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## Factors of Employee Retention Within Youth-Serving Nonprofits in the Mid-Atlantic Region of the United States

Meleny Thomas  
*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Health Sciences and Public Policy

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Meleny Thomas

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Review Committee

Dr. Anthony Fleming, Committee Chairperson,  
Public Policy and Administration Faculty

Dr. Michael Knight, Committee Member,  
Public Policy and Administration Faculty

Dr. Gema Hernandez, University Reviewer,  
Public Policy and Administration Faculty

Chief Academic Officer and Provost  
Sue Subocz, Ph.D.

Walden University  
2022

Abstract

Factors of Employee Retention Within Youth-Serving Nonprofits  
in the Mid-Atlantic Region of the United States

by

Meleny Thomas

MS, Walden University, 2012

BA, Hood College, 2007

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
Public Policy and Administration

Walden University

August 2022

## Abstract

Factors of employee retention have been widely researched and examined. However, research on factors of retention in relation to youth-serving NPOs was limited. Turnover was an issue that many organizations face, but the impacts and implications of turnover for youth-serving nonprofits may be greater. Using Herzberg's two-factor theory of motivation, this study identified the factors that local and national NPO employees in the Mid-Atlantic region of the eastern United States provided as to why they remained at or left NPOs. The aim of this study was to identify the motivator and/or hygiene factors that employees or former employees of NPOs provided in relation to retention factors. A qualitative study was conducted of six youth-serving nonprofits in the Mid-Atlantic region, and the data were used to help create a retention resource guide for nonprofits to incorporate into their businesses. Data were analyzed using pattern coding and data saturation, which allowed themes to emerge. Findings indicated a number of hygiene factors (e.g., employee benefits, organizational climate, and good leadership and support) would increase retention. The findings of this study may assist staff of youth-serving organizations with insight for creating strategic retention plans, and the data may be incorporated into current policies to help organizations incentivize their employees and boost morale. This research may create positive social change by helping organizational leaders be more intentional about retention strategies that positively contribute to creating organizational climates and cultures.

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## Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to all those who are pursuing a dream. My prayers are with you, and know that if I did it, you can too. To my family and friends, thank you for putting up with me and encouraging me when I wanted to quit and did in fact give up physically and mentally many times. You were my motivation to finish what God helped me to start. Additionally, to all the employers who are looking for ways to improve employee morale, this investigation is for you! The information obtained may even be helpful in the hiring process.

## Acknowledgments

I would like to thank God for seeing me through and giving me the strength and courage to finish it all! My family and friends, for their patience and support along the way. A special thank you goes to my chair, Dr. Anthony Fleming, and success coach, Jacqueline Cook-Jones; you all have motivated me and helped me to release the notion of perfection to move to completion. To my tribe of amazing accountability partners, you all helped stir up the fire to FINISH! To all of you, I thank you and owe all my gratitude.

“Goliath” is defeated!

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

### **Introduction**

The goal of nonprofit or not-for-profit organizations is to provide a service within their community, and in order to do that, they need employees and reliable volunteers (Ciucescu, 2009). Typically, nonprofit organizations (NPOs) are categorized under the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) as tax-exempt 501(c)(3) organizations. This classification allows for nonprofits to be listed as public charities that serve and meet a public need (Hinton & Maclurcan, 2017). As registered charities, local nonprofits receive donations from many people who then receive various tax benefits, and the money that is earned does not benefit the donors, but instead benefits the community and the people that the organization is intended to serve. Nonprofit leaders rely on and desire the long-term commitment of employees (Hamann & Foster, 2014). However, interruptions in staffing lead to challenges with fulfilling services, and those interruptions are costly. Boushey and Glynn (2012) estimated that turnover costs are 100% to 300% of the base salary of the replaced employees. Organizations pay with their time to recruit, interview, hire, and train new employees, as well as to run background checks and meet all the requirements to bring on a new hire. The hiring process is very important and should not be rushed. The money and time that organizations spend recruiting new talent to carry out their mission are resources that could be used towards effective retention strategies. Williams, Nichols, Kirk, and Wilson (2011) concluded that within the first year of employment, employee retention rates were 43% in a few government-funded NPOs and 55% within

privately funded NPOs. Evidence-based retention strategies can be useful for nonprofits to improve statistically low rates of retention.

Each nonprofit should have retention strategies in order to prevent, predict, or even minimize turnover. One way to address the issue is to understand why turnover exists. Through this dissertation, I sought to identify factors that employees gave for remaining with or retiring from youth-serving nonprofits. This dissertation presents the research available regarding the problem of retention in NPOs and specifically focuses on youth-serving nonprofits in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States. The gap in literature addressed by this study concerns retention rates specific to youth-serving nonprofits. A sound mission and vision can attract employees to an organization, but they will not always make employees stay (Brown & Yoshioka, 2003).

NPOs are developed with the idea of addressing needs that are prevalent in the community. Angelica (2001) explained that the core of an organization is its mission; this is what attracts employees, funders, donors, and volunteers. Brown and Yoshioka (2003) reported that employees are drawn to carrying out the mission within the organization, but other factors such as pay/compensation can become dissatisfying. Considering the findings from past research, I sought in this dissertation study to shed more light on the ever-growing issue of employee retention and provide a guide and support to exploring retention plans and evidence-based retention strategies.

### **Background**

Most people work for nonprofits because they believe that their contribution to the work will make a difference; after all, that is the purpose of an NPO. Bandura (1977)

found self-efficacy to be an individual's belief that their contributions will lead to positive outcomes. An employee's level of self-efficacy could be a reflection of their job performance and thoughts about retention within the company (Bandura, 1977). Organizations would not function without employees to implement their policies and mission. Therefore, employees' level of self-efficacy is critical to the organization's success. For this dissertation, I sought to identify how effective and tenured employees feel about their jobs in the communities in which they work and serve. I also investigated what factors cause employees to leave an organization. Yanay and Yanay (2008) found correlations between employee retention rates and factors such as abusive leadership tactics, and various leadership styles were found to have a high correlation with employee retention. The researchers found that abusive leadership tactics contributed to a decrease in employees' motivation and drive to excel in their craft (Yanay & Yanay, 2008). Based on the research articles that have been explored, leadership styles within an organization have a high correlation to employee retention rates.

This study was needed to address whether the factors of employee retention are the same for youth-serving nonprofits. The existing body of literature is missing this focus, and this dissertation adds to the body of literature on other retention factors specific to youth-serving NPOs.

### **Problem Statement**

What are the factors that keep employees motivated and driven? In this dissertation study, I sought to explore various themes and trends to understand what supports or creates a desire to stay employed with youth-serving NPOs. NPOs are



charged with the task of contributing to and promoting positive social change by addressing needs specific to the population that they serve. Smith and Richmond (2007) considered nonprofits heroes of society. Being a hero and addressing challenging needs such as youth development and positive youth engagement require dedication from an organization's board of directors, managers, volunteers, and employees. Their dedication must not only be to the organization, but also to the mission, vision, and target population. The problem is that there is a cost to the organization financially when it loses an employee, and the youth being served also experience the loss of a caring adult relationship that they have developed. Boushey and Glynn (2012) reported that when nonprofits lose mid-level employees it cost them 100% of the annual salary and for top-level executives and directors it would cost the organization 300% of the annual salary.

I used a qualitative phenomenological study approach to examine potential factors influencing retention of employees at youth-serving NPOs in the Mid-Atlantic region of the Eastern United States. Although previous studies have examined employee retention factors, none have specifically examined employees at NPOs serving youth between the ages of 10 and 17 years. I sought to describe, interpret, and analyze relevant employee retention factors to understand why employees retain employment at the selected NPOs. Herzberg's (1974) theory of motivation was the theoretical framework used in this dissertation. Two of the four agencies studied were locally based in the Mid-Atlantic region of the Eastern United States, and the other two were national organizations that had offices in the Mid-Atlantic region of the Eastern United States. Including national organizations aided in the comparison of participant responses from local and national

NPOs. Based on the findings, conclusions were drawn and distinctions were made that can aid organizations in implementing the key factors of retention that the participants identified in the organizations' retention plans. A secondary research question that arose was the following: Are factors of employee retention the same among national and locally based nonprofit organizations in the Mid-Atlantic region of the Eastern United States?

Employee retention is always a topic of discussion among nonprofit sector managers. Whitaker (2010) noted that symptoms of low employee morale were high absenteeism and frequent employee turnover. The first part of the process of investigating factors of employee retention is to understand what employee retention is and how companies are choosing to address the issue. Businesses cannot operate successfully without having employees; therefore, it is important to understand what factors make employees stay. Selden and Moynihan (2000) emphasized that employee turnover is an ongoing problem within the public administration field. There are various factors, such as organizational culture, leadership, employee morale, and leadership style, that influence an employee's reason for staying with an organization, and my hope in conducting this dissertation was to uncover some additional factors. If employee morale were too low, it would be considered a detriment to the organization, according to Traynor (2009).

### **Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to identify and interpret employee retention factors affecting employees who work or have worked with NPOs serving youth who are 10-17 years old in the Mid-Atlantic region of the Eastern

United States. This exploration was conducted to improve the employee retention rates of NPOs that are serving youth. I gathered data from interviews and study participants' descriptive accounts of their personal reasons for continuing to work with their current NPOs. Upon completion of the interviews, I analyzed the transcribed interviews to identify underlying patterns and trends.

The overall goal of this dissertation study was to fill the gap in literature regarding employee retention of youth serving NPOs in the Mid-Atlantic region of the Eastern United States. Similarly, Dean (2012) examined volunteer retention within youth-serving NPOs in southern New Jersey and recommended that volunteers receive recognition and appreciation for their time and service. If volunteer recognition is customary in an organization, then employee recognition should be as well. The findings from my dissertation are expected to help NPOs develop different or improved methods for retaining employees. The study was designed to promote positive social change by allowing more Mid-Atlantic-area youth to be serviced by NPOs that have more adequate staff coverage to provide quality programs due to lack of attrition. These NPOs are expected to spend fewer resources on training or recruiting of eligible employees to replace those who leave or are released. Developing sound retention plans will add value to NPOs as employees will feel as though their voice matters and will be able to witness their employers' employee appreciation through various company-planned events.

### **Research Questions**

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to identify the factors that minimize turnover and keep employees of youth-serving organizations in their

positions within the organization. I also sought to identify the factors that have caused or could lead to employee turnover. The main research questions were as follows:

1. What primary factors do you believe influence employee retention within your current organization? Please state the type of influence each of the factors has.
2. For employees who have been employed with nonprofit agencies in the Mid-Atlantic region of the Eastern United States for more than 2 years, what themes emerge in their responses relating to the factors that lead to retention with the organization?
3. For employees who have worked for nonprofit agencies and completed exit interviews, what factors did they attribute their decision to leave the agency to?

These additional interview questions were asked to help answer the research questions and identify themes that emerged from the interviews.

1. What retention strategies has your employer implemented?
2. What, if any, barriers to retention exist for you, and how do you address them?

Purposive sampling was used to select eight to 12 employees and/or previous employees of NPOs to obtain a better understanding of the factors they believed contribute to employee retention. Employees participating in the study needed to meet five primary criteria: (a) be 18 years of age or older, (b) self-identify as employees of NPOs, (c) self-identify as being employed with the agency for 2 or more years, (d) be

employees (or previous employees) of NPOs serving youth in the Mid-Atlantic region of the Eastern United States, and (e) be able to understand and communicate in English.

### **Conceptual Framework for the Study**

Employees provide various skill sets and talents to organizations. Each position offers a scale for compensation for work depending on the budget and the employee's experience. Herzberg's (1974) two-factor theory of motivation has been used in various research studies. This theory, also known as the *motivation-hygiene theory*, proposes that people are influenced by intrinsic rewards or motivators, which are things that give employees satisfaction. Meanwhile, the hygiene factors of job security, employee benefits, and salary can impact the level of dissatisfaction that employees feel. Hygiene factors are also often referred to as *dissatisfiers*, and motivator factors are also referred to as *satisfiers* (Herzberg, 1968). Herzberg (1968) reported that a hygiene factor "prevents dissatisfaction but does not necessarily provide positive motivation" (p.33). Identifying hygiene factors is not the solution to the issue of retention; however, more knowledge about such factors may contribute to the existing body of literature.

This theory was used in the dissertation study to identify the motivator and hygiene factors of the current and previous employees of the various NPOs selected to be a part of this study. Herzberg's theory was used as the conceptual framework for which the open-ended interview questions were derived.

### **Nature of the Study**

The rationale for selecting a qualitative phenomenological study approach for this dissertation was that I sought to identify what factors tenured employees (past or present)

from youth-serving nonprofits felt contributed to their reason for remaining employed with their respective NPOs. I also investigated what caused employees to leave the organizations. Personal interviews were more personal and allowed participants to share freely without fear of judgment. This study was inclusive of four NPOs in the Mid-Atlantic region. Two were local, and the other two were national organizations that had an office in the Mid-Atlantic region. Four to eight employees from the four to six organizations were interviewed and asked a series of questions. Responses were recorded to ensure participant credibility and minimize researcher error in transcription. The data collected was transcribed and categorized to identify any similarities and differences in responses.

### **Definitions**

*Employee retention:* “Employee retention is the organizational goal of keeping talented employees and reducing turnover by fostering a positive work atmosphere to promote engagement, showing appreciation to employees, and providing competitive pay and benefits and healthy work-life balance. Employers are particularly interested in retaining employees during periods of low unemployment and heightened competition for talent.” (Sutner, S., 2018)

*Employee burnout:* Feelings of overwhelm and exhaustion with work duties to the point of affecting individual health and well-being (Maslach & Jackson, 1981).

*Employee turnover:* The duration of or lack of commitment of service to an organization resulting in either self-termination or employer termination of a position.

*Exit interview:* “A final wrap-up meeting between management representatives and someone who is leaving the organization” (Wigmore, I, 2013).

*Herzberg’s two-factor theory of motivation:* An ideal that identifies satisfiers (factors of motivation) such as a position or title and associated benefits, which can contribute to pride in a job, and dissatisfiers (hygiene factors) such as monetary compensation and work environment, which can contribute to shame or dissatisfaction with a job (Herzberg et al., 1959).

*Nonprofit organization (NPO):* An organization that is independent and not controlled by the government. These organizations are usually tax-exempt from the IRS, and no particular owner can benefit from profit sharing.

*Phenomenological study:* A phenomenological study in qualitative research involves exploring individual experiences with a particular phenomenon.

*Purposeful sampling:* Using a particular set of criteria to narrow the sample of a population of interest that will allow for specific data to be collected and investigated (Business Research Methodology).

### **Assumptions**

I assumed that participants would have worked with their nonprofit organization for 2 or more years. Additionally, I assumed that participants would answer honestly and to the best of their ability. It was also my assumption that participants would consent to participation in the study and understand that participation was voluntary and that the participants could cease participation at any time. I assumed that participants would

communicate any concerns or questions prior to the study and understand that responses will be kept anonymous.

