t want me. But in terms of how I felt about going to the school, honestly, it was a relief. I was happy to be there and away from the situation at home.

Kathy described a very different experience of the separation from family. She stated:

For me, it was an awesome experience because it was the only time in my childhood that I had any sort of “normal” childhood. So for me, it was a relief, and it was amazing to just have these people embrace you. I know I loved being there because it was safe for me.

Most subjects experienced separation from their families as traumatic, leading to a range of strong affective reactions. Subjects described feelings of anger, confusion, anxiety, fear, and despair. They responded in both internalizing and externalizing ways, including ruminating and self-harm. Both Jackie and Kathy described feeling a sense of relief at going to live at Kurn Hattin. Both subjects had previously described an unsafe home environment where either they or others were victims of abuse. The need to feel safe may have strongly affected their experience of being placed at Kurn Hattin, lessening the trauma of separation from family.
**Difficulty adjusting to the new environment.** Four of the six participants experienced difficulty adjusting to Kurn Hattin, due to having to adapt to new and unfamiliar people, rules, and schedules. For several participants, being at the school was the first time in their lives that they had experienced stability, consistency, and feelings of safety. All the subjects did eventually adjust to and come to appreciate the consistency and structure of Kurn Hattin, calling it helpful and important. Richard described his feelings around trying to adjust to the new people and rules and not knowing if or when he would be seeing his family again. Eventually, he resigned himself to and ultimately came to appreciate the situation:

> It was hard because all of a sudden someone else was taking care of us. What was most difficult was not being able to get home to your family; not knowing whether you were going to be able to see them or whether they were going to be able to pick you up for vacations. You could only call or write letters once a month. You couldn’t get a call from your family. You were shut off for long periods of time. I felt like a prisoner. After a while I kinda realized that that’s just how it is and that’s how it had to be. It was difficult adjusting to the rules, but it was also helpful. It was good for helping people feel safe and have consistency in their lives. I know a lot of people felt pretty lost for the first few weeks or months until they learned the rules and figured out how to fit in. It was just good to know what to expect next, ‘cuz I never had that in my family back home.

Kathy echoed the challenge of adjusting to the new environment and structure, but also spoke of the importance of consistency, noting the lack of consistency in her life before coming to the school:

> It was a difficult adjustment, but after a while it was helpful. I never had that in my life before coming to Kurn Hattin and so at first, I was kind of taken aback by it. I didn’t like
it at first, but later on I appreciated it because it gave me a sense of purpose. I liked that they kept us busy. I knew where I was supposed to be. I knew when they said that at four o’clock we were going here, they meant it, and I knew it was really going to happen.

Tammy also described a difficult adjustment to Kurn Hattin’s structured environment. She added, however, that she came to appreciate the structure and how it shaped her.

Well, first it was really hard because, like any small child, they don’t like doing chores, let alone take care of their selves. I wasn’t used to having a set time of doing things, so for me, it was like, horrible. But once I got used to it and went with the flow, it made me become who I am today...I felt very safe and secure. I had the security of structure, and there were rules instead of just having to do what you want.

Jackie did not report any difficulty in adjusting to the school environment or the structure, despite coming from a family where there had been no structure, and she also expressed an appreciation for structure in her life.

I think it had a good effect on me. I mean, where I came from, I didn’t have structure, and I think that’s something a kid needs. They were always keeping us busy and I liked it. I definitely felt safe because it was a lot more of a stable environment and there were people who actually cared about me there. You know, I was coming from the projects where all this bad stuff was going on, and there wasn’t love there, there was violence there. And there wasn’t violence at Kurn Hattin.

Kelly also appreciated the structure and having her basic needs taken care of, which gave her a feeling of home:

It gave things a sense of predictability and made it feel like home. It was important to have that feeling of consistency. That daily routine for a child is important. I felt very
safe. There was food and shelter, and there were people acting like a mother and father: our house parents.

The majority of participants described a difficult adjustment to the new environment and structure, including new rules, relationships, and expectations. Whether their own homes and families were healthy or unhealthy, helpful or unhelpful, the children were accustomed to the norms of their homes and families and had formed attachments to their primary caretakers. Adjusting to the new environment was an additional trauma for most subjects, as it meant coping with the loss of what was familiar, building trusting relationships with new people, and accepting the norms of the new environment, all difficult social and emotional tasks for small children.

Herman (1997) states that to recover from a traumatic event, children need a feeling of safety, stability, and connection to others, all elements that Kurn Hattin provided. Eventually, each of the subjects came to appreciate the structure for reasons of predictability, consistency, and feelings of safety, features of life at Kurn Hattin that may have been scarce or unavailable in their own homes. Jackie and Kelly had less troubled adjusting than some of the other children. For Jackie, who described coming from a violent neighborhood, the safety, stability, and caring, attentive parental figures Kurn Hattin provided were a haven from the stressors she had experienced at home, making her adjustment to the new environment easier on her. Kelly had siblings at the school and had requested to be placed at Kurn Hattin, both factors which would have resulted in an easier adjustment for her. It is also possible that she was more resilient than some of the other children and could tolerate stressors more easily (Egeland, Carlson, & Sroufe, 1993; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998).
Life at Kurn Hattin: Relationships, Extracurricular Activities, and Academics

All of the participants described relationships with staff and peers and involvement in programs and activities as important factors for them socially, emotionally, and academically.

**Relationships.** All six of the subjects described relationships made at the Kurn Hattin as very important to them. Houseparents provided subjects with comfort, encouragement, a feeling of safety, a sense of connection and belonging, and the feeling of being part of a family. Teachers and coaches provided subjects with support and encouragement, and pushed them to believe in themselves and to achieve academically and physically. Relationships with peers were also important, as they helped subjects feel less alone and better understood. The subjects’ sense of isolation was mitigated by living among other children who, like them, had been removed from their homes and relocated to Kurn Hattin. Tammy remembered feeling she could trust her houseparents, counselors, and music teacher. It was important to her that people loved and cared for each other, creating a feeling of family. Friendships with other students were also important to her.

The people there showed me that they cared about me, and I got to know what that was really about. I had a couple of house parents, Mrs. M and then Ms. W. During my seventh and eighth grade year we also had a music teacher, Ms. L. They also had counselors and guidance counselors that I could talk to every now and then. It was like a family atmosphere, they way we just loved each other. You know, like when you got hurt, everyone was concerned about you. The love and the trust were important. Some of my friends were also a great help. Some of them had come from similar situations and we would kind of pull together and cope with it altogether.
Angela recalled that developing relationships with houseparents gave her a feeling of family and a sense of safety, which in turn allowed her to begin trying new things. Relationships with friends were also important to her. She said:

I think having an emotional connection to some of the houseparents, like the B’s and the C’s made me finally feel like I was part of a family. I didn’t feel very safe the first year. I had a lot of anxiety and continued to have feelings of abandonment. I kept wondering, “Why am I here and not home with my family?” When I moved to the next cottage and met the houseparents, I started to get emotionally connected and began to feel like part of a family. Then I began finding my way, making new friends, and trying new things. And then there were my relationships with my friends, too. With Kelly, we were close like sisters. And there was the relationship I really loved that I had with Edward [another student]: there was a whole other dynamic. He was like a boyfriend, but we didn’t really have boyfriends in fourth grade. He was like a brother to me, very protective. The friendships I had were invaluable.

Kelly remembered that she could go to her houseparents for help and support. Indeed, she thought of her house parents as a mother and father. Also, her friendships with two other students provided her with emotional support and a feeling of family.

I was very, very close to my houseparents, the C’s, so if I had any issue, I could go to them. To me, they were my mother and father. And even more so, I had my two friends who I was always close to, and whatever kind of emotion I was experiencing I would share with those two folks. I really trusted and loved them and considered them my family, my best friends. I’m still in touch with them today and still consider them to be
like my sisters. Kurn Hattin was my family, and I think that I felt that I enjoyed being there more than I did at home. Kurn Hattin became my home and my family.

Jackie remembered teachers, a houseparent, the equine therapy instructor, and the educational and residential director at that time as people she could go to for support. She described the importance of having an adult who listened to her, and how her equestrian instructor helped her find ways to heal emotionally:

Ms. L., she was always there to listen, and that was important to have an adult listening. I formed a relationship with my horse instructor, Ms. M., too. She always talked to me about things, and she’s the one that helped me form kind of who I am. She taught me how to find healing through other things, like horses, and positive things instead of negative things that I had been exposed to at home. There was one teacher, Ms. W: she and I were really close. And also a house parent, Ms. D, and then Mr. F., obviously. He was very involved with all of us…

Despite the strong sense of connection reported by most subjects, not everyone felt safe and connected to all of the staff at Kurn Hattin. Angela described feeling safe at some times and not safe at other times. She linked some of her feelings of a lack of safety to a particular teacher with whom she felt uncomfortable and even unsafe. She recalled:

But there were also certain people there I didn’t trust and who made me feel uncomfortable. Mr. B [a teacher] and his whole family seemed cruel. I was afraid of them and stayed away from them as much as I could.

Although Angela’s experience of not feeling safe around a particular teacher was not typical for most subjects, it is disturbing and bears noting. Even at Kurn Hattin, a place that for
most subjects embodied safety, security, and a feeling of family, clearly there were exceptions and the potential for negative experiences and even for further trauma.

All the subjects of this study described relationships at Kurn Hattin that were important to them and that impacted them positively. Through relationships with houseparents, staff members, and other students, subjects found comfort, support, a feeling of safety, belonging, and a sense of family. Safety, both in relationships and environment, and connection to others are two important factors supporting recovery from traumatic events and rebuilding healthy lives and connections (Herman, 1997). For children who have been exposed to early adversity and traumatic events, including separation from their families, building new relationships with safe, caring adults, as well as with children who find themselves in similar circumstances, is a key part of recovery and growth. Most subjects reported that their parents were either disengaged or minimally involved in the subjects’ lives when they were at Kurn Hattin. This parental disengagement would help to explain the importance of the new relationships formed at the school and the subjects’ need for a feeling of family.

**Extracurricular activities.** All of the subjects reported the positive impact of participation in extracurricular activities. Four out of the six mentioned the music program, two people mentioned the arts programs such as drawing and ceramics, three people mentioned learning skills such as typing, sewing, weaving, printing, cooking, and cleaning. The equine therapy program, the Big Sister Program, Busy Boys, and attending church on Sundays were also mentioned. Many of the participants referred to the programs as therapeutic, healing, and nurturing. Through participation in the programs they learned skills, felt challenged and encouraged, felt connected to the community, learned to take pride in their accomplishments,
strengthened their self esteem, boosted their confidence, shaped their identities, and found emotional healing. Jackie described benefitting mostly from the equine therapy program:

They had something called therapeutic horse riding, which is kind of like healing through horses, and I really enjoyed that. The horse program was a big part of my time there. I became an accomplished rider. I have ribbons all over my living room walls. That was probably the biggest part of my coping.

Richard described the arts and music programs as providing him with an outlet to express his feelings and emotions and helping shape his sense of self:

Art and music were definitely awesome outlets for me. Before I got involved in music, I didn’t know who I was. I was very shy and had a hard time. But playing music made me feel like I was a person; like I was somebody! Music opened me up a lot as far as communicating with people. I loved going out and playing the concerts. Taking what they taught you and going out and showing what you learned. Being able to turn a lot of people on like that; it was a great feeling for me. I still carry all that with me today. And with art, it was a way for me to express myself, because I didn’t always have a lot of words.

Tammy remembered the music and sports programs as helpful distractions from difficult emotions, as well as the relationship with her Big Sister, attending church and participating in a church sponsored play. Her early church participation also helped connect her to God as an adult.

I was really big into the music and sports programs. They were helpful in keeping my mind off of stuff...keeping me preoccupied off the bad stuff and onto the good. And I stayed with it, even after I left. And I had a Big Sister who would come and get me on the weekends and take me up to Vermont Academy for football games and basketball games
and stuff. It was just really good to get off the campus sometimes. And I can’t forget the church. We did a program there, a play, about Joseph and the Coat of Many Colors, and I was involved in that and really loved it. I used to love to go to church on Sundays. And that brought me closer to God now as an adult.

Kathy remembered working on ceramics as a way of helping her manage and channel her feelings into something creative. She stated:

We had the whole ceramic thing just set up downstairs in my cottage. That was something I always enjoyed. And there were times when my house parents knew that I just needed to be alone, and they would let me go down and paint my things just to be alone. I could just, kind of, get into my project and pour my feelings into whatever I’m making, whether I’m painting or sewing. I’ve always found that to be very therapeutic for myself.

Angela found a positive sense of identity through sports, which helped shaped her into an athlete, and a sense of accomplishment through learning many skills.

