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The Presence of Leadership in the Homeless Environment

A study of leader traits, perceptions of leadership and difficulties facing potential leaders in the homeless environment

by

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April, 1996
"The Presence of Leadership in the Homeless Environment"

A Study of Leader Traits, Perceptions of Leadership and Difficulties Facing Potential Leaders in the Homeless Environment

A Senior Project
by Maria C. Chávez

The Jepson School of Leadership Studies
Dr. William Howe
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"A leader is a person who has the power to get a group to do something or make something, or at least convince them to want to, but without physical force." This may not be the most scholarly manner to define what a leader does, or what leadership is, but there is a shading of comparison to how many students in the Jepson School of Leadership Studies have come to define leadership. We have generally defined leadership as the process in which a group of individuals achieve a collective goal. It is also similar to Harry S. Truman's, a former president of the United States and a well-known leader, explanation that a leader is a "man who has the ability to get other people to get other people to do what they didn't want to do, and like it" (as cited by Forsyth 214). But the first definition was not a response of a new leadership studies major, nor even a child in grade school. The definition of a leader came from a homeless woman from the Merrill Espigh Family Shelter on East Grace Street in downtown Richmond Virginia.

What are all the contexts in which we can find leaders and leadership? Traditionally, leaders and leadership has been examined and documented in formal context like a business setting or the military. In the Jepson reader, a handbook that all Foundations of Leadership classes use at the University of Richmond, all the articles chosen to illustrate the fundamentals of leadership, (part four, titled, "The Process of Leaders") come from military sources such as West Point. But as
the study of leadership grows and develops, the limitations of prior studies are becoming more and more apparent. As we have studied time and time again in the different leadership classes at the Jepson school, leadership and the power leaders have over a group of people is not merely reserved for the CEOs and generals of the world. It is becoming to be a more universal concept. Only recently has any consideration been given that leadership can exist in any context. In the leadership studies major specifically, we have learned about leadership existing in the contexts of social movements and at the community levels as well. Burns has said that the only two essentials of power are motive and resource (Burns 12). If these are the only two minimal requirements to acquire power, then leaders should be found and thoroughly studied in many more contexts than ever believed before.

This idea cannot be better examined and documented than in a homeless shelter, a place where the inhabitants have not traditionally been thought to possess leadership skills, much less a home or steady income. At first, a homeless shelter may not look like a place where potential leadership dwells, but after a careful study, it was obvious that there were many homeless individuals, and not just the legitimate staff of the shelter, with leader traits and actively practicing leadership. It has been established that leadership needs to be developed (Atwater and Yammarino 645) but Segal in 1985 did suggest that the traits are a large part of an individual's leadership
potential (as cited by Atwater and Yammarino 213). Therefore, it could be possible that there are potential leaders in the homeless community; their resources have for the most part yet to be tapped, molded and developed.

This study examines the existence of leadership in this context of the homeless. More specifically, the study looks at the leadership traits and the potential for leadership among homeless women finding temporary refuge in an emergency shelter in Richmond, Virginia. It will also give more legitimacy to the notion that leadership can exist in any context. And finally, this study will look at the difficulties potential leaders in the homeless context face, and what the possible ways are to alleviate them.

Leadership has traditionally fallen into the hands of the individuals with legitimate power - either through a title or rank, or other quality like wealth. But in the environment of the homeless population, power obviously had to be gained through some other means.

The Context of Homelessness

The homeless population in the United States has exploded in recent decades. All people have to deal with this growing issue, even if they do not come in physical contact with a homeless person on a day to day basis. Although there are discrepancies in the number of homeless people in the United States, the ball park figures are nevertheless astronomical. The United Institute
of Study reported in 1992 that there were "500,000 to 600,000 homeless nationwide on a single day - that falls between the advocate and HUD (Housing and Urban Development) extremes"("Encyclopedia of Sociology" 844). The National Coalition for the Homeless in Washington D.C. claimed that the number of homeless people ranges 600,000 to 3 million a day that same year.("Christian Science Monitor" 6) The media has also forced the issue into the forefront of all our minds. Recently, the topic of homelessness has been covered on popular talk shows such as Oprah Winfrey, and is often the subject of many t.v. documentaries.