Although these assumptions were present, I did my best to not allow my assumptions to influence the research. By addressing them, I was aware of some grey areas that I might need to avoid. I was sure to document carefully—using a recording device and handwritten notes—what the participants reported to avoid my own interpretation. I also employed member checking to ensure that the transcribed data were accurate and free from bias or transcription error.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

I presently work for a nonprofit and have witnessed high staff turnover in my tenure here. Additionally, I recently experienced sudden job loss within a youth-serving nonprofit for which I worked for 10 years. Therefore, I was aware of my personal bias and strongly relied on member checking to focus on the participants' responses and thoughts as opposed to my own. I was able to separate the two and not allow my own biases to influence the results of the study. Additionally, I avoided sharing personal stories during the interviews and strictly allowed the participants to share their thoughts free of interruption except if clarification was needed.

### **Limitations**

The dissertation was limited to a small sample size, as only four nonprofits were identified. Purposeful sampling was used to carefully select the limited number of participants for this study. The desire was to have two to four current employees from



each of the four organizations and two other employees who no longer worked for the nonprofits. However, I knew that these were only desires and might not be met.

The sample size could have posed a limitation because the response generated might not have fully answered the research questions, leaving the study inconclusive. However, Marshall (1996) expressed that “An appropriate sample size for a qualitative study is one that adequately answers the research questions ... Single figure population sizes are relevant for simple studies; whereas, large samples are needed for the more complex studies” (p. 59). For this simple study, under 10 participants is enough to help in identifying the factors that contribute to employee retention. Therefore, the small sample size was capable of yielding profound results and might not have been a limitation after all. Furthermore, the purpose of the dissertation was to gain insight into what other employees felt to be factors that made them stay with the organizations and what factors had caused other employees to leave.

### **Significance**

High turnover rates can lead to burnout syndrome. Demerouti et al. (2001) explained that burnout syndrome is inclusive of the following: overworked employees, multiple job duties, and no changes in compensation (pay) for double the work. Although there were a lot of observations and questions in previous research, the factors in why people stay with an organization or why they leave vary from person to person. Through this dissertation, I sought to identify and analyze the factors of employee retention and identify best practices for keeping employees motivated in youth-serving NPOs in the Mid-Atlantic region of the Eastern United States.

Numerous researchers have investigated factors such as organizational culture and leadership style and how they affect the employees within an organization. Aside from these factors that such studies have identified, the goal of this dissertation was to identify what other factors employees believe to be associated with retention. This dissertation was aimed at granting employees a voice within the organization. A lot of times, executives and managers may not experience day-to-day stressors and other hardships that are directly placed on employees. Additionally, outside stressors or influencers may be attributed to poor work performance. Through this research study, the participants were able to shed light on this ongoing problem and suggest ways to make positive changes.

### **Summary**

Through this dissertation study, I sought to identify valid reasons that employees within youth-serving nonprofits in the Mid-Atlantic region remain employed. My goal is to use the results to help employers understand the thoughts and needs of employees and aid in discovering factors that will keep employees motivated and encouraged to always present their best selves in the office and out of the office.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore and identify the factors that keep employees in youth-serving NPOs. Organizational success and business competition are affected by employee retention rates (Joo et al., 2015). According to Mitchell et al. (2001), job embeddedness involves an individual's perception of how they fit in within an organization, how they connect to others, and what sacrifices would be made if they left. Job embeddedness is something that most nonprofit leaders and managers believe attracts employees to their organizations. Many researchers have explored employee retention in many different ways, and studies have identified how various factors, such as leadership style, organizational structure, and motivational theories, also affect or contribute to retention rates.

In fact, Deresky (2006) illustrated that high staff turnover is not limited to a geographic region or a specific industry. Instead, he found that high turnover is becoming more widespread as corporations disperse companies to geographic locations globally. Although these factors and findings exist, there is little research on what factors of retention are for youth-serving NPOs in Maryland. NPOs exist to support and respond to social problems (Smith, 2002). There are a variety of NPOs throughout the United States that have taken on the challenge of responding to societal needs. According to Grantspace (2015), organizations that fulfill the critical role and need of serving disadvantaged groups of people are child and family NPOs. Due to the need and demand for NPOs, understanding what increases retention is vital to helping organizations meet social needs.

Jensen (2010) published studies suggesting that the absence of positive youth programming may lead young people between the ages of 10 and 17 to negative activities such as criminal behavior. This adolescent period is an important one when it comes to the development of a child, and the village approach, where everyone (teacher, parent, aunt, uncle, neighbor, mentor) is necessary. Stolberg and Babcock (2015) reported that two dozen people were arrested and charged in relation to involvement with property destruction and battles with police during the 2015 Baltimore City riots. Most of the arrests were high school students. Youth-serving NPOs are largely dependent on support from government and federal grants and other philanthropic supporters.

The focus of this dissertation was on understanding what factors contribute to staff retention in youth-serving NPOs in the Mid-Atlantic region of the Eastern United States. Adequate funding for NPOs has been investigated numerous times; however, the focus of this study was on identifying other factors in addition to the strain created from not having adequate funding. This dissertation may indicate ways that nonprofit leaders can retain staff using some of the factors identified. Additionally, my hope was to contribute to the existing research on how to incorporate retention strategies during the interview process.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

The literature review focused on youth programs, NPOs, nonprofit funding, and retention strategies. Research for this dissertation was derived from professional journals, newspaper articles, Google Scholar, and studies available through various Walden University library databases. These databases included Sage Publications, Business

Source Complete, EBSCO, ProQuest, PsychINFO, Thoreau databases, and other internet sources. Keywords that were used to find articles on employee retention and NPOs included *leadership within nonprofits, employee retention, employee turnover, youth nonprofits, phenomenological study, staffing nonprofits, funding nonprofits, Maryland nonprofits, employee motivation, manager motivation, theories of motivation, manager and employee relationship, volunteers in nonprofits, volunteer and employees, youth afterschool activities*, and other topics that were found while searching for relevant information.

The search process began by broadly searching for articles on nonprofit employee retention, and then I began to add in keywords to phase out the results. There was a wealth of information that focused particularly on leadership styles and specific factors for retention. Articles were selected based upon whether or not they were scholarly, peer reviewed, and published within a 10-year period. In the search for sources for this dissertation, there was difficulty in finding a lot of research specific to the problem. This further supported the idea of the gap in literature pertaining to youth-serving NPOs.

The theory that this dissertation explored was Herzberg's two-factor theory. Following the theory, the literature review involved three themes: the role of employee retention and successful organizations, organizational leadership perceptions of successful employee retention, and employee perceptions of successful employee retention.

## **Conceptual Foundation**

Herzberg's two-factor theory was first identified in 1959 and used to examine the elements of employee retention. This theory was chosen for this phenomenological study because it addresses why a person is motivated to work. Krajcsak (2018) proposed that the key component in improving employee performance and employee retention is motivation. Therefore, Herzberg's two-factor theory was identified as the best theory to determine what causes employees' satisfaction or dissatisfaction with their jobs (Herzberg et al, 1959). Herzberg's (1974) theory comprises two stages: hygiene and motivator factors. Herzberg, this American psychologist made the claim that work environment, work conditions, salary, benefits, and coworkers are considered hygiene factors or dissatisfactors. Meanwhile, motivator factors or satisfaction producers include things such as growth and training opportunities, promotion opportunities, recognition, responsibility, and a great understanding of the tasks on the job. Maidani (1991) conducted a comparative study of Herzberg's theory in private- and public-sector employees. The study concluded that public-sector employees placed more value on hygiene factors than private sector employees did (Maidani, 1991).

Through this dissertation study, I aimed to identify which factors promote employee retention in youth-serving NPOs. Using Herzberg's theory allowed for classification of factors that participants reported during the interviews. Herzberg reported a correlation between productivity and satisfaction in relation to the two-factor theory. However, most of his research focused on employee satisfaction or motivator factors. Past researchers, such as Marta et al. (2010), have reviewed the value of

satisfaction of employees and volunteers. During their study, Marta et al. suggested that retention was based on past volunteer experience with the organization. The study allowed for classification of short-, middle-, and long-term satisfaction and reported that an individual's experience during any term would affect their level of satisfaction and overall commitment to the organization. Herzberg (1987) and Herzberg et al. (1959) placed a strong emphasis on the need for hygiene factors such as compensation and job security in order to keep employees satisfied with their jobs. This dissertation was based on this theory and allowed me to identify specifically what satisfaction or dissatisfaction reasons are needed to create stable retention rates in youth-serving nonprofits in the Mid-Atlantic region of the Eastern United States.

### **Literature Review Related to Key Concepts**

#### **Understanding Employee Retention as It Relates to Leadership Styles**

Employee retention is defined as an organization's ability to maintain an employee. Schwartz and Austin (2009) reported that employees are not an NPO's only primary concern because the nonprofit sector has historically relied on volunteer and professional resources and assistance to meet the service needs of communities. With youth-serving nonprofits, there is an added challenge as government background checks are required of all employees as well as those volunteers who will be responsible for direct service with youth. This examination of literature lays the foundation for this dissertation by exploring the benefits or detriments to having good retention plans within NPOs. Armstrong and Taylor (2014) addressed employee retention as being the process of policies and procedures developed to influence commitment and meet employee needs.

Understanding who is responsible for meeting employee needs is a process and one that requires clear and direct communication from the employee and employer. Dumoulin (2017) reported that it is a manager's responsibility to cultivate strong leaders, recruitment efforts, trainings, and motivating factors. According to this article, the onus lies on the employer to help create an environment to cultivate strong leadership. However, what about the employee? Latukha (2011) conveyed that employee motivation was supported by a desire for individual growth and self-achievement. Employee retention can be a challenging issue to solve, as individuals arrive with varying levels and goals for personal growth and achievement. According to Lee et al. (2017), effective leaders are able to achieve wanted changes in employee behaviors, beliefs, and goals while proposing to build employees' self-esteem. Again, these researchers highlight the need for strong leadership in order to influence change.

Leadership approaches usually fall within five categories: democratic, authoritative, coercive, transactional, and transformational (Zuned, 2017). There may be times when leaders need to adapt their leadership styles depending on the situation or the type of interaction they are engaged in. Rahbi et al., (2017) also referred to the democratic approach to leadership as the *participative approach*. This type of leader is said to be one who encourages employee engagement and participation in decision making (Mohiuddin, 2017). This type of leadership can be rewarding if the goal is to empower the employees. However, Rahbi et al. also identified how this leadership approach can lead to failure if employee roles are not clearly identified and deadlines or



tasks are missed. With leadership, it is imperative to find some balance and understand when certain leadership styles are effective.

When an executive's goal is to create a shared vision, then the leader will likely assume the authoritative role (Zuned, 2017). This leader or manager will establish demands, rules, punishments, and regulations while assuming a top-down communication approach to leadership with minimal room for feedback or engagement as seen in the democratic leadership style (Kelly & MacDonald, 2019). When exploring factors of employee retention, this type of leadership style may be less favorable; however, it depends on the employee because there may be some employees who function better in an environment like this. Rahbi et al. (2017) noted that the authoritative style has its benefits but suggested that long-term use of this leadership style may have negative impacts for employees, as it does not allow for much creativity and is more structured.

Much like the authoritative leader, those who adopt a coercive approach to leadership put a great deal of emphasis and control on the manager rather than the employee. Coercive leaders are usually the ones to make difficult decisions and focus on how to achieve results while saving or cutting costs (Zuned, 2017). This type of leadership style can be effective, depending again on the employee and the needs that they bring to the table. Like coercive leaders, transactional leaders have a focus that is task and results driven. They also compare with the authoritative leadership style as the achievement of set goals and objectives, such as those within a job description, is among the things that transactional leaders prioritize (Zuned, 2017). However, this type of leader has more awareness of the employee, as the transactional leader rewards the employee for

meeting goals or enforces punitive actions for not meeting goals or deadlines. Yasir et al., (2016) shared that transactional leaders typically reward through recognition, monetary compensation, or promotions, while poor performers can receive written reprimands or even face termination.

Lastly, the transformational leader is one who creates space for growth, challenges employees to perform, and responds to challenges while giving input toward decisions that are made (Abdullah et al., 2015). Those who adopt this leadership style view employees as role models for the organization and as embodying organizational goals. The beauty of these leadership styles is that employers are not typically restricted to just one method. Employers who understand the benefits and risks of each leadership style will know when to adapt, depending on employees' needs and organizational needs. For example, in an organization undergoing an audit, an individual who would typically be a transformational leader might need to adjust to the style of an authoritative leader should employees need clear and concise instructions for the task ahead.

Employers and employees who know and have an understanding of leadership styles should be more intentional with the type of environment that employees have to complete their jobs and fulfill their hygiene factors for retention. Fiaz et al. (2017) proposed that the leadership of an organization is a primary factor in retention and turnover. Managers play a great role in engagement, motivating and retaining employees. My hope is that this dissertation adds to the existing body of knowledge to help employers meet and achieve their retention goals while employees learn what skills are

needed or desired to have a prosperous environment. After all, without employees or a volunteer plan, organizations cannot exist and carry out their missions.

### **The Role of Employee Retention and Successful Organizations**

Employees are the glue needed to complete an organization. Tenured employees are highly valuable as they gain new insight and expertise the longer they remain employed with the organization (Ansari & Bijalwan, 2017). Losing experienced and tenured employees poses great losses to the organization too as organizational productivity is diminished, according to a study published by Kang et al. (2015). Kang et al. further said that employee morale and business reputation are jeopardized when staff turnover is high. According to Rahbi et al. (2017), employee motivation is a critical support in order to generate and implement ideas that lead to organizational success. Herzberg's two-factor theory particularly explores the factors of employee motivation.

Each employee brings a certain set of ideals, values, energy, and a way of thinking to an organization. Jensen and Bro (2018) explored the different ways that employees can be motivated. They identified intrinsic and extrinsic influences. Extrinsic influences include external factors such as recognition or rewards, also referred to as hygiene factors.

### **Organizational Culture and the Effect of Employee Retention**

Given the satisfactory or dissatisfactory factors that employees report, the organizational culture and leadership representatives may perceive the environment in a different way. Having nonbiased assessments to examine and explore organizational cultures may be helpful as organizational leaders look into retention factors and ideals.

Sahi and Mahajan (2014) explored how organization commitment is linked to an employee's attitude, norms, and behavior. The authors further defined organizational commitment to an employee's state of mind as it relates to their relationship with the organization. Saadat and Eskandari (2016) emphasized that leaders needed to examine their organizational culture in order for organizations to attract and maintain talent. Each organization has a unique culture that is directly attributed to a number of organizational outputs and the mission (Whelan, 2016).

The culture could directly or indirectly influence the hygiene and motivator factors that Herzberg noted, as well as employee performance (Kontoghiorghes, 2016). Culture includes interactions as well as measurable aspects of the work environment, according to a study by Rahbi et al. (2017). Numerous researchers have reported that organizational culture plays a significant role in improving the commitment of employees and volunteers (Abdullah et al., 2015; Mitić et al., 2016). For this dissertation, I conducted case studies on four NPOs, two that were locally developed and two that were part of a larger national franchise. This decision was due to the fact that there are a number of factors, such as size, structure, ideologies, and hierarchy of authority, that can contribute to the behavioral expectations within an organization, according to a study by Cronley and Kim (2017). All of those elements create a system and standard of operations and further lead to other hygiene factors that employees may experience (Rahbi et al., 2017).

