

Making Organizations Work

Exploring Characteristics of Anti-oppressive Organizational Structures in Street Youth Shelters

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Abstract

- *Summary:* Human service organizations are often viewed by clients as bureaucratic, formal, oppressive and insensitive environments. Through structured interviews with 42 service providers and 65 street youth in Toronto, Montreal and Guatemala, and participant and non-participant observations in all three locations, this analysis explores tenets of anti-oppressive organizational structures within the youth shelter construct.
- *Findings:* Anti-oppressive organizations allow for the emergence of meaningful and vibrant community settings by embracing grass-root social development, active participation, a structural analysis of the problem, consciousness raising and social action. These findings can be interpreted as lessons from the field – noting what seems to work best for hard-core and marginalized street youth populations. The current academic discourse concerning notions of anti-oppression has tended to focus upon pedagogy and/or practice; this analysis moves the discussion to a new realm involving organizational behavior. Anti-oppressive organizational structures attempt to build safe and respectful environments for marginalized populations.
- *Applications:* Such findings can hopefully impact the manner by which social work administrators and practitioners understand service delivery within their particular organizational setting and more specifically, how they conduct meaningful social work within their day-to-day practices.

Keywords anti-oppression homeless street youth human service organizations youth shelters

Introduction

Child welfare services play a significant role in the lives of marginalized, stigmatized and alienated street youth populations (Berman and West, 1995; Karabanow, 1999, 2000; Ruddick, 1996). Nonetheless, according to numerous reports, the majority of child welfare clients describe these settings as 'bureaucratic', 'dehumanizing', 'ineffective' and 'oppressive' (Edney, 1988a; Henry, 1987; Karabanow and Rains, 1997; Kurtz et al., 1991; Ruddick, 1996; Wharf, 1990; Wilkinson, 1987). This analysis discusses organizational tenets that espouse anti-oppressive philosophies of practice and operation. These tenets include locality development, social development, active participation, structural definition/analysis of the situation, consciousness raising and social action. Organizations that have been successful in attracting hard-core street youth appear to embody such orientations. As such, this paper identifies characteristics of street youth organizations that appear to work best for service users.¹

Methodology

Data was obtained through in-depth interviews with 65 youth living on the streets in Toronto and Montreal, participant and non-participant observations of street life and shelter culture in these same locations, and a documentary the author made while working with street youth in Guatemala. Moreover, structured interviews with 42 service providers in all three locations complement the investigation. The data was collected throughout the mid 1990s and is enriched by the author's work experiences with, and reflections of, these populations. Analysis involved open, axial and selective coding techniques which encompassed fracturing of the data into conceptually specific themes and categories; rebuilding the data in new ways by linking primary categories and auxiliary themes into a path analysis; and constructing a theoretical narrative shaped by data integration and category construction (Strauss and Corbin, 1990).

Three case settings are explored in this analysis. Montreal's Dans La Rue (DLR) is an alternative downtown street youth shelter and drop-in service that has been remarkably popular with hard-core street youth. Toronto's Covenant House (CH) is a premier street youth service that offers short-term shelter, drop-in support, health and educational services, job training, and long-term housing. CH is the largest and best funded street youth agency in North America. Guatemala's Casa Alianza (CA) is an extensive network of street youth services providing short- and medium-term shelter, legal and health services, and detoxification outlets. CA has been a leading advocate against the horrific abuse, torture and death of street youth by paramilitary forces throughout Guatemala.

Reviewing the Literature

Street Youth and Child Welfare Services

Much of the literature regarding the child welfare system has shown its limitations in providing a safe and caring environment for street-entrenched youth. The literature reviewed here is critical – challenging the common perception of child welfare practice as being ‘in the best interest of the child’.

