10-21-2025

Identifying Motivators for Retention of Service Workers in Youth Group Care Programs

Michelle Lynn Briegel
Walden University

Walden University

College of Psychology and Community Services

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Michelle Briegel

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

Review Committee
Dr. Sarah Matthey, Committee Chairperson, Human Services Faculty
Dr. Kecia Freeman, Committee Member, Human Services Faculty

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

Walden University
2025

Abstract

Identifying Motivators for Retention of Service Workers in Youth Group Care Programs

by

Michelle Briegel

M.Ed., Concordia University, 2014

BAJS, Mount Royal College, 2001

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Human Services

Walden University

November 2025

Abstract

Residential group care programs in Calgary, Alberta, Canada face challenges in recruiting and retaining qualified human service workers. This workforce retention issue affects the quality of care provided to vulnerable children and youth, as well as the overall stability of residential group care. The purpose of this qualitative action research study was to explore why service workers in front-line jobs choose to stay in their positions in youth-serving residential group care programs, guided by Herzberg's two-factor theory of motivation. Nine participants were recruited through purposeful sampling via social media and email, with the criterion that they had been employed at a residential group care program in Calgary, Alberta, for at least 1 year. Data were analyzed using thematic coding and inductive analysis. Key results included diversity of roles and employment length, fulfillment of purpose, commitment to youth and improving care systems, pursuit of professional growth, fulfillment from witnessing youth growth, satisfaction from improving professionally, reliance on supports, connection to people and the work, resilience to manage the demands of the work, suggested improvements to increase retention, and alignment to residential group care work. Recommendations included developing and prioritizing structured and ongoing relational supervision practices, creating a peer mentorship program and sector-wide network for new and emerging human service workers, and advocating for increasing compensation and equity across the sector. This study may lead to positive social change by enhancing services to children and youth in residential group care programs, thereby increasing the retention rates of human service workers.

Identifying Motivators for Retention of Service Workers in Youth Group Care Programs

by

Michelle Briegel

M.Ed., Concordia University, 2014

BAJS, Mount Royal College, 2001

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Human Services

Walden University

November 2025

Dedication

This is dedicated to my grandfather (Ray Kientz), who always wanted to see me achieve a doctorate in my field; my grandmother (Thelma Butchard-Briegel), who led the way toward higher education by achieving a Masters' degree in the 1930s; my daughter (Sydney Kranjcevic) who is on her own journey in a practice-based field of study; and to all the young people who struggle in school and in finding their way in the world – anything is possible with commitment and perseverance.

Acknowledgments

I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to Dr. Sarah Matthey, who stood beside me every step of the way, held me accountable each week, and never let me lose sight of the finish line. I also thank Dr. Kecia Freeman for her steadfast encouragement and belief in my ability to complete this study. As my committee members, both reminded me that I already held the knowledge, skills, and expertise to succeed. Special thanks to Dr. Patricia Kostouros, Dr. Michelle Yeo, and Dr. Jenny McGrath for serving as my expert review panel. Your thoughtful feedback and professional insight were invaluable in refining my interview questions and elevating the quality of my research. To the participants in this study, thank you for your time, openness, and contributions; this research would not have been possible without you.

To my career mentors, Dr. Patricia Kostouros, Dr. Marlene Kingsmith, and Roland LaHaye, thank you for guiding me to be the best human service practitioner and educator I can be. Your influence has been foundational in my growth, both professionally and personally. From the very start of my career as a student and frontline practitioner, through to developing as an educator and scholar, to this moment of my highest academic accomplishment. I am also grateful to my professional colleagues and friends who consistently encouraged me to advocate for the field of child and youth care and to pursue doctoral studies as a pathway to leadership. Thank you as well to my fellow academics who walked alongside me in this journey of higher education, offering mutual support and camaraderie.

Finally, to my spouse and best friend, Shawn Coulter, and my daughter, Sydney Kranjcevic, your unwavering belief in me, your patience, and the countless ways you picked up the slack at home gave me the space I needed to focus and finish. To my extended family and friends, thank you for understanding when I often chose study over socializing. I look forward to reconnecting and making up for lost time.

Table of Contents

Section 1: Introduction to the Problem

Background of the Human Services Problem

Human service worker retention and turnover have been a problem for decades. Over the years, the well-being of workers in the human service sector has been studied in terms of what contributes to worker turnover, with few studies having been done to examine the factors that promote worker well-being (Lizano, 2021). Social work, specifically child/youth and family social work, has been identified as having the highest levels of workforce turnover and poor mental health, comparable to other human service occupations (Turley et al., 2021). High workload demands, organizational and government bureaucracy, rapidly changing policy, negative social perception, highly emotional work environments, severely traumatized children and families, and the consequences of the seriousness of the work are a few of the factors that contribute to turnover (Turley et al., 2021). Human service workers have a high turnover rate due to high workload demands, workplace environments, complex clients, and challenging systems.

The human service sector is impacted by employee turnover for a variety of reasons, and some areas of human service work are affected more than others. Social work, child and family work, and out-of-home group care facility work are areas that experience a lack of stability in the workforce (Turley et al., 2021). High turnover rates, especially in the child welfare workforce within the human service sector, have a significant impact (Casey Family Foundation, 2023). Stressful job conditions, high client needs, and limited funding are among the factors that contribute to turnover and will be a

concern for human service workers (Wine et al., 2020). Turnover rates were associated with the practitioner's age, education level, and job stress (Herschel et al., 2020). However, turnover rates are also associated with organizational considerations such as size and organizational culture (Herschell et al., 2020). Several factors, both personal and organizational, influence turnover in the human services sector.

Social Problem

In North America, human services workers in group care programs may be undervalued, leading to high turnover and instability and leaving young people unsupported. Human service workers in group care facilities are often the most uneducated and lowest-paid employees who work around the clock in highly stressful environments with youth who are experiencing serious emotional and behavioral concerns (Smith et al., 2021). Employee retention has a significant impact on residential centers in North America, disrupting therapeutic relationships with young people and causing complications for their well-being and stability in residential programs (Nyerges et al., 2023). Employee retention helps establish a sense of safety and stability for youth, increasing trust between young people and the employees and supporting the therapeutic environment. Without staffing stability, there is a potential for mistrust by young people toward the employees, potentially resulting in aggressive and non-therapeutic behaviors (Nyerges et al., 2023). Group care employees are often poorly compensated and not supported well in the challenging work they do with youth who have complex emotional and behavioral needs, causing employee turnover.

Internationally, there is global concern about employee retention in the human services care sector. Organizations that provide services for youth in residential care often face challenges with employee turnover and staffing shortages, which create difficulties for group care facilities and hinder the delivery of quality services to young people (Mairhofer & van Santen, 2023). Also, efforts to support the well-being and retention of human service care workers need to be addressed internationally, as workers are aging out of care work on top of the many other factors causing turnover (Morris et al., 2023). Globally, organizations are experiencing similar challenges with employee turnover and retention.

Local Problem

Some human service organizations in Alberta, Canada, struggle to retain and recruit qualified employees. The staffing crisis in Alberta extends to the human services sector, where retaining qualified staff is challenging (Briggs et al., 2022). Human sector demands, such as low operating budgets, inflationary cost of living, employee mental health concerns, and the increasing complexity of clients' needs, strain nonprofit organizations' ability to retain staff (Briggs et al., 2022). Challenges related to employee retention in Alberta include 71% of nonprofit organizations identifying that staff mental health and well-being are negatively impacted, 55% reporting concerns about retaining employees, and 53% expressing concern that they will be unable to recruit new, qualified staff (Briggs et al., 2022). The Association for Community Agencies (ALIGN) in Alberta has seen a 30% annual turnover rate, on average, in their child intervention service programs (R. Barraclough, personal communication, January 24, 2024). The Alberta

Union for Provincial Employees (AUPE) reported that human service government employees in child intervention are stressed by the work and government program changes; many of them do not stay past 2.5 years because the work is so hard (Johnson, 2023). Organizations in Alberta, Canada, may be losing human service employees to mental health issues, inflation, and the stress of the work.

The residential group care sector of child intervention is experiencing difficulty in retaining human service workers for an extended period of time. Some unique factors contribute to employees choosing to leave group care. Reasons for turnover have been identified in reports as workload, perceived lack of support from supervisors, organizational and government disunity, organizational morale, working conditions, low pay, and extreme behaviors of the youth in their care (Briegel & Friesen, 2024). Some human service organizations in Calgary, Alberta, Canada, are finding it difficult to retain staff longer than 2 years (C. Hicks, personal communication, May 28, 2024). Organizations that provide group care may face challenges in retaining qualified employees for longer than 1 year due to factors such as supportive supervision, organizational issues, low pay, and poor working conditions.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative action research study was to explore why service workers in front-line jobs choose to stay in their positions in youth-serving residential group care programs in Calgary, Alberta, Canada. The study was needed to help organizations that provide group care to youth in the care of children's services better understand what factors contribute to human service employee retention. The study

informs advocacy by providing evidence that supports change in retention practice for group care programs within Calgary, Alberta, Canada.

Research Question

What are the frontline service workers' reasons for choosing to stay in their positions in youth-serving residential group care programs in Calgary, Alberta, Canada?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework that provided the foundation for this study was Herzberg et al.'s (1959) two-factor theory. According to the two-factor theory, two sets of factors influence job satisfaction: hygiene factors and motivation factors (Herzberg et al., 1959). Hygiene factors include supervision, working conditions, salary, policies, procedures, practices, interpersonal relations, benefits, and job security; these factors can impact employee motivation if they are not positive (Herzberg et al., 1959). Motivating factors include achievement, recognition for accomplishment, challenging work, increased job responsibility, and opportunity for growth and development; these factors can lead to improved job satisfaction (Herzberg et al., 1959). Herzberg et al.'s two-factor theory provided a framework to examine hygiene factors and motivating factors of job satisfaction. Herzberg et al.'s two-factor theory was used to frame this study, providing insight into the practice problem of employee turnover and retention in Calgary, Alberta, Canada. Herzberg et al.'s two-factor theory is relevant to this study because I examined the factors that motivate front-line human service workers to stay working at residential group care facilities for more than one year. I chose Herzberg et al.'s theory because the

hygiene factors align with potential organizational challenges for residential group care programs.

Nature of the Study

The study's design is an action research approach that engages research participants in solving immediate problems that affect their day-to-day lives by providing actionable knowledge that can influence change (Shani & Coghlan, 2021). It provides a way for human service workers to participate in improving the efficacy of their working environment through their lived experience (Stringer & Ortiz Aragon, 2021). I chose action research because of its focus on participants' experiences informing action that can improve the social problem.

The study used purposeful sampling, semistructured interviews, and thematic analysis. Purposeful sampling involves selecting participants based on the likelihood that they can provide rich information about the topic (Knott et al., 2022). I used purposeful sampling to recruit participants by asking my partner organization to send a letter about the study to human service workers in their residential group care programs who had been in their jobs for over a year, requesting participants. Semistructured interviews involve the interviewer using a series of questions as a foundation, with the ability to ask further questions based on the responses provided (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021). I conducted semistructured interviews with human service workers who have worked in residential group care for over 1 year. Thematic analysis is a form of narrative analysis in which the researcher examines participants' responses and identifies codes and themes, such as recurring phrases, incidents, or words, from the interviews (Knott et al., 2022). I

coded the data identifying themes related to what motivates participants to remain in their jobs.

Defined Terms

Employee retention: The process of holding onto employees through an organizational effort to reduce employee turnover, resulting in employees wanting to stay at their jobs (Kuuyelleh, 2021).

Employee turnover: The voluntary decision for employees to leave an organization (Bolt et al., 2022).

Frontline human service workers in residential group care programs typically act as direct service providers, supporting children and youth residing in the program (Collins et al., 2023). This social practice, or youth work, involves working with young people in their living spaces and actively participating in their lives (Corney et al., 2023).

Residential group care: Residential group care is also known as residential foster care, group home care, or out-of-home care (Collins et al., 2023). In residential care, children and youth live in highly structured group environments staffed by workers around the clock, with rotating shifts (Collins et al., 2023).

Significance of the Study

Significance of the Study for Community or Organization

The study's results will help organizations within Calgary, Alberta, Canada, to understand what factors motivate their employees to stay working at their residential group care programs for more than 1 year. Organizations can reexamine their employment practices to seek opportunities to improve employee retention and reduce

employee turnover. Understanding how to improve employee retention will lead to stable staffing in group care programs and stable living environments for youth in the program. As stability improves in group care programs, there will be an increased focus on intentional direct practice, centered on the well-being of youth, and ultimately, better outcomes for both youth and organizations.

Significance of the Study for Human Services

This study was significant because it filled a gap in practice on why frontline service workers choose to stay employed in youth-serving residential group care programs. The study results aid global community organizations operating children's services residential group care programs in identifying what motivates staff retention in frontline residential group care settings, thus providing more stable living conditions for young people in these programs. Staff retention in group care programs needs to be addressed to create positive social change in the working conditions of human service workers. Improving the retention of human service professionals in group care settings leads to better support of youth in group care, which leads to increased well-being of youth in child protective service programs and increases the chance that they will leave child protective services and become productive members of society.

Literature Review

Literature Search Strategy

A comprehensive literature review was conducted using the library resources at Walden University and Mount Royal University. The databases used were EBSCO, SocIndex, ERIC, Science Direct, Psych. Articles, and Taylor & Francis. Key terms used

in the search included *group care employee retention, turnover, residential group care, worker well-being, burnout, non-profit staffing,* and *Herzberg's two-factor theory*. Citation chaining through Google Scholar and Walden University's previous dissertations was also used to obtain relevant research literature. Each search term was paired with *child and youth care practitioner, child and youth worker, child and youth counsellor, human service worker,* and *child services worker.* The search parameters used were peer-reviewed articles within the last 5 years. The central themes of the literature review were workplace pressures that influence human service employees' dissatisfaction, strategies to enhance human service employee retention, organizational culture and leadership influences human service employee satisfaction, and resilience factors that improve human service employee satisfaction.

Conceptual Framework

The framework guiding my study was a theory grounded in human resource management that helped to understand what influences employee job satisfaction. The two-factor theory, also known as the motivation-hygiene theory, was first developed in 1959 by psychologist Herzberg (Herzberg et al., 2010). It is a foundational theory rooted in organizational psychology and human resource management, aimed at understanding factors influencing employee satisfaction and motivation (Herzberg et al., 2010). Herzberg et al. (2010) developed the two-factor theory to better understand what motivates employees and causes job satisfaction and dissatisfaction. Herzberg et al. challenged the view that job satisfaction and dissatisfaction were on a single continuum. Instead, the theory proposed that employee job satisfaction was influenced by two

distinct factors: motivators and hygiene. Herzberg et al.'s two-factor theory focused on identifying the elements in the workplace that lead to satisfaction (motivators) and those that prevent dissatisfaction (hygiene factors). The two-factor theory can be used to understand employee satisfaction by identifying motivation and hygiene factors.

The two-factor theory can help organizations understand the factors influencing employee satisfaction and dissatisfaction. The original research involved semistructured interviews with engineers and accountants, who were asked to describe situations where they felt particularly satisfied or dissatisfied at work, with the intent of understanding employee satisfaction and motivation (Herzberg et al., 2010). Subsequently, Herzberg et al. (2010) discovered that causes of satisfaction differed from the causes of dissatisfaction; motivator factors primarily influenced satisfaction, while the absence or inadequacy of hygiene factors drove dissatisfaction. As such, in the two-factor theory, Herzberg et al. suggested that the lack of hygiene factors drives employee dissatisfaction, whereas motivation factors influence employee satisfaction.

Main Tenets of Two-Factor Theory

Hygiene Factors

The two-factor theory proposed that hygiene factors are aspects of the job that are external to the employee and influence job dissatisfaction. Herzberg et al. (2010) posited that absent or insufficient hygiene factors contribute to employee dissatisfaction. Hygiene factors are extrinsic factors related to the job environment and do not motivate employees or lead to higher job satisfaction; instead, they prevent dissatisfaction (Herzberg et al., 2010). Hygiene factors include salary, working conditions, company policies,

supervision, and job security (Herzberg et al., 2010). Inadequate or poor hygiene factors cause employee dissatisfaction, but improving these factors does not necessarily increase satisfaction; instead, it brings the job to a neutral state where dissatisfaction is minimized (Herzberg et al., 2010). The lack of hygiene factors contributes to employee dissatisfaction, but improving hygiene factors does not increase job satisfaction; it only prevents dissatisfaction.

Motivator Factors

The two-factor theory also proposed that motivational factors improve employee experience and job satisfaction. Motivator factors are intrinsic factors related to the job content itself. When present, motivator factors increase job satisfaction and motivation, leading to greater employee engagement and performance (Herzberg et al., 2010). Herzberg et al. (2010) say that motivator factors influence the personal growth of employees. When motivators are present, employee satisfaction in the workplace improves.

Application of Two-Factor Theory

The two-factor theory has been used in numerous research studies on employee turnover and retention and provides a framework to understand what motivating factors influence job satisfaction. Peramatizis and Galanakis (2022) identified that motivator factors, like employee achievements, employee recognition, and increased responsibilities, are linked to satisfaction among many workplace settings. Similarly, Zeng and Paphawaist (2024) applied the two-factor theory to examine the turnover of entry-level employees and found that employees were more likely to stay at their jobs

when motivator factors, such as achievement, responsibility, and opportunities for growth, were in place. Liu et al. (2023) also found that job satisfaction was improved by intrinsic factors of the job, such as responsibility, recognition, achievement, and personal growth, as well as extrinsic factors, such as decent salary, employee benefits, supportive organizational policies, and positive working conditions. Complementing these findings, Basril (2020) found that motivator factors, such as recognition, personal growth, and achievement, enhanced employee satisfaction. Together, these studies support the Herzberg et al.'s (2010) theory that motivator factors improve employee satisfaction and retention. The application of Herzberg et al.'s (2010) two-factor theory across multiple studies demonstrates the value that this theory offers for understanding the motivating factors influencing employee turnover and retention.

Researchers have also studied hygiene factors, such as salary and working conditions, as contributing to the prevention of employee dissatisfaction. Hygiene factors, like salary, organizational policies, employee supervision, and working conditions, are effective at preventing employee dissatisfaction; however, they do not actively contribute to the improvement of employee satisfaction (Basril, 2022; Peramatzis & Galanakis, 2022; Zeng & Paphawasit, 2024). Poor hygiene factors can lead to decreased job satisfaction and may increase employee turnover rates. Good hygiene factors can increase employee satisfaction and reduce turnover, while hygiene and motivator factors can further improve employee satisfaction. Nagpaul et al. (2022) demonstrated that, when hygiene factors are poor, the relationship between hygiene and motivator factors can also lead to decreased employee satisfaction and increased turnover. In addition, Nagpaul et

al. (2022) emphasized that motivator factors enhanced employee satisfaction. Hygiene and motivator factors may influence employee satisfaction and retention or employee dissatisfaction and turnover, suggesting that organizations should pay attention to both to improve employee retention.

Understanding the hygiene and motivator factors that contribute to employee satisfaction can help organizations mitigate employee turnover. Halim et al. (2024) conducted a systemic literature review about the relevancy of psychological theories like the Herzberg et al. (2010) two-factor theory, and how applicable they are at providing organizations with insight into what influences employee behavior and motivation. Halim et al. found that when management strategies in organizations included perspectives of psychological theories, it enhanced employee motivation and engagement, improving the overall performance of organizations. Furthermore, organizations that used human resource strategies that were informed by psychological theories like the Herzberg et al. two-factor theory saw improved employee satisfaction, higher productivity, and reduced employee turnover (Halim et al., 2024). Similarly, Mitsakis and Galanakis (2022) found that motivator factors such as the intrinsic nature of the work, achievement, and employee recognition were the strongest predictors of job satisfaction. When employees are recognized for their efforts and feel that their job is meaningful, they report higher levels of satisfaction and motivation, underscoring the importance of motivator factors in employee retention. Mitsakis and Galanakis also emphasized the connection between meaningful work and employee motivation, which adds to the value of the Herzberg et al. two-factor theory in understanding employee motivation. These studies established the

value of applying the two-factor theory to human resource practices to understand and impact motivator factors that can enhance employee retention.