Organizational Context of the Study

The Merrill Espigh Family Shelter is located in downtown Richmond on East Grace Street. It is one of two family shelters run by Emergency Shelter, Inc, an organization started in the early 1980s by a concerned group of citizens in Richmond. The shelter houses women and any of their children for an average length of two months. The women are screened before they are allowed to stay at the shelter. All potential residents have to be mentally healthy and capable to take of herself and any of her children to stay at the shelter, and must actively work with one of the shelter's case workers to improve her life so that she may be able to succeed without any additional assistance once she leaves the shelter.

The shelter utilizes a pro-active system of rehabilitation
and education for the residents. The Merrill Espigh Family Shelter is not merely a building where homeless women can find a warm bed and a meal. The residents are actively taught practical skills like how to keep a checking account, and how to save their money. There are also programs that deal with the emotional side of these women. Many homeless people tend to become depressed because of their situation. There are mandatory programs aimed at bolstering self-esteem and the idea of self-worth. And lastly, because this is a shelter for women, there are mandatory parenting classes for all mothers and would-be mothers. These classes deal with issues such as discipline and emotional needs of a child.

**Methodology**

**Participants**

Sixteen women from the Merrill Espigh Family Shelter completed a survey with questions ranging from who exhibited leadership in the shelter, to whether or not the women themselves possessed any leadership traits. This particular family shelter is located on Main Street in Richmond, Virginia. The shelter houses women twenty four hours a day, and provides three meals daily. Fourteen women were African-American, and the remaining two were caucasian.

In total, 40 women participated in the entire study which started on January 23, 1996. But because of the nature and context of the study, I was not able to work with the same group
of women for the entire length of the project. During my project, many women were successful in finding a more permanent housing situation and moved out of the shelter. Subsequently, new homeless women filled their beds. But it was still possible to study leadership, and the flow of women entering and exiting the shelter helped exhibit leadership at different levels.

Procedure

This entire study was made possible through the enthusiastic cooperation of the shelter, and especially, the activities director, Megan Lemieux. The survey (appendix a) was passed out to every woman living in the shelter that particular day. On April 3, 1996, there were sixteen women utilizing the shelter.

Fourteen were completed on the first day, while the remaining two were given out and completed the next day. There were two women who had Megan write down their thoughts because they felt that they could not do it well themselves.

Personal interviews were conducted and observations were made in an informal manner. I spent many Tuesday afternoons at the family shelter participating in the mandatory activities such as their Life Skills meetings, parent meetings, and the nightly house meetings. I also shared dinner with the residents of the shelter on many of these Tuesday nights. It was through conversation with many of the women that I had made my original observations of leadership traits which inspired this study.

The last method I used to collect information for this study
was to access the personal files of each woman at the shelter. The data I found ranged from their personal background information to what they wished to accomplish and learn about themselves during their stay at the shelter. These files truly enabled me to see a broad picture of these particular homeless women.

I also supplemented my findings with informal interviews and surveys about leadership in the family shelter. I tied together all the field work by doing library research on any documentation on leadership within this different context.

Data Analysis

The qualitative data were interpreted from the surveys through content analysis. I looked for patterns in the answers given by the women of the shelter. Combined with the notes I took from the many interviews, from my observations, and from my research from the library, I synthesized the information to make my conclusions.

Validity of the Study

Due to the nature of the survey, I know that my results are valid. The women at the shelter had no reason to embellish their actions or words, because they only knew me as a college volunteer who would come in on Tuesday afternoons. My name was not on the survey either.

These women are also not the first group of homeless
individuals to exhibit leadership traits and knowledge about the topic. During my literature review, I encountered a paper that examined the group development and leadership issues of a community action group of homeless people in a New England City (Cohen 71). They were empowered by volunteers serving on the agency board of directors and the staff case manager. A case manager generally works directly with a client, in this case a homeless person, and facilitates the process to fulfill their needs, like housing and a job. The group of homeless people were "seen as a vehicle for building leadership skills among consumers that could be used to affect change within the agency and larger community" (Cohen, 73). Today, the group facilitates a weekly meeting at this particular shelter and promotes other clients to take "action in and on their environmental social system" (Cohen, 73) This earlier study was strong evidence that homeless people can be utilized in positions of leadership.