Wilkinson (1987: 75) discovered that the majority of her sample of Spokane street kids had prior experience with foster care but ‘found a lack of genuine care and concern for them on the part of foster parents’. Moreover, my own work experiences with street youth emphasized the fact that a majority of institutionalized adolescents make the ‘loop’ within the system – from open to closed units; from foster care to group homes: thus leaving them angry, confused, frustrated and alone. A 1985 Greater Boston Adolescent Emergency Service study describes the ‘shelter hopping’ process within the child welfare system: ‘As on a carousel, children . . . are placed on a painted pony which promises to take them to a safer world. For too many, however, their spinning wheel ride cycles them endlessly through the system with no planned destination’ (Alleva, 1988: 36–7). Alleva (1988: 36) presents several studies (unpublished shelter reports) that found 70% of sheltered youth had child welfare experiences and that sheltered youth have been found to move, on the average, ‘through six different living situations in a given year’. In their study of 489 Calgary street kids, Kufeldt and Nimmo (1987) note that 53% of the ‘runners’ and 30% of the ‘in and outers’ said they were on the streets primarily because of their experiences with child welfare agencies and secondarily because of their experiences with their biological parents. The authors conclude that the street has become a final resort once child welfare agencies ‘let them [street kids] down’, leading to more neglect and abuse and ‘finally a sad, desperate death’ (Kufeldt and Nimmo, 1987: 540).

Kurtz et al.’s study (1991: 313) of youth shelters in the south-eastern United States found that homeless youth, compared to non-homeless youth, had longer histories with child welfare agencies and ‘perceived the helping they received as punitive and harmful’. In addition, these youth had experienced so many placements within the youth care system that many ‘emotionally distance themselves from those who try to help in an attempt to protect themselves from the hurt of the separation they know to be inevitable’ (Kurtz et al., 1991: 313).

One study suggests that child welfare institutions *produce* street kids by inculcating learned helplessness – ‘an absence of any motivation to change a problematic situation’ (Van der Ploeg, 1989: 47). Studies also more regularly suggest that street youth have run from child welfare institutions and agencies because of negative experiences. In their review of residential treatment with homeless youth, Morrissette and McIntyre (1989) emphasize the isolation, anger, frustration and inevitable failure incurred by these youth that comes from a cycle of numerous placements, linear treatment strategies (‘fix’ the

'problem' within the individual), and running away episodes. More often than not, homeless teenagers '... described their negative experiences with social service agents as those where they were not heard or believed, where they were not considered capable of making decisions for themselves, and where they were dealt with punitively and in a controlling manner' (Edney, 1988a: 28). Edney notes 'the very high rate of movement between placements suggests that the system, as it is currently set up, is not working for these juveniles' (1988a: 28). He categorizes agents and agencies along quite simplistic yet relevant lines – those who were punitive and controlling of juveniles and those who were described as helpful and supportive. With respect to negative experiences with social service agencies, Edney's (1988b: 68) sample notes 'they felt ignored, misunderstood, disbelieved and rejected. They also felt pushed around and placed in venues without consultation and which they felt were entirely untenable and inappropriate.' Although less common, positive experiences did come out of interactions 'where they were listened to, respected and understood. On these occasions they felt that they had some say in what would happen to them and some control over their lives' (Edney, 1988b: 68). These interactions were based on relationships of trust and acceptance and most frequently took place in alternative, voluntary agencies.

Similarly, in his review of the child welfare system, Alleva (1988) notes that alternative youth service programs (such as drop-ins and shelters) have empowered youth through participation and involvement in many levels of planning, implementation and running the particular service. From my own work experiences at Montreal's DLR, utilizing youth in the development and functioning of programs and services creates a sense of youth ownership and greater self-esteem. Many authors note that youth-centered services tend to be lacking in the child welfare system (Michaud, 1989; Morrissette and McIntyre, 1989; Wharf, 1990).

Finally, one of the only analyses to focus upon runaway youth as well as helping agencies found that over one-half of the sample did not list any formal agency as being either helpful or appealing (Miller et al., 1980: 70). One-third of the sample felt more comfortable seeking help and advice at counterculture agencies (free clinics, voluntary shelters, drop-ins, crash pads) since they were more 'free', 'unrestrained' and 'trustworthy' and met basic needs. Over one-half of the sample suggested the following as an ideal agency: free food and shelter in a relaxed setting with sensitive staff who understood street life and related to them on their own level. The authors conclude that 'our runaway subjects tended not to turn to formal agencies for help, but rather looked to counterculture or interpersonal networks for assistance' (Miller et al., 1980: 73).

Youth Shelters as Alternative Systems

Street youth shelters, identified variously as informal systems, non-profit organizations and voluntary agencies, epitomize the essence of the alternative organization. In her discussion of alternative institutions, Rothschild-Whitt

(1979: 509) provides a useful definition of informal and alternative organizations: ‘... parallel to, but outside of, established institutions [rational-bureaucracies] and which fulfil social needs (for education, food, medical aid, etc.) without recourse to bureaucratic authority.’

