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Quilting in Self-Efficacy Group Work With Older African American Women Leaving Homelessness

David P. Moxley, Norman, OK, Holly R. Feen-Calligan, Olivia G. M. Washington, and Lois Garriott, Detroit, MI

Abstract

The use of quilting as an art therapy intervention in a self-efficacy group of African American women who were leaving homelessness is examined in this article. Two quilting workshops (n = 8; n = 12) contributed to a larger parent project (N = 530 over a 10-year period), entitled the “Leaving Homelessness Intervention Research Project,” conducted in a U.S. Midwestern city. In addition to framing the importance of quilting as a form of group work and health promotion that may foster resilience toward stressful transitions, the authors offer a rationale, outcomes, and guidelines for community building and advocacy through the quilting form that is a heritage of American folk art.

Quilting holds a time-honored place in the American historical experience. It is a communal form of expression that has helped communities cope with change, foster group life, and muster social support. This is particularly the case for people at certain junctures in life in which they are transitioning in terms of roles and status, such as giving birth or coping with the death of a loved one. Quilting has been used in or as art therapy (Anderson & Gold, 1998; Nainis, 2005; Robertson, 2001) and as a medium of memorial and advocacy (Junge, 1999; Moon, 2003). However, quilting as a therapeutic intervention is underrepresented in the art therapy literature.

This article examines the use of quilting to support older African American women in their efforts to leave homelessness. The quilting interventions described herein were part of a participatory action research project entitled the “Leaving Homelessness Intervention Research Project” that has been ongoing for nearly a decade. Although a full description of the project is beyond the scope of this article, its central focus has been to design and test various strategies and tools with older African American women as co-researchers (a quality consistent with participatory action research) and to help them transition out of homelessness, stabilize their living situations, and move forward in life. Over 530 women have participated in one or more sub-studies of the project in the last 10 years (Moxley, Tatum, & Washington, 2011). To date, two quilting workshops have been completed as sub-studies; one (n = 8) in an early phase of the project as a way of helping women tell their stories, and one (n = 12) following an advocacy phase of the research to support women’s ongoing efforts in ending homelessness and remaining domiciled.

The Heritage of Quilting

Throughout history, quilting has served multiple purposes resulting in many different types of quilts, as Table 1 summarizes (Kiracofe & Johnson, 2004; Roberts, 2007). The heritage of quilting in the United States dates to pioneer quilts created by 19th-century families and groups in preparation for long journeys as immigrants to North America and in the Western migration. Such quilts reflect their anticipatory function; their creation helped people prepare for important events in their lives, including an event as significant as moving thousands of miles away and journeying across dangerous territory.

On the other hand, the simplicity of such “adversity quilts” belies the complex events that they address. Quilt making has helped people capture particularly troubling events in the history of their country and in their families, communities, and personal experiences. As descendants of slaves who arrived from Africa before the American Civil War, the women of Gee’s Bend, Alabama, experienced substantial poverty, isolation, and oppression (Levit, 2004). Their quilts seemingly communicated a paradoxical message: that people addressed hardships in their lives through an adversity quilt while concomitantly commemorating those events in the beauty reflected in the quilt work. Like many quilts, adversity quilts were often composed of humble materials (e.g., feed sacks) stitched together to produce a functional textile.

Other types of quilts include signature, honor, friendship, and mutual support quilts. The inclusion of signatures memorializes friendships among the people who make such quilts. Similarly, mourning or bereavement quilts offer families a means for easing both themselves and their loved ones...
into the experience of death. Often these quilts comfort a dying family member or wrap the body after death, and thus become part of a ceremonial process to enhance transitions in the life course.

Quilts are very easily employed as a social action strategy. They can facilitate mutual support among members of advocacy groups who seek to memorialize their losses while also attracting and retaining the public's focus on a social problem. The AIDS quilt exemplifies such advocacy (Junge, 1999; Moon, 2003). As an art form, quilting can communicate a deep aesthetic appreciation, provide a vocational outlet for some groups, and serve to increase public awareness and understanding. The Quilts of Gee’s Bend is a national exhibit that illustrates how the art of quilt making handed down from one generation to another can hold considerable sentimental and market value, both for those who make the quilts and for those who purchase them (Arnett, Cubbs, & Metcalf, 2006).