Organizational culture assessments typically fall under or between one of three categories: prepared, unprepared, or contra-prepared (Hurst & Hurst, 2016). The authors

Hurst and Hurst (2016) explained that if an organization falls within the prepared category, it is seen as an entity that is able to rapidly change and adapt to changes as they arise. This skill is necessary for any organization but is especially important for NPOs as they constantly have to compete for limited resources to support their day-to-day efforts. The success of employees is impacted and influenced by the culture that the organization creates (Jablonowski, 2017). A study by Diebig et al., (2017), reported that if there is one employee that has a negative experience or is constantly stressed with work tasks, this may have a negative impact on the work experience for the other employees who are working in the same environment.

Having practices and policies in place to address employee dissatisfaction that keeps in line with organizations goals and priorities is critical to addressing the negative chain reaction that a negative employee can cause. An organizational culture that is strong and concise will be able to navigate through challenges that arise. Whelan (2016) reports that when the organizational culture reflects the goals and values of management and those said values are shared by a majority of the employees then this allows for the development of a strong organizational culture. Within strong, positive organizational cultures the alignment of the organization's mission, vision, and values are understood and adopted by the employees (Hurst & Hurst, 2016). Organizations that are looking to strengthen their organizational culture can create a more participatory process for customs, practices and procedures of the organization (Gochhayat et al. 2017). Therefore, prepared organizations that continue to build strong cultures may also experience

increases in other areas or the organizational cohesion and effectiveness (Gochhayat et al., 2017).

Unprepared organizational cultures are not as willing or capable of accepting, acknowledging or adapting to change (Hurst & Hurst, 2016). A typical unprepared organization has no clear understanding of their mission and values. The researchers, Hurst & Hurst (2016) also report that the leaders within this unprepared section do not prioritize skill growth and development within the organization. Learning is key to addressing and overcoming challenges. Through learning exchanges organizations are able to explore successes or challenges within other organizations to be able to prevent or minimize turnover. When there is no clear vision and commitment to the mission, employees may be narrowly focused on individual success within the organization, instead of working to ensure organizational results are being met overall (Hurst & Hurst, 2016).

Moreover, cultures that fall within the contra-prepared category of organizational culture experience increased difficulty responding to and adapting to change (Hurst & Hurst, 2016). This mode is often compared to survival mode. The main goal of an organization with a contra-prepared culture is to maintain low costs and do the very least to meet organizational goals. This type of culture is not conducive for trust, teammanship, or support. Withdrawal, high stress and employee burnout is typical for organizations with a contra-prepared culture (Hurst & Hurst, 2016). This culture is not one that we would want to see within youth serving nonprofits. Instead, we would want a

culture that is able to adapt and prioritizes leadership development (Costanza, Blacksmith, Coats, Severt, & DeCostanza, 2016).

Recruitment and retention are factors that can be used to determine what culture the organization presents within the business environment (Kontoghiorghes, 2016). Ethics must be a governing principle for NPOs, because ethical cultures help to build trust and inspire positive work environments (Kontoghiorghes, 2016). Following ethical organizational cultures, the organizations are able to build and establish a trust worthy culture and environment which will lead to cooperation of employees and leaders within the organizations (Halbesleben & Tolbert, 2014).

### **Leadership**

Cotae (2010) emphasized that true leadership involves facilitating organizational change. Change is inevitable and is vital to growth whether personal or professional. In the process of facilitating this organizational change, leaders must build commitment and trust with their employees (Caldwell, Hayes, & Long, 2010). Leadership style and organizational culture contribute to employee retention rates and employee morale (Schien, 2010), but this study seeks to identify if these factors are the same for the employees of youth serving nonprofits. Effective leaders in nonprofit management designate time to train and guide employees in their positions. The leaders also model the behavior and expectations that they desire. Although training and mentorship is time restricting, the training should be a priority to orient new employees and to keep tenured employees ready eager to learn ways to work smarter in the field.

## **Employee Training**

When looking at this issue of employee retention within any organization, several concerns arise. Demerouti et al. (2001) with low job resources and high demand employees are withdrawn and unmotivated. Employee training and supervision can be a costly budget item for NPOs. Mohamed, Singh, Irani, & Darwish (2013) analyzed recruitment, training and retention practices from an international view point and reported that larger organizations were able to train employees while smaller NPOs did not have frequent formal training. Would the organizational culture contribute to retention of employees (Armenakis, Brown, & Mehta, 2011)? These authors found that organizational culture did have an effect on retention. However, they reported that further investigation was needed to determine how significant the effect was. Dean (2012) investigated how volunteers can sustain an organization, and found that when are proper volunteer management and training in place along with incentives for volunteers to stay motivated, they are successful.

The purpose of this dissertation is to identify those factors that influence employee retention and turnover with the youth-serving nonprofits in the Mid-Atlantic Region of the Eastern United States. The primary research question for this study is, “What are some of the factors that contribute to employee retention within four youth serving NPOs in the Mid-Atlantic region of the Eastern United States?” A planned outcome from this dissertation is to develop and or modify employee retention plan (s) for nonprofits using the data gathered.



Another outcome is to bring awareness to the importance of employees' voices and to have the employees also contribute to the development or improvement of retention plans. This process is intended to create an atmosphere in which open dialogue between employees and employers takes place; wherefore, improving employee and supervisory morale and creating an open atmosphere conducive for learning and growth. Although working for nonprofits has known challenges, it is still important for employers to maintain good employees and understand the factors that contribute to employee retention. Being proactive in developing an employee retention plan will be instrumental to the success of these NPOs.

### **Retention Factors Within Organizations**

Baron, Hannan, & Burton (2001) researched how organizational change affected the employees in newly developed high tech firms, finding that there is increased turnover among tenured employees when new policies are put in place. The researchers reported that changes sometimes can bring about chaos within an organization if they are not implemented correctly. They also identified many factors related to changes in the organization's structure that could bring about employee turnover, including mundane tasks such as a new way to file a report. Oftentimes change is not easy, but it can be necessary. New ways to file a report may not be an organizational mandate but a grantor mandate; the training and explanation of the change needs to be done in an appropriate manner. Staw (1980) reported that employee turnover can be detrimental to organization. From this research study, it is understood that changes in the work environment can lead to changes in employee morale and employee satisfaction; however, employers can put

policies in place to ensure a smooth transition. Transparency is key and helpful in these situations where changes need to be made to normal routines.

Bolat, Bolat, & Yuksel (2011) examined how role ambiguity and burnout affect organizational change. These researchers stressed the importance of employees knowing their role within an organization. They identified how uncertainty could lead to turnover within the organization and affect the organizational culture as a whole, and recommended having various programs and policies in place to combat the burnout that employees may experience. This article is beneficial to this dissertation as it identifies a popular factor that could contribute to employee retention. Clarifying employees' roles or interpretation of a position is instrumental to their success. These researchers just reiterated that employees are able to thrive when they are completely knowledgeable of their position and the expectations of their supervisors.

Frey, Bayon, & Totzek (2013) examined clients as a potential reason for staff turnover. Their approach was to look outside, beyond the scope of just looking at an organization or its leaders; instead, they focused on the clients served by an organization and how they may or may not influence the retention rates of organizations. These researchers found that less than half of the participants reported changes in how they felt about their positions and job role after encountering negative clients. The authors established a link to how customer satisfaction can be associated with employee satisfaction and retention rates of employees. These authors reported that if the clients/customers are happy, the employees usually are too. However, the opposite was

also found to be supported. What if the quality of service is pitiable, then the clients/customers will not be happy.

Lawal & Oguntuashe (2012) focused on how organizational leadership and culture impacted organizational trust. Organizational trust is earned over time and is can easily be broken (Lawal & Oguntunashe, 2012). Organizational leaders that do not live up to the mission and vision of the organization suffer the consequences of having a bad rapport by losing the trust of stakeholders and vested partners. Trust is very important within an organization and transparency is also an important factor (Lawal & Oguntunashe, 2012). Everything that is done should be mission-focused and tailored to add value to the organization as a whole (Angelica, 2001).

Relationships matter; employee morale and leadership styles have been found to influence the professional relationships within an organization (Kashyap & Rangnekar, 2014). In order for employers to satisfy employees, they need to know what their employees need (Bolat, Bolat, & Yuksel, 2011). Furthermore, in order for employees to be effective employees, they need to understand their role. Assigned tasks and duties must be clear. Supervisions and other staff development training are necessary to keep employees current with issues, policies and procedures (Barrick, & Zimmerman, (2009).

This dissertation focuses on identifying factors that contribute to employee retention within four youth serving NPOs in the Mid-Atlantic region of the Eastern United States. As part of this study, I will interview participants to identify various factors that they believe to impact employee retention. One of the dissertation goals is to determine whether the investigated factors are the same in different locations, or if there

are different factors for different organizations and communities within the Mid-Atlantic region of the Eastern United States.

### **Stressors of Employees**

Bolat, Bolat, & Yuksel, (2011), identified role ambiguity, burnout as significant factors of retention and stressed how these factors lead to employee turnover. Bolat, Bolat, & Yuksel, (2011), also reported that unclear job duties created stressors for the employees: Such feelings of being overwhelmed are likely to cause employees to leave. The true mystery is behind those that retain employment with the organizations even through trying or difficult times and that is what this dissertation seeks to identify. Moreover, this dissertation will inquire about how client interactions affect retention rates. Working in stressful environments where demands are in place cause employees to become agitated. However, when difficult clients are added to the equation, further problems are generated. Frey, Bayon, & Totzek (2013) took a different approach in their study and they investigated how clients too can be responsible for increasing staff turnover. The study shared how working with youth at any age can be challenging. A lot of patience is required in order to be a youth worker. Frey, Bayon, & Totzek (2013) continue to share responses from participants that highlighted times where the clients said or did hurtful things, and how it affected their employee morale. Conclusions from this study shared the importance for employers to consider how these other factors could be affecting their employees and decreasing their desire to fulfill their job duties.

### **Staff Motivation and Rapport Building**

Clients play a major role in influencing staff motivation (Frey, Bayon, & Totzek, 2013). It is important for employers to understand that other supports such as team building, staff appreciation should be included in employee performance measures as these authors suggest Becker, Antuar, & Everett (2011). Although the passion may be there, employees need to understand that they are appreciated and cared for (Bolat, Bolat, & Yuksel, 2011). Becker, Antuar, & Everett (2011) relate that employees that work with clients should have mandatory appreciation celebrations where they are able to release the stress and appreciate being recognized. Acknowledging those employees who consistently give of themselves and are good at what they do will cause employees to consistently give and be the best that they can be (Becker, Antuar, & Everett, 2011).

Building a good rapport is something that happens over time. An organization must be very cautious of the reputation that they develop within the clients they serve and among employees. Nonprofits especially must ensure that they are mission-focused and maintain ethical proceedings, because it is easy to be tempted to commit fraud when desperation for funding is present (Dede, 2009). Aligning with their mission and educating others about the mission are important factors to attract the right employees and increase credibility (Becker, Antuar, & Everett, 2011). Mission-focused strategies are demonstrated through different events or program offerings. Lawal and Oguntuashe (2012) examined *organizational trust* and how its relation to employee retention. They reported that inconsistencies in an organization's mission work could lead to potential issues and loss of trust. When stakeholders lose trust in organizations, it is difficult to

regain that support (Lawal and Oguntuashe, 2012). Therefore, it is imperative for organizational leaders to be consistent in their approach and message delivery. Leaders should be cautious of what they represent and be mindful of how their actions are shaping the organization's culture. Credibility is a huge factor as well that leaders must be cautious of not violating.

Overall, through the examination of these research articles, the various authors provided support for the factors they examined. All of the articles support the need for further investigation specifically as to how these factors relate to youth serving NPOs. The goal of this dissertation is to develop a retention plan for organizations to use to ensure that employees are appreciated; not burnt-out or overwhelmed by job stress, and trust their employers and what the NPOs represent.

### **Organizational Mission and Retention**

Yanay & Yanay (2008) and Lanfranchi, Narcy, & Larguem (2010) believe that mission and vision of the organization and passion provide enough motivation for employees to thrive in NPOs. However, passion and belief in a mission do not always make employees stay, other factors have to be included. Employee retention is a rising issue in both public and private sector communities in the United States, especially in Maryland. In the state of Maryland, there was a total of 142,064 unemployed in January 2017 of which 69,490 of that number were Baltimore-Columbia and Towson residents (BLS.gov). In Maryland, the Baltimore region has the highest employed and unemployed in the state (BLS.gov)! Several studies have investigated how costly employee retention can be to organizations and their business operations (Posthuma, Joplin, & Maertz, 2005;

Von Hagel, 2010; Walumbwa, Lawler, Avolio, Wang, & Shi, 2005). These researchers have illustrated that employees who are vested in the organization usually maintain employment. However, finding the right employees who truly believe in the mission and vision of the organization is not a light undertaking. Ensuring that employees are fully equipped and able to handle and understand job duties requires time, resources, and money. Nonprofits, in general, have difficulty training employees if retention rates are not stable. NPOs are classified by the United States Revenue Code under section 501(c)(3) Unlike most private/government organizations, NPOs in the United States usually operate under contractual agreements such as grants, and therefore rely on donations or fundraisers to fill funding gaps (such as trainings) that arise. Schneider (2010) investigated the effects of decreased donations to nonprofits and reported that organizations suffered when they did not receive the donations around the holiday as they did the year before; this investigation reported that agencies had some budgetary deficits as a result of decreased donations.

### **Employee Turnover**

The specific problem investigated by this study is that employee turnover is an ongoing issue within the field of Public Administration (Selden & Moynihan, 2000). However, Deresky (2006), suggests that high turnover is a widespread issue across the geographic region and even globally. The United States Department of Labor publishes the Bureau of Labor Statistics monthly to provide an update and illustrate the trends in employment and unemployment rates by state. Although this information is not limited to NPOs, it is vital information about the economy and workforce by state. Baltimore is

high ranking close to and in some instances higher than the United States averages (BLS.gov).

This dissertation primarily focuses on youth-serving NPOs because turnover of employees at these companies also affects the youths served. Harris et al. (2007) conveyed how young people benefit from consistent support and structure. At times, organizations such as the Boys and Girls mentoring club, a national NPO, provide such structure and balance for the youth that they serve. Inconsistent employee involvement can cause changes to the quality of services offered (Cohen et al., 2010). Alleyne and Wood (2011) argued that when youth do not have positive choices, they are more prone to delinquent activities such as gangs, drugs or even crime. Therefore, consistent and reliable employees of youth-serving organizations are essentially responsible for minimizing idle time youth have by implementing programs and services (Alleyne & Wood, 2011).

There has been limited studies to date into factors of employee retention that are specific to youth advocacy organizations in Baltimore and how they relate to those popular factors that researchers have investigated. For instance, Frey et al., (2013) investigated how clients/customers can influence employee retention and found that in some instances clients did influence employee morale but the study was not directly correlated to the retention rates. Dextras-Gauthier et al., (2012) researched how organizational culture, work conditions, and mental health stress were connected and further contributed to employee retention rates, but again the study did not connect specifically to nonprofits. Although there was a slight correlation found between the



factors mentioned, these researchers did not indicate if all three factors were identical to the participants or not. Additionally, the researchers Dextras-Gauthier et al., (2012) did not specify if there was a genetic predisposition to mental health stress among the participants involved or if work trauma led to mental health stress. This dissertation desires to see how the factors of this dissertation study relate to these common factors found in previous research.