Results

Analysis of all three methods of study indicated that all the women of the shelter did have a basic understanding of what traits a good leader possesses. In the observation segment of the study, there were a number of instances noted and recorded in which certain residents were exhibiting some type of leadership that had been documented in a scholarly manner, such as in an academic journal or one of the text books utilized by students at the Jepson School of Leadership Studies. For the most part, the
women at this particular family shelter indicated they knew the importance of leadership, and despite being homeless, many women realized and verbalized that they had strengths and goals that could be developed and used to improve their current living situation. But they never connected that their concept of leadership was actively happening in their living environment. The woman basically understood it, but did not assimilate it to their own lives. There were a number of women, however, who did communicate that they did want leadership training because it would help their current situation.

*Weekly Observation*

There were a number of instances in which some type of leadership could be observed. The type of leadership exhibited by women most commonly took on the form of charismatic leadership that utilized a combination base of referent and expert power. With no material incentive to offer or exchange, there was little evidence of transactional leaders, outside of the staff of the shelter.

Often leadership was exhibited by two women in the shelter. They were the two who had been in the shelter the longest—almost three months. Generally, the longer a woman stayed at the shelter, the more likely she was to exhibit leadership. The women tended to follow their leaders first until they were acclimated and learned the system in the shelter. As one of the residents explained, "We follow what they do, because they know the ropes."
They know how things run around here." Whether anyone consciously realized it, their power base combination of referent and expert power was effective. Expert power is derived from the "assumption that the powerholder possesses superior skills and abilities" (Forsyth 186) while referent power comes from the followers' desire to identify and emulate the power holder (Forsyth 184). Often these women were able to gather the other residents for the mandatory afternoon sessions of Life Skills and parenting. These two women had an especially upbeat look on their current situations, and were never without a smile. The other residents could see this, and were attracted to it. In these sessions, these women were also the most vocal, and the other women paid attention and commented with their own remarks, rather than talking amongst themselves as they were often observed doing while a staff member was speaking.

Through the rotation of chores, one woman was discovered to be a wonderful cook. At the staff's encouragement, she is now fully in charge of cooking the dinner meals for the women at the shelter. She is competent, and consults with the staff only to decide what the meals will actually be. The cooking is entirely up to her, and she delegates the task effectively to her group. She is still very much involved in the actual cooking, but she has included other interested and assigned women to help her prepare the meal for the entire house, including the staff and volunteers that are there during the dinner hour.

Many of the mothers also exhibited leadership with their
children. The mothers successful in communicating to their children were observed to lead by example. One mother in particular was especially effective in this manner. She was never observed to raise her voice at her son. She also never commanded him to do something from afar, like from the other side of the room. Instead, she would approach and touch her son while she explained to him why he should not do things such as kick on the floor and hit other children. He usually offered no resistance and listened to his mother's words.

**Informal Interviews**

In general, the women were able to give clearer answers to how they defined leadership in casual conversation than on paper for the survey. These particular homeless women most often defined leadership in terms of a person who was in a position of authority in order to have leadership. Most often the women felt that the leader was a person who had positional power because they were organized or had their life in order. Leadership was also perceived as an end product, rather than a process or journey. Once again, there was little evidence in these informal interviews that many of these women could assimilate leadership as they viewed it, in their own lives.

**The Survey**

The survey elicited a certain trend in the different women's answers. There were some original individual answers, but
generally, all the women's experiences with leadership and leaders were similar.

Defining Leadership
Many either had a difficult time defining leadership or gave a definition in the context of rank or position. Almost all of the women gave the general answer that leadership is when someone is "in charge."

The Qualities of a Good Leader
For the second question, "What do you think are the personal qualities, characteristics or standards that make a person a leader," there was also a notable trend in the answers. Each woman was able to list at least three, if not more characteristics and qualities they felt a good leader possessed. Listed below were the most common answers to this question on the survey.

Determination to get a task accomplished
This was the most prevalent characteristic reported by the resident. In some fashion all but one woman indicated that a good leader has to understand what had to be accomplished, and have the drive to actually follow through and accomplish the task as well. One woman phrased that a good leader was a "head strong person who know what they want and go for it."