Sports were there in a real positive way for me. I delved into that as a distraction to try and busy myself. I like how [the coaches] really encouraged me to get involved. It made me feel that I belonged, and was part of a team. That was the segue into my becoming an athlete. I liked being able to work on the farm and learning how to sew and weave baskets. We learned the elements of cooking and cleaning and pretty much being responsible for your stuff, your space. I thought all of it was valuable.

Kelly recalled that having learned the skill of typing made her more confident and set her apart from others in her high school class. It continues to be helpful to her today.
I think about the typing. I mean, this is what I do today: I sit on the computer all day long. When I left Kurn Hattin, I was probably the strongest typist among the freshman. It’s great to have that know-how, and it makes you feel good that you have a little knowledge of something. And I learned to sew, too. I still use that today, and it’s great!

All of the participants described their involvement in activities and programs in positive ways. Through their involvement in Kurn Hattin programs and extracurricular activities, the students found therapeutic benefit, a sense of belonging, a sense of identity, an increase in their self-esteem and self-worth, and feelings of accomplishment. Participation in programs and activities allowed them to take on challenges, to learn to work together as part of a team, and to experience a feeling of accomplishment and achievement, all of which are vital stages of psychosocial development that must be mastered for continued growth into adulthood (Erikson, 1985). By making available extracurricular activities for all students, Kurn Hattin provided opportunities to experience activities that otherwise might not have been available to them due to financial and other barriers. Participation in extracurricular activities typically demands parental involvement and support, not to mention financial costs, precisely the kinds of advantages that most subjects did not have at home. Kurn Hattin provided students with access to horses to ride, musical instruments to play, facilities and equipment for participation in athletics, and studios for ceramics and other arts. Students also learned life skills like typing, cooking, and sewing. Subjects reported that skills they learned at Kurn Hattin continue to benefit them in their lives.

**Academics.** Most of the participants described their academic experiences at the school as positive, citing small class sizes, one-on-one attention, encouragement and support from teachers, and a supportive environment as important factors. Five out of six participants stated that attending Kurn Hattin had a positive effect on their academic accomplishments, while one of
participant reported not feeling prepared academically for high school. Subjects noted teachers’ high expectations, feeling academically challenged, benefitting from the teacher’s sense of drive and belief in students’ abilities, and that attending Kurn Hattin allowed them to focus on school and other programs, rather than on “adult things.” Three participants stated that they were academically advanced when they left Kurn Hattin and went on to high school, while two others reported feeling behind. Tammy recalled small class sizes allowing for extra tutoring as helpful for her learning.

We had a lot of one-on-one help. It helped me because I’m more of a hands-on person than a “show me on the board” type person. I was a slow learner. It took me a little longer to catch on to things sometimes. If I needed help, I could just raise my hand and my teacher would come help me instead of me having to wait until later on. My math teacher really broke it down for me so that I really understood. I always had the help I needed.

Problems at home had caused Kathy to do poorly in the public schools. She cited Kurn Hattin’s small class sizes, extra one-on-one help, and an environment where she was able to focus on school as key factors in her academic recovery and success:

When I got to Kurn Hattin, I did very well and that made me feel really good. I got all A’s and B’s, because I was finally able to focus on what a child is supposed to be focused on at that age: going to school and playing in the band, not adult things. Smaller class sizes and more one-on-one attention was helpful, ‘cuz I had come from public school, and, like, two years before I got there was when my whole life fell apart. I was being dragged through court proceedings and stuff like that, so I had done very poorly at school the year before. But when I got there, I was actually valedictorian of the class. Kurn
Hattin made me realize that I could do well by putting my mind to it and being able to focus on school. It certainly helped me for years after that.

Jackie cited small class sizes, teachers’ support and high expectations, and classrooms being grouped by ability rather than age as factors that were helpful to her:

Classes were a lot smaller than in public school, so you got more teacher involvement. Also, classes were set up by ability, and I was always kind of ahead of the kids in my class, so I was able to move to a place that was comfortable and challenging for me, rather than the easy stuff I went through in public school. All the teachers were really great! They pushed you to get good grades and they made it happen. If you didn’t understand, they’d figure out a way to help you understand. They pushed that drive for doing well at school.

The participant who attained the highest level of education did not believe that attending Kurn Hattin had any impact on her academic achievements. Angela stated:

When I think of Kurn Hattin, there’s nothing I can think of that’s academic-related at all. I don’t feel, academically, that there was anything that was helpful to me. I didn’t go into high school feeling exactly super-prepared for anything. Kurn Hattin was strictly an emotional experience for me.

It is difficult to know for certain what led to Angela’s very different experience of the academic program. It may have been related to the time period that she attended Kurn Hattin: during the late 70’s and early 80’s, which was before the campuses merged and a new administration came on board. It is also possible that for her, the intensity of her ongoing confusion and anxiety about why she had been sent to Kurn Hattin made it difficult for her to fully engage with the academics. Additionally, the importance she gives to the positive
experiences she had through relationships and activities may have been a more pressing need for
her and therefore, left a stronger impression on her than her experience of academics.

Most of the subjects stated that they benefitted from small class sizes, one-on-one
tutoring, and engaged and caring teachers in a supportive learning environment. The children’s
home environments had been unstable, unpredictable, and sometimes dangerous, all factors
associated with high stress responses in children. Such stress responses adversely impact
learning and development (De Young, Kenardy, & Cobham, 2011). It is difficult for a child to
focus and achieve academic success in the absence of a stable, predictable, and safe home
environment. The safety and stability of the Kurn Hattin environment in conjunction with caring,
supportive teachers and small class sizes all aided the children’s learning.

Overall, the subjects’ description of their experiences at Kurn Hattin Homes for Children
suggests many of the same qualities that Winnicott (1992) refers to in his writings on holding
environments for children who have experienced a lack of adequate care from their primary
caregiver(s). He states: “The child whose home fails to give a feeling of security looks outside
his home for the four walls… Often a child gets from relations and school what he missed in his
own actual home” (Winnicott, 1992, p. 228). In Winnicott’s thinking about ways to provide at-
risk children with the crucial experiences provided by an attentive and loving parent, he
specifically mentions residential education as a stable environment where children have access to
love, care, protection and some measure of flexibility. Kurn Hattin Homes for Children provided
children with all of these factors, significantly impacting their lives in a positive way.
Transition From Kurn Hattin: Uncertainty, Loss of Community, and the Wish for a Kurn Hattin High School

Five of the participants mentioned that their transition from Kurn Hattin was difficult. They cited a lack of communication about where they would be going after graduation, the vast differences in size between Kurn Hattin and the high schools to which they transferred, difficulty fitting in to their new school environments, and problems that still existed at home. Three participants mentioned that they wished the school had gone on to twelfth grade. Richard remembered that problems occurring at home and a lack of structure and expectations made the transition back home very difficult.

Things were very disorganized at home and my mother was struggling with trying to figure out how to take care of us after not having us around for years. There were no rules or bedtimes or anything, and nobody really helped you out with your homework or anything. We were kinda just left to fend for ourselves, and it didn’t take long to sort of feel like you just wanted to give up. We basically just ended up hanging out with friends and having a good time instead of focusing on school and doing what we shoulda been doing. It wasn’t a good situation. I always wished I had stayed in school and graduated. Actually, I wish Kurn Hattin went all the way through to the twelfth grade. That would’ve made a difference in my life, for sure!

Kelly had difficulty adjusting to the size of her new city and school and also to her mother’s authority over her after such a long absence:

When I had to leave the school, it was very difficult. You know, I really do wish it went to high school. I went from, what, maybe a handful of kids to hundreds. It was culture shock, for sure. I thought that [the new city] was this huge, large city. Also, having to
listen to or abide by anyone else’s rules was even more difficult. Because, you leave
Kurn Hattin and suddenly you’re 14 years old, and your mother, who didn’t raise you, is
telling you what to do. I wound up in foster care and was totally lost.

Tammy also found the new, larger environment to be difficult to adjust to. She stated:

It was a very hard transition. ‘Cuz, I mean, I was in there from the fourth grade and I was
used to that atmosphere. And suddenly you’re thrown out into the big world. I mean,
that’s a big transition. I didn’t know nobody. I mean, I was scared to death! Absolutely, it
was very hard. I really wish Kurn Hattin had a high school program. I think it would be
much easier for the children.

Kathy felt like she never fit in at the college prep school she transferred to from Kurn Hattin.

From Kurn Hattin, I went to [a co-ed boarding, prep school], and I just felt like I never fit
in. It was a bunch of rich, snotty kids, and I stayed there for three quarters of the first
year, but didn’t finish. Instead, I ended up going back home.

Angela recalled a lack of information about her transition from Kurn Hattin. She stated:

At the end of the four years, I didn’t even know where I was going. I just thought I was
probably going off to [a nearby prep school] or some place where I would just continue
on in an environment like Kurn Hattin. So I was in shock when that didn’t happen.

Transitioning from Kurn Hattin to their next home and school was described as a difficult
experience for many of the subjects. Problems that arose included a lack of communication about
plans for their transition, difficulty fitting into their new environment, a lack of preparation for
returning to the parent-child relationship, and a loss of community and structure. Given that all
of the subjects reported early family experiences of adversity such as a lack of safety, stability,
and predictability, their reported lack of communication about and preparation for the transition from Kurn Hattin to their new environment is concerning.

The age at which students leave Kurn Hattin is a crucial part of this issue. Children age 14 or 15 are at a particularly vulnerable stage in their lives and are deeply involved in the process of identity formation, which involves the process of determining who they are and how they fit in with peer groups, their communities, and the larger world (Erikson, 1985). Children living at home in secure and stable families have an advantage, in that their sense of belonging to a place is usually well established. Their experience of growing up among their peers gives them the opportunity to discover where they fit into their peer group. For children who have lived away from home at Kurn Hattin, their sense of place is the Kurn Hattin community, and their peers, the other resident students, both of which are abruptly lost upon graduation from Kurn Hattin. This sudden loss of community and stability was experienced as traumatic for many of the students, who were left to adapt to new relationships, new environments, and new rules and expectations apart from those whom they had previously relied on for comfort and support. Subjects who returned to homes where major problems still existed experienced additional stressors.

The fact that so many students experienced this transition as difficult suggests that it is an area that should be prioritized. Kurn Hattin would do well to put extra effort into assessing for potential problems and ensuring better transition outcomes. (A greater discussion of this is found later in the discussion section of this paper).

Subjects had a number of final reflections on the takeaways of attending Kurn Hattin Homes for Children, with main themes being enduring relationships and gratitude for the opportunities they had received. The next section explores those reflections.
Kurn Hattin Final Reflections: Enduring Relationships, Gratitude for Opportunities

Received

All of the subjects of this study maintained relationships with former students and staff members since leaving Kurn Hattin. The students’ desire to remain connected to Kurn Hattin friends and staff members has remained strong, and for some, has endured over 30 years. Many subjects refer to their former peers as “brothers” and “sisters,” and consider them to be family. Social media has played a role in connecting people and maintaining relationships.

Enduring relationships. 100% of the subjects of this study commented on the lasting friendships and relationships they had with people they originally met at the school: students, teachers, and other staff. All subjects had kept in contact with at least one person from the school. Participants consistently referred to other students from the homes and school as their “brothers,” “sisters,” and “best friends.” When describing the quality of their relationships they used phrases like “real close,” “super close,” “they mean the world to me,” “really special,” and “there’s a strong bond between us.” The relationships they had made at the school were deeply valuable and meaningful to them, and important for them to maintain. Tammy still visits some of her friends from the school and has reconnected to several through social media. She has also remained connected to staff.

Several of [the students] were still my brothers and sisters for a while. They just mean the world to me. For the most part, all the friends I made there, we’ve been real close. I go to visit two or three of them every year. I don’t know what I would do without my Kurn Hattin brothers and sisters. I get a lot of good advice from them. I also still talk to the music director and my math teacher…and also Chris Barry, and the nurse. Kathy also appreciated having others who went through a similar experience. She stated:
There are certain people in my class that I’ve always kept in touch with and we’re definitely Kurn Hattin sisters. We try to get together as much as we can. And there’s definitely a bond between us all that wouldn’t be there if we hadn’t have been where we had been in life at the time.

Jackie is also still in contact with her friends and is very close to them. She appreciates that they had shared experiences to hers and that they understand her. She commented:

I’m actually still friends with a lot of people. It’s easier now because of the Internet and stuff. One girl, we grew up together and had experiences together. That relationship is really special to me: having someone who grew up with you and has that understanding.

We’re still super close. She lives two hours away and I try to see her as much as I can.