Salamon & Lessans-Geller (2010) reported that, “nonprofit jobs are very popular in Baltimore City and rural areas across the state; in Baltimore alone nonprofits total 33 percent of all private jobs” (p. 2, Widespread growth across the state, para. 5). That is a large percentage for Baltimore, compared to “9.2 and 9.6 percent in Washington and Baltimore suburbs” (p. 2, Widespread growth across the state, para. 5). Given these statistics, it is imperative that retention is kept at an all-time high. Understanding the factors that contribute to employee retention will allow these organizations to flourish in Baltimore and beyond. Employees often know what they need in order to be successful. It is important for organizations to have strategies in place that give employees a voice and contribute to the sense of belonging.

### **Communication**

Recognition and communication are abilities that most managers who are committed to retention should seek (Mandhanya, 2015). Madden, Scannapieco, and Painter (2014) focused on the need for realistic job expectations from employees and the ability to offer incentives such as educational assistance or advanced training. The authors, Chun-Fang, Canter, and Prince (2008) stated that strong, clear and direct

communication may be all that some employees need and are motivated by. Also with communication employees and employers are able to clearly express their needs and desires.

### **Summary and Conclusions**

Employee motivation and satisfaction can be identified through theorist like Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory. The existing literature highlight various factors that could contribute to retention among organizations. However, we know that everyone is unique and their reasons differ for why they retain or resign from employment with an NPO. This dissertation will examine what factors employees or past employees from organizations in the Mid-Atlantic Region of the United States share regarding their employment or past employment. From the data that will be obtained, it is the desire to contribute to the body of literature and provide some insight to organizations on how to improve their existing work culture. This dissertation also hopes to identify what factors have been working to keep employees motivated and committed to carrying out the mission and vision of the youth serving NPO.

## Chapter 3: Research Method

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to identify the factors of retention that employees of NPOs serving youth ages 10–17 years old provide. As the literature review showed, there are many reasons that can contribute to employee retention. This chapter includes descriptions of the research method, setting, participants, sampling, and instruments that were used in the study. The main purpose of this chapter is to further articulate the research goals and objectives and how they were met through data analysis. This dissertation incorporated a phenomenological study approach to the qualitative research design.

In the first section, details about the research design and rationale are explained. I conducted personal one-on-one interviews via Zoom or another web-based platform or phone interviews with the participants in this study. In the next section, I explain my role as the researcher of this dissertation. Following that, I address the methodology and present issues of trustworthiness. The chapter concludes with a summary of how I protected participants and maintained their confidentiality in this study.

### **Research Design and Rationale**

When researchers are looking into attitudes and behaviors in their natural settings, qualitative research is appropriate (Rubin & Babbie, 2010). One primary research question guided this dissertation: What primary factors do you believe influence employee retention within your current youth-serving nonprofit organization in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States? Through this dissertation study, I investigated,

examined, and analyzed the reasons that employees gave for committing to work for the NPOs or why they left. In conducting the phenomenological study for this dissertation, I sought to fill a gap in the literature regarding primary factors of employee retention for youth-serving NPOs. Information on these primary factors may contribute to the body of knowledge around factors of employee retention. In this dissertation study, I assumed the role of the observer. During the personal interviews, the participants were the focal point, and as the observer, I only asked questions to clarify responses and not to manipulate the responses. The interviews were recorded if the participants consented; I made recordings only so that I could refer to the recordings during the transcription and analyze the responses.

This study and these factors that were identified can be used to inform organizational policy to increase retention strategies and aid in the selection of employees who will help carry out the vision of the organization. These factors could help facilitate better informed decisions about the organizational culture and other training activities that employers could potentially implement. I did not anticipate any time and resource constraints beyond scheduling and availability of participants.

A phenomenological study approach was selected, as this method allowed for open-ended dialogue and discussion for employees to voice their opinions and experience without feeling as though they had to limit their responses. The interview questions were geared towards understanding what the employee felt that the organizational culture provided and identifying what factors motivated them to retain employment or what dissatisfiers promoted them leaving the organization. The focus on youth-serving

organizations was intentional because researchers have expressed concern that youth without consistent support will cause an increase in the number of at-risk youth (Bond & Gebo, 2014; DuBois et al., 2011; Jiang et al., 2017; National Gang Intelligence Center, 2013). High employee turnover turns into interruptions in service and can lead to burnout and other factors whereby youth may end up not receiving the best care possible.

Implementing sound retention practices is vital for employers that service vulnerable populations. These strategies and practices may be implemented and migrated into the organization's policies and procedures to be used and modified for years to come.

This study is useful and necessary to ensure the success of NPOs because when they are fully staffed and operational, they are able to fulfill their commitments to the community and population they have vowed to serve. Additionally, when turnover is not a concern, NPOs can dedicate time and resources to ensuring that employees are satisfied and motivated to continue to serve with excellence. By gaining an understanding of employee motivators and dissatisfiers, the organization's leadership can modify policies to better support factors that will contribute to long-term commitment.

### **Role of the Researcher**

As the observer, my role was to clearly and accurately transcribe the participants' responses to the research questions. I respected the participants and understood that their involvement in the phenomenological study was completely voluntary. For the past 15 years, I have worked in the youth-serving nonprofit industry, and I understand how my personal experience could be transposed into interpretations of responses. To avoid any personal and researcher bias, I relied on recorded sessions to ensure validity of responses.

I refrained from interviewing former coworkers, supervisors, or past employees whom I had supervised because this might have caused tension or interfered with having authentic conversations. Conducting such interviews could also have been a conflict of interest and negatively impacted the effects of the study. If a participant had been someone whom I knew personally or professionally outside of my immediate or past employment, I planned to ask whether the participant was comfortable with the interview and have them sign a disclosure form acknowledging that we might know each other and that their participation was at their own will.

### **Methodology**

A phenomenological study is a qualitative research approach that involves developing themes from individual experiences shared relating to a particular phenomenon. The goal is to gain an understanding of the experiences firsthand. Phenomenological studies are typically based on the investigation of an individual's experiences with a specific phenomenon. In this dissertation, the phenomenon was working for youth-serving nonprofits. Qualitative research allows for more open-ended discussion and conversation so that the researcher and readers are able to get a clear understanding of the individual's point of view around the particular topic. O'Sullivan, Rassel, & Berner (2008) concluded that qualitative research usually involves investigative and detailed approaches to understanding events or factors that are not quantifiable.

## **Population**

For this dissertation study, I sought to identify participants over the age of 18 years who lived or resided in the Eastern Mid-Atlantic region of the United States who had worked or still worked for youth-serving NPOs that served youth between the ages of 10 and 17 years. Through this study, I sought to identify four youth-serving nonprofits, two that were local to the region and two that were national organizations. The comparison of national and regional NPOs is important to understand if the size of an organization or its impact has any effect on factors of retention that are reported. The goal was to interview at least two paid employees from the four organizations for a total sample size of eight participants. The study would not have exceeded 10 participants in the event that there had been more interest in participation.

## **Sampling and Sampling Procedures**

This phenomenological study used purposeful sampling to determine participant eligibility. Selection of participants for the phenomenological study was based on the following requirements:

- must be least 18 years old
- must have been a paid employee of a youth- (10–17 years old) serving nonprofit
- must have worked for the organization for at least 2 years
- must work in the Eastern Mid-Atlantic region of the United States

The rationale for this type of sampling was that it was needed to understand the motivations, experiences, and perceptions of employees of youth-serving nonprofits. The

four participation criteria were listed on the consent form that participants received to determine their eligibility to participate. The sample size was limited to interviewing at most two participants per organization because the local organizations might not have had more than three employees. I did not want to exclude the voices and input of smaller nonprofits because some of the factors shared could be helpful in creating the necessary policy to maintain operations. Ellis (2016) reported that typically, six to 20 participants have experienced the phenomenon of a study. Therefore, a minimum of eight to 10 participants will allow the researcher to get the insight needed.

### **Instrumentation**

Rudestam and Newton (2015) proposed that in qualitative research, the primary instrument is the observer, which was the role that I played during the interviews. I served as the sole data collector and researcher. Individual virtual interviews were conducted with eligible participants who had been or currently were paid employees of youth-serving nonprofits in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States. This region was selected due to the high rate of youth violence in cities. On October 5, 2020, Fox 45 News in Baltimore reported on “Youth Crime and Today’s Juvenile Justice System,” sharing that there had been a slight increase in the number of youth arrested for robbery in 2020 when compared to the year before (Ashwell, 2020).

The researcher-developed instrument that was used for this study was a spreadsheet to collect demographic information and the answers to qualification questions. The instrument was created in Excel and had the following columns and rows:

- name (coded as Participant P1, P2, ...)



- gender (male, female, nonbinary, other)
- contact information to follow up for questions (this was not associated with the particular participant to further protect confidentiality)
- age
- time as an employee (minimum of 2 years required)
- work with national or local nonprofit

### **Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection**

Qualitative researchers should plan to have various recruitment efforts and data collection tools to aid in a study. All data collected were secured on a password-protected flash drive, which will ensure data security (Sutton & Austin, 2015). After 5 years, all data will be destroyed. The use of real names or identifying descriptions was prohibited in efforts to fully protect the client participation and ensure confidentiality (Petrova et al., 2016). The procedures for recruitment, participation, and data collection were inclusive of the following steps:

1. Obtain approval from the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB).
2. Identify local and national youth-serving nonprofits in the Eastern Mid-Atlantic region of the United States.
3. Contact organization regarding the scope of the study and ask for permission to share the recruitment flyer with employees.

4. Post recruitment flyer at the local libraries or places that people frequent; post on social media and forward electronic copies to various organizations via email for a period of 2 months.
5. Wait for participants to request to be part of the study and share an electronic consent to participate form and demographic form.
6. After the form has been submitted, contact the participant by phone or email to schedule the 1-hour interview that would take place virtually.
7. Each participant was interviewed individually to protect confidentiality and was assigned a letter and number to identify them. Interviews were recorded just for quality's sake and will not be shared with anyone.
8. Interviews were conducted during a 2-month timeframe. If the targeted number (up to eight participants) had not been met after the first month, I planned to reshare recruitment posters to begin identifying other eligible participants.
9. After the interviews were completed, I explained the debriefing process and asked the participant if they would be open to me contacting them for any clarity that might or might not be needed.
10. I provided participants a small stipend of \$25 dollars, in the form of a Wal-Mart e-gift card, for their participation in the study and to honor their time commitment to ensuring the quality of this research dissertation.

11. If there was a need for follow up, the participants received an email asking to schedule a short debrief to discuss any questions they might have or clarifying questions that I, as researcher, had.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

Through various collection efforts, researchers are able to review and study data that has been collected, which is a process called data analysis. According to Neale (2016), the goal of data analysis is to provide an accurate description and interpretation of the data that have been obtained. Data were recorded on a device or computer and saved as an MP4 file. The recording was strictly voice, and participants did not have to turn their cameras on during the study.

Sorting through data can be a complex process (Chowdhury, 2015); thus, it was important to have an organized and detailed plan to be able to transcribe data that were obtained. Microsoft Excel and Microsoft Word were used to better organize and code data that were collected. Additionally, copies of the data should be kept as a backup, in the event that information is destroyed or damaged mistakenly or due to technological error. Recorded data were transcribed using a transcription service or trusted transcriber. Data will be stored in a folder on a password-protected hard drive for further protection of privacy for the participants.

Rosenthal (2016) recommended checking transcribed data against the recording as an additional step to ensure validity of the participants' data. The process of reviewing the transcribed data for validity also allows the researcher to gain increased familiarity with the content (Neale, 2016). As the data are analyzed, the researcher can identify and

notate themes that emerge (Vaughn & Turner, 2016). It was my intention to review the responses question by question, which further allowed for the identification of themes that could and might emerge during the analysis process. Once the themes had been identified from the participant responses, the themes aided in the data interpretation process.

### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

When considering qualitative research studies, it is important to ensure trustworthiness to the participants as well as the persons who will review the study. The researcher must prepare to account for ways to prove this trustworthiness. Constantinou, Georgiou, & Perdikogianni (2017) reiterated that the quality of qualitative research is assessed through the following four criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability. Having this system and steps in place to ensure these criteria is critical to the qualitative approach. Furthermore, Cypress (2017) emphasized the importance of addressing validity and reliability during the three phases of the study. These phases include the design phase, analysis phase, and the quality of the study phase.

#### **Credibility**

In order to establish credibility, I used an interview protocol, IRB review, and triangulation. Credibility is established when the researcher clearly and accurately depicts the reality and truth of what is being reported by the participant (Cypress, 2017). I sought to achieve credibility with this dissertation by recording every interview, ensuring that the recording was clear and audible, transcribing the data, and sharing the transcription with the participant to ensure the accuracy of what was shared during the interview.

**Transferability**

Transferability assess whether or not the results of the study can be duplicated or transferred to similar cases according to Constantinou et al., (2017). In effort to create a transferrable study I, as the researcher, will have to detail every step of the process to the best of my ability. Clear and concise directions will allow for future researchers to duplicate the study in their proposed geographical areas. However, some geographical areas may pose limitations to the study if all the factors outlined are not the same. I will address transferability by using purposive sampling and very detailed reports of the process to conduct this study.

**Dependability**

Within qualitative research reliability and dependability are used interchangeably. Dependability forces the researcher to provide detailed reporting in explaining the study. Jiggins-Colorafi and Evans (2016) proposed that dependability can be achieved when consistency in use of procedures is maintained all throughout the study with every participant. In order to achieve dependability, each response will be reviewed question by question until all themes have emerged, which will also be when data saturation is reached. Constantinou et al., (2017) refer to data saturation occurring when the researcher has identified all themes and no additional information is needed or can be extracted. The researchers also indicated that when a researcher is able to reach data saturation that the depth of data collected is sufficient enough (Constantinou et al, 2017).

**Conformability**

A study reflective of the experiences and thoughts of the participants and not myself as the researcher is how conformability will be achieved (Jiggins-Colorafi and Evans, 2016). In order to fully achieve conformability, I have disclosed my bias and how I plan to mitigate potential issues of personal bias. I aim to achieve conformability through participant review of the transcription as well as through the Walden University doctoral review process. During the Walden Review Process, my committee which consists of three persons reviewed this research to assess relevance.

**Ethical Procedures**

This dissertation will follow all ethical guidelines and standards to ensure that no participant is harmed in any way by participation and also to ensure that no organization or employee is negatively impacted for their agreement to participate in the study. Managers or supervisors will not be asked for recommendations as an additional measure to ensure confidentiality. Participants will be contacted directly or will call or email with their interest and willingness to participate. Upon outreach, participants will complete the consent form that I will verbally read with them and allow for any questions regarding the form.

**Summary**

In Chapter 3, I have clearly described my role, addressed personal bias and steps planned to complete this study. I have provided additional details about the research methods, instruments, and design. A concrete plan for analyzing data and dealing with personal bias has been shared and ethical considerations have also been mentioned. The

purpose of this chapter has been to detail how I conducted the research to ensure that these steps and plans align with the Institutional Review Board and academic team.