In essence, the street kid shelter is an organizational form that counters the trends of the traditional welfare state by being non-bureaucratic, non-professional, non-secular, decentralized, and direct providers of basic needs services without the obligation for personal information and disclosure. Youth shelters are most often rooted in religious experience and classical charity, characterized by simple organizational structures that provide immediate services in a flexible, caring and easily accessed environment. In general, alternative/informal agencies tend to have the following characteristics: innovation, flexibility, participation, protector of particularistic interests, and providers of services to meet immediate needs not met generally by formal structures (Kramer, 1981).

Conversely, the established welfare institution, according to many authors, has failed to rescue those on the streets, precisely due to its ‘machine-professional-bureaucracy’ that is rigidly organized around efficiency of service outputs and based on intense information gathering, record keeping and rehabilitation (Henry, 1987). The youth shelter organization emerged out of the ideals of the Settlement movement and, according to its advocates, is presently the only structure that is simple and flexible enough to respond to hard-to-reach populations (such as the homeless) through the provisions of food, shelter and clothing to ‘all who come’.

Formal and informal/alternative social service agencies make different assumptions concerning the nature of problems and ways to deal with them; the relationship between workers (helpers) and clients (helped); and the organizational set-up in which the help occurs. Since most alternative agencies arise in response to lack of available services or perceived inadequacy of existing services, their domain is more narrowly defined (focusing upon a specific population or set of needs) than the formal child welfare system. Moreover, service technologies differ for both groups. Formal agencies rely on intervention strategies based upon scientific knowledge (rationalized measures of effectiveness and efficiency) and administered by professionals through structured interactions between clients and staff, where control of form and content lies with the professional. On the other hand, informal agencies tend to rely upon client experience and participation as the predominant mode of intervention and rationale for activity; engage fewer (if any) professionals; and pursue egalitarian and sharing relationships between participants and staff (Gidron and Hasenfeld, 1994).

Both systems are also characterized by distinct organizational structures. Alternative agencies are regularly characterized as informal structures emphasizing horizontal relations, interchangeability of roles, diffusion of authority, and participatory and democratic structures with few rules. In contrast, formal

agencies are bureaucratic structures reinforced by hierarchical relations, reliance upon professionals, and little client input. Henry (1987: 145) highlights the major differences between these two organizational forms in reference to his analysis of two homeless shelters:

The main conclusion which can be drawn from the characteristics and the general scene of homelessness is that the response of voluntary shelter organizations to the problem of homelessness is antithetical to the response of the professional bureaucracy. As such, it lacks the discipline and authority, the orderliness, the predictability, the standardized solutions and technologies of the accepted bureaucracy and the social work profession.

Alternative organizations tend to be 'mission-oriented' (Lipsky and Smith, 1989–90) and promoters of a more 'humanistic' welfare state. In their national survey of non-profit organizations serving homeless populations in the United States, Berman and West (1995: 237) perceive voluntary shelters (and other non-profit agencies) as an 'important driving force' in solving the homeless crisis. According to the authors, non-profit organizations have legitimacy in working with homeless populations; provide a loud voice on behalf of this marginalized population; and are quick to respond to crises (Berman and West, 1995: 237).

The emergence of street kid shelters (and other alternative social service outfits such as drop-ins, soup kitchens, detox centres, independent and co-operative living settings and health clinics) represents the public's efforts to devise a 'better way' to fix or contain youth homelessness. As noted above, its older alternative, the formal system of child care and protection, has been described by many as part of the problem.

The informal system (shelters, drop-ins, and other alternative settings) has been repeatedly described in the literature as a more favourable and congenial environment for homeless youth than the formal child welfare institution. Lipsky and Smith (1989–90: 632) explain: 'First, if people say they are hungry, or homeless, or recently assaulted and fearful for their safety, nonprofit [voluntary] organizations are inclined to accept such testimony as sufficient. Government officials upholding the equity requirement cannot tolerate such an accepting attitude.' The formal child welfare system has been painted by most scholars as a bureaucratic, machine-like structure that is cold and rigid and perpetuates street existence for many youngsters.