Angela had a more complicated relationship to her experience at the homes and school, although she, too, remained in contact with one friend and has recently connected with the school and other friends. She stated:

I still keep in touch with one friend. Before facebook, we kept in touch through letter-writing and have stayed in touch since Kurn Hattin. Well, there’s now facebook, which has reconnected all of us, so I’ve kept in contact for the past couple of years with Kelly, which has been important to me.

All of the subjects reported lasting friendships with students and staff that came out of their time at the school, with four out of six referring to their friendships with other students as “like brothers” or “like sisters.” Many of the students mentioned the importance of having other students who had gone through similar experiences to their own, and therefore, had an understanding of what it was like to live away from their families and share the Kurn Hattin
experience. They described the support and comfort they found from being able to talk about their feelings with the other students.

The strength and meaning of these relationships for the subjects connects back to the issue of identity development and a sense of belonging. All of the subjects retain as part of their identity the experience of having grown up away from their families at Kurn Hattin. The students lived in small cottages with houseparents, which created a sense of family. They lived together, went to school together, participated in extracurricular activities together, and shared experiences both good and bad. An important aspect of emotional and psychological development is the need to feel seen and understood by others. Through their shared experiences, former Kurn Hattin resident students feel both seen and understood by one another. Their experiences were unique, and likely not shared by others in their communities back home. Connections to other Kurn Hattin students helps validate their experiences of trauma, loss, and separation while providing the kind of long-term, stable relationships that are the hallmark of families. In fact, for many of the subjects of this study, the people who they connected with at Kurn Hattin became their families and remain their families. The experience of these subjects proves that families are not always dictated by blood, but can also be created through shared and meaningful experiences.

Gratitude for opportunities received. 100% of the participants in this study expressed feelings of gratitude for the opportunities they received while attending Kurn Hattin. Five out of the six subjects mentioned that they might not have received those opportunities had they remained at home with their families. They cited learning how to sew, type, cook, clean, and be responsible for themselves. Several participants also wondered where they would have wound up and what their lives might have been like, had they not gone to Kurn Hattin. Richard summed up his feelings of gratitude with these words:
Overall, you get a lot of experience, you learn a lot of things, and you’ve got people who were there with you and are with you for the rest of your life, who went through it with you. I overlooked it at the time, but at reunions, when you get to talk about it years later with all these people…in a way, it kind of makes it unreal for me. When I find myself doing things now in my life, I look back and say, “I got that at Kurn Hattin.” I would definitely tell other people about Kurn Hattin.

Kelly expressed an appreciation for having learned basic skills, and wondered what her life might have been like without Kurn Hattin. She commented:

I mean definitely, you know, I thank God I asked my mother to go. I mean, emotionally, it was like home. Because really, where else would I have learned those skills, those simple skills? I thank God I went. Absolutely! I often wonder, if I had stayed with my mother, would I have finished high school? Where would I be? Would I have chosen a different group of friends? Would I have been a drug dealer? I often wonder if I would be who I am today if I did not attend Kurn Hattin. I could have certainly been lost.

Jackie also expressed her gratitude for all that she got out of her Kurn Hattin experience.

I just think about it like, people should know it’s a good place. I know a lot of times nowadays, there’s a stigma that people there are bad kids that their parents can’t control. And it was a really good experience for me. I probably would have had a really crappy life now if I hadn’t gone there because I wouldn’t have been exposed to all of the opportunities that I got when I was there. And I wouldn’t have that drive that they put in me. They showed me how I could be different from my own parents and the life my parents had for me.
Tammy described how her feelings about Kurn Hattin changed over time, and in the end, how she felt grateful for the experience. She stated:

But I kind of hated it at first. Toward the end, I got used to it and didn’t want to leave. When I think back now, I’m glad that DSS stepped in and took me and put me somewhere that I could learn the basics of life: sewing, cooking, cleaning, and how to take care of myself. God only knows what would have happened if I didn’t go there. I wouldn’t trade it for nothing!

Angela described how her perspective of Kurn Hattin had changed over the years since leaving, and how she is now able to truly appreciate the opportunity she was given. She commented:

I went through a long period of time, many years, particularly through high school, where I did not want to even talk about Kurn Hattin, pretended it never happened. Anything that came in the mail got thrown away. I didn’t like to talk about it when I met new people. I mean, how do you delve into this whole conversation about “What is Kurn Hattin?” It was really a negative experience for me. But within the past five years, my husband and I went back and visited the girl’s campus and I just had this flood of emotions come back, but also this complete respect and “Aha!” moment, like, Holy smokes! The people here…this is amazing! I just left there feeling completely different and with a sense of relief that I was able to let go of a time that I thought was this horrific experience, but it was…really…it saved my life! I don’t know where I would have been if my mother didn’t bring me there. I’ve also connected with the administration, in terms of giving back and helping out.

As adults looking back on their experiences, most of the participants were able to see how attending Kurn Hattin had positively impacted them socially, emotionally, and
academically. All of the participants expressed feelings of gratitude for the experiences and opportunities they had received while attending Kurn Hattin and most recognized that if they had remained at home, their parents would likely not have been able to provide those opportunities, due to the problems that had precipitated their being placed at Kurn Hattin to begin with. The experience of separation from family and readjustment to new rules, relationships and structure was harder for some than it was for others. Whether attachments to one’s primary caregiver(s) are secure or insecure, most children wish to remain with their families, even when the situation at home is not in their best interest. Overwhelmingly, participants came to appreciate the safety, stability, and structure offered by the school, and the care and opportunities they received.

For Angela, who described a very traumatic arrival at the school as well as strong and ongoing feelings of abandonment, anxiety, and a lack of safety, carrying negative views of Kurn Hattin into her adult years and denying the experience are understandable. When traumatic events happen, especially to children, it can be difficult to fully understand the complex circumstances surrounding them. For Angela, Kurn Hattin represented a painful and ongoing separation from family and friends that she did not fully understand. She may have also had associated feelings of shame that she needed to work through around what it meant to have attended Kurn Hattin. Though it took her much longer to recognize the important role Kurn Hattin played in her life, today her feelings are unequivocal: “…it saved my life!”

**Foster Care: Loss of Stability, Safety, and Love**

Two subjects reported having lived in foster care for some period of time after leaving Kurn Hattin. They both reported mixed experiences of foster care, with some foster parents that seemed to care for them while others clearly did not and “were in it just for the money.” Both subjects experienced multiple placements while in care. One subject, who lived in three different
foster homes within a few years, recalled a lack of concern from her foster parents about her whereabouts, her emotional health, and her future, receiving no guidance or direction about what she should do with her life. Another subject reported being placed first in foster care with a family she liked and later, in a different out-of-home care setting that she experienced as very negative, from which she eventually ran away. She referred to the foster parents and the setting as “cold and callous.”

Both subjects’ experiences of foster care after leaving Kurn Hattin included instability resulting from multiple placements, a lack of consistent caregivers, a lack of emotional support, guidance and regular love and care. Although the numbers are small, their experiences are worth noting, as they are the exact opposite of those they reported while attending Kurn Hattin. One of Kurn Hattin’s main strengths is the safety, stability, and consistency it provides as a residential education program. The average length of stay for the subjects of this study was 5.6 years. For children requiring a more long-term placement, Kurn Hattin’s structure and programming successfully meets children’s emotional, social, and educational needs.

Summary

The main themes that emerged from the qualitative data in this study about the impact of attending a private, charitable, therapeutic children’s home and school on the lives of former resident students were (a) Before Kurn Hattin: adversity and instability at home; (b) At Entry to Kurn Hattin: the negative impact of separation from family, difficulty adjusting to the new environment; (c) Life at Kurn Hattin: relationships, extracurricular activities, and academics; (d) Transitioning from Kurn Hattin: uncertainty, loss of community, and the wish for a Kurn Hattin High School (e) Kurn Hattin Reflections: enduring relationships, gratitude for opportunities received; (f) Foster care: loss of stability, safety, and love. The themes and quotes
in this section suggest that the children who attended this particular residential education program, Kurn Hattin Homes for Children, were impacted both positively and negatively by the experience, and ultimately found the experience to be beneficial to their social, emotional, and educational lives. Although the separation from their families was experienced as painful for many of the subjects, they found ways to adjust to their new environment and benefitted heavily from supportive and caring relationships with staff members and other students, as well as through participation in extracurricular activities.

Most subjects experienced the campus as a safe and supportive place and the experience of living with house parents and other children as “like family.” All of the subjects derived emotional and social benefit from the programming, including emotion regulation, increased self-esteem, self-confidence, and a strengthening of their identities. Most subjects had a positive academic experience that they attributed to small class sizes, extra tutoring, and supportive and caring teachers. All subjects experienced difficulties with attending Kurn Hattin, including for the majority of subjects, being separated from their families and friends for extended periods of time. Many subjects experienced the transition from Kurn Hattin as very challenging due to lack of communication about the transition, lack of preparation for the parent-child relationship, and vast differences between the size and culture of their old and new environments.

All of the subjects described the importance to them of relationships they had made while at the school and the enduring nature of those relationships, referring to other students from the school as Kurn Hattin “brothers” and “sisters.” All of the subjects also expressed their gratitude for the experiences and opportunities they had been given while at Kurn Hattin and saw the value and benefit in their time spent there. The two subjects who went on to live in foster care experienced multiple placements that resulted in a lack of stability and disrupted attachments.
They also both experienced at least some foster parents who did not provide them with the structure or the sense of safety or love that they desired and had received while at Kurn Hattin.
CHAPTER V

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to add to the literature about the experiences of at-risk children who have attended residential education programs, in this particular case, a private, charitable, therapeutic children’s home and junior boarding school, Kurn Hattin Homes for Children. The framework in this section grew out of the analysis of data from six qualitative interviews with former resident students of the homes and school.

The major findings of this research study are that attending Kurn Hattin Homes for Children had a positive impact, both socially and emotionally on the lives of all of the former resident students, and had a positive impact, academically, on most of the former resident students. The positive impact occurred through the provision of a safe, consistent, supportive environment, through supportive and caring relationships with houseparents, teachers, other staff members, and fellow resident students, through the many opportunities the subjects were given access to as a result of attending Kurn Hattin, including music and arts programs, sports, and other extracurricular activities, through small class sizes which allowed for extra one-on-one support, and through the help of caring, supportive, high quality teachers who encouraged academic success. These findings were all supported through the literature included in this study.

Other major findings of this study are that many of the students’ lives were negatively impacted, in the form of emotional distress, caused by the initial and ongoing separation from their families and friends, as well as by the difficulties they experienced with transitioning from Kurn Hattin into their new environments. These findings were also supported in the literature.
The main themes that emerged around the negative impact of Kurn Hattin were lack of communication about where they would go after leaving the school, difficulty adjusting and fitting into their new environments, and a lack of preparation for how to return to the parent-child relationship.

This study adds to the literature in three ways: first, many studies called for more qualitative research on the impact of residential education programs on at-risk youth. This study’s qualitative design specifically met that goal by interviewing former resident students about their experiences. Second, this study site was a children’s home and junior boarding school, serving grades 1-8, unlike the settings researched in most of the existing studies, which run through the twelfth grade. Therefore, this study represents important data on an under-researched topic.

Third, this study contributes to existing literature on the positive impact of a consistent, structured, safe environment for at-risk youth, the positive impact of consistent, loving, supportive care providers on children who have experienced traumatic or adverse life events, the positive impact of high-quality programming and extracurricular activities for at-risk children, the positive impact of high-quality, supportive teachers for academic success, as well as existing literature on foster care as both a negative and positive experience and particularly, on the negative impact of multiple placements for children in care, an all too common experience.

In the following section, I will discuss the key findings from the study and connect them to the existing literature. Following that, I will present a theoretical framework through which the findings of this study can be better understood. Finally, I will describe the implications that the findings of this study hold for both policy and practice with at-risk youth.
Adversity and Instability in the Home

A common theme for all of the former resident students was that their lives had been negatively impacted by some form of trauma, adversity, or instability before arriving at Kurn Hattin and that those experiences were severe enough to lead to the decision to remove them from the home and place them at Kurn Hattin. Considering that Kurn Hattin’s purpose is to serve the needs of disadvantaged populations, this was not an unexpected finding of the study. As I stated earlier in this paper, research suggests an association between early traumatic experiences or adversity and later negative emotional, behavioral, and physical outcomes (Anda et al., 2005; D’Andrea, Ford, Stolbach, Spinazzola, & van der Kolk, 2012; Cicchetti, Rogosh & Toth, 2006; Grasso, Ford, & Briggs-Gowan, 2013; Perry & Szalavitz, 2006). Young children are particularly vulnerable to the effects of early adversity and trauma due to their limited coping skills and dependence on their primary caretakers (De Young, Kenardy, & Cobham, 2011). Therefore, the subjects’ removal from the home and placement at Kurn Hattin was an appropriate and wise intervention, which minimized the children’s exposure to adversity at home. Subjects came to be enrolled at Kurn Hattin through both voluntary and involuntary measures, a fact that is also supported in the literature on residential education programs (Lee & Barth, 2009).

