



## WANDERING HEART: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INQUIRY ON THE PLIGHT OF HOMELESS CHILDREN

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### Abstract:

This study explores the lived experiences of homeless children in one of the shelters in Davao City, their coping mechanisms, and insights in relation to their experiences to share with the community. The study employed a qualitative phenomenological approach. A researcher-made interview protocol was developed to be used in an In-depth Interview with five (5) study participants from the shelter aged between 15-17 using a purposive sampling technique. Data gathered were analyzed using the thematic analysis. The study revealed that the themes on the experiences of homeless children in shelters revolved around Adjustment and Community, Support and Care, and Challenges in Adaptation. As with the coping mechanisms of homeless children, the themes that emerged are as follows: Emotional Resilience, Social Support, and Divine Intervention. Lastly, as with the insights of homeless children, the themes generated included Learning and Growth, and Future Aspirations emerged as essential themes. It is important that shelter staff undergo training and seminars to equip them with knowledge and skills in dealing with these vulnerable children. In addition, DSWD, Policymakers and future researchers may utilize this paper as the baseline to create strategies intended for the development of these vulnerable children.

**SDG Indicator #1:** (No Poverty) **#4:** (Quality Education)

**Keywords:** social studies, education, homeless children, qualitative, phenomenology, Philippines

### 1. Introduction

Homelessness is still a pressing issue, affecting millions of children globally. Children experiencing homelessness often face myriad challenges, including food insecurity, limited access to healthcare, and even disruption of schooling. Recent studies have shown

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that homeless children are more likely to suffer from chronic health and mental health problems compared to their housed peers (Cutuli & Herbers, 2019). A similar study has shown that these children experiencing disruptions of education lead to poor academic performance, frequent change of schools in no time, and the risk of dropping out (Pavlakis, 2021).

In addition, the uncertainty of their living condition mainly affects these young individuals' emotional and psychological health, which eventually may lead to serious problems like depression, anxiety, and even behavioral issues. A research study conducted by Gultekin *et al.*, (2020) examines the mental health issues faced by these individuals, including anxiety, depression, and PTSD, which are prevailing among these types of fragile and vulnerable populations.

In temporary living accommodations such as the shelter, homeless children are usually provided with basic necessities such as food, clothing, and a place to sleep. However, the problem in the shelter is that the environment becomes too chaotic and crowded, which also becomes a struggle for many children due to the lack of privacy and personal space. These homeless individuals are struggling with physical health issues as they have minimal access to health care. Thus, the tendency of getting chronic illnesses is higher as compared to those children with direct access to the health care system (Coughlin *et al.*, 2020; Sandel *et al.*, 2018).

This unhealthy situation for these children can actually hinder their ability to relax and feel safe. Additionally, despite the effort by the shelter staff to create a supportive environment, the nature of the shelter's life makes it really hard for these individuals to form stable relationships and feel a sense of belonging. Aside from these, most of the challenges of these children face in the shelter are that, the environment of the shelter itself presents challenges. Coughlin *et al.* (2020) and Pavlakis (2021) examined children in the shelter as having a lack of privacy, overcrowding, and inadequate nutrition. These vulnerable children also face isolation from social, developmental delays, and stress from the family, which could affect their cognitive and emotional development (Labella *et al.*, 2019; Masten *et al.*, 2020)

Davao City has many shelters, including the Foundation of Balay Pasilungan, which means "shelter home." It is a safe place for young street boys Bankerohan, Davao City, Philippines. Opened in May of 1989, the Foundation of Balay Pasilungan, Inc. has worked to serve the needs of street children in Davao City. The Society of Mary-Marist Fathers and Brothers administers the center. Urban migration, unemployment, inadequate housing, and destitute street families are all causing social problems in Davao City, as in most metropolitan areas. The Foundation of Balay Pasilungan, Inc. seeks to provide a haven for street boys who have become homeless due to various factors, an alternative family structure, and the skills and resources necessary for a successful future. While existing research extensively documented the myriad of challenges faced by these homeless individuals in shelters, there is a gap in understanding the long-term effectiveness of interventions in mitigating these issues. Studies by Cutuli and Herbers (2019), Pavlakis (2021), and Gultekin *et al.* (2020) focused on identifying problems rather than evaluating sustained solutions.

In educational outcomes, the study of Cutuli *et al.* (2012) on their longitudinal study on academic achievement trajectories of homeless and highly mobile students revealed that there is a significant disadvantage for homeless children who live in shelters. The result showed that these students consistently perform below their housed peers in standardized tests. 8-10 percentile point gap in math and 6-8 percentile point gap in reading. This is alarming because this achievement gap becomes more expansive over time, with each year of homelessness associated with a further 2-3 percentile point decline in their academic performance. This data showed that there is a negative impact on educational outcomes when it comes to homelessness among children. These children experienced significant challenges that affected their education on many levels. These experiences may continue to get worse if not addressed.

In another study conducted by Fantuzzo *et al.* (2013), a population-based study examining the homeless and early educational well-being using the sample of 10,639 students in their third grade from a large urban district revealed that children who became homeless as toddlers were 60 percent more likely to struggle with Mathematics as compared to children who faced homelessness in their elementary. Additionally, 46 percent increase in academic engagement problem was associated from homelessness during infancy. This study identified distinct development for homelessness experiences, noting that the highest incidence of shelter use occurs during the birth to 2 developmental periods. The types of homelessness are both associated with lower academic achievement, with shelter stays linked to more severe deficits. Additionally, absences among these homeless youth are also prevalent with higher rates, particularly those children with experiences living in the shelter.

Further, the timing of homelessness played a significant role, as homelessness during early childhood was associated with poorer third-grade outcomes compared to later experiences. It has also found that those children who experienced multiple homeless episodes across the development period showed the poorest third-grade outcomes. This research concluded that children associated with shelters have more negative educational well-being than non-sheltered homeless children.

Another study conducted by Chen *et al.* (2020), a comparative research, paints a concerning picture of the physical health of homeless children in their temporary living accommodations, such as shelters. They are 2.5 times underweight for their age as compared to housed children from low-income neighborhoods, indicating significant challenges in terms of nutrition. The research presented a higher prevalence of chronic health conditions, with 34 percent vs. 21 percent among homeless children, particularly asthma at 18 percent vs. 11 percent, and anemia at 15 percent vs. 7 percent, which only suggests that homelessness exacerbates health vulnerabilities beyond those who are associated with poverty alone.

While existing studies focus on quantifiable outcomes such as educational challenges, mental and physical health issues, and the effectiveness of interventions (Jiang *et al.*, 2020), they often fail to capture the nuanced, subjective experiences of the children themselves. There is a clear need to delve deeper into the emotional, psychological, and social dimensions of homelessness as experienced by children to

provide a deeper understanding of its effect on their identity, well-being, and development.