Another respondent wrote that a good leader has "self-motivation," or "has initiation [initiative]" as well.
A third woman put it in simpler terms and felt that a good leader is "on top of things and keep[s] everything organized."

**Ability to Work and Cooperate with Others**

All but two women also noted on their survey that they felt a good leader should be able to work well with others. This entailed for one respondent that a good leader should be "able to understand and listen and give feedback that can help." For another woman, a leader must be punctual and a strong communicator.

**A Positive Attitude Towards the Group**

All but two women also noted that attitude was a determinant of whether or not a leader was a good one or not. More specifically, two women also indicated that a good leader should have a good sense of humor to deal with a situation that is not going as planned.

A third woman further explained that having a positive attitude also entailed being "flexible for any changes."

**The Shelter's Leader**

Most commonly, Megan Lemieux, the activities coordinator was named as the first person to come to mind when asked to name a leader at the shelter. The women felt that she is a helpful, "open-hearted" and kind person, who "stops in tracks to take time to address concerns." Naming Megan as the leader is consistent with the majority of the women's opinion that leadership falls
into the hands of the person in position of power.

There were however, three women who felt that they were the leader at the shelter that came first to their minds respectively. One woman felt that she was a leader because she exhibited "self-control."

Another respondent concluded that she was a leader at the emergency shelter because she "attend[s] groups cooperatively, and provide[s] insight. [She] took initiative to clean the donation room. [She] is now directing others on what to do, . . . and works with everyone real well." The donation room is the room in the shelter that is reserved for all the clothing items that have been donated by local businesses or generous individuals. The donation room tends to become disorganized as it becomes more and more filled during certain times of the year, like the Christmas holiday.

A third respondent felt that she was a leader because she is "honest towards everyone and is an individual."

There was only one woman who did not list anyone at all as a leader at the shelter. She explained by writing, "I really don't know right now because I'm new here and I don't know everybody."

Other Leaders at the Shelter

This question was only applicable to the respondents that named a member of the shelter staff as a leader in question three. Therefore, there were only thirteen responses to this particular question. The most common answer was that there were
no residents at the shelter that they considered leaders. One woman explained that there are "no residents [that she can consider as leaders]. Not everyone does their chores. They are impossible."

Another respondent wrote, "No [leaders]. Everybody [is] joking, nasty, argue about petty things. [They] don't have respect for others and stuff. House full of little girls."

The woman who in the last question wrote that she did not know anybody yet because she had just moved into the shelter wrote, "[W]ell I think everybody that work here should be our leader so we can learn and lead our kids. She was the only woman surveyed that made any written mention of leadership and her children.

The Residents and their Leader Qualities

Even though few women listed themselves as leaders at the shelter, and even fewer women listed any other residents as leaders, an overwhelming number of women (all but one respondent) felt that they possessed the qualities of a leader and proceeded to list at least one quality they had. In all but one case, the respondents gave at least three qualities that they possessed. The one woman who did not respond with qualities, instead answered that she didn't know if she had any qualities a good leader had.

A majority of the women listed the qualities that they felt good leaders should have as qualities they felt they possessed as
well. One respondent specifically mentioned that she had the qualities of a leader and that "others depend on me more than I depend on myself."

The Residents and their Feelings About Being a Leader

In the last attempt to see if the respondents would answer that they were a leader, more than 50% answered that they were not, even though they wrote that they possessed and actively exhibited many qualities that made a leader many of the earlier questions.

One woman explained that "no, I don't think I am the leader, but I am one for my kids."

Another resident explained that she "could be not a real natural leader. [I] have been in jobs supervising though."

What It Would Take to Be a Leader

For all the women either said that they did not know if they were a leader, or felt that they, only one woman responded to the last question. The same woman who felt that she was not a natural leader wrote that for her to become a leader she would need to "listen to other people and their feeling. [She would need the a]bility to compromise." She further wrote that "[c]ompromise provides for better efficiency - easier to get the job done."
Personal Background Information

All women for a past Life Skills class were required to fill out a personal and work evaluation sheet that listed, in numerical order, what their immediate priorities were. One woman listed leadership training as a priority second only to finding her career focus. Her third goal was "stress management", and fourth was exercise.

Another woman listed learning better public speaking skills as her first priority while at the shelter.