Separation from Family

A key finding of this research study was the common experience for most subjects of separation from their families being experienced as negative, both initially and ongoing. Five out of six of the subjects reported negative affective reactions resulting from the separation. Subjects’ affective reactions to the initial separation ranged from mild to severe. Existing literature supports the finding that separation from family due to placement at boarding school
can be experienced as traumatic for some children, in particular, young children (Schaverien, 2011).

Shaverien (2011) found, in working with former boarding school attendees who had experienced separation at a young age, a common pattern of symptoms and behaviors, which she referred to as “Boarding School Syndrome” (p. 140). These symptoms included homesickness, depression, psychological armoring, loss of memory of traumatic feelings, and later, problems with intimate relationships, where early losses play out through reenactments in current relationships. Graves, Shavings, Rose and Saylor (2007) also found that for many of the Alaska Native Americans who had attended boarding school, separation from their families was experienced as very traumatic and may have led to ongoing problems with attachment and intimacy. Bowlby’s (1985) writing on the negative effects of separation for children from their primary caregiver(s) helps explain why so many of the children experienced the separation as traumatic. Children depend on their caregiver(s) for a sense of safety and security in the world. When children are given no choice or power over the decision to separate from their families, feelings of anxiety, sadness, anger, and despair often result (Bowlby, 1985).

**Adjustment to the New Environment**

Another major finding of the study was the difficulty the majority of the participants had, initially, with adjusting to their new environment. Four out of the six participants reported having difficulty adjusting to Kurn Hattin’s structure, including new rules and new relationships. Some of the participants had never experienced regular rules, bedtimes, chores, or structured activities and were resistant to them being imposed upon them. Some were also resistant to forming relationships with their new providers. This finding is consistent with existing literature that describes the difficulty some children have with the structure inherent in residential education.
programs, including a loss of connection to family (Bass, 2014), resentment about strangers taking the place of parents (Jones, 2009), and difficulty adjusting to new rules and expectations (Maxwell, Chase, Statham & Jackson, 2009).

Upon entering Kurn Hattin, the children experienced dislocation from their prior homes and disconnection from their families and friends, for many, leading to further traumas. The children then needed to adjust to a number of unfamiliar people, rules, roles, and expectations in the new environment, all difficult tasks for small children to master with their limited coping skills. Despite the initial difficulty many of the subjects experienced adjusting to the new environment, they all eventually adjusted well. Once the new environment and routine became familiar to them, most subjects reported that the structure of the homes and school had a positive impact on them, which is also supported in the literature. Fryer Jr. and Curto’s 2014 study of the Washington D.C. SEED school found that for many disadvantaged students, the added structure and support provided by the boarding school had a positive impact on their lives, socially, emotionally, and academically. The students were able to have a safe place to work on their studies and supportive tutors available to help them with questions and were surrounded by like-minded peers.

Bass (2014) found similar results in her study of disadvantaged students who attended a private boarding school. She found that the boarding school structure was particularly helpful to those students whose home life was most unstructured and unsupportive of learning. Maxwell, Chase, Statham and Jackson (2009) found that attending the school led to less truancy and more time in the classroom and may have resulted in increased academic success. Although not stated explicitly as a finding for all of the studies, it is easy to see how a safe, structured, and supportive environment could lead to positive outcomes for most students, especially those the most at-risk.
Relationships

The majority of the subjects described relationships with house parents and some staff members as supportive, caring, and “like family,” and with peers, they described the importance of being able to talk to and get support from others who were going through similar experiences to their own. Both these findings are supported in the literature (Jones, 2009; Lee & Barth, 2009; Lee & Thompson, 2008; McLoughlin & Gonzalez, 2014; Polat & Farrell, 2002; Thompson et al., 1996).

Jones (2009) describes the positive impact of the house parent model, where subjects expressed a strong preference for house parents over childcare providers due to their greater availability, consistency, and the family-type feeling they engender. The houseparent model created a continuity of caregiving and a lessening of the “institutional effect,” leading to an easier adjustment to the new environment. Thompson et al. (1996) and Lee & Barth (2009) also describe the positive impact of the “Teaching Family Model” used in their programs, where children live in small cottages with houseparents. Polat and Farrell (2002) found that many of the students thought of their houseparents as their family and developed close emotional relationships with them, even returning to the school after they had graduated to seek emotional support. Relationships with other students were also important to them. Finally, Alexander-Snow (2011) described how students experienced a feeling of inclusion and belonging, increased self-esteem, and access to positive role models and peers at the Piney Woods School.

Given that all of the subjects had been dislocated from their prior homes and communities and disconnected from their families at entry to Kurn Hattin, the need for connection to others would have been great. In her writings on trauma and recovery, Herman (1997) states that recovery from traumatic events, especially traumas that happened within the
context of relationships must also be healed within the context of safe, consistent relationships. The Kurn Hattin houseparents, staff, and other students provided the safe, consistent, family relationships through which the children were able to process their traumas and ultimately, to learn to reconnect and trust again. Within this context, they were able to benefit from all the Kurn Hattin had to offer.

**Extracurricular Activities**

All of the subjects referred to the activities and programs at Kurn Hattin as beneficial to them in some way, either as a way to cope with difficult emotions or as a way of increasing their sense of self-esteem, confidence, and belonging. These findings are also well supported in the literature (Alexander-Snow, 2011; Bass, 2014; Maxwell, Chase, Statham & Jackson, 2009; Polat & Farrell, 2002). Maxwell, Chase, Statham & Jackson’s 2009 study of The Pathfinder Program affirmed these findings, suggesting that through participation in extracurricular activities, boarding school students reported increased confidence and leadership skills and an increase in the ability to socialize and build friendships.

Bass (2014) found that cultural benefits were gained through access to cultural activities, clubs, and sports, which also increased leadership skills. Alexander-Snow (2011) found that subjects benefitted from participation in extracurricular activities. Students at the Piney Woods School engaged in the Rite of Passage program, volunteered for the United Way, and attended church. Students reported an increase in cultural awareness and pride, a feeling of inclusion, belonging, and community, increased self-esteem, and access to positive role models and peers. Graves, Shavings, Rose and Saylor (2007) also found that Alaska Natives experienced some of the boarding school activities and programs as positive, and as a way for them to cope with their emotions, especially through cultural ceremonies.
As children who had been dislocated and disconnected from family, friends, and community the Kurn Hattin subjects experienced a range of feelings including sadness, anxiety, anger, despair, abandonment, and feelings of isolation. By participating in activities and programs, they children learned how to work as part of a team, to feel a sense of belonging, pride, accomplishment, and mastery. Many of the activities had therapeutic qualities, allowing the children to feel more relaxed and providing them with ways to both express themselves and to channel their difficult emotions. These experiences were made possible in the context of a safe environment and through relationships with consistent, caring, and supportive instructors, coaches, and other staff members.

Academics

Five of the six subjects of this study went on to graduate from high school and four of the six completed at least some college. One subject obtained a bachelor’s of science degree. The majority of the subjects reported having a positive academic experience at Kurn Hattin Homes for Children and attributed their positive experiences to the small class sizes at the school and high-quality, supportive teachers with high expectations. The existing literature supports these findings as well.

Lee and Barth’s 2009 study of 67 residential programs found that of the 60% of programs that looked at outcomes, nearly half of the members of the most recent graduating class were enrolled in either 2 or 4-year colleges. The findings of Thompson et al.’s 1996 study of 583 students who attended Boy’s Town showed that the students had “a significantly higher grade-point average, completed significantly more years of school, had a higher rate of high school graduation…[and] had significantly more positive attitudes toward post secondary education,” (Thompson et al., 1996, p. 236). Jones & Lansdverk’s 2006 study of The Academy also reported
increased academic achievement, higher GED scores, and higher college enrollment of graduates of the program. Small class sizes and more tutoring help were both aspects of the program.

Fryer Jr. and Curto’s 2014 study of the Washington D.C. SEED school suggested that due to smaller class sizes, highly trained tutors, a structured setting, and other factors, students achieved increased scores in both math and reading. Alexander-Snow (2011) found that students at Piney Woods felt that their academic achievements were, in part, a result of their teachers’ high expectations of them. Polat and Farrell (2002) also found that students at the Oakdale Court School benefitted greatly from small class sizes, extra teacher support, and high quality teachers.

The Kurn Hattin subjects benefitted from the small class sizes, the extra support from tutors, a safe and supportive environment in which to focus on their studies, and teachers’ high expectations, things that they likely would not have had access to back home. When a child’s environment is safe and consistent, the child develops a feeling of predictability and security. When a child is able to form strong attachments to caring, consistent caregivers who are invested in them, the child feels valued and encouraged and develops a strong sense of self-esteem and the motivation to do well. When a child attends the same school and lives in the same community for years, the teachers and staff come to know and understand the child’s academic strengths and challenges, and are in an excellent position to help that child succeed academically.

The safe and consistent environment provided by Kurn Hattin Homes for Children, in conjunction with caring, consistent, high-quality teachers who came to know and understand the children’s learning needs benefitted the children greatly. The fact that 5 of the 6 subjects graduated from high school and had attended at least some college suggests that Kurn Hattin’s environment was a positive factor in their academic experience.
**Transition from Kurn Hattin**

Another major finding of the study was the difficulty the majority of subjects had with transitioning from Kurn Hattin into their new environments. Five of the six subjects reported that their transition from the homes and school was a traumatic and confusing experience and that adjusting to their new environments of both home and school had been problematic. Subjects described a lack of communication as one of the main causes for the difficulty. A lack of preparation for the return to the parent-child relationship, as well as vast differences between Kurn Hattin and the new environment were also mentioned. Three of the students stated that they wished Kurn Hattin extended into high school. The literature supports the findings of a difficult transition.

Bass (2014) found that students who attended a private boarding school had a difficult time returning back to their homes and communities due to no longer fitting in culturally with their families and peers. Maxwell, Chase, Statham and Jackson’s 2009 study of The Boarding Pathfinder schools found that disadvantaged students at the school had a difficult time returning home to their families due to the lack of structure and different expectations at home compared to those at the school. Alexander-Snow’s 2011 study found that the four Black graduates of the Piney Woods School experienced difficulty transitioning into traditional “Euro-American universities” which they experienced as unwelcoming, isolating, and not committed to cultural differences or perspectives.

Although I did not find specific references in the literature to difficulties associated with a lack of communication between those enrolled at residential education programs and their care providers and families, instances of this phenomenon was found in the literature with regard to children who are exiting or aging out of foster care. In Tarnai and Krebill-Prather’s 2008 study
on children in foster care, only 33% of students age 17 and above had ever been invited to participate in meetings about their transition from care. The transition out of foster care is a major topic of current interest and studies show that clear and open communication between all parties (foster children, parents, foster parents, social workers, etc.) makes the transition more successful for all involved (Tarnai & Krebill-Prather, 2008).

The experience that several of the subjects mentioned of a difficult transition at exit from Kurn Hattin bears further discussion. In a 2014 telephone interview, Kurn Hattin Executive Director, Connie Sanderson described to me the measures Kurn Hattin has taken to improve the transition experience for students exiting the school. Beginning in the seventh or eighth grade, a family outreach coordinator is assigned to graduating students. The coordinator works with the student and their family in preparation for the transition from Kurn Hattin. The outreach services continue through the high school years and are taken over at that time by the Kurn Hattin Alumni Association. The school works to ensure that all graduating students have access to resources in their area if they should need added help and support.

In regards to the wish by some of the students that Kurn Hattin extended through high school, there has been a promising development. A relationship has formed between Kurn Hattin Homes for Children and the Milton Hershey School in Hershey, PA. The Milton Hershey School was founded in 1909, twenty-five years after Charles Albert Dickinson founded Kurn Hattin Homes for Children. Like Dickinson, Milton Hershey’s goal was to provide a home and school for orphaned boys. The Milton Hershey School continues today as a co-education school, providing a high quality, cost-free education to income-eligible students from pre-K through twelfth grade (Milton Hershey School, 2015).
Although the partnership with the Milton Hershey School does not allow children to remain at Kurn Hattin through high school, with its similar values and structure, the Milton Hershey School is a natural fit for Kurn Hattin students seeking the continuation of a more structured, supportive home and educational experience. In 2014, seven Kurn Hattin graduates were accepted into the Hershey School (Kurn Hattin Homes for Children Bulletin, 2014). Another key development, unrelated to transitioning from the school, but intended to help further the education of Kurn Hattin alum, is the recent creation of a scholarship program in memory of the late Tom Fahner, former Kurn Hattin principal and staff member who passed away earlier this year.