The urgency of studying homeless children living in the shelter directly addresses pressing humanitarian issues and societal crisis because the children belong to the vulnerable populations, facing physical, emotional, and even psychological risks as they live in the shelter which exposes them to unstable environments, disruption of education, inadequate healthcare, and even emotional trauma which have long-lasting effects in the future. In addition, this study is pretty unique as it focuses on a distinct and vulnerable subgroup whose experiences significantly differ from other types of populations.

The primary objective of this research was to determine the experiences of the homeless children inside the Foundation of Balay Pasilungan, Inc., their coping mechanisms, and the participant's insights to share with the community about their experiences.

This study is anchored on the theory proposed by Abraham Maslow's Needs Theory (1943), as cited by Mcleod (2023). Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory states that people are motivated by five basic categories of needs: physiological, safety, love, esteem, and self-actualization. Hopper (2020) reported that Maslow believed that human wants may be structured into a hierarchy to understand better what motivates people. This hierarchy encompasses more tangible requirements like food and water to more abstract ones like self-fulfillment. When a lower need is met, our attention shifts to the next higher need in the hierarchy, according to Maslow.

As the study explores homeless children's experiences inside the Foundation of Balay Pasilungan, Inc., including their coping mechanisms, it will serve as a basis for whether the basic needs of the children are provided. Each level in Maslow's hierarchy can guide the researcher in providing detailed information and in-depth discussion about the respondent's experiences. The hierarchy of needs consists of physiological needs, safety, belongingness, love, esteem, and self-actualization. Physiological needs are known as universal needs because they include air, water, food, and clothes. It focuses on the necessities of the children. Safety needs include safety from abuse, financial security and well-being. Belongingness and love are about connection, family, friendship, and intimacy. Esteem is about how things about us are reflected from other people's perspectives. It is a form of status, recognition, attention, and appreciation. It is a validation of self and others' perception. Lastly, self-actualization is about developing talent and abilities (Celestine, 2017).

John Bowlby, a British Psychologist on his attachment theory described this theory as "*lasting connectedness between human beings*". (Bowlby, 2014) page 194 of his 1969 book. He observed that clear behavioral patterns and motivational patterns characterized attachment. He figured that when the child feels frightened, the child immediately seeks comfort and care from the primary caregiver. Bowlby added that there is a universal human need to form close bonds with others; "*human beings of all ages are found to be at their happiest and are able to express their best attributes when they feel that standing behind them, there are one or more trusted persons who will come to their aid should difficulties arise*" (Bowlby, 1973 p194). With his theory, Bowlby reinforces the importance of social support

as a key component when dealing with difficult times. Having social support during a stressful event like homelessness can allow a person to better deal with the situation.

Moreover, examining relevant concepts for combating child homelessness finds that vulnerability theory is useful because it aims to shift the poverty conversation away from the circumstances that contribute to homelessness and towards the common needs of all people. Vulnerability theory seeks to transcend identity categories to shed light on institutional, social, and cultural forces that distribute privilege and disadvantage via various systems (Weaver, 2014). The concept of vulnerability is also linked to dependency, which is a natural and inevitable cycle of the human condition. In addition, scholar Martha Fineman proffers vulnerability theory to reconsider legal equality discourse that focuses on identities of social categories, such as race, national origin, gender, and ethnicity, for anti-discriminatory protection. Fineman argues that the traditional focus on these identity categories fails to address the universal and constant condition of human vulnerability, thus calling for a legal framework emphasizing a more responsive state and institutional responsibility to ensure substantive equality and social justice (Fineman, 2018).

The plight of homeless children embodies a critical challenge in achieving these sustainable development targets. Homelessness is both the consequence and perpetuator of extreme poverty worldwide, directly impacting SDG-1, eradicating poverty in all its forms, and SDG-4, which is quality education. At the same time, this young wanderer faces challenges such as lack of access to necessities, inadequate shelter, education, and nutrition, which are fundamental in breaking the series of intergenerational impoverished. Thus, studying this vulnerable population addresses systematic inequalities and promotes social well-being, as these children highlight marginalized groups and their struggles with housing instability and lack of access to healthcare and education.

Moreover, this study can contribute significantly to formulating programs for the homeless children who live in shelters. Thus, it allows the government agencies such as the DSWD to create systematic programs that address the unique needs of these youth. In addition, educators, social workers, future researchers, shelters, other stakeholders and non-government organizations can also benefit from this study since this will provide comprehensive data that identifies the needs of these young individuals, which are the focus of this research.

## **2. Method**

This section describes the methodologies undertaken by the researcher in collecting and analyzing the data. The study participants, materials and instruments, and design and procedure are likewise presented in this section.

## **2.1 Study Participants**

This study comprises five (5) participants housed in a shelter named The Foundation of Balay Pasilungan, Inc. Some qualitative experts suggest that the minimum number of participants in in-depth interviews should vary and depend on the subject. However, according to Morse (2000), the minimum number of participants for in-depth interviews is between 5 and 50, an adequate sample size to gain more affluent, more detailed insights from the participants' experiences. Therefore, the researcher opted to have 5 participants to participate in the in-depth interview.

The selection technique used was purposive sampling. As Creswell (2014) suggested, purposive sampling involves identifying participants who can provide richer insights into the research question. It is a non-probability sampling technique where a specific characteristic must be part of the analysis. It allows the researchers to focus on a specific area, enabling them to gather in-depth data for their study.

The inclusion criteria to participate in this study are those children who experienced physical, mental, or emotional abuse, including sexual abuse by an adult or anyone from the family members. The participants must have lived at the Foundation of Balay Pasilungan for more than a year, be of different ages of 15-17, be mentally capacitated, and be able to answer specific questions from the researcher. Those children who do not meet the criteria for inclusion are excluded from participating in this research study.

## **2.2 Materials and Instrument**

The collection of data was made possible through an in-depth interview using an unstructured interview guide that was open-ended and supported with probing questions to gain a richer understanding of the participants. The interview guide was carefully drafted based on the objectives of the study. It aims to explore the experiences of homeless children in the shelter, examine their coping mechanisms, and elicit insights from the participants, which they can share with the community about their experiences. Then, it was sent to the committee of experts for validation and quality assurance. The set of questions was drafted using the English language and translated into local dialects, considering the language spoken by the participants. Finally, the questionnaire with probing questions was validated by the experts of the University of Mindanao with the rating of Very Good, which corresponds to a numeral data of 9.5/10. The questionnaire was then administered to the identified subjects in the shelter.

## **2.3 Design and Procedure**

The qualitative method of phenomenology was used in this study since it offers an in-depth understanding of human behavior. Data collection, such as interviews and focus group discussions, allows the researchers to gather detailed information about the respondents' perspectives in the study.

According to Oranga's (2023) study on qualitative research: essence, types and advantages, the qualitative type of study has advantages in terms of flexibility, the spontaneity of interviews, it does not require a more extensive study sample, and it offers

an opportunity for the researchers to meet the respondents and encourages meaningful discussion with them. Qualitative study allows researchers to understand, seek clarification, and have insightful and relevant responses.