Themes and Subthemes of Literature Related to Human Services Problem

Burnout Influences Human Service Employee Dissatisfaction

Chronic stress, excessive responsibilities, and increased administrative duties may increase human service employee dissatisfaction. Gimenez-Bertomeu et al. (2024) found that burnout is common in human service professions and is caused by chronic stress, emotional overload, and feeling ineffective, particularly in jobs that involve direct client care. Similarly, Lushin et al. (2023) noted that work-related burnout increased when human service employees were faced with increased responsibilities, mainly duties and tasks that were administrative and not directly client care-related. Burns et al. (2023) highlighted that unrealistic demands, high workloads, and too many responsibilities contributed to human service employee burnout and overall dissatisfaction. Further, Radey and Wilke (2023) found that human service employees who left their jobs in child welfare organizations said that mounting job responsibilities were the main reason. Factors like mounting job responsibilities, chronic stress, and high workloads may lead to dissatisfaction in human service employees and increased employee turnover. Identifying factors that contribute to burnout is important for improving retention and creating a stable workforce for human service professions.

Additionally, human service employees are not able to form meaningful relationships with clients when they are experiencing burnout due to the demands of their work, limits within the organization, uncertainty about their role, and work-life

imbalance. Santos et al. (2023) emphasized that human service employees are not able to form meaningful relationships with clients when they are experiencing burnout, which impacts the quality of care they can provide clients, and may result in increased employee turnover. Similarly, Mer et al. (20024) identified that human service employee engagement and job satisfaction were reduced when they experienced role uncertainty, increased job demands, organizational limitations, and an imbalance in work and personal life. High job demands, organizational limitations, and employee uncertainty about roles and responsibilities limit human service employees' ability to form meaningful relationships with clients and increase the likelihood of burnout. Santos et al. (20023) expressed that this was even more concerning in adolescent residential care settings, where there are already higher occurrences of stress, secondary traumatic experiences, depression, and other emotional and mental health concerns among the employees that negatively impact the quality of care the clients receive. Identifying the factors that contribute to burnout is important for improving human service employee well-being, reducing turnover, and improving outcomes for vulnerable client populations.

Stress Influences Human Service Employee Dissatisfaction. The sources of stress experienced by human service workers in child welfare are varied and influenced by personal and work-related factors. Santos et al. (2023) identified six primary sources of stress: caring for children and young people, work overload, career progression and salary concerns, relationships at work, training activities, and challenges with the work-home interface. Santos et al. further expressed that stressors are not uniform across all workers; significant differences have been observed based on personal variables such as

age and educational level, and work-related variables like professional role and years of service. Complimenting these findings, Zhou and Semanchin Jones (2023) found that when human service workers had confidence in their ability to perform effectively in challenging situations, the likelihood of stress and employee dissatisfaction decreased, emphasizing the importance of building workers' self-efficacy. Supporting this, Nagpaul et al. (2022) claimed that job satisfaction mediates the relationship between various workplace factors and workers' intentions to quit, thus highlighting its central role in retention. Further, workers who perceive their roles as meaningful are particularly likely to remain in their positions, underscoring the importance of aligning work responsibilities with a sense of purpose (Nagpaul et al., 2022). Santos et al. and Zhou and Semanchin Jones underscored that stressors are varied and multifaceted, contributing to employee dissatisfaction; however, when workers felt confident, dissatisfaction decreased. Nagpaul et al. added that workers were less likely to resign when satisfied and their jobs had meaning. When employees feel confident and have a purpose in their work, their stress is mitigated, thus reducing feelings of employee dissatisfaction

Residential child and youth workers are particularly vulnerable to stress-related pressures due to the demanding and emotionally taxing nature of child welfare work. Brend and Sprang (2020) found that human service employees were often exposed to the stories of abuse and neglect experienced by clients, resulting in vicarious or secondary traumatic experiences. Brend and Sprang explained that the prevalence of secondary trauma among human service employees was a significant factor in long-term retention of employees. A lack of trauma-informed support from human service employees among

child welfare organizations intensified the secondary trauma experiences of employees, leading to burnout and eventual increased leaves from work. However, staffing shortages in adolescent residential group care programs caused many human service employees to have to return to work shortly after they took a leave, even after violent encounters, not allowing them time to fully recover (Brend & Collin-Vezina, 2022). Child welfare human service employees often face traumatic events that may cause them to have to take time off from work. However, due to chronic staffing shortages in residential group care programs, employees are forced to return to work before they are ready, compounding their burnout even further. There are gaps in residential group care programs that leave staff susceptible to traumatic stress, impacting worker well-being and ultimately retention in these high-stress environments.

Human service workers in residential care programs face demands that significantly impact their ability to perform effectively and sustain their roles. Verhage et al. (2023) found that many workers reported feeling unprepared and insufficiently informed about the demands of their positions, particularly in environments characterized by high staff turnover, understaffing, extensive responsibilities, and irregular hours. Due to constant staffing changes and reliance on part-time or temporary workers, the inability to build therapeutic relationships with youth undermined the effectiveness and sense of fulfillment of human service workers (Verhage et al., 2023). Female human service employees found that balancing the demands of family life and working in residential group care created challenges, contributing to job dissatisfaction and burnout (Verhage et al., 2023). Factors such as personal stress, high caseloads, increasing job demands,

limited organizational resources, severe client cases, and inadequate supervision and limited coworker support also contributed to the stress of human service employees (Kothari et al., 2021). Notably, many workers end up leaving their jobs without having a plan in place, suggesting that improved working conditions might have allowed them to stay in their role (Radey & Wilke, 2023). The unique demands of residential group care impact the unhappiness and satisfaction of human service employees, causing many to leave their jobs without something else to go to lined up. Human service employees are often unprepared for the difficult work in adolescent residential care programs, and gaps in support from the organization can create an environment where employees do not experience success in their work. Barriers in the workplace system may create an unsupportive experience for many human service employees in residential group care settings.

Organizational and personal risk factors may contribute to the stress and well-being of human service employees in child welfare organizations, but they do not receive the same attention that other employment sectors do. Boonzaaier et al. (2021) found that factors like high workloads, long hours, violence, severe client cases, low salaries, and lack of support were common factors contributing to significant amounts of stress for workers. Olaniyan et al. (2020) added that personal factors, stemming from human service employees' home life and society, further compound these challenges. The working conditions of human service employees in the child welfare sector are frequently overlooked compared to other employment sectors (Olaniyan et al., 2020). Santos et al. (2023) suggested that identifying and addressing these concerns can enhance the quality

of care provided to adolescents in residential group care programs by improving the stress and well-being of human service employees. The risks, working conditions, and well-being of human service employees receive less attention than those in other employment sectors, which impacts employee satisfaction.

High Workload Influences Human Service Employee Dissatisfaction

Human service employees in child welfare work are feeling the pressure of high workloads due to organizational financial hardships, coupled with the increasingly complex needs of clients. Kothari et al. (2021) found that the pressure on human service employees was compounded by an increase in the severity of clients and caseloads, and is significantly impacting turnover and retention rates. Kothari et al. explained that workers reported unmanageable job expectations, high caseloads, complex clients, and lengthy commute times as factors that affected their willingness to stay at their job. Additionally, Burns et al. (2023) found that human service employees were often expected to perform beyond reasonable limits, such as working unpaid overtime or using their personal vehicle for work without compensation, which exacerbated work-related stress and burnout. Increased pressure in the workplace impacts the well-being of human service employees and creates additional challenges for organizations, as well as the stability of client service delivery. Unmanageable workloads and emotionally demanding job responsibilities may contribute to high turnover rates among human service employees.

Unmanageable job demands, unrealistic expectations, and increasing workloads contribute to dissatisfaction among human service employees. Numerous participants in various studies reported working long hours, frequently required overtime, and being

expected to work on their days off as factors that influenced their decision to leave their jobs (Burns et al., 2023; Radey & Wilke, 2023). Lizano (2021) also found that high workloads and the corresponding stress impacted the health and happiness of human service employees, with workload described as a significant factor in overall well-being. Inadequate support systems in integrated care settings amplified work stress and burnout, leading to widespread dissatisfaction (Liu et al., 2023). Neely-Barnes et al. (2023) noted that a growing demand for services exacerbated challenges, as organizations struggled to recruit and retain sufficient employees to meet the increasing needs of their clients. The increasing strain on poorly resourced organizations, exacerbated by the pandemic, has led to widespread employee resignations as workers prioritize work-life balance over unsustainable job demands (Neely-Barnes et al., 2023). Liu et al. (2023) have also shown mixed results in efforts to improve job satisfaction among primary care workers through integrated support services. While enhanced working conditions, career development opportunities, and stronger coworker relationships have improved satisfaction for some, others report that increased workloads and associated stress have had the opposite effect (Liu et al., 2023). Mounting workloads, unmanageable job demands, and unrealistic expectations exacerbate employee dissatisfaction and are critical factors in stress and overall well-being. Conversely, organizations struggle to recruit and retain staff, thereby alleviating the workload of the remaining employees. Workload pressures and demands of human service workers are critical factors contributing to their dissatisfaction and impacting employee turnover and retention for organizations.

Case Complexity Influences Human Service Employee Dissatisfaction

Human service workers in residential care face challenges due to complex cases that affect their well-being, safety, and ability to provide adequate care. Benveniste et al. (2024) found that compassion fatigue was prevalent in human service care workers, stemming from prolonged exposure to the trauma experienced by the children in care, often manifesting as secondary traumatic stress and vicarious trauma of human service workers. Adding to this strain, Smith (2020) emphasized that client violence is a pervasive issue, with human service care workers frequently encountering physical and emotional harm, including biting, hitting, and other forms of aggression. High employee turnover of human service employees has been attributed to the dangerous nature of the work, leaving many employees feeling unsafe and preventing relationship building with clients (Smith, 2020). Case complexity due to traumatized clients, violence towards human service care workers, client addiction, and concern for client retaliation has caused human services care workers to fear for their safety.

Case complexity, coupled with a lack of preparedness, contributes to employee dissatisfaction and turnover. Kothari et al. (2021) identified that case severity was acknowledged as one of the most damaging aspects of job demands, often leading workers to consider leaving their roles; the greater the severity, the higher the likelihood of turnover. This fear has caused some workers to avoid necessary interventions, undermining the environment's safety and the development of therapeutic relationships. Further, educational preparation for human service workers in residential group care settings is often insufficient to meet the job demands. Verhage et al. (2023) noted that

human service workers appreciated the knowledge gained from mental health and addiction courses they took in school and the insights provided by guest speakers from residential care facilities. Human service employees reported feeling unprepared to handle many of the situations they encountered, despite receiving training on mental health and addictions (Verhage et al., 2023). Case complexity and lack of feeling prepared in their jobs have impacted feelings of dissatisfaction and turnover.

Compensation Influences Human Service Employee Dissatisfaction

Low salaries and poor employee benefits influence human service employee retention. Compensation is a significant issue, with inadequate funding leading to low wages and insufficient benefits (Burns et al., 2023; Neely-Barnes et al., 2023). Burns et al. (2023) found that human service employees often face insufficient benefits and have limited access to resources. Neely-Barnes et al. (2023) found that salary was a significant problem as most organizations do not receive enough funding to pay their employees decent wages. However, organizations that were able to afford to provide better benefits and salaries, retained employees more effectively. Burns et al. (2023) suggested that there may be a negative link between the amount of salary compensation employees receive, the workload they are expected to do, and the high stress they endure. Luo and Chui (2020) emphasised that there is a direct connection between low salaries and high turnover and high salaries and a reduction in turnover. However, salary alone does not account for high turnover rates; workload stress and poor job satisfaction also impact turnover (Burns et al., 2023; Luo & Chui, 2020). In contrast, flexible work schedules, a positive workplace culture, and alignment with the organization's mission help create a

supportive and meaningful work environment, even when salaries are not competitive (Slatten et al., 2021). Employees who feel they are contributing to a meaningful cause demonstrate more significant organizational commitment despite lower compensation (Slatten et al., 2021). While fair salaries and benefits are essential for reducing turnover, cultivating a purpose-driven and supportive workplace is equally critical for retaining employees in resource-constrained organizations. Low salaries and inadequate benefits impact employee dissatisfaction and contribute to employee turnover and retention concerns.

Trauma-Informed Practice Enhances Human Service Employee Retention

Adopting trauma-informed care policies and practices is essential for protecting the well-being of staff and clients in residential care settings. Trauma-informed and evidence-based approaches guide organizations in addressing children's and staff's needs by building resilience, managing distress, and reducing harm (Brend & Sprang, 2020). Implementing trauma-informed care creates safer environments, improves caregiver-youth relationships, and enhances staff well-being (Brend & Sprang, 2020; Santos et al., 2023). Training programs that focused on trauma-informed practices were shown to mitigate compassion fatigue, increase mindfulness, and promote job satisfaction, though the effectiveness of such programs varies across contexts (Benveniste et al., 2024; Santos et al., 2023). Saunders et al. (2023) reported that staff members who received trauma-informed training described feeling more prepared and fulfilled in their roles as they gained the skills and knowledge to assist trauma-affected individuals effectively. In addition to enhancing individual competencies, trauma-informed care models strengthen

team dynamics. Staff members noted improved collaboration and mutual support, which reduced burnout and emotional exhaustion (Saunders et al., 2023). Furthermore, the flexibility of trauma-informed models allowed caregivers to tailor their approaches to meet the diverse needs of service users, fostering a sense of competence and job satisfaction (Saunders et al., 2023). However, Brend and Sprang (2020) noted that organizations must ensure ongoing training and support, as the lack of trauma-informed practices can lead to burnout and high staff turnover. When trauma-informed training and practices are in place, employee satisfaction increases because of increased distress tolerance and stress management of human service workers and clients, increased resilience, and safer environments. Overall, integrating trauma-informed care at the organizational level benefits service users and supports staff by creating a more sustainable and empathetic work environment.

Positive Workplace Culture Influences Human Service Employee Satisfaction

Recognition and supportive climates improve employee satisfaction. de Guzman et al. (2020) found that supportive climates with recognition increase commitment and satisfaction and are linked to reduced employee turnover. Cantos-Egea et al. (2024) found that self-care, team support, adequate supervision, and recognition of achievements improved job satisfaction and emotional well-being. Lakshmi and Mathavan (2024) identified that a positive workplace offers good organizational support, professional development, and employee recognition. Also, human service employees who felt secure in their work reported less stress, resulting in higher satisfaction (Lakshmi & Mathavan,

2024). Supportive climates increase employee satisfaction by providing organizational support, recognition, and developmental opportunities.

Workplace cultures that are supportive, allow flexible work arrangements, and offer employees incentives improve human service employee satisfaction. Edwards et al. (2022) cited that organizations that offer incentives and have supportive work environments aid in employee retention, especially in high stress human service programs. Neely-Barnes et al. (2023) noted that organizations also identified that positive workplace culture is as way to retain employees. Further, Slatten et al. (2021) found that flexible work arrangements and a purpose-driven workplace culture are critical strategies to improve employee satisfaction for nonprofit organizations. Expanding on workplace flexibility, Judijanto et al. (2024) noted that flexible arrangements such as telecommuting or shorter work weeks are strategies used by nonprofit organizations to promote work-life balance; policies such as paid time off and wellness programs also support employee well-being. Employees who perceived a good work-life balance are more productive, motivated, and committed to their organization's mission (Judijanto et al., 2024). Organizations with high stress environments that offer incentives, flexible work arrangements, and supportive climates have increased employee satisfaction.

Workplace culture influences employee satisfaction and retention. Neely-Barnes et al. (2023) found that organizations identified positive and supportive workplace cultures as a way to retain employees. Brend and Sprang (2020) emphasized that residential child welfare programs need new approaches to staff retention to improve working conditions for employees and outcomes for children and youth. Consequently,

human service workers leave organizations due to unreasonable work expectations and a lack of concern for employee well-being (Radey & Wilke, 2023): While employees who stayed reported higher job resources, such as openness within the organization and coworker support, in a work environment where employees felt heard and able to express their concerns (Astvik et al., 2020). Positive workplace culture has a direct influence on employee satisfaction and employee retention

Training and professional development can reduce staff turnover and provide a sense of job security. Peryer et al. (2022) reported that high-quality training, especially in evidence-based practices, accompanied by ongoing supportive consultation and monitoring, can reduce staff turnover. However, training alone is insufficient and requires ongoing support mechanisms, such as fidelity monitoring and positive engagement with the training content (Peryer et al., 2022). Lakshmi and Mathavan (2024) suggested that increased feelings of job security, established through clear communication, stable employment policies, and supportive management investing in employees, significantly enhanced employee satisfaction and retention. Professional development training is a factor in reducing staff turnover because it provides employees with a sense of job security, knowing that the organization is investing in them.

Burnout prevention and employee resilience are developed in supportive work environments. Cantos-Egea et al. (2024) stated that high job demands, burnout, depersonalization, and compassion fatigue contributed to job dissatisfaction among residential care staff. However, Kind et al. (2020) found that a sense of coherence in the workplace and supported self-care mitigate the effects of stress and burnout in

challenging caregiving environments. Modlin and Magnuson (2021) found that workers who took ownership of their responses to challenges and sought solutions independently were more likely to be satisfied with their work. Combining cohesive, supportive work environments, encouragement for self-care, and human service workers who take ownership of their challenges and solutions decreased burnout and increased resilience.

Leadership Influences Human Service Employee Satisfaction

Good leadership enhances job satisfaction and improves employee retention. Park and Pierce (2020) found that transformational leaders create positive work environments by including supportive cultures and climates and paying attention to employees' needs. Park and Pierce (2020) also noted that transformational leadership impacts child welfare workers' intentions to stay or leave their jobs. When local children and family service office directors exhibited transformational leadership, child welfare workers were less likely to want to quit (Park & Pierce, 2020). Complimenting these findings, Ressang-Wildschut et al. (2023) found that transformational leadership positively impacted employee commitment, job satisfaction, and turnover reduction in residential child and youth care settings, enhancing job satisfaction and reducing turnover. When leaders pay attention to human service workers' needs and foster a supportive workplace culture by being transformative in their leadership, it improves employee satisfaction.

Transparent and aligned leadership sets the tone for employee satisfaction. Katz et al. (2022) emphasized that when organizational leadership communicated transparently and aligned with staff goals, employee retention improved, and employees were more likely to stay when leadership practices aligned with team goals and maintained

transparent communication. Katz et al. stated that participants valued open, transparent communication with agency leadership and a clear connection between the leader's vision for the agency and the goals of their specific units. Organizational leaders can influence workers' commitment and investment by setting the tone regarding workplace culture and behavior. Leadership behaviors, such as creating a shared vision, providing trust and safety, and motivating workers, were associated with improved team performance and a better organizational climate (Ressang-Wildschut et al., 2023). Positive environments with leaders who are transparent in their communication and pay attention to alignment boost workers' commitment.

Supportive leadership may improve employee satisfaction. Supportive leadership fosters engagement and reduces burnout in nonprofit organizations (Mer et al., 2024). Good leadership, especially servant and ethical leadership, fosters work engagement in nonprofit organizations by creating a supportive and engaging work environment (Mer et al., 2024). Support from higher levels of leadership was deemed essential for lower-level managers to implement effective changes (Ressang-Wildschut et al., 2023). Also, Olaniyan and Hetland (2024) suggested that team-based interventions, such as group supervision, effectively improved job satisfaction and reduced turnover. Supportive leadership may improve employee satisfaction by fostering engagement and reducing burnout.

Leadership styles may also be connected to employee satisfaction. Kelly and Herald (2020) found that transformational leadership was associated with lower burnout levels, particularly in reducing emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. Transactional

leadership, especially when combined with contingent rewards, also positively impacted reducing burnout (Kelly & Herald, 2020). However, laissez-faire leadership was consistently associated with higher levels of burnout (Kelly & Herald, 2020). Kelly and Herald (2020) noted that the relationship between leadership styles and burnout varied, depending on the organizational context and the professional roles of the staff being studied. Ressang-Wildschut et al. (2023) explained that transformational leadership enhances team performance and strengthens organizational leadership behaviors, such as creating a shared vision, providing trust and safety, and motivating workers, which were associated with improved team performance and a better organizational climate. Katz et al. (2022) claimed that leaders' commitment to ensuring quality client services influenced participants' decisions to stay in their jobs. Park and Pierce (2020) noted that workers who feel more committed to their organization are less likely to want to leave. Employee satisfaction may be influenced by leadership styles and behaviors within their organizations.

Supportive Supervision Improves Human Service Employee Satisfaction

Supportive supervision is pivotal in retaining human service workers, particularly in residential care settings. Scheduled supportive supervision that includes emotional support has been shown to positively impact retention, as supervisors often serve as primary support figures for staff (Brend & Collin-Vézina, 2022; de Guzman et al., 2020). Kothari et al. (2021) found that high quality supervision, workplace relationships that are meaningful, and access to appropriate work tools or resources are factors that enhance employee satisfaction and increase employee willingness to stay in the workplace. Burns

et al. (2023) found that human service employees who stayed in their jobs received on-the job training that was instrumental in their decisions to stay. Further, Warwick et al. (2023) found that supervisors who engage with active listening and show empathy and relational safety for human service employees can influence retention rates. Additionally, supervision practices and relationships between supervisors and employees can improve well-being and retention (Warwick et al., 2023). Supervisors and organization leadership are essential supports that can be leveraged to improve the effects of the job on human service employees (Brend & Collin-Vezina, 2022). Employee support, quality supervision, and relational safety improves human service employee satisfaction. Ensuring employees have these supports and are well supervised can improve employee retention.