Street kid shelters proliferated in the 1970s and 1980s due to the growing number of runaways and street kids in need of a safe refuge.² Alleva (1988) and Karabanow (1999, 2000, 2003) argue that these shelters were portrayed as alternatives for youth who mistrusted traditional services:

Runaway children tended to be mistrustful of adults and adult organizations and institutions. The youngsters seemed to be seeking a better social environment than those in their own homes and their communities, and avoided assistance from the traditional social welfare agencies which they regarded as too structured, too impersonal or too

inflexible to respond to their own problems or needs. (Saltonstall, 1973, quoted in Alleva, 1988: 29)

The alternative youth shelter, in response to a certain degree of dissatisfaction with the inadequate methods and resources plaguing the public welfare system, emerged to supplement (extend) and complement (add something qualitatively different to) the formal child welfare system.

As the literature documents, there is much consensus concerning what doesn't work with hard-core street youth populations. The following discussion highlights lessons from the field in order to explore organizations that have been successful in attracting street youth and to learn what works with such a population.

Characteristics of Anti-oppressive Organizations

An anti-oppressive framework involves several key overarching tenets: awareness of the mechanisms of oppression, domination and injustice; acknowledgment of the structural elements at play in human behavior; acceptance of diversity and difference; recognition of the complexity of power; and necessity for action (Campbell, 2000). The majority of the literature concerning anti-oppressive analyses has focused upon areas of pedagogy and clinical practice. This article extends this discussion to organizational structures and behaviors. With reference to organizational functioning, an anti-oppressive framework could include such elements as locality development; social development; active participation; structural definition of the situation; consciousness raising; and, social action. The following discussion explores these concepts in relation to the three youth shelter cases.

Locality Development

Locality development addresses the spirit of grass-root cultivation – the notion of a 'bottom-up' approach that includes the locality's definition of the phenomenon under study; the locality's direction for intervention; and, the locality's involvement in implementation and sustainability. A significant dimension of locality development is immediate response to problems in a caring, sensitive and compassionate manner (Karabanow, 2003). CH, CA and DLR each espoused immediate attention to the needs of their clients – referring to food, health care, showers, clothing and shelter. Prior to any type of intake procedure, workers are trained to identify emergency concerns of clients. As such, locality development implies the creation of a 'symbolic space' (Karabanow, 1999, 2003) – a place where marginal populations can feel safe and respected. As a Montreal street girl eloquently noted: 'The thing about [DLR] is that you don't feel like a street kid, you feel like a human being.' Popular youth organizations transform into 'surrogate families' (Karabanow and Rains, 1997; Ruddick, 1996) for street youth, presenting a setting where one's ideas, thoughts and experiences are listened to and valued. As one resident of

Guatemala's CA explained: 'You can be yourself here . . . don't have to act all tough like on the street.' Locality development highlights the emergence of a community setting – a location where one can feel safe, cared for and accepted: unique characteristics for most street youth populations: '. . . This [CH] is the only home I got' (Steven, 17, Toronto). At Toronto's CH, for instance, much attention is paid to the cleanliness of the shelter since a clean house equates to street youth feeling respected and valued. Locality development can be perceived as a foundation for street youth to build a sense of place. As described by Halladay (1992: 3): 'What lights up the world and makes it bearable is the feeling which we usually have of our links with it – and more particularly of what joins us to other people.' Locality development allows for the seeds of community to be planted within the shelter environment.

Social Development

Social development highlights the importance of human capital as well as economic resources in addressing social ills. This approach acknowledges the strength of individual and collective explorations, analyses, and solutions to crises. As such, this perspective adopts a humanistic and holistic analysis of the individual – confronting social, political and economic forces which shape an understanding of such issues as youth homelessness. For example, anti-oppressive organizations do not identify an individual through his/her deviant street behaviors such as 'prostitute' or 'drug addict', rather understanding/exploring the multitude of identities and characteristics which make up the person. Montreal's DLR and Toronto's CH present a 'strength' perspective within youth interactions at the individual and group level. Counseling and interventions employ resilient/empowerment activity through mutual aid and self-help orientations. Youth learn to value and respect themselves and others, acknowledging their agency and resolve in past, present and future endeavors. For example, at CH, much attention is placed upon the resident accepting his/her situation and taking responsibility for what has happened and what can happen. As such, youth learn to place themselves in the 'driver's seat' – choosing directions, making choices and ultimately maintaining control: 'I realize more now that I can change things, things in my life that I don't like . . . one of the things I learned [at DLR]' (Sylvia, 15, Montreal). Anti-oppressive organizations foster the strengths of individuals and acknowledge the significance of one's experiences in constructing identity. At DLR and CA, group activities facilitate the strength and energy of collective responses to trauma (such as past abuse and street delinquency). The group dynamic underscores the agency of the individual in understanding, accepting and addressing traumatic experiences within a collective environment.