According to Good (2023), a phenomenological design type of research is a qualitative approach that creates assumptions on universal essence depending on the respondents' experience. It is a type of design where the respondent's perspective is the answers or information that matters. Their responses will be recorded, analyzed, and interpreted. It is known to be deeper than broad understanding. The experience in this design involves feelings, perceptions, thoughts, memory, and emotions.

In this study, the researcher's duty was to collect, analyze, and interpret the data from the identified participants derived from the transcriptions. The permission to conduct this study was secured from a shelter in Davao City through the social workers in charge of the children in the institution, who presented the assent form affirming that the identified children were interested in participating. The researcher must protect the rights of the participants by ensuring that the data obtained from the respondents is securely stored in a safe place and adheres to RA 10173 or the Data Privacy Act of 2012. Before the study, the social worker from the Foundation and the Guidance Counselor from the Davao Oriental State University were present for any tension that may arise during the interview session. Each of the respondents was assigned a pseudonym to ensure their privacy. They were also informed about the purpose of the study as well as their rights, and they could always withdraw from participation in the survey without any obligation to pay for the participation in this research.

Thematic analysis was used in this study as it is a method known to understand peoples' views, opinions, and experiences. The data from this analysis is from the interviews, focus group discussions, surveys, and other forms of textual data. The use of thematic analysis in this research allows flexibility, coding, themes, iterative process, and interpretation to come up with informative data and draw a meaningful conclusion. According to Naeem *et al.* (2023), in their study entitled *A Step-by-Step Process of Thematic Analysis to Develop a Conceptual Model in Qualitative Research*, the thematic analysis identifies and interprets patterns or themes to determine new insights and understanding. It involves the adaptability of the proposed process in different research methodologies.

In addition, the UM Ethics Review Committee has established strict criteria and processes for conducting this research. The researcher carefully sought and obtained the necessary approval from the ethics committee with the UM Ethics Review Committee (UMERC) no. 2024-051 on March 16, 2024. Thus, ensuring that all ethical considerations and concerns are the utmost priority of this research. It was also crucial that the researcher did not manipulate the result of the research materials nor omit or add the data obtained from the participants. Also, the research ensured that all the sources were cited correctly, accurately credited, and paraphrased to provide sufficient information free from plagiarism. The adviser is also considered the co-author of this study since she helped the researcher accomplish this research output.

### 3. Result and Discussion

In this section, the results and discussion are presented. This section outlines the themes formulated and the core ideas generated from the study participants' transcripts. The presentation of results encompasses the lived experiences, the coping mechanisms, and the insights of the study participants.

#### 3.1 Experiences of Homeless Children

Table 1 presents the major themes of the experiences of homeless children in Balay Pasilungan emerging in the study, which are Adjustment and Community, Support and Care, and Challenges in Adaptation.

**Table 1:** Experiences of Homeless Children at the Shelter

Essential Themes	Core Idea
Adjustment and Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Adjusting to the shelter was initially challenging.</li><li>- The shelter provided a sense of belonging and family.</li><li>- The children built strong bonds with peers, despite occasional conflicts.</li></ul>
Support and Care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- The shelter staff created a supportive environment.</li><li>- Educational and life skills support help them grow.</li></ul>
Challenges in Adaptation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- The emotional difficulty of being away from family.</li><li>- Bullying was a source of emotional pain for some children.</li><li>- Learning to navigate interpersonal conflicts and limited freedom.</li></ul>

##### 3.1.1 Adjustment and Community

It is known that adjustment from one place to another is complex, and it is challenging for homeless children to fit in shelter life. However, the respondents averred that despite difficulties, the community in the shelter was able to make them feel at home.

Participant relates as he shared,

*“Akong masulti diri bahin sa Balay Pasilungan kay, nakatabang sa pagpadayon sa akong pag-eskwela. Daghan kog natun-an, mga learning.”* (KNIGHT–L1)

*“I can say that the Foundation of Balay Pasilungan have shaped me because I have learned so much, and they also support my education”*

The participant proudly shared that the Foundation has contributed significantly to his well-being and education.

Further shared the same sentiment,

*“Ang Balay Pasilungan is, part na siya sa akong family, memory. Naka kuha pud ko diri ug learnings. From the word Balay Pasilungan is magpa silong lang ka. Like, dili siya permanent shelter for Boys nga gusto nila nga maka trabaho jud sila. It’s for me, temporary lang jud siya. Balay Pasilungan has a very healthy environment.”* (LONE RANGER–L1)



*"The Foundation of Balay Pasilungan, Inc. became part of my memory and became a family. I have also learned something here. From the word Balay Pasilungan "House for Shelter", so staying here is temporary. This is not a permanent place for boys that you think you can go home from work; it is just a mere shelter. This shelter has a healthy environment."*

In the shared experience, the participant expressed his sentiment about the foundation's community, saying that it became his family. It was found that although living in a shelter is temporary, it has a healthy environment where everyone is welcome.

One participant shared,

*"Akong pagpuyo dinhi sa Balay Pasilungan, malipayon ko nga naa ko diri-a. Naa koy na-feel na love, care ug support gikan sa among mga foster parents. Also, makipag-dula sa akong mga fellow nga kids, mg aka-level nako nga mga bata, ug makipag bonding sa akong mga foster parents." (ARTIST-L1)*

*"I am delighted to be here. I have felt love, care, and support from our foster parents. Additionally, I enjoy playing with my fellow children at the same age level as me, and I cherish the bonding moments with my foster parents."*

*"It is found that the participant felt the love and support in the shelter as provided by the staff as their foster parent. He also added that he enjoys playing with his fellow children who are the same age as the participant."*

The same sentiment was also shared,

*"Akong ma-ingon kay, nindot. Kanang nalipay ko nga naabot ko diri-a, naka kalag ko diri ug bag-ong pamilya. Daghan kog natun-an, sama sa akong mga talent karon, mga skill sama sa pagluto. Mga talent nako nga wala nako na-discover sa una kay diri nako nadiscover like mag-sulat ug mga tula, mag-sulat ug mga kanta, mag-perform sa eskwelahan. Murag nagka-confidence ko ba, murag na hubog siya diri ba. Diri ko mas na ganahan. Unya, ang love na ginahatag sa akong parents sa akoa kay mas na dungagan siya diri-a ba. Mas, daghan kog na-ilhan nga pamilya ba bisan dili nako sila ka-dugo, gituring nako silang pamilya." (SCIENTIST-L1)*

*"It's great! I am happy that I came here and found a new family. I have learned a lot, I have cooking skills. These are the talents that I didn't discover before, but I found them here, like writing poems, writing songs, and performing at school. It's like I gained confidence, and I was shaped here. I love it here. And, the love that my parents gave me has also increased here. I have gotten to know many families here, too, and even though we are not related by blood, I consider them as my family."*

Another participant shared his positive experience about finding a new family in the shelter environment. He shared how he was being shaped by learning new things such as cooking skills and writing poems and songs, which are the new skills he could develop. He also became more confident through the services given by the staff in the shelter.