A third woman listed her first priority as to "balance personal and work life," followed next by "making positive decisions," then "setting goals," and followed up with her last priority as working towards a "higher level of self-esteem."

Discussion

All three methods of study were conclusive in showing that leadership is evident in the environment of the family shelter and that it is a concept in which these particular homeless women have definite ideas. But through this study it was also learned that many of the conceptions they have are misconstrued. This misunderstanding can be attributed to societal or traditional ideals that they have been conditioned to, and the nature of homelessness that leads to a distorted image of leadership. However, there are possible ways to improve their situation as explored by this study as well.
Perceptions of Leadership and the Idea of Power

Interestingly, the women at the shelter generally make a note of pointing out that there is a difference between "the" leader and "a" leader. Just because many of these women admit that they possess many qualities they associate a leader to have, did not mean that they could consider themselves or be considered the leader, except in the one case where the woman did name herself as a leader in the shelter. Basically, in their minds there is a ranking of higher versus lower leadership positions as more legitimate, or better roles. The distinction seems to be decided on whether or not there is positional power. That is, they have a "socially sanctioned right to require and demand compliance"(Forsyth 183). Even if the leader has none of the qualities they feel a good leader should have, these women still recognize their power and leadership simply because of their given title. Generally, in these residents' view, the leader has positional power. The leader at the shelter was Megan because she was the staff in charge with whom they had the most positive contact. These women seem to perceive positional power as the strongest and most legitimate source of power.

What these women do not realize and have not been schooled is that there are other legitimate bases of power that can elicit leadership and that they function with it every day. The leader does not have to be any different, or even better than a leader. The alternative bases of power are less formal, but
still elicit compliance from the residents. It is obvious that many of the women do not understand this due to the design of the survey. While many of the women felt that they possessed qualities they felt good leaders had, in essence they denied they were the leader in three opportunities on the survey.

These observed bases of power utilized by certain women are just as effective as the legitimate power base the staff was perceived to utilize. A common alternative type of leadership elicited is charismatic leadership. Charismatic leaders "stir our imagination, [and] have the...gift to kindle the enthusiasm of their followers" (Fiedler 620).

Another concept that most of the women overlook in their perception of leadership is that the roles of leader and follower are interchangeable as well. Realization of this fact may alleviate or even eliminate the concept of the leader, versus a leader. "A follower can be an active role that holds within it the potential of leadership, and behaviors to represent effective leadership included attributes of good followership" (Hollander and Offerman as cited by Jepson Reader 50). The resident who felt that because she was only a leader in a limited sphere (with her children), she could not consider herself the leader. Many of the women at the shelter misinterpret the role of leader to be a constant state, rather than one a person can step in and out of, depending in the situation at hand. They seem to only associate the idea of leader to a dictator, who rules with an iron fist.
However, this is not indicative of a good leader, nor good leadership, as evident in their answers of what made for a good leader. "Directing followers only through the power of authority was compared unfavorably to leadership by Freud (1921) who considered it dominance" (Hollander and Offerman as cited by Jepson Reader 51). There is a lack of connection between the idea of leadership and the perceived role of the leader and the leader himself.

Citizen or community leadership advocates that "[p]articipation at any level is an exercise of leadership, joining others to use power for constructive ends." In the relatively new spirit of leadership, these homeless women's potential should be tapped to improve their own plight, as well as the environment of the shelter, from its daily running to shelter policies.

In defining the qualities all good leaders should have, the women named many of the same qualities that leadership scholars have also concluded are common to good leaders. The attribute that most women included in their assessment of a good leader was the determination to finish a given task. Every good leader is productive, because he or she is able to guide the group to the collective goal. Dwight Eisenhower, another former president, said that "[l]eadership is the ability to decide what is to be done, and then to get others to want to do it" (as cited by Forsyth 214). Many women also indicated that a good leader would have the traits of dependability, or punctuality, which enable a
Another common trait indicated by the women is the need to listen to followers. Often "the overlooked skill for...leaders is learning to ask effective question and to listen well" (Mabey as cited by Jepson Reader 23). This is another effective tool good leaders have traditionally been perceived to utilize.