Another purpose of this study was to provide varying perspectives about retention from various employees of youth serving nonprofits. This chapter has been carefully crafted and detailed to ensure the participant is protected at all measures. In Chapter 4 I will present an in-depth analysis of the results of the interview process and the data that was shared.

## Chapter 4: Results

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to identify the factors that minimize turnover and keep employees of youth-serving organizations in their positions within the organization. I also sought to identify the factors that had caused or could lead to employee turnover. The main research questions that guided this study were as follows:

1. What primary factors do you believe influence employee retention within your current organization? Please state the type of influence each of the factors has.
2. For employees who have been employed with nonprofit agencies in the Mid-Atlantic region of the Eastern United States for more than 2 years, what themes emerge in their responses relating to the factors that lead to retention with the organization?
3. For employees who have worked for nonprofit agencies and completed exit interviews, to what factors did they attribute their decision to leave the agency?

These additional interview questions were asked to help answer the research questions and identify themes that would emerge from the interviews.

1. What retention strategies has your employer implemented to minimize turnover?
2. What, if any, barriers to retention exist for you, and how do you address them?



Depending upon responses, a series of other open-ended questions were asked to further help understand participant perspectives and experiences. In this chapter, I share the research setting and demographics and end with a discussion of data collection and analysis methods used. Additionally, this chapter covers evidence of trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Now, I will overview the results.

### **Setting**

Interviews were conducted via Zoom, with participants joining from their desired locations. I conducted interviews in my private office and left my camera on, but participants were encouraged to decide if they wanted to keep their cameras on for the duration of the interview. Although the cameras were on during the recording, participants were reassured that only the audio would be used for the purpose of this study. During the interview, I informed the participant of the pseudonym that they would be assigned, and all transcripts were saved on a password-protected hard drive. Online transcription software was used, and while transcribing the data, all personal identifying information, including participant names and the name of the business, was changed or removed to protect confidentiality. Participants were reminded that participation was completely voluntary and that if they desired to stop the study at any point, they were free to do so without question.

### **Demographics**

The participants interviewed were either current or former employees of youth-serving nonprofits who had been with the organization for at least 2 years. Google Forms

was used to capture demographic data and to confirm eligibility for participation in the study. There were a total of 12 participants who emailed about participation in the research study. Each of the participants was emailed the demographics survey link and the PDF copy of the consent form. Based on responses for preferred methods of contact, each participant was contacted and sent several dates and times for suggested meeting times. Only 10 participants responded to the suggested meeting times; the other two emailed stating that their schedules would not permit their participation any longer.

Purposive sampling was used to select eight to 12 employees and/or previous employees of NPOs to obtain a better understanding of the factors that they believed employee retention could be attributed to. Employees participating in the study needed to meet five primary criteria: (a) be 18 years of age or older, (b) self-identify as employees of NPOs, (c) self-identify as being employed with the agency for 2 or more years, (d) be employees (or previous employees) of NPOs serving youth in the Mid-Atlantic region of the Eastern United States, and (e) be able to understand and communicate in English.

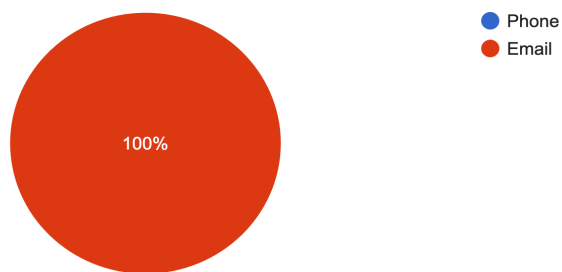
Figures 1–6 show the responses from the 10 of the 12 participants who expressed interest in being part of the study and filled out the demographic survey. This final study includes results from two males and six females who were able to participate. Fifty percent of the participants had worked for the youth-serving nonprofits for over 9 years, and the majority of organizations served youth 15 years of age or older. All participants worked for local chapters of youth-serving nonprofits; however, three of the participants worked for nonprofits that were local chapters of national nonprofits.

**Figure 1**

*Preferred Method of Contact*

What is your preferred method of contact?

10 responses

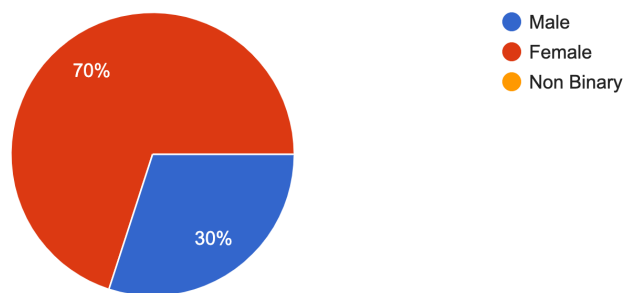


**Figure 2**

*Gender*

Gender (How do you identify?)

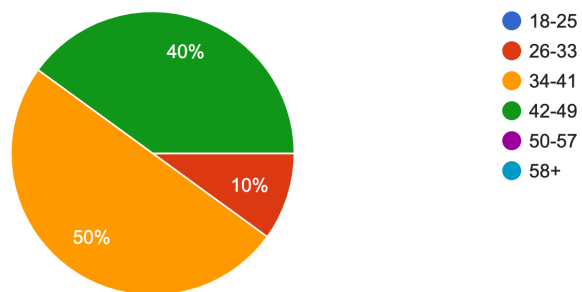
10 responses



**Figure 3***Age Range*

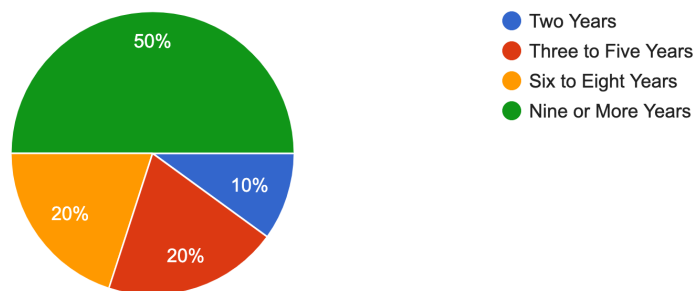
Please select the appropriate age range

10 responses

**Figure 4***Time With Nonprofit Organization*

How long have you worked with the Nonprofit Organization?

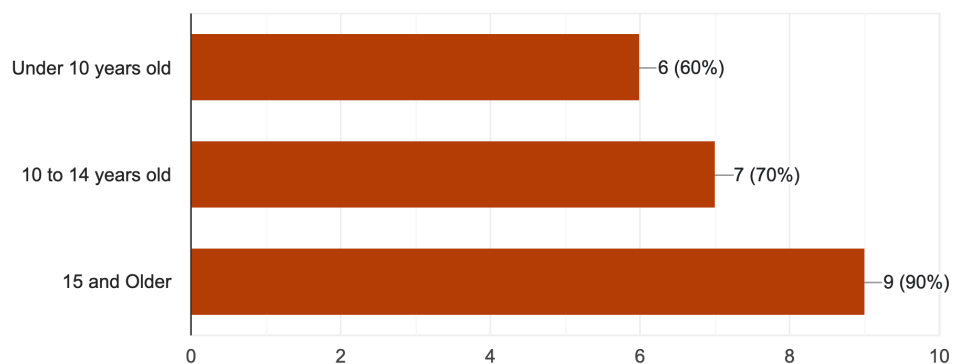
10 responses



**Figure 5***Population Served by Nonprofit Organization*

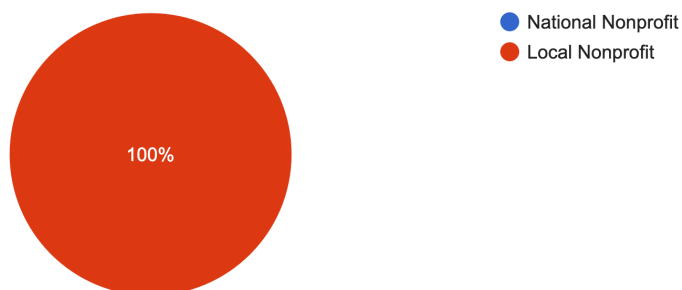
What age population did you serve? (Select all that apply)

10 responses

**Figure 6***Local or National Nonprofit*

What kind of youth serving nonprofit do you or have you worked with?

10 responses



### **Data Collection**

Once approval from Walden's IRB approval committee was received, I began recruitment for participation. Due to being under pandemic restrictions, I used social media to advertise for participation in the research. I posted on my personal pages on Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, and Instagram. Additionally, emails were sent to groups that served nonprofits to share the recruitment flyer with their networks. I did not get any responses from the emails to the various groups, so I messaged people directly who worked for some youth-serving NPOs and shared it directly with staff to pass on to other colleagues. This method did generate a few initial responses, but there was no follow through beyond initial interest.

The recruitment form that was shared instructed interested participants to email me at my Walden email address. Once initial expression of interest was received via email, I sent each member a link to the demographic survey and the consent form. Based on the survey response, I emailed all participants to see if they had any additional questions and scheduled the interviews after they responded to the email with verbal consent to participate in the study.

Through the various social media posts, I was able to recruit 14 participants who expressed interest in the study, and 12 responded with verbal consent to participate. However, only 10 of those interested completed the demographic survey, and only eight actually followed through to complete the interviews. The other two shared personal challenges and emergencies that prevented them from participating fully. Four of the

eight participants were no longer working for the nonprofits and shared the reasons that led to their departure.

Initially, the goal of this study was to be able to establish a phenomenon between local and national organizations with local chapters. My desire was to interview participants from two truly local grassroots nonprofits and participants from two national nonprofits with local chapters in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States. The final study included two members from local chapters of the same national nonprofits, one member of another national nonprofit, and five members of five different local grassroots nonprofits in the region.

The interviews were conducted from September 18, 2021 through January 15, 2022. The length of the interviews ranged from 30 minutes to 65 minutes, although each participant was told to reserve at least 60 minutes for the interview. The length of the interviews varied depending on how much information was shared in the participants' responses. After each interview, the recording audio was saved to my personal computer and transferred to a password-protected hard drive.

Semistructured interviews were conducted with open-ended questions. After the initial interview questions, follow-up questions were added to better gain an understanding of participant perspectives about retention strategies, policies, and goals. The only deviation from the questions illustrated in Chapter 2's literature review was to clarify information or statements made by the participants, which would be used to further answer the research questions. The list of all the interview questions asked is attached in the Appendix of this study.

Names of participants or organizations were not used to protect privacy, and transcriptions have been stored on a password-protected hard drive. In accordance with IRB protocol, the data will be stored for 5 years, after which the data will be destroyed. My notes associated with the study have been printed and stored in a locked file cabinet and will be shredded after 5 years. The demographic survey has been stored on Google Drive and is password protected; again, at the 5-year anniversary, the files will be deleted permanently.

Prior to beginning each interview, I provided an overview of the consent, summarized the purpose of the study, and asked the participant if they had any questions or concerns. After final consent was received, I informed participants that the recording was going to begin and they could decide whether or not they desired to keep their cameras on. Seven of the eight participants kept their cameras on for the duration of the interviews. During the interviews, I asked questions, listened attentively, asked follow-up questions, repeated responses to ensure that I was hearing and understood correctly, and recorded responses from the participants. The interviews were very insightful, and all participants were very candid about their experiences with the various youth-serving nonprofits. They all shared their thoughts on ways that retention strategies could be improved within the nonprofits. After the final question was asked, each participant was asked if they had any additional thoughts or comments to add that were not elicited during the interview. Seven of the eight participants added thoughts on how retention can be addressed and what nonprofits should focus on to attract and retain good talent.



Each participant was reminded that transcriptions would be shared for accuracy and that if they desired a final copy of the dissertation, it would be shared as well. Additionally, as part of the recruitment efforts and in appreciation of their precious time, each participant received a \$25 electronic gift card to Walmart.

Recruiting took a lot longer than I had initially anticipated; the first interview was held in September 2021 and the final interview was conducted in January 2022. The participants were from several organizations, and I had to send various emails to follow up to schedule the initial interviews and confirm the dates selected. In some instances, I had to wait a few weeks for responses from members, and some just stopped responding altogether. I had to adjust one meeting because I was delayed in a traffic detour. Being in the midst of a public health emergency (Covid-19) and trying to navigate through the changes of working through unprecedented and trying times were also taken into consideration to account for delays in responses.

### **Data Analysis**

The main data sources for this research study included audio recordings, handwritten notes, transcriptions of the recordings, and the responses to the Google Form survey. I transcribed audio recordings from Zoom using Transcribe by Wreally LLC. Transcribe was recommended as one of the most popular professional transcription software applications. The service required a nominal fee to transcribe the data. Although most of the transcriptions were accurate, I still listened to and reviewed the transcriptions for accuracy. Rosenthal (2016) recommended checking transcribed data against the recording as an additional step to ensure validity of participants' data. The process of

reviewing the transcribed data for validity also allows the researcher to gain increased familiarity with the content (Neale, 2016). The transcriptions were emailed to members for member checking, and everyone confirmed that the responses were accurate. There was no need for follow-up calls, emails, or corrections. Participants were thanked again for their participation in this study.

According to Neale (2016) the goal of data analysis is to provide an accurate description and interpretation of the data that has been obtained. Sorting through data can be a complex process (Chowdhury, 2015), thus it is important to have an organized and detailed plan to be able to transcribe data that has been obtained. Microsoft Excel and Microsoft Word were used to better organize and code data that was collected. Additionally, copies of the data were printed as back up, in the event that information is destroyed or damaged mistakenly or due to technological error.

As the data is analyzed the researcher can identify and notate themes that emerge (Vaughn and Turner, 2016). I reviewed the responses question by question which further allows for the identification of themes that can and may emerge during the analysis process. Once the themes were identified from the proposed responses, the themes will aid in the data interpretation process.

### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

#### **Credibility**

In order to establish credibility I utilized an interview protocol, IRB review, and triangulation. Credibility is established when the researcher clearly and accurately depicts the reality and truth of what is being reported by the participant (Cypress, 2017). I

achieved credibility with this study by recording every interview, ensuring the recording is clear and audible, transcribing the data and sharing the transcription with the participant to ensure the accuracy in what was shared during the interview. All participants responded that the transcriptions were accurate and there was no need for revision. Patton (2002) shared that in order for research to be useful, it needs to be credible and not serve the researcher interest.

This study and the discussions that resulted from the interview proved to be relevant and timely especially in light of the Public Health Emergency (PHE). As the researcher there was no personal interest satisfied; instead, it is the desire that this data will add to the limited body of knowledge around how employee retention affects youth serving nonprofits and ways to improve and minimize employee turnover.

### **Transferability**

Transferability assesses whether or not the results of the study can be duplicated or transferred to similar cases according to Constantinou et al., (2017). In an effort to create a transferrable study I, as the researcher, detailed every step of the process to the best of my ability. Clear and concise directions will allow for future researchers to duplicate the study in their proposed geographical areas. However, some geographical areas may pose limitations to the study if all the factors outlined are not the same. I addressed transferability by using purposive sampling and very detailed reports of the process to conduct this study.