One participant also shared,

*"Ku-an, ang relasyon nako diri-a sa akong mga kauban sa Balay Pasilungan, kay maayo jud. Although, usahay naa man jud mga misunderstanding jud gamay pero kuan pirmi ang bonding. Tanan nga Pwede namo buhaton kay ginabuhat namo nga makaplipay sa amoa. Dili lang tong mga bad nga mga kuan, tapos sa kuan naman sa mga staff diri sa balay pasilungan, same lang. Ginabuhat nila ilang mga trabaho, gina-guide mi sa mga butang nga maka-ayo sa amoa."* (SPONGEBOB-L2)

*"The relationship between me and my fellow children here in the Foundation of Balay Pasilungan is quite satisfactory. Though, sometimes we have minor misunderstandings but we have strong bond. We do things that made us happy in a good and positive way. The staff here are extra-ordinary, too! They always guide us to do better things, including housed chores."*

As stated by the participant, his relationship with his fellow children in the foundation wasn't perfect, but he tried to blend in and was able to adapt quickly. He mentioned how misunderstandings turned into positive ones, which made their bonding as strong as ever. He opened up that they do things that make them happy. He also shared how the staff are of good service and described them as extraordinary as they provide the guidance they need.

Considering the participants' sentiments, their experience in shelter life took so much time to adjust. However, the Balay Pasilungan was able to make them feel comfortable and at home. The sentiment of being supportive is crucial to homeless children because it is the start of building their good relationships with others despite their experience outside shelter life.

This finding implies that a strong support system within shelters is essential in helping homeless children overcome emotional and social challenges. The sense of belonging and guidance they receive fosters resilience, allowing them to adapt, build confidence, and develop healthy interpersonal relationships. By providing a stable environment where they feel valued and supported, shelters can counteract the negative effects of homelessness and instability, ultimately shaping their ability to navigate life beyond the shelter. This suggests that further exploration is needed on how shelters can implement more structured and long-term programs that address children's immediate needs and their emotional and psychological development to better prepare them for a stable and successful future.

According to Nest Community Shelter (2024) on Breaking the Cycle of Homelessness: The Importance of Supporting Homeless Children, by providing the

homeless with necessary resources, tools, and good support, they can have a good foundation to have a prosperous and stable life. A research conducted by Sulkowski and Michael (2021), children without a stable house face several challenges in terms of mental health. The study reported a higher prevalence of mental disorders in this type of population compared to their housed peers, with conditions like depression, anxiety and PTSD being prevalent. They emphasized that there is a significant impact on mental health issues from having to live in temporary places or being homeless and adverse childhood experiences. If the children's sentiments were not immediately addressed, there would be an effect on their mental, emotional, and physical well-being, which is why the shelter is making efforts to guide them.

### 3.1.2 Support and Care

The homeless children were able to experience the care from the staff in Balay Pasilungan. As revealed from the responses, there are staff who are approachable, and the shelter itself feels free from harm.

A participant shared,

*"So ang kuan, ang among communication diri, ang maingon lang jud nako diri sa akong mga kauban kay they are very friendly, approachable ang mga staff, ug healthy ang communication ug ang kanang maki pag halobilo ka sa mga kauban."* (LONE RANGER-L2)

*"We have the best communication here. The people are very friendly, and the staff are approachable. Also, we do have safe socialization here."*

As the participant shared his sentiment, he stated that open communication between children and staff made him feel comfortable. He described the staff as friendly and approachable. He added that he gets to socialize with other children as well.

As agreed by another participant,

*"Mas, daghan kog na-ilhan nga pamilya ba bisan dili nako sila ka-dugo, gituring nako silang pamilya."* (SCIENTIST-L2)

*"I have gotten to know many families here, too, and even though we are not related by blood, I consider them as a family."*

As stated by the respondent, staying in the shelter made him feel that even though they're not related by blood, he feels accepted and cared for and that he considers the community as his own family.

Furthermore, a participant shared,

*"Sa akong experience diri-a kay ginatudloan mi diri kung unsaon paglambo sa knowledge ug skills. Tapos, kanang mga talent namo, gina enhance nila."* (KNIGHT-L3)

*"In my experience, we are allowed to learn and hone our skills and talents."*

As another participant shared, his experience in the shelter provides an opportunity to learn and hone his talent as well as his skills.

A participant also agreed and shared,

*"Since naa ko diri-a po, ako jud natun-an kay ang house chores, skills, tapos kanang pag-edit po kanang graphic editing, tapos kana pong discipline, unya education po aron maka padayon mi sa pag-eskwela."* (ARTIST-L3)

*"Now that I am here, I have learned how to do house chores. Also, I have learned how to create graphic design, which has enhanced my editing skills. Self-discipline was also fundamental to me in continuing my education."*

One participant agreed that ever since he became homeless and housed in the shelter, he learned valuable skills like doing household chores and graphic editing; most significantly, he learned about discipline, which he believed is fundamental to continuing his education journey.

The same sentiment was shared by the participant,

*"So far, maayo man akong pagpuyo diri. Blessed kaayo ko diri kay gitagaan ko nila ug chance nga mag-eskwela, ma providan ko nila sa akong pag-eskwela, mga basic needs nako (pagkaon, puloy-anan) ug kuan pud, gina providan pud ko ug financial needs nga makapadayon ko sa akong pag eskwela. Kana kay grateful kaayo ko ana kay ilaha kong gitabangan diri-a."* (SPONGEBOB-L1)

*"So far, I'm comfortable staying here. I am blessed because I was given a chance to study, and everything is provided for my education, including basic needs such as food, shelter and financial support to continue my education. I am so grateful for them."*

Another participant responded that staying in the shelter made him feel comfortable. He added that he is blessed because the shelter has allowed him to continue his education and that everything he needs is being provided. From clothes to education as well as his basic needs, for which he's very thankful to the staff and the management of Balay Pasilungan.

Another participant agreed to the shared sentiment,

*"Ang nahatag nila diri sa akua kay, una jud ang pag-tuon sa pag-eskwela, magbasa, magsulat. Pag-abot nako diri-a kay wala kaayo koy alam, pero tungod diri kay gitudloan ko nila about education. Mga skills, sama sa pag-guitara, gi-pagawas gyud nila akong talent ba. Gipakita pud nila diri nga naa pakoy daghang mahimo sama sa pagsulat ug tula."* (SCIENTIST-L3)

*"I didn't know how to read and write when I came here, but they taught me those things. They also taught me to play musical instruments like the guitar, which molded my inner talent, and even showed me that I have so much to learn, like writing a poem."*

In the statement above, it is also found that children were taught how to read and how to write. The participant shared that he didn't know anything when the shelter opened its gate for him. He also learned to play musical instruments like the guitar which he's passionate about, and learned to write poems.

It is vital that the homeless children in Balay Pasilungan are being treated rightfully. Their basic needs in life are provided. Providing them with education and counseling shows their concern and motive in creating a better future for the respondents. Education benefits everyone, especially the respondents, because it is their step to live a better life and have their goals accomplished free from poverty.