Peer Support Improves Human Service Employee Satisfaction

Peer and social support are important aspects of managing workplace stress and improving retention among human service employees in residential group care settings. Peer and social support for human service employees is a factor against the impact of traumatic workplace experiences such as violence (Brend & Collin-Vezina, 2022). Liu et al. (2023) found that focusing on the support and well being of human service employees improves job satisfaction and provides effective client service delivery. Russ et al. (2020) advocated for relational-reflective practices, such as trust-building and support, to help manage stress and possible burnout, improve resilience, and encourage retention (Russ et al., 2020). Russ et al. (2020) noted that human service employees who engaged in reflective practices were more likely to stay in their jobs and that the relational-reflective

framework promotes resiliency by helping employees process the experiences of their work, develop coping strategies, and maintain emotional well-being. However, Olaniyan and Hetland (2024) found that peer support had mixed results, showing that it helped mental health but had no impact on job performance. Individual-centered interventions, such as self-care training or therapy, improved knowledge and practices related to self-care, but showed limited impact on reducing burnout (Olaniyan & Hetland, 2024). However, organizations that embed reflective and relational practice into the culture of their workplace may see improvements to employee well-being and organization morale. Peer and social support of human service employees may aid in stress management and improve employee satisfaction and retention.

Supportive Organizational Climates Improve Human Service Employee Satisfaction

When organizations are supportive of their employees by providing quality supervision, recognizing employee achievements, and caring team environments, employee satisfaction is higher. Organizations can encourage employee job satisfaction by providing supportive team environments, ensuring there is quality supervision that is supportive of the employee, and by acknowledging employee achievements (Cantos-Egea et al., 2024; de Guzman et al., 2020). Prysmakova and Lallatin (2023) found the perceived organizational support positively influences job satisfaction, employee commitment, motivation, well-being, and intent to remain in the workplace among nonprofit employees. As well, Cantos-Egea et al. (2024) noted that human service employee satisfaction in their jobs is linked to better outcomes. Moreover, Benveniste et al. (2024) found that compassion satisfaction, the positive feelings derived from helping

others, supervision, training in trauma-informed care, and strong support networks among staff were identified as protective factors that mitigated compassion fatigue. In addition, Olaniyan et al. (2020) found that workplace support and recognizing the efforts and contributions of employees influenced decisions about staying or leaving child welfare organizations. Human service organizations can enhance employee satisfaction, improve client care, and reduce turnover by supporting and recognizing the efforts and contributions of employees.

Supportive work environments and manageable job demands promote retention and well-being in human service employees. Human service employees with manageable job demands and more supportive resources had higher odds of retention (Radey & Wilke, 2023). Mer et al. (2024) noted that job resources such as leadership styles, human resource management, intrinsic rewards, and supportive relationships with supervisors and coworkers positively influences work engagement. Lizano (2021) found engagement with work is associated with greater levels of health and life satisfaction. Additionally, employees with higher levels of job satisfaction and those who practiced self-care were less likely to burnout or experience severe compassion fatigue (Benveniste et al., 2024). Supportive work environments and resources that encourage engagement improve employee well-being and satisfaction.

High quality training and supportive supervision increases human service employees' confidence. Williams et al. (2023) found that foster parents who received evidence-based training, such as trauma-informed care, reported there was greater satisfaction with their jobs and that they would be more likely to continue fostering, as

such, training is considered a motivator for retention. Similarly, good relationships with caseworkers were vital in the satisfaction and retention of foster parents (Williams et al., 2023). Zhou and Semanchin Jones (2023) suggested that human service employees' confidence in their ability to perform well in challenging situations improves when they are trained and would be more likely to decrease burnout. High quality training and emotional support may empower caregivers and human service employees to perform confidently, thus increasing their job satisfaction.

Supportive work climates and positive organizational cultures improve employee retention in high stress environments like social services and nonprofit organizations. de Guzman et al. (2020) found that recognition and supportive climates increase employee commitment and satisfaction while reducing turnover rates. Edwards et al. (2022) added that offering incentives and fostering a culture of support are particularly effective retention strategies in high pressure settings. Flexible work arrangements and a purpose driven culture further enhance retention, especially in nonprofit organizations where salaries are often lower (Slatten et al., 2021). Organizations that prioritize workplace culture as a tool for retention benefit from increased job satisfaction among human service employees, as positive cultures provide opportunities for professional development and employee recognition (Lakshmi & Mathavan, 2024); Neely-Barnes et al., 2023). Supportive work climates and positive organizational culture create environments where employees feel valued and supported, leading to increased employee commitment and reduces turnover.

Flexible work arrangements improve employees' work-life balance and can improve human service employee satisfaction. Judijanto et al. (2024) found that human service employees who had a good work-life balance reported being more productive, motivated, and committed to the organization. A balance between work and personal life improves employee satisfaction and retention rates, making it an important factor for organizations to consider (Judijanto et al., 2024). Sorn et al. (2023) also stated that factors such as job satisfaction, organizational culture, leadership, and work-life balance play a part in employee retention. However, nonprofits face challenges in implementing work-life balance initiatives due to fiscal limitations and workplace cultural resistance to change; some organizations find it difficult to find work-life balance programs that work, and others may have a culture of overworking in their organizations that represents dedication (Judijanto et al., 2024). Providing options for flexible work can create a more balanced approach for human service employees, allowing them to feel more satisfied when they are at work, which may lead to better retention overall.

A supportive work environment with manageable job demands and adequate resources improves human service employee retention rates and job satisfaction. Radey and Wilke (2023) found that 22% of human service employees left their child welfare organizations due to unreasonable work expectations and a lack of concern for employees by the employer. Resources such as effective leadership, intrinsic rewards, and relationships with coworkers influence work engagement and contribute to retention (Astvik et al., 2020; Mer et al., 2024). Employees who stayed in their jobs reported higher job resources, such as openness within the organization, support from coworkers,

and an organization that cares for employee well-being in a work environment where employees felt heard and able to express their feelings (Astvik et al., 2020). Additionally, organizational features such as job security, stable policies, and supportive management, improves satisfaction and retention (Lakshmi & Mathavan, 2024). Organizations that support employee self-care, team support, and employee recognition have less turnover and more satisfied employees (Cantos-Egea et al., 2024). By fostering supportive conditions and addressing job demands, organizations can create a sustainable and engaging workplace that benefits employee and organizational outcomes, resulting in satisfied human service employees and improved retention.

Specialized training is important for reducing staff turnover and improving job satisfaction. However, Peryer et al. (2002) noted that training alone is not enough; training must be accompanied by ongoing support by the organization, such as monitoring that the skills are being used properly and continuous engagement with the content of the training, in order to be the most effective. Williams et al. (2023) looked at how trauma-informed care training has improved confidence for foster parents. Williams et al. (2023) found that foster parents who participated in trauma-informed training felt more equipped in their jobs and were more likely to stay in their job. Additionally, motivators such as specialized training and emotional support increase job satisfaction (Williams et al., 2023). Specialized training and emotional support help human service employees feel more confident to handle complex situations. Therefore, specialized training aids in increasing employee satisfaction and retention.

Employee dissatisfaction is often the result of organizational issues. Brabson et al. (2020) found that poor organizational culture, leadership, and low salaries increased turnover. Excessive job demands, burnout, depersonalization, lack of institutional support, and compassion fatigue contributed to job dissatisfaction among residential care staff (Cantos-Egea et al., 2024). Additionally, high employee turnover, limited resources, and the complexity of introducing new routines in busy residential care programs were significant barriers to employee satisfaction (Peryer et al., 2022). Understanding these concerns is important in order to improve organizational issues that affect job satisfaction, and turnover rates.

A supportive and resilient workforce improves employee satisfaction and retention. Factors like self-care, team support, adequate supervision, and recognition of achievements improved employee satisfaction and emotional well-being (Cantos-Egea et al., 2024). An employee's ability to see life as structured, predictable, and manageable, coupled with self-care, were strongly associated with lower burnout and improve resiliency over time (Kind et al., 2020). Modlin and Magnuson (2021) found that human service employees who rely on internal values, personal goals, and high standards of self are more autonomous and use internal standard to assess their performance, deriving satisfaction from personal growth and resiliency. Additionally, Russ et al. (2020) advocated that relational-reflective practices improve resilience and retention and that relational practices such as trust building and support help employees manage stress and mitigates burnout. Implementing these approaches fosters a supportive and resilient workforce, ultimately improving employee satisfaction and retention.

Fair pay, employee recognition, workplace safety, professional growth, and advancement opportunities improves employee satisfaction and retention. Compensation plays a role in retaining employees, but it must be complemented by factors such as job satisfaction, effective leadership, and work-life balance (Sorn et al., 2023). While financial incentives are important for recruitment, they are less effective for retention on their own (Gelencser et al., 2023). Staempfli and Lamarche (20220) found that pay and safety help prevent employee dissatisfaction, and employee satisfaction is driven by motivators such as recognition, professional growth, and opportunities for advancement. A holistic approach that combines competitive compensation with intrinsic motivators and supportive organizational practices is essential for long-term human service employee retention.

Mentorship Programs Improve Human Service Employee Satisfaction

Mentorship programs can affect positive employee satisfaction. Mentorship improves the satisfaction of human service employees because it aids in building their skills and competence. Trawver and Brocious (2024) identified that participants who were involved in mentorship programs reported higher job satisfaction and increased confidence. Similarly, Radey and Wilke (2023) found that workers who were mentored reported increased job satisfaction and personal capabilities. The positive effects of mentorship that supports continued learning and growth for employees. Organizations can use mentorship to support employee satisfaction and increase employee retention is human service programs.

Mentorship helps retention within high stress human service organizations. Radey and Wilke (2023) found that 74% of human service employees who remained in child welfare had participated in mentorship programs, where only 57% of those who left the field had participated in mentorship programs. Radey and Wilke also found that mentorship programs helped to improve retention of employees by improving their skills, increasing their confidence, and helping them manage challenging situations in the workplace. Trawver and Brocious (2024) also noted that mentorship enhances skills, showing the impact mentorship has on human service employee satisfaction. Mentorship is a tool for human service employee professional development and improves retention in human service organizations.

Career Growth Opportunities Improve Human Service Employee Satisfaction

Career growth opportunities influence employee satisfaction and retention within human services. Edwards et al. (2022) found that career growth opportunities at work helped to improve employee satisfaction. Similarly, de Guzman et al. (2020) found that professional development opportunities impacted job satisfaction and employee retention. Furthermore, on-the-job training and supervisor support was linked to improved employee commitment (Burns et al., 2023). Together, these findings support career growth opportunities improving human service employee satisfaction. Career growth opportunities can enhance employee engagement and improve retention for human service organizations.

Organizational barriers due to the structure and nature of the work may prevent employee satisfaction. Brend and Collin-Vezina (2022) highlighted that the work

schedules in residential programs often prevent many employees from participating in team meetings or attending professional development opportunities. These constraints may be a barrier to career growth opportunities for human service employees, which are important for employee satisfaction and retention (Burns et al., 2023; Edwards et al., 2022). Identifying and fixing shift schedules in residential group care settings could help more employees to be able to attend career growth opportunities. Organizations could better support employee satisfaction and retention by improving these issues.

Summary

Section 1 introduced the human service problem, including the social and local problems, the purpose of the study, the research question, the nature of the study, the conceptual framework, defined terms, and the significance of the study for the community organization and the study of human services. It also included a thorough literature review of the topic. In this section, I outlined the themes identified in the literature influencing employee dissatisfaction and satisfaction. The themes influencing employee dissatisfaction include burnout, stress, high workload, case complexity, and poor compensation. The themes enhancing employee satisfaction include trauma-informed practice, supportive supervision, peer support, positive workplace culture, leadership, supportive organizational climates, mentorship programs, and career growth opportunities.

Employee retention and turnover have long been challenges in the human service sector, particularly in social work and child/youth and family services, which experience some of the highest turnover rates and poorest well-being outcomes among human

service occupations (Casey Family Foundation, 2023; Turley et al., 2021). Factors such as high workloads, organizational and government bureaucracy, rapidly changing policies, negative societal perceptions, and the emotional demands of working with severely traumatized children and families contribute significantly to workforce instability (Turley et al., 2021). Workplace factors such as stressful job conditions, high client needs, and limited funding exacerbate turnover, particularly in child welfare and out-of-home care settings (Wine et al., 2020). As well, personal factors like age, education level, job stress, and organizational factors such as size and culture influence turnover rates (Herschell et al., 2020). These challenges highlight the need to further examine personal and workplace factors to improve retention and workforce stability in the human service sector.

Residential group care organizations struggle with the high turnover of human service workers. High turnover results from employee dissatisfaction caused by significant workplace pressures, such as burnout, stress, high workloads, and case complexity, contributing to turnover among human service workers. Organizational issues, including inadequate leadership, poor organizational culture, and low compensation, increase these challenges, while supportive environments, manageable job demands, and trauma-informed practices promote retention. Leadership styles, particularly transformational and supportive leadership, play a critical role in fostering job satisfaction, reducing burnout, and enhancing commitment. Strategies to improve retention include high-quality training, mentorship programs, flexible work arrangements, and career growth opportunities. Positive organizational climates that

provide recognition, team support, and professional development also enhance employee well-being and reduce turnover. Addressing barriers to employee satisfaction and cultivating supportive workplaces are key to improving the retention and satisfaction of human service workers.

I discovered that a gap in practice existed in understanding how to retain human service workers in residential group care programs. This study is significant in understanding the factors that influence employee satisfaction in residential group care front-line practice, which can, in turn, improve the retention of human service employees. In Section 2, I discuss the project design and methodology.

Section 2: The Project

Introduction

In Section 2, I introduce the project, including the purpose statement of the study, project design, methods, and data analysis. I also provide information about the researcher's role, participant recruitment strategy, data collection, data analysis plan, and ethical considerations for data collection.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative action research study was to explore why service workers in front-line jobs choose to stay in their positions in youth-serving residential group care programs in Calgary, Alberta, Canada.

Project Design

The design of this project took the form of a white paper. White papers are commonly used to engage audiences in research and solutions related to a specific social problem. White papers are used in business, nonprofits, and government industries to identify solutions to social problems (Brichacek, 2004). A white paper is a well-researched, evidence-based, detailed report that identifies a problem within a discipline and offers a persuasive solution to stakeholders (Stelzner, 2006). White papers are often well-received by community stakeholders because they are written to solve a particular social problem they are experiencing.

My white paper promoted positive social change by examining the social problem of employee turnover faced by residential group care organizations. It used an evidence-based approach to explore the perspectives of human service practitioners in residential

care programs to look for themes that suggested what factors aid in retaining human service residential care employees. I used this information to develop a white paper that summarized the social problem, explained key points from the literature review, identified the population and sample size of my study, discussed the data collection and analysis, provided a description of the main findings, and discussed the implications for practice. The white paper is included in Appendix A.

Methods

Role of the Researcher

The role of a qualitative researcher is to collect, analyze, and report on data through narratives, observation, and insights, uncovering deep meaning in participants' experiences. Qualitative researchers are instruments in data collection; they explore human experiences by gathering data through narratives, observations, and insights (Yadav, 2022). Researchers establish trust with participants by creating a safe space where they can interact closely, uncovering deep insights into participants' experiences regarding the research topic (Brown-Saracino, 2021). Further, researchers must adhere to rigorous, systematic, and ethical data collection practices (Lim, 2024). Researchers must make sense of the data they have collected by looking for patterns and themes that offer meaning to the social problem being explored (Lim, 2024). For my study, I was responsible for establishing trust with my participants, creating a safe place for participants to speak freely about their personal experiences, upholding ethical, systematic, and rigorous data collection methods, exploring patterns and themes in the data, and reporting on my findings.

Researchers often bring experiences and preconceived ideas that can create bias when conducting research. Research bias refers to preconceived ideas that interfere with data design, collection, and analysis (Buetow & Zawaly, 2022). Factors such as the researcher's lived experiences, emotions, and expectations may bias the researcher's thinking, influencing the study's outcomes (Pyo et al., 2023). Qualitative research relies on the researcher interpreting data; as such, there is a risk of subjective influence based on the researcher's beliefs, values, and experiences (Lim, 2024). Researchers' experiences, emotions, and expectations can influence the study's outcomes; thus, researchers must be aware of their preconceived ideas.

I am a human service professional with a background in adolescent residential care programs, serving as both a direct practice practitioner and manager of residential treatment programs. I am now an educator in a child and youth care counsellor undergraduate program, and I am on the board of directors representing the professional development of human service workers (child and youth care counsellors) in Alberta, Canada. I am interested in the working conditions of human service professionals and enhancing the growing child and youth care profession. Based on my experience representing the professional development of child and youth care counsellors, I have a preconceived bias that human service professionals in child and youth care are not adequately compensated for their incredibly challenging work. My professional experience as a practitioner and a program manager has created this bias, as I know how human service workers in adolescent child and youth care programs are compensated. Therefore, I was aware of and mitigated my bias.

Mitigating bias in research occurs when the researcher is aware of their biases and ethically keeps them separate from the study by bracketing them in their reflexive research journal. Bracketing is a method whereby the researcher identifies and suspends their beliefs and preconceived notions by setting aside assumptions, allowing the researcher to engage with the data and to be reflexive while conducting the study (Thomas & Sohn, 2023). Bracketing allows the researcher to uncover their beliefs, values, and emotions that lead to assumptions and preconceived ideas (Grajzel, 2025). Biases often stem from past experiences, but new biases can arise during the course of the study and should be accounted for by ongoing reflection and self-monitoring (Grajzel, 2025). Self-monitoring should be done at the start of the study to help the researcher make ethical choices about things such as research questions, population sampling, interview or survey questions, data collection and analysis, and reporting of the data (Grajzel, 2025). Researchers engage in bracketing by recoding thought processes, methodology information, and observations in memos; having conversations with advisors and colleagues who can help uncover themes or bias; and by reflexive journaling, where researchers can explore their internal thoughts and motivation, opinions, societal issues, or conflicts (Habibullah et al., 2023). A reflexivity bracketing journal is a tool for qualitative researchers to use to identify awareness of their bias, self-disclosure, and any problems that may arise during the course of the research study (Banerjee & Dasgupta, 2024). By keeping a reflexive research bracketing journal, I mitigated my biases by identifying them at the beginning of the study and throughout the study as they came up. I began by identifying my existing bias about human service

workers' poor compensation in my research bracketing journal. As I prepared for and conducted the study, I remained reflexive about any potential bias, emotion, or feeling. I also reflected on the analysis and study results to ensure that my biases, emotions, or feelings have not impacted the outcome.

Ethical considerations in my study included providing a token of appreciation to participants for their participation. Providing research participants with a small token of appreciation is ethical in studies because it allows the researcher to show respect for the participants' time and effort, and it creates a more equitable relationship (Warnock et al., 2022). Small gifts given as a token of appreciation to study participants after they have completed their involvement have been deemed ethical and acceptable as they likely have no impact on recruitment (Różyńska, 2022). A small token of appreciation in the form of a $10.00 Tim Hortons coffee e-gift card is an ethical practice utilized in my study. Further, as I may have known potential participants interested in my research study, I did not recruit any participants with whom I have previously or currently been in a supervisory relationship. This helped mitigate any concerns regarding the coercion of participants.

Participant Recruitment and Sampling Strategy

The population and sample size influence the credibility of a research study. The population is the group that the study is focusing on, and it defines the limits and scope of the study (Hossan et al., 2023). The sample is the number of participants selected from the population included in the study (Althubaiti, 2022). The sample size determines the rigor and reliability of the study and is based on the study's objectives (Althubaiti, 2022).

The population for my study was human service workers in adolescent residential programs in Calgary, Alberta, Canada. The sample for my study consisted of human service workers who had worked in residential care programs for 1 year or more at local residential group care organizations in Calgary, Alberta, Canada. I interviewed human service workers who worked in adolescent residential care programs as the sample population.