This review of quilting heritage reveals the many functions such a tradition can fulfill: Quilting can serve to memorialize events and history, confirming their power as a source of institutional or community memory; they can also affirm friendship and support in recovery from profound loss, and help survivors cope with profoundly negative consequences of the lived experience. The important role quilting played in the American pioneer experience suggests that the process of quilting can serve to bind anxiety among group members in the face of considerable uncertainty, or in making transitions across the life course, from birth to death. Quilting, therefore, is well grounded in the American experience. As a potential community-building activity, quilting affirms a group's experience and offers its members opportunities for reflection, reframing of experiences, and mutual support. Such qualities made quilting especially relevant to the Leaving Homelessness Intervention Research Project, in which participants could share a common experience in the coproduction of a meaningful and evocative piece of folk art.

### Homelessness Among Older African American Women

Homelessness in U.S. society involves specific subgroups that are especially vulnerable to changes in economics and social welfare, including women in particular. African American women are an overrepresented and growing subpopulation among people who are homeless (de Chesnay, 2005; National Coalition for the Homeless, 2009). Given that economic change is at the heart of homelessness, those who are vulnerable to such changes also are vulnerable to a host of social issues. Thus, it may be expected that the

### Table 1 A Typology of Quilts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Quilts</th>
<th>Heritage</th>
<th>Distinctive Features and Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adversity quilts</td>
<td>Constructed to memorialize historical events, and to communicate hardship and beauty (in both theme and humble materials used).</td>
<td>Quilts gave voice to adversity (e.g., economic hardship and/or oppression); offered unique perspectives of survivors and catharsis inherent in memorializing the lived experience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pioneer quilts</td>
<td>Constructed by American pioneers to prepare for their westward journeys or other specific undertaking.</td>
<td>Families convened to construct a quilt, which offered an emotional stimulus and helped them prepare for the uncertain areas of their journeys.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mourning/bereavement quilts</td>
<td>Constructed by families to ease bereavement and grief. Used at funerals or for presenting or showing the body of a deceased loved one.</td>
<td>In hospice programs, quilts are central to a model (e.g., hospice programs) that offers comfort and facilitates preparing for and grieving death.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social action/advocacy quilts</td>
<td>Constructed to communicate injustice and to memorialize both individuals and events.</td>
<td>Since 1987 the AIDS quilt has memorialized stricken individuals and the AIDS pandemic. Public display provides a catalyst for communities to organize and intervene. The Quilts of Gee's Bend, constructed by southern African Americans, also is an example of the fusion of art and enterprise.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art form quilts</td>
<td>Constructed with a deep aesthetic and respect for folk art forms that may link to enterprise and commercial folk art.</td>
<td>Group members who share common bonds quilt to affirm those bonds, particularly friendship. Each member contributes a signed panel that memorializes their contribution.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Signature/friendship quilts</td>
<td>Constructed by a group using simple block pattern and squares from available scrap material.</td>
<td>A group may construct a 6-hour quilt crafted by hand or machine. The quilt can reflect individual and life events (e.g., a woman's labor that also memorializes the birth of her child).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Six-hour quilts</td>
<td>Rapidly constructed when time is limited, as a gift for a particular person (e.g., a child or a homeless person). Conveys a statement of caring rather than witness to injustice.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
intersection of gender, ethnic minority status, and age would result in a population of individuals who account for the growing ranks of those who are about to become or are homeless because of economic downturn and the limited availability of social welfare.

Although accurate statistics on homeless women of color are unavailable, the number of homeless people who are 50 years or older is expected to increase dramatically as unmet demands for affordable shelter, adequate income, and appropriate social services accelerate in the face of a large population reaching older adulthood unprepared for retirement and financial self-sufficiency (Cohen, 1999; Rosenheck, Bassuck, & Salomon, 1999). Women of color in particular are sensitive to such social and economic changes. Whereas earlier in their lives they may have creatively combined parenting and employment, changes in health, limited employment options, and escalating housing costs can conspire to tip such individuals into homelessness.

Once living on the streets or in makeshift and uncertain arrangements with other people in the shelter care system, the vulnerability of people who are homeless can be further exacerbated, particularly through exposure to violence. The most violent trauma occurring among homeless women was sexual assault, which, in turn, can increase their risk for depression, posttraumatic stress, and substance use. The experience of homelessness can amplify anxiety and extreme vigilance, resulting in compromised physical and mental health. The absence of safety is itself a health issue as the combined influence of the threat of physical attack, long-term exposure to the elements, and weakened physical well-being can dramatically result in decline (Vandemark, 2007), anxiety, and fatigue.