According to Lane (2022) on the Importance of Education for Children, education plays a crucial role in shaping the future of children, teaching them the skills and knowledge to survive and navigate steps through the complexity of society. It enhances their emotional intelligence, academic skills, social skills, and creativity in different fields. It has been noted that the importance of education lies in its ability to build a strong foundation for their intellectual, emotional, and social development by exploring their curiosity.

The support for education in the shelter is strong. As mentioned by Child Hope (2024) in *Why is Education Important? The Significance of Education in the Philippines*, education is not just about the lessons from the school. It covers a diverse process of learning. Child Hope provides five main reasons why education is important, which also shows that the experience of homeless children in Balay Pasilungan can help them have a better future. It includes empowering people, bridging economic gaps, driving innovation and growth, fostering critical thinking, and creating informed citizens.

### **3.1.3 Challenges in Adaptation**

The participants are experiencing a lack of privacy because of shared rooms in the shelter. It becomes challenging for them to socialize and deal with other people because of their differences in attitude and character.

A participant relates as they shared,

*"Kuan kanang malayo ko sa akong pamilya. Mao jud na akong kuan kay dili nako sila makita ba. Makita pud tagsa pero naay limit ba kay busy man pud ang mga staff kay naa man silay gina-asikaso nga ubang bata nga gina-cater pud nila diri-a. So kuan, kining mao na akong pinaka lisod nga naagian kanang pag sacrifice nga dili sa jud nako makita akong pamilya kay kuan para lagi pud sa akong pag-eskwela, mao mag sacrifice lang jud."*  
(SPONGEBOB-L5)

*"One of my struggles here is that my family is quite far from me. I don't see them often, which kind of makes me sad. I can only see them occasionally due to the visitation limit."*

*However, I understand the situation since there are so many kids that the social worker is attending to. So, that is a struggle that really saddens me. The sacrifices to make for not seeing them often."*

Among the experiences of these children being housed in the Foundation, they also faced several challenges. It has been found that one of their struggles is missing their family. As shared by the respondent, being far from his family makes him sad. Although he totally understood his situation, it was hard for him to accept that having to miss the family is a lot of sacrifices.

One agreed and shared,

*"Kuan kanang layo sa pamilya. Makahilak ko sa una kay layo kaayo sila ug mangita jud ko sa ilaha. Maka-ingon ko taga-gabii nga asa akong Mama, ang kanang mag-unsang man ko diri..." (SCIENTIST-L4)*

*"I think one of my struggles here is being away from my immediate family. Sometimes, I cried because I knew my family was far from me, and I always sought their presence. Usually, I ask myself every night where my Mom is, why I am here, why I miss my mom, and where my older sister. Like, I miss them every day."*

As shared by another participant, his immediate family made him cry every night as he misses them dearly. It would come to the point that he would ask himself about his whereabouts, where his mom was, and why he was even in a shelter. He added that he misses his family every day of his life.

One participant sentiment shared,

*"Naka-agi man ko ug mga bullying diri sa una katong bata pako, pero habang naga dako ka, makabalo jud ka nga unsa diay wala pa sa iyaha nga naa na nako or unsay naa nako nga wala sa iyaha." (LONE RANGER-L5)*

*"I experienced bullying when I was a kid. But growing up, you can adjust and understand that there are things that I have and you didn't have, and things that I don't have but you do."*

Another struggle is that the participant experienced bullying inside the shelter. Although it was hard for him, he learned to blend in and adapt to the environment. He learned that bullying is never a good approach to living harmoniously within the community.

Furthermore, a participant shared,

*"Naa po, naa jud siya dili jud siya malikayan. Especially, kanang bullying. Pero solve lang gihapon kay tabangan mi." (ARTIST-L6)*

*"Sometimes, there is bullying here. But we try to solve it immediately because there is a process to make amends through the social work services."*

As shared by another participant, he also experienced bullying in the shelter environment. Fortunately, the staff has a process to resolve the issue and is grateful to maintain a harmonious relationship between the children.

Another sentiment shared by the participant,

*"Kuan kanang, dili man kaayo as in lisod jud, ang limit ra jud noon sa freedom diri-a. Dili pareha sa ubang mga bata nga maka-dula kag everyday, kanang gusto ka mag-dugay kag tulog taga-gabii nga gina-himo nako sa balay. Unya, lahi man pud ang badlong diri sa pamilya jud, kanang gina-turing ka nila nga anak pero lahi lang jud ang pagbadlong sa imoha." (SCIENTIST-L7)*

*"I identified some minimal struggles, such as the limitation of freedom. I can always compare the freedom from the outside world of this shelter. For example, I want to sleep late at night. We don't have that kind of freedom back home. They have different ways to discipline here than that of my immediate family. However, we are treated as family. Although we are treated as family members, it is kind of different for me."*

One participant shared that he faced minimal struggle, such as the limits of freedom. He expresses his disappointment by comparing the freedom in the shelter and that of the outside world he used to live in. He added that the Foundation has stricter rules and guidelines to discipline disruptive behaviors. Though the children are treated as family members, he couldn't help but think that it is quite different.

As shared by the participant,

*"Murag wala ma'y kalisod kung gustohon jud nimo (mo follow sa rules ug regulations diri). Pero sometimes man gud kay kanang kalisod naa man jud na sa atong kinabuhi, pero kung imoha ra jud nang pasagdaan or kanang mag-go with the flow lang jud ka, mawala ra jud nang kalisod." (LONE RANGER-L4)*

*"I don't think I find struggles here if you obey and follow the rules and regulations the management sets. Though, sometimes, you may find struggles in life but if you just go with the flow, it will just disappear in thin air because if you give attention to the struggles, they will always be a problem."*

One participant shared that he doesn't find the rules and regulations a struggle if they only obey the rules. He understands that there may be hurdles, but he doesn't think much of them. As for him, it will just disappear without him knowing. Thus, he finds struggles as a perennial problem.

Despite the effort by the shelter staff to create a supportive environment, the nature of shelter life makes it really hard for these individuals to form stable relationships

and feel a sense of belonging. Aside from these, most of the challenges of these children in the shelter is that the environment of the shelter itself presents challenges. Coughlin *et al.*, (2020) and Pavlakis (2018) examined that children in the shelter have a lack of privacy, overcrowding, and inadequate nutrition. These vulnerable children also face isolation from social, developmental delays, and stress from the family, which could affect their cognitive and emotional development (Labella *et al.*, 2019; Masten *et al.*, 2020).

### 3.2 Coping Mechanisms of Homeless Children

Table 2 presents major themes in the coping mechanisms of homeless children in Balay Pasilangan emerging in the study, which are Emotional Resilience, Social Support, and Divine Intervention.