Active Participation

A key tenet of both locality and social development is authentic (rather than token) involvement in organizational operations by service users. Montreal's

DLR exemplifies this theme – involving street youth in the design and implementation of the shelter (Karabanow, 1999). In fact, a committee of street youth named the shelter the ‘Bunker’ and many residents sit on committees responsible for shelter policy. Moreover, there are several positions within the organization that incorporate street youth in service provision (such as self-help/mutual aid groups, peer mentoring and cooking). Participating within the organization can also entail linkages with mainstream culture. For example, at Toronto’s CH, street youth residents are involved with external research projects and educational programs linked to several universities. At DLR, youth represent the agency at media functions (such as radio and television programs) and service delivery meetings with external organizations (such as the police and child welfare services). Active participation, notwithstanding its difficulties in relation to implementation and coordination, allows for feelings of ‘being accepted’ and ‘belonging’. Moreover, many youth perceive involvement as a way to ‘pay back’ organizations to which they feel a sense of commitment and loyalty. As one Montreal street youth noted: ‘I don’t mind getting up early for these meetings [at DLR] . . . I owe them at least that much – they were there when I really needed somebody’ (Barrie, 19). As such, participation within the organization is commonly equated by youth with acceptance and respect. Many adolescents perceive participation as ‘being needed’ and ‘feeling worthy’. In this sense, active participation represents for street youth a form of partnering, where both workers and residents can join together to build a common vision and direction for the organization.

Structural Definition of Situation

The street youth literature has highlighted both the ‘push’ (e.g. poverty, family dysfunction, abuse, school problems) and ‘pull’ (e.g. independence, freedom, drug/alcohol abuse) factors concerned with street youth etiology (Karabanow, 2003). Much of this debate revolves around individual pathology and structural forces (i.e. are street youth a problem of social misfits or social structure?). Anti-oppressive organizations adopt the latter vision, believing that political, economic and social forces propel the individual to street life. Understanding the ‘whole’ person entails a holistic perspective of both individual traits and structural constraints. For example, DLR acknowledges that the existence of most youth on the street is due to a lack of both affordable and clean housing and adequate employment. As such, rather than blaming the individual, DLR links political and economic forces to the individual’s present situation. Moreover, organizations such as DLR, CA and CH acknowledge the myriad of street activities (both legal and illegal) employed by youth to survive. Rather than condemning such street behaviors, anti-oppressive organizations place them within a larger context of exploitation and victimization. As a CH front line worker explained: ‘I don’t see these kids as male hustlers or female hookers – that would make them delinquents . . . I see them as young boys and girls exploited and taken advantage of by our society . . .’ (David, Toronto). In this

sense, anti-oppressive organizations' perceptions of street youth complement the population's self-constructed images – fostering 'value/identity harmony' which leads to meaningful interaction. Several street youth highlight this perspective:

CH treats me well, not like I'm some dumb hooker . . . it's like what a family should be. (Lana, 19, Toronto)

I came here [CA] because it's the only place that cares, I got a clean bed, good food . . . workers are really nice . . . (Miguel, 15, Guatemala)

The staff don't judge you here [DLR], you can tell them whatever . . . like my stuff with jail and all and they [DLR staff] listen . . . (Jay, 18, Montreal)

Along with a sense of community, street youth also find sanctuary in settings where they are accepted for who they are and judged to be worthy citizens. Such a unique environment contrasts with more prevalent societal perceptions of street youth as 'street urchins', 'bums', and 'dregs of society' (Karabanow, 2003).

Consciousness Raising

Meaningful interaction within a safe setting allows for genuine explorations of the individual's past and present and future goals and experiences. At their own choosing, residents of DLR engage in a sort of cathartic enterprise – usually within informal mutual aid group settings, where youth can connect experiences to others as well as engage in deeper understandings of particular issues. On numerous occasions, I witnessed the epiphany-like moment when a young person came to realize that his/her past family abuse experiences not only mirrored those of street youth colleagues, but also raised doubt as to his/her culpability (or more aptly, self-blame) regarding past acts (Karabanow, 2000). Moreover, accepting this new reality also allows for a reconsideration of present survival activities (such as prostitution). Consciousness raising implies an intimate and in-depth exploration of one's actions through a process of knowledge-building, solidarity and commitment. Part of this process involves critical reflection – linking one's situation to micro and macro intentions. At Guatemala's CA, there is a strong movement (involving street youth and the organization) to pressure glue manufacturers to change the way in which they sell products that ultimately end up in the hands of street youth. Youth learn to connect their addictions not only to past and present struggles in their own lives, but also to the economic and political culture which allows for corporate revenues to supersede social responsibility.