There are multiple pathways into homelessness in later life. Substance use or mental illness, although significant, only account for a portion of those who lose their housing. Homelessness among older women of color is a result of diverse issues that include poverty; the lack of a living wage; unsustainable employment due to poor health; and scarce, if nonexistent, housing that is affordable, safe, and supportive (Belle & Doucet, 2003; Cohen, 1999; Radley, Hodgetts, & Cullen, 2006; Williams & Jackson, 2000). Lifelong exposure to serious, health-compromising stress can influence motivation dramatically and can result in discouragement, pessimism, and hopelessness such that older women of color who become homeless may not look for assistance from established social service or health providers (Belle & Doucet, 2003). Severe cutbacks in social and health services may simply justify women’s assumptions that few resources are available to help them find and maintain stable housing.

The investigators of the quilting sub-studies described in this article were professors of social work, nursing, gerontology, and art therapy at a major urban research university. The plight of older African American women who were homeless came to our attention as part of our Leaving Homelessness Intervention Research Project research documenting older African American women’s experience with homelessness (Washington, Moxley, Garriott, & Crystal, 2009). Our research with homeless and formerly homeless older African American women has progressed through several stages: (a) an early principal focus on documenting the transition of women out of homelessness; (b) a subsequent focus on understanding the recovery processes homeless women use to cope with their situations and to find new life directions; and finally, (c) designing and testing useful interventions to help women address the negative consequences of homelessness and embark on new life styles.

The First Quilting Workshop: “Telling My Story”

Overview and Rationale

The first intervention tested was a quilting workshop conducted toward the end of the first phase of the Leaving Homelessness Intervention Research Project research called “Telling My Story,” aimed at documenting the transition of women out of homelessness. Shelter-based surveys and interviews were conducted from which eight women were chosen to participate in in-depth narrative interviews. Because of the factors that triggered their homelessness, each participant was considered a revelatory case. The quilt workshop was created as a final step in the narrative interviewing process, as a method to help the investigators further understand common themes among the eight participants.

Quilting was chosen as a low cost and clean medium option for group work. We also recognized that most of the women seemed to have an intuitive cultural and personal sense for quilting as opposed to other art forms. Discussing the value of fiber as material, Wright (2001) noted:

Fiber, perhaps more than any other material, has the ability to embody the individual as opposed to the masses. Everyone has a personal connection to fabric that is fundamental. Clothing protects our nakedness from the elements . . . Fabric even has the ability to unite millions around a common cause through the colors and symbols of flags or the simple twist of a red ribbon pinned to a shirt. (p. 11)

The women participated in the quilt workshop mindful of their own narratives but not yet aware of their commonalities because the workshop followed their individual participation in intensive qualitative interviews. With the assistance of a group facilitator, together the participants completed a nine-patch quilt, with a center title patch and eight individual patches—one for each participant, with each patch expressing its maker’s resilience in the face of vulnerability (Washington et al., 2009). The two principal investigators (first and third authors David Moxley and Olivia Washington) served as participant observers over the course of the quilt workshop and fourth author Lois Garriott served as the workshop facilitator.

Quilting Process

The women were provided with technical instruction during the workshop so they could bring their patches to successful realization. Each participant worked with a pre-cut cotton square and an assortment of materials (e.g., pieces of colored fabric, felt, markers, beads, fringe, ribbon, etc.). Participants were encouraged to create a patch that included personal meaning and that expressed their transition out of
homelessness. Working around a table on her own patch while interacting with other group members, each quilter discussed the theme she desired to communicate. Next, they planned and worked together on the construction of the whole quilt, with each woman making a primary contribution to the project (the creation of her own personal patch) as well as ancillary contributions (e.g., organizing materials and helping peers prepare materials to use in their own individual patches).

They named the completed quilt *Patchwork: One Piece at a Time Over 50 and So What* (Figure 1) and talked about their patches and the quilt as a whole. For example, one participant created a “golden book of poetry” (bottom right) that opens to reveal a poignant statement of her recovery from the trauma of domestic violence and homelessness. The quilt patch symbolizes the lyrical character of her journey in which journaling and writing poetry provided sources of sustenance during the nadir of her life. The patch on the upper left depicts the shelter where that woman and her two minor sons lived. Written on her patch is the question, “Who cares? I care. Does the community care?” This participant accurately felt that society was unaware of the negative effects of homelessness on the people who are homeless. The patch on the middle left was created by a woman who,
after many months of trying to leave the shelter system, had nearly attained independent living. The patch depicts the sun over a hill, representing, she said, that "you don't give up just because there is an obstacle standing in front of you. If you give up hoping, it's over.”