**Table 2:** Coping Mechanisms of Homeless Children at the Shelter

Essential Themes	Core Idea
Emotional Resilience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The children used creative outlets.</li> <li>- Meditation and personal reflection helped children find inner peace.</li> <li>- Staying focused on education and future aspirations.</li> </ul>
Social Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Finding support among peers.</li> <li>- Receiving encouragement from staff.</li> </ul>
Divine Intervention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Spiritual activities and prayer were a source of hope and emotional relief.</li> <li>- The children relied on their faith to overcome difficult emotions.</li> </ul>

#### 3.2.1 Emotional Resilience

It is essential that the children are aware of their feelings and are not deprived of acknowledging them. In today's generation, it is crucial to address the emotion and feelings of everyone. Emotional stability is the step to practicing a good way of living, and the sense of anxiety, depression, and loneliness must be minimized. However, staff should also guide them in handling their emotions as it may lead to consequences when not appropriately addressed. Encouraging them to enjoy themselves, find hobbies, and focus on what matters is essential for them to live life the best way possible.

A participant relates as they shared,

*"Gi-focus lang nako akong sarili sa pag-eskwela, sa mga skills nako like mag-sulat ra kog tula. Like kanang isa ka-notebook nako puno na'g tula. Daghan na kaayo ko'g nasulat. Malipay man pud ko kay kanang akong problema ba kay ma (divert) sa kalipay sa uban. Kay everytime mag-sulat kog tula, naay mo-ana nga ay kato si "The Scientist" kay hawod to mobuhat ug tula, kato siya kay mag-perform to siya. Ako ilang mapili ba. Unya, malipay ko kay feeling nako ma belong ko ba, dili ko ma-outcast. Tapos, habang nag-recite ko sa akong tula, ang uban mag-hilak, ang uban pud moingon "hala proud kaayo ko sa imoha ba" labi na akong teacher kay ni-ingon siya nga "akong anak dili na makaya ba pero ikaw kay kaya nimo". Ingon ana ba, malipay ko ba." (SCIENTIST-L8)*

*"I just keep myself focused on my studies and develop my skill by writing poems. Like, I have one notebook full of poem written by myself. I feel happy when I write because*



*sometimes it makes everyone happy, especially during school events. My classmates would want me to perform. The best part is that when I recite my poem, some would cry and say how proud they are of me. I also received a comment from my teacher such as, "I am so proud of you, "The Scientist" because at your age, you do things that my child couldn't". I feel delighted hearing those comments coming from my teacher."*

As the participant shared his tactics to cope with struggles, he stressed that keeping himself busy, such as focusing on his studies and developing skills by writing poems, are his coping mechanisms. He added that he feels happy because it made his classmates happy. He shared that he has a notebook full of poems which he wrote as his hobby, making him a performer. Thus, he delightfully expressed his sentiment about how praises from his classmates as well as from the teachers made him proud of himself.

One participant agreed,

*"Ginakuan lang nako ang sarili nako kanag makig-dula ko sa ubang bata. Mag-drawing kay kuan man gud, Artist man gud ko. Kabalo ko mag drawing, magkanta, mag-guitar, ug hilig pud ko mga sports. Sporty ko nga klase nga bata."* (SPONGEBOB-L8)

*"I just entertain myself by playing with my fellow house children. Since, I also spent most of my time by singing a song while playing musical instrument like Guitar, and I like to play Basketball with the other kids and staff as well since I'm also into sports."*

As agreed by another participant, his way to cope with sadness is to play sports with his fellow children. His talent in singing and skill in playing guitar helped him cope with his struggles in the shelter.

Furthermore, sentiments shared,

*"Kuan sir, una mag meditate, usahay magpunta sa tahimik na lugar, iisipin ko yung nakaraan na nakalipay sa akoo. Mga kaagi nga gusto nako balikan ug sometimes naga anu pud ko ug music kanang pampawala ba sama sa Guitar kay ako kanang ku-an ko ba, volunteer ko sa Christian church. So, didto pud ko naka kat-on ug Guitar, Drums, kana makapawala na siya sa akong kuan sadness."* (KNIGHT-L7)

*"Sometimes, I meditate, go to a quiet place and recall those worthy happy times. Also, I learned to play musical instruments such as the Guitar and drums in the church where I am volunteering. But reflecting is what I usually do."*

Another sentiment shared from the identified participant is meditation. His way to cope with sadness is to go and find solace in a quiet place where he can recall his joyful moments. He also learned to play musical instruments like the others as he volunteered in a church where he acquired his skills. However, he mentioned that reflection is his hobby to ease the struggles in the shelter.

Another participant agreed,

*"Akoang i-burst-out in a good way. Aron mapagawas nako akong mga gibati, like mag-drawing, mag basa-basa kay aron mapagawas nimo ang imong mga kasubo, in a good way. Maki halo-bilo sa imong mga friends, ma-ingon man gud na nimo gud like naa koy problema ani, unya maka-share pud siya ug advice kay like ako man gud ganahan man gud ko makig-storya ug tao gud, ma-istorya nako sa uban akong problem. So, in a good way jud siya. Dili ko ganahan ug Sarcasm nga environment." (LONE RANGER-L8)*

*"When I feel sad, I indulge myself in drawing something and keeping myself busy to ease the loneliness. Also, I tend to socialize with my friends and seek their advice. I am a very extroverted person, and I do share my problems. I don't like sarcasm environment."*

One participant said that he indulges in drawing and keeping himself busy as his way to cope with struggles. He added that socialization eases the sadness he felt in the foundation. Another thing is that he seeks advice from his friends and the staff in the shelter. Being sociable has helped him overcome the challenges as he enjoys a healthy environment.

In the work of Abustan *et al.* (2021) on Conscience Development, Emotional Stability and Caregiving Practices at Bahay Ampunan nila Jesus, Maria, at Jose, Canlalay, Binan, Laguna, they found that there are orphans who were nurtured and taken care of by staff in the shelter, they prepare children to be emotionally stable to face different challenges in life. Psychological support is beneficial for total development. It is linked to the personality development of the children, where they can feel motivated and be inspired to explore different things at their age. They will be encouraged not to be timid or anti-social. As a result, they will be able to adapt the intrapersonal and interpersonal adjustments.

### 3.2.2 Social Support

It is known that support from others is one of the sources of happiness, inspiration, and motivation. It allows individuals to strive harder, to do things they like, to create memories, and to keep being positive in life. Social support is not only an external factor that gives another person a companion, but it is more on the shared moments, the bond created together, and the words or advice given to each other.

A participant shared,

*"Una kay ang staff kay sila ang nagahatag ug mga advice sa amoa nga ingon-ani or ingon-ana aron mas kuan mas maayo ang pagpuyo diri-a. Ingon ani ang buhata para dili pud ka makabati ug kuan ba mga ka-boring. Akong mga amigo pud diri-a gina-ingnan pud ko nila nga "sige ra kay temporary lang man pud ta diri. So, mao nang maningkamot na lang pud ta kung unsa ang ihatag sa atoa, atong tumanon ug atong buhaton sa maayo nga paagi." (SPONGEBOB-L9)*

*"First of all, we seek advice of what's the best thing to do from the staff of the Balay Pasilungan. Secondly, I also asked my friends. They would tell me that living here is temporary and that this won't last long. We just have to abide and follow what we think is the best thing to do."*

As shared by the respondent, living in the shelter is just temporary. He added that seeking advice from the staff and friends is his way of coping with struggles. He just needs to abide by the rules and regulations set by the management to make his life easier.