As I stated earlier, this is an area that Kurn Hattin should continue to prioritize, through the steps they are currently taking, and by conducting thorough assessments of the potential problems that may arise on an individual basis at transition. Kurn Hattin has made progress in this area over the years, particularly in the area of engaging both the students and families in the conversations about transitioning. For those students who either do not wish to attend the Milton Hershey School or for those who are not accepted, the emphasis should be on ensuring the best arrangements for them on their return home or their next setting. After all of the investment that Kurn Hattin has made in the students up to the time of their transition, ensuring the best possible arrangements to maximize the greatest likelihood of success for exiting students is to the benefit of the student, their family, and Kurn Hattin alike.

Enduring Relationships

Another key finding of this study is that all of the participants reported that they were still in contact with other students from the school, as well as some of the house parents, teachers, administrators, or other staff members. Many of the relationships that were formed during their
time at the homes and school have endured long after their departure from the school, and those relationships continue to be a source of emotional support and deep social connection for many. Many of the subjects refer to other Kurn Hattin alumni as their “Kurn Hattin brothers and sisters.” This finding was also supported in the literature.

Jones and Lansdverk’s 2006 study of students who attended The Academy found that most students continued with a high level of engagement with other students after leaving the school and that nearly half stayed in contact with staff. Students reported that their relationships were a strong source of support and connection for them. Bass’s 2014 study found that disadvantaged students who attended a small, private boarding school gained social benefits through “close-knit relationships” (p. 29) with other students, and were committed to remaining in contact with them after graduation. Polat and Farrell (2002) described similar findings, with many students citing strong connections to houseparents, staff, and peers that continued after they left the school.

That students had a strong desire to remain connected to other students and teachers after graduating suggests the great importance and value of those relationships to the students. As I stated earlier, the bonds made through the traumatic separation from family, and the unique experience of being raised away from home in a surrogate family had a profound impact on the subjects. In continuing the relationships with friends and staff from the school, the subjects are able to feel validated in their experiences by those who truly understand because they, too, shared the experiences. At entry to Kurn Hattin, they had become family by circumstance, but upon exit from Kurn Hattin, they remained families by choice.
Foster Care

Both subjects who remembered their experiences of foster care described a combination of negative, as well as some positive experiences of being in care. Both subjects experienced multiple placements after leaving Kurn Hattin, creating unstable home situations and disruptions in their educational experiences. Both also experienced foster parents who did not care about them or support them, which made trusting and forming secure and consistent relationships to the foster parents difficult or impossible. They also described having some foster parents who did care about them.

These findings are also supported in the literature on foster care. Many studies have shown that children who have lived in foster care or are currently are living in foster care report both negative and positive experiences. Multiple placement changes are a common experience for children in foster care and become more likely the longer a child is in care and the older the child is. Multiple placements have been linked to a host of negative outcomes, academically, emotionally, socially, and often legally due to the many social, emotional, and educational disruptions the children endure (Allen & Vacca, 2010; Fernandez, 2009; Leslie et al., 2000; Rubin, O’Reilly, Luan & Localio, 2007; Stott & Gustavsson, 2010; Tarnai & Krebill-Prather, 2008; Unrau, Seita, & Putney 2008; USDHHS, 2011).

The difference between the subjects’ experience of Kurn Hattin and their experience of foster care is vast. After leaving Kurn Hattin, the subjects experienced a total of five separate placements, resulting in a number of dislocations, broken attachments, and adjustments to new rules, roles, and expectations. They both reported that some of their foster parents seemed to genuinely care for them while others did not and appeared to be in it “just for the money.” The subjects both experienced a lack of safety, guidance, support, and love while in foster care.
These experiences are a major contrast from the experiences the subjects reported while attending Kurn Hattin. While the numbers are small, the evidence is clear: many children who wind up in foster care will have a more unstable, unstructured, and unloving experience than children who attend more long-term residential education programs such as Kurn Hattin.

Gratitude for the Experiences and Opportunities

All of the subjects of this study expressed gratitude for the experiences and opportunities they had been given as a result of their attendance at Kurn Hattin Homes for Children. Several of the participants of this study used phrases such as, “I don’t know where I would be today if I didn’t attend Kurn Hattin,” “Thank God for Kurn Hattin,” or “Kurn Hattin saved my life.” Participants saw their attendance at Kurn Hattin as a crucial, albeit difficult, decision that ultimately had a strong positive impact on their lives. The literature supported this finding as well.

Polat and Farrell’s 2002 study of 26 former resident students of Oakdale Court Residential School in the U.K. found that many students expressed gratitude for the opportunities they had been given at the school and for helping them emotionally, socially, behaviorally, and educationally. For some of the students, their experiences at the school were the first time they had ever felt cared for in their lives. Bass also found in her 2014 study that students expressed gratitude for being given the opportunity to attend the school and for all the opportunities and experiences attending the school had provided.

Framework of Themes

Viewing the themes that emerged from this study through the lens of Herman’s trauma theory, Bowlby’s attachment theory, Erikson’s psychosocial stages of development, and Winnicott’s “holding environment,” helps provide a theoretical framework for interpreting the
findings. The themes, which included adversity and instability in the home, negative impact of separation from family, difficulty with initial adjustment to the new environment, coping through relationships and activities, beneficial aspects of programming and activities, positive academic experience, enduring relationships, and multiple placements and inconsistent relationships in foster care, provide a narrative of the subjects’ experiences of trauma, loss, recovery, and growth.

All of the subjects of this study reported experiencing some type of adverse or difficult events at home that led to their enrollment at Kurn Hattin Homes for Children. Those experiences included sexual abuse, neglect, parental mental illness, parental drug or alcohol abuse, parental separation or divorce, poverty, or homelessness. According to Herman (1997), who wrote extensively on the subject of trauma and recovery, children who have undergone adverse events such as these, experience them as deeply traumatic. Experiences such as these can severely negatively impact a young child, shaping and sometimes permanently distorting the child’s development. It is fair to say that all of the subjects of this study experienced certain events at home as traumatic, and were heavily impacted, to a greater or lesser degree, by those events.

Bowlby’s (1969; 1988) research on parent-child attachment shows the importance of safe, consistent relationships between young children and their primary caregiver(s) to help foster feelings of safety and security in the world leading to healthy growth and development. A child deprived of secure and consistent primary attachments fails to earn that feeling of security in the world and the ability to trust others, leaving a lasting negative effect on the child’s ability to form healthy relationships. It is safe to assume that attachment relationships between many of
the subjects of this study and their primary caretakers were compromised, both before and after they arrived at Kurn Hattin adding to their feelings of insecurity and anxiety.

Bowlby (1969; 1973) found that when a child whose attachment to their primary caretaker(s) is disrupted through separation, the child experiences a predictable set of emotional responses, usually moving from protest to despair to detachment. All of the subjects of this study experienced a disruption in their attachment relationships to their primary caretaker(s) upon entering Kurn Hattin, and the majority of the subjects behaved in a predictable manner after separation from their primary attachment figures, experiencing distress, sadness, anxiety, despair, confusion, and anger. Many of the subjects found their new environments foreign and unfamiliar, causing them further trauma, as they struggled to adjust to new rules and form new relationships.

Herman (1997) posits that recovery from traumatic events can only occur in the context of relationships with safe, consistent, and trusted others, especially if the original traumas occurred in the context of relationships. All of the subjects of this study spoke to the importance of close, caring, consistent, and trusting relationships with houseparents, teachers, other staff members, and other students. It was through these relationships that they were able to feel a renewed sense of safety and trust and to begin the process of healing from their earlier traumas and building new connections.

Subjects also cited the importance of extracurricular activities and programs in their process of coping and healing. It was through participation in activities such as music, arts, sports, church, as well as academic classes that subjects were challenged intellectually, physically, and spiritually and found connections to others, a sense of trust, a sense of belonging, feelings of serenity, a sense of industry and purpose, a sense of mastery and competence, and a
sense of identity. Much of what the subjects’ described aligns well with Erikson’s (1985) psychosocial stages of development, stages that all individuals must master to gain a healthy sense of self-esteem, competence, and identity, on their path toward healthy development.

Winnicott (1992; 2002) spoke of high quality residential care as one potential solution for young people who have not received adequate care and support from their primary caretaker(s). He referred to such an environment as a “holding environment,” a “facilitating environment,” or a “suitable home-substitute” (Winnicott, 1992, p. 231). Kurn Hattin Homes for Children mirrors his notion of a holding environment: a safe, consistent, supportive environment where individuals are given the opportunity to form attachments, to learn trust, to explore and grow.

The majority of the subjects of this study spoke of their Kurn Hattin Homes as safe, consistent, and supportive, where they were able to form long-term attachments with safe, caring, consistent, and supportive houseparents, teachers, staff, and peers and were given the opportunity to explore, learn, and grow with some degree of autonomy. Lastly, every participant in this study maintains a deep appreciation for the experiences and opportunities they were afforded while attending Kurn Hattin Homes for Children.

In light of the above information, it follows that placing children in foster care would be disadvantageous to them, due to the high risk for multiple placements, which often result in broken attachments and disruption of their social, emotional, and educational experiences.

**Considerations for Policy and Practice**

The results of this study suggest that high quality, safe, structured, residential education programs like Kurn Hattin Homes for Children can be effective alternatives for some children who might otherwise remain in unsafe, unstable home environments or be placed in foster care or other out-of-home settings, putting them at risk of multiple placements which are known to be
associated with negative outcomes. Provided with a safe, consistent, supportive environment and caring, consistent, supportive caretakers, at-risk children can benefit emotionally, socially, and academically from attending residential education programs.

The benefits of attending a residential education program are gained due to the long-term, consistent structure of the programs, the long-term, stable, and enduring relationships that can form in such settings, the access to extracurricular activities and programs that help foster trust, confidence, competence, self-esteem, and a sense of belonging, and the smaller class sizes and extra tutoring that are often available in residential education programs.

Although limited, due to the small sample size, the results of this study may be useful to those making decisions on out-of-home placements for at-risk children, as well as those involved in making policies related to education funding. The results of the study suggest that it is worth researching further and exploring the possibilities of publicly funded K-12 residential education programs, making them available to all who have the potential to benefit from them, including students who are the most at-risk for negative social, emotional, educational, and legal outcomes.

It is the hope of this researcher that the data collected from this study will lead to a better understanding of which aspects of attending the school were most beneficial to the students and which factors or interventions were most effective in meeting their social, emotional, and educational needs. This information could then be used to further inform practice and programming policies in residential education programs.

Limitations of this Study

There are several limitations to this study. To begin, only six people participated in the study, instead of the twelve that Smith College requires to produce a good qualitative study. Although all of the subject’s experiences are important, due to the small sample size, the findings
cannot be taken to be representative of the larger population of former students of the homes and school. It is important to consider the possible reasons for my inability to recruit the full number of required participants. Ten people originally agreed to participate in my study, although only six followed through with signing and returning consent forms. It is possible that people’s lives are difficult and busy, and not knowing me, they may have felt reluctant to participate in my study. It is also possible that after reading the potential risks of participation, people chose not to participate. I may have also gotten better results had I contacted every person on the alumni facebook page individually, rather than only posting my recruitment flyer on the newsfeed.

This study asked former students of the children’s home and school to look at their experiences retrospectively. For some study participants, that required looking back and trying to remember experiences that occurred up to 35 years ago. Some people may have misremembered their experiences, and people’s experiences since leaving the homes and school may have shaped the way they interpreted those past experiences.

Also, this study did not conduct a baseline of participant’s experiences upon entering the homes and school, so it lacks a before and after perspective of participant’s emotional, social, or educational experience. Without a clearer assessment of where participants were when they entered the school, it is difficult to fully understand the impact that attending the homes and school had on their lives.

A majority of the sample used in this study consisted of White women, despite my attempt to recruit a more diverse sample. Though their views may be an accurate portrait of their own personal experiences at Kurn Hattin, due to the lack of diversity of the sample, their experiences cannot be considered as representative of the larger population of former resident students of Kurn Hattin Homes for Children. Also, due to the difficulties experienced in
recruiting subjects for this study, I opened up the dates of attendance at the school to include years going back to 1980.

Over the course of the past 35 years, many changes have taken place at the school, including combining two campuses into one making the campus co-ed, changes in administration, curriculum and programming, with the addition of equine therapy, support groups, family outreach programs, admission of students through programs such as Friends of Children, based out of New York City, and finally, the relationship with the Milton Hershey School. As such, the experiences of those who attended in decades past would have been quite different from the experience of those who have attended more recently, and therefore, it is not possibly to accurately compare experiences of one to the other. The focus of this study was limited by the interview questions designed by this researcher. A more open-ended study, designed to allow for more freedom and flexibility for subjects to express their experiences more spontaneously and broadly, may have elicited richer, more descriptive information and might have benefitted this study.