Mother as Leader

This is a relatively understudied consideration in leadership studies. The family is not often utilized as a tool to study group dynamics or leadership. There has only been one time the family structure and dynamics have been given consideration in a class setting, and it did not last longer than one class period. The family would perhaps be an excellent area to study the art of leading by example. Most children are naturally imitative, and learn best when they have someone, namely their parents, to emulate. This can be viewed as leadership as well. "The principle of example is a challenging one, for it involves not only what you do but also who you are and how you live. It reminds you that leadership can never be a thing apart from the rest of your life"(Adair 55). Therefore, unbeknownst to them, many women are actively practicing leadership with their own children. They should not "rank" it, and place it lower than other types of leadership, because leading by example has been proven generation and generation, to
be a very effective way to lead individuals to a certain goal. In this case, the goal is to help guide their children into growing up to become a positive and productive part of society. No mother at the shelter wants her children to grow up and also live in a shelter and depend on public assistance. Through conversation it was very clear that they were actively working towards making a better life for their children.

Leading by example belongs in the category of non-communication. "It is relevant to the task circle, as the original meaning of leadership - going out in front - makes clear"(Adair 55). These homeless women are going out in front and guiding their children through their developmental years.

Difficulties that Face Potential Leaders

1. lack of leadership education
2. lack of group cohesion due to nature of homelessness
3. compassion fatigue

One of the general obstacles that face many potential leaders is the identification of leaders with certain positions. Mabey writes:

"An office holder is automatically defined as a leader whether or not he or she leads anyone. Non-office holders are labeled as outsiders or activists. Public space must be created for legitimizing informal citizen [in particular case, citizens of the shelter community] and formal leaders to come together to discuss and offer alternative solutions to societal problems."(Jepson Reader 22 - Mabey)

In this particular shelter, this is probably the case in many other settings, the residents need to be educated about this kind
of leadership. This could broaden their minds to see all of their potential in leadership. "Good example has creative power, especially if it involves an element of self-sacrifice. It can work in employees' minds to alter their ways. That process may take time, but the leader whose example backs up his words puts himself in an unassailable position" (Adair 55). The problem here for the homeless context is that there is not always the luxury of time on their side. A longer period of time at the shelter is simply not complementary to a homeless person's immediate needs. One of the goals for all the women at the shelter is to improve their current situation in the shortest amount of time. This usually entails finding a more permanent place to live. But this completely conflicts with the notion that time is needed to establish leadership. Even if these women wanted to exercise leadership with anyone other than their family, most often there are few chances to do so due to the unclear and unpredictable future of any homeless person.

Groups and their Importance in Leadership
Cheryl Mabey wrote that "[l]eadership involves considerably more than a leader" (Jepson Reader 19). Leadership inherently involves followers, because it is these individuals that define a leader to her role. No leader can fulfill her role as a leader, unless there are followers to lead to the shared goal. Hollander and Offerman also asserted that "[l]eadership and followership... consist of an interlocking system of relationships" (Jepson
Reader 49). This system cannot have any chance of success unless all the components are intact and functional.

Successful leadership often happens in groups. A group is "two or more interdependent individuals who influence on another through social interactions" (Forsyth 7). Interdependence is when members of a group rely on each other. Actions and their consequences of a member of the group will affect the rest of the group because they must all function and cooperate.

"Leadership [also] implies the personal willingness to go out in front - accepting the risks involved - in order to ensure that your team go in the right direction and at the right speed" (Adair 55). This also assumes that you have personal stakes in your group that have developed and taken hold. But how can this happen in an unstable environment that is inherently without a strong and cohesive group? Forsyth defined the cohesiveness is "the strength of the relationships linking members to one another and to the group itself" (10). Due to the nature of homelessness, people in this situation do not usually get the chance to become a part of a cohesive group. Groups do not usually stay together in the homeless environment for extended periods of time to allow cohesive groups to form. This is a second obstacle that face potential leaders in the homeless environment. People who take refuge in a shelter have a better chance of securing a group, but the situation is not as optimistic for the individuals who do not.
The Possible Effects of the Public's Perception of the Homeless