Related sentiments shared,

*"Naa po, ang first jud nga nitabang sa akoo kay kato ju'g loyal jud nako nga friend nga wala na siya diri karon. And, after nawala siya diri kay na-integrate siya ug balik sa iyang family, and always jud ko naga-pangayo ug advice sa social worker para pud aware ko kung unsa akong mga mali ug unsa pud akong tama nga mabuhay in the future."* (ARTIST-L9)

*"Yes, Sir! I had a loyal friend who helped me to live here. He's now integrated back to his family. Also, I always seek advice from the Social Worker so I can be aware of my actions in the future."*

*"In the statement above, the participant shared that his way of coping with struggle is to have a friend in the shelter. Establishing relationships with peers eases his sadness, he stressed. He also added that seeking support from the staff, like the social worker, had also helped him cope with the struggles."*

Furthermore, a sentiment shared by participant,

*"Naa kay ang una jud sa tanan, ang nagtabang jud sa ako-a kay katong social worker namo sa una si "Ate R", kato siya gitabangan ko ato niya diri-a. Katong among director diri sa una, si "Fr. L" kay iyahang treat sa akoo kay syempre nidako ko nga walay papa, ang treatment niya sa akoo ba kay anak jud..."* (SCIENTIST-L9)

*"We have the previous Social Worker, whom I shall name, "Ate R". Second, our previous director, whom I shall call, "Fr. L" who treated us like his son. Growing up, I never had a dad, but he showed me and treated me like his own."*

The respondent shared and expressed his coping mechanism in the foundation. Getting support from a social worker and some important individuals made him feel warmed and welcomed as he treated them as his foster parents. He realized that he dearly missed those who nurtured him in the facility as they no longer work in the Foundation of Balay Pasilungan.

One participant shared,

*"Naa sir kanang mga amigo nako, always man jud mi mag-uban diri no so kung mag sige-mig away, ang environment magka-hugaw hugaw jud unya ako man gud gina-maintain man gud nako ang good environment. So, ang mga tao pud nga imong ma-duolan diri-a friendly man pud. So, mawala ra jud nang kasuko." (LONE RANGER-L9)*

*"Yes, I have few friends. we always wanted to maintain the healthy environment here (in Balay Pasilungan). Also, the people here are so friendly. So, those things like misunderstandings won't last long because we make sure to resolve them right away."*

Having real friends and a healthy environment makes the facility livable for the children in the facility. As described by the participant, maintaining a healthy community promotes healthy well-being among children. Establishing friendships will foster better living and sustain healthy relationships among peers, including the staff in the shelter.

The same response was shared by the participant,

*"Sometimes, naga-duol ko sa mga tao nga tan-aw nako masaligan. Nagapangayo ko ug mga kuan ba, kanang tambag. Sometimes naga-istorya pud ko sa ilaha kung na experience ba nila ang na-experience nako. Kay kung makadungog man gud ko sa ilaha, so ana ko nga naka-experience man pud diay sila ani so dapat dili pud ko mag-padala pud sama sa pag-suicide." (KNIGHT-L8)*

*"Sometimes, I seek advice from the person who I think is trustworthy, open up some of my experiences and ask them if they have the same experience with me. So, when I hear them, I would say that I'm not alone in this boat, and I can avoid committing undesirable attempts such as suicide."*

The same coping mechanism was shared by the respondent. He stated that seeking advice from a close friend who can be trusted and open up struggles made him feel comfortable. Thus, it is also significant as it diverts his attention from suicidal attempts. As stated by Thistle-Elliott, L. (2014), emphasizing the importance of having a healthy relationship between homeless children and their teachers in the school-based intervention greatly reduced the impact of homelessness. As a result, these homeless individuals can actually form a strong foundation. Character formation is essential for one's growth and well-being as it helps children develop a sense of purpose, awareness of themselves, and the ability to make crucial decisions.

The participation of students can help build connections, develop skills, and even make them feel more welcomed in the campus community. This engagement is beneficial particularly in fostering a sense of belongingness and inclusion, which are essential in students' retention and success (Murphy *et al.*, 2020).

### **3.2.3 Divine Intervention**

Being religious is important to overcome challenges and difficulties in life. We find the bible verses comforting because they help us not only to soothe the problems but also to

find solace in the midst of struggles. Participating in religious activities builds strength and compassion towards one another, especially in the shelter community where fragile souls are being housed. Thus, it provides an opportunity for us to pray together and become closer to God.

One participant shared his sentiment,

*“Kato lage katong sige ralog ampo-ampo din mao to, gihatag ni God nga makita nako akong parents and gitabangan ko sa mga tao diri-a sa Balay Pasilungan.” (ARTIST-L10)*

*“I really had hope and prayed that God would find a way for me so I could meet my parents. Thankfully, I was able to meet them through this foundation.”*

As shared by the participant, one of his coping mechanisms is having faith, which brought him and fulfill his desire to meet his parents. He expressed that he is thankful to the foundation because it has helped him achieve what his heart has longed for.

One participant agreed and shared that,

*“Ang Balay Pasilungan jud po is naga service pud sila ug spiritual nga mga activities. So akong ginabuhay is, prayers and hope nga kini siya nga mga problems kay dili man jud ni siya forever, makaya ra jud ni siya.” (ARTIST-L8)*

The Foundation of Balay Pasilungan also provides spiritual services. So, I hope and pray because I know that these problems are temporary, and I believe I can do it.

As shared by another participant, aside from the reading, writing and guidance from the social worker, the foundation is also providing spiritual service. One of which is praying, and he's hoping that all his struggles will be resolved in due time. The statements support the survey of the Philippine Statistics Office (2020) that being a religious country, faith has a profound impact on the homeless children in the shelter.

Sample and Ferguson (2020) also posited that having faith provides vital support and coping mechanisms for homeless children during their trauma and instability.

### 3.3 Insights of Homeless Children in the Shelter

Table 3 presents major themes of the insights of homeless children in Balay Pasilungan emerging in the study, which are Learning and Growth, and Future Aspirations.

**Table 3:** Insights of Homeless Children at the Shelter

Essential Themes	Core Idea
Learning and Growth	Realizing the importance of patience and determination They also learned that with support, people can change and improve over time.
Future Aspirations	Education was seen as the key to achieving a better future The shelter helped the children recognize their potential

### 3.3.1 Learning and Growth

It can be seen that participants deal with pain and tough times, but that experience is also the reason why they become stronger than before. Their experiences may be brutal and unpleasant; however, the way they look through life and the way they overcome struggles indicate that they can survive. In addition, the problems they encountered made them better versions of themselves. Surviving from their experience means they don't need to depend on anyone at all times. They can either ask for help or survive alone. Either way, the experience made them stronger.

A participant shared,

*"Akong mga realization jud is patient." (ARTIST-L10)*

*"One of my realizations is being patient."*

One participant shared that his realization is being patient. His experience in the shelter community molded him to be resilient and helped him to develop his patience.