This study also did not take on the larger question of public vs. private education, or look at the impact of charter schools on the current education system. Both issues are very important and would require a much greater exploration of the education system than the limits of this paper allow. Suffice it to say that this researcher believes that our education system does need to be reformed and that high-quality K-12 residential education programs should be one of the publicly funded options for all students, while private residential education programs should be allowed to continue as they are. A priority should be increasing funding for all levels of education, with special attention paid to early education. There may be other limitations to this study that I have not considered.
Researcher Bias

In their 2013 text on research writing, Engel and Schutt state that, “Qualitative researchers recognize that their perspective on social phenomena will reflect in part their own background and current situation” (p. 272). My own experiences at Kurn Hattin certainly will have shaped my perspective and interpretation of the findings of this study. As a researcher for this study I am in a unique position, as I hold both an insider’s view, as a former resident student who had been positioned in the lower socioeconomic class, and also an outsider’s view, as a researcher now socially positioned in the upper middle-class. The memory of my family’s and my own struggles are vivid, yet also distant, and shaped by the passage of time. Both experiences may have influenced the questions I chose to ask and not ask for this study, as well as my interpretation of the subjects’ responses.

Areas For Further Research

The limited nature of this study leaves open the possibility of a larger study, encompassing a broader range of experiences and perspectives. A more helpful study to assess how the homes and school are functioning currently would include the perspectives of a more diverse range of recent graduates of Kurn Hattin Homes for Children. This study did not ask former resident students to discuss in broad detail the quality of their lives today or to comment on how their attendance at the school may be impacting their lives currently. A study designed to gather information about current quality of life and life satisfaction of former resident students would add to the limited information available on the impact of attending Kurn Hattin Homes for Children.

An outcome study for students who have gone on to continue their education at the Milton Hershey School would also be beneficial data, as would a study assessing the outcomes
of those who do not go on to the Milton Hershey School. It would be useful to survey more recent graduates of Kurn Hattin to find out how they are experiencing the transition to a new environment. Longitudinal studies, including baseline assessments at entry to Kurn Hattin would be helpful in assessing how attending Kurn Hattin Homes for Children impacts former resident students lives over time.

**Conclusion**

There will always be a need for alternative settings for children who have been removed from their homes due to adverse events. The separation of a child from his or her family will always carry some level of risk of additional trauma to the child, but if placed in a setting with high quality, caring and supportive staff, in a safe, stable, consistent and supportive environment, the harm of separation can be mitigated and a real difference can be made in the lives of children at risk of negative outcomes. Although they are not the answer for all children, many children who have been placed in these settings have benefitted socially, emotionally, and educationally compared to those who have been placed in foster care or who have remained at home in unstable, unsupportive environments. High quality, publicly and privately funded residential education programs are a viable, and I would suggest, a preferable option to foster care, especially for the most at-risk children, and should be explored further and considered as an addition to our traditional public schools.


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Appendix A: Kurn Hattin Permission Letter

January 16, 2015

Ms Felicia Sevene
83 N Prospect Street
Amherst, MA 01002

Dear Felicia,

It’s been exciting to follow the progress of your thesis study. Part of your project involves certain Kurn Hattin systems. We are more than happy to assist you in acquiring the information needed as part of your research process.

Specifically, you have permission to post on the Kurn Hattin alumni Facebook page asking graduates from 1998-2008 to participate in your study. In addition, you are welcome to contact graduates via hard copy mail as needed. Should you need addresses, please contact Sonja Fullam (sfullam@kurnhattin.org). Often we do not have a current address for a graduate, but she will assist you whenever possible.

Please let me know if there is anything else we can do to help. Best of luck as you move forward with this project.

Sincerely,

Connie Sanderson, CFRE
Executive Director

Kurn Hattin Homes transforms the lives of children and their families forever.
PO Box 127 Westminster, Vermont 05158 | TEL (802) 722-3336 | FAX (802) 722-3174 | www.kurnhattin.org
Appendix B1: Recruitment Flyer #1 for Facebook page

Greetings and Happy New Year!

• Did you attend Kurn Hattin for at least 2 years between 1998 and 2008?
• Are you over the age of 18?
• Do you speak and read English?

My name is Felicia Sevone and I am a Kurn Hattin Homes for Children alum and a current graduate student at Smith College School for Social Work. I am in the process of conducting a research study to fulfill the thesis requirement of my graduate program. This study, titled: *Kurn Hattin Homes for Children: Exploring the Experiences of Former Resident Students of a Private, Charitable, Therapeutic Children’s Home and School* will explore former Kurn Hattin students’ experiences of attending the homes and school. The purpose of the study is to better understand the impact that attending Kurn Hattin had on resident students’ lives. Participation in this study is voluntary and confidential.

In order to participate in the study you must:
• Be over the age of 18
• Have attended the school for at least 2 years between 1998 and 2008
• Be able to read and to complete the interview in English
• Be willing to participate in the study

To be part of the study, you would be asked to read and sign our consent form, and after it is returned, to participate in a 60-minute long interview over the phone that will be audio-recorded.

*Your participation in this study will be kept entirely confidential.* You will not receive money or any type of compensation for your participation in this study. Some study participants find that they benefit from talking about and sharing their experiences. Participating in this study has the potential to cause emotional or psychological distress due to talking about past experiences, some of which may have been difficult. You will be provided with access to support services, should you need them as a result of participating in this study. The results of this study may be published or used in presentations, but all participants’ identities will remain confidential and all names will be disguised. Participants have the right to withdraw from the study at any time.

If you would like to participate in this study, you may contact me by phone at (XXX) XXX-XXXX or by email at XXXXX@smith.edu.

Thank you for your time and consideration, and I look forward to hearing from you!
Greetings and Happy New Year!

- Did you attend Kurn Hattin for at least 2 years between 1998 and 2008?
- Are you over the age of 18?
- Do you speak and read English?

My name is Felicia Sevene and I am a former student of Kurn Hattin Homes for Children and a current student at Smith College School for Social Work. I am in the process of conducting a research study to fulfill the thesis requirement of my graduate program. This study, titled: Kurn Hattin Homes for Children: Exploring the Experiences of Former Resident Students of a Private, Charitable, Therapeutic Children’s Home and School will explore former Kurn Hattin students’ experiences of attending the homes and school. The purpose of the study is to better understand the impact that attending Kurn Hattin Homes had on former resident students’ lives. Participation in this study is voluntary and confidential.

In order to participate in the study you must:
- Be over the age of 18
- Have attended the school for at least 2 years between 1998 and 2008
- Be able to read and to complete the interview in English
- Be willing to participate in the study

To be part of the study, you would be asked to read and sign our consent form, and after it is returned, to participate in a 60-minute long phone interview that will be audio-recorded.

Your participation in this study will be kept entirely confidential. All participants of this study will receive a $20 gift card to compensate them for their time. Some study participants find that they benefit from talking about and sharing their experiences. Participating in this study has the potential to cause emotional or psychological distress due to talking about past experiences, some of which may have been difficult. All participants will be provided with access to support services, should they need them as a result of participating in this study. The results of this study may be published or used in presentations, but all participants’ identities will remain confidential and all names will be disguised. Participants have the right to withdraw from the study at any time.

If you would like to participate in this study, you may contact me by phone at (XXX) XXX-XXXX or by email at XXXX@XXXXXXX.

Thank you for your time and consideration, and I look forward to hearing from you!
Appendix B3: Third Recruitment Flyer for Facebook Page

Greetings and Happy (snowy??) Spring!!

- Did you attend Kurn Hattin for at least 2 years between 1980 and 2010?
- Are you over the age of 18?
- Do you speak and read English?

My name is Felicia Sevene and I am a former student of Kurn Hattin Homes for Children (Class of 1982) and a current student at Smith College School for Social Work. I am in the process of conducting a research study to fulfill the thesis requirement of my graduate program. This study, titled: Kurn Hattin Homes for Children: Exploring the Experiences of Former Resident Students of a Private, Charitable, Therapeutic Children’s Home and School will explore former Kurn Hattin student’s experiences of attending the homes and school. The purpose of the study is to better understand the impact that attending Kurn Hattin Homes had on former resident student’s lives. Participation in the study is voluntary and confidential.

In order to participate in the study you must:
- Be over the age of 18
- Have attended the school for at least 2 years between 1980 and 2010
- Be able to read and to complete the interview in English
- Be willing to participate in the study

To be part of the study, you would be asked to read and sign our consent form, and after it is returned, to participate in a 60-minute phone interview that will be audio-recorded.

Your participation in this study will be kept entirely confidential. All participants of this study will receive a $20 gift card to compensate them for their time. Some study participants find that they benefit from talking about and sharing their experiences. Participating in this study has the potential to cause emotional or psychological distress due to talking about past experiences, some of which may have been difficult. All participants will be provided with access to support services, should they need them as a result of participating in this study. The results of this study may be published or used in presentations, but all participants’ identities will remain confidential and all names will be disguised. Participants have the right to withdraw from the study at any time.

If you would like to participate in this study, you may contact me by phone at (XXX) XXX-XXXX or by email at XXXX@XXXXXX.

Thank you for your time and consideration, and I look forward to hearing from you!
Title of Study: Kurn Hattin Homes for Children: Exploring the Experiences of Former Resident Students of a Charitable, Therapeutic Children’s Home/Junior Boarding School

Investigator:

Felicia Sevne -- (XXX) XXX-XXXX

Introduction

• You are being asked to be in a research study exploring how attending a private, charitable, therapeutic children’s home and junior boarding school impacted the lives of former resident students.
• You were selected as a possible participant because you lived at Kurn Hattin Homes for Children for at least 2 years between 1998 and 2008, are over the age of 18, and are able to read and speak English.
• I ask that you read this form and ask any questions that you may have before agreeing to be in the study.
• I have completed the CollaborativeInstitutionalTrainingInitiative (CITI) on line training course prior to HSR approval. The certificate of completion is on file at the SSW.

Purpose of Study

• The purpose of the study is to gain a better understanding of the experiences of former resident students of a private, therapeutic, children’s home and junior boarding school (Kurn Hattin Homes for Children) by interviewing them about the impact attending the school had on their social, emotional, and academic development. The purpose of conducting in-depth interviews is to gain an understanding of former resident student’s experiences through their own words.
• This study is being conducted as a research requirement for my master’s in social work degree.
• Ultimately, this research may be published or presented at professional conferences.

Description of the Study Procedures

• If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to do the following things: Read, sign and return this consent form, and participate in a one-time 60-minute interview with the researcher by telephone. This interview will be audio-recorded and transcribed. The interview will involve discussing your experiences of attending Kurn Hattin Homes for
Children and the impact you feel that it had on your life. During the interview, I will also ask the following demographic questions: your current age, your age upon entering and exiting the school, your race/ethnicity, gender, relationship status, current occupation, highest level of education and current level of income.

**Risks/Discomforts of Being in this Study**

- The study has the following risks: First, the interview questions may bring up uncomfortable or distressing memories or feelings of your time at the school. It is somewhat likely that this may occur. Second, it is possible that those memories or feelings could cause you psychological distress. If this occurs during our interview you may choose to take a break or stop the interview at any time. Before the interview, I will mail to you a mental health resource sheet that will describe how you will be able to access mental health resources, if needed, including crisis services in your area. These resources are available should you experience psychological distress as a response to participating in this study.

**Benefits of Being in the Study**

- The benefits of participation in this study are that you will have the opportunity to discuss your experience of living and going to school at Kurn Hattin Homes for Children. Some people find talking about their experiences to be helpful. Through this process, you may gain insight into some of your experiences that you did not previously have. Also, participating in the study will give you the opportunity to talk about issues that may be important to you.

- The field of social work and society as a whole may benefit from having more information about different out-of-home placement options for children, as well as a better understanding of the impact of different placement settings on children. In this case, there is the potential to show the impact of placement at a therapeutic children’s home and junior boarding school.

**Confidentiality**

- Your participation will be kept strictly confidential. Any quotes coming directly from you that appear in the study will be represented by a pseudonym (a false name), which will further protect your confidentiality.

- All records pertaining to this study will be kept strictly confidential. Consent forms with signatures will be kept separate from interview transcripts, and all records will be assigned a pseudonym (a false name), rather than listed with your actual name. All research materials including recordings, transcriptions, analyses and consent documents will be stored separately in a secure locked box for three years, according to federal regulations. All electronically stored data will be password protected during the storage period. We will not include any information in any report we may publish that would make it possible to identify you.

**Payments/gifts**

- You will not receive any payment or compensation for participation in this study.