**Dependability**

The Walden Qualitative Dissertation Checklist is a resource that was used to help ensure dependability. Dependability forces the researcher to provide detailed reporting in explaining the study. In order to achieve dependability, each response was reviewed question by question until all themes have emerged, which will also be when data saturation is reached. Chapter 3 outlines the methodology for this study and in this chapter more detail on how the methods were carried out is shared. Additionally, the research questions are attached in the Appendix of this study. By providing these detailed information I was able to ensure dependability of this study.

**Conformability**

A study reflective of the experiences and thoughts of the participants and not myself as the researcher is how conformability will be achieved (Jiggins-Colorafi and Evans, 2016). In order to fully achieve conformability, I disclosed my bias and how I plan to mitigate potential issues of personal bias. During the interview process, I often repeated what I heard the participant respond in an effort to not insert my own thoughts or opinions, but to state exactly what is being shared. I achieved conformability through participant review of the transcription as well as through the Walden University doctoral review process. During the Walden Review Process, my committee which consisted of three persons reviewed this research to assess relevance. Each committee member as well as participant agreed that this research study will contribute to the very limited body of research relating to this issue.

## **Results**

This study's findings were a result of analysis of data collected from eight participants during the interview process for this phenomenological study. Below are themes that were identified within each research question.

### **Research Question 1**

The primary research question that guided this study was, "What primary factors do you believe influence employee retention within your current organization? Please state the type of influence each of the factors have." The themes that emerged relating to this question were as follows: (a) employee benefits, (b) staffing- family environment, (c) organizational climate, (d) feeling appreciated, (e) opportunity for growth, and (f) having good leadership and support. For the initial question, we had some similarities in responses. We had five participants report that the primary factor that influences retention for them were employee benefits, having good co-workers or a family environment and having good leadership and support.

Herzberg's two-factor theory was identified as the best theory to determine what causes satisfaction or dissatisfaction with their jobs (Herzberg et al, 1959). Herzberg's (1974) theory comprises two stages: hygiene and motivator factors. This American psychologist made the claim that work environment, work conditions, salary, benefits and coworkers are considered hygiene factors or dissatisfactors. Meanwhile, motivator factors or satisfaction producers included things like, growth and training opportunities, promotion opportunities, recognition, responsibility and a great understanding of the tasks on the job.

**Table 1***Hygiene and Motivator Factors Related to the Primary Research Question*

Participant	Hygiene factors	Motivator factors
P1	Benefits and leadership	Recognition
P2	Staffing—Great coworkers	
P3	Organizational climate	
P4	Feeling appreciated	
P5		Opportunity for growth, Organizational history
P6	Health care: Employee benefits	
P7	Having good leadership and support	
P8	Staffing—Having a family environment	

***Employee Benefits***

All participants expressed the desire and need for good employee benefits. However, P1 and P6 listed benefits as being one of the primary factors to increase retention. After P1 responded, I asked the follow up question asking for them to explain what type of benefits would increase retention. Their response was as follows: “our organization offers retirement benefits and that is rare for most nonprofits; also our leadership has also implemented a yearly increase evaluation policy which has been GREAT!”

P6 discussed how healthcare benefits were a motivating factor to stay with the organization, in the event of “injury or something like that. Having insurance to help

cover bills is vital. Also the benefits of paid holidays, vacation and sick days were a plus.” All other participants also agreed that being offered various employee benefits would be motivator factors to reduce turnover. However, the participants all stated that if the work conditions are “very bad” employee benefits will not make them stay. The descriptions of very bad work conditions varied by participant. For instance, P1 considered employee favoritism as being bad and also shared that she is the only African American Full-Time Staff. As she shared that, she mentioned that being part of an organization that did not prioritize Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) training would be a deterrent as well.

In summary, the participants viewed employee benefits as a vital factor in influencing retention within the youth serving nonprofits. This was a factor because of the potential harm employees can endure when dealing with and serving youth that may have behavior issues or special needs. This study sought to understand what if any phenomenon’s were found between local and national chapters of organizations. The size of the nonprofits ranged from three employees to the most reporting 200 employees. More specifics are found in the table below. Following this chart was the second theme that emerged, which was creating and having a family environment and culture within the organization.

**Table 2**

*Nonprofit Data and Details on the Number of Employees the Organization Has and Whether or Not Job Training Is Offered*

Participant	National or local nonprofit	Number of employees	Is there a training period or orientation?
P1	Local countywide nonprofit	50	2–3 weeks now—when I started it was 2 days
P2	Local statewide nonprofit	200	1–2 weeks and ongoing optional trainings
P3	Local chapter of national NPO	150	1 week and then “thrown to the wolves”
P4	Local chapter of national NPO	80-130	No formal training
P5	Local citywide chapter	3	No formal training
P6	Local chapter of National NPO	2,500	Not offered training
P7	Local countywide nonprofit	5	Minimal training
P8	Local countywide nonprofit	50	No training as an instructor

*Note.* P1 and P8 worked for the same countywide organization, while P4 and P6 worked for different local chapters of the same national NPO. P4, P6, P7, and P8 no longer work for the organizations that they discussed.



### *Staffing—Family Environment*

P2 and P8 both shared that having good coworkers helped make the job easier and exciting. For example, P2 shared that, “having supportive coworkers is so important because for I think for all or most nonprofits, there are always challenges because revenue is a big component, right: Not only revenue, but training of staff, transparency of the administration and their ability to communicate what is happening. Even with the challenges, when you have a good team, I think that is what keeps the employee The employee retention rates increase and turnover is lower when supportive environments exist.”

Moreover, P8 shared that, “Well I think the way we work together, like the particular organization that I worked at, everyone was basically a family and literally called everyone family. So I think that was key in helping keep everybody there because everyone felt like they belonged. Also, everyone really loved the children and even though the organization was bought over and staff changed, the original staff members still keep in contact and remain close. So, I think one way to keep retention high is to focus on workshops and things to help build community. We used to have a lot of those workshops and it helped us all tremendously with the work and having support to navigate through challenging times in the organization.”

P4 shared that within her former organization, new employees were “thrown to the wolves,” so other coworkers that had been there before really provided support and leadership that management was not. “We relied on coworkers and site supervisors, if there was one, for guidance.” After this response, I asked a follow up question, “What

would you say was the cause of ‘being thrown to the wolves’ as new hires? Were they understaffed?” She responded by saying, “I think that one of the major reasons is that a lot of people that work in the higher level positions over the programs, have never actually worked in the lower level positions. So they know that the book tells you, but they really do not know until they get down in the trenches and do the work that they really know what is needed for proper training. So, what happens is, every decision that you make at that point about the job is based off of pure logic, and not experience.”

Overall, the other participants also expressed that having good staff environment also helps to increase retention within the organization. Having good staff also plays a role in the climate and culture of the organization.

### ***Organizational Climate***

When asked the primary research question, P3 responded, “I believe that the climate of the organization should be welcoming. A welcoming climate causes people to feel a sense of belonging where they are. They relate to the mission and vision of the organization....I guess friendly is similar to welcoming, also kind of just the authenticity piece, I think is important. And also, like just a level of transparency, healthy transparency within the organization and I would also say that people feeling appreciated is an important factor as well.”

After this response, I followed up with the following question, “So I heard, climate, transparency and feeling appreciated. Can you share a little more about how and what would relate to staff feeling appreciated?” P3 shared,

Yeah, so I think, looking at it from kind of a more micro view, just kind of the supervisor supervisee relationship is really important and so making sure the supervisor is encouraging to the supervisee and is you know, every once in a while just being encouraging to the staff member; giving Kudos when there's good work that done. Literally, you know, letting him/her know, I appreciate you and the work that you are doing giving them credit for the work that is done and not taking credit for themselves, because I have seen that done before. And then, from a larger organizational perspective, kind of doing the same thing. Just doing little things to let staff know they are appreciated, whether it is kind of giving an additional day off, or putting out food at staff meetings and just little things to let people know we really do appreciate you. You know health care costs are rising, like taking on some of those costs are ways to make employees feel appreciated. So just different things like that and just being mindful of what your staff are going through, like on the ground and not being oblivious to it. Even sometimes when you may not be able to do much about, but just acknowledging it I think is important.

After this response, I asked how many staff the organization had and she responded that they are pretty large and there are around 150 employees. After hearing that response, I asked another follow up, "Have you worked for smaller nonprofits and how would you compare the climates in smaller vs larger nonprofits?"

P3 said,

I've worked in both small and larger nonprofits, I think that if you're intentional about it, then it can be done. Because I've worked for several smaller nonprofits and if you're intentional, then it can be easier to help staff feel appreciated, and what's the word? I guess a climate where there's more of a sense of belonging and where you identify with the mission and vision and kind of all those things than a large nonprofit. If you're intentional about creating a climate like that, it can be done, because you're able to get to know one another easier when in smaller organizations. You know I can reach out to this staff member, that staff member and connect easily. You can leave individual notes and call and it is a lot easier to do things like that in a smaller organization. In a larger organization or where there's so many staff, the same thing can go on, but it could be the opposite for smaller organization too, but again it goes back to setting the intention to create a good organizational climate.

P3 shared how the climate can be shared when the intention is set. Similarly, P5 also brought up a great topic and suggestion during this interview. He shared how in his role, he has been able to experience both sides from being a recipient of the program to now managing the program. He shared that, "Organizational history I think is something often overlooked that shapes the organizational climate. In the nonprofit sector you have folks who come into the leadership position of a nonprofit and know nothing about its struggles and that can be detrimental. I cannot tell you how many times the previous executive director, he and I had conversations about programming; he would just tell me because I'd been here so long he knew I would be able to offer some insight. So I've

been affiliated with the organization for over a decade, so I can tell a little bit of history, I can't tell you how many times he's said, 'P5, just tell me what happened with this and I would run it down for him and so organizational history just adds a larger context than the credit we give and I think it is extremely important for leaders to take into consideration.'"

Also, of most importance is having a youth-centered culture in a youth serving nonprofit. P5 stressed the importance of decisions being made with youth voice and participation. He stated, "If you serve young people, they are at the center of your work, they are at the center of your grant writing, they are at the center of your programming, they are at the center of your evaluation and they are at the center of your professional development. Sometimes in nonprofit sectors, we get so overwhelmed we do not want to involve the ones we serve more. You hear, 'no, I do not want to do that. Yes you do because this is going to give you a skill that is going to help you develop better relationships with our young people. Every intention you have needs to be done with young people in mind because when they see that you come to work for them every day, when everybody comes to work for them every day, they see that these people not just this person, these people care about me!

Through this theme, we found that being intentional about setting a welcoming climate, being intentional about putting the youth at the center of decisions and also uplifting and taking time to understand the organizational history. Being intentional about those things can help an organization move from just being good to great because

employees will feel seen, heard and understood. The next theme that emerged from the research was feeling appreciated.

### ***Feeling Appreciated***

P4 shared that feeling appreciated is one of the primary factors to retention in the job. She explained,

With my previous employer, retention was difficult because I think that the largest factor is feeling appreciated and respected by your supervisor. Okay, at the organization (name removed for privacy), depending on what department you're in, you can get lucky enough to work under some amazing people. However, you can have the opposite situation in which case you end up having high turnover because of the way things are managed. The other thing I would say is asking for a lot for very little. So you know having a lot of demands on a person and not really compensating. My role was in therapeutic recreation. So you know, working with children with special needs. You know they are some of the behaviors and some additional duties that are required and can be a lot for people who have no training. So that was another problem, at my current job retention is actually pretty high. That is because there's a lot of emphasis on employment. You're appreciated, there's a lot of communication. One of the biggest things I think is when new people are brought on board, they do not just throw you to the wolves; they really go step by step and prepare you before they set you free. And then even after setting you free, there's still support there. And you know then old saying, 'no question is a stupid question,' like they are true to that! All you do is

just ask, somebody is always there to support you and to make you feel like you know it is a positive thing that you're asking questions to make sure you do things correctly.

All employees shared that feeling appreciated was vital, especially in the work youth and young adults. P4 expressed how her current employer has given her hope and continue to remind staff how appreciated and valued there are, not just in talk, but in deed also. This sense of feeling appreciated leads into the other theme that emerged, which is appreciating the staff enough to care about their career and personal advancement by providing and creating opportunities for growth.

### ***Opportunity for Growth***

P5 has been with the organization since September of 2016, when asked the primary research question, he responded, "Opportunity for growth, I think is the biggest one. We're a small organization so there is not a large or should I say there's not a largely scaled opportunity to climb the employment ladder within the organization. And so with that, we find individuals who will come to us in whichever capacity or whichever level. They come to us via an appropriate, an entry level program coordinator or a managerial director and do fantastic work in their position and gain a lot of skills and experience along the way. And find that the lack of growth or lack of promotion creates this spike in progress where they find themselves doing the same thing over and over and over, but they do not feel like they have been able to maximize their impact so they begin to venture and find new opportunities and organizations."

After repeating back the key points, he stated,

Absolutely, if I may add to it, we know the nonprofit sector is unique in its practice than its culture and what not, so being realistic... I think if we create opportunities, employees should have diverse portfolios. They'll be able to create some professional growth to a certain degree. If you're someone you know, I'll talk about myself for example and I think I'm experiencing this right now. The nonprofit that I work for, I came in as an entry level program coordinator working in school based programming with school age youth, I now work with young people who have been involved in the criminal justice system. And I'll tell you and I'll be transparent with you that when this became my new responsibility, there was a learning curve that I had to adapt to and that learning curve was the best practices and the rules of engagement that you use with school age youth is not the same as Juvenile Justice Youth. And so, I'm still learning that my engagement has to be different. So, I've widened my portfolio so I can say my work began with school aged youth, but now focuses on youth who've been in the Juvenile Justice System. So, I think if there are opportunities where employees have the chance to expand their portfolio, I think it'd be a good substitution.

Much like P5, there were others that agreed to having a need to grow within the organization especially to attract and retain good talent and the organizational leadership play a role in this theme of creating opportunities for growth as well. It all goes back to organizations being very intentional about what they want to create and how they want their employees to be engaged. What was just described is often absent if leadership does not have the best interest of the staff or clientele in mind.



### ***Having Good Leadership and Support***

When asked the primary question, many of the participants eluded to needing good strong leadership and support to be effective in their positions. However, P7, referenced this as their primary factor. She responded, “The organization I worked for was more of a faith-based NPO. What I think influences employee retention would be having support and being connected to the community for a while. So having connections with the people that were in that institution and having outside as well as internal in terms of you know, your work and learning different skills to help you in the position.” After her response, I asked how did the support, outside support, and environment influence her wanting to remain with the organization. She stated the following:

So I would say, at the time I was starting out in the social work field, so I had another job at a mental health organization where I had supervisors and I was working with youth in that organization. So I got a lot of support and feedback on how to handle different challenges that may arise. And sometimes they were very supportive of, like when I was thinking ‘is this thing right?’ They would say go through all of my social work training and things like that, so I felt like that helped me to have a grounding and incorporate certain things that children or teenagers would say... I would say that was the most helpful and I would say I internally think having people that were willing to step up when there were changes in the organization like having people to really step up and say, ‘oh, you know I’d be willing to help you out with doing this group with teen or you know to support an event of some sort.’ So I think just having people that are

willing to come and support you, as you know different challenges come up. So I think that is helpful.