Consciousness raising emerges as an intimate process of accepting, exploring, and ultimately reconstructing one's past and present and one's future orientations. Through individual and collective enterprises, anti-oppressive organizations foster safe community settings where individuals can build and rebuild a sense of identity, worth, and understanding of their immediate environments.

Social Action

Apart from allowing youth to feel comfortable and cared for, many anti-oppressive organizations also move a step further – advocating for and on behalf of alienated and stigmatized populations. Social action implies a commitment to fundamental change in the form of demands for increased resources and/or equal treatment. As such, social action involves consciousness raising made active and public – allowing those without a voice to be heard through critical reflection and empowerment strategies. DLR has many examples of social action endeavors – including joining with street youth to protest the closing of a local park; petitioning municipal and provincial leaders for increased youth employment and affordable housing; and facilitating a group of youth (named ‘Punk Not Junk’) to mobilize the street youth community in order to sensitize the public as to the actual experiences of street life and heroin (‘junk’) abuse (Karabanow, 1999). Along the same lines as Gustavo Gutierrez’s liberation theology, social action highlights a joining of forces among service providers and service users in order to voice common struggles.

The process of social action appears to grow out of a culmination of tenets previously highlighted in this paper. To reach social action, a sense of commitment and trust needs to be forged between actors – fostered in settings where locality and social development (i.e. community building) are fused with active participation, structural analyses and consciousness raising. In Guatemala, CA has been a leader in raising awareness of the horrific treatment of street youth at the hands of paramilitary forces. In addition, the organization has developed a legal department to build court cases against involved parties. CA staff and street youth advocates have been threatened, terrorized and even murdered in their struggle to bring guilty individuals to trial. In a vastly different political and economic climate, Toronto’s CH has been prominent in advocating government bodies for higher per diem rates to house street youth. Moreover, the shelter has joined with street youth to protest recent conservative government housing and welfare policies. Such examples signify the alliance between anti-oppressive organizations and marginalized populations in fighting for legitimacy, respect and tangible resources.

While locality and social development can be interpreted as activities focused upon process issues (i.e. building community), social action initiatives are largely interested in end results (i.e. gaining resources). Maintaining both avenues of service delivery can provide organizations with comprehensive, committed and complementary approaches to anti-oppressive practice.

Conclusion

Much of the academic debate concerning notions of anti-oppression has remained within the confines of pedagogy and/or practice. This analysis attempts to extend the discussion to organizational structures and behaviors. This has been articulated through redirecting anti-oppressive tenets such as

awareness of injustice, acknowledgement of structural forces, and the recognition of power, diversity and action into the forum of organizational functioning. Anti-oppressive organizational structures attempt to build safe and respectful environments for marginalized populations. Through grass-root social development, active participation, underscoring a structural analysis of the problem, consciousness raising and social action, anti-oppressive organizations allow for the emergence of meaningful and vibrant community settings. These findings can be interpreted as lessons from the field – noting what seems to work best for hard-core and marginalized street youth populations. Street youth organizations that engage in such practice orientations have been found to have much success in attracting hard-core street populations. In the prologue to *When Corporations Rule the World*, David Korten (1995: 1) pronounced that ‘[e]verywhere I travel, I find an almost universal sense among ordinary people that the institutions on which they depend are failing them.’ This observation haunts the formal child welfare system. Street youth services such as CH, DLR and CA demonstrate a distinctly different approach to working with street youth, as such, making them significant and ‘successful’ players in the lives of street youth populations.

As state governments throughout the world distance themselves from social safety net constructs, those within the non-government realm (made up of both formal and informal systems) have emerged to reorient, redesign and/or extend a support network for those most marginalized and alienated. This paper provides some key organizational lessons by which to foster a more humane and caring social service delivery system.

Notes

1. A previous study (Karabanow, 2002) explores organizations that ‘work best’ from the point of view of staff.
2. Karabanow (2000), Price (1989) and Washton (1974) provide insightful accounts of their respective street youth shelters’ evolution.

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