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Right to Refuse or Withdraw

- The decision to participate in this study is entirely up to you. You may refuse to take part in the study at any time up to 2 weeks after the date of our phone interview without affecting your relationship with the researchers of this study or Smith College. Your decision to refuse will not result in any loss of benefits (including access to services) to which you are otherwise entitled. You have the right not to answer any single question, as well as to withdraw completely up to the point noted below. If you choose to withdraw, I will not use any of your information collected for this study. You must notify me of your decision to withdraw by email or by phone no later than 2 weeks after the date of our interview. After that date, your information will become part of the thesis.

Right to Ask Questions and Report Concerns

- You have the right to ask questions about this research study and to have those questions answered by me before, during, or after the research. If you have any further questions about the study, at any time, feel free to contact me, Felicia Sevne, at XXXX@XXXX or by telephone at (XXX) XXX-XXXX. If you would like a summary of the study results, one will be sent to you once the study is completed. If you have any other concerns about your rights as a research participant, or if you have any problems as a result of your participation, you may contact the Chair of the Smith College School for Social Work Human Subjects Committee at (413) 585-7974.

Consent

- Your signature below indicates that you have decided to volunteer as a research participant for this study, and that you have read and understood the information provided above. You will be given a signed and dated copy of this form to keep.

Name of Participant (print): ____________________________________________

Signature of Participant: ____________________________ Date: ____________

Signature of Researcher(s): ____________________________ Date: ____________

1. I agree to be audiotaped for this interview:

Name of Participant (print): ____________________________________________

Signature of Participant: ____________________________ Date: ____________

Signature of Researcher(s): ____________________________ Date: ____________
2. I agree to be interviewed, but I do not want the interview to be taped:

Name of Participant (print): ____________________________________________
Signature of Participant: ___________________ Date: _____________
Signature of Researcher(s): ___________________ Date: _____________

Form updated 9/25/13
Appendix C2: Second Draft of Informed Consent Form

Consent to Participate in a Research Study
Smith College School for Social Work, Northampton, MA

Title of Study: Kurn Hattin Homes for Children: Exploring the Experiences of Former Resident Students of a Charitable, Therapeutic Children’s Home and Junior Boarding School

Investigator:
Felicia Sevone -(XXX) XXX-XXXX -- XXX@XXXXX

Introduction
• You are being asked to be in a research study exploring how attending a private, charitable, therapeutic children’s home and junior boarding school impacted the lives of former resident students.
• You were selected as a possible participant because you lived at Kurn Hattin Homes for Children for at least 2 years between 1998 and 2008, are over the age of 18, and are able to read and speak English.
• I ask that you read this form and ask any questions that you may have before agreeing to be in the study.
• I have completed the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) on line training course prior to HSR approval. The certificate of completion is on file at the SSW.

Purpose of Study
• The purpose of the study is to gain a better understanding of the experiences of former resident students of a private, therapeutic, children’s home and junior boarding school (Kurn Hattin Homes for Children) by interviewing them about the impact attending the school had on their social, emotional, and academic development. The purpose of conducting in-depth interviews is to gain an understanding of former resident student’s experiences through their own words.
• This study is being conducted as a research requirement for my master’s in social work degree.
• Ultimately, this research may be published or presented at professional conferences.

Description of the Study Procedures
• If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to do the following things: Read, sign and return this consent form, and participate in a one-time 60-minute interview with the researcher by telephone. This interview will be audio-recorded and transcribed. The interview will involve discussing your experiences of attending Kurn Hattin Homes for Children and the impact you feel that it had on your life. During the interview, I will also ask the following demographic questions: your current age, your age upon entering and exiting the school, your race/ethnicity, gender, relationship status, current occupation, highest level of education and current level of income.
Risks/Discomforts of Being in this Study

• The study has the following risks: First, the interview questions may bring up uncomfortable or distressing memories or feelings of your time at the school. It is somewhat likely that this may occur. Second, it is possible that those memories or feelings could cause you psychological distress. If this occurs during our interview you may choose to take a break or stop the interview at any time. Before the interview, I will mail to you a mental health resource sheet that will describe how you will be able to access mental health resources, if needed, including crisis services in your area. These resources are available should you experience psychological distress as a response to participating in this study.

Benefits of Being in the Study

• The benefits of participation in this study are that you will have the opportunity to discuss your experience of living and going to school at Kurn Hattin Homes for Children. Some people find talking about their experiences to be helpful. Through this process, you may gain insight into some of your experiences that you did not previously have. Also, participating in the study will give you the opportunity to talk about issues that may be important to you.

• The field of social work and society as a whole may benefit from having more information about different out-of-home placement options for children, as well as a better understanding of the impact of different placement settings on children. In this case, there is the potential to show the impact of placement at a therapeutic children’s home and junior boarding school.

Confidentiality

• Your participation will be kept strictly confidential. Any quotes coming directly from you that appear in the study will be represented by a pseudonym (a false name), which will further protect your confidentiality.

• All records pertaining to this study will be kept strictly confidential. Consent forms with signatures will be kept separate from interview transcripts, and all records will be assigned a pseudonym (a false name), rather than listed with your actual name. All research materials including recordings, transcriptions, analyses and consent documents will be stored separately in a secure locked box for three years, according to federal regulations. All electronically stored data will be password protected during the storage period. We will not include any information in any report we may publish that would make it possible to identify you.

Payments/gift

• You will receive a $20 gift card as a thank you for your participation in this study.

Right to Refuse or Withdraw

• The decision to participate in this study is entirely up to you. You may refuse to take part in the study at any time up to 2 weeks after the date of our phone interview without affecting your relationship with the researchers of this study or Smith College. Your decision to refuse will not result in any loss of benefits (including access to services) to which you are otherwise entitled. You have the right not to answer any single question, as well as to withdraw completely up to the point noted below. If you choose to withdraw, I will not use any of your information collected for this study. You must notify me of your decision to withdraw by email or by phone no later than 2
weeks after the date of our interview. After that date, your information will become part of the thesis.

Right to Ask Questions and Report Concerns
• You have the right to ask questions about this research study and to have those questions answered by me before, during, or after the research. If you have any further questions about the study, at any time, feel free to contact me, Felicia Sevene, at xxx@xxxx or by telephone at (XXX) XXX-XXXX. If you would like a summary of the study results, one will be sent to you once the study is completed. If you have any other concerns about your rights as a research participant, or if you have any problems as a result of your participation, you may contact the Chair of the Smith College School for Social Work Human Subjects Committee at (413) 585-7974.

Consent
• Your signature below indicates that you have decided to volunteer as a research participant for this study, and that you have read and understood the information provided above. You will be given a signed and dated copy of this form to keep.

Name of Participant (print): ____________________________________________
Signature of Participant: ___________________________ Date: _____________
Signature of Researcher(s): ___________________________ Date: _____________

1. I agree to be audiotaped for this interview:

Name of Participant (print): ____________________________________________
Signature of Participant: ___________________________ Date: _____________
Signature of Researcher(s): ___________________________ Date: _____________

2. I agree to be interviewed, but I do not want the interview to be taped:

Name of Participant (print): ____________________________________________
Signature of Participant: ___________________________ Date: _____________
Signature of Researcher(s): ___________________________ Date: _____________

Form updated 9/25/13
Appendix C3: Final Draft of Informed Consent Form

Consent to Participate in a Research Study
Smith College School for Social Work, Northampton, MA

Title of Study: Kurn Hattin Homes for Children: Exploring the Experiences of Former Resident Students of a Charitable, Therapeutic Children's Home and Junior Boarding School

Investigator:
Felicia Sevne -(XXX) XXX-XXXX -- XXX@XXXXX

Introduction
• You are being asked to be in a research study exploring how attending a private, charitable, therapeutic children’s home and junior boarding school impacted the lives of former resident students.
• You were selected as a possible participant because you lived at Kurn Hattin Homes for Children for at least 2 years between 1980 and 2010, are over the age of 18, and are able to read and speak English.
• I ask that you read this form and ask any questions that you may have before agreeing to be in the study.
• I have completed the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) online training course prior to HSR approval. The certificate of completion is on file at the SSW.

Purpose of Study
• The purpose of the study is to gain a better understanding of the experiences of former resident students of a private, therapeutic, children’s home and junior boarding school (Kurn Hattin Homes for Children) by interviewing them about the impact attending the school had on their social, emotional, and academic development. The purpose of conducting in-depth interviews is to gain an understanding of former resident student’s experiences through their own words.
• This study is being conducted as a research requirement for my master’s in social work degree.
• Ultimately, this research may be published or presented at professional conferences.

Description of the Study Procedures
• If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to do the following things: Read, sign and return this consent form, and participate in a one-time 60-minute interview with the researcher by telephone. This interview will be audio-recorded and transcribed. The interview will involve discussing your experiences of attending Kurn Hattin Homes for Children and the impact you feel that it had on your life. During the interview, I will also ask the following demographic questions: your current age, your age upon entering and exiting the school, your race/ethnicity, gender, relationship status, current occupation, highest level of education and current level of income.
**Risks/Discomforts of Being in this Study**

- The study has the following risks: First, the interview questions may bring up uncomfortable or distressing memories or feelings of your time at the school. It is somewhat likely that this may occur. Second, it is possible that those memories or feelings could cause you psychological distress. If this occurs during our interview you may choose to take a break or stop the interview at any time. Before the interview, I will mail to you a mental health resource sheet that will describe how you will be able to access mental health resources, if needed, including crisis services in your area. These resources are available should you experience psychological distress as a response to participating in this study.

**Benefits of Being in the Study**

- The benefits of participation in this study are that you will have the opportunity to discuss your experience of living and going to school at Kurn Hattin Homes for Children. Some people find talking about their experiences to be helpful. Through this process, you may gain insight into some of your experiences that you did not previously have. Also, participating in the study will give you the opportunity to talk about issues that may be important to you.

- The field of social work and society as a whole may benefit from having more information about different out-of-home placement options for children, as well as a better understanding of the impact of different placement settings on children. In this case, there is the potential to show the impact of placement at a therapeutic children’s home and junior boarding school.

**Confidentiality**

- Your participation will be kept strictly confidential. Any quotes coming directly from you that appear in the study will be represented by a pseudonym (a false name), which will further protect your confidentiality.

- All records pertaining to this study will be kept strictly confidential. Consent forms with signatures will be kept separate from interview transcripts, and all records will be assigned a pseudonym (a false name), rather than listed with your actual name. All research materials including recordings, transcriptions, analyses and consent documents will be stored separately in a secure locked box for three years, according to federal regulations. All electronically stored data will be password protected during the storage period. We will not include any information in any report we may publish that would make it possible to identify you.

**Payments/gift**

- You will receive a $20 gift card as a thank you for your participation in this study.

**Right to Refuse or Withdraw**

- The decision to participate in this study is entirely up to you. You may refuse to take part in the study at any time up to 2 weeks after the date of our phone interview without affecting your relationship with the researchers of this study or Smith College. Your decision to refuse will not result in any loss of benefits (including access to services) to which you are otherwise entitled. You have the right not to answer any single question, as well as to withdraw completely up to the point noted below. If you choose to withdraw, I will not use any of your information collected for this study. You must notify me of your decision to withdraw by email or by phone no later than 2
weeks after the date of our interview. After that date, your information will become part of the thesis.

Right to Ask Questions and Report Concerns

- You have the right to ask questions about this research study and to have those questions answered by me before, during, or after the research. If you have any further questions about the study, at any time, feel free to contact me, Felicia Sevene, at xxx@xxxx or by telephone at (XXX) XXX-XXXX. If you would like a summary of the study results, one will be sent to you once the study is completed. If you have any other concerns about your rights as a research participant, or if you have any problems as a result of your participation, you may contact the Chair of the Smith College School for Social Work Human Subjects Committee at (413) 585-7974.

Consent

- Your signature below indicates that you have decided to volunteer as a research participant for this study, and that you have read and understood the information provided above. You will be given a signed and dated copy of this form to keep.

Name of Participant (print):__________________________________________________
Signature of Participant: __________________________ Date: _________________
Signature of Researcher(s): __________________________ Date: ________________

1. I agree to be audiotaped for this interview:

Name of Participant (print):__________________________________________________
Signature of Participant: __________________________ Date: _________________
Signature of Researcher(s): __________________________ Date: ________________

2. I agree to be interviewed, but I do not want the interview to be taped:

Name of Participant (print):__________________________________________________
Signature of Participant: __________________________ Date: _________________
Signature of Researcher(s): __________________________ Date: ________________

Form updated 9/25/13
Appendix D1: First Draft of Interview Questions

Demographic Questions

*Age-*
1. What is your current age? Age at the time you entered Kurn Hattin? Age at the time you exited Kurn Hattin?

*Race/Ethnicity-
2. How do you identify your race or your ethnicity? Please list all that apply.