In summary, the theme of having good leadership and support is vital to all the other themes mentioned. Leadership has the power to negatively or positively affect change. This leads us to the next research question which examined what the primary factor is for those who have left the organizations.

### **Research Question 2**

For employees who no longer worked for the NPOs they were asked what factors did they attribute to their decision to leave the agency. All four participants, P4, P6, P7, and P8 all attributed their leaving to poor leadership. Leadership was the common theme that emerged from this secondary research question. Both P4 and P6 work for the same branch of nonprofit in different counties, and they both recalled experiences of having very toxic leaders that were verbally abusive, condescending, and also not welcoming. P6 was the only one to report having received an exit interview. He shared that during the interview he was very candid about the poor leadership and how his experience there had shifted from positive to negative. He expressed that it was a good meeting and the exit team seemed to be receptive to the feedback.

P4 explained, that leadership was very dismissive of her ideas and after she received recognition for a program she designed, that the leader stripped her from the project. She shared further how it caused the relationships she built with the partners to also be destroyed. She stated, “My manager did not think how that experience would

affect the students and it really hurt me knowing how hard I worked to establish the program and partnership and how much the youth enjoyed it.”

P7 shared that there were “consequences” when you shared any concerns that leadership did not agree with. And usually that consequence was removing the person from the organization, this often affected the youth who had built and established rapport with the individuals that were fired.

P8, expressed that although the program dissolved that the staff still keep in contact and that speaks to the strength of creating good co-worker relationships and partnerships that withstand the challenges.

Overall, the secondary question showed similar results and the synopsis was that leadership, good leadership is vital to retention. Lastly, the final research explored retention strategies that exist or need to be created.

### **Research Question 3**

The last research question this study explored was how do factors of retention affect youth programming within the nonprofits. Participants that discussed high staff turnover within the organization were asked, “What retention strategies has you employer implemented to minimize turnover, and what if any barriers to retention exist for you and how do you address them?” The responses were as followed:

P1 explained that, during the pandemic it was rough trying to fill positions, but “luckily, they had part-time staff that wanted to step into two vacant positions, so that part was not hard, but the hardest part was finding an assistant because the job is so heavy with grants and you know that work with grants and federal money is demanding. It was

about two months for us to find the right person to fill that vacancy.” In response to any barriers to retention, P1 further shared the following:

The only barrier that I see at this juncture when it comes to retention, maybe the fact that we have to go into the office and some people still want to be remote. So we are going to the office and we are offering in person services for the children. So that is a barrier for some because they just aren't ready to work around children that are not vaccinated. So that is a another barrier when it comes to getting instructors or crew staff. You know, or the fact that some of the staff aren't vaccinated or do not want to be vaccinated and now since you know we follow the federal guidelines with either you're vaccinated or submit to producing COVID tests weekly, and some people just do not want to do that.

P2 expressed how challenging it is navigating turnover in a residential setting. She recounts how there were no periods of transition, just increased caseload. During the interview she shared candidly how there was a merger of a smaller (the one she worked for) and larger nonprofit and in the merger some people left, so that created challenges with scheduling and getting adequate coverage for the clients. She shared,

We were notified that there were conversations happening about us being bought out. I think you know when you're a small fish in the pond, you do not really understand it. So I know for me I was just like, all right. Well you know, I hear you and I see the emails but when it hits, and we're about to cross that bridge, then maybe I'll start paying more attention right? So we're at the bridge, getting ready to cross merge, it is happening. We didn't necessarily have a pause because

again, we're taking care of people right? It is a residential setting, so we are 24/7. Work doesn't stop, so we still had to come in and do our shifts and medication monitoring. You know you're helping them prepare food or whatever it is for breakfast, lunch, or dinner. And they have appointments that you have to transport them to, so there really wasn't a pause to stop doing work, but there was still chatter in the background. While the chatter is happening, you as a staff member had to maneuver and try to make the best of the communication that you are getting... But again, I think they did try to do their best to not impact the smaller nonprofit and the staffing as the merge happened. I really honestly think they did their best; but again, sometimes it just doesn't work out the way we think or how we want it to work and they were hitting speed bumps. While hitting the speed bumps, they just had to refine and figure out another way to get the work done. After the merge, there was no orientation right away; I do know that it took them some time for them to create policies, so we just continued to work until we knew more.

P3 stated that, " There has not been a lot of turnover and that they have actually seen a lot of growth. So there's been a lot of addition. There has been little turnover and that honestly it was due burnout during the public health emergency." I followed up with the following question to see how or if management has things in place to minimize burnout. She further explained,

We've done staff meetings and then like some health and wellness tips and reminders for staff. We actually just recently were given an additional day off,

which is for a recognition of like it is so much going on, so in appreciation of everything that everyone is going through we are wanting people to take an additional day off during the summer. We have implemented what's called Summer Flex, and it is a compressed work week, so you work nine days and take the 10<sup>th</sup> off. So that is one of our top benefits, I know we just finished accreditation for a few of our programs and because of the accreditation we provided lunch to all the program workers that received that accreditation. So, we do little things like that and also help to make sure there is regular supervision. In regular meetings employees are able to share where they need support. Although most are still remote, we do have a number of employees that are still in the field and these check ins are important to learn what they are experiencing, what their concerns are and any challenges and in doing so we are able to kind of brainstorm about somethings that can help alleviate the issue. Because if you do not have that type of support you're going to burn out quicker.

P4 shared her experience with turnover at her former employers. She recalled, So from the beginning of 2017 till the close of 2020, so about four years, I worked at a nonprofit in the Mid-Atlantic Region of the US. This organization worked with multiple populations, but they have a like transition age youth program. They had a homeless shelter that had a domestic violence program, and for my first two and half years with them employee retention was and high because this place highly valued employee appreciation. They did this because burnout is a thing, and if people do not feel appreciated, if they feel like you're taking them for

granted in the field, their time gets cut short. There were so many initiatives, people were positive, and people were happy. Then there was a change in management at the executive level and she was awful, I mean awful! Two people at the executive level that had created the positive transitioned when this new leadership came in and everything trickled down from there. Kind of like a domino effect and I'd say after I left around that time, several other people were leaving over the span of a few months. Everyone was jumping ship and the company seemed to be falling apart. They even lost some funding and had to downsize their offices, and this was a smaller agency with maybe 70-80 staff... Poor leadership was the result of turnover in this agency. Whereas the other nonprofit organization I worked for turnover was high because there were not enough jobs. Those positions were mostly occupied by college students who come back every year and expect to be able to go to those programs and sometimes there's not enough jobs for them or there's not enough hours for them so they get thrown into another program that they may not be comfortable with. Another way retention affects programming is when those regular staff are not able to fill the same positions the faithful youth members experience that loss most. For instance, a lot of times children with special needs, and even those without special needs develop relationships and bond with certain staff and that can make or break the way a person's day is going to go at work because that person behaves a certain way. When certain programs had to be cut or when certain staff had to be moved to other places, we had to re-balance everything and adjust to doing things

differently with little time to plan. The changes affect how programs are run because you know, not every director for a particular program is going to run things the same and you know for summertime programs you know they hire different directors if certain people do not come back, so that is definitely one of the biggest ways it affects programming.

P5 shared something similar, he said,

We always talk about the tip of an iceberg. We are not talking about what is underneath, a bit staff changes as it relates to young people can be in some cases the cause of an exit of young people from the program and a lot of people do not recognize that young when they find someone who they can trust, who is reliable, who is dependent, who they know is best for them, they commit. And when they commit sometimes it is not appropriate because we have to teach our young people boundaries, and we have got to teach them professionalism but this is their commitment. It is their being real with you. So youth might be a little more honest and open about some things you probably do not want to hear, but they feel comfortable with you to share that. Change in staff breaks that bond... So many young people have been the victims of revolving doors. That you just perpetuate that when you have staff turnover. After they have seen so many people come and go the youth get to point where they get numb to it and they shut down and eventually make their exit, they go somewhere else.

P6 explained how turnover affected the programming, he stated,



So with the change, I mean, the neighborhoods that all participants in the community got to know the staff and suddenly all staff were shifted around. Some of the students stopped coming. Upper management in the past year years have taken away a lot of responsibilities from the local recreation staff, and they are micromanaging to the point where most people are afraid to do anything without getting approval. I mean, you are hired to do the job, but you're afraid to do the job because it is so much micromanaging that you get in trouble or written up. In my exit interview, I shared how the culture has to change and people should not have to come to a miserable place to work for because it then turns into people just coming to work for a paycheck and not committed to the job and joy of serving the youth. Instead, they are worried about whether or not they will have a job at the end of the day. That is no way to function, not when you have to serve youth, the stress from poor leadership will affect employees performance on the job. So for retention to improve their micromanagement needs to be lessened and the employees should be more empowered and supported to use their creativity in serving the youth and ensuring programming is run smoothly.

Earlier, we shared how P7 recounted their an experience where an employee was terminated for ethical reasons. She further explained,

I do not think the other people in leadership really thought about how turnover affected the youth, but I did not talk about it with them either because it was a personal and ethical matter. Personally, I believe that turnover affected the youth because some of the people that were turned over, had relationships or built

relationships with the youth and you know, when you leave, especially if it is not a planned thing, it is difficult. Planning for a person to leave gives you more time to process, but when people are fired or terminated abruptly it made programing not sustainable. In the sense of like if a youth knows like I can not go to that person any longer that I built a relationship with, it is difficult to want to be vulnerable and establish a relationship with someone else who too could be moved without warning. Although it was difficult to navigate and build trust after transition, it worked out in our case, because the new people I felt were better trained workers and they had a better understanding of how to work with and connect with youth.

Lastly, P8 shared that in her experience with the center, she didn't think that turnover of staff would affect the students too much because there are always various options for classes to participate in. She stated, "I guess there would be an adjustment period for teachers and older repeat students, but for the new students, they would not really know that there was a large turnover in staff unless someone told them. However, one reason why I stayed with the organization for so long is because you had the freedom and flexibility to create the space you want for your students. So I think that it is a great policy to let the teachers create the space they want, you pretty much use their building but when you get to choose your schedule then it becomes yours and more authentic, it is like your own business almost."

Moreover, the participants shared to the level of their comfort and provided good data for this study. From the other interview questions, the participants mentioned the

following other traits as being other factors that would influence retention. They are divided into Hygiene and Motivator factors.

**Table 3**

*Other Hygiene and Motivator Factors That Contribute to Employee Retention*

Participant	Hygiene factors	Motivator factors
P1	Structure, communication, benefits, uniformity (professionalism) in dress code appropriate for youth	Training opportunities, diversity, yearly evaluation with potential pay increases
P2	Transparency, communication, benefits	Diversity and inclusion
P3	Organizational climate	
P4	Feeling appreciated, transparency	Employee recognition, specialized training for working with different populations.
P5	Health care benefits, savings or retirement plans	Employee freedom to create and lead
P6	Health care: Employee benefits	
P7	Having good leadership and support	
P8	Staffing—Having a family environment	

## Summary

I conducted this qualitative phenomenological study to explore the factors of employee retention for youth serving nonprofits and to see how staff felt turnover affected the youth programming and participation. From the interviews with these nonprofit professionals, I was able to gain insight regarding factors that they felt affected retention the most. The participants in this study were eight nonprofit leaders, two males and six females. I used semi-structured interview questions to obtain in-depth responses to the research question. Based on responses additional follow up questions were asked. The themes that emerged relating to this question included: (a) employee benefits, (b) staffing- family environment, (c) organizational climate, (d) feeling appreciated, (e) opportunity for growth, and (f) having good leadership and support.

In Chapter 5, I present a detailed evaluation of the findings, which will include a comparison of the existing research literature and their relationship to the theoretical framework identified. Additionally, I will share insight to study limitations, recommendations and implications associated with the results.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

### **Introduction**

NPOs function to carryout various specified missions to help achieve the greater good for their intended populations. Various researchers have focused their studies on retention efforts and understanding what factors increase retention within organizations. Smith and Richmond (2007) considered nonprofits to be heroes of society. Being a hero and addressing challenging needs such as youth development and positive youth engagement require dedication from the board of directors, managers, volunteers, and employees. The dedication must not only be to the organization, but also to the mission, vision, and target population.

One early researcher who brought these issues to light was Bandura (1977), who found self-efficacy to be an individual's belief that their contributions will lead to positive outcomes. An employee's level of self-efficacy could be a reflection of their job performance and thoughts about retention within the company (Bandura, 1977). Other influential researchers include Yanay and Yanay (2008), who found that abusive leadership tactics contributed to a decrease in employee motivation and drive to excel in their craft. The research articles that I explored indicated that leadership styles within an organization have a high correlation to employee retention rates. The data gathered for this study support this notion relating to how leadership styles can affect retention.

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study approach was to examine potential factors influencing retention of employees at youth-serving NPOs in the Mid-Atlantic region of the Eastern United States. Although previous studies have examined

employee retention factors, none have specifically examined employees at NPOs serving youth between the ages of 10 and 17 years. I described, interpreted, and analyzed relevant employee retention factors to understand why employees retained employment at the selected NPOs. Herzberg's (1974) theory of motivation was the theoretical framework used in this dissertation.

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What primary factors do you believe influence employee retention within your current organization? Please state the type of influence each of the factors has.
2. For employees who have been employed with nonprofit agencies in the Mid-Atlantic region of the Eastern United States for more than 2 years, what themes emerge in their responses relating to the factors that lead to retention with the organization?
3. For employees who have worked for nonprofit agencies and completed exit interviews, what factors did they attribute to their decision to leave the agency?

These additional interview questions were asked to help answer the research questions and identify themes that emerged from the interviews.

1. What retention strategies has your employer implemented to minimize turnover?
2. What, if any, barriers to retention exist for you, and how do you address them?

The themes that emerged relating to this question included (a) employee benefits, (b) staffing—family environment, (c) organizational climate, (d) feeling appreciated, (e) opportunity for growth, and (f) having good leadership and support. These themes aligned with previous research and assisted in answering the aforementioned research questions.

In Chapter 4, I shared in-depth summaries and excerpts from the interviews with the eight nonprofit leaders and workers or former workers. All participants either directly worked with the youth or served as an executive leader in the organization supervising those who directly worked with the population served. In this chapter, I discuss the themes that emerged supporting the research questions and share the limitations, recommendations, and implications of this study. Last, I clarify the aim of this study and its findings and how the research could potentially impact social change.

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

Selden and Moynihan (2000) emphasized that employee turnover is an ongoing problem within the public administration field. The first part of the process of investigating factors of employee retention is to understand what employee retention is and how companies are choosing to address the issue. Businesses cannot operate successfully without having employees; therefore, it is important to understand what factors make employees stay.

This study brings awareness to the existing body of literature related to issues of retention. Moreover, I sought in this study to identify strategies to reduce turnover within youth-serving nonprofits. This study reviewed eight people's perceptions on factors of

employee retention. I examined six nonprofit agencies, three of which are local chapters of national nonprofits. The other three are unique city or county youth-serving nonprofits in the Mid-Atlantic region of the Eastern United States. Including national organizations aided in the comparison of participant responses from local and national NPOs.