The process of designing and preparing the quilt permitted the women to express their insights into transition and recovery from the harsh consequences of homelessness. Participants seemed to gain confidence in their own creativity and capacities, and took great pride in their contributions to the quilt. The physical act of creating a quilt patch incorporated each of the women's particular stories while also permitting them to share very compelling and often painful stories in more comforting ways, a step in group process important to gaining support from peers (Vandemark, 2007).

Evaluation

The two participant observers both took narrative notes over the course of the workshop sessions, and debriefed with one another and the workshop facilitator after each session. In addition, the investigators interacted with the participants by asking them about how they experienced the workshop and the quilting process, what they found useful, and how the workshop could be improved. At the end of the sub-study the investigators conducted a focus group to illuminate those aspects of quilting and the group process that the participants found beneficial. With regard to how the quilting group helped them to share their experience of homelessness, five themes were common among the women:

1. Although homelessness was not expected, it occurred after a stressful period of challenging circumstances for which the person did not have resources to cope, such as exposure to domestic violence or a house fire.
2. Homelessness truly was not envisioned as an eventuality because all eight women took pride in earlier life situations in which they had engaged in work, homemaking, productive relationships, and involvement in community and faith-based organizations.
3. Each participant struggled to resist homelessness only to find that she had no options but to become homeless and deal with that reality.
4. Health problems inevitably emerged while each participant was coping with the environmental and personal demands of homelessness. Health interacted with the realities of being older and having previous health vulnerabilities.
5. The options the women had available to them to manage their homelessness were considered substandard and part of the problem of being homeless. The shelter system in particular was viewed as degrading and without an inherent quality of kindness and compassion. Such circumstances induced emotional states that the women found stressful, including perpetual anger and frustration.

In this workshop intervention quilting together allowed the women to interact with one another in a deep and meaningful way, such that these themes and insights could be made explicit. The quilt making itself also was significant. Recalling the quilting bees of years past, *Patchwork* was constructed as a group effort, not only unifying the woman in a common activity but also through common experiences. A single patch on the quilt reflected the experience of a particular homeless woman, but the collection of patches captured the collective efforts associated with their transitions out of homelessness. The completed quilt came to symbolize diversity within universality. The stitching together of various pieces, making decisions about what was needed and what was not, came to symbolize how the reconstruction of daily life could proceed. Creating the quilt (e.g., “pushing and pulling” the needle through fabric, making decisions about design, ripping apart and starting over, transforming a destructive experience into something constructive) seemed to be a metaphor for the women’s progress in finding and maintaining housing and in their growing self-efficacy.

The Second Quilting Workshop: “Advocacy for Leaving Homelessness”

Overview and Rationale

The illumination of the women’s life stories and the serious issues they faced led to the creation of the “Advocacy for Leaving Homelessness” sub-project. This sub-project took place in the third phase of the research over a period of
9 months, and used data collected from the previous two phases to develop and test an advocacy intervention with 25 participants who were transitioning out of homelessness. We interviewed the women on a weekly basis to determine the issues associated with their transition using instruments developed during the first two phases of the research. In addition, because of the benefits observed from the first quilt making workshop, 12 women who had completed the interviews in the Advocacy for Leaving Homelessness sub-study were invited to participate in a second group quilting workshop.

A purposive selection process was used to invite women who had experienced a variety of problems and situations in their transitions out of homelessness. Although some of the women had been acquainted with each other through shelter living, they did not all know one another prior to the workshop. The group was intended to provide emotional support and therapeutic benefits along with facilitating the creation of individual panel quilts that each woman could use for warmth. We anticipated that the workshop would assist the women with developing self-advocacy skills as they addressed the transition issues they faced. The second and fourth authors facilitated the workshop.