A purposeful sampling strategy is appropriate for qualitative research. Purposeful sampling is a method where the researcher selects participants from the population based on characteristics and experiences that align with the research question (Kandi, 2022). Purposeful sampling is appropriate for qualitative evaluation because it enables the researcher to gather in-depth, meaningful insights into the problem being studied by selecting participants directly connected to the phenomenon specified in the research question (Jack & Phoenix, 2022). I used purposeful sampling to select participants by inviting human service workers who have worked in residential group care in Calgary, Alberta, for over 1 year to participate in the study if they were interested. I asked my partner organization to send a recruitment letter with my contact information to human service workers who fit my criteria within their organization, and posted the invitation to participate on social media for child and youth care human services workers in the local area.

Clear criteria are required to choose individuals to participate in qualitative research studies to ensure validity. Participant criteria are specific characteristics that individuals must meet to participate in a study, guided by the study's goals (Dahal et al.,

2024). Clear participant criteria contribute to the credibility and reliability of the study by helping researchers choose participants who can contribute to the study in a meaningful way (Yadav, 2022). The criteria for participating in my study were that participants were front-line human service workers in a residential group care setting in Calgary, Alberta, for more than 1 year. I established that participants met the criteria by asking when they applied for my study if they met the criteria. Adhering to these criteria ensured that I chose participants who could contribute their experiences to the research question, improving the credibility of my study.

The number of participants required for qualitative research studies varies by the analysis type and depends on when enough data are collected. Qualitative research data collection is less about reaching a predetermined sample size number and more about achieving a robust understanding of the research topic; however, there are some guidelines for the number of in-depth interviews required to achieve saturation (Daher, 2023). Thematic analysis can reasonably compile enough data in as few as nine interviews or four focus groups (Wutich et al., 2024). Others suggest the guideline is between 9-12 interviews (Daher, 2023). I conducted 9 interviews in my study based upon these recommendations.

Participant recruitment involves identifying individuals who meet the study's criteria and are willing to participate. A participant recruitment plan is devised to identify and engage participants in the study (Bonisteel et al., 2021). A strong recruitment plan allows the researcher to manage the recruitment process, ensuring the study includes participants who have firsthand knowledge and experiences that align with the research

topic (Dahal et al., 2024). A strong recruitment plan is essential for the success of qualitative research. I recruited participants by posting my study flyer on social media and by email. I also asked my partner organization to send their staff team the recruitment email on my behalf. See the letter of cooperation from my partner organization in Appendix C. In the recruitment social media post and email, I described the study, including the social problem, the research question, and how the research will be used. I also included the criteria for participant involvement, the time commitment of participants, and that a $10.00 gift card as a token of appreciation was included. I provided my contact information, and explained that the first 9-11 qualified participants would be chosen to participate in the study.

In qualitative research, the sample size is determined by data saturation. Saturation means no additional data or insights are identified (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). Data saturation occurs where no new information emerges from the collected data, and further data collection is unnecessary (Jennings & Yeager, 2025). Data saturation is related to sample size because saturation guides the decision regarding how many participants to interview (Jennings & Yeager, 2025). Saturation is commonly achieved in 9-17 interviews and is identified when the data repeats itself throughout two to three interviews (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). I knew that I reached data saturation when the data become repetitive and no new issues or insights were identified after at least nine interviews.

Data Collection

I used a semistructured interview protocol for my study. A semistructured interview protocol is a structured guide that qualitative researchers use to conduct interviews. The protocol includes procedures, scripts, and questions to help the researcher consistently navigate interviews (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). Crabtree and Miller (1999) introduced a framework for a semistructured interview protocol that provides a structured yet flexible method for conducting in-depth interviews, ensuring ethical considerations regarding the rights of participants. The interview protocol framework of Crabtree and Miller (1999) described several sections that researchers should follow in semi-structured interviews. These sections include an introduction that offers information about the study purpose, building rapport with the participant, obtaining consent, and describing the ethical considerations of confidentiality and voluntary participation; grand tour questions that get detailed narratives from the participant regarding broad, open-ended questions; key thematic questions that align with the research objectives and are structured but flexible; probing follow-up questions to gain deeper insight; clarification and summary of the key points, the conclusion and debriefing of the interview; and the researcher's post interview reflection (Crabtree & Miller, 1999). My semistructured interview protocol (Appendix C) aligned with the interview protocol framework of Crabtree and Miller (1999) by using the same structure. I opened by thanking the participant for agreeing to participate in my study, provided an overview of the purpose of the study, explaining that the study data are confidential, and stating that they were free to leave the study at any time as participation was voluntary. I used a guided but flexible approach to

semistructured questions, allowing for detailed, open-ended narrative answers from participants and minimizing researcher bias. I asked probing or follow-up questions to gain clarity and provided a summary of the participant's information. I concluded by thanking the participants for their time and contribution and advised them that I will send them a copy of their transcript to ensure I have captured their contribution accurately as well as an executive summary of the study. Then, I engaged in my post interview reflection, documenting my impressions, observations, and key takeaways.

I conducted an expert panel review to validate my instrument. The expert panel review consists of professionals with experience and perspectives in specialized areas (Gallo et al., 2020). The expert panel reviewers look at the interview protocol to ensure relevance, clarity, and comprehension of the questions in the study (Poll & Petru, 2023). I had an expert panel review consisting of one qualitative research expert, one content expert, and one expert with expertise in both the content and qualitative research look at the interview protocol.

Expert Panel Reviewer 1 was a qualitative research expert and said that the overall process framework was good; however, it is important to have flexibility to probe as people share, naturally and conversationally. They said that summarizing the main points of what participants said might be difficult, but as it is part of the chosen framework, to see how it works. This panel reviewer also suggested that I expand by including some follow-up questions for depth, probing participants to expand on their experience. For example, after asking about job satisfaction, include a follow-up asking for a specific example of when the participant felt highly satisfied in their role. The

second expert panel reviewer was a content expert who said they had nothing to add. They thought the interview protocol was straightforward and the questions were clear. The third expert panel reviewer was both a content and qualitative research expert. Their feedback included ensuring clarity and precision by rewording questions to elicit more specific and insightful responses. They added that there were inconsistencies in the phrasing of questions, recommending that I use uniformity in questions, such as please describe and tell me about. They suggested that I add a question asking participants to describe support systems available in their workplace, followed up with how that has impacted their experiences, as well as a final question asking if there was anything else the participant wanted to share about their experience working in residential care that they have not already. The expert panel review resulted in a more structured and precise interview protocol. The revised interview protocol ensures that data collection will be valid and aligned with the study's objectives by addressing clarity, consistency, flow, and mitigating researcher bias. These improvements strengthen the reliability of the study by enabling rich and meaningful responses that reflect employee retention in residential group care settings.

The interview protocol allowed me to collect the data to answer my research question because I was be able to collect deep, rich, narrative data that covered all of the points of the research objectives. The data was collected on a Zoom virtual meeting platform. I was the only person collecting the data. There was only one interview with participants, and I followed up by sending them the interview transcription to ensure that I accurately collected their perceptions. The interview took between 40-60 minutes. The

interview was recorded and transcribed using Zoom. Participants exited the study when the interview was finished. I thanked them for their time and participation, informed them about the coffee gift card as a token of my appreciation, and advised them that I would send them the transcription of the interview for their review as well as the final white paper. After the interview, I went through the transcription to clean up punctuation and errors in word translation and then sent the transcript to each participant for verification of accuracy.

Data Analysis

Data Analysis Plan

I used Saldana's (2021) thematic coding approach to analyze the interview data from my study. Saldana's approach to qualitative data analysis has four steps: first-cycle coding, second-cycle coding, theme development, and assertions. As the foundation of analysis, coding assigns labels to data sections representing themes, concepts, or patterns, helping the researcher move raw data into insights (Saldana, 2021). First-cycle coding breaks down qualitative data into manageable chunks using coding methods that include descriptive coding, in vivo coding, process coding, emotion coding, and values coding (Saldana, 2021). Second-cycle coding refines and synthesizes the first-cycle codes into broader themes by grouping codes together in patterns, categories, or emergent theory (Saldana, 2021). Theme analysis involves the researcher interpreting the themes to explain social phenomena, experiences, or behavior (Saldana, 2021). Assertions involve the researcher developing statements summarizing findings and relationships between themes (Saldana, 2021). Saldana's approach is structured and comprehensive, and I used

these four steps in my study. I assigned codes to the data I collected in semistructured interviews representing key themes, concepts, or patterns. I then grouped codes into broader themes, used patterns to develop themes that represented meaningful patterns explaining participants' experiences. I then summarized the findings and identified relationships between them. I will used Excel spreadsheets to organize, analyze, and interpret the data from the interviews in my study.

There were no discrepant cases in the data that were identified and addressed in the findings. Discrepant cases are outliers that do not fit the emerging patterns or themes but are important to ensure rigor and credibility in qualitative research (Coleman, 2021). Ignoring discrepant cases can lead to biased conclusions, and acknowledging them strengthens the credibility of the findings; thus, researchers must reflect on their assumptions and look at alternate explanations (Aguboshim, 2021). Coleman (2021) outlined the importance of identifying, examining, contextualizing, and incorporating discrepant cases into the findings. I did not identify any discrepant cases that need to be incorporated into my research findings.

Ethical Considerations for Data Collection

I protected my participants by obtaining institutional review board (IRB) approval before collecting data. I obtained informed consent by explaining the purpose of the study and that participants can leave the study without any negative repercussions and would still receive their token of appreciation. Tokens of appreciation were a $10.00 coffee gift card. Data was stored on my password-protected computer and only accessed by me. Only my committee members and I saw the data. Data will be ethically destroyed within

5 years of completion of the study. There was a chance that I had a pre-existing relationship with participants. However, I did not include participants I have had any power over in the past, or was in a supervisory relationship with at the time.

Summary

In Section 2, I introduced the project, the purpose statement of the study, project design, methods, and data analysis. I provided information about the researcher's role, participant recruitment strategy, data collection, data analysis plan, and ethical considerations for data collection. In Section 3, I will discuss the study's results and any discrepant cases.

Section 3: Results of the Study

Introduction

In Section 3, I present the thematic results of the study. I begin by stating the research question and then presenting the results. I explain how the identified themes align with the literature review and the conceptual framework. There were no outliers to report in this section.

Research Question

What are the frontline service workers' reasons for choosing to stay in their positions in youth-serving residential group care programs in Calgary, Alberta, Canada?

Presentation of the Results

Human Service Workers Vary in Diversity of Roles and Length of Employment

Human service workers vary in the length of time they are employed in residential service direct practice. Most of the human service workers interviewed have been employed in residential group care facilities for over 2 years. Two participants were employed between 1 and 2 years; three were employed between 2 to 5 years, and four were employed for 5 years or more. Two participants described being in the field of child and youth care before moving into direct care practice roles in residential group care. Participant 9 explained, "I've been in the field for about 18 years, and I've been in therapeutic campus-based care (TCBC) work for about 5 years. I've always had a close proximity and deep understanding of residential treatment or TCBC." Most human service workers enter residential group care when they are new to their career and stay for under 5 years. However, there are some who started in other areas of work within

their organizations before moving into residential group care. Participant 5 described working as a night staff member in a young adult program before moving to residential group care.

> I was at one of the apartment buildings, I think probably our biggest building that had 25 adults. So, they could vary in age, and most of them had been in a program before, and had I guess the word is aged out. I hate that word. But they're beyond what they're able to do in the system, that's why they're in that situation. And what I did in that location was harm reduction and also some support…I jumped in with both feet, and it was hard, and it was heavy, and within 6 months I burnt out, and that was tough. Sort of a crash and burn sort of thing. So, I'm just coming back from 3 months medical leave to group care, it's more with youth. I think it's a better fit.

The participants interviewed have been in residential group care for varying amounts of time, with a few participants transitioning to residential group care from other sectors within the field. Most of the participants were in the field for between 2 and 5 years.

The roles of human service workers in frontline residential group care vary in diversity. Human service workers are most often involved in the direct care of youth in their daily lives. Human service workers support youth by addressing their behaviors, managing emotions, assisting with complex needs, providing crisis intervention, and participating in case planning. Participant 1 described their current role as a youth counselor, explaining that "My role is a youth counselor trying to work with young people to address their behavior, emotion, their social challenges or affairs in their

activities, and how I can help them in daily life." Workers in residential group care programs support youth through their daily life events by engaging with them as they navigate through their challenges. Although there is some difference in roles based on organizations, most residential group care work is emotionally challenging, requiring skills in areas of mental health and crisis intervention. Participant 2 described their role similarly, but with a few differences.

> I support adolescents in a residential treatment setting, many of whom have experienced trauma, you know, most of the time the cases are mental health challenges, or family instability. Well, my work includes crisis intervention, developing individualized care strategies, and helping build life and coping skills in a safe, structural environment.

Workers may hold frontline positions in one program throughout their entire tenure at the organization. Or, they may have roles that require them to work in multiple programs within their organization. Participant 5 identified their role to be different in terms of where and how they work:

> I'm just upon a new role. I am a float support worker for 3 different programs, two are group homes and the other is an apartment building…Since I've been at this job, I have been a nighttime overnight support worker. So, you're awake all night. You know different things come up. But definitely, the medications [administering] are a big thing and also, I help with so much harm reduction.

The roles of human services workers in residential group care settings are similar in that they support young people with challenges in their daily lives, but diverse in terms of their work and the types of situations they encounter in their roles.

Human service workers who have been working in residential group care for more than a couple of years often move into roles of supervision or team leads within their programs. Some participants explained that, after a few years in frontline direct care roles, their roles evolved into leadership roles within their program. Some identified moving into team lead roles that supported their fellow staff members, and others said they became program supervisors. Participant 3 said,

> I started in residential group care 4 years ago. May 25, 2021 and I was frontline for about a year and a half, and I've been in a supervisor role since then. That's my current position…I try to focus more on supervising and supporting the staff, who I try to give space to do the frontline work and engage with the youth. I do a lot of modeling though. And yeah, use the skills that I've learned as frontline and throughout to engage the youth and support with the day-to-day stuff and with maybe like a bigger picture in mind of the case, the clients, and their case plans and what work needs to be done, and following up with the staff on whether we've done that work or have had certain conversations with them [youth].

Many frontline workers move through various positions in their organizations. Some who are committed to residential group care move into supervisory or leadership roles within their program. Similarly, Participant 7 also moved into a supervisor position and said

> I did frontline for many years, and now a lot of my work is around managing staff. Still, the kids and the youth in the program absolutely, but also managing the frontline team that's working the floor day to day.

Human service workers who transition into leadership roles within their program and organization often do so after spending several years as direct care frontline workers. Leadership or supervision roles vary in how much time is spent with youth and how much time is spent on other duties such as supporting other staff. Human service workers who transition through various roles often find satisfaction in the diversity of their roles. Participant 8 transitioned into a supervisory role after 3 years in a frontline residential group care role explained that they moved into a different type of role.

> My current role is I'm a level 3 counselor at a therapeutic campus-based care program. I've been in the level 3 supervisory role for about 2 years, and in total, I've been working in residential group care for 5 years. And so, in my current role, I do a lot of in program support. I do most of the staff hiring, training, just supporting in the everyday kind of role with the young people there. I do a lot of coaching of the staff through crisis scenarios. I try and have a really good relationship with the young people as well, because I find that very fulfilling. So, I make sure I make lots of time for them as well within my role.

It is common for human service workers who have stayed in residential group care for more than a couple of years to take on different roles from frontline direct practice work, supporting the youth and the program in different ways, as leaders in their programs or organizations.

Human Service Workers Enter Residential Group Care to Fulfill Purpose

Some human service workers enter residential group care work due to their personal history, whether from their own lived experiences or witnessing the experiences of people close to them. Participants described feeling that the work of residential group care aligned with their values and experiences. Participant 9 described it as an opportunity to give back by saying,

> Because of my cultural background of being Cree and Caribbean, and of course, seeing the high volumes of Indigenous populations within the system, it's a way for me to give back to my community and create a sense of capacity, building and connection and understanding for Indigenous ways of being and knowing.

Human service workers sometimes enter the field of residential group care because of a desire to give back to their cultural community. Others enter the field due to personal experiences in their past that ignite a spark to want to contribute to this work. Participant 6 expressed a direct connection to witnessing experiences of loved ones, they said, "growing up. I've witnessed personally the damages mental health deterioration has cost and not to myself, though, but to friends and close family." Personal history is often a driving factor leading people to work in residential group care. Likewise, Participant 8 described having a personal experience with a family member, "I had some personal experience with a family member with addiction, and so I initially kind of found my road to residential care through confinement programs actually." The past experiences of human service workers often motivate them to want to enter the residential group care

sector, wanting to be part of supporting young people and giving back to community, as a way to fulfill purpose.

Human service workers often enter into residential group care because of a desire to work with youth. Some participants expressed always wanting to work with youth as the reason why the entered into residential group care. Participant 2 stated,

> Well, personally, I have a strong, you know, emotions and care concerning the young clients we have. And what drew me to this work was a deep desire to support the youth, you know, who feel unseen, unheard, you know, something I related to growing up.

Some workers are drawn to residential group care because of a desire to work with youth. This desire to work with youth may be connected to their personal experiences growing up. Participant 3 said, "I knew that I'd always wanted to work with people. I thought kids and families, and really just gravitated towards the adolescent group." Workers often have an interest in helping people and find that they gravitate towards the youth demographic, particularly when the work is meaningful and aligns with their interests. Participant 7 also supported this and said, "I knew that I always wanted to work with youth more so than the younger folks." Human service workers who enter into residential group care work sometimes do so because of their interest in working with a youth population, or find that they gravitate towards the adolescent age group as fulfilling their purpose.

Other human service workers explained feeling a sense of purpose, pulling them to work in residential group care. Participants explained feeling pulled to residential

group care work by a spiritual, moral, or cultural calling. Participant 5 explained that they had a spiritual calling to the work:

> Over and over and over again. I would end up being somewhere. Oh, Amsterdam, I did a counseling school in Amsterdam, and we live just off of the red-light district, and it's sort of like, you see a theme here. It's sort of like, maybe I didn't have a plan, but I really believe God did, and so my banking [previous job] was funding me being able to be part of Youth with a Mission, and to do what I felt like I was called to and so it wasn't until several years later that I found myself. I kept going to places going I want to get involved. How can I get involved?

Youth care work is framed as a calling by some workers. Workers are drawn to the field not for external rewards, but due to purpose-driven reasons. Participant 4 described feeling a sense of purpose in the work:

> I wanted to change how youth feel about themselves, and how they can see themselves in the future, and maybe change a little bit of the community, or from different types of groups of people. That is important to me, generally helping somebody overcome that challenge, and of being a positive result at the end of the day and making some people feel good about themselves. After they have been through a lot in life.

In addition to feeling drawn to the work, some have entered the field of residential group care because of their belief systems. Participant 2 stated that "I've always believed that every good person deserves someone who believes in them." Others have described residential group care work as aligning with them morally and ethically. Participant 8

said that “morally and ethically, it’s actually the type of programming that I align most with.” Residential group care work resonates with some workers from a value-based perspective, and for others it vibrates to them through cultural perspective. Participant 9 specified that they had a cultural calling to the work:

> because of my cultural background … it’s a way for me to give back to my community …and I just love frontline work. But I also love capacity building within teams for those that do the frontline work. Because that’s really important to me, and I know that that’s what really helps support, growth and change within the system. To ensure that the outcomes for the people that we serve is being met appropriately.

Frontline human service workers often enter residential group care work to fulfill a sense of purpose in a spiritual, moral, and cultural context.

Human Service Workers are Committed to Youth and Improving Care Systems

Human service workers are influenced to stay in their position because of their commitment to the youth in the program. Participants expressed being motivated to stay because of the impact on the youth. Participant 1 said, “I love what I am doing, they [youth] need be around more,” indicating that this participant is committed to stay because of their impact on youth in the program. Most of the participants mentioned their commitment to youth in the program influencing their desire to remain in residential group care. Similarly, Participant 2 explained that “what influenced my decision to stay in this job over a year and a half is the connection I’ve built with the youth and the sense of purpose I feel every day.” Human service workers described a sense of purpose and

accomplishment when they impact youth, an intrinsic factor motivating them to stay in the work. Further, workers found that the work itself is meaningful and participants stay despite the stress of the work, because youth matter. Participant 3 who came to this line of work as a second career stated,

> Oh, well, I mean when it's on your heart for 40 years you don't just go 'Oh, that was a bad deal, I guess I'll just leave'. It's like that I signed up for this. So, you know if it's hard, then suck it up, Buttercup, you know, it's like they're doing it. They're sucking it up. Why, why, when it gets hard, are you going to just go? Oh, I quit. I'm sorry, you know. They deserve somebody that's going to push through for them.

Despite the stress of residential group care, those who stayed for more than 1 year did so because of the youth. Commitment to the youth in residential group care facilities is an influential factor motivating human service workers to stay in their positions.