*Gender-
3. What is your gender?

*Relationship status –
4. What is your relationship status? Married___Divorced___Widowed___Domestic Partnership___Single___Long-term Relationship___Other___

*Education-
5. What is the highest level of education you completed?

*Employment status-
6. What is your current employment status?

*Occupation-
7. What is your current occupation?

*Income-
8. What is your current income level?
   o $0-25,000
   o $25,000-50,000
   o $50,000-75,000
   o $75,000+

Qualitative Interview Questions

*Separation from primary caregiver(s)/family/community – emotional impact*
   1. What was the reason you went to Kurn Hattin Homes for Children?

   2. What emotions do you remember experiencing about being separated from your parents, caregivers, or other family members?

   3. How did you cope with any strong feelings you may have experienced at that time?

*Caregiver involvement*
   4. If your parents or caregivers were involved in any aspect of your Kurn Hattin experience, please describe how you felt about their involvement. a. Why did you feel that way?

*Emotional needs/relationships*
   5. Did you feel safe while you were at Kurn Hattin?

   a. Why or why not?
6. While you were living at Kurn Hattin, was there anyone you felt you could trust and go to for support, to help you manage any strong emotions you might have felt, such as sadness, loneliness, anxiety, frustration, anger, or fear? a. If yes, who? If no, what was that like for you?

**Relationships/social**
7. Please describe any relationships you had while you lived at Kurn Hattin that were important to you. Examples might be: house-parents, teachers, counselors, coaches, other students or someone else.
   a. What was important about them?

**Activities/groups/clubs/programs**
8. Please describe any activities or programs that you participated in while living at Kurn Hattin that were meaningful or helpful to you? Examples might be: music, arts, sports, gardening, equine or pet therapy, family programs, support groups, etc.)
   a. What was meaningful or helpful to you?

**Academics**
9. Was there anything at all about the classroom experience you had at Kurn Hattin that you feel was helpful to your learning?
   a. Please describe.

10. Was there anything at all about the classroom experience you had at Kurn Hattin that you feel was unhelpful to your learning?
    a. Please describe.
11. Do you feel that attending Kurn Hattin had any effect on your academic accomplishments? a. Please describe.

**Residential structure of the school**
12. What effect did the structure of the Kurn Hattin environment have on you? (For instance: living on a separate, private campus, having scheduled activities throughout the day, having daily chores, having school rules, living in cottages with house-parents, etc.)

13. Was there anything that was difficult for you about attending Kurn Hattin?

**Present day**
14. Do you still have a relationship today with anyone you knew from your time at the school? If yes, please describe what the relationship means to you. If no, please describe why not.

**Follow-up question**
15. Is there anything else that you feel is important for me to know about your experience of attending Kurn Hattin Homes for Children that I haven’t yet asked?
Appendix D2: Final Interview Questions

Demographic Questions

Age-
1. What is your current age? Age at the time you entered Kurn Hattin? Age at the time you exited Kurn Hattin?

Race/Ethnicity-
2. How do you identify your race or your ethnicity? Please list all that apply.

Gender-
3. What is your gender?

Relationship status –
4. What is your relationship status? Married___Divorced___Widowed___Domestic Partnership___Single___Long-term Relationship___Other___

Education-
5. What is the highest level of education you completed?

Employment status-
6. What is your current employment status?

Occupation-
7. What is your current occupation?

Income-
8. What is your current income level?
   o $0-25,000
   o $25,000-50,000
   o $50,000-75,000
   o $75,000+

Qualitative Interview Questions

Separation from primary caregiver(s)/family/community – emotional impact
1. What was the reason you went to Kurn Hattin Homes for Children?

2. What emotions do you remember experiencing about being separated from your parents, caregivers, or other family members?

3. How did you cope with any strong feelings you may have experienced at that time?

Caregiver involvement
4. If your parents or caregivers were involved in any aspect of your Kurn Hattin experience, please describe how you felt about their involvement. a. Why did you feel that way?

Emotional needs/relationships
5. Did you feel safe while you were at Kurn Hattin?
   a. Why or why not?
6. While you were living at Kurn Hattin, was there anyone you felt you could trust and go to for support, to help you manage any strong emotions you might have felt, such as sadness, loneliness, anxiety, frustration, anger, or fear? a. If yes, who? If no, what was that like for you?

**Relationships/social**
7. Please describe any relationships you had while you lived at Kurn Hattin that were important to you. Examples might be: house-parents, teachers, counselors, coaches, other students or someone else.
   b. What was important about them?

**Activities/groups/clubs/programs**
8. Please describe any activities or programs that you participated in while living at Kurn Hattin that were meaningful or helpful to you? Examples might be: music, arts, sports, gardening, equine or pet therapy, family programs, support groups, etc.)
   b. What was meaningful or helpful to you?

**Academics**
9. Was there anything at all about the classroom experience you had at Kurn Hattin that you feel was helpful to your learning?
   b. Please describe.

10. Was there anything at all about the classroom experience you had at Kurn Hattin that you feel was unhelpful to your learning?
    a. Please describe.

11. Do you feel that attending Kurn Hattin had any effect on your academic accomplishments? a. Please describe.

**Residential structure of the school**
12. What effect did the structure of the Kurn Hattin environment have on you? (For instance: living on a separate, private campus, having scheduled activities throughout the day, having daily chores, having school rules, living in cottages with house-parents, etc.)

13. Was there anything that was difficult for you about attending Kurn Hattin?

**Present day**
14. Do you still have a relationship today with anyone you knew from your time at the school? If yes, please describe what the relationship means to you. If no, please describe why not.

**Follow-up question**
15. Is there anything else that you feel is important for me to know about your experience of attending Kurn Hattin Homes for Children that I haven’t yet asked?

**Foster care**
16. Did you ever live in foster care? Y/N
17. If you did live in foster care, did you remain in the same home for the entire time that you lived in foster care?

18. If you lived in more than one foster care setting, please describe how moving from one home to another impacted your life.

_Foster care vs. Kurn Hattin Homes for Children_  
19. Was your experience of living in foster care different from your experience of living at Kurn Hattin? Please describe.
Appendix E1: Change of Protocol Request Form #1

SMITH COLLEGE
IRB RESEARCH PROPOSAL FORM

RESEARCH PROJECT CHANGE OF PROTOCOL FORM – School for Social Work

You are presently the researcher on the following approved research project by the Human Subjects Committee (HRC) of Smith College School for Social Work:

Exploring The Experiences of Former Students of a Private, Charitable Therapeutic Children’s Home and Junior Boarding School for At-Risk Youth
Name of Researcher -- Felicia Sevane
Name of Research Advisor -- Robert Eschmann

I am requesting changes to the study protocols, as they were originally approved by the HRC Committee of Smith College School for Social Work. These changes are as follows:

[DESCRIBE ALL PROTOCOL CHANGES BEING PROPOSED IN NUMERIC SEQUENCE; BE BRIEF AND SPECIFIC]

1. I plan to offer each subject of the study a $20 gift card for their participation in my study.
2. I plan to alert the Kurn Hattin Alumni Facebook Group of the change to my study by writing a short post before reposting the updated recruitment flyer.

_X__I understand that these proposed changes in protocol will be reviewed by the Committee.
_X__I also understand that any proposed changes in protocol being requested in this form cannot be implemented until they have been fully approved by the HRC Committee.
_X__I have discussed these changes with my Research Advisor and he/she has approved them.

Your signature below indicates that you have read and understood the information provided above.

Signature of Researcher: ____________________________
Name of Researcher (PLEASE PRINT): Felicia Sevane Date: 2/6/2015

PLEASE RETURN THIS SIGNED & COMPLETED FORM TO Laura Wyman at L.Wyman@smith.edu or to Lilly Hall Room 115.

***Include your Research Advisor/Doctoral Committee Chair in the ‘cc’. Once the Advisor/Chair writes acknowledging and approving this change, the Committee review will be initiated.
February 7, 2015

Felicia Sevene

Dear Felicia,

I have reviewed your amendments and they look fine. The amendments to your study are therefore approved. Thank you and best of luck with your project.

Sincerely,

Elaine Kersten, Ed.D.
Co-Chair, Human Subjects Review Committee

CC: Rob Eschmann, Research Advisor
Appendix E3: Change of Protocol Request Form #2

RESEARCH PROJECT CHANGE OF PROTOCOL FORM – School for Social Work

You are presently the researcher on the following approved research project by the Human Subjects Committee (HSR) of Smith College School for Social Work:

Exploring The Experiences of Former Students of a Private, Charitable Therapeutic Children's Home and Junior Boarding School for At-Risk Youth

Name of Researcher – Felicia Sevence
Name of Research Advisor – Robert Eschmann

I am requesting changes to the study protocols, as they were originally approved by the HSR Committee of Smith College School for Social Work. These changes are as follows:

[DESCRIBE ALL PROTOCOL CHANGES BEING PROPOSED IN NUMERIC SEQUENCE; BE BRIEF AND SPECIFIC]

1. I plan to change the timeframe eligibility requirements of my study from only those who attended the school for at least 2 years between 1998 and 2008 to anyone who attended the school for at least 2 years between 1980 and 2010.
2. I plan to make the amendments to my recruitment flyer and re-post it on the Kurn Hattin Homes for Children Alumni Facebook page.
3. I plan to alert the Kurn Hattin Alumni Facebook Group to the change to my study by writing a short post before re-posting my updated recruitment flyer.
4. I plan to eliminate all respondents to the recruitment letter that was sent by the executive director of Kurn Hattin Homes for Children to the paper mailing list of Alumni of Kurn Hattin Homes for Children.

_X__I understand that these proposed changes in protocol will be reviewed by the Committee.
_X__I also understand that any proposed changes in protocol being requested in this form cannot be implemented until they have been fully approved by the HSR Committee.
_X__I have discussed these changes with my Research Advisor and he/she has approved them.

Your signature below indicates that you have read and understood the information provided above.

Signature of Researcher: ____________________________
Name of Researcher (PLEASE PRINT): Felicia Sevence
Date: 2/20/2015

PLEASE RETURN THIS SIGNED & COMPLETED FORM TO Laura Wyman at L.Wyman@smith.edu or to Lilly Hall Room 115.

***Include your Research Advisor/Doctoral Committee Chair in the 'cc'. Once the Advisor/Chair writes acknowledging and approving this change, the Committee review will be initiated.
February 22, 2015

Felicia Sevene

Dear Felicia,

I have reviewed your amendments and they look fine. These amendments to your study are therefore approved. Thank you and best of luck with your project.

Sincerely,

Elaine Kersten, Ed.D.
Co-Chair, Human Subjects Review Committee

CC: Rob Eschmann, Research Advisor
Appendix E5: Change of Protocol Request Form #3

**SMITH COLLEGE**

**IRB RESEARCH PROPOSAL FORM**

**RESEARCH PROJECT CHANGE OF PROTOCOL FORM – School for Social Work**

You are presently the researcher on the following approved research project by the Human Subjects Committee (HSR) of Smith College School for Social Work:

Exploring the Experiences of Former Students of a Private, Charitable, Therapeutic Children’s Home and Junior Boarding School

Name of Researcher - Felicia Sevete
Name of Research Advisor - Robert Eschmann

I am requesting changes to the study protocol(s), as they were originally approved by the HSR Committee of Smith College School for Social Work. These changes are as follows:

I will add 4 additional questions to my current interview questions:

1. Did you ever live in foster care? Y/N
2. If you did live in foster care, did you remain in the same foster home for the entire time you lived in foster care? Y/N – N/A
3. If you lived in more than one foster care setting, please describe how moving from one home to another impacted your life.
4. Was your experience of living in foster care different from your experience of living at Kurn Hattin Homes for Children? Please describe.

I understand that these proposed changes in protocol will be reviewed by the Committee.

I also understand that any proposed changes in protocol being requested in this form cannot be implemented until they have been fully approved by the HSR Committee.

I have discussed these changes with my Research Advisor and he/she has approved them.

Your signature below indicates that you have read and understood the information provided above.

Signature of Researcher:

Name of Researcher (PLEASE PRINT): Felicia Sevete Date: 3/1/2015

PLEASE RETURN THIS SIGNED & COMPLETED FORM TO Laura Wyman at LWyman@smith.edu or to Lilly Hall Room 115.

***Include your Research Advisor/Doctoral Committee Chair in the ‘cc’. Once the Advisor/Chair writes acknowledging and approving this change, the Committee review will be initiated.***
March 10, 2015

Felicia Sevone

Dear Felicia,

I have reviewed your amendments and they look fine. These amendments to your study are therefore approved. Thank you and best of luck with your project.

Sincerely,

Elaine Kersten, Ed.D.
Co-Chair, Human Subjects Review Committee

CC: Rob Eschmann, Research Advisor