Quilting Process

In the first session, the women introduced each other and viewed examples of quilts. Similar to the previous workshop, 12" × 12" muslin squares were provided, along with a variety of other cotton print fabric and fabric markers. The women were instructed to start by developing a muslin square that expressed their process of finding and maintaining housing, their time being homeless, or their
future hopes. For example, Jane (pseudonym) created a square with the theme, “home is where your heart goes” (Figure 2). With five children, including one child with epilepsy and one child with renal failure who required dialysis three times a week, Jane faced considerable stress in her personal life. She had been a preschool teacher prior to experiencing seizures herself, which prevented her from working in a teaching capacity and consequently resulted in her being unemployed. Jane later made a quilt square for each of her children as an extension of her theme that she wanted to be self-sufficient in order to provide for them.

The women created one additional patch in a subsequent session with the intent of giving it to another group peer as a symbol of support (Figure 3). For this patch, participants could bring their own fabric or use fabric provided by the facilitators. The only requirement was the 12” width needed to construct the panels. The women learned how to prepare quilt pieces, how to sew panels with batting, and how to combine back and front sides.

Although 12 women were invited, not all were able to participate; the largest number to attend a single session was 6. The participants responded favorably to the quilt intervention, which took place over a 4-month period. Because each woman was making a quilt for herself, it was exciting to see the product start looking more like a quilt, which in turn made her confident in her creative and technical abilities, and pleased with her efforts and her product.

The group sessions took place in the lobby of a Midwestern university building during Saturdays when the building was closed. Tables, irons and ironing boards, and sewing machines were moved into the lobby each week, and snacks were provided. Sometimes children or significant others attended as well. The women said that they enjoyed the camaraderie of working together around the table and socializing. All expressed that they had no other opportunity like this, and that it was important to them. Rose (pseudonym), for example, stated that she came to the group because she needed therapy (even though the group was not described as a therapy group). Sharice (pseudonym) had been acknowledged for her art skills that lent support to others; the experience inspired her to resume her creative interests (Figure 4). Though small in number, the women supported one another through such events as changed living situations (most shelters allowed only 90-day stays) and family crises.

**Evaluation**

After each session, the facilitators made process notes and photographed the progress of the quilts. We discussed themes in the conversations of the women, as well as transition issues they described. A focus group was conducted at the end of 4 months so that the women could express their experience of the workshop and formally share their quilts (Figure 5). The eight women from the first quilt workshop also were invited to attend this presentation. By the end of the afternoon, phone numbers were exchanged and a larger circle of support emerged. The benefits of both quilt-making workshops and other emergent themes are discussed in the following section.

**The Importance of Quilting in Group Work**

**The Quilt as Memorial and Advocacy**

The quilt as a memorial of the exigencies the women experienced over the course of their homelessness was perhaps the most important function of the quilt workshop. As each of the women articulated in their narrative interviews, the public rarely understood homelessness and as a result the women had no avenue to tell their stories and voice the horrors they experienced as people who were homeless. For those women who learned to speak to one another about the intimate details of their experiences, the workshop served as a rehearsal for a greater community education effort.

*Telling My Story* quilts and other artifacts about the homeless experience have been publicly displayed in six venues since 2006 (Moxley, Washington, & Feen-Calligan, 2008). The investigators did not require or coerce such public presentation; it was a decision that the women took upon themselves, exemplifying the courage they demonstrated in the face of adversity. Thus, the quilt in public exhibition
can broaden public understanding and insight. The personal therapy of participants can evolve into a form of public therapy as others, perhaps those fully insulated from homelessness in their day-to-day lives, come to a better, more empathic understanding. Herein lies the importance of moving something out of the personal and therapeutic, and into the realm of the public and engaged.

Quilting and Social Support

Especially relevant to women coping with harsh living conditions and trauma, group work may decrease isolation and increase support by fostering interaction, affiliation, and social involvement (Toseland & Rivas, 2005). Group work also is appropriate for women with diminished status because their outsider or marginalized positions can amplify social rejection and discrimination. Experiential group work inherent in quilting is especially helpful to women of color dealing with homelessness because it can facilitate the formation of intentional communities in which participants can feel free to reflect on their lives, the dynamics of their traumatic situations, and the factors that threaten their recovery from these situations that they may overcome.

In the case of the two quilting workshops, the groups provided a context to permit members to learn from one another, thereby setting the conditions of social learning. As a result, participants obtained vicarious understanding of their situations and issues they faced by listening to and hearing others’ stories (Toseland & Rivas, 2005). Group work offers safety by providing a place where participants can test new behaviors and expose personal issues to others and stimulate feedback that is helpful in resolving their issues. In addition, group work brought assumptions, thoughts, and feelings outside of immediate awareness into consciousness to catalyze action (Washington, Moxley, & Garriott, 2009). These participants also learned to think in more empowering ways, and to overcome self-defeating behaviors.