Additionally, human service workers stay in their position because they are committed to improving the system of care. Most of the participants were invested in the impact the work has on young people and are committed to improving their experiences in care. Participant 3 described being motivated to stay because "I work for an agency that knows the system is broken and wants to fix it, and actively does push against that system and challenges it." The child welfare system itself is challenging and creates tension, but staying to advocate for change is important. Participants appreciate working for organizations that push back against the system in support of change. In addition to advocacy, participants identified having a strong internal commitment when it comes to

helping people. Participant 4 explained that they are motivated to stay because "I knew that someday I had to be somewhere helping a group of individuals." Participants also expressed the importance of their values aligning with not only the work that they do, but also the organizations that they work for. Participant 7 said that "this is important, and I feel like my morals and my values are in the right place. So that's what motivated me to stick around." Human service workers are motivated to stay in residential care despite systemic challenges because of their intrinsic motivation, morals and values, and their desire to be part of the work that contributes to improving the system of care.

Human Service Workers Pursue Professional Growth to Achieve Career Progress

Human service workers are motivated to remain employed in residential group care to gain experience. Participants expressed that opportunities for professional growth were important factors in their retention. Participant 2 said that "ongoing training and the opportunity to grow professionally have also kept me motivated." Human service workers want opportunities to gain skills, obtain certifications, and deepen their knowledge. Participants expressed wanting to grow professionally, reflecting a desire to be engaged in the work. There is inherent motivation to work in residential care. Some workers are interested in staying longer term; whereas, some are interested in growth to progress toward other roles. Participant 6 explained that

> I am building on myself, doing some research and writing some papers; I want to enroll in a psychologist program; getting experience to up my game; I would like more one to one contact with youth to get skills. I am not happy in this [current] position, but am looking to upgrade my skills to move on.

Professional growth and advancement are intrinsic motivators that are factors in why human service workers stay. Therefore, the opportunity for training and experience may influence the decision of human service workers to stay employed in residential care facilities for over 1 year.

Human service workers also stay employed for more than 1 year due to the opportunity for mobility and growth within the organization and the sector. Participant 7 said,

> It is a large agency, and there is a lot of growth and opportunity that could present itself over the years. So just by the sheer number of programs that the agency had, I saw myself as okay, I'm going to start here, and I could see myself really moving around and growing with the agency.

Participants expressed that they are motivated by the opportunity for change and growth within the organization they currently work at. Being offered growth opportunities and moving within the organization is of value to human service employees. Similarly, contributing to change and growth within the organization is also motivating to human service workers. Participant 9 described change and growth as motivators by saying

> Honestly, I love being able to see change and growth in any capacity, and just be being able to help build self-efficacy and autonomy within either the people I serve or within the staff that I'm supporting. Because it's a human nature field. And it's, you know, there's a lot of grey. And it's really hard work and being able to be intentional with my practice and solutions, focus, and being strength based. Is what this field needs to help continue the growth for the hard work that we do.

Human service workers are motivated by professional growth and career progression opportunities influencing their decisions to stay in their positions for over 1 year.

Human Service Workers Experience Fulfillment by Witnessing Youth Growth

Human service workers experience fulfillment by witnessing youth progress and emotional breakthroughs. Most participants expressed feeling fulfilled by seeing the growth and progression of youth in their programs. Fulfillment was described by Participant 2 who stated,

> What makes me feel most satisfied in my job at the moment is when I see real progress in a youth, you know, when they learn to regulate their emotions, take accountability, or even just start trusting adults again. And I feel fulfilled when I help them create goals during case planning, support them through a crisis without it escalating, or simply, you know, having a meaningful one on one conversation where they can open up. Even small wins, like you'd making it through a tough day without conflict. It reminds me that all the work I've been putting effort in is not actually a waste.

Seeing youth succeed creates a feeling of accomplishment and a sense of purpose. Human service workers are intrinsically motivated by relational practice and assisting youth in achieving positive outcomes. Participant 3 explained their fulfillment by saying

> I think I feel I'm like motivated by 2 different things. But when I think of the moments where I engage with the youth and get to use youth-work skills to elicit certain outcomes and get them [youth] thinking different ways by doing less talking and asking really intriguing questions. And I feel the most fulfilled. I

> would say, after a great interaction with the youth, or a challenging one that had a positive outcome. Whether it was they didn't go into crisis when we were able to talk about something, they were able to reflect in a different way, or they were able to take accountability for something, and just like to see that like internal growth, is what like fulfills me the most.

Witnessing the progress and emotional breakthroughs of youth is fulfilling to human service workers in residential group care. Human service workers feel job satisfaction and a sense of purpose when they see youth growth and progress.

Human service workers feel fulfilled when they form relational connections in the workplace. Participants explained that they were motivated by engaging with youth and fulfilled by interactions. Participant 1 said that they feel fulfilled by meaningful interactions:

> When I can solve problem, or listen to them, and. I've been able to understand the youth's perspective. That smile on your face when they leave, or. that, joy I feel. That is, it just makes me really happy. It makes me feel alive. I feel very happy at the moment.

Human service workers in residential group care are motivated by relationship with youth in their care. They feel fulfillment when they have meaningful interactions with young people that promotes positive feelings for youth. Some human service workers enjoy the connection to youth and fellow employees in the program. Participant 4 described relational connection by saying "being around different people with different backgrounds and sharing views, what they have been through in life, and what they're

achieving right now is so fun" Workers feel increased satisfaction and fulfillment when they perceive they are building meaningful relationships with youth in residential group care programs. Equally as important is engaging in meaningful relationships with peers and coworkers. Similarly, Participant 8 noted that

> I think just the relationships you can form, I think, being able to like, I say, be that person for someone in their life is a really like privileged position to hold. And so, I think that brings me a lot of satisfaction. I also think a lot of times. It's a lot of fun like the good days are high highs, I would say, like, the kids are wonderful, have a great sense of humor, and so I always like kind of frame it, that if the good days aren't making up for the bad days anymore, then it's time for me to kind of move on, but that has never been the case. Like you have 1 hour of a really great relational interaction, or just get to spend some time with a young person, and that might make up for a whole week of chaos or stress

Forming meaningful connections with youth and colleagues creates fulfillment. Human service workers who develop meaningful relationships feel satisfaction in the job and a sense of purpose.

Human Service Workers Experience Satisfaction when Improving Professionally

Human service workers are satisfied in their job when they experience professional growth and mastery in their roles. Participant 3 noted that

> I really noticed a huge shift, especially after the first year of doing this work, and it was also around that time where I myself was then a little more cognitively developed. And so, I was able to really understand things like boundaries which I

> had never really learned before, and how I can have boundaries, and what that looks like, and how I can put that into practice, how I can communicate with people, and how I can listen to people.

Human service workers often spend the first year in residential group care direct practice learning. There is a progression in their growth as practitioners where they develop cognitively and improve their skills. However, growth continues after the first year and when workers have a pathway to grow, they are more likely to stay in their roles. Participant 4 said that

> I am somewhere that I wanted to be at a point in my life and growing. I think I'm still growing. Little by little. We have been offered career guidance for the employees and also for the youths that are in the program, which is very beneficial for both of us.

As well as pathways and guidance towards career growth, human service workers are motivated by on-the-job training and development. Participant 5 explained opportunities for on-the-job professional growth by saying

> Well, I mean, I just went from you know, one program that wasn't quite the right fit for me to this opportunity. And I'm in 3 different programs now. And so, I'm looking forward to see seeing what that's going to be and I've been told that you know, I can work my way into being a case worker. Which I would really like to do. It's kind of on-the-job training.

Opportunities for professional development and mastery are often presented to human service workers in residential group care. Human service workers who experience the

opportunity to grow as a professional and learn on the job are more satisfied and feel a sense of purpose.

In addition, human service workers feel increased satisfaction and purpose when they take part in staff training and development that improves impact. Participant 7 noted that

> I think now, in more of a coordinator role, my satisfaction has shifted. Not that the youth aren't the main focus. They absolutely always are. But I see success, I feel successful, or I feel satisfied with my work when my staff are doing what they should be doing; so, t's a little bit more removed. But obviously the trickle-down effect is still there. If the staff team is well trained and they're satisfied, and they're doing what they should be doing, that's going to improve the quality of care for the young people. So, I think now that I'm in the position I'm in, that brings me more satisfaction, seeing success within my staff team because then that trickles down to the kiddos who are in the program.

Human service workers are motivated by continuous learning and professional development training. Workers feel satisfaction when organizations invest in skill development and training that increase workers skills, confidence, and competence. Supporting this, Participant 9 described their satisfaction supporting their staff team development by

> being able to see the staff's increase in confidence in the work that they're doing and being able to, you know, live in the gray critically, think, and you know, just

> do really good work. While building on their careers, I think, is the biggest thing. That kind of keeps me, going.

Staff development and training supports positive team impact and subsequently impacts the system and youth in the program. Human service workers who experience professional growth through skill development that improves impact of staff teams and systems feel satisfied and a sense of purpose in their job.

Human Service Workers Rely on Supports to Maintain Engaged in Their Role

Human service workers who receive consistent supervisor support and recognition maintain engaged in their role. Participants who received relational supports from their supervisors reported feeling more engaged in their position in residential group care. Participant 1 described that

> Yeah, of course, there have been some organizational support, financially and through check ins once in a while to see how we're doing on. All of this means that our services are being valued, and. there are people that really want the best [for us]. So, all those factors help out as well. Whenever we talk, I feel alive, no matter the challenges, though. They talk to us to motivate us, tell us why we are needed, tell us why we are appreciated, tell us if we are not there it wouldn't be the same and motivate our service. They say good things about what we have done, appreciating our efforts. Those praises by supervisors really help us to remain in the work.

Supportive supervision is a key factor in human service workers feeling satisfied. When supervisors provide consistent motivating supportive guidance, employees feel more engaged and supported in their job. Participant 5 explained that

> I have an amazing supervisor, and seriously, she is not afraid to disclose her own journey. She really is incredible and she really encourages self-care. is so big and boy. do I know it now, more than ever. I mean, I knew it before. But, boy, I didn't realize what a slippery slope it could be. So, I think that's really important. And the more management is open with you [about your practice]. [Asking] do you realize what you're doing.? And do you realize where you should be going? Because, yeah, I mean, I'm working with other staff members that are anywhere from 20 to my age and they don't know. I mean, I thought I knew, and yet there I was, crashing and burning right. People don't know where the lines are. And I think that's really important for management to just go. Okay, let's check out these lines, and maybe, you know, maybe tweak things a little bit, and what is really helpful for you.

Human services workers require guidance from supervisors in how to manage the difficulties and challenges of working in residential group care. Organizations that intentionally support and implement regular employee supervision improve the stability of workers. However, Participant 7 noted a different experience as a frontline practitioner in their organization:

> Supervision, I would say, that's something that the agency in general holds as very important, however, holding that value on paper versus actually

> implementing it are two different things, so I can say in my time as a frontline staff. I didn't have as much supervision, sit down supervision check-ins, with my supervisors as I would have liked. So now, in my role, I'm trying to make that a priority and checking in with my staff more often because I experienced the other side of it as a frontline staff.

Frontline human service practitioners appreciate having supervisors who care and make the time for regular supportive check-ins. Human service workers stay engaged in their role when they receive regular supportive supervision and recognition for their work.

Human service workers are engaged in their role when they experience a positive team culture and collegial environment. Participant 2 said that what supported them was "this wrap around supervision aspect of the team support. Yes, actually, consistent supervision and team support within my agency has actually played a big role in helping me stay in this position." Peer-to-peer support, team cohesion, and caring leadership teams support human service practitioners in their role, thus improving their satisfaction and experiences. Participant 3 supported the importance of a positive team by saying

> My leadership team, I think, really understands me and my motivations and certain things that will fill my cup, and then will give me different projects that help them because they get certain things done. And so, being in an environment where people are curious, being in an environment where it's about learning and growth [helps me stay]. I've been able to take certain risks or make certain decisions and feel comfortable that I will be like trusted in that decision, or I will learn from it, and that'll be like a safe and comfortable experience. So that has

> also been really great. And then just the amount of, I think, like appreciation and value that I experience from my team members is also really great, even just a few days ago I got a really warm email from my manager, who was just reflecting on how much she appreciates me, and one of my colleagues who we both work under her.

Collaborative teams may improve the experiences and satisfaction of human service workers. Multidisciplinary teams help works not feel alone and provide a broader perspective because of varying skill sets. Participant 8 said that

> I like that we have people from different lenses. We have a pretty big multidisciplinary team. So, I feel like we have a bunch of people that may bring different lenses, but we all have the same shared end goal. I think it just allows us to be collaborative. You know you can swap out. I never feel like I have to do anything alone. I always feel like I have a person that is either supporting me or is behind me to support what I'm doing. I feel like I have a big team I can turn to, and I have a lot of people to, you know, debrief things, I never feel necessarily like I'm alone in something.

Further, a collaborative and supportive team culture helps workers to feel competent and confident, increasing their developmental growth as a practitioner and improving their job satisfaction. Participant 9 described team culture and collaboration by saying, "It's so important, capacity building and having a supportive collaborative solution focused, strength-based leadership [team] is so important to maintain self-efficacy within this field. I think it's really a huge value of mine in the work that I do." A supportive team

and collaborative environment help human service workers stay engaged in their work. Human service workers stay in their role when they feel supported by their team and workplace culture.

Human service workers remain engaged in their role and are more likely to stay when they receive adequate compensation and incentives. Participant 2 explained that incentives like workshops and webinars help by saying, “we also have access to mental health resources and ongoing training provided through partnership with local organizations, which helps me grow professionally and feel more confident in my role.” Workers feel supported by their organizations when they have access to mental health supports to help them cope with the challenges and stress that the job brings. Participant 4 said that

> there are some days that I face challenges, and I have to seek guidance and speak to somebody like a therapist. So, I have had an opportunity some days to speak to the therapist we use in the in the program which was so helpful we have given. We are given room to seek help wherever we want, and they are so welcoming, and they are ready to help anybody anytime.

In addition to mental health supports, participants expressed their satisfaction with good benefit packages. Workers feel supported when there are benefits available to them right away that support their well-being. Participant 5 stated that

> So, one of the very first things I noticed when I came to the organization, and to me it was just a sign that I was in the right place, is that benefits had no waiting period. If you’re working for them, they are going to show you that they want

> you. Right now, day one benefits, you know, and I thought. that's really impressive. I don't know any other places that do that, usually there's a waiting period, you know, usually 3 months. To me, that was a really good indication that okay, they're serious.

Supportive practices such as financial bonuses and incentives outside of regular pay also increase the satisfaction of human service workers. Participant 6 explained that supports that helped them stay in their role included "bonuses, allowances, and a range of all those things but generally my, my organization are always generous with, you know, bonuses and you know, over time, honorarium and all that." When supportive structures are strong, staff stability improves. Human service workers who receive wellness resources and incentives maintain engaged in their role and stay in residential group care longer.

Human Service Workers Resist Leaving by Connecting to People and the Work

Human service workers resisted leaving the job because of their connection to the people, the youth and staff team. Participant 3 stated,

> I just I feel like I have impact where I am. And, I recognize that like the kids here and the workers that want to do this work, all need support. I'm fulfilled being in a position where I can have impact on the youth that are in a really sucky place, and the adults that want to put themselves out there to do the work that is challenging.

Human service workers feel a sense of validation through strong youth and peer connections where they feel they make an impact. Participant 7 described a relational supervisor as reason to stay:

> So, I guess in that moment what made me stay was having a supervisor that seemed like she valued me as an employee, and found kind of an alternative in order for me to stay she could have just been like, well, if this schedule doesn't work for you, sayonara, and you can apply back when the schedule does work. But she found a way to make it work for both of us.

Supportive supervisors, teams, and management who help find solutions make workers feel that they are valued. Meaningful connection to teams helps to buffer the challenges workers experience working in frontline residential group care roles. Participant 8 explained that

> Yes, I've considered leaving for sure. You have those days where you're like I'm done with this. What made me decide to stay, I think, having a really supportive team. So, I think within my like senior, like management team, feeling very supported to, you know, vent it out, rant, and like feel like people have my back in the decisions I make and just honestly, the kids like I think I don't know about other people, but I find them hard not to like and care about. So, I think what makes me stay is them, and kind of being able to see it through. I know the impact turnover can have on them, and so, just being able to stick by their side, even if it has been a rough day, or maybe they haven't been the kindest you to come back the next day and be like, let's try again. So yeah, I think, the kids bring me back to it.

The connection to people, both youth and colleagues are important to human service workers in residential group care. Human service workers are motivated to stay in their role, instead of leaving, because of their connection to the youth and the staff team.

Some human service workers resist leaving residential group care because of their loyalty to the work. Participant 2 stated that

> Well, I see this role that I'm currently in as a very crucial role, because I would say I enjoy it because, you know, day by day, I see people that I've actually helped. So, I most of the time, I imagine myself like, I know, not currently in the role. I feel this will actually bring a very big gap, because with me not being in my position or role to offer help and assistance, I believe my community or society where I find myself is going to actually, you know lack the professionalism, which I actually offer.

Many workers stay in residential group care because they feel personally connected to the meaning of the work. They feel needed, have a sense of purpose, and are committed to this type of work. Participant 3 explained that they decide to stay in the job because

> When I say I considered leaving, it would be a very lateral shift where I'd want to do similar work elsewhere, or like advance in my career. But again, doing very similar work. And, I don't. I just I feel like I I have impact where I am.

Some human service workers are satisfied with the residential group care setting, and they stay in this work because of the opportunity to influence change for the youth in the program. Participant 9 noted that

> I love the 24 hour [group care] setting, it needs more collaboration connection, and like strength-based leadership and opportunities to show a growth mindset, to continue to grow and evolve to better support the youth that we serve, instead of just kind of being stuck in this is the ways that we've always done things. So that's honestly what keeps me around and specifically around the cultural needs for the youth that we serve.

Participants enjoy supporting youth in a 24-hour group care setting and find it impactful. Human service workers in residential group care settings stay in their roles because of their loyalty and dedication to the importance of the work and the impact it has on youth.

Human Service Workers Develop Resilience to Manage the Demands of the Work

Human service workers develop resilience to manage the demands of residential group care through emotional grit and self-regulation. Participants described having personal qualities that support resilience. Participant 2 stated that

> I do try to keep my head straight, you know, focus on the purpose, the personal qualities that help me manage the emotional toll of this job, you know, patience, because, you know, we meet different kinds of individuals who have different preferences, pertaining to how they tend to respond to you, your character, the situation they are facing, the frustration, and the emotional damage. I try to also have empathy and emotional resilience. I've actually learned to stay calm under pressure, you know, to not take things personally, and to set healthy boundaries, so I can show up fully without burning out.

Resilience and grit are personal qualities that workers often have that help them to cope with the aspects of residential group care work. Having empathy and understanding of trauma and development helps workers manage the demands of the work. Participant 3 supported this by saying

> I would say, [having] resilience and grit. Absolutely. And I think, really having a deep understanding of trauma, and how that affects the brain and development, and how that shows up as pain-based behaviors, how your own energy and tone and approach can all make a situation better make a situation worse. But just having that understanding, it's a lot easier to separate yourself and not take things personally.

The energy and tone in which workers approach their work is also important. Some human service workers believe that humor is important in managing the demands of the job. Participant 8 stated that

> Oh, I think a lot of humor. I think that's a pretty common answer, but a lot of humor. I think, just like a really high level of empathy, but not in the way of like even with the kids. But I think with everyone, because I think it's really easy to be critical of everyone in this field because it is so high stress. So, whether it's other services. Other, staff members, newer people to the field. Children's services, or Recovery Alberta; I think just empathy, that everyone is trying kind of the mindset I always approach is everyone is doing the best they have the best they can with what they have in that moment, and even when I maybe don't fully believe that I really have to go back to that, because, if not, I'd be a very bitter

> individual. So just kind of assuming people are doing the best with what they have.

Frontline human service workers in residential group care develop emotional discipline and boundaries to sustain their work. Human service workers have emotional grit and self-regulation as personal qualities that help them to manage the demands of the work.

Human service workers develop resilience to manage the demands of residential group care through self-care and wellness practices. Participant 2 stated,

> I do hit the gym, you know, just to have a refresh of myself, in order to make sure that I'm not, burned out, and then I keep my health. I do maintain my adequate medical check-up, and as well, I do try to meditate in order to keep myself calm, and also, I do have a lot of time to relax, and also to calm myself.