The general public's perception of homelessness presents a potential problem. "People's conceptions of the problem [of homelessness] are likely to shape the way they treat homeless people" (Link et al. 534). And from the mass media's point of view, "the public is losing compassion and is becoming increasingly hostile toward homeless people" (Link et al. 534). Whether this is an accurate perception or not, the study concluded that people are not suffering from "compassion fatigue," (Link et al. 535). The public and also policy makers are heavily influenced by the mass media. The first negative result is that "if politicians believe that the public has lost compassion, restrictive policies toward homeless people would be seen as consistent with public opinion and would be adopted more readily" (Link et al. 535). This could limit the attention and resources given to homeless people. On a priority list, leadership education would most likely rank lower than basic necessities like food and housing, and in turn not even be considered. And second, even if there was an opportunity to provide leadership training, it could be conceivable that the public would not want to help them due to the negative view they receive from the media. The general public would not want to waste their time on the homeless.
Future Goals and Other Points to consider to help alleviate this problem

Gardner asserted that "[t]he first step is not action; the first step is understanding. The first question is how to think about leadership" (Jepson Reader 5). Throughout this discussion, it is obvious that there is a need for education on the subject of leadership. The women at the shelter need to have a better understanding of the different bases of power in leadership in order to explore and experiment to see which one is most effective for them in their environment. "Leadership is clearly teachable, and indeed must be taught...to develop the talent...need[ed] for the unpredictable years ahead" (Adair 47).

"Skills for action need to be recognized and nurtured..." (Jepson Reader 23). In order to practice their leadership skills, there is a need to empower the women at the family shelter. "Even disenfranchised individuals and groups with little access to resources possess strengths and skills that will be expressed if given the opportunity" (Banyard and Graham-Bermann 481). The resident who became the preparer of the dinner meals is a good example of the wonderful results of empowerment. In Zimmerman and Rappaport's words, empowerment is:

"...a construct that links individual competencies, natural helping systems, and proactive behaviors to matters of social policy. It is thought to be the process by which individuals gain mastery or control over their own lives and democratic participation in the life of their community" (as cited by Banyard and Graham-Bermann 481).

Currently there is a program that is in its earliest stages, being formed specifically for the Merrill Espigh Family Shelter.

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It is envisioned to be an incentive program that will empower the women who want to assume more control over the daily running of the shelter. This program has the potential to spark the feeling of pride in taking charge of their immediate living situation at the shelter in the women. The planned incentives range from material goods such as complimentary bus passes and extra trips to the donation room, to intangible incentives such as resident of the month honors, to encourage a healthy spirit of competition. The objectives of the program would be consistent with the overall goal of the shelter, which is to enable the women by giving them the tools to improve their current homeless situation. "Developing a [community] leader begins with encouraging opportunities for 'doing something' with others and for giving 'voice' to one's impressions and reactions" (Jepson Reader, 22).

Conclusion

I feel that my senior project can contribute a great deal to the study of leadership and to the Merrill Espigh Family Shelter. Traditionally, leadership has been associated with very specific contexts, namely the formal organization and military contexts. Only recently has any consideration been given that leadership can exist in other contexts. In the leadership studies major specifically, we have learned about leadership existing in the contexts of social movements and at the community levels as well.
This study could further broaden our perspective on where leadership can exist.

This project studied the relationship as well as the perceived relationship between power and leadership. Leadership has traditionally fallen into the hands of the individuals with legitimate power - either through a title or rank, or other quality like wealth. But in the environment of the homeless, power was observed to be gained through other means. In the family shelter, leadership among the homeless women usually falls in the hands of women with charismatic power. The women at shelter genuinely follow the ones whom they respect and like, and not because of any title.

I felt that this field-based project has a strong focus on leadership theories. This study disputes some of the traditional and older ideas of leadership as well. This project is strongly congruent with the curriculum goals of the leadership school.

This particular senior project illustrated the idea that leadership can exist in any situation, which is an idea that is pursued in all leadership classes. This project also ties theory and practice together. It will also hopefully have initiated and lead to continued development of leaders (in this case, the homeless women) by self-directed learning.

Finally, the results of my senior project have helped others more actively exercise and be aware of leadership in their everyday lives.

I have enjoyed my project thoroughly. It opened my eyes to
a group of people with wonder gifts, talents and potential to improve their current situations. This senior project has also opened the door to a leadership context that has not often been discussed during many classes at the Leadership School.
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