### **Employee Benefits**

All participants in this study expressed the need and desire for good employee benefits, including paid time off, healthcare, flex spending accounts to cover health care costs, yearly evaluations to justify pay increases, retirement, and stock options for investment. However, although all participants identified benefits as being important, only two of the eight participants listed them as one of the primary reasons that they would remain with an organization. P6 shared that in working with youth of varying backgrounds, at times staff may incur injury as a result of doing the job, so having benefits to get proper care in the event of a work injury was very important to them.

More so, P1 expressed the desire to have nonprofits incorporate some of the policies that corporate organizations do in an effort to attract good talent to the nonprofit by having competitive benefits packages and also as a way to retain and reward employees by offering benefits that are not necessarily typical for most nonprofits. The smaller NPOs sometimes have a more difficult time offering competitive benefits packages due to operating costs shortfalls.

Employee benefits fall under hygiene factors, according to Herzberg's theoretical framework. Hygiene factors are things that employees are often dissatisfied with, and most nonprofits do not offer or provide competitive benefits to their employees.



**Staffing—Family Environment**

Having great coworkers who create a family environment was important to two of the participants. If employee morale is too low, it is considered a detriment to the organization, according to Traynor (2009). The participants shared that because they were able to create such strong bonds among coworkers, they navigated through the challenges and stressors of their jobs more easily. One participant recounted that working with youth has numerous challenges and sometimes can be very difficult, but having support from coworkers and staff de-escalation of different scenarios was manageable as everyone worked together to achieve a common goal. This theme is also a hygiene factor, according to the framework.

P8 recalled how the executive leadership team was intentional about creating a culture where the staff supported one another. She shared that they had monthly outings and team-building exercises to get to know one another more, and that helped to create bonds and friendships that remain strong today. From the participants' responses, it was very clear that the effort to achieve a family environment in the workplace must be intentional. Moreover, P1 stated that the workplace should not be or have a family environment but a respectful working culture and relationship. Often, with family environments, favoritism can be shown, which can cause issues and challenges with other staff, so it is important to know how to balance a culture that encourages partnership and collaboration with keeping things professional.

Although it was not listed as a primary factor, P4 shared that the reliance on colleagues and team leads was great because upper management typically “threw new

hires to the wolves” with no proper training. Therefore, having strong support from coworkers was needed, or else duties would not be done correctly.

### **Organizational Climate**

The responses from the participants all related to traits or conditions that make up the organizational climate. P3 stressed the importance of creating a welcoming climate, especially in the light of a public health emergency (PHE) in which people were juggling many challenges on top of being in a demanding job. Under this umbrella of good organizational climate, she shared that people need to feel a sense of belonging, have a friendly atmosphere, perceive healthy transparency within the organization regarding issues or changes, and feel appreciated through incentives for small milestone achievements or even something as simple as providing lunch for in-person staff meetings.

The factors identified included a mix of both hygiene and motivator factors of Herzberg’s theory, which P3 said should be in place to ensure that retention efforts and strategies are met. During the other interviews, other participants mentioned factors that indicated a climate and culture for growth versus destruction.

### **Feeling Appreciated**

Recognition and communication are abilities that most managers who are committed to retention should seek (Mandhanya, 2015). Feeling appreciated was another hygiene factor that was shared as a primary reason for retention for P4. She expressed the deep need to have management that was understanding, empathetic, and open to acknowledging staff versus taking sole credit for staff successes. All other participants

mentioned this as a need and component to increase retention within youth-serving nonprofits. The authors Chun-Fang, Canter, & Prince (2008) stated that strong, clear, and direct communication may be all that some employees need and are motivated by. Lack of feeling appreciated and supported and toxic leadership were the reasons that P4 no longer worked for the organization. According to Lee, Woo, & Kim (2017), effective leaders are able to achieve wanted changes in employee behaviors, beliefs, and goals while proposing to build an employee's self-esteem. Employers should share in the responsibility of empowering employees and building their character and sense of self. Employers' efforts to be intentional in making their employees feel good about themselves will carry through in the way that they work with and interact with the youth they serve.

Previous researchers' findings relate to and support what the participants reported in this study. Therefore, no matter the sector, public or private, feeling appreciated is especially needed in youth-serving nonprofits or any other nonprofit work. Excitingly, P4 shared that in her current organization, leaders exemplify this factor and continue to support their employees, which contributes to increased employee morale and retention. More so, employees perform their jobs better and serve clients with dignity, knowing that they are fully supported and appreciated by leadership. This factor of feeling appreciated is also compared to feeling seen and not overlooked. It is something that P3 talked about, sharing that organizational leaders began incorporating mental health days and self-care workshops for their employees during the pandemic. Additionally, the company added summer flex days where staff were off after working 9 days. Overall, participants shared

that appreciation does not have to take the form of huge displays; it may just be expressed by something thoughtful that indicates that management sees and appreciates their efforts and the value that they add to the organization.

### **Opportunity for Growth**

Madden, Scannapieco, & Painter (2014) focused on the need for realistic job expectations from employees and the ability to offer incentives such as educational assistance or advanced training. The participants in this research study shared and recounted having the desire to experience different levels of leadership within any organization. Several shared how they came in at entry-level positions and were able to experience promotions throughout their tenure with the organization. P5 shared that the nonprofit sector is mostly attractive to young students fresh out of college who are ready to tackle the world's problems; however, he stated that when organizations are not able to provide trainings to expand employees' personal knowledge and skill or opportunities to grow, they often lose good talent because of not being able to retain and support employees' need and desire for growth.

Latukha (2011) conveyed that employee motivation is supported by a desire for individual growth and self-achievement. Employee retention can be a challenging issue to solve, as individuals arrive at organizations with varying levels of and goals for personal growth and achievement. Every participant shared that the opportunity for growth is very important to retention efforts, and strategies and should be something that leadership is intentional about creating and offering for employees. If positions are not available,

offering things like certifications or other trainings for employees should be considered to help boost retention.

### **Having Good Leadership and Support**

Yanay and Yanay (2008) found that abusive leadership tactics contributed to a decrease in employees' motivation and drive to excel in their craft. Half (four) of the participants in this research study left the youth-serving nonprofits due to abusive leadership tactics. The data in this study coincide with extensive existing research studies on how leadership styles and tactics highly influence retention in organizations. Many of the participants shared how poor and toxic leadership trickled down into every aspect of the organization and was even detrimental to the organization's future success.

Inconsistent employee involvement can cause changes to the quality of services offered (Cohen et al., 2010). Inconsistencies can stem from high turnover, changes in roles and positions within the organization, and other factors. Alleyne and Wood (2011) argued that when youth do not have positive choices, they are more prone to engage in delinquent activities such as gang involvement, drug use, or even crime. Therefore, consistent and reliable employees of youth-serving organizations are essentially responsible for minimizing idle time that youth have by implementing programs and services (Alleyne & Wood, 2011). The four participants who no longer worked for the organizations shared how poor leadership led to the demise of quality programming. Some participants shared that leaders should review everything from the participant's point of view to understand how decisions affect the recipients of service. This study also revealed how micromanaging leadership styles often blocked the creativity of employees,

as employees were often afraid of consequences for making decisions without proper approval. Youth work often requires a lot of flexibility and adjustment, and not having the freedom and authority to make adjustments can and does affect how programming is experienced.

Dumoulin (2017) reported that it is a manager's responsibility to cultivate strong leaders, recruitment efforts, trainings, and motivating factors. According to this article, the onus lies on the employer to help create an environment to cultivate strong leadership. And last, the employees must be willing and feel empowered to share their ideas and carry out activities that align with their program focus areas.

### **Limitations of the Study**

#### **Generalization**

Generalization was one limitation in this study because the sizes of the organizations varied as well as whether or not they were local or national chapters of NPOs in the Mid-Atlantic region. Another variation was the positions of each of the employees or former employees of the organizations. Their roles played a part in how they viewed, interpreted, and reacted to the research questions posed. Additionally, personal experience shaped how individuals responded; nonetheless, great information was derived from this research, and although the findings cannot be generalized, they do align with existing research in the field.

Furthermore, external generalizations cannot be made because the participants were limited to a specific geographic area in the Mid-Atlantic region of the Eastern

United States and the size, mission, and vision of the nonprofits varied and were not representative of the various nonprofits around the country.

### **Sampling**

Sampling was another limitation during this research study because purposeful sampling methods was used. These methods restricted participants from participating if they did not meet the pre-determined standards. This type of sampling was perfect for the research study because it allowed me to specifically target the needed population of employees of youth serving NPOs. The small sample size could also be viewed as a limitation. However, Marshall (1996) expressed that “An appropriate sample size for a qualitative study is one that adequately answers the research questions...Single figure population sizes are relevant for simple studies; whereas, large samples are needed for the more complex studies.” In this case, the eight participants provided more than enough data for this research study in response to the simple research study.

### **Interviewing**

Although we were able to establish themes in responses of participants interviewing posed a few limitations. For instance, responses were limited by the individuals ability to interpret the research question and what is being asked. There were a few times where I had to restate or rephrase the question for clarity sake at the request of the participant.

### **Public Health Emergency**

The final limitation of the study was the Public Health Emergency (PHE), also referred to as COVID-19 Pandemic, slowed down responsiveness of participants as

individuals had increased challenges navigating scheduling, home duties, and work challenges. Additionally, the PHE caused many workers to be without their jobs if there were no remote work options available.

### **Recommendations**

I conducted this research study to contribute to the research related to retention efforts for youth serving nonprofits. Whereas with previous studies there was a more generalized focus on different factors that contribute to retention or turnover, this study sought to identify what factors help retain workers and minimize turnover and also sought to see how youth services are affected by high turnover. While conducting the literature review, there was very little research specific to youth serving nonprofits and how retention or turnover affects them. This research study provides insight on nonprofit employee perspectives and factors that are important to increased retention of employees.

The results show that each individual has different desires or needs when it comes to employer satisfaction, nonetheless all of the factors matter to the employees. No one factor alone can solve retention challenges, but having the right mix of factors would bring about true success for both the employee and employers. The participants shared almost equal hygiene and motivator factors to increase retention; however, the hygiene factors were more prevalent in the primary research question. Further research is needed to make more in depth conclusions into how clients served are impacted when being supported by nonprofits whose business model incorporates high worker turnover.

Another topic for research could be the relationships or comparisons of how executives view their culture versus how employees view the organizational climate or



culture. This is important to look into because a few of the participants mentioned how sometimes upper management make decisions on paper and policy that do not necessarily always work out well when put into practice. This type of research would provide such great depth to the level of existing research. Leadership would have to be open to hearing feedback and this should be done in a controlled environment as to protect privacy and prevent potential backlash for participation. Also the organizations involved should also be kept confidential as an effort to work to reduce any potential harm.

Developing sound retention plans will add value to NPOs as employees will feel as though their voice matters and they will be able to witness their employers' appreciation through various company-planned events and through incorporating policies and practices that support and create thriving working environments.

### **Implications**

Staw (1980) reported that employee turnover can be detrimental to organization. This research study provided such extensive details about employee experience from perspectives of direct front line staff, administrative professionals and executive leadership. Having safe work environments where discussions and disagreements can be had without causing too much chaos is necessary. Boushey and Glynn (2012) reported that when nonprofits lose mid-level employees it cost them 100% of the annual salary and for top-level executives and directors it would cost the organization 300% of the annual salary.

Employee turnover has a cost, and for youth serving nonprofits that cost is not only monetary but programmatically and professionally. Not only is there great financial

loss when employees leave and resources are put into recruitment efforts, but there is loss of rapport for staff or youth who built trust with the former employee. Rapport and caring adult relationships are not things that you can buy or even replace. It takes special individuals to be able to work with our youth and young adults and too much change as we learned from some of the participants can cause the youth to leave the program.

The culture could directly or indirectly influence the hygiene and motivator factors that Herzberg credits and also highly influence employee performance (Kontoghiorghes, 2016). Culture includes interactions as well as measurable aspects of the work environment according to a study by Rahbi et al., (2017). Numerous researchers have reported that organizational culture plays a significant role in improving the commitment of employees and volunteers (Abdullah et al., 2015; Mitić, Vukonjanski, Terek, Gilgorović, & Zorić, 2016). Organizations must be honest and reflective of how their organizational culture and climate affect staff. In order to get a truly accurate depiction of this culture, an unbiased evaluator is needed to help organizations through this exercise. Examination of all leaders and supervisors within the organization is also vital to developing an accurate picture of what the culture and climate of the organization is, how it functions and how it compares to long-term goals and vision.

Moreover, the use of evaluation tools and reports from outside evaluations should be used to work with staff in creating and or modifying retention strategies and most importantly, youth voice must be part of the planning as well. Our youth are leaders today and they can and do have insight and knowledge to share that should be acknowledged and included to ensure true program success.

## Conclusion

This dissertation aimed to identify which factors promote employee retention in youth serving NPOs. Based on the themes from the primary research question, we see a combination of both hygiene and motivator factors from the participants. Herzberg (1987) and Herzberg et al., (1959) place a strong emphasis on the need for hygiene factors such as compensation and job security in order to keep employees satisfied with their jobs. This dissertation is based on this theory and allowed us to identify specifically what satisfaction or dissatisfaction reasons are needed to create stable retention rates in youth serving nonprofits in the Mid-Atlantic region of the Eastern United States.

Krajcsak (2018) proposed that the key component in improving employee performance and employee retention is motivation. Maidani (1991) conducted a comparative factor of Herzberg's theory in private and public sector employees. The study concluded that public sector employees placed more value on hygiene factors than the private sector employees (Maidani, 1991). The results of this study coincide with the existing data, the participants desired to be motivated, led, and supported by leadership and desired to have an offering of competitive hygiene factors to help boost morale and give employees benefits they are so deserving of. The participants shared that feeling valued and heard were important and believed that more discussions like these interviews were needed to help employees evaluate their programming and cultures and make necessary and intentional changes to help improve how they serve the population chosen.

The data showed that many of the factors that participants shared were hygiene factors and other motivator factors were shared which required and called for intentional

planning and support for employees. One interesting factor was in regards to job orientation, two of the local chapters of the National NPOs did not provide adequate training for their employees. Participants in the study recounted how other co-workers fulfilled leadership roles and stepped in to train new staff and give them guidance and support that they lacked.

Overall, the participants felt as though this research could help begin some of the difficult conversations to ensure employees are seen, as well as heard, and appreciated for their hard work and dedication to fulfilling the mission and vision of the organization.

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## Appendix: Interview Protocol

**Participant Code Name/Pseudonym:****Interview Questions:**

1. What primary factors do you believe influence employee retention within your current organization? Please state the type of influence each of the factors have.
2. For employees who have been employed with nonprofit agencies in the Mid-Atlantic region of the Eastern United States for more than two years, what themes emerge in their responses relating to the factors that lead to retention with the organization?
3. For employees who have worked for nonprofit agencies and completed exit *interviews*, what factors did they attribute to their decision to leave the agency?

These additional interview questions may be asked to help answer the research questions and identify themes that will emerge from the interviews.

1. What is the size of your organization?
2. Why have you stayed with the organization?
3. What retention strategies has your employer implemented?
4. What if any barriers to retention exist for you and how do you address them?
5. What are factors that would cause you to leave?
6. Has your organization experienced turnover?
7. In what ways has the turnover affected programming? Other staff?  
Leadership? Youth?

8. Is there an orientation period for new hires?
9. What policies are important to you within an organization?