Self-care and wellness are practiced by most human service workers as a way to cope with the demands of the job. Wellness practices are diverse based on the interests of workers including physical and creative activities. Participant 3 supported this by saying

> Self-care. I try to leave work at work as much as possible. But it's a very emotional and cognitive job. So, it's hard to completely walk away from that. But some things that I've implemented is audio books. That is something that is very meditative for me, because as soon as I get in my car I put on the audiobook because my mind is going to start to wander and think about things. But then, if I actually want to pay attention [to the audiobook], I have to remind myself to be present, and that really helps me to transition out of work, just needing like come back like out of your mind. Come back to reality, come back to the present. I go

> to the gym, I do combat sports, and therapy. I try to do all those things on a regular basis. My perception of self-care is that it's a proactive and a practice. So, you have to actively, proactively, regularly practice it, so that when I am in distress, I know how to take care of myself and to handle that.

Workers who practice self-care strategies on an ongoing and consistent basis find it helpful to better manage distress in the moment. Some find that having regular rituals after work help them to shut off their brain from work, allowing them to have separation between work and home life. Participant 7 explained that

> I think spending time with family. Usually on my way home from work like right after a shift, I need either blasting music or to put on a podcast, and it's a bit of a 20 min to half an hour, kind of dissociate from my day on my way home that gives my brain time to just kind of think about something else. In the summer I do a lot of camping and being outdoors and just trying to shut off my brain from the work. Having interests that are outside of work. So not just coming home after a hard day and thinking about everything that happened, but whether it's going for a walk or doing something with my kids, or going to a concert like finding things that will take your mind off of work, having other things in your life to put your focus on.

Developing resilience to manage the demands of the work also involves self-reflective practice. Workers who reflect on their own healing journey, pay attention to their self-care, and maintain their professional development improve their resilience and ability to cope with the demands of residential group care. Participant 9 noted that

> You have to do the work for yourself. Everybody's on either a healing journey or an unlearning or understanding privilege journey, and if you're not doing that, you can't really be effective in this line of work, because then that's where your values can come to work, or your kind of working through your stuff while you're working with these vulnerable people. And so, the biggest thing that I kind of hang my hat on is doing that inner work, and that healing work, and like having really good, like self-care and coaching, and expanding my education, my knowledge, and getting certificates. Ceremonially, I go to sweat lodges once a month. I do have elders that I connect with, and time on the land is a really big part of my practice as well for my self-care.

Maintaining physical and emotional health through consistent self-care and wellness practices support worker longevity. Human service workers in residential group care manage the demands of the job by building resilience by using coping strategies of consistent self-care and wellness practices.

Human service workers build resilience by having positive support systems and connection to community. Participant 2 explained that "I lean on self-reflection and team support, and reminding myself that every small progress means I'm making a difference." Further, to self-reflection and team support, some workers rely on family and loved ones as their support systems to help them cope with the job. Participant 7 explained that

> I think my support system is very helpful. My husband, over the years, has heard me complain about work and talk positively about work; and talk about the wins and the little things and he is supportive in those conversations. So, I think that's a

> big piece of being able to come home from a hard shift and talk about it for 20 minutes, get it off your chest, and then move on and be able to go on about your day.

Some human service workers find that having support systems made up of peers who work in the same, or similar, field is helpful. Peers who understand the demands of the job can be helpful for coping and improving resilience. Participant 8 noted that "sometimes talking it out with a friend, if I have some friends in similar professions, you know, talking to them about it, or talking with my colleagues about things" is helpful. Additionally, being part of an organized community of practice is helpful for some workers. Participant 9 explained that "being a part of community of practice and honestly increasing collaboration is a really big thing. I have my people that I call and connect with and communicate with." Receiving relational support from peers, family, and community contributes to worker's resilience. Human service workers build resilience to manage the demands of the work by connecting with support systems and community.

Some human service workers develop their resilience by engaging in meaning-making, growth, and spiritual grounding. Participant 4 explained growth by goal setting by saying,

> Oh, setting goals; setting a goal that in a period of time I have to achieve. A goal would be if I have a goal for the group, or even individuals, that I am currently helping, and at the end that period I have to achieve them. And if I am not achieving them, and you look at areas where I backslide, or where I didn't do well. What happened? Is it something that needs guidance or seeking help from

> somebody else, or a more experienced professional domain. Then I go for that and try to solve the problem and make sure that it doesn't repeat itself again.

Human service workers find satisfaction in overcoming challenges and building their resilience through achievement and problem solving. Others find that taking care of the spiritual needs is what helps them develop resilience to manage the job demands. Participant 5 noted their methods of resilience by saying,

> I need to make sure that I'm talking care of my relationship with God, so that you know there's no feedback from anywhere there. And, that I'm involved in something positive, whether or not that has to do with work. It is imperative to just feel productive, and I need to exercise, those 3 things are my lifeline.

Emotional and physical needs are elements that workers need to pay attention to manage the demands of the work. Some workers also find it helpful to journal as a coping mechanism. Participant 6 discussed journaling as a method they use:

> I love journaling so. Whenever the job is actually making me feel should I say depressed, I just get my diary or my journal, whichever one is close. just pick up this fine idea for my mind and start writing about it. It really helps me a lot. It distracts my mind completely from whatever be the issue at hand, and my attention will be focused on the story and writing, and if I can do drills for a couple of minutes, and I'll just be okay.

Connecting to community through culture and spiritual grounding improves resilience and the ability to manage the demands of the work. Cultural connection helps workers engage in practices of well-being that build resilience through a higher purpose.

Participant 9 described coping with the demands of the job by grounding to spirituality and culture by saying,

> The biggest thing that I kind of hang my hat on is doing that inner work, and that healing work, I go to sweat lodges once a month, I do have elders that I connect with; time on the land, … I smudge daily with my son.

Spiritual grounding and a sense of purpose empower workers to persist in residential group care. Human service workers use meaning-making, growth, and spiritual grounding as way to build resilience strategies to manage the demands of the work.

Human Service Workers Suggest Improvements to Increase Retention

Human service workers in residential group care suggested that improved compensation and access to earned time off would help them continue in their role long-term. Participant 2 explained that

> I would say to support long-term commitment my organization could actually, keep up with the standard of living, invest in staff wellness, offer mental health days, access to counseling, and more consistent debriefing after tough incidents. Organize career development opportunities or workshops, like training for leadership roles or specialized [roles], you know, [professional] certification would also help me to see a future here, and then feeling valued and supported and having room to grow are the keys to staying long term in such demanding but meaningful field.

Workers suggested that improving compensation, mental health support, and access to benefits would give them more motivation to stay in residential group care long term.

Also, intentional supporting and guiding self-care practice of workers by supervisors would be beneficial. Participant 5 said,

> Well, definitely, an increase in pay would go a long, long way. I think checking in with your staff has to be more intentional. It's like. You know. Let's not just talk about the pink elephant in the room. The pink elephant is self-care. Let's go. Okay. What are you doing? What are you not doing? How do we help you? So, for me, I guess that would mean maybe some help towards my fitness, like a staff pass. That would be huge you know.

Most workers suggested that organizations should pay more attention to the work life balance of employees to encourage long-term retention. Participant 6 added that

> One other thing to make sure that as I am kept for a longer time in my role is to encourage a work-life balance. This would actually help the mental health of workers, because like my last supervisor who was expecting me to walk around the clock even giving me extra work, even working extra shifts and I wasn't paid for the extra. So, that was so frustrating. So, I think they should encourage work life balancing. Workers should have the option of being able to go for vacations, and to take leaves to spend time with family and friends, you know just to make sure that you're able to look after yourself while you're working and you're not actually going crazy in the job.

Workers suggested that, in addition to improved compensation, employees should be able to access their earned time off, promoting work life balance, self-care, and well-being. Participant 7 explained that

> We have a lot of personal day, sick days, and vacation days. But staff don't always feel like they're able to take those. So, finding a way as an agency to make that a priority that they don't have to feel like guilty for asking for time off, or they don't have to feel like they're not allowed to use their sick days because they're not reliable. I feel like there's an overarching feeling around that. For myself, I have a bajillion sick day, but I feel guilty taking them. I think I'm not the only one in the agency that feels that way. So somehow shifting that mindset that you're still reliable, you can still be accountable. These days are there for a reason, and you should be able to take them. I think money is a big one, just being able to pay staff more. Then I think that would help some of the other problems that come along with it. Like how I was saying a lot of the majority of my staff team work 2 jobs. So, if they were able to be paid enough to only work. One job, I think that would decrease staff, burnout and stress and staff turnover rate immensely.

Workers expressed that increased salaries will improve worker retention long term. Decent pay would help workers to feel more stable and less inclined to leave for better paying work. Participant 8 supported this by saying

> I think a big one is pay. I think pay is usually what drives people away. I know it's a factor for me. Like we've had salary increases (a decent one), but even with that, it's like, oh, well, we're just under what I think we should be making, so I think increase in pay is huge.

Participants felt that increased salary compensation and being able to take their earned time off would go a long way toward retention. Human service workers suggested that improving compensation and access to using their allotted time off without guilt will increase retention and help them continue for a long time.

Human service workers suggested that increasing the number of skilled staff would help them continue in their role long-term. Participant 1 said, “I guess more manpower. Sometimes a workload is stressful and manpower is quite low. I guess more manpower will really help and it will really go a long way, because it will reduce the stress.” Most of the participants said that an increase in residential care workers would improve their satisfaction in residential group care. In particular, it is important to hire enough workers so that there is always enough staff to resident ratio. Participant 3 supported this by saying retention would improve “if there was a magic wand and we were able to bring up our staffing structure to like 2 staff on at a time.” However, increasing residential care workers also means ensuring that they are skilled and knowledgeable about residential group care Participant 6 suggested improving staff retention by investing in staff development by saying “I think if they could invest more in staff, and professional development and skill development of professional staff.” Human service workers would like to work alongside trained and competent peers, and see training as ongoing. Training while on the job is important, as it provides development as real life situations occur. This was supported by Participant 7 who stated,

> I think working on being able to train staff better would be a priority of mine. So being able to have an extra staff member on the floor every single day in a

> training role. So, every time we have new staff coming in, it's not like shove all this new information down their throat and then throw them to the wolves, and hope they figure it out. They could have a 2-week, 3 week, or 4-week training period where they have a trainer assigned to them, and they're on the floor with that person. I think that would also cut down on staff turnover and burnout rate, because staff would feel more competent and confident in their role.

Investing in more staff to have adequate ratio and investing in training new staff would help keep frontline human service workers in residential group care settings. Human service workers suggested that organizations increase their skilled staff ratio and provide training to encourage long-term commitment to the role and increase retention

Human service workers suggested that systemic changes would help them remain in their job long-term. Participant 3 explained that

> I think it would be great if one day group homes didn't exist, but being with an agency where we understand the reality is that this is the system that we are in in Alberta That's the kind of agency that I want to work for.

Systemic issues are most often out of the control of organizations. However, workers think that they would be able to stay in residential group care longer if there were systemic changes. Some workers feel improved job satisfaction when they work for organizations that push back against the external system to evoke change. Participant 4 discussed growth in the system of residential group care by suggesting that organizations "provide room for growth, like offering training, career opportunity trainings, to advancing knowledge and skills. And having a conducive work environment for me. I

think that's going to make me stay for a long time." When workers are provided opportunity for change and growth in their organizations, it creates a more tolerable work environment, influencing the likelihood they will stay longer. However, often dissatisfaction is due to issues outside of the organization. As Participant 8 stated that the system is often the problem, not the organization:

> I think a lot of the burnout I find, or just like what pushes people away is that systemic piece so not necessarily our organization. But how other organizations respond? So, I think that's a tough one. I guess that's not what my organization could do. So, I think that's actually what I find more wary is that we do all of the background work. But we have the least amount of, say, when it comes to the big picture with these kids.

Improving the system outside of the organization is challenging. However, workers thought that improving new employee orientation, interagency collaboration, diversity training, and leadership responsiveness reflect a desire for organization support. Participant 9 explained how the system could be challenged to improve them continue in their role long term by saying

> The biggest thing is [showing] continued growth, mindset and change; like unpacking and understanding, or unlearning, privilege in order to better serve the Indigenous communities that are a part of our population is really important. I know in the past, with certain systems, things can become more of a checkbox as opposed to true intentionality. And so, I always strive to communicate about communication collaboration, really putting in the work, and being able to

> challenge either executive or like senior leadership in like unpacking some of those pieces, but in a safe way, so that we can sit in discomfort, but move together in a good way. That starts with conversations, group coaching like really, really unpacking and looking at why we do the things that we do. And what could we change to be more intentional with our practice when it comes to the diverse communities that we serve.

Participants acknowledged that not all systemic change is within the capacity of organizations to change. However, organizations that advocate for and engage in change making activities improve the likelihood that staff will stay long-term. Human service workers suggested that systemic changes would help to increase long-term retention in residential group care.

Human Service Workers Alignment to Residential Group Care Work

Human service workers often align through values -driven commitment to the work. Participant 1 explained that

> My experience has really been lovely, because I love what I'm doing. I'm passionate about it, and I want to be here. I want to be able to meet the youth's needs. What has kept me going is that I'm passionate about it. I love it, so anyone that wants to venture into it should be serious and passionate about it, because the stress is much. But when you have that passion, you see the joys.

Human service workers described feeling connected to the work and the youth they serve. They discussed what helped them stay committed to the role and what they would

recommend to new residential care workers to increase satisfaction and longevity in the work. Participant 2 said that

> Progress actually takes time. Every small step matters, you know, build trust slowly, listen more than you speak, and then don't take things personally. Use your team for support, take care of your own mental health, and also remember you should, when you remember why you started this job, you know, normally, most of the time unforeseen circumstances can occur, so you should actually have it in mind that it can be tough, but the impact you make will always last for a life time.

Participants highlighted moments of personal and professional alignment in the work. They reflected on what has helped them remain committed in work that is emotionally challenging. Participant 3 stated that

> Really like putting into practice what we learn and know about trauma, pain-based behaviors and like removing yourself like, it's not about you. It's about them, and really showing up for them…We're guided to do and take initiative and be like proactive in doing the work, and the work is with the youth.

Participants described passion, lifelong impact, and showing up for youth as values that influence their commitment to the work. Human service workers have values that contribute to their commitment to staying in residential group care.

Human service workers align with organizational culture as reasons to stay committed to their role in residential group care. Participant 5 described this by saying "In just so many ways where I am now is so much better, and I am so much happier."

Workers described alignment with organizational values and culture as essential for sustainable frontline work in residential group care. When workers' personal philosophies align with the principles and actions of care within an organization, their job satisfaction increases. Participant 8 said that

> What keeps me here is having a really supportive team and working somewhere that aligns with my morals. Also, we have, like the staff parties and things like that. But that's never been something that's like super impactful for me. I think what makes me feel appreciated is opportunities for growth. I think some people don't want to feel stagnant. So, whether it's opportunities to take on new things within a program or to contribute to the agency in different ways. My agency does a good job of this. You can be a trainer for something, or you can join committees and give back in different ways. And it's not free like you do it on work time. I think that makes people feel appreciated getting time to do other things. They're passionate about that impact for you and like, you know, good benefits and holidays packages. But I think my agency is really good.

Human service workers are more likely to commit long term when their own ethical stance aligns with the policies and practices of the organization. Participants described feeling satisfied when they felt aligned with the organizations standards of practice and values. Participant 9 described alignment with their organization by saying

> Honestly, standards of practice, I think, are so huge, and I think for training, because I've worked at a couple of different agencies that are fairly big, and seeing how different agencies run, their values, and some of their standards of

> practice and the way that their training is. My agency now, for sure is top tier for that. But then there are other agencies I have worked at that have a more collaborative community. Kind of like team culture. And so, it would be really nice to see a blend and more collaboration amongst nonprofits, because we're all doing the same work. And so, that is honestly the big reason why I stay in the field, because I just want to like break down the competition, and, like all of us come together and share knowledge, share space, share hard times, share, like, you know, ways of changing things, blends of western and Indigenous ways of being and knowing so that we can truly support all of the populations that we serve, but also specifically the Indigenous communities the best, so that we can actually lower the number of Indigenous kids and families that are a part of this pretty big system. And like, gain some empowerment and like self-efficacy and some autonomy and some confidence and just taking ownership of our lives.

Participants identified alignment with their organization through fit of placement, morals and opportunities, standards of practice and team culture as reasons for staying in the work. Human service workers remain committed to residential group care because of alignment with their organization or agency culture.

Summary

In this section, I presented the thematic results of the study and explained how the identified themes align with the literature review and the conceptual framework. The main themes of the study introduced were human service workers diversity of roles and length of employment, human service workers enter residential group care to fulfill

purpose, human service workers are committed to youth and improving care systems, human service workers pursue professional growth to achieve career progress, human service workers experience fulfillment by witnessing youth growth, human service workers experience satisfaction when improving professionally, human service workers rely on supports to maintain engaged in their role, human service workers resist leaving by connecting to people and the work, human service workers develop resilience to manage the demands of the work, human service workers suggest improvements to increase retention, and human service workers alignment to residential group care work.

I discovered that human service workers in residential group care remain in their positions when their personal values align with the mission and practices of the organization, when they have access to supportive relationships with supervisors and leadership, and when organizational structures address the realities and challenges of the work. Passion for the work, a sense of purpose, and commitment to making a difference fostered resilience and long-term engagement in human service workers. Supportive supervision, peer relationships, and opportunities for professional growth strengthened their connection to the work and alleviated the impact of job stress. Additionally, organizational practices that prioritized adequate staffing, manageable workloads, safety, and employee recognition created an environment where workers felt valued and competent to meet the demands of the job. These factors highlighted the connection between individual motivation, relational support, and systemic conditions in sustaining human service worker retention in residential group care.

In Section 4, I will discuss, reflections of self and reflections of scholar practitioner, as well as recommendations.

Section 4: Conclusion and Reflections

Introduction

In Section 4, I reflect on how I have changed as an individual and as a scholar-practitioner throughout my doctoral journey. I examine the barriers and challenges I encountered during my journey and how I overcame those challenges. I also present the recommendations I have identified to assist in the retention of frontline human service workers in residential group care programs in Calgary, Alberta, Canada. These reflections highlight how the doctoral journey has shaped my leadership, advocacy, and commitment to transformative change in the human services sector.

Reflection of Self

The doctoral journey has taken me 4 years to complete, marked by challenges and personal growth along the way. The process of learning and developing has been life-changing, and my self-confidence as a learner has grown the most during this time. I fulfill many roles in my life (mother, partner, daughter, educator, and advocate for the profession of child and youth care counsellors), which makes time management the biggest obstacle. To address this, I slowed my pace through the program, often taking only one course per term to avoid burnout. I dedicated an hour or 2 each day to reading and participating in course learning materials, and I dedicated one full evening a week and one full weekend day to completing assignments. This schedule allowed me to ensure that my job was being done well, that I could still spend time with my family, and that I could continue with my community service work. I have learned that I work best when I have consistency in my schedule and when my family is aware of it.

Additionally, I was fortunate enough to work at an institution that provided me with time allocated for completing my doctoral studies, which helped me when it came time to begin my doctoral research. I did, however, have to examine some social commitments and analyze the cost and benefit to letting go of things I used to do with friends and family. The extent of work and time I needed to dedicate to this study was high, but I managed to balance out a bit of time, giving me the energy to keep going. I learned along the way that the key to successfully completing my doctoral degree was consistency, dedication, determination, and the willingness to listen to my committee.

A notable challenge was financial. As a Canadian international student in a United States graduate program, I was ineligible for most scholarships and faced high tuition costs. With the support of my employer and a line of credit, I was able to complete my degree. However, the financial burden has been heavy. I will be continuing to pay off the debt I accumulated as a student for some time, but it was worth it. I have completed the highest level of education and excelled; no one can ever take that away from me, and it will benefit me for the rest of my life.

This journey has deepened my understanding of justice, fairness, and compassion. It has heightened my awareness of how personal and professional values are shaped by experience, and how they have shaped me as a person. My worldview has expanded, and I have gained greater empathy and critical insight into the field of human services. I am grateful for the time I spent in the doctoral program and have emerged as a better person because of it.

Reflection of Scholar-Practitioner

As a scholar-practitioner, I have deepened my understanding of how academic inquiry and community-based practice mutually strengthen each other. Before starting the doctoral program, I understood scholarly work as academic literature that was separate from direct practice. I have learned that community practice can actually be the foundation for meaningful scholarship in academia. As an educator in child and youth care counseling and a child and youth care practitioner in the community, I have dual roles as both scholar and practitioner. The doctoral program has helped open my eyes to the incredible opportunities a dual role can provide. I was able to blend my professional roles and my role as a doctoral student by aligning my assignments to what was happening in the field, thus strengthening my knowledge and commitment to advocacy pertaining to practices in residential group care.