In both quilt workshops, the construction of a quilt required a whole group working in a coordinated and concerted way that combined different perspectives and ideas. The inherent features of a quilt’s construction stimulated a process of information sharing, comparison, problem solving, and mutual support that are qualities central to effective group work (Yalom & Molyneux, 2005) and to fostering interactions to discover commonalities of experience. Group work and quilting, therefore, have much in common and form a synergy that stimulates group development—in

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Contribution to Recovery</th>
<th>Potential Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expressive and cathartic</td>
<td>Disclosure of feelings is enhanced by creating quilt panels that stimulate reflection and reconstruction of the experience.</td>
<td>Unburdening of emotions associated with life transitions and the lived experience of homelessness; reduced anxiety and depression; heightened emergence of optimism and hope.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance and product</td>
<td>An engaging group task is shared simultaneously among participants with a common background; constructing individual panels and contributing to the whole produces knowledge while experiential activity mediates a tangible product.</td>
<td>Enhanced feelings of competence and effect motivation (e.g., augments the desire to change one’s situation).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persuasion</td>
<td>Insecurity associated with shame- or guilt-producing memories is decreased as members focus on production, quilt heritage, and their artistic expressions.</td>
<td>Increased feelings of involvement and a psychological support from commitment to group; enhanced competence and sense of mastery.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modeling</td>
<td>Opportunities for vicarious learning are provided as work proceeds and the work of fellow participants is observed.</td>
<td>Increased confidence and decreased uncertainty as models emerge from which group members can pattern their participation in the group experience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal learning</td>
<td>Social interaction and influencing behaviors increase via conversation about techniques, comparison of strategies, and interpretation of experiences to other members.</td>
<td>Feelings of mutuality emerge through shared experiences. Relationships form as a sense of universality develops within the group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural learning</td>
<td>Personal heritage and traditions (e.g., family, ethnic, racial, and gender) are invested in design and realization of quilt panels, affirming unique personal knowledge and history.</td>
<td>Appreciation for cultural heritage and traditions, for strengths as women, and for families and prior generations; cultural relearning emerges that strengthens self-concept.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conclusion: Quilting’s Contribution to Self-Efficacy

The quilting projects discussed herein included and prioritized six sources of self-efficacy (Table 2). Indeed, the quilting projects took place in contexts in which the sources of self-efficacy can combine to involve emotional arousal, exposure to positive role models, persuasion for undertaking complex projects, and opportunities for skilled performance. Independent of the product per se, participants can benefit from such supportive conditions that may interact to motivate change. The quilt as product emerges within these contexts, offering opportunities for participants to increase their confidence—a quality that is badly needed when homelessness can literally erode energy and optimism.

Quilting groups offer participants opportunities for catharsis in the expression of feelings about the homeless experience. This source can stimulate reflection and reconstruction of the experience and ultimately help people unburden themselves of negative feelings in a safe environment of collaboration and support.

The sources of self-efficacy and recovery were evident within the creative process of the workshop format. Perhaps the single most influential outcome of such a process lies in the strengthening of interpersonal ties among the project participants. Prior to the workshop these women may have approached each other with considerable wariness because their experiences with strangers proved threatening, with abuse or exploitation likely outcomes of interaction. The quilting workshop format helped participants create a supportive milieu in which they could find interpersonal strength garnered by working together or independently within a group. No matter how time-limited, a support group can evolve naturally from bonds among participants who share common experiences. The emergence of such support is vital to facilitating transition out of homelessness and stabilization in independent living by permitting the women to subsequently call on one another for friendship, socialization, information, and useful advice and guidance.

Each successive group of participants in the Leaving Homelessness Intervention Research Project will likely engage in quilting; they too can benefit from the sources of self-efficacy and recovery that such an enterprise can mobilize. Timing the workshop so that it coincides with important milestones of transition may prove to be strategically sound, particularly for those women who need a supportive reference group for the journey they are endeavoring to make out of homelessness. We believe that it is best to undertake such a challenging journey in company with other people who understand this quest. The quilt making workshop may prove to be useful to art therapists and others whose mission is to help vulnerable women make a safe and supported journey to lives of dignity and opportunity.

References