As agreed by others,

*"Kumbaga akong na realized nga need jud diay nako ma-motivate aron mapadayon nako ug matabangan nako akong pamilya kung makahuman ko." (KNIGHT-L9)*

*"I realized that I needed motivation to continue, and so I can be able to help my family when I graduate."*

Another participant concluded that he needed motivation to continue his education, and he can be of big help to his family in the future as he aspires to become successful.

A sentiment shared,

*"Actually, daghan jud kaayo siya Sir pero ang isa jud nako nga na-realized kay kato ju'ng words of wisdom gikan sa social worker nga ang batasan sa usa ka tao, ma-change just siya. So, kung unsa siya ka worst karon, ma-change jud siya in the future nga tabangan nimo siya." (ARTIST-L13)*

*"Actually, there are many things that I wanna share with them, but I think the best one is the words of wisdom from the Social Worker, that attitude may change overtime. No matter how bad the attitude is, it will be changed if you help the person."*

One participant also expressed his desire to he can share a lot of things with his fellow children. But one that is truly remarkable for him are the words of wisdom from the social worker which struck him most. He explained that no matter how bad a person is, as long as there is someone who is willing to help, that person can change.

Furthermore, a participant shared,

*"Akong panlantaw kay, naa diri akong tama nga kaugma-on. Murag diri ko molamabo, murag diri nako makuan akong mga pangandoy, mga pangarap nako. Kay tan-aw nako dako kaayo ilang matabang sakoa, like kanang mahuman nako tanan diri akong gusto nga himoon."* (SCIENTIST-L10)

*"I can see that my future lies in here. I think I can achieve my goals and my life dreams. I can see that they can contribute significantly in achieving my dream."*

The participant shared that with the help of the staff in the shelter, he can achieve his dreams and outlook in life. It was found that the staff in the shelter greatly impacted his life and as a human being. He stressed how the shelter contributed to his overall well-being.

In the study of Labella *et al.* (2019), supportive parenting and positive peer relationships can actually buffer against adverse effects of homelessness in terms of socioeconomic function among children. As Kull *et al.* (2019) observed, homeless children usually exhibit resilience in the face of risk, showcasing their ability to cope under challenging circumstances.

### 3.3.2 Future Aspirations

Having a dream and a goal is one way to live, as it is the reason why people choose to continue despite the difficulties in life. In this instance, participants are still hopeful about the future, building a home, and giving back to others. The mindset of homeless children was guided and honed in a meaningful way.

One respondent shared,

*"Naay uban nga gikan sa street pareha nako kay street kid man pud ko dati, ang ginahatag nga serbisyo nila kay bag-ohon nila ang isa ka bata unya himoon nila nga impluwensya sa uban."* (SPONGEBOB-SL3)

*"Some of the kids are coming from the street like myself, and they gave me the chance to transform the street children like someone with a positive influence."*

As shared by the participant who goes by the pseudonym of SPONGEBOB, someone like him has been given a chance to become somebody, a better version of himself. He expressed that the shelter staff provides guidance on how they can become someone who can positively influence other children in the shelter community.

The same sentiment was shared by one respondent,

*"Paghuman sa pag-eskwela, kay mao jud na ilang kuan sa akua nga "ayaw na pag problema sa lain, ayaw kabalaka kay mahuman nimo tanan diri kay pa-eskwelahon paka."* (SCIENTIST-L10)

*"I can finish my education here, as what they have said. They promised me to support my educational needs. I am so grateful for this opportunity because they took me in here."*

The same sentiment shared by another respondent that goes by the name of Scientist is that the management can help him by providing his educational and basic needs. For that, the respondent expressed his joy because it was one of the lifetime opportunities that the shelter had promised him for guidance and support.

As shared by the respondent,

*"Naa kay sama atong gi-ingon nako ganiha nga basin dili ko makapadayon ug eskwela kay basin makulang akong pag huna-huna sa akong mga plano ba nga dapat makahuman jud ko. Dapat naa jud koy mabuhay nga maka padayon sa akong pag-eskwela, mao ra to ang maka-pressure pud sa akoo."* (SPONGEBOB-L12)

*"Like I was saying a while ago, if I leave this shelter, I would not be able to continue my education. So, I need to do something so I can finish my studies. That is the only thing that keeps pressuring me."*

The same sentiment is shared by SPONGEBOB when it comes to his realization that if he leaves the shelter, his future would be uncertain. As he expresses his sentiment, he is motivated to achieve his goal and finish his education journey. The only thing that pressures him is not to finish his education, and that is why he's very determined.

The study of Thistle-Elliott, L. (2014), Supporting homeless children and youth through proactive and positive behavior management and intervention practices, revealed that a child who received consistent encouragement and assistance from the teachers in school tend to develop better socialization skills and perform better.

#### **4. Implication and Recommendation**

The lived experiences of the homeless children in the Foundation of Balay Pasilungan, Inc. provide invaluable insights for improving policies and practices. This study offers a unique window into vulnerable populations' challenges, needs, and resilience, helping to inform better, effective, and compassionate support systems. Listening to the voices of these homeless youth, educators, and research practitioners can gain a more profound understanding of the day-to-day realities of what life is in the shelter, including the impact on education, social relationships, and overall welfare.

Consequently, this study acknowledged the needs of these vulnerable children. Shelters like the Balay Pasilungan should assess the emotional and social experiences of the children in terms of adjustment, support, and care to ensure that each child's emotional resilience is nurtured. It is suggested that the staff should be well-trained for informed trauma care to address emotional difficulties and promote a safe and supportive environment. It is also effective to use one-on-one counseling sessions with



the children; peer or group therapy sessions are also advised so that children can process their experiences inside the shelter.

In addition, beyond emotional care, these vulnerable children need opportunities for growth. The shelter should not just offer educational support but also vocational training including mentorship, to guide the children in fulfilling their dreams and ambitions. Creating an environment that nurtures the holistic development of homeless children is essential.

Lastly, the government agencies such as the DSWD and NGO's can provide valuable sources and train the shelter staff for mental health support, educational scholarships, and career development workshops.

#### **4.1 Implication for Future Research**

The researcher is proud that this research paper significantly contributed to the body of knowledge. This phenomenological study can help the future researcher to explore critical areas of this study. One critical area is the mental health and emotional challenges of the sheltered children. A quantitative research study may be utilized to measure the anxiety, depression, and trauma of homeless children, which can provide a clearer picture of their emotional struggles. In addition, another factor would be the children's resiliency in terms of coping mechanisms, social support, and positive relationships within the shelter environment, which will offer insights as to how these children are able to manage difficulties.

Another critical area that needs to be explored is the educational outcomes and learning challenges of these children. A quantitative study is useful to determine their academic challenges and educational outcomes. A future researcher can use the children's academic records, such as academic performance and school attendance, to identify patterns and develop interventions.

Lastly, quantitative or mixed methods can be used to explore how social relationships and peer interaction affect their well-being, and the long-term outcome is also important to assess their transition from shelter life to adulthood.

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### Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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