As a practitioner who recently arrived in full-time academia, I am a new scholar. I want my scholarly contributions to have an impact on direct practice in human services and not be solely an academic endeavour. This program has taught me that it is possible to be an academic and still make a direct impact on change in practice. During my time in the program, I became a tenured associate professor at the university where I work and have been invited to speak at national and international conferences, further cementing my position as a leader in the field.

Taking my time in the program allowed me to slow down and appreciate what I was learning. During my time as a doctoral student, I have strengthened my knowledge of qualitative research practices, particularly community participant action research. This

knowledge will help me as I move forward in my career as an educator in a professional practice program and as a practice-based scholar. I have learned how to communicate and write up my research for dissemination in both academic and non-academic realms of practice, meeting the needs of my dual roles as scholar and practitioner. It is important to me that scholarship guides practice and practice influences scholarship; they are equally important to each other.

My research has helped me articulate longstanding questions about justice, recognition, and care for human service practitioners in residential group care. I am grateful for my time as a doctoral student, and I am no longer satisfied with the current situation of the field; I want to transform systems. This research study is not the end; it is a springboard for future work and transformation in the sector.

Recommendations for Human Services Organization or Human Services Field Advocacy

Based on a review of the literature and analysis of the data collected from this study, I propose recommendations to enhance the retention of human service workers in residential group care programs in Calgary, Alberta. The first recommendation is for organizations to develop and prioritize structured ongoing relational supervision practice. Organizations should implement scheduled, reflective supervision that includes relational check-ins, not just task-based oversight. Supervision should focus on the human service providers' self-reflection of their clinical practice and emotional regulation strategies, reviewing client case complexities and ethical practice, rather than just performance reviews or incident reports. Advocacy action towards this recommendation is for the

organization to partner with professional associations to develop a shared supervision framework and advocate to funders for capacity-building dollars dedicated to training, implementation, and embedding supervision into policy and practice.

Second, I propose creating peer mentorship programs for new and emerging staff. Participants highlighted how mentorship shaped their confidence and resilience early in their careers or during transitions into new roles. Organizations should establish mentorship programs that match seasoned practitioners with new or early-career human service workers. Mentorship should include both informal moments, such as storytelling and modeling skills in practice, and more formalized moments of reflection and peer review. Advocacy action for this recommendation is to create sector-wide mentorship frameworks, encourage funding bodies to support mentorship as a staffing model requirement, and embed mentorship into onboarding and retention strategies.

The final recommendation is to advocate for wage increases and equity across the sector. Workers reported that their emotional labor outweighed the compensation provided. Fair wages, benefits, and clear career advancement pathways are essential to prevent turnover and enhance employee retention. Professional associations and organizational leaders should collaborate to push for competitive livable wages, competitive benefit plans, and compensation structures with salary grid development and pathways to career advancement that reflect the emotional labor and skill involved in residential group care. Advocacy action is to establish a workforce coalition with organizations and professional associations to advocate collectively for fair livable

wages, standardized pay grids, and government recognition of residential group care work as essential and skilled labor.

Summary

In this section, I presented my reflections on how I have changed as a person and as a scholar-practitioner during the course of completing the Doctorate of Human Services program. I offered my recommendations for improving human service worker retention in residential group care programs in Calgary, Alberta, Canada, which included developing and prioritizing structured and ongoing relational supervision practices, creating a peer mentorship program and sector-wide network for new and emerging human service workers, and advocating for increasing compensation and equity across the sector. I also included actions that organizations and the profession can use to advocate for the recommendations to come to fruition, including advocating for structural relational supervision funding and to be included in policy and practice, advocating for funding for peer mentorship programs in organizations, and forming a sector-wide workforce coalition to create joint policy proposals and generate a united voice in funding negotiations.

References

Adeoye-Olatunde, O. A., & Olenik, N. L. (2021). Research and scholarly methods: Semi-structured interviews. *JAACP: Journal of the American College of Clinical Pharmacy, 4(*10), 1358–1367. https://doi.org/10.1002/jac5.1441

Althubaiti A. (2022). Sample size determination: A practical guide for health researchers. *Journal of General and Family Medicine*, *24*(2), 72–78. https://doi.org/10.1002/jgf2.600

Aguboshim, F. C. (2021). Adequacy of sample size in a qualitative case study and the dilemma of data saturation: A narrative review. *World Journal of Advanced Research and Reviews, 10*(3), 180–187. https://doi.org/10.30574/wjarr.2021.10.3.0277

Astvik, W., Welander, J., & Larsson, R. (2020). Reasons for staying: A longitudinal study of work conditions predicting social workers' willingness to stay in their organisation. *The British Journal of Social Work, 50*(5), 1382–1400. https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcz103

Banerjee, R., & Dasgupta, M. (2024). Critical reflexivity of the researcher as an exploratory vehicle in sensitive research. *Journal of Psychosexual Health*, *6*(3). 224–234. https://doi.org/10.1177/26318318241283709

Basril, H. (2022). Literature review determination of employee satisfaction and performance: Hygiene and motivator factors analysis. *Dinasti International Journal of Management Science, 3*(5), 976–984. https://doi.org/10.31933/dijms.v3i5.1199

Benveniste, T., Smith, D. R., Gupta, C. C., Chappel, S. E., & Sprajcer, M. (2024). Compassion fatigue in out-of-home care workers: A systematic review. *Residential Treatment for Children & Youth,* 1–29. https://doi.org/10.1080/0886571X.2024.2310583

Bhatt, N., Chitranshi, J., & Mehta, M. (2022). Testing Herzberg's two-factor theory on millennials. *Cardiometry, 22*, 231–236. https://doi.org/10.18137/cardiometry.2022.22.231236

Bolt, E. E. T., Winterton, J., & Cafferkey, K. (2022). A century of labour turnover research: A systematic literature review. *International Journal of Management Reviews: IJMR, 24*(4), 555–576. https://doi.org/10.1111/ijmr.12294

Bonisteel, I., Shulman, R., Newhook, L. A., Guttmann, A., Smith, S., & Chafe, R. (2021). Reconceptualizing recruitment in qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 20,* 1–12. https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069211042493

Boonzaaier, E., Truter, E., & Fouché, A. (2021). Occupational risk factors in child protection social work: A scoping review. *Children and Youth Services Review, 123.* https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2020.105888

Brabson, L. A., Harris, J. L., Lindhiem, O., & Herschell, A. D. (2020). Workforce turnover in community behavioral health agencies in the USA: A systematic review with recommendations. *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review, 23*(3), 297–315. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10567-020-00313-5

Brend, D. M., & Collin-Vézina, D. (2022). Stronger together: Workplace social support among residential child welfare professionals. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 130.*

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2021.105302

Brend, D. M., & Sprang, G. (2020). Trauma-informed care in child welfare: An imperative for residential childcare workers. *International Journal of Child and Adolescent Resilience, 7*(1), 154–165. https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1072595ar

Brichacek, K. (2024). From ivory tower to cubicle: White papers as inclusive and empowering alternative writing assignments. *American Association of Philosophy Teachers Studies in Pedagogy*, *9*, 67–87. https://doi.org/10.5840/aaptstudies202472287

Briegel, M., & Friesen, S. (2024). Perspectives of frontline child and youth care staff in group homes: Internal report for Trellis Society. *[Unpublished report].*

Briggs, A., Ball, K., Boda, K., Little, J., & Lee, C. (2022). Alberta's nonprofit sector: Too essential to fail. *CCVO Empowering Nonprofits.* https://calgarycvo.org

Brown-Saracino, J. (2021). Unsettling definitions of qualitative research. *Qualitative Sociology, 44*, 591–597. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11133-021-09498-9

Buetow, S., & Zawaly, K. (2022). Rethinking researcher bias in health research. *Journal of Evaluation in Clinical Practice*, *28*(5), 843–846. https://doi.org/10.1111/jep.13622

Burns, D. D., Langenderfer-Magruder, L., Yelick, A., & Wilke, D. J. (2023). What else is there to say? Reflections of newly-hired child welfare workers by retention status. *Children and Youth Services Review, 144.* https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2022.106731

Cantos-Egea, A., Camarero-Figuerola, M., & Tierno-García, J.-M. (2024). Job

satisfaction of child and youth residential care professionals: A European overview. *Qualitative Research in Education, 13*(2), 126–148. https://doi.org/10.17583/qre.13545

Casey Family Foundation. (2023). *How does turnover in the child welfare workforce impact children and families?* Casey Family Programs. https://www.casey.org/turnover-costs-and-retention-strategies/

Cassie, K. M., & DuBose, E. M. (2023). An exploratory examination of the effect of self-care practices on job satisfaction and organizational commitment. *Journal of Evidence-Based Social Work, 20*(2), 258–271. https://doi.org/10.1080/26408066.2022.2156832

Coleman, P. (2021). Validity and reliability within qualitative research in the caring sciences. *International Journal of Caring Sciences, 14*(3), 2041–2045. www.internationaljournalofcaringsciences.org

Collins, D., Katz, C. C., Cianfarini, H., & Wall, E. (2023). Funding the frontline: A comparison of funding model effects on residential childcare staff retention. *Residential Treatment for Children & Youth, 40*(4), 427–444. https://doi.org/10.1080/0886571X.2023.2243206

Corney, T., Marion, J., Baird, R., Welsh, S., & Gorman, J. (2023). Youth work as social pedagogy: Toward an understanding of non-formal and informal education and learning in youth work. *Child & Youth Services, 1*(26). https://doi.org/10.1080/0145935X.2023.2218081

Crabtree, B. F., & Miller, W. L. (Eds.). (1999). *Doing qualitative research* (2nd ed.).

Sage Publications.

Dahal, N., Neupane, B. P., Pant, B. P., Dhakal, R. K., Giri, D. R., Ghimire, P. R., & Bhandari, L. P. (2024). Participant selection procedures in qualitative research: Experiences and some points for consideration. *Frontiers in Research Metrics and Analytics, 9,* Article 1512747. https://doi.org/10.3389/frma.2024.1512747

Daher, W. (2023). Saturation in qualitative educational technology research. *Education Sciences, 13*(2), 98. https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci13020098

de Guzman, A., Carver-Roberts, T., Leake, R., & Rienks, S. (2020). Retention of child welfare workers: Staying strategies and supports. *Journal of Public Child Welfare, 14*(1), 60–79. https://doi.org/10.1080/15548732.2019.1683121

Edwards, D., Trigg, L., Carrier, J., Cooper, A., Csontos, J., Day, J., Gillen, E., Lewis, R., & Edwards, A. (2022). A rapid review of innovations for attraction, recruitment and retention of social care workers, and exploration of factors influencing turnover within the UK context. *Journal of Long-Term Care,* 205–221. https://doi.org/10.31389/jltc.130

Gallo, S. A., Schmaling, K. B., Thompson, L. A., & Glisson, S. R. (2020). Grant reviewer perceptions of the quality, effectiveness, and influence of panel discussion. *Research Integrity and Peer Review, 5*(7). https://doi.org/10.1186/s41073-020-00093-0

Gelencsér, M., Szabó-Szentgróti, G., Kőmüves, Z. S., & Hollósy-Vadász, G. (2023). The holistic model of labour retention: The impact of workplace well-being factors on employee retention. *Administrative Sciences, 13*(5), 121.

https://doi.org/10.3390/admsci13050121

Giménez-Bertomeu, V. M., Caravaca-Sánchez, F., de Alfonseti-Hartmann, N., & Ricoy-Cano, A. J. (2024). Burnout among social worker social services: A system review and meta-analysis of prevalence. *Journal of Social Service Research, 50*(4), 664–683. https://doi.org/10.1080/01488376.2024.2371847

Grajzel, K. (2025). Meditation in qualitative research for bracketing and beyond. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods. 24*. https://doi.org/10.1177_16094069241312826

Habibullah, K. M., Mohammed, B.U., & Hamza, M. (2023). Conceptual framework in reflexive bracketing techniques in qualitative methodology. *Research Review*, *4*(02), 849–857. https://researchreview.in/index.php/rr/article/view/161

Halim, A., Susianah, S., Gunawan, G., Mansyur, A., & Tirtawana, M. (2024). Human resource management strategy: Integrating psychological perspectives through qualitative description and literature review. *Golden Ratio of Human Resource Management, 4*(2), 122–134. https://doi.org/10.52970/grhrm.v4i2.484

Hennink, M., & Kaiser, B. N. (2022). Sample sizes for saturation in qualitative research: A systematic review of empirical tests. *Social Science & Medicine*, *292*. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2021.114523

Herschel, A., Kolko, D., Hart, J., Brabson, L., & Gavin, J. (2020). Mixed method study of workforce turnover and evidence-based treatment implementation in community behavioral health care settings. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 102.* https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2020.104419

Herzberg, F., Mausner, B., & Snyderman, B. B. (1959). *The motivation to work* (2nd ed.). John Wiley & Sons.

Herzberg, F., Mausner, B., & Snyderman, B. B. (2010). *The motivation to work* (12th ed.). Transaction Publishers.

Hossan, D., Dato'Mansor, Z., & Jaharuddin, N. S. (2023). Research population and sampling in quantitative study. *International Journal of Business and Technopreneurship (IJBT)*, *13*(3), 209-222. https://doi.org/10.58915/ijbt.v13i3.263

Jack, S. M., & Phoenix, M. (2022). Qualitative health research in the fields of developmental medicine and child neurology. *Developmental Medicine & Child Neurology*, *64*(7), 830-839. https://doi.org/10.1111/dmcn.15182

Jacob, S. A., & Furgerson, S. P. (2012). Writing interview protocols and conducting interviews: Tips for students new to the field of qualitative research. *The Qualitative Report, 17*(42), 1–10

Jennings, B. M., & Yeager, K. A. (2025). Re-viewing the concept of saturation in qualitative research. *International Journal of Nursing Studies Advances*. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijnsa.2025.100298:contentReference[oaicite:0]{index=0}

Judijanto, L., Devi, E. K., Hibrida, A. R., Arisanti, I., & Erliana, Y. D. (2024). Implementation of work-life balance in non-profit organizations in Region C: Literature review on its impact on employee performance and satisfaction. *Sciences du Nord Humanities and Social Sciences, 1*(1), 25–32.

https://doi.org/10.58812/5vx4gv10

Kandi, V. (2022). Research process, study variables, statistical validations, and sampling methods in public health related research: an update. *American Journal of Biomedical Research*, *10*(1), 1-8.https://doi.org/10.12691/ajbr-10-1-1

Katz, C. C., Julien-Chinn, F. J., & Wall, E. (2022). Perceptions of agency leadership and intent to stay: An examination of turnover in the child welfare workforce. *Journal of Public Child Welfare*, *16*(3), 302-320. https://doi.org/10.1080/15548732.2021.1876808

Kelly, R. J., & Hearld, L. R. (2020). Burnout and leadership style in behavioral health care: A literature review. *The Journal of Behavioral Health Services & Research, 47*(4), 581–600. https://doi.org/10.1111/aswp.12330

Kind, N., Bürgin, D., Fegert, J. M., & Schmid, M. (2020). What protects youth residential caregivers from burning out? A longitudinal analysis of individual resilience. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 17*(7), 2212. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17072212

Knott, E., Rao, A. H., Summers, K., & Teger, A. (2022). Interviews in the social sciences. *Nature Reviews Methods Primers, 2*(73). https://doi.org/10.1038/s43586-022-00150-6

Kothari, B. H., Chandler, K. D., Waugh, A., McElvaine, K. K., Jaramillo, J., & Lipscomb, S. (2021). Retention of child welfare caseworkers: The role of case severity and workplace resources. *Children and Youth Services Review, 126.* https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2021.106039

Kuuyelleh, E. N. (2021). A review of employee retention strategies: Implications for future research. *European Journal of Business and Management, 13*(1). https://doi.org/10.7176/ejbm/13-1-03

Lakshmi, K. D., & Mathavan, R. (2024). Investigating the relationship between job security and job satisfaction in cooperative bank: Insights from Namakkal District. *Library Progress International, 44*(3), 479–486. https://doi.org/10.52970/grhrm.v4i1.440

Lim, W. M. (2024). What is qualitative research? An overview and guidelines. *Australasian Marketing Journal, 0*(0). https://doi.org/10.1177/14413582241264619

Lizano, E. L. (2021). Work engagement and its relationship with personal well-being: A cross-sectional exploratory study of human service workers. *Human Service Organizations: Management, Leadership & Governance, 45*(4), 326–336. https://doi.org/10.1080/23303131.2021.1898071

Liu, M., Wang, J., Lou, J., Zhao, R., Deng, J., & Liu, Z. (2023). What is the impact of integrated care on the job satisfaction of primary healthcare providers: A systematic review. *Human Resources for Health, 21*(1), 86. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12960-023-00874-w

Liu, Z., Wong, H., & Liu, J. (2022). Why do social workers leave? A moderated mediation of professionalism, job satisfaction, and managerialism. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 20*(1), 230. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph20010230

Lubbadeh, T. (2020). Job burnout: A general literature review. *International Review of Management and Marketing, 10*(3), 7–15. https://econjournals.com/index.php/irmm/article/view/9398

Lushin, V., Katz, C. C., Julien-Chinn, F. J., & Lalayants, M. (2023). A burdened workforce: Exploring burnout, job satisfaction and turnover among child welfare caseworkers in the era of COVID-19. *Children and Youth Services Review, 148,* 106910. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2023.106910

Mairhofer, A., & van Santen, E. (2023). Human resource development in residential youth care facilities: Findings from a Germany-wide survey on the staffing situation and strategies for recruitment and retention. *Residential Treatment for Children & Youth, 40*(4), 464–483. https://doi.org/10.1080/0886571X.2023.2209757

Mer, A., Kumar, V., Verma, V. K., De, T., & Mathew, J. (2024). A review of predictors and outcomes of work engagement in nonprofit organizations. *Social Sciences & Humanities Open, 10,* 101083. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssaho.2024.101083

Mitsakis, M., & Galanakis, M. (2022). An empirical examination of Herzberg's theory in the 21st-century workplace: Organizational psychology re-examined. *Psychology, 86*(13), 264–272. https://doi.org/10.4236/psych.2022.132015

Molakeng, M. H., Truter, E., & Fouché, A. (2021). Resilience of child protection social workers: A scoping review. *European Journal of Social Work, 24*(6), 1028–1050. https://doi.org/10.1080/13691457.2021.1901660

Modlin, H., & Magnuson, D. (2021). A constructive-developmental analysis of

satisfaction, challenge, and coping in residential child and youth care. *Child & Youth Services, 42*(2), 179–199. https://doi.org/10.1080/0145935X.2021.1903857

Nagpaul, T., Leong, C. H., Toh, C. S., Amir, A. B., Chin, R., & Tan, S. (2022). Exploring job satisfaction and intentions to quit among security officers: The role of work hygiene and motivator factors. *Social Sciences, 11*(11), 497. https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci11110497

Neely-Barnes, S., Hirschi, M., Taylor, L., Delavega, E., Malone, C., Shelley, S. A., West, K., & Harris, M. (2023). The great resignation and its impact in behavioral health and social services. *Human Service Organizations: Management, Leadership & Governance, 48*(2), 150–163. https://doi.org/10.1080/23303131.2023.2271055

Nilsen, K. H., Lauritzen, C., Vis, S. A., & Iversen, A. (2023). Factors affecting child welfare and protection workers' intention to quit: A cross-sectional study from Norway. *Human Resources for Health, 21*(1), 43. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12960-023-00829-1

Olaniyan, O. S., & Hetland, H. (2024). Health interventions to improve work and well-being among child welfare workers: A scoping review. *Asian Social Work and Policy Review, 18*(3). https://doi.org/10.1111/aswp.12330

Olaniyan, O. S., Hetland, H., Hystad, S. W., Iversen, A. C., & Ortiz-Barreda, G. (2020). Lean on me: A scoping review of the essence of workplace support among child welfare workers. *Frontiers in Psychology, 11,* 287. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.00287

Orsi-Hunt, R., Harrison, C. L., Rockwell, K. E., & Barbee, A. P. (2023). Addressing

secondary traumatic stress, burnout, resilience, and turnover in the child welfare workforce: Results from a 6-month, cluster-randomized control trial of Resilience Alliance. *Children and Youth Services Review, 151,* 107044. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2023.107044

Park, T., & Pierce, B. (2020). Impacts of transformational leadership on turnover intention of child welfare workers. *Children and Youth Services Review, 108,* 104624. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2019.104624

Peramatzis, G., & Galanakis, M. (2022). Herzberg's motivation theory in the workplace. *Psychology, 12*(12), 971–978. https://doi.org/10.17265/2159-5542/2022.12.009

Peryer, G., Kelly, S., Blake, J., Burton, J. K., Irvine, L., Cowan, A., Akdur, G., Killett, G., Brand, S., Kpehe Musa, M., Gordon, A., & Goodman, C. (2022). Contextual factors influencing complex intervention research processes in care homes: A systematic review and framework synthesis. *Age and Ageing, 51*(3), afac014. https://doi.org/10.1093/ageing/afac014

Poll, G. H., & Petru, J. (2023). Exploring the contributions of expert review and cognitive interviewing to evaluating the content validity of items for a new measure of adolescent social communication, the Transition Pragmatics Interview. *Clinical Linguistics & Phonetics, 37*(12), 1124–1140. https://doi.org/10.1080/02699206.2022.2148131

Prysmakova, P., & Lallatin, N. (2023). Perceived organizational support in public and nonprofit organizations: Systematic review and directions for future research. *International Review of Administrative Sciences, 89*(2), 467–483.

https://doi.org/10.1177/00208523211033822

Pyo, J., Lee, W., Choi, E. Y., Jang, S. G., & Ock, M. (2023). Qualitative research in healthcare: Necessity and characteristics. *Journal of Preventive Medicine and Public Health = Yebang Uihakhoe chi*, *56*(1), 12–20. https://doi.org/10.3961/jpmph.22.451

Radey, M., & Wilke, D. J. (2023). Extent, trajectory, and determinants of child welfare turnover and exit destinations. *Children and Youth Services Review, 144.* https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2022.106733

Radey, M., & Wilke, D. J. (2023). The importance of job demands and supports: Promoting retention among child welfare workers. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal, 40*(1), 57–69. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10560-021-00762-z

Rakes, S., Radey, M., & Wilke, D. J. (2024). Examining employment outcomes of recently hired, older workers in the child welfare workforce. *Journal of Public Child Welfare, 18*(3), 489–502. https://doi.org/10.1080/15548732.2023.2222091

Ressang-Wildschut, J., Oldenhof, L., & Leistikow, I. (2023). Can leadership make the difference? A scoping review of leadership and its effects in child and youth care. *Children and Youth Services Review, 150,* 107017. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2023.107017

Różyńska, J. (2022). The ethical anatomy of payment for research participants. *Medicine, Health Care and Philosophy, 25*, 449–464. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11019-022-10092-1

Russ, E., Lonne, B., & Lynch, D. (2020). Increasing child protection workforce retention

through promoting a relational-reflective framework for resilience. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 110.* https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2019.104245

Saldaña, J. (2021). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.

Santos, L., Ferreira, A., Silva, D. R. D., Pinheiro, M., & Rijo, D. (2023). Assessing occupational stress in residential youth care settings: Validation of the Stress Questionnaire for Residential Youth Care Professionals. *Residential Treatment for Children & Youth, 40*(2), 217–237. https://doi.org/10.1080/0886571X.2022.2073940

Santos, L., Miguel, R. R., do Rosário Pinheiro, M., & Rijo, D. (2023). Fostering emotional and mental health in residential youth care facilities: A systematic review of programs targeted to care workers. *Children and Youth Services Review, 147,* 106839. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2023.106839

Saunders, K. R., McGuinness, E., Barnett, P., Foye, U., Sears, J., Carlisle, S., Allman, F., Tzouvara, V., Schlief, M., Vera San Juan, N., & Stuart, R. (2023). A scoping review of trauma-informed approaches in acute, crisis, emergency, and residential mental health care. *BMC Psychiatry, 23*(1), 567. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12888-023-05016-z

Slatten, L. A., Bendickson, J. S., Diamond, M., & McDowell, W. C. (2021). Staffing of small nonprofit organizations: A model for retaining employees. *Journal of Innovation & Knowledge, 6*(1), 50–57. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jik.2020.10.003

Smith, Y. (2020). Can children be safe if their caregivers are not?: Reflections on the

"promise" study of workforce issues in a residential treatment center for children. *Residential Treatment for Children & Youth, 37*(2), 156–173. https://doi.org/10.1080/0886571X.2019.1704672

Sorn, M. K., Fienena, A. R., Ali, Y., Rafay, M., & Fu, G. (2023). The effectiveness of compensation in maintaining employee retention. *Open Access Library Journal, 10*(7), 1–14. https://doi.org/10.4236/oalib.1110394

Staempfli, S., & Lamarche, K. (2020). Top ten: A model of dominating factors influencing job satisfaction of emergency nurses. *International Emergency Nursing, 49,* 100814. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ienj.2019.100814

Stelzner, M. A. (2006). *Writing white papers: How to capture readers and keep them engaged*. Whitepaper Source Publishing.

Stringer, E., & Ortiz Aragón, A. (2021). *Action research* (5th ed.). Sage Publications.

Syam, S. (2024). Understanding human resource management: Exploring psychological dynamics and strategic approaches through qualitative description and literature review. *Golden Ratio of Human Resource Management, 4*(1), 67–78. https://doi.org/10.52970/grhrm.v4i1.440

Thomas, S. P., & Sohn, B. K. (2023). From uncomfortable squirm to self-discovery: A phenomenological analysis of the bracketing experience. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *22*. https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069231191635

Trawver, K. R., & Brocious, H. (2024). A statewide integrated child welfare coaching and mentoring program: Mentored workers' perception of quality, impact, and satisfaction. *Journal of Public Child Welfare, 18*(1), 182–207.

https://doi.org/10.1080/15548732.2023.2182397

Verhage, V., Jansen, D. E. M. C., Wunderink, C., Alma, M. A., Reijneveld, S. A., & Grietens, H. (2023). How the bachelor of social work (BSW) prepares one for working in a residential youth care setting: A thematic analysis of youth workers' experiences in the Netherlands. *Residential Treatment for Children & Youth, 40*(4), 407–426. https://doi.org/10.1080/0886571X.2023.2243211

Verlinden, K., & Martynovych, Y. (2024). Resilience in residential child care: Results of a survey among professionals. *Residential Treatment for Children & Youth.* https://doi.org/10.1080/0886571X.2024.2350727

Warnock, R., Taylor, F. M., & Horton, A. (2022). Should we pay research participants? Feminist political economy for ethical practices in precarious times. *Area*, *54*, 195–202. https://doi.org/10.1111/area.12790

Warwick, L., Beddoe, L., Leigh, J., Disney, T., Ferguson, H., & Cooner, T. S. (2023). The power of relationship-based supervision in supporting social work retention: A case study from long-term ethnographic research in child protection. *Qualitative Social Work, 22*(5), 879–898. https://doi.org/10.1177/14733250221113015

Williams, K. A., Lewis, E. M., & Feely, M. (2023). Stay just a little bit longer: A scoping review of foster parent engagement in the US. *Children and Youth Services Review, 146,* 106814. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2023.106814

Wine, B., Osborne, M. R., & Newcomb, E. T. (2020). On turnover in human services. *Behavior Analysis Practice, 13,* 492–501. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40617-019-

00399-6

Wutich, A., Beresford, M., & Bernard, H. R. (2024). Sample sizes for 10 types of qualitative data analysis: An integrative review, empirical guidance, and next steps. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 23,* Article 16094069241296206. https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069241296206

Yadav, D. (2022). Criteria for good qualitative research: A comprehensive review. *Asia-Pacific Education Researcher, 31*, 679–689. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40299-021-00619-0

Zeng, S., & Paphawasit, B. (2024). Exploring key factors in understanding graduate turnover through Herzberg's two-factor theory: A literature review. *Educational Administration: Theory and Practice, 30*(7), 503–512. https://doi.org/10.53555/kuey.v30i7.6713

Zhou, Q., & Semanchin Jones, A. (2023). Improving retention in child welfare: Comparing needed support for supervisors and caseworkers. *Human Service Organizations: Management, Leadership & Governance, 48*(2), 181–195. https://doi.org/10.1080/23303131.2023.2271045.

Appendix A: The Project

Motivators for Retention of Human Service Workers in Residential Group Care

Introduction

Human service worker retention and turnover have been a problem for decades. Over the years, the well-being of workers in the human service sector has been studied in terms of what contributes to worker turnover, with few studies having been done to examine the factors that promote worker well-being (Lizano, 2021). Social work, specifically child/youth and family social work, has been identified as having the highest levels of workforce turnover and poor mental health comparable to other human service occupations (Turley et al., 2021). High workload demands, organizational and government bureaucracy, rapidly changing policy, negative social perception, highly emotional work environments, severely traumatized children and families, and the consequences of the seriousness of the work are a few of the factors that contribute to turnover (Turley et al., 2021). Human service workers have a high turnover rate due to high workload demands, workplace environments, complex clients, and challenging systems.

The human service sector is impacted by employee turnover for a variety of reasons, and some areas of human service work are affected more than others. Social work, child and family work, and out-of-home group care facility work are areas that experience a lack of stability in the workforce (Turley et al., 2021). High turnover rates especially impact the child welfare workforce within the human service sector (Casey Family Foundation, 2023). Stressful job conditions, high client needs, and limited

funding are among the factors that contribute to turnover and will be a concern for human service workers (Wine et al., 2020). Turnover rates were associated with the practitioner's age, education level, and job stress (Herschel et al., 2020). However, turnover rates are also associated with organizational considerations such as size and organizational culture (Herschell et al., 2020). There are multiple factors, both personal and organizational, that influence turnover in the human service sector.

Problem Statement

Some human service organizations in Alberta, Canada struggle to retain and recruit qualified employees. The nonprofit sector is facing a staffing crisis due to factors like low operating budgets, inflation, employee mental health concerns, and complex client needs (Briggs et al., 2022). In Alberta, 71% of nonprofit organizations identify negative impacts on staff well-being, 55% are concerned about employee retention, and 53% worry about recruiting qualified employees (Briggs et al., 2022). In child intervention service programs, annual turnover rates average 30%, and many human service workers do not stay past 2.5 years due to the intensity of the work (R. Barraclough, personal communication, January 24, 2024; Johnson, 2023). These pressures are especially present in residential group care, where some organizations struggle to retain frontline staff for longer than 1 to 2 years (C. Hicks, personal communication, May 28, 2024). Common reasons for employee turnover include unsupportive supervision, poor working conditions, low pay, lack of organizational alignment, and the emotional toll of the work (Briegel & Friesen, 2024). This ongoing retention problem directly impacts the stability and care of vulnerable child and youth in

residential care programs, contributes to systemic challenges in service delivery, and is a factor in burnout among practitioners.

Market and Social Drivers

Organizations that run residential group care programs in Calgary, Alberta are under pressure to stabilize their workforce in order to provide consistent, safe, and high quality care for children and youth. This study identified a need for solutions to improve employee retention in residential group care, where turnover disrupts therapeutic relationships with clients and negatively impacts the stability of organizations. Organizations are recognizing that high turnover is impacting the quality of service and outcomes for children and youth, influencing the likelihood of burnout in remaining employees and increasing the financial costs of continuous onboarding of underprepared new employees (Boonzaaier et al., 2021; Brend & Collin-Vezina, 2022; Verhage et al., 2023). Market drivers that address the need for change include improved service quality for children and youth, reduced financial strain on organizations from turnover, enhanced employee well being in the workplace, and increasing trust in residential group care. By addressing the motivations and needs of frontline human service workers in residential group care, organizations can create more stable environments for children and youth, reduce disruption, and improve long term outcomes for both clients and organizations.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to rigorous ethical considerations and standards to protect the rights and well-being of participants. Informed consent was obtained prior to data collection to ensure that participants understood the purpose of the research, that their

participation was voluntary, and that they had the right to withdraw at any time without consequence. Confidentiality was maintained by anonymizing all identifying details in the transcripts and the results. The data were securely stored on a password-protected computer and in a protected Zoom account. The research was reviewed and approved by Walden University Institutional Review Board, ensuring compliance with standards for research involving human participants.

My role in this study was grounded in a professional background in residential group care, as a frontline practitioner, program manager, child and youth care counselor educator, and advocate for practitioners of human service workers in Alberta. The close connection to the topic of workforce retention was recognized as a potential bias. To ensure research integrity and mitigate bias, I used a research bracketing journal to reflect on preconceived notions, emotions, and assumptions throughout the research process. I designed a semistructured interview protocol and revised it with an expert panel review to ensure clarity, consistency, and alignment with the research objective. A purposeful sampling strategy was used to recruit participants with relevant experience, excluding participants with supervisory relationships to the researcher to avoid coercion. Ethical reciprocity was demonstrated by providing participants with a small token of appreciation following their participation. Data collection included transcript verification and follow up through member checking, to ensure participant voices and experiences were accurately captured. Together, these considerations supported an ethical research process.

Evidence Supporting the Need for a Solution

Data was collected for this study using a semistructured interview protocol, using Crabtree and Miller's (1999) framework. Individual interviews were held over Zoom, with nine human service workers who had worked in residential group care for over 1 year in Calgary, Albera. The interviews were between 30 -60 minutes long, were audio recorded, transcribed, and verified with the participant for accuracy. The semistructured interview protocol included nine open ended questions, allowing for in-depth answers from participants and probing or follow-up questions from the interviewer. Data were collected until reaching saturation, when no new themes emerged from interviews. Following each interview, I completed reflexive notes in a research bracketing journal, documenting impressions from the interview to mitigate bias.

Data analysis was conducted using Saldana's (2021) four step thematic coding approach to qualitative data analysis. First, an inductive approach to creating codes based on participants; words was used to break down the data into manageable segments, using In Vivo coding (Saldana, 2021). Second-cycle coding was then used to refine and synthesize the first-cycle codes into broader themes by group together patterns, categories, or emergent theory (Saldana, 2021). The third step involved theme analysis where I interpreted the themes to explain social phenomena, experiences, or behavior (Saldana, 2021). Finally, I developed statements summarizing the findings and relation between themes found in the data (Saldana, 2021). There were no discrepant cases or outliers that did not fit the emerging patterns in the data that were identified and addressed in the findings.

Findings

The study found that human service workers in residential group care human service workers enter residential group care to fulfill purpose, human service workers are committed to youth and improving care systems, human service workers pursue professional growth to achieve career progress, human service workers experience fulfillment by witnessing youth growth, human service workers experience satisfaction when improving professionally, human service workers rely on supports to maintain engaged in their role, human service workers resist leaving by connecting to people and the work, human service workers develop resilience to manage the demands of the work, human service workers suggest improvements to increase retention, and human service workers alignment to residential group care work.

Human service workers in residential group care remain in their positions when their personal values align with the mission and practices of the organization, when they have access to supportive relationships with supervisors and leadership, and when organizational structures address the realities and challenges of the work. Passion for the work, a sense of purpose, and commitment to making a difference fostered resilience and long-term engagement in human service workers. Supportive supervision, peer relationships, and opportunities for professional growth strengthened their connection to the work and alleviated the impact of job stress. Additionally, organizational practices that prioritized adequate staffing, manageable workloads, safety, and employee recognition created an environment where workers felt valued and competent to meet the demands of the job. These factors highlighted the connection between individual

motivation, relational support, and systemic conditions in sustaining human service worker retention in residential group care.

Description of the Proposed Solution

Human service worker retention in residential group care can be improved by developing strategies that involve organized and consistent relational supervision, structured peer mentorship, and equitable compensation practices across the sector. These solutions are supported by the reasons that human service workers report staying in residential care, gathered from the literature and from this study, which include feeling supported, feeling aligned with organizational values, and being recognized for the emotional labor they provide. Organized and consistent supervision creates space and opportunity for reflection, ethical and competency building dialogue, and emotional processing, which is supportive and a factor in reducing feelings of burnout. Structured peer mentorship builds cohesion and alignment with the organization, reduces isolation, and encourages competency-based learning. Improving compensation recognizes the value of human service workers and the complexity and nature of the work. Together, these proposed suggestions offer a solution that benefit the problem of recruiting and retaining qualified human service workers by improving employee retention and improving consistent care for children and youth, creating a stronger workplace, and reducing reoccurring onboarding and training costs to organizations.

To strengthen the retention of human service workers in residential group care, organizations should implement mandatory relational supervision as a core standard of practice. This includes providing comprehensive training for supervisors and establishing

accountability measures to document and evaluate supervisory efforts. Development of formal peer mentorship programs is also recommended, with compensation for peer mentors who bring lived experience in residential group care and are part of a structured onboarding program. Organizations are further encouraged to advocate for sector wide equitable compensation that reflects the emotional demands, complexity, and safety risks involved in the work. To mitigate burnout, protected time should be allocated for human service employees to engage in reflective practice and emotional processing with mentors or supervisors; alongside wellness initiatives informed by the input of human service workers. While these strategies are within the operational control of organizations, their successful implementation requires broader systemic support, including increased operational funding and supportive regulatory frameworks. Collaboration with professional associations, unions, and agency networks is essential to advocate for sustainable funding models that prioritize workforce stability and enhance the quality of service provided for children, youth, and families.

Recommendations for the Next Steps and Call to Action

Organizations providing residential group care programs for children and youth are urged to adopt a multilayered approach to improving the retention of human service workers. First, organizations should implement a relational supervision practice model that emphasizes emotional regulation support for workers, ethical and competency-based reflection, and supervisor accountability. This step requires training supervisors to use a relational model of supervision and embedding reflective supervision requirements into job descriptions and evaluation criteria for both supervisors and front-line human service

workers. Second, organizations should create formal peer mentorship programs that provide consistent onboarding, support, and knowledge sharing between seasoned human service workers with lived work experience in residential group care and new residential care workers. This step requires creating a mentorship program with clear role definition for mentors and mentees and allocating funds towards developing a mentorship program where mentors are trained and compensated for their time. Third, organizations should partner with sector associations, unions, and other organizations to demand wage parity that reflects the complex and emotional toll residential group care takes on human service workers. Organizations should conduct internal reviews with their existing employees to identify current retention strategies and gap areas, and commit to implementing these recommendations into policy, procedure, and practice. Delaying action will contribute to further deteriorate of the workforce, continue to destabilize the quality of care in residential group care, and increase the likelihood of poor outcomes for the children, youth, and families being served.

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Section 1: Introduction

Interviewer: Hello [Participant's Name]. Thank you for taking the time to participate in this interview. I appreciate your willingness to share your experiences with me today. I am a Doctor of Human Services student at Walden University. This interview is part of a research study I am conducting for my Doctoral degree, exploring why frontline service workers choose to stay in their positions in youth-serving residential group care programs. Your insights will help contribute to a greater understanding of employee retention in this field.

Before we begin, I want to remind you that your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You will receive a $10.00 Tim Horton's e-gift card as a small token of appreciation for your participation. You can skip any question you are uncomfortable answering, ask to take a break if you need one, and are free to withdraw at any time during the interview without any consequences. If you withdraw during the interview, you will still receive your Tim Hortons gift card. Everything you share will remain confidential, and any identifying information will be removed from the final report to protect your anonymity.

Consent Process

Interviewer: To ensure you are fully informed about this study, I want to confirm that you have read and understood the consent form. Before we proceed, do you have any questions about the study or your participation?

[Pause for response]

If you agree, I request your permission to record and transcribe this interview to accurately capture your responses. I will record our meeting using Zoom and activate the transcribe feature. The recording will be kept secure and used only for research purposes. Do I have your consent to proceed with the recording?

[If the participant consents, begin recording. If not, proceed with written notes.]

Section 2: Key Questions

Interviewer: I am interested in exploring the factors that have influenced your decision to stay as a human service worker in residential group care.

1. What factors have influenced your decision to stay in your role in residential group care for over 1 year?
2. What aspects of your work do you find most rewarding?
3. What aspects of your work do you find most challenging and how might those challenges be addressed within the organization?
4. How do relationships with colleagues and supervisors affect your job satisfaction?
5. What is a specific example of when you felt highly satisfied in your role?
6. What role does compensation, including salary and benefits, play in your decision to stay?
7. How have professional growth or career advancement opportunities encouraged you to remain in your position?
8. How do workplace policies and procedures influence your decision to stay?
9. What support systems are available in your workplace? How have they impacted your experience?

10. In your opinion, what could be improved in residential group care to encourage employee retention?
11. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience working in residential group care?

Section 3: Conclusion and Debriefing

Interviewer: Thank you again for your time and for sharing your experiences today. Your insights are incredibly valuable, and I genuinely appreciate your willingness to participate in this research. As a next step, I will send you a copy of the transcript so that you can verify that I have captured your ideas accurately. Then I will analyze the information collected from this interview and others to identify key themes. Once the research is complete, I will happily share the executive summary of the findings with you. Please feel free to reach out if you have any questions after this interview or want to add anything else. Thank you again for your time, and I wish you all the